

House of Commons
Committee of Public Accounts

**IMPROVING STUDENT
ACHIEVEMENT AND
WIDENING
PARTICIPATION IN
HIGHER EDUCATION IN
ENGLAND**

Fifty-eighth Report of Session 2001–02

*Report, together with
Proceedings of the Committee,
Minutes of Evidence and Appendices*

Ordered by The House of Commons to be printed 17 July 2002

HC 588
Published on 12 September 2002 by authority of the House of Commons
London : The Stationery Office Limited
£13.00

Committee of Public Accounts

The Committee of Public Accounts is appointed by the House of Commons to examine “the accounts showing the appropriation of the sums granted by Parliament to meet the public expenditure, and of such other accounts laid before Parliament as the committee may think fit” (Standing Order No. 148).

Current Membership

Mr Richard Bacon MP (*Conservative, South Norfolk*)
 Mr Ian Davidson MP (*Labour, Glasgow Pollok*)
 Geraint Davies MP (*Labour, Croydon Central*)
 Rt Hon Frank Field MP (*Labour, Birkenhead,*)
 Mr Barry Gardiner MP (*Labour, Brent North*)
 Mr Nick Gibb MP (*Conservative, Bognor Regis and Littlehampton*)
 Mr George Howarth MP (*Labour, Knowsley North and Sefton East*)
 Mr Brian Jenkins MP (*Labour, Tamworth*)
 Mr Nigel Jones MP (*Liberal Democrat, Cheltenham*)
 Ms Ruth Kelly MP (*Labour, Bolton West*)
 Mr Edward Leigh MP (*Conservative, Gainsborough*) (Chairman)
 Mr George Osborne MP (*Conservative, Tatton*)
 Mr David Rendel MP (*Liberal Democrat, Newbury*)
 Mr Gerry Steinberg MP (*Labour, City of Durham*)
 Jon Trickett MP (*Labour, Hemsworth*)
 Rt Hon Alan Williams MP (*Labour, Swansea West*)

Powers

Powers of the Committee of Public Accounts are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No. 148. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

The reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. The Committee’s reports are on the Internet at: <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm/cmpublic.htm>; press notices are at: <http://www.parliament.uk/commons/selcom/pacpnot.htm>. A list of reports of the Committee in the present Parliament is at the back of this Report.

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to The Clerk of the Committee of Public Accounts, Committee Office, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general inquiries is: 0207-219-5708. The Committee’s e-mail address is: pubacom@parliament.uk.

Footnotes

In the footnotes of this Report, references to oral evidence are indicated by ‘Q’ followed by the question number; references to the written evidence are indicated by the page number as in ‘Ev’.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
FIFTY-EIGHTH REPORT	
Introduction and list of conclusions and recommendations	5
Improving school performance	8
Improving arrangements for entry into higher education and widening participation	10
Improving the financial support system for students	14
Improving retention and achievement	15
PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMITTEE RELATING TO THE REPORT	18
EVIDENCE (<i>Monday 28 January 2002</i>) (HC 581-i, Session 2001–02)	
WITNESSES	
Sir John Bourn KCB, Comptroller and Auditor General	Ev 1
Mr Glenn Hull, Second Treasury Officer of Accounts	Ev 1
Mr David Normington CB, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education and Skills; Professor Sir Howard Newby CBE, Chief Executive, Higher Education Funding Council for England	Ev 1
EVIDENCE (<i>Wednesday 30 January 2002</i>) (HC 588-i, Session 2001–02)	
WITNESSES	
Sir John Bourn KCB, Comptroller and Auditor General	Ev 24
Mr Glenn Hull, Second Treasury Officer of Accounts	Ev 24
Mr David Normington CB, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education and Skills; Professor Sir Howard Newby CBE, Chief Executive, Higher Education Funding Council for England; Mr Jeff Jones, Account Director, National Audit Office	Ev 24
APPENDICES	
1 Supplementary memorandum submitted by Mr David Normington CB	Ev 48
2 Supplementary memorandum submitted by the Higher Education Funding Council for England	Ev 52
3 Supplementary memorandum submitted by The Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE)	Ev 54

FIFTY-EIGHTH REPORT

The Committee of Public Accounts has agreed to the following Report:

IMPROVING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

INTRODUCTION AND LIST OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Through the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the Department for Education and Skills spends £4.8 billion a year on higher education in 131 institutions, which are attended by about 1.7 million students. Higher education covers all study, training and research carried out at a standard higher than that of A-level or National Vocational Qualification level 3. It includes Higher National Certificates and Diplomas, degree courses and postgraduate courses.¹

2. Government policy is that the higher education sector should make a significant contribution towards national learning targets (Figure 1). The Government is committed to working towards widening participation in higher education while continuing to improve standards and raise achievement levels, and its undertakings for the sector are shown in Figure 2.²

Figure 1: National Learning Targets for young people and adults			
	Position when targets were launched in 1998	Position in Autumn 2000	Target for December 2002
19-year-olds with "Level 2" (5 GCSEs at A*-C, an NVQ ³ level 2, intermediate GNVQ ⁴ or equivalent)	73.9%	75.3%	85%
21-year-olds with "Level 3" (2 A-levels, an NVQ level 3, an Advanced GNVQ or the equivalent)	52.2%	53.7%	60%
Adults with "Level 3" (as above)	45.1%	47.2%	50%
Adults with "Level 4" (NVQ level 4, i.e. having a degree or a higher level vocational qualification)	26.1%	27.5%	28%
Learning participation target—reduction in non-learners	26% of population not in learning	Data not yet available	24% of population not in learning

Source: *Department for Education and Skills*

¹ C&AG's Report *Improving student achievement in English higher education* (HC 486, Session 2001–02), paras 2–3, 1.1

² *ibid*, para 1.9 and Figures 5, 6; C&AG's Report *Widening participation in higher education in England* (HC 485, Session 2001–02), para 1.6

³ National Vocational Qualifications

⁴ General National Vocational Qualifications

Figure 2: Key Government Targets for widening participation in higher education while continuing to improve standards and raise achievement levels	
Delivery targets	Progress
Increase participation towards 50 per cent of those aged 18–30 by the end of the decade while maintaining standards	To be reported in 2002
Make significant year on year progress towards fair access as measured by Funding Council benchmarks	To be reported in 2002
Bear down on rates of non-completion	The Funding Council expects to publish a target for the sector in January 2002, but had not done so by 17 January
Strengthen research and teaching excellence	Results of the Research Assessment Exercise published in December 2001 indicate that 55 per cent of research staff now work in departments which contain work of international excellence A new quality assurance method is to be introduced from September 2002

3. The Comptroller and Auditor General produced two reports, *Improving student achievement in English higher education* and *Widening participation in higher education in England*.⁵ We examined the performance of schools in preparing students for entry into higher education, financial support for students, and ways of improving retention and achievement in higher education.

4. In the light of our examination, we draw four overall conclusions:

- There is some lack of clarity about the target for widening participation. Definitions have varied over time, and what qualifications count is under review. The basis of measurement has also changed, in the light of the Department's review of reported data. The Department should set out in unambiguous terms the target for widening participation, the courses that count and the basis for measurement.
- The Funding Council pays higher education institutions a premium, based on student home postcodes, as a broad proxy for the extra costs institutions incur on students from poorer backgrounds, for example on focused recruitment and extra teaching support. The Council recognises that the "postcode" system is not ideal, especially for students from rural areas or inner cities. In its review of the

⁵ C&AG's Reports (HC 485, Session 2001–02) and (HC 486, Session 2001–02).

additional costs higher education institutions bear and of the methodology used to allocate widening participation funding, and it should look for ways of better targeting the £31 million involved.

- Pupils from poorer backgrounds get fewer GCSEs at A-C grade and A-Levels, and far fewer go on to higher education. The Department have an array of initiatives aimed at helping these children to develop positive attitudes to education and gain better qualifications, including Sure Start, the literacy and numeracy strategies, and Education Maintenance Allowances. And they have recently issued a green paper on proposals for extending opportunities and raising standards for 14–19-year-olds.⁶ Improving their performance in schools and colleges is crucial to raising the overall number who go on to higher education, and to raising participation from 41.5 per cent in 2001–02 towards the target of 50 per cent by 2010.
- The current system of financial support for students is too complicated, particularly in respect of the wide range of discretionary funds that might be available. This complexity and the fear of debt are barriers to increasing participation. In its review of student funding, the department should strive to make the system simpler to use, better targeted on those from lower socio-economic groups and the disabled, and give potential students more certainty about the support they are likely to get.

5. Our more specific conclusions and recommendations are as follows.

On improving school performance

- (i) The Department has instituted a range of measures to improve the educational experiences of young people aged up to 18 in schools and colleges, including Excellence in Cities, the Connexions Service and Education Maintenance Allowances. Some positive signs are emerging. It needs to evaluate the success of these initiatives (individually and overall) every 2–3 years to assess effectiveness in delivering higher attainment, higher staying on rates in post-16 education, and more students coming through to higher education.
- (ii) One reason why students leave higher education without completing their qualification, or fail, is that they are not well prepared in key skills before they start. Higher education institutions therefore have to identify knowledge and skills gaps and provide support to students, for example remedial or catch-up courses in mathematics in the first year. The Department need to ensure that the difficulties being experienced by institutions are fed into curriculum development and back to schools, through the work of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.

On improving arrangements for entry into higher education and widening participation

- (iii) High education institutions now have to prepare widening participation strategies and report progress annually. The Funding Council has also developed institution-specific benchmarks, to provide milestones. The Council should also develop targets for each institution, linked to achievement of 50 per cent participation by 2010.
- (iv) Participation by disabled students is particularly low: an 18-year-old with a disability or a health problem is 40 per cent less likely to enter higher education than an 18-year-old without one. The Funding Council should review institutions'

⁶ 14–19: *Extending opportunities, raising standards*, Cm 5342

widening participation strategies to ensure that their plans to recruit more disabled students are sound, and to disseminate good practice.

On improving the financial support system for students

- (v) In their review of the system of student finance, the Department should aim to rationalise the 23 different elements and the channels through which they are administered.
- (vi) The Department should review the support available for disabled students, including allowances from local authorities, so as to give these students greater certainty over support before they have to decide on whether to accept a place in higher education, to remove any disincentives to participation.

On improving retention and achievement

- (vii) Overall achievement in higher education compares favourably with other industrialised nations. Significant improvement depends on raising students' academic performance in schools, which will take time. Meanwhile, the Funding Council should continue to bear down on very wide variations in performance between institutions, for example success rates ranging from 48 per cent to 98 per cent. It should develop an action plan focusing on under-performing institutions, in consultation with the Department.
- (viii) Potential students rely on good information to ensure they get on the course they want and that it meets their expectations. The quality of information is improving, for example through on-line services such as Higher Education Research Database. In their information to potential students, institutions should draw on the research conducted by the National Audit Office to provide information on areas such as course content, methods of assessment, the amount of time students should spend at their studies, any ancillary costs, and success rates of past students.

IMPROVING SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

6. Evidence from a study of 32 countries by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)⁷ shows that only four (Canada, Finland, South Korea and Japan) perform better overall than the UK in key subjects. At the detailed level, the UK scored 7th on literacy, 8th in maths, and 4th on scientific literacy. The main issue identified in the study was the gap in attainment between the lower and higher socio-economic groups. Lower academic attainment at age 18 accounts for most of the lower participation in higher education by 18-year-olds from poorer social classes or with disabilities. Many students from lower socio-economic groups are not getting good enough GCSEs, and therefore are not staying on in full-time education and A-levels, as Figure 3 illustrates; but also over half of the social class V pupils with good GCSEs do not stay on to get A-levels. Ninety per cent of those with two A-levels go into higher education, so the focus of the Department's policies is on helping and supporting people from these groups to get better GCSEs and undertake A-levels.⁸

⁷ *Knowledge and Skills for Life* – first results from PISA 2000

⁸ C&AG's Report *Improving student achievement in English higher education* (HC 486, Session 2001–02), para 2.4 and Figures 9, 10; *Widening Participation in Higher Education in England*, Qs 1, 67–71; Ev 49–50; *Knowledge and Skills for Life* – first results from PISA 2000

Figure 3: Academic attainment and continuation in education at ages 16 and 18		
	5+ GCSE passes A*-C at age 16	Level 3+ qualifications at age 18
All young people aged 16 or 18	49%	37%
Has no disability or health problem	51%	39%
Has a disability or health problem	28%	20%
Social classes I and II	69%	56%
Social class V	30%	13%

Source: *Department for Education and Skills*

7. The Department has instituted a range of measures to improve the educational experiences of young people up to the age of 18 in schools and colleges, including:

- Excellence in Cities and Excellence Clusters, covering a third of all secondary school pupils and designed to tackle under-achievement in some of the country's most challenging areas;
- Education Action Zones, promoting innovation and higher standards in small urban and rural pockets of deprivation;
- new learning pathways for 14 to 18-year-olds, giving greater scope to mix academic and vocational qualifications and designed to end the culture of leaving school at age 16;
- the Connexions Service, providing teenagers with help and support in preparing for the transition to work and adult life; and
- Education Maintenance Allowances for 16 to 18-year-olds in education, currently covering about a third of the youth population in pilot projects.

8. The Department and the Funding Council see further improvement in secondary education as a prerequisite to further raising performance in higher education, especially for people from the lower socio-economic groups. Success depends on effective leaders, head teachers and teachers creating an ethos of discipline and learning.⁹

9. Another key to progress is developing the aspirations of young people. As well as developing the ethos, philosophy and performance of secondary schools, the gap between primary schools needs to be closed, because some of the falling behind of children from poorer families starts there. There is also a need to tackle low aspirations and culture in communities and families.¹⁰

10. OFSTED inspects all maintained schools, and has identified just over 60 that require special measures. The Department follow up on schools that are weak and failing. For example, each of the 200 schools with fewer than 25 per cent of pupils achieving five A-C grade GCSEs has an individual plan with extra support to improve their performance. These plans include ensuring that the school has an ethos of discipline, which is essential to creating a learning environment. In addition, programmes such as Excellence in Cities about supporting schools to raise attainment, including tackling behaviour and working

⁹ Qs 251, 255, 437-441

¹⁰ Qs 43-44, 48-57, 63, 148

with families. One example is Tower Hamlets, which under the Literacy Strategy has made significant improvements towards the national average.¹¹

11. Education Maintenance Allowances aim to encourage young people to stay at school after 16. At the time of our hearing, these allowances covered about 30 per cent of the country and evidence was emerging that they were raising staying-on rates significantly. Subsequently, in June 2002 the Government published a consultation document on *14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards*, which looks at how to encourage students to stay on and achieve more. Its proposals include more flexible and responsive curriculum planning, better recognition for and more coherent technical and vocational education, closer collaboration between schools and colleges and better guidance, advice and support for young people.¹²

12. The Department are already seeing the first signs of improved levels of educational attainment at GCSE for pupils from poorer families and from poorer areas. These ought now to be reflected in higher staying on rates in further education and post-16 education and A-levels, and shortly in more poorer students coming through into higher education.¹³

13. Higher education providers are also helping to address the problem of early disengagement with a range of measures that aim to encourage young pupils to stay in education for longer and meet the needs of adults who left education early. These include visiting schools and colleges, partnerships with schools and colleges, taster days and events for parents.¹⁴

14. One of the reasons why students leave higher education without completing their qualification or fail is that they are not well prepared. As a result, higher education institutions are increasingly seeking to identify knowledge and skills gaps and ease students' transition, for example by offering remedial or catch-up courses in mathematics in the first year.¹⁵

15. To improve numeracy, the Department have launched programmes starting with teaching of mathematics in primary schools and subsequently for children between 11 and 14. They are also concerned about the failure rate in AS level mathematics, and the impact on the number of maths teachers. Other countries are experiencing similar problems, and the only countries where the numbers of students in mathematics and maths-based subjects are holding up are in the Far East.¹⁶ There are also concerns that the modular nature of A-levels means that students can get a good pass in maths, yet still lack essential skills for their degree courses.¹⁷

IMPROVING ARRANGEMENTS FOR ENTRY INTO HIGHER EDUCATION AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION

16. To improve progression from school to higher education, there is a need not only to raise aspirations and school performance, but for those in higher education to make sure that the courses they are offering are attractive and fit for purpose, and that admissions policies are fair and equitable.¹⁸ We looked at measures to help widen participation, how higher education institutions could improve the information available to students, and the fairness of admissions procedures.

¹¹ Qs 77-78, 81, 83-85, 133-135, 141

¹² Qs 146-147, 191-192; *14-19: Extending opportunities, raising standards*, Cm 5342

¹³ Q12

¹⁴ C&AG's Reports: HC 485, Session 2001-02, paras 3.4-3.7 and Figure 16; HC 486, Session 2001-02, Figure 7

¹⁵ C&AG's Report: HC 486, Session 2001-02, paras 10, 2.10, 5.7-5.9

¹⁶ Qs 256-257, 420-432

¹⁷ Qs 346-349

¹⁸ Q15

(a) Progress in and measures aimed at widening participation

17. We noted that in various statements there appeared to be some uncertainty about the target for widening participation. The Department said that the target of increasing participation towards 50 per cent of those aged 18–30 by the end of the decade had been based on forward projections by the National Skills Task Force of the number of high level jobs there were going to be in the economy. The Department were confident of putting in place the plans and policies to achieve this target. They do not believe that the target is too ambitious, in terms of the capacity of children to improve. Between 1989 and 2000 there had been a marked increase in attainment at GCSE for children of unskilled manual workers, from 11 per cent achieving five A–C grades to 30 per cent, which showed how levels could be raised.¹⁹

18. Since 1998–99, the Department said they had used a consistent measure, the Initial Entry Rate to measure progress. This measures changes in the number of 18–30-year-olds projected to go into higher education. The available data then available gave a participation rate of 43 per cent, but subsequent quality assurance reviews of data from higher education institutions and further education colleges had found some errors. Using more robust data, the participation rate in 2001–02 was 41.5 per cent. These figures do not include professional qualifications, and the Government has asked the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to say whether they meet the test of higher level qualifications. The Department estimated that any change would only have a marginal effect on the participation figures.²⁰

19. The Funding Council provides funds to help higher education providers meet the costs of widening participation activities. It also provides access funding for providers to pass on to students facing hardship. Students with disabilities can apply to their local education authorities for Disabled Students' Allowances overseen by the Department. The total funding allocation under these categories was over £200 million for 2001–02.²¹

20. Funds to help offset providers' costs consist mainly of four premiums (Figure 4), paid with overall teaching funds. They are designed to recognise extra fixed 'per head' costs for part time students and extra recruitment and support costs for mature students and students from low participation postcodes or with disabilities. The premiums also cover the extra costs of lifelong learning so are not entirely focused on widening participation. Further funds comprise £8 million for partnership projects with schools and colleges, £4 million for summer schools to raise the aspirations of young people and £6 million to increase participation by students from the state education sector at providers currently recruiting below 80 per cent from that source. There will also be a distribution of £56 million to help with costs of physical adjustments required under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.²²

¹⁹ Qs 2–3, 90–91, 140

²⁰ Qs 179–190, 302–320, 179–190, 249–250; Ev 49

²¹ C&AG's Report (HC 485, Session 2001–02), para 1.25; Qs 155–156

²² C&AG's Report (HC 485, Session 2001–02), paras 2.14–2.16 and Figure 12

Fund	Coverage	Started	2001–02 (£million)
Part time	Part time students (young and mature)	1998–99	26
Mature	Mature full time students	1998–99	12
Postcode	Young full time and part time students from postcodes with below average youth participation	1999–00	31
Disability	All students with disabilities, based on the number receiving Disabled Students' Allowances	2000–01	8

Note: *Part time students are defined as those studying for less than 21 hours a week or less than 24 weeks a year; young students are defined for funding purposes as those under 25 at course commencement*

21. The Funding Council allocates the premium on the basis of a classification of postcodes into clusters that have broadly homogeneous population characteristics. The Funding Council accept that in some inner city areas like London and in remoter rural areas, postcodes are not a close proxy for participation factors. The Council has therefore decided to launch a review of the indicators to see whether it can find a means of directing support in a more specific and concentrated way.²³

22. The Funding Council discourages providers from taking account of students' postcodes when processing applications, because it does not want the interview process to be distorted by factors, such as additional funding, which are extraneous to an assessment of students' potential. Providers can however obtain information about current students, eighteen months after their admission, by examining Funding Council data showing the postcode cluster to which it has assigned each student, requesting further data on participation levels in each cluster and matching the two sets of information.²⁴

23. Higher education providers believe that the costs of their widening participation activities exceed the funds they receive for them. The Funding Council commissioned KPMG to undertake two studies to identify the additional costs. Their reports indicate a wide range of costs in different institutions, depending on what they are doing to widen participation and KPMG are undertaking further research. The Council expect that once they have a much more accurate estimate of these costs, they will raise the premium.²⁵

24. There is a wide variation between institutions in the proportion of students they have from poorer social classes. Oxford and Cambridge have the lowest participation rates. They have far more well-qualified applicants than places available, but the Funding Council has been urging them to adopt strategies to widen participation. Like similar colleges, they receive an "aspiration premium", to pay for the additional costs of going into schools and colleges and into parts of the country which historically have had very low rates of participation in higher education, and those universities in particular. In this way,

²³ C&AG's Report (HC 485, Session 2001–02), para 2.16; Qs 7, 149, 213–214, 377

²⁴ C&AG's Report (HC 485, Session 2001–02), paras 2.16–2.17; Qs 149–150, 217–219

²⁵ C&AG's Report (HC 485, Session 2001–02), para 2.19; Q145

the institutions try to raise aspirations, work with schools and colleges, inform them about their admission policies and demonstrate that they operate on the basis of merit and no other basis.²⁶

25. The Funding Council had asked all higher education institutions to provide widening participation strategies, including targets for widening participation, and to report progress through their annual operating statement. They had also launched a benchmarking exercise, which aimed to set widening participation targets for each institution, reflecting different mixes of subjects and different patterns of recruitment but ensuring that each institution was working up to and beyond its benchmark. Looking forward, they had it in mind to set targets for institutions working in partnership with schools and colleges.²⁷

26. Students from poorer social classes have particularly low representation in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science and higher representation in education, mathematical and computer sciences. As regards medicine, the Funding Council has persuaded the Council for Heads of Medical Schools to introduce a set of innovative measures to encourage medical schools to seek well-qualified students who may not have aspired to a medical career for cultural reasons. Over the past two years, experiments have been running in five or six medical schools, and which are not only attracting non-conventional students, but also retaining the confidence of the medical profession.²⁸

(b) The information available to students

27. Potential students need good pre-enrolment information about courses to ensure that their higher education experience meets their expectations and aptitudes, and enables them to progress along their chosen career path. Information about higher education, individual institutions and courses offered is more widely available than ever before, through websites as well as prospectuses and open days. UCAS now has an array of services on line, and the Higher Education Research Database also provides information online. However, some students are dissatisfied with initial descriptions of courses and others, particularly those accepted through the "clearing" process, have little time to research fully the courses on offer.²⁹

28. The Funding Council recognises the need to continue to improve the quantity and quality of information students have, so as to make informed choices about the type of course and type of institution that most suits them. It accepts the need to ensure that there is no deliberate over-selling, and the Quality Assurance Agency looks specifically at claims in both prospectuses and other course material to ensure that the aims and objectives are valid and are met over the lifetime of the course.³⁰

(c) Admissions procedures

29. The majority of potential full-time students apply to institutions immediately from school or college, or after a 'gap year'. Most submit their application forms to their chosen institutions through UCAS and admissions tutors sift through the forms to identify suitable students. Institutions make offers of places based on results already obtained, or conditional offers based on predicted grades at A-level or Advanced GNVQ, or other evidence of their suitability. Some, which attract more applicants than they have places for, make offers based on high grades at A-level, or the achievement of other qualifications. Others who have more difficulty in recruiting students tend to make much

²⁶ C&AG's Report (HC 485, Session 2001–02), para 1.20 and Figure 8; Qs 4–6, 143–144, 226–234, 237–239

²⁷ Qs 4–6, 14, 142–144

²⁸ C&AG's Report (HC 485, Session 2001–02) para 1.19 and Figure 7; Qs 220–224, 235

²⁹ C&AG's Report (HC 486, Session 2001–02), paras 14, 4.2–4.5, 4.11; Qs 336–339

³⁰ Qs 262–263

lower offers. Applications from students with disabilities or from mature people with less traditional qualifications are usually considered individually. A few institutions, notably Bristol University, have also started to take account of the overall performance of the school or college applicants have been attending, and have interviewed students from those schools with low average achievement.³¹

30. The aim is to widen participation without lowering standards of entry, which is not in students' interests either. Over the last 15 years, and despite a substantial expansion in higher education, the average A-level points on entry have risen from 18 to 19.³² The Department see no evidence of a drop in the standards of A-levels, and the scope for variations between examining bodies is less, now that the number has been reduced to three. It is the role of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to maintain standards across the boards.³³

31. Most institutions accept that interviews are the best way to test an individual's commitment to the course, and their aptitude for it. Especially for returners to education, applicants with lower prior academic qualifications or "widening participation" students, interviews help staff assess whether or not any additional support may be needed. Interviews are also very important for helping applicants assess the suitability of the institution and the course for their needs. Interviewers may help students explore other options or advise on additional qualifications (e.g. an Access course at a further education college) before proceeding with the current application.³⁴

32. In practice, interviewing is very resource intensive, and for most faculties it is impossible to interview all students whom they might be willing to accept. Many target interviews at particular groups. About two thirds of institutions provide specific training to interviewers to ensure that they put candidates at ease and get the best from the interview.³⁵ Following the Comptroller and Auditor General's report the Funding Council plans to issue urgently advice on admissions to establish good practice which all higher education institutions must apply, and through the funding mechanism seek assurance that these criteria are being used.³⁶

IMPROVING THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR STUDENTS

33. The Comptroller and Auditor General found that one of the main obstacles to widening participation was difficulty in securing financial support. Groups with low representation face greater uncertainty and complexity than others, including limited entitlement to loans or help with fees if they study part time. Key issues included:

- The complexity and wide range of potential sources of public funding from which students can seek support.³⁷
- Uncertainty over access to additional funds distributed at the discretion of higher education institutions; some do not tell accepted applicants until it is too late what support they will receive.³⁸
- Difficulties with the interface between the student support system and benefit

³¹ C&AG's Report (HC 486, Session 2001-02), paras 4.6, 4.9

³² Qs 268-270

³³ Qs 272-274, 404-418, 424, 430, 448-452

³⁴ C&AG's Report (HC 486, Session 2001-02), para 4.8

³⁵ *ibid*, paras 4.9-4.10

³⁶ Qs 154, 168, 242-247

³⁷ C&AG's Report (HC 485, Session 2001-02), paras 9, 2.9-212, 3.17-3.20 and Figure 19

³⁸ *ibid*, paras 2.12, 3.18

systems, for example disabled students studying with extended work placements break their entitlement to long term disability benefits. The Department has joined with the Department of Work and Pensions, HM Treasury and the Department of Health to resolve these problems.³⁹

- The availability of Disabled Student Allowances from local authorities can only be decided after acceptance, which causes uncertainty and can delay payments.⁴⁰
- Levels of debt after qualification.⁴¹

34. The Department consider that the basic financial support arrangements, through a contribution to tuition fees and the student loans, are not complicated. However, they acknowledge that all the discretionary and hardship funds are difficult to understand, that there is very little certainty, and that the fear of debt has some impact on the likelihood of people from poorer families going on to higher education. Simplifying the system, particularly as it relates to discretionary funds, is the first aim of an ongoing review of student finance. The review also aims to provide more up-front support for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, tackle the problems of debt, and address issues such as the extent to which the costs of studying in different locations, such as in London, are taken into account. However, the timing of any announcements is uncertain, and any changes will not affect the package available to those going into higher education in autumn 2002.⁴²

IMPROVING RETENTION AND ACHIEVEMENT

35. Some 77 per cent of full-time undergraduate students are projected to achieve a degree at the institution at which they started. A further one per cent will obtain a different qualification, and five per cent are expected to transfer to another institution. This compares well with other sectors and higher education in other countries. The comparisons by the OECD of the performance of a range of industrialised nations suggest that only Japanese students are more likely to obtain their degree.⁴³

36. Despite this relatively high success rate, the sector will have to recruit more students and maintain or improve achievement rates if it is to meet the Government's national learning targets. Moreover, some institutions lose more than one in five full-time first year degree students, and the proportion of students likely to graduate ranges from 48 per cent to 98 per cent. Non-continuation rates tend to be lower in pre-1992 universities than in post-1992 universities and "other" institutions. And there is a strong correlation between success and prior educational qualifications. The Funding Council recognises that these variations are too wide and is tackling the problem by focusing on under-performing institutions.⁴⁴ For example, it has instituted a programme called *Action on Access* to establish and disseminate good practice on matters such as giving students more support and encouragement.⁴⁵

37. There is a risk that to widen participation there might be a reduction in standards of intake, provision and degree. The Funding Council pointed out that there is no incentive for institutions to recruit weaker students who might then leave within the first year. The

³⁹ C&AG's Report (HC 485, Session 2001-02), para 3.19; Q323

⁴⁰ C&AG's Report (HC 485, Session 2001-02), para 3.20

⁴¹ *ibid*, para 2.12

⁴² *ibid*, para 3.18; Qs 8-11, 39, 101, 106, 110-113, 123-124, 175-176, 193-194, 197-210, 248, 354-359, 476-480

⁴³ C&AG's Report (HC 486, Session 2001-02), para 7, 2.4, and Figure 9; OECD *Knowledge and Skills for Life*, first results from PISA 2000

⁴⁴ C&AG's Report (HC 486, Session 2001-02), paras 11-12, 3.2, 3.4 and Appendix 3; Qs 261, 280-282, 290

⁴⁵ Qs 264, 290

Council clawed back money in respect of those students.⁴⁶

38. The Council took the view that the rise in the average A level points on entry was evidence that standards of intake had not declined. To offset the risks of lower standards in provision, the Quality Assurance Agency has established benchmark standards on a subject by subject basis for all institutions and is undertaking its first review of provision to ensure that institutions deliver to an appropriate standard. As regards the quality of degrees, there is no system to ensure national conformity. The Agency's benchmarks are the minimum standard, subject by subject. However, there is variation above that minimum threshold in terms both of the content of the degree and the level to which students are taken.⁴⁷

39. Ninety per cent of full-time first degree students continue into their year after entry.⁴⁸ Young students (those under 21 at the start of their year of entry and who represent about three-quarters of the undergraduate population) are more likely to continue (92 per cent) than mature students (84 per cent). Students who withdraw tend to have lower prior academic qualifications. They are also more likely to have entered through clearing. The Department put the costs to the Exchequer of the students who do not continue into the next year at about £90 million, although this excluded costs borne by the students themselves and their families which might bring the cost nearer to £200 million.⁴⁹

40. Qualitative research carried out by the National Audit Office indicates that the main causes of withdrawals are lack of preparedness for higher education, changing personal circumstances or interest, financial matters, paid work and dissatisfaction with the course or institution. The Comptroller and Auditor General identified a range of good practice, which if implemented more widely could better match students to courses and provide effective preparatory activities, induction, teaching and support.⁵⁰

41. The Funding Council told us about a range of initiatives in these areas, including:

- *On matching students to courses* more appropriate to their qualifications and aptitudes, the Funding Council is working to improve the quantity and quality of information available. The work of the Quality Assurance Agency in validating claims made in prospectuses is important.⁵¹
- *On teaching*, the Funding Council allocates resources to institutions to help ensure that wherever students go, teaching resources are broadly similar—within plus or minus 5 per cent. It had reduced variations by shifting resources from those with large amounts of money per capita to those with low levels, and was continuing to do so. Institutions could top up these funds with their own resources.⁵²
- *On student support, including pastoral care*, the Funding Council has recommended that to help improve retention institutions should provide additional pastoral and academic care; ongoing study skills; and literacy, numeracy and IT skills services when students enter high education and throughout their study to help aim retention. Students were being offered the opportunity to visit institutions during the summer before entry to learn more about what goes on, and where appropriate to receive some learning skills tuition. Student counselling services and

⁴⁶ Q294

⁴⁷ Qs 92–93, 174, 230–234, 253, 271, 276–277, 364–371, 401–403

⁴⁸ National Audit Office analysis of Funding Council performance indicators

⁴⁹ C&AG's Report (HC 486, Session 2001–02), paras 8, 2.2–2.5; Qs 339–344, 360–363

⁵⁰ C&AG's Report (HC 486, Session 2001–02), paras 10, 14–19, 2.9 and Parts 4, 5; Qs 283–287

⁵¹ Qs 262–263

⁵² Qs 373–377, 381–390

student unions were focusing on assisting students in their first years. No cost-benefit analysis has yet been undertaken on these different activities, partly because it is difficult to isolate and quantify the effect each has on retention. As a result, evidence is generally drawn from on case studies.⁵³

⁵³ Qs 327, 333; Ev 52-53

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS OF
THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

SESSION 2001-02

MONDAY 28 JANUARY 2002

Members present:

	Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair
Mr Richard Bacon	Mr George Osborne
Mr Ian Davidson	Mr David Rendel
Geraint Davies	Mr Gerry Steinberg
Mr Nick Gibb	Mr Alan Williams
Mr Brian Jenkins	

Sir John Bourn KCB, Comptroller and Auditor General, was further examined.

The Committee deliberated.

Mr Glenn Hull, Second Treasury Officer of Accounts, was further examined.

The Comptroller and Auditor General's Report on Widening participation in higher education in England (HC 485) was considered.

Mr David Normington CB, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education and Skills; and Professor Sir Howard Newby CBE, Chief Executive, Higher Education Funding Council for England, were examined (HC 581-i).

A division of the House being called, the Chairman suspended the meeting for ten minutes.

The Committee resumed.

The witnesses were further examined.

* * * * *

[Adjourned until Wednesday 30 January at Four o'clock.

* * * * *

WEDNESDAY 30 JANUARY 2002

Members present:

	Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair
Mr Richard Bacon	Mr Brian Jenkins
Mr Ian Davidson	Mr David Rendel
Geraint Davies	Mr Gerry Steinberg
Mr Nick Gibb	Mr Alan Williams

Sir John Bourn KCB, Comptroller and Auditor General, was further examined.

The Committee deliberated.

Mr Glenn Hull, Second Treasury Officer of Accounts, was further examined.

The Comptroller and Auditor General's Report on Improving student achievement in English higher education (HC 486) was considered.

Mr David Normington CB, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education and Skills; and Professor Sir Howard Newby CBE, Chief Executive, Higher Education Funding Council for England were further examined; and Mr Jeff Jones, Account Director, National Audit Office, was examined (HC 588-i).

The witnesses withdrew.

The Committee further deliberated.

* * * * *

[Adjourned until Monday 4 February at half past Four o'clock.

* * * * *

WEDNESDAY 17 JULY 2002

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Richard Bacon
Geraint Davies
Mr Frank Field
Mr Nick Gibb
Mr Brian Jenkins
Mr Nigel Jones

Mr George Osborne
Mr David Rendel
Mr Gerry Steinberg
Jon Trickett
Mr Alan Williams

Mr Tim Burr, Deputy Comptroller and Auditor General, was further examined.

The Committee deliberated.

* * * * *

Draft Report (Improving Student Achievement and Widening Participation in Higher Education in England), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 4 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 5 postponed.

Paragraphs 6 to 41 read and agreed to.

Postponed paragraph 5 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fifty-eighth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman do make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That the provisions of Standing Order No. 134 (Select Committees (Reports)) be applied to the Report.

* * * * *

[Adjourned until Monday 21 October at Four o'clock.]

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE

TAKEN BEFORE THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

MONDAY 28 JANUARY 2002

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Richard Bacon
Mr Ian Davidson
Geraint Davies
Mr Nick Gibb
Mr Brian Jenkins

Mr George Osborne
Mr David Rendel
Mr Gerry Steinberg
Mr Alan Williams

SIR JOHN BOURN KCB, Comptroller and Auditor General, further examined.

MR GLENN HULL, Second Treasury Officer of Accounts, HM Treasury, further examined.

REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL:

Widening participation in higher education in England (HC 485)

Examination of Witnesses

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education and Skills, and PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE, Chief Executive, Higher Education Funding Council for England, examined.

Chairman

1. Welcome to the Committee of Public Accounts. Today we are considering the Comptroller and Auditor General's Report on Widening Participation in Higher Education in England. We are delighted to be joined by Mr David Normington, the Permanent Secretary to the Department for Education and Skills, and Professor Sir Howard Newby, the Chief Executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Welcome. Mr Normington, perhaps I can start with you and go straight to Page 6, Figure 2, of the Comptroller and Auditor General's Report. You will see there under Figure 2 groups with historically low representation within the student population, and you will see that you are making good progress over the last six years with women, ethnic minorities and people declaring disabilities. However, there has been no progress whatsoever in terms of social classes III, IV and V. I understand that from an historically low base, although data is not very good, that five to ten per cent—and we are talking about history going back to the Second World War—there has been a gradual rise but no progress within the last six years. Why has there been no progress, Mr Normington?

(*Mr Normington*) I think it is absolutely right that the number of people from the lower socio-economic groups going into higher education has risen but the overall proportion has not risen. I think there are a whole number of reasons for that, but the most important reason, and I guess the reason we will keep coming back to and which the Report keeps coming back to, is about prior attainment. It is basically that not enough students from the lower socio-economic groups are getting good enough GCSEs and they are therefore not staying on in full-time education and they are not going on to get A-levels. Once you get A-levels your chances of going into higher education

are very high. 90 per cent of those with two A-levels go into higher education and all the focus, therefore, of our policies is on helping and supporting people from lower socio-economic groups to get better GCSEs and to get better A-levels.

2. Obviously colleagues will want to go into the fundamental aspects of this Report in more detail. If you stay on Page 6 and look at Figure 1, you will see the three targets there that relate to widening participation. How confident are you that these targets will be met? Will you meet the 50 per cent participation target?

(*Mr Normington*) It is for 2010 so it is a long time off. I am as confident as I can be that we are putting in place the plans and policies to achieve it. We are at somewhere about 41 per cent now. That is quite a mountain to climb, but I am reasonably confident that if we pursue the policies that we are putting in place that we will have a very good chance of meeting it.

3. You do not think the targets are too ambitious?

(*Mr Normington*) The more difficult target is the one which talks about significant year-on-year progress in widening participation. I think it is difficult to increase participation but even more challenging to widen participation. For the reasons we touched on just briefly in the answer to the first question, I think that is going to be the bigger challenge. To do both of these things is the really big challenge. I think we will meet the third one, the 2002 target, and we are very, very close to it already.

4. Sir Howard, if I could now ask you to please look at Page 9, Figure 8. You will see that some institutions there have a very small proportion of students from poorer social classes. What are you

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Chairman Cont]

doing to persuade them to accept more students from poorer social classes or indeed to encourage more to apply?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) We have asked all the higher education institutions in England to provide us with their widening participation strategies which will include targets for improvement in this kind of area. They report to us on their progress towards these targets through their annual operating statement. There is a very wide variation. Many would suggest that they would like to see that variation much less than it currently is. It is, of course, very much tied up with the previous education and qualifications of the students submitted to these different institutions.

5. You will see there that there are some very low figures indeed. I understand, if we just look at Oxford and Cambridge, that they do not, apparently, have too bad a record in accepting those from the poorer social classes who apply—about a third—but their problem is that people just do not apply. Is that correct?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) That is correct.

6. And what are you doing, and what are they doing to try and get over this culture of people simply not applying to Oxford and Cambridge from the poorer social classes?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) Universities like Oxford and Cambridge, and it includes some others in addition to them, are already in receipt of what we call an “aspiration premium”, which is money specifically directed to those institutions to pay for the additional costs of them going out into schools and colleges and into parts of the country which historically have had very low rates of participation in higher education generally, and entry to those universities in particular, to try to raise aspirations, to work with schools and colleges, to inform them about their admissions’ policies, and to demonstrate that they operate on the basis of merit and no other basis.

7. I am wondering if any of the mechanisms you are using are particularly effective. If you look at the Appendix, for instance, on Page 31, if I can just return to that, this is about trying to encourage participation from various postcodes. If you look at that figure there, postcodes with lowest participation, you have got that figure of 40 per cent. Reading that, it looks like even in those postcodes, which presumably are picked because they are supposed to be poorer classes, 60 per cent come from the better off classes anyway, so I am not sure how effective this mechanism is.

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) We are reviewing it. First of all, I should say that the postcode indicator was introduced as an attempt to find a proxy for the kinds of issues that we are discussing. For a variety of technical reasons, we recognise that both in remoter rural areas and in some inner city areas like London, postcode is not a very good proxy. So we are reviewing this and my Board agreed only last week to move forward on the basis of a complete review of indicators like this to see whether we can find a means of directing the support we offer in a more specific and concentrated way to those who need it.

8. Mr Normington, if I could ask you now to go back to Page 22 and look at Figure 19, you will see there that there is a bewildering array of funds to which students, particularly poorer students, can apply for support. What are you doing to make the system a lot simpler? The basic problem is, is it not, that if you come from a family which has no involvement traditionally in higher education, you yourself make a business decision “is it worth my while going on?” And you have got this completely bewildering array of possible support mechanisms in front of you. It is a bit off-putting.

(Mr Normington) Yes, I think it is too complicated.

9. How do you make it more simple?

(Mr Normington) There are two things to say. I think the basic support arrangements through a contribution to tuition fees and the loan, that basic system which applies to most people, is not that complicated, and it is only those two things that apply to many potential students. It is all the discretionary and hardship funds which are difficult to understand. It is not that they are just difficult to understand, I think it is also there is very little certainty, if you are poor, as to whether you will get them, and the answer is that we have this review going on of student finance, the first aim of which is to simplify the system, particularly as it relates to all these discretionary funds. It looks particularly complicated. Some of these arrows apply to only very small numbers but I agree very much with the general thrust of what you have said and what the Report says.

10. When will the review report?

(Mr Normington) The review will report soon. I cannot tell you precisely when.

11. Do you think it would be helpful if you had a one-stop shop for students to go to?

(Mr Normington) This is something else we are looking at. At the moment there are two sources of assessment, one is the local authority and one is the higher education institution. The reason we concentrated a lot of the hardship and access funds on the universities was because they are best-placed to judge whether that student is in hardship as they are applying and when they are in the university. Some of this is the function of trying to target access and hardship and discretionary funds very precisely on those students who are in most difficulty. I think, though, that it has created a complicated system.

12. If you now go back to Page 11 and look at Figures 9 and 10—and this is going back to the point you were making earlier about groups not participating in higher education because they leave education at age 16—when do you think that your initiatives that you are taking will have some impact on this problem?

(Mr Normington) We are beginning to see already the first signs of improved levels of attainment at GCSE for pupils from poorer families and from poorer areas. That is partly as a result of the Government’s efforts to raise attainment in the inner city areas through its Excellence in Cities programmes. We are beginning to see that happening and to see faster improvement in those areas than overall and as soon as that starts happening it ought to begin to knock on into staying on rates in further

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Chairman Cont]

education and post-16 and into A-levels. There are some other things that are necessary and will, I hope, help. One is the great efforts that are going on to link up universities and schools much earlier so that you raise the ambitions of children much earlier. I think you have to get to them much earlier than 14 or 15 because by then they are already taking decisions about what they are going to study. We are also providing better advice through the Connections Service and we are providing support for poorer students beyond 16 through Educational Maintenance Allowances. The combination of those things will, I think, very shortly begin to see more poorer students coming through. I answered the first question by saying that this is the big challenge and you can see from Figure 9 why that is.

13. You sound very confident so to go back to my first question, that first figure, that rather depressing graph that I pointed out to you that showed no progress, you are confident that we are going to see that edging upwards?

(*Mr Normington*) I said that it was a very tough challenge. I am confident that we are putting in place the arrangements to do it. Eight years before we have to hit the target I am confident we are getting the policies in place.

14. Sir Howard, could I now ask you to turn to Appendix 3, Paragraph 8, Page 31. This is talking about these benchmarks. They are just benchmarks, they are not targets so I was wondering what you are doing to change the regime to encourage a real improvement.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) As you say, these are benchmarks and they are designed to reflect back to the institutions how well they are actually performing compared to how well we feel they could reasonably be expected to perform. Looking forward to the future, we have it in mind to set targets. These targets would be set not just for individual higher education institutions but for higher educational institutions working in partnership with schools and colleges so that over a period of time and broken down into different localities we could try to hit the 50 per cent participation target and do something about widening participation as well.

15. This is the last point on this theme. If you go back to Page 18, Figure 16, Sir Howard, we are talking here about the activities to raise aspirations, but a lot of this is just attracting people who would go on to higher education anyway. How are you trying to target the right people who you want to get into higher education who have not hitherto enjoyed it?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) The way forward is to develop something we are calling "Partnerships for Progression". I very much agree that the problem is a 14 to 19 educational progression issue. We come in at the end of that and that is why to take really effective action we have to work in collaboration with schools and colleges within a local area and so with our partners we need to move on several fronts at once. We need to raise aspirations. Schools and colleges will need to raise levels of attainment. We in the higher education sector need to make sure that

the courses we are offering are attractive and fit for purpose for students and that our admissions policies are fair and equitable.

16. Do you accept that this is a very serious problem and there are some council estates where not a single person historically is going on educationally post 16?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I certainly do.

17. Do you think that the measures you have got in place to tackle this very serious problem are effective and likely to deliver results?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) We believe so, on the basis of the knowledge we have at the moment. Obviously the proof of effectiveness will come when we start to do it. I have to say that working out where particular policy instruments can be rendered most effective is difficult. Nationally we have a rather thin evidence base on which to work here and the evidence is not that great in other countries either.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr Geraint Davies?

Geraint Davies

18. Mr Normington, you started off by saying the real challenge, or words to this effect, is really in GCSEs and A-levels, as opposed to going to university, for those people with poorer social backgrounds, but would you not agree that one of the issues is not simply the attainment of the necessary conditions to go but the risk aversion of people from less well off backgrounds to taking out massive loans and their affordability?

(*Mr Normington*) That is a factor as well. There is a range of factors. I think the prior attainment and the ambition to go to university is overwhelmingly the most important factor, but there is evidence, of course, that people from poorer families with few means of support are worried about debt.

19. Would you be surprised to know that many of my constituents have come to me where they have taken a number of years and taken a job to save money because they cannot afford to go, particularly in London because of the price of housing, and they then find themselves unable to go to college? Would you be surprised by that?

(*Mr Normington*) I have met, too, potential students who have been deterred. I think I would like to sit down and argue with them that there was a package of support which would help them. I do not think it is quite as bad a package as they think. However, the perceptions, the misunderstandings about it, the perception that there is very little support and fears about debt, are considerable amongst some people.

20. Have you any data on the proportion of students and their social background who take up mini-cabbing and bar work, etcetera, etcetera, in order to avoid unsustainable debt as they see it and what impact that has on their educational attainment? In other words, do you know if they are prejudiced doubly?

(*Mr Normington*) I do not think I do have precise figures about that. A substantial proportion of students work while they are going through

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Geraint Davies Cont]

university now. In my mind I have a figure of around 40 per cent working on a regular basis but I would have to check that figure.¹

21. Is the tendency for those people from poorer families to tend to do more of that sort of work therefore undermining their studies?

(*Mr Normington*) It is not just people from poorer families working.

22. I appreciate that but that is the propensity.

(*Mr Normington*) Clearly if you are not getting as much support from your family then you are going to look for other ways of supporting yourself, and working is one way.

23. Are you sympathetic to the idea of a graduate tax?

(*Mr Normington*) I do not think it is for me to say whether I am sympathetic or not.

24. Do you know how much extra tax the Exchequer could expect to get from someone with a degree versus someone with A-levels?

(*Mr Normington*) I do not know that. I know that a graduate is likely to earn substantially more.

25. I think the figure is between £30,000 and £50,000 more in tax. I also understand that if a graduate tax were charged by raising National Insurance ceilings to a 40 per cent kick in we would raise between £9,500 and £14,500. Given that the money could be reined in and paid for itself by a graduate tax, are there many discussions on this going on?

(*Mr Normington*) I am not really willing to be drawn about the discussions going on in the Department.

26. I simply make the point that I hope you are engaged in the idea of investing in human capital and making a profit on it and helping everybody. On the issue of standards, would you be surprised to hear stories of universities phoning headmasters asking whether they had anyone with three Us at A-level at their school so people can go into university without any A-levels and get funding? In any such cases do you find a very large drop-out after year one of people who have got poor grades, which has nothing to do with social background?

(*Mr Normington*) One answer to you is that we do not want to see a lowering of standards as participation is widened. I do not think that is a helpful course of action at all. I would be a little bit surprised to hear that, but I know that universities set their own admission levels and I do not influence those at all, in fact I am forbidden from doing that, and they obviously do look at a range of factors other than just qualifications.

27. Professor Newby, maybe you can give us some illumination and provide some information on how many people are going to university with no A-levels at all in order for the university to get the money.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) My comment on the issue of headteachers ringing up and asking for students in that fashion is that it is rank bad practice on admissions.

28. I appreciate that but they are desperate to fill the places they have got and get the funding for them.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) However, there are many students who present themselves to universities for admission who do not have A-levels who quite legitimately are offered places because of their particular background circumstances, and often mature students, for example, who have not got those qualifications, are admitted, sometimes—usually in fact—after having gained a qualification after having undertaken a foundation course.

29. Do you know of any research that suggests that the preconceptions of children as to whether they expect to be train drivers or stockbrokers, or whatever, are made at a very early age and it is quite difficult to break out of that, and so self-esteem and expectation is a driving force of later success? What action are you taking to combat that in early years of teaching?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) If I can break down your question. There is evidence, first of all, to show that attitudes to learning are formed at a very early age. Certainly by the ages of 13 or 14 they are relatively fixed and that is why, if we are to raise aspirations amongst young people as institutions, as universities, we must work with the schools to intervene at those early years. Secondly—

30. May I interrupt you just for a second on that because you said things were relatively fixed by the age of 15. I recall seeing a television programme that tracked people and interviewed these people asking “what are you going to be?” and they came back to them when they were 15 or 20 and found that in 95 per cent of cases they had in fact fulfilled their expectations, and the idea they were genetically programmed to become train drivers was unconvincing.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I was not suggesting for one minute that they were genetically programmed—

31. This was decided at 15 as opposed to five.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes, but not on the basis of genetics, on the basis of the culture, the culture of the family, the culture of the community, the culture of the peer group within which they are operating. I can remember last year a newspaper headline in reference to admissions to university, which is something raised in the Report about the differential between girls’ and boys’ aspirations, saying “It is not cool to be clever”, and I think, amongst young boys in particular, there is that factor and it is formed amongst their peer group. That was the kind of thing.

32. What is Oxford or Cambridge, or any university for that matter, doing to raise expectations and enthusiasm among students who are normally not very good at forming skills in that respect?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) They are doing a number of things. First of all, they are employing more recruitment officers to go out into schools and give talks in schools, to work with school teachers to raise aspirations. They are also doing more in the way of running summer schools and organised visits to the institutions, specifically aimed at those schools which have not had a tradition of students applying to those universities.

¹ *Note by witness:* The student Income and Expenditure Survey 1998/99 indicates that 46% of full-time students are employed during term-time.

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Geraint Davies Cont]

(*Mr Normington*) There is quite a bit of evidence from those summer schools that by introducing potential students to the possibility of going to those places and breaking down the mystique, you can begin to change perceptions. There is some really encouraging evidence from that.

33. Obviously the statistics from Oxford and Cambridge, as I understand them, show that a similar proportion of people apply from any social background. The problem is that many schools never have people applying so there is a more proactive attempt to go into schools that never apply. Is that correct?

(*Mr Normington*) That is correct.

34. In terms of women in higher education—and I know David Rendel is a bit interested in this—my understanding of senior lecturers is that there is something like a ratio of 3:1 in favour of men. There are all sorts of explanations for this, but would you be aware of any pressure that is being put on female lecturers in higher education to terminate their jobs or change them in order to get a higher accreditation in terms of the university itself which delivers more funding? In other words, if it is the case that you have a man and a woman who are equal in every respect but the man happens to be generating extra paper in whatever journal and the woman at that point might have a child, for instance, and it might be the case that there is a greater propensity for women to look after children certainly when they are first born, have you any evidence that senior management are coercing such people out of their jobs in order to lift standards in order to get more money?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Not in general no, but I am aware, as I suspect you are too, of some isolated cases, one of which received quite wide publicity recently when it was taken to an industrial tribunal.

35. Which one was that?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) The case of the London School of Economics.

36. I was thinking of another one actually.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I should say that the guidelines which the Funding Councils lay down over procedures for the research assessment exercise specifically make reference to the position of female colleagues who of necessity might have had to take career breaks in order to bring up children.

37. So would you accept that within the financial machinery that is currently employed there is institutional sexism, for the reason I said, coming to a head in a certain number of cases at the moment?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) If by “institutional sexism” you mean are there practices in higher education institutions which inadvertently result in a lower than expected number of females—

38. I do not mean to have a go at the institutions, I mean to have a go at the financial machinery that is driving managers in those institutions to be prejudiced against women.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) No I do not think there are practices of that kind, although I do believe that the proportion of senior staff in higher education institutions which is female is unacceptably low and

I also agree that we, along with institutions, must be more active in ensuring that that is not perpetuated in future.

39. Can I ask Mr Normington again on funding, given the changing costs in terms of the various regions, particularly costs of housing in London, do you think there is a reason to review finances on a regional basis? Do you feel that insofar as a very high proportion of the poorest students stay at home, the fact that there are no grants available is limiting the choices of poorer students to go to the universities that they might otherwise choose? They might want to go to Oxford but they do not live there so they go to Treforest, or wherever it happens to be?

(*Mr Normington*) It is certainly true that students from poorer families are more likely to go to a university near their home and that must be related to their view of the support that they are going to get from the system. If you look at the present system, of course, it already has differential rates of loans for students who are studying in London, students who are studying away from home and students who are at home so there are three levels. There is already built into the system some recognition of the different costs. There is quite a lot more money in London for loans. All this is the subject of the review which the Secretary of State announced in October and which we are actively carrying through.

40. Would you accept—and I know this is a subjective issue—that students, like yourself, who have left home and gone into digs have a more enriching, fulfilling experience than those who stay at home, or would you have preferred to have stayed with your parents?

(*Mr Normington*) Personally I would have preferred to leave home—

41. I will not tell your mother!

(*Mr Normington*) It really does vary. It really has to be about the individual. I would prefer it if the individual had that choice and that, if they wanted to, they felt they could have the support to go and study away from home. It depends on their circumstances, but I would prefer that.

42. Finally coming back to expectations, self-esteem and these issues, how important do you feel it is to get, as it were, role models from communities who are traditionally under-represented to be encouraged and financed to go back to communities and say, “Look, I came from this community, I did it, you can do it?” To what extent is that happening or is it just lip service?

(*Mr Normington*) I know that is happening with schools. I have seen it happening with schools. I have seen schools actively using their success stories, particularly from under-represented ethnic minority groups going back into schools saying “we made it”. It is really powerful. I have seen it a lot in schools.

Chairman: Mr Gibb?

Mr Gibb

43. I was interested in your comment that really the whole problem is based on prior attainment, and that is overwhelmingly the most important factor. The Report says at 2.4 that “lower academic attainment at age 18 accounts for most of the lower participation

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Gibb Cont]

in higher education.” What you are saying tallies directly with the Report. I am interested in understanding why it is that children from social class V have lower educational opportunities prior to higher education.

(Mr Normington) For a whole set of reasons. Basically because they are going to schools where they do not achieve as much, for a whole set of reasons. They are often from communities where they go to schools which have traditionally not got very good GCSE results and therefore rather fewer pupils go on to A-levels. Some of this starts back in primary schools, which is why the Government has made such an effort to raise attainment in primary schools and to close the gap between primary schools because some of the falling behind of children from poorer families starts there.

44. Why is it just in areas like this that the schools are poor? Why? Is it because children from social class V have an average lower IQ than other social groups? That is not my perception and I do not believe that is true of society. So why is it?

(Mr Normington) I do not believe that to be so. There is a whole range of factors, some of them are social factors, some of them are about the families you come from and the aspirations those families have, some are about the quality of the schools in those areas, some are about concentration of deprivation in those schools, the fact that you have more poor children. It is a range of those factors.

45. Why should a concentration of poor children, given that they have the same average IQs, be a factor? I do not understand. I have had lots of these conversations with teachers and heads and I can never understand why it is.

(Mr Normington) I am not myself going to accept that argument because the whole basis of this Government’s approach and the policies we are pursuing is to tackle that.

46. If you do not know why, how can you tackle it?

(Mr Normington) I think we believe it is possible.

47. I can see it is possible but why? This is an intellectual discussion we are having. Why? What are the reasons?

(Mr Normington) I have given you some of the reasons.

48. No you have not, I am afraid.

(Mr Normington) Some of it is about the low aspirations of the communities in which those schools are and the low aspirations of the schools themselves and sometimes the concentration in those schools of teachers who do not believe that you can raise the attainment of those children.

49. So it is the low aspirations and expectations of the teachers in those schools?

(Mr Normington) Not just the teachers.

50. Who then?

(Mr Normington) It starts with what happens in families and with the parents.

51. How do we get out of this vicious cycle? Do we not do so at the school level where they spend seven hours a day throughout the year?

(Mr Normington) School is a very important influence on that. I was going to say I think we have shown with the emphasis on really good teaching of reading and writing and building up good practice in those schools that you can make good progress. I think we have begun to break the myth that you cannot raise the aspirations of those young children.

52. Do you accept the view, which is my view, that the fact that the intake of a school comes from socially deprived areas is no excuse for poor attainment of GCSEs at secondary education level?

(Mr Normington) That is what I believe.

53. Do you think there is something wrong with the ethos of secondary schools who do protest that their intake is the cause of their problems? Is something wrong with the philosophy and ethos of those comprehensive schools?

(Mr Normington) I am really reluctant to say that those schools are not trying to improve.

54. That is not the question. Is there something wrong with the ethos and philosophy?

(Mr Normington) There are all kinds of barriers which those schools have to overcome in order to raise achievement. It is not as easy to raise achievement for those children because there are family problems, problems of poverty, problems of housing, problems of disruptive families, all of those things.

55. Now you are saying intake is a reason for low attainment.

(Mr Normington) I am saying that it is possible for those children to attain but the barriers to their attainment are greater. I am saying that particularly applies in secondary school. I am saying that in primary school it is possible to make progress faster.

56. Now you are saying that the intake does affect the achievements of the school because they have all these barriers that only exist in socially deprived areas. Is that what you are saying? I really need to understand this because it is an important point.

(Mr Normington) I understand that. By the time the children are entering secondary school, some of the children from these lower socio-economic groups have already fallen behind in their levels of attainment and therefore there is already a catch-up to be achieved in the first years of secondary school. Many of the secondary schools have an intake which has already got lower levels and therefore there is a big job of catching up. I think if we measured some of the attainment of those schools in taking them from a lower base forward, we would say they are not doing too badly.

57. So there is a problem in ethos and philosophy of primary schools in this country in those socially deprived areas?

(Mr Normington) In some cases I am saying that is so. It is a very complicated set of issues. I have admitted one factor is the ambitions and aspirations and beliefs that you can do it, in schools, in communities, and in the parents of the children, which need to be raised.

58. If you could take a group of children of mixed ability from those socially deprived areas who go to schools in those areas and put them into Eton or

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Gibb Cont]

Bradford Grammar school or any school that has a traditional ethos, they would perform better or worse?

(Mr Normington) I do not know. I do not think I know the answer to that.

59. You must have a view. You are the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Education.

(Mr Normington) But I do not know the answer to that.

60. Who does in your Department? Does anybody in your Department?

(Mr Normington) It is pure speculation, is it not, because, on the whole, those children do not go to those schools.

61. I think it goes to the fundamentals of the state education in our country, what kind of ethos and philosophy schools are practising, and you are saying one is as good as another. Is that what you are saying?

(Mr Normington) I am saying I want schools of the highest ethos. I think to compare those schools is a hypothetical case because we do not have many children from poor backgrounds going to Eton. Eton is highly selective.

62. What about Bradford Grammar School?

(Mr Normington) It is a highly selective school, is it not?

63. I am talking about its ethos and philosophy. Do you think a child in social class V would thrive in the ethos which Bradford Grammar School practises?

(Mr Normington) It might well do. The ethos of a school is very important. The ambitions of the school and the ethos of the school are very important.

64. Why are applications to Oxford and Cambridge so low amongst classes III, IV and V? Is there an element of inverse snobbery by some of the teachers at those comprehensive schools?

(Mr Normington) I am not going to follow you in saying that. We have said that there are not enough applications. That is the main issue in terms of Oxford and Cambridge from those groups. It might be to do with the attitudes in those schools. It is just as likely to be from pupils and families who do not believe that Oxford and Cambridge are for them.

65. So you think all schools are pushing for their brightest children to apply for Oxford and Cambridge?

(Mr Normington) No, I do not think they are. That is one of the things we have to tackle.

66. Are you proud of state education in this country?

(Mr Normington) I think it can be better.

67. Do you think it compares well to other developed nations in the west? Or do you not know that?

(Mr Normington) No, I do know that. I think that we have just had the evidence from a study of 32 countries which shows that we are very high up.

68. Where? What position?

(Mr Normington) I think we are 4th, 7th and 8th out of 32 in English, science and maths for 15-year-olds. If you look at that report, there are only two other countries in each of the categories that are significantly ahead of us.²

69. Which are those countries?

(Mr Normington) As I recall, and I am not going to get this the right way round, it is Japan and Korea and Finland and Canada. Those are the four.

70. So will you be examining the methods of teaching in those countries to see what we can learn?

(Mr Normington) We are looking at what we can learn from those countries, of course, but it is the best performance this country has ever had in state education. It is a remarkable performance. It really is a remarkable performance.

71. So you are satisfied with the state system in this country?

(Mr Normington) I cannot be satisfied with it. What that Pisa Report, OECD Report said was that while we were succeeding to a very great degree compared with other countries, the big issue here was the gap between the attainment of the lower socio-economic groups and the higher socio-economic groups. That was the fundamental issue we had to tackle here which is what you are saying.

72. Exactly. Can I refer you to an article in *The Times* in December. It is an article written by David Mattin who is a graduate of Cambridge who went to a comprehensive school. I could have written this article based on my own education. Thousands of people in Britain could have written this article. There is nothing special about the article. He went to an average comprehensive in a commuter town, not an inner city comprehensive. He said: "At this school, to work hard, to show deference to teachers, or to admit to any academic ambitions meant social death. My friends and I had to learn to fit in. For us, school was a project in becoming something we were not. By year nine, aged 14, none of us was a child any more. Cheek towards teachers had turned into aggression. Teasing had turned into verbal abuse and physical violence. . . Peer pressure meant that almost everyone had given up any desire to achieve academically or to learn anything; no one wanted to be seen as bright." Is that your view of how comprehensive schools in this country are across the country?

(Mr Normington) No.

73. It is not?

(Mr Normington) You will find that, of course, in some places but that is not—

74. How widespread would you say this ethos was in our comprehensive schools?

(Mr Normington) You will find that in some places. I do not know how widespread it is. The whole focus of our efforts in schools at the moment is to raise standards in secondary schools—

² Note by witness: The Organisation for European Co-operation and Development's report *Knowledge and Skills for Life* (December 2001), found the UK performance was significantly above the OECD average - 7th highest out of 32 countries on the reading literacy scale, 8th on the mathematical literacy scale and 4th on the scientific literacy scale.

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Gibb Cont]

75. If you do not know how widespread this kind of attitude is in our schools, how can you say you are going to raise standards? This article resonates with a lot of people in this country.

(*Mr Normington*) I agree with you that that is so.

76. How widespread is this? Is there anybody in your Department who knows?

(*Mr Normington*) We do the secondary sector a great disservice if we think that is widespread. There are some parts, particularly in our cities, where that is the case.

77. This is a commuter town, this is not a city.

(*Mr Normington*) There are some places where that is so. We do have a problem in some places with a boys' culture which is anti-learning. I think that is a social problem in this country which we have to tackle as well. Of course, one has to be realistic about what one is facing and the challenge one is facing, but I do not think we should talk down the secondary sector.

78. I want to know how you are going to tackle this point. You do not know how extensive it is. You do not think it is that extensive. I am sure people reading the transcript outside will be interested in your view on that. How do you intend to tackle this problem in this commuter town or is it only inner cities that you are dealing with?

(*Mr Normington*) If you take the 200 schools which have fewer than 25 per cent of their pupils achieving five A-C GCSEs, we have an individual plan with extra support for every one of those schools to get them above that level and to improve their performance, and some of that is about improving behaviour and ensuring that the school has an ethos of discipline and good behaviour because if you go into any school, unless the school is ordered, unless it has good discipline, you will not find an environment where children learn.

79. It says in this article: "The teachers were resigned to the idea that teaching was a battle against the disruptive pupils for the benefit of a few. They were for the most part a dedicated staff, invariably of mixed ability. But some of them never learnt to control a class. Once a timid young female teacher was reduced to tears by the sexual insults hurled at her by my class. She was shouted at, interrupted and ignored during all her lessons, but continued anyway, shouting over the noise. . . . But most struggled to get any work at all from the pupils. And they did not hear about bullying from any of us." This is an appalling indictment of schools in our small towns around Britain, is it not?

(*Mr Normington*) There are some schools like that.

80. It is more widespread than you seem to understand. That is my concern about this interview today.

(*Mr Normington*) There are some schools like that and some parts of schools like that and there are some children who are behaving like that. I do not think that is the whole of the secondary sector. I do not see any advantages in starting from that basis.

81. What does that statement mean?

(*Mr Normington*) I think it is better to look at the system we have in place. The system we have in place involves, first of all, OFSTED inspecting all schools,

but it is particularly following up those schools that are weak and failing and putting in place arrangements to reverse that. Many of the schools which are weak and failing will be the ones where you have the behaviour you describe. Those things often go together.

82. These are not weak and failing schools, these are average schools. I am disappointed by the complacency I am hearing from you.

(*Mr Normington*) No, I am not complacent.

Mr Gibb: Finished.

Chairman: Thank you very much. Mr Gerry Steinberg?

Mr Steinberg

83. I was not going to go down this track but I think Mr Gibb is partly right and partly wrong. I was a headteacher in quite a deprived area and my wife has taught in a deprived area for many years, and it is not so much the teachers who have low expectations—teachers always get the blame—it is the families who have the low expectations, that is the problem. I have had parents come to me and say, "What the f. . . has education done for me?" And he is on the dole. You say, "Quite clearly it has done nothing for you, has it, but it might do something for your kid." You do not seem to realise that at all.

(*Mr Normington*) I do realise that. I said that it was not just about the low aspirations of the teachers or that it was always or mainly about that. I said it was the communities and families, that is where it starts.

84. Right. So that is where some work has really got to be done, has it not, with the families from the deprived areas who have no confidence at all in education. Not the educational system, because they do not know what the education system is, they just have no confidence in education at all. They do not believe in education and therefore they are not interested in it and they tell their kids they are not interested in it and the kids become not interested in it. Teachers cannot be blamed for a situation where they have the children for five hours a day and the rest of the 18 hours a day are spent at home. So it is very difficult for a school to be able to indoctrinate when the kids come from that sort of background.

(*Mr Normington*) I think the schools have a more difficult task if they are trying to overcome that kind of family attitude. I do not think it is impossible. You have to work really hard. Most of the schools in these areas work really hard with the parents to overcome that. Where I do not follow you completely is I believe that most parents want their children to succeed. They may not know how that is to be done but most parents do want their children to go to school and succeed.

85. I am not sure whether you are right there, to be honest. Mr Gibb was partly right as well in terms of the attitude towards teachers. It is not necessarily that the kids in schools are aggressive towards teachers, although that does happen, it is the parents who are aggressive towards the teachers. My wife was attacked four or five years ago by an aggressive adult who was not even the parent because she had supposedly said something to a child. There seems to be no support for the teachers in that respect either.

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Steinberg Cont]

Mr Gibb in some respects is quite right, that in some of the areas that we draw from there is not a lot done to help the situation and we seem to concentrate on other areas and we do not tackle those particular problems.

(*Mr Normington*) There is a huge programme focusing on schools not just in inner city areas but under the heading of Excellence in Cities which is about all the things that you need to do to support the schools to raise attainment in those areas, which includes extra support for those schools in tackling behaviour and working with families.

86. You are not succeeding. It might well be a breakdown of society. I can give another example of a 21-year-old girl who had three children all to different fathers and the kids themselves do not know who their fathers are and you have got a situation where in ten years' time or 15 years' time you are going to have incest because nobody knows who is related to who. It is a situation that is happening and we do not seem to be doing anything about it. It has a bearing on education.

(*Mr Normington*) It is asking an awful lot of schools to overcome all those surrounding circumstances.

87. It is not schools, it is government, it is people like yourselves who are the ones who are responsible along with the politicians. Not all schools are unambitious, if you like. My son went to an ordinary comprehensive school and he went to Cambridge but that was because of family encouragement because we saw the benefits of getting the best possible education. We were able to do that possibly because we saw that, but how do you persuade other families from deprived areas to do that?

(*Mr Normington*) To go to Cambridge?

88. Not to go to Cambridge, but to impress upon their youngsters, their children that education is so, so important?

(*Mr Normington*) I think there is no other solution than to support the schools in working with the parents and those children.

89. I think it goes a lot deeper than that. Once you get to the school situation, it is too late. There is a whole social programme that needs to be done in conjunction with education. Let's move off the topic.

(*Mr Normington*) There is a huge investment going on in pre-school education for that reason and in Sure Start, which is a programme specifically addressing that for nought to three year-olds.

90. I have not got time to go down that track but I thought you were very complacent in answer to Mr Gibb and that is why I decide decided to follow that up. Let me go on to my original line of questioning. I fully support the Government's aim to get 50 per cent of 18 to 30-year-olds into higher education but I am rather sceptical about it. Do you believe that 50 per cent of the population is even capable of having higher education?

(*Mr Normington*) I think so, if we can achieve what we said earlier, which is to get more young people through GCSEs and into A-levels.

91. That is the whole point. I went to college and did psychology—and I am talking about 30 or 40 years ago now—and in those days you could talk

about IQ, you are not supposed to talk about IQs nowadays, and if I remember rightly there was a graph which said that the average IQ was 100 and so many percentage had IQs of 70 and so many had IQs of 120, and the graph went something like that, so there were those in the bottom part of the graph who were never capable of going into higher education and getting qualifications. Do you think we are too ambitious or not?

(*Mr Normington*) I will give you two reasons why I do not think we are too ambitious. One is because all of the projections of growth of jobs in the economy over the next ten years say that 80 per cent of those jobs are going to require people with degree or near degree level qualifications and therefore as an economic proposition we need to set our sights higher. The second reason why I believe it is possible is if you look at what has happened to the attainment of children of unskilled manual workers over the last 11 years, there has been a huge increase in their attainment at GCSE, from something like 11 per cent achieving five A to C GCSEs in 1989 to something like 30 per cent in the year 2000, which shows that you can really push achievement levels up. That gives me hope that we can really do it. I think we have to try.

92. It is our job here today to see whether it is possible. Getting people into college for the sake of getting people into college or higher education, does that not just lower the standards? Does that not water the standards down?

(*Mr Normington*) I do not think we want to. The Government has set an objective that it will increase participation, but it does want to see a lowering of standards. It is not in anyone's interests to do that.

93. As a result of the policy working, it could lower standards.

(*Mr Normington*) If you look at the big expansion of higher education in the first half of the 1990s, there was no lowering of entry standards at that point. If anything, A-level entry standards went up slightly in that period, so it does not look as though that is a problem, but I agree we have to keep our eyes focused on it.

94. I want to change the subject again to tuition fees. When tuition fees were introduced at the beginning of the last Parliament, I got the impression that we were told that those fees were being charged so that they could be directly passed on to the universities to put more money into the universities and that was the reason why university fees had come in, to increase expenditure in university education. We are told in the Report that higher education institutions received something like £3.2 billion for teaching. That is Page 5, Paragraph 1.4. That explains it there and the paragraph goes on to say: "Although in recent years the funding for each student has been maintained in real terms, over the last decade it has declined by over a third." So have all the tuition fees that have been taken in from students over the past four years been passed directly to universities on top of the money that they were getting in the first place?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) No, they have not.

95. They have not?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) No.

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Steinberg Cont]

(*Mr Normington*) The first thing to say is that funding in higher education has risen by £1.7 billion—

96. That is irrelevant.

(*Mr Normington*) That has not gone into—

97. When I voted for tuition fees to be introduced, I voted on the assumption that I was being told that this was one way of putting more money into higher education and tuition fees would do that. Professor Newby has just said no it has not. Where has that money gone?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) The grant to institutions was reduced by exactly the amount that was coming through in tuition fees so essentially there has been a displacement effect.

Mr Steinberg: I am absolutely staggered.

Chairman

98. I am sorry, I did not catch that.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) The amount of money that has been collected through the tuition fees, if you put all that into a pot, the grant to higher education institutions has been reduced by exactly that amount so there has been a substitution effect.

(*Mr Normington*) But overall the amount going into higher education has gone up by 18 per cent.

Mr Steinberg

99. I personally would have expected it to go up by the amount that we said was going to be put in. It was said that tuition fees were being brought in so that more money could be spent on higher education and that was the reason why I voted for it. Now you are telling me that it was just displacement so tuition fees could be included in the 18 per cent it has gone up or could also have paid for tarmacking roads somewhere?

(*Mr Normington*) We are talking about different things, I think. The cost to the Exchequer of higher education has gone up by £1.7 billion. Some of that was financed by the change in the funding system. What it has not gone into is teaching. It is only just now that the unit cost decline per student has been reversed this year.

100. My questions have been totally thrown out because I was expecting you to say yes it had. At least, I was hoping Professor Newby was going to say that it had. Now I have to change tack. What percentage of the tuition fees that have been paid have gone into higher education teaching then? Do you know?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Over the period that the fees have come in there has also been an expansion in student numbers, so it is true that the overall public investment in higher education over that period has gone up, but it has not gone up anything like as much as it would have done if you add the tuition income to the public investment already going in. So there has been a displacement effect. In terms of where it has gone in institutions then, as the Permanent Secretary quite correctly said, since the last Spending Review the long-term decline

in the amount of money each institution receives for teaching students has halted, in fact it has gone up very slightly over the intervening period.³

101. That is extremely disappointing, as far as I am concerned anyway. I have not got long left. I am sorry I was late but it took me five hours instead of three to get here. Perhaps some of these tuition fees could go into the railways! The system of student support is universally unpopular. I represent Durham City, which is home to one of the biggest universities in the country, and at the last Election my majority went down considerably. It was not because they did not like me, it was not because I was not a good MP, it was simply because I had 15,000 students who hated the system of student support at the present time and that was the reason they voted Liberal. I cannot think of any other reason why they would want to vote Liberal anyway! I saw that the Chairman had mentioned Figure 19, which clearly shows that the system of student support is very complicated. With all the options there seem to be on Figure 19, it still leaves students with huge debts and puts many off going into higher education. Do you think the system should be simplified?

(*Mr Normington*) Yes. The Government is doing a review and the first objective of that review is to simplify the system.

102. The last question is can you tell us some of the options that are being investigated?

(*Mr Normington*) I cannot today talk to you about the review, I am afraid. I can tell you what its objectives are but I cannot go into the review.

Mr Steinberg: I have got loads more questions but you are here again on Wednesday, are you not, so I do not need to do much work for Wednesday because I have still got these here. Thank you.

Chairman: We can hear part two of this drama on Wednesday. Mr Bacon?

Mr Bacon

103. Mr Normington, I would like to start by reading you a quote: “. . . the current financial system for full-time higher education students is ineffective, insufficient and administratively complicated and is therefore a deterrent to higher education in itself.” Do you agree with that?

(*Mr Normington*) I do not agree with every aspect of that.

104. Can we go through it. Ineffective; you do not think it is ineffective?

(*Mr Normington*) It depends how you measure that. The number of students going into university continues to rise. The entry rate last year was 5.4 per cent up and this year it looks as though—and we get the applications shortly—that applications are up again, so it does not appear that students are being put off.

105. It is true that the proportion from poorer social background is not increasing?

(*Mr Normington*) I was going on to say that there is an issue about students from poorer backgrounds.

³ Ref Qs 483–486, evidence taken before the Committee on 30 January 2002, *Improving student achievement in English higher education*.

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Bacon Cont]

106. So to that extent you would say it probably is ineffective?

(*Mr Normington*) I would say that is an issue that is being looked at in the review.

107. What about insufficient?

(*Mr Normington*) There is an argument about this. The basic loan is intended to cover the essential support that students need to live, and the overall level has not changed from the time ten or 15 years ago when it was largely paid in grants.

108. I am not asking how it was ten or 15 years ago.

(*Mr Normington*) It has never been the case that student support was to cover all of the students' living costs. It has always been a contribution to that. It has always been the case that students have looked to supplement their grant in other ways.

109. The Report, Paragraph 2.10 says: "Median expenditure of £5,464 exceeded the maximum loan and grant support of £3,619. . ." Is it not the case that students spend much more time scabbling around trying to find money and getting jobs during the academic term in order to make ends meet?

(*Mr Normington*) There has been an upward trend in students working during term time.

110. What about administratively complicated?

(*Mr Normington*) I said in answer to one of the earlier questions that we do think that the hardship and access funds, the funds for those from poorer families, are complicated and do need some refining.

111. Too complicated? I cannot entice you to say too complicated? It looks pretty complicated to me. Figure 19, which somebody has already referred to, has 23 different sources of funding on it. Of course you have said that the vast majority of people have only two sources but the other sources, lone parents and childcare grants, although they apply to a relatively small proportion of the population, precisely affect the people from the poorer social groups who find it difficult to access them, do they not?

(*Mr Normington*) My Minister of State said the other day that she thought it was too complicated in those areas for those students. If you have dependants, for instance, it is complicated.

112. You would agree, would you, that the financial support system itself has a negative impact on participation from lower social groups?

(*Mr Normington*) There is some evidence that fear of debt has some impact on the likelihood of people from poorer families to go to university.

113. You are taking that evidence into account when you are doing your review?

(*Mr Normington*) Of course. Apart from simplifying the system, one of the declared aims of the review is to provide more up-front support for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and it is in response to that issue.

114. How many times have tranches of the Student Loan Book been sold?

(*Mr Normington*) I think twice.

115. What was the percentage of the face value of the debt?

(*Mr Normington*) They were sold in billion pound tranches at face value.

116. At face value? They were sold at face value, not discounted face value?

(*Mr Normington*) They were sold at face value. It is very important to say this: because the interest rates paid on the loans are at inflation and not at commercial rates, there was a subsidy to those who bought the debt to recognise that. So that may be what you are saying.

117. So net, net, net the sentence should be "the sales yielded only 50 per cent of the face value of the debt".

(*Mr Normington*) I do not know the precise figure, but the net figure would be less because of the payment we had to make.

118. Why do you think the discount is so large?

(*Mr Normington*) I do not think I know. I am afraid I have not come briefed to tell you what the discount was.⁴

119. There was a large discount, that is a fact.

(*Mr Normington*) As I understand it, we sold it at face value but we took into account the fact that the loans are not repaid at a commercial rate, they are repaid at a substantially lower rate which is basically inflation, and therefore if you were doing this on the open market you would be paying a lot more in repayments.

120. Is not the reason that it is net, net, net because there is such a low collection rate?

(*Mr Normington*) No, I do not think there is a low collection rate. The Student Loans Company has got a very high collection rate. My recollection is that it is quite a high collection rate. I do not think there is a major problem there.

121. Let me read you another quote: "Interest subsidies are inefficient, expensive and unfair. Well-off students take out the maximum loan and put the money into a bank to make a profit. On the government's own estimate, confirmed by simulations at London School of Economics, interest subsidies mean that about one-third of lending to students is never repaid. If total lending by the Student Loans Company is £1.2 billion—which is the year 2000 figure—"the long-run cost of interest subsidies on this year's loans is around £400 million—enough to pay one-year maintenance scholarships to 75,000 students. As if that fiscal hole were not bad enough, these subsidies benefit most those who borrow most—once more, better-off students." Would you comment on that?

(*Mr Normington*) I do not agree with the general issue there. I think it is true that it is a very beneficial loan rate. If you repay at inflation it is very beneficial.

122. There are students who are going out, to your knowledge, borrowing the maximum amount and sticking it in the market at a higher rate?

(*Mr Normington*) That is what we are sometimes told.

123. What are you doing about that? Do you think that is an economical use of taxpayers' money?

(*Mr Normington*) That is the system that the Government has decided to introduce and it is also the system the Government is reviewing.

⁴ Ev 48, Appendix 1.

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Bacon Cont]

124. My point is about the current student loans system. The quote I gave you is the Scottish Independent Committee of Inquiry into Student Finance and, of course, they did something about it there. My point is that the present system of student loans itself is a deterrent to people going into higher education, particularly to people from poorer social backgrounds. I would also make the point that the present system is neither effective, economic nor efficient in delivering the Government's stated objectives. Is that fair?

(*Mr Normington*) I have admitted that there is a fear of debt by students from poorer families and therefore the review is looking at whether we can provide more up-front support to children from those families. That is one of the issues that is being looked at. So I am agreeing with you that the Government has said it thinks it needs to look again at some of these issues. What I do not agree with you on is the basic principle that you get graduates to repay some of the costs of their higher education from the premium they get in their earnings, which is a bad principle on which to base a student financing system. That is the basic system across the world. It is also very important that you set up a system which has loan repayment arrangements which do not put off people unduly. That is in a sense one reason why the Government changed the system because the previous system did have a very sharp cliff edge in it in terms of repayment, where you pay nothing one day and £100 the next.

125. I did not mean to say there was not a good case for students repaying some of the premium. That is a good idea. It is a question of how you set up the system at the start. So you agree that at the moment there is a deterrent?

(*Mr Normington*) Yes, although numbers going into higher education continue to be buoyant.

126. Not from those social groupings?

(*Mr Normington*) The numbers coming from those families are increasing but, overall, the proportion is not changing.

127. May I direct a question to Sir John or maybe Mr Jones concerning specifically the effectiveness and efficiency of the student loan finance system in terms of delivering the Government's aims of improving access. Has the NAO done any work on that or looked at any work on that?

(*Sir John Bourn*) We did work on the Student Loans Company in terms of the setting up of its operation, its vulnerability to fraud, and its future on becoming a public limited company.

128. But nothing specifically?

(*Sir John Bourn*) But we have not looked, as yet, at the question of the way in which and the extent to which the Company and the student loan system has achieved the Government's objective for it.

129. Indeed, it is this Figure 19 everybody keeps talking about on Page 22. Has the NAO studied that system as a whole in terms of its effectiveness, efficiency and economy?

(*Sir John Bourn*) My view on that, if that counts as studying it, is that a system as complicated as that is bound to be a deterrent to people because they will not know exactly where they stand and if you come

from a background where your parents or your teachers are not used to handling material of that complexity, I think it will lead to a lot of people, who might otherwise have gone to university, saying, "It is all too difficult, too problematic, I do not know where I will stand", and it is a deterrent. That is my view of it.

130. You are saying the system itself is a deterrent?
(*Sir John Bourn*) Yes, that is my view.

131. Thank you very much, Sir John. Mr Normington, did the ending of the grammar and direct grant schools have any impact on the ability of people from poorer backgrounds to break into higher education.

(*Mr Normington*) I am afraid factually I do not know the answer to that. I do not know whether at that point there was any change. It was a long time ago and, of course, much smaller proportions went into higher education.

132. Has any work, any academic study been done measuring the impact of that?

(*Mr Normington*) There may have been. I will certainly look at that, if you like, and let you know.⁵

Mr Bacon: If you could.

Mr Gibb: You are the Permanent Secretary.

133. Mr Steinberg kicked off with my first lot of questions. I would like to continue with Mr Gibb's line. Could you say quantitatively how many schools are as Mr Gibb described?

(*Mr Normington*) How many?

134. How many schools are like the ones Mr Gibb described?

(*Mr Normington*) I said to him I do not know. I just do not have the information.

135. Do you think the Department might look at that?

(*Mr Normington*) I know, and we could do this, how many have failed their OFSTED and are in special measures, which in terms of secondary schools is just over 60. I did say that I think you would find some of the poorest behaviour and poorest discipline related to those schools. I do not think that is an answer to either of your questions, but OFSTED does inspect and it does look at those issues, and often academic attainment and ethos and discipline are all linked; in fact usually they are.

136. I would just like to ask one other question for the general benefit and information of the Committee, not directly related to participation but it is something you will be coming before this Committee on in due course to talk about, namely Individual Learning Accounts. The Minister has said that so far the Department has exceeded spending by £63 million. When will you know what the total overspend is?

(*Mr Normington*) I think it will be a little time yet.

137. By May or May 2005?

(*Mr Normington*) It is really important we know soon. I cannot say precisely. I hope it will be by the end of this financial year, but I do not know for sure.

Mr Bacon: Thank you, Chairman.

⁵ Ev 48-49, Appendix 1.

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

Chairman

138. Mr Bacon was referring to Mr Gibb's questions and drawing some comparisons between the comprehensive he mentioned in this article and Bradford Grammar School. I see that you went to school in Bradford. You did not go to Bradford Grammar School, did you?

(Mr Normington) I did.

139. The questions were well put. You did not reduce your teachers to tears, did you?

(Mr Normington) It is possible! It was a different school in those days, of course, it was a direct grant school.

Chairman: Brian Jenkins?

Mr Jenkins

140. I noticed, Mr Normington, from one of your answers that you were quite confident that you would reach your targets in eight years' time. In the main those children are now ten years old. You must have a lot of confidence in the SATs results that you have had in the last few years and that you can do the same thing with secondary education that we have done with primary education in the last few years.

(Mr Normington) I am very pleased indeed with the progress we have made on SATs results. What I actually said in answer to the previous question was that I was confident we had in place a lot of policies that were going to move us there. I was not absolutely sure that we were going to hit a target eight years out, I cannot be sure, but I was confident that we had policies in place to tackle that. For 2010 most of those pupils will be coming out of primary school this year.

141. I think you will find the ones who are now ten years old are not going to make it, they will be conditioned for failure. Mr Steinberg said that it is partly the family, and certainly, as you suggest and recognise, that is a major challenge for any government and not just the schools. I know I have seen it in my own locality where we have made some tremendous improvements but it is hard work and requires extra resources and specialist staff to overcome the problems, working with families.

(Mr Normington) I agree with that. Just to say, though, that the biggest achievement in literacy and numeracy is not the overall improvement, it is the closing of the gap in some of the areas which never improved. If you go a few miles from here to Tower Hamlets, some of the biggest improvements in literacy under the Literacy Strategy are there and they have almost got to the average. That suggests that you can reverse what people think of as irreversible decline. It is something important.

142. I only wish that in my area we had the same sort of funding and financing that Tower Hamlets have. With regard to your comment on Oxford and Cambridge about the numbers from schools, I do not see them widening participation because the youngsters were going to apply to some other "red brick" university if not Oxford and Cambridge, because basically their belief is that they need clever youngsters to maintain their grades, to maintain output, to maintain their status.

(Mr Normington) They set very high standards in terms of A-levels and therefore if you do not get those A-levels you are going to have more difficulty getting into them. This is really Professor Newby's territory.

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) I believe very firmly that no university or institution should abrogate its responsibilities towards widening participation. Having said that, I think we have to recognise that achieving the target will not mean that each institution will itself achieve it at the same rate. The whole purpose of the benchmarking exercise is because of different subject mixes and different patterns of recruitment of different institutions, and because of the different entry requirements which institutions set. What we need to do is to ensure that every institution is working up to and beyond its benchmark, which will not mean that each institution is admitting the same proportion of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

143. I see from Page 5 that Bristol, which is a rather progressive institution, when it analysed the intake and output, saw quite clearly that students from the lower performing schools who did not have the grades that they normally accept have done very well.

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) Yes, the University of Bristol is very aware of its reputation as being the kind of institution that perhaps students from lower socio-economic backgrounds would not normally aspire to, and it has been making very strenuous efforts to overcome that perception by working very closely with schools and by a very active and aggressive programme of school visits and the mentoring of some schools to encourage those schools who have not traditionally put forward students to Bristol to do so.

144. Something which Oxford and Cambridge might like to adopt as a strategy?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) Indeed, and we have been urging those two institutions to do that and, in fairness to them, they have adopted more and more of those kinds of action plans. They, too, are now identifying the schools which have not traditionally sent students to Oxford and Cambridge and are working closely with those schools to raise aspirations within them.

145. Some of the universities and colleges say that the widening participation premiums do not cover the costs. What plans do you have to monitor costs and adjustments as necessary?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) We recently commissioned KPMG to undertake two studies for us to try to identify what the additional costs are because we also believe that the premium does not cover the full additional costs of all these activities. The reports which we have received indicate that there is a wide range of costs between different institutions depending on the actions they are taking, so we have gone back to KPMG and asked them to do some further study. We are reviewing the premium. I am in no doubt that at the present level it is not sufficient to cover additional costs and once we get a much more accurate estimate of what those costs are, I fully anticipate that we will raise the premium to take account of that.

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Jenkins Cont]

146. We have got Educational Maintenance Allowances to encourage youngsters to stop on post 16. Have we had any information back? Are they a success? Are they working and what plans do we have to roll this out?

(*Mr Normington*) They cover about 30 per cent of the country at the moment. We are beginning to get evidence that they are raising staying-on rates post-16 significantly. We have not quite got to it yet, but it is beginning to have that impact, and this will be an issue that we will have to discuss with the Treasury and Chancellor in the Spending Review, using the evidence we have.

147. Can you give us an assurance that it is not just retention for the sake of retention that is occurring, but that we are progressing with regard to advancing their education while they are there.

(*Mr Normington*) Yes, it is really important that it is both the quality of the further education, which is for many of these students of high quality, and that it is leading to improvements in outcomes. The Government is about to produce a Green Paper on the 14 to 19 phase which will address this issue and look at how you encourage students to stay on and attain more.

148. If I were to stay on as a young person, when I come to the decision-making as to whether I am going to go into further education or not—and you alluded to this example you are simplifying it and doing a good job—would there be any chance of me getting some sort of compact from some education authority which says, “This is what you will be entitled to if you took this path. If you continue with your studies and work hard and if you do well, this is what we are going to let you borrow, this is the support you are going to get”, as a written document? For many of these families there is no-one in the family who can read it or understand it or have any perception about education and even some of the schools lack the time and ability to deliver this.

(*Mr Normington*) I think there is a need to improve the information available. There is a very good booklet produced now which explains the system very clearly and under the heading of the Government’s Excellence Challenge, in the work it is doing to encourage students and children to think about university, one of the themes of that is to explain the system more clearly. We need better advice coming through the system, better advisers in the system and, again, the development of the Connexions Service, which is trying to integrate and improve the advice available to children earlier so that their choices are informed, is a very important part of that. So it is about raising aspirations, it is about better quality provision, it is about better quality advice, and it is about financial support.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) That word “compact” that you use is a very apt one and it is one that we have encouraged higher education institutions to adopt in their work with schools and colleges. That compact exists also in the form of universities and colleges offering that kind of advice to schools in their area and even in some cases offering that kind of incentive. More and more universities are working with schools and colleges, usually locally, to say “we will work with you, we will offer a place to those students who can come through

to give them an incentive to raise their aspirations provided they achieve certain educational attainment along the way.”

149. I am not sure from the fact that I spent 14 years in further education before I had a real job, that is right. One of the things I noticed in the Report on Page 15 is that you discourage universities and colleges when processing applications from taking into account the postcode that will attract extra funding. How can it make sense to pay institutions a premium to encourage them to widen participation and tell them to take no notice of it?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) The issue of the postcode premium, as I said earlier, is under review. The postcode premium is only introduced as a proxy to try to identify where institutions might be incurring additional costs for all the reasons we mentioned. I think we are satisfied that it has very significant weaknesses and we are reviewing it to see whether the funds we put in through the various premia can be better channelled to achieve the end that we have specified.

150. It is strange that you have got a premium there and you tell them not to take any notice of it when they are conducting their interviews. Universities are trying to get as much money in as they can.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) There is a dilemma here, I think. We are very anxious to ensure that the interview process is not distorted by factors which are extraneous to an assessment of that student’s educational potential. On the other hand, I take the point that you are making, which is one of the reasons why it is under review.

151. If I can remember back, and if I were this young 18 year old looking for a university course or a particular institution—and it says on Page 12, Paragraphs 2.7 and 2.8 that young people doubt the personal benefits of higher education (and some do have some doubt)—I would think “Do I commit three years of my life, not make any money and finish up with a debt? What is in it for me?” I would not know which institution or necessarily which course to go onto and yet we tend to break these courses down as to what the pay back is on various courses. It might seem right to go on a media studies course now but in three years’ time the world might be awash with media studies’ experts and there will not be a job. I am sure there will be jobs as engineers because we have a lack of engineers. We seem to have a very materialistic approach to this investment of time and money, and yet we do not seem to think of education in itself as being a good thing.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I think there are two reasons for that. The first is even at the point when they are thinking of going to university, one of the questions students ask more frequently now than ever before, in my experience, is, “What is this going to mean to me in terms of my career prospects?” The other reason is I think we have recognised as we have moved more and more into a knowledge-based economy that higher education is a means to an end rather than being an end in itself, and the two ends which are often referred to in public debate are, first of all, higher education as a means of improving our

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Jenkins Cont]

global economic competitiveness and, secondly, as we have been discussing, higher education as a means of addressing the social inclusion problem.

152. Higher education would lead to better qualified parents to bring up the next generation. It raises expectations for society as a whole. It is not all about materialistic goods and how competitive we are. All we have done is walk on one step from the old secondary school as producing factory fodder. It is just better-qualified factory fodder, is it not?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I have spent all my life in education so I believe passionately in the vocation of education. I would also add that it happens that there are an awful lot of other benefits to students going into higher education than the two I have just mentioned, whether it is improved parenting, improved stability in family life.

(*Mr Normington*) We will not persuade them at the point when they are taking these decisions. I do not think that will be the way—

153. Try selling them a dream; it works sometimes.
(*Mr Normington*) 35 per cent bigger incomes.

154. No, no. Some people actually do get qualified and they do not work for a big income and a lot of these people work in the public sector on low money providing a career helping people in what they believe in. I notice that only half of the universities and colleges provide specialist training for their recruitment staff, only half have got written strategies for the selection of students. There is an absence of written criteria for these students. We have no statistics in place or very, very few statistics. We do not know whether interviews are helping people. When do we start getting some standard entrance criteria put in place for what is a publicly-funded body so that students have a fair and equal chance, no matter where they go, and that they understand the system?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I think it is very important we establish good practice which all higher education institutions must abide by when it comes to their admissions procedures. Following this report, it is the determination of my Council to do precisely that. We would then, through the funding mechanism we have, seek an assurance from all the institutions they are abiding by those criteria. It is very important that there are no obstacles placed in the way of any student who can benefit from higher education from doing so by virtue of admissions procedures which deter some of those students from entering higher education.

Mr Jenkins: Maybe you should look at FE recruitment or admissions policy, they have been far in advance for many years.

Mr Osborne

155. If I could question in a slightly different territory. There is always the disadvantage going later in the hearing that you let some of the juicy territory go by and my colleague, Mr Gibb, has certainly got stuck in there. In paragraph 10 of the Conclusions in the Report, it says, “The Department and the Funding Council have increased the element of overall funding allocated to recognise additional costs of widening participation progressively from

just over £50 million in 1997–98 to just over £200 million in 2001–02.” Was there any single impetus for that big increase?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes, it was because, as we moved from a situation in which only a very, very small proportion of the 18 to 21 year olds in the country were in higher education to one where a much larger proportion were in higher education, we became aware of the fact that the increases from those of poorer socio-economic backgrounds were nowhere near as great as they were from those from professional managerial backgrounds. In other words, we became aware of the fact that the gradual expansion of the sector in the late 1980s and early 1990s had not produced a commensurate expansion in the numbers going into higher education from poorer socio-economic groups.

156. There was not a single event which made you think, “We ought to put some more money into this”?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) No, it was the kind of analysis I have described.

157. I am thinking of a single event, which was the enormous political row over Laura Spence. I seem to remember, and unfortunately I did not do all my homework before this meeting, a whole load of Government initiatives which suddenly appeared in the months after that. Can you assure me that the Laura Spence row had nothing to do with the thinking on how much money was going into those programmes?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) No, I do not think I can give you that assurance in all honesty. What I could say is, first of all, a number of these programmes pre-dated what became known as the Laura Spence Affair, and what I would say is that the case of Laura Spence clearly brought to public attention the necessity to address this problem vigorously and with some despatch.

158. You say with great candour you could not in all honesty say that—and I am not necessarily getting at you because this is how politics works, things come up and as a result departments get their act together—but what were the Department’s and the Council’s responses to the Laura Spence political row? Were there any specific initiatives which were dreamt up or accelerated?

(*Mr Normington*) Neither of us were there at that point, but if you look at how the money is spent some of the increase is in disabled students, very little of it is addressing the issue of widening participation at Oxford and Cambridge specifically. There were a whole range of things going on. To answer your question directly, I would have to recall precisely when it was and look at the initiatives around that time, but what you see—and actually it is in Figure 11 on page 13—is there was an increase in that money going on from 1997–98 right through that period. That line goes like that (*indicating*); it is increasing year on year.

159. But you would accept it did have an effect on the Department’s policies?

(*Mr Normington*) No, I would not.

160. So you disagree with Professor Newby?

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Osborne Cont]

(*Mr Normington*) He was not in the Department. I would not—

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) With respect, I did not say it had an impact on policy. I was asked, I think, did it have an impact on the resources going in.

161. Resources are where you start the policy.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I was not there at the time, but this certainly was drawn to the attention of the Funding Council, and indeed all universities were very concerned to ensure, in the wake of the Laura Spence Affair, they were not inadvertently discriminating against students from particular kinds of backgrounds. I would say, as far as the Funding Council was concerned, it has drawn to our attention not only the issue of widening participation, because that particular student of course did not come from a deprived background, but also the issue of fair access.

162. But you did see an increase in resources?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes, but it predated the period.

(*Mr Normington*) It really was not as a result of the Laura Spence Affair.

163. But there was a sudden increase in ministerial interest in this issue.

(*Mr Normington*) That is indisputable.

164. From our earlier conversation, in fact it was the wrong target, was it not, because the main problem, as we have discussed at length, is educational achievement earlier on in people's lives. Do you think it is helpful to bash universities about their application procedures?

(*Mr Normington*) I do not want to link that back to the Laura Spence issue—

165. Just hypothetically.

(*Mr Normington*)—but as a general issue, it is right that if we think that a university is not achieving the kinds of levels of participation we expect, that is highlighted. That is what our ministers have been doing in recent times again, including with Oxford and Cambridge. There is no point in having these performance indicators unless you look at them and decide that you need to do something about them. After all, the Funding Council is in that business.

166. Do you believe—and maybe this is a pejorative phrase—that positive discrimination in favour of applicants from poorer social backgrounds does have a place in widening participation?

(*Mr Normington*) I think you have to be quite cautious about it, because I think you have to know why you are doing it and you have to know that you have a student on your course who is going to be able to attain the standard of that course. I do not think we should be heading down the road of lowering the standards.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I think the phrase “positive discrimination” is open to misinterpretation here, because it implies if you are discriminating positively in favour of somebody you are discriminating against somebody else. I think the objective of all of us is to open up and improve opportunity for everyone to get into higher education. What I would say is that for many, many years, since I have been in the university world, admissions tutors have always taken into account

when making an offer to a student a wider range of their background and circumstances than just their A-level score. That has always been the case.

167. I am not necessarily saying it is a bad thing, by the way. In paragraph 13 of the conclusions it says, “Key activities related to the application and selection process include... taking applicants’ backgrounds and circumstances into account in assessing the likelihood of succeeding in higher education.” Also, in the Bristol University case, which my colleague mentioned, there is evidence they do that. Is that not in effect positive discrimination? You may not like the phrase but the effect is the same.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I think that is simply a repetition, as I said, of practices which universities have been undertaking for many, many years. I know it is commonly understood that universities mechanistically and automatically offer students a place in terms of their A-level grades, but that has never been mechanistically and automatically the case, those offers have always varied according to an assessment by tutors of a whole range of background features of those applicants, whether it is the mix of A-levels they have taken, the kind of backgrounds they have, their ages and all other factors.

168. I was speaking to an Oxford college admissions tutor about this issue quite recently, and he was saying to me that the problem they have is basically they have thousands of students now applying with straight A grades at A-level, and there are many, many more students with straight A grades than places in Oxford, and the only way they really can discriminate against people is through an interview process, which is in itself fairly inexact and depends on people's individual whims and so on to a degree. Is that a problem? Is there some way of stripping out the straight A cohort, the top achievers, perhaps by introducing a new kind of exam?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) It is a problem, not just in respect of universities like Oxford but also in respect of certain subjects which are vastly over-subscribed in terms of applications for the places available, where again even those with straight As are more than the number of places available. This is why we do need to issue, with some urgency I think, some good practice guidelines on admissions, because it is not whether or not you interview, it is how the interview is conducted that is going to be absolutely crucial, as it is in every other walk of life.

169. In fact the admissions tutor said that when people do not get accepted these days, they do not just tear up the slip and go out to the pub, they call their lawyer about how the interview was conducted. I was very privileged in my education, I went to St Paul's School in London, which is a fee-paying school and I think sends more students to Oxford and Cambridge than any other school, and I was trying to work out what the ethos there was—apart from the obvious thing, that it had a lot more money because parents were paying money—and obviously it is very selective and has an academic ethos and the children who get sent there tend to come from families who value education. I was trying to think of the state school which came closest to that ethos and it is the grammar schools, as far as I can see, and I am

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Osborne Cont]

interested in what Mr Normington was saying in response to Mr Bacon. Is there any evidence that as the grammar schools have declined there has been a falling-off in people from state schools getting into good universities?

(*Mr Normington*) I just do not know that, I am afraid.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I am not aware of anything.

(*Mr Normington*) I can try and find out.⁶

170. I remember seeing a figure at the time of the Laura Spence row that actually there was a much higher percentage of state-educated people at Oxford in the 1960s than there is now, so there has actually been a decline.

(*Mr Normington*) I think that might be the case, but I just do not know the figures.

171. Is that not something you should be looking at? I am not saying necessarily bring back grammar schools, because that is a policy decision, but should you not be looking at that kind of ethos—and this is partly Mr Gibb's territory—and looking at what it is that makes a school an academic-achieving school?

(*Mr Normington*) I think the whole thrust of the policy is to create schools which have an ethos of attainment and aspiration and that is what it is all about. We are proud at looking at any examples of that but grammar schools were a particular type of school, as you say, which were very highly selective, and those which still exist are still highly selective.

172. Would I be right in saying that the thrust of education policy at the moment, with more and more tests, is that certain schools will be more selective and there will be more specialist schools? You are sort of creating grammar schools in all but name.

(*Mr Normington*) No, that is not the policy, and specialist schools are nothing like grammar schools; absolutely nothing like them. It is not re-introducing selection.

173. Not at all?

(*Mr Normington*) No.

174. The Department's mission statement, if that is the correct phrase, is in paragraph 1.6, "The Department is committed to working towards wider participation in higher education while continuing to improve standards." A lot of people out in society think that standards at universities are declining and they point to certain degree courses—and I do not want to be unfair to the people I am about to mention—like hairdressing degree courses and catering degree courses and so on. Do you think that is a problem?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I am not aware of any degree courses in hairdressing, let me say straight away. I think we need to unstrip the myths from the reality here. I repeat the comment that the Permanent Secretary made earlier, it is no part of our intention, indeed we would be doing a disservice to students, to admit more students into higher education at the price of lowering standards. It would not be fair to the students, let alone to anyone else. I do not believe standards have fallen in universities, we have evidence from the Quality Assurance Agency which

monitor these things to demonstrate that the quality and standards which operate in higher education in this country are very high, are sustainably high and are as good as anywhere in the world.

(*Mr Normington*) Clearly the range of courses has greatly increased but it does not follow they are lower standard courses.

175. Mr Normington, you said there was some evidence that student loans or the fear of debt by students was having a deterrent effect on people from poorer social backgrounds. What is that evidence? What statistical evidence do you have?

(*Mr Normington*) I think this comes from the student income and expenditure survey. Remember, one of the issues here is that this system has hardly been in place long, so some of the evidence we have is for the previous system.

176. You are about to scrap it. Maybe we will never know.

(*Mr Normington*) We are having a review of it, we are not about to scrap it. I can provide you with the proportions. Some of it is about the perception of debt, fear of debt, and there is some evidence of that. There is also some evidence though that that goes along with some of the things we were talking about earlier, which is, "It is not for me, I couldn't imagine going to university", and some of that is up the table compared with the fear of debt. But fear of debt is an issue.

Chairman

177. Mr Osborne asked you a question about the relative decline in people coming from state education to the most popular universities, can you give us a note on that?

(*Mr Normington*) Yes, I will do that.

Mr Steinberg

178. Chairman, can they give us a break-down of some of the universities as well?

(*Mr Normington*) I guess so.⁷

Chairman: Thank you. There is a division in the House, we will break for about ten minutes.

The Committee suspended from 18.24 pm to 18.45 pm for divisions in the House

Mr Rendel

179. Firstly, can I ask you where the 50 per cent target came from?

(*Mr Normington*) Do you mean how do we measure it or—

180. How was it arrived at? How did anyone decide that 50 per cent was the right target?

(*Mr Normington*) As I understand it, it was largely based on something I referred to earlier, which was a forward projection of the number of high level jobs there were going to be in the economy. The National Skills Task Force projected about 1.75 million but

⁶ Ev 48-49, Appendix 1.

⁷ Ev 48-49, Appendix 1.

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Rendel Cont]

most of the growth in jobs was going to be in that area, and therefore there would be a demand for high level skills. It is not a precise science.

181. When was that prediction made? Is that in a published document?

(Mr Normington) The National Skills Task Force prediction of 1.75 million jobs was I think in 1999. It was a report in 1999 or 2000 by the National Skills Task Force.⁸

182. I am glad to have the name of that particular body mentioned because I see in the *Spectator* this week the Secretary of State was asked where the numerical target came from and she replied, "Some body or other, the one that looks at the skills needs of the nation, set the target."

(Mr Normington) She was right, it was the National Skills Task Force.

183. What is the current participation rate? I think I heard you say you thought it was 41 per cent, is that right?

(Mr Normington) Yes, we think it is just over 41 per cent.

184. I understand the Minister for Higher Education said to the Select Committee 44 per cent in oral evidence earlier last year.

(Mr Normington) I do not know about that. I am quite confident it is just over 41 per cent.

185. What counts as a person participating in higher education? What are the 41 per cent? What are they doing?

(Mr Normington) The 41 per cent is all courses of one year or more which lead to a qualification awarded by a higher education institution or a widely-recognised national awarding body like the Institute of Management.

186. If that is how the 41 per cent is measured, presumably that is what is going to be measured when we decide whether or not you have met the target in 2010?

(Mr Normington) With one qualification to that. The Government has said quite publicly that it has sought advice on which short qualifications should be included. At the moment that does not include professional qualifications. It has asked the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to say whether they meet the test of higher level qualifications. Even if those are included, it will only have a marginal effect on that figure, but it seemed important to make sure we were counting all higher education qualifications. So it is broadly this one but with that qualification.⁹

187. But given you have set the target at 50 per cent, because that is how many you needed to go through university in order to meet your skills requirements or whatever, and you have measured it in a certain way—and this target was presumably set given the type of measurement you are making

now—is it not rather odd to then start including other bits in that figure? Clearly, you are more likely to meet the target if you include more students. If you go on including enough different qualifications, you can meet the target today probably.

(Mr Normington) Yes, and there is no point in doing that, and we are not in that game.

188. Exactly.

(Mr Normington) I think it is important to include all true higher education qualifications. The oddity about the initial entry rate, as it is called, the measure we now have, is that it has a sort of duration bar, it is about one year courses, and I do not think that is flexible enough. But we will not fiddle with this, we will have the initial entry rate, the only issue is the one I have described which will have a marginal effect on the figures.

189. I am delighted to hear you say you will not fiddle with it because I have to say I have my suspicions. I have here a series of quotes. The Prime Minister said in February last year, "By 2010 I want to achieve a university participation rate of over 50 per cent among under 30 year olds." In the general election manifesto they said, "We want to see half . . .", not over half, ". . . of all young people under 30 going to university." Then the DfES in a press release in April said, "Our aim is that by 2010 50 per cent of young people will have the opportunity to benefit from higher education. . .", not necessarily university. Two months later the DfES were saying, "Our target of providing 50 per cent of under 30s is with having the opportunity of a higher education. . .", perhaps not even necessarily going into higher education and participating, simply having the opportunity of it. Then in November last year, the DfES was saying, "The Government's target is that by 2010 50 per cent of young people will experience higher education by the time they are 30", presumably it could just be going to see an open day at one university, that would give you experience of higher education. It does seem to me the thing is slipping and slipping quite quickly.

(Mr Normington) The question is how we are going to measure it. We are going to measure it by the long-standing definition.

190. You are not, because you are changing the definition.

(Mr Normington) We are going to use the initial entry rate, which is based on the long-standing way of doing it. I have described openly, as have ministers, the one way in which we may change it. It is not lots of ways, it is that one way.

191. Can we go on to the education maintenance allowances, which were mentioned by Brian Jenkins I think earlier. You said that there was some evidence they were working well in terms of increasing participation among 16 year olds. Can you explain a bit more why you think they are working well?

(Mr Normington) I think they are working because they provide financial support to students post-16. I think there goes along with them though very good advice and support in those areas where they apply. I do not think it is just about finding the money. Indeed, as I was saying in answer to one of the earlier questions, it is about quality of provision and the quality of advice and the financial support.

⁸ Note by witness: Research produced for the National Skills Taskforce by the Institute of Employment Research *Projections of Occupations and Qualifications 2000/01* indicated that between 1999 and 2010 there would be a growth of 1.73 million jobs in those occupations that typically recruit graduates.

⁹ Ev 49, Appendix 1.

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Rendel Cont]

192. So financial support has some effect in increasing participation?

(Mr Normington) Yes.

193. Would the same system of increasing financial support work to increase the participation of 18 year olds in higher education?

(Mr Normington) I do not know whether precisely the same one would, but the review we are carrying out acknowledges that one of the aims should be to provide more up-front support for students from less well off families, and therefore that is acknowledging there is an issue about providing financial support to students from less well off families.

194. One of the things which has always struck me as very illogical is that the Government, I think quite rightly, went in for education maintenance allowances in order to provide funds for maintenance for young people between 16 and 18—the education of course at that stage is free—but then said that education itself should be paid for and there should be no maintenance grants once you are post-18. I really do not see why it is a good thing to give it to the 16 to 18 year olds but actually takes it away from the 18 year olds-plus.

(Mr Normington) I think the principle is that the returns on higher education are much greater, and the support between 16 and 18 was to get them up to a level where they could benefit from higher education. You could argue there are different justifications for that. We are looking at it again.

195. Good. Do you think the Scottish funding system is more likely to encourage young people to into higher education?

(Mr Normington) I do not know. It may do, but I do not know. There are slightly higher participation rates in Scotland anyway.

196. Do you accept there are nowadays more Scottish students going to Scottish universities, whereas there are fewer Scottish students going to English universities? Would you accept that that indicates that the Scottish students are telling you that system of funding is a better system of funding?

(Mr Normington) I think that is factually true, but I do not know whether it is directly related to funding. I do not think we have the evidence of that. It is possible.

197. Margaret Hodge, the minister, in the *House* magazine article she wrote, said, giving reasons for doing the review, “We must also ensure that cost and debt fears are not deterring some young people”, and I think that tallies with something you have said earlier. She said that we should provide more up-front support for students from poorer backgrounds. The Secretary of State said in the *Guardian*, “I recognise that for many low income families, fear of debt is a real worry and could act as a barrier to higher education. I want to make sure our future reform tackles this problem.” That indicates to me quite heavily that young people can expect that the review will produce a better financial package for them, particularly if they come from poorer sections of the population. Would you accept that is what they have been led to expect?

(Mr Normington) You have described some of the aims of the review, and those are the aims. We have not finished the review yet, we do not know whether the review is going to achieve those aims or when we consult about it what people’s reactions will be.

198. But the aim is clearly that they will get a better financial package if they come from a poorer background?

(Mr Normington) The aim is to provide more up-front support to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and also to tackle the problems of debt and the perception of debt. The Secretary of State is on record as saying that, and so is the Minister of State.

199. If you were told that the financial package for students was under review, and that the package in the year 2003 might be better than the package in the year 2002 as far as you were concerned, if you knew you came from a poorer background, would you be inclined to put off going up until 2003?

(Mr Normington) You might be.

200. Do you think that is going to be a significant problem this year? We have been told the package will not be changed in time for this September.

(Mr Normington) Indeed, we have said we are not going to change the package. That is something we have to be very conscious about as we announce the outcome of the review.

201. So there is a significant danger that you may have a number of people deciding to put off going up for a year, with all the pressure that is going to mean the following year, and the problems for universities it could mean with people deciding not to go up this year.

(Mr Normington) I do not want to agree with that. I would just say, we need to be very clear when we come out with the outcome of the review, we have to have our eye very firmly on the impact of students going in this September as well as next September. Applications to universities are very buoyant at the moment.

202. It sounds from what you are saying that you may be tempted not to make the package very much better, because if you do make it very much better you might tempt students into putting off going up.

(Mr Normington) That is not my decision.

203. I know it is not just your decision, but you seem to be implying that, which is something of a worry.

(Mr Normington) We have to see what comes out.

204. Do you think there is a particular problem with up-front costs? I have a worry that a number of students, particularly perhaps from poorer backgrounds, may think that up-front costs are a particular risk. If they are asked to pay up-front—and we have all I think accepted now there is a case for saying those who go to university should pay something back from the benefit they get from a university education—they are taking a big risk, because they may not get all the way through university, for whatever reason, they might fall ill, they might be unable to finish their university course, and they might be left with quite large debts hanging over them and no way of paying them back. Obviously, in some cases they will not have to pay

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Rendel Cont]

that back, their income will be too low, but nevertheless they will be left with that debt which makes all the greater difficulty for things like mortgages.

(*Mr Normington*) In extreme cases, if they never earn £10,000 a year, they will never pay it back. That is why it is income-contingent. They only start paying back when they start earning.

205. For that very reason, a young person thinking about a student financial package, may see it as really quite risky because they have to pay a lot up-front, get into debt and they may not get the pay-back in terms of getting a university education, through to a degree and then getting a better salary.

(*Mr Normington*) They may feel that, of course they may feel that. I do not know whether the facts support that.

206. Would it not be a better scheme to try to have the pay-back after they have got that degree, rather than paying up-front and having to go through that risk process which they would not have to go through if you only had to pay it after you had your degree?

(*Mr Normington*) You lead me back towards the Scottish system in a way.

207. Indeed.

(*Mr Normington*) That is what the Scottish system does.

208. Indeed.

(*Mr Normington*) I do not think we have the evidence of that. It is a possibility. The Scottish system would I think cost quite a lot more money.

209. Potentially it would have the effect of encouraging people to go to university.

(*Mr Normington*) If we agree there is a fear about debt, there are different ways of tackling that. 50 per cent of all students do not pay tuition fees, do not pay a contribution to tuition fees. That is not well known. Only about a third of students actually pay the full contribution to tuition fees. If you asked everybody on the street, they would think they all had to contribute. So there is an issue there as well.

210. Which is precisely the reason why a lot of them, even those who do not have to pay, are being put off.

(*Mr Normington*) The fear and perception of debt is an issue.

The Committee suspended from 18.59 pm to 19.05 pm for a division in the House

Mr Rendel

211. I have two questions remaining to ask. The first refers to Example 5 on page 21, which I must say I found fascinating, where the University of Bristol examined the relationships between the A-level scores and degrees, and I think again Brian Jenkins mentioned something about this earlier. If that research is good research and it is true of other places, and I see no reason why if it is true of Bristol it should not be true of other places, then I would have thought that points a very clear marker towards what ought to become best practice for all higher education institutions when they are considering which students to take in and which not to take in. I would

have hoped the Department would therefore be sending round a memo to all institutions it funds to say, "Look at what has happened in Bristol, they seem to have a very good scheme working here, it ought to become best practice for all of you."

(*Mr Normington*) I cannot do that legally, this is really for the Funding Council. I cannot interfere with the admissions policies of universities.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I referred earlier to the fact that we are indeed developing good practice on this through Action on Access and various other programmes we have put in place. I would agree, the Bristol example is very encouraging. I would just caution a little on the grounds that we are dealing with a very diverse range of institutions and what might apply in Bristol might not necessarily apply in every single university up and down the land, but nevertheless I agree there is good practice going on here which we should disseminate all round the sector.

212. If some of them do not think they are similar, they ought at least to be testing that presumably?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Indeed so. I think it is especially important that those institutions which are below their benchmark, which Bristol was, in particular take note of this.

213. The second question is about the premiums for taking on students from lower representation postcodes. Am I right in saying that premium is paid when they take them on?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes.

214. Would it not be rather cleverer perhaps to spread that payment during the time that student is at university, since there is known to be a problem with universities who may be scratching around for students taking on anyone they can and might see it as quite advantageous to take on such a student because even if they drop out a little bit later they have got the money?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) If they drop out within the first year, they do not get the money. I take the general point you are making. I think we need a rather more sophisticated means of identifying the cost in the first place and then, having identified what the additional costs are, find an appropriate way of covering those costs within institutions in general. So I accept the thrust of your question.¹⁰

Mr Davidson

215. Could I start off by saying that this, I think, has been one of the most depressing hearings I have been at, because it is one of the most important subjects that we have had the opportunity to deal with and I have been struck throughout by what I think is almost a complete lack of commitment from both of you to what I believe is the Government's policy and the general thrust of what we seem to be

¹⁰ *Note by witness:* The premium is calculated to reflect the proportion of students from neighbourhoods that are under-represented in HE in all years of study, not just those in their first year. The proportions are calculated using the individual student data for the most recently completed academic year. We do not pay a lump sum as soon as an institution recruits a student from an under-represented neighbourhood, as the methodology described above shows.

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Davidson Cont]

arguing for. Maybe I have misunderstood your commitment to this and, if so, I would be grateful if you could clarify that during the exchanges. Can I put a point first of all to Mr Normington. The first thing we heard from you was the main issue was the question of school results, and I appreciate if you want to succeed in life generally you want to choose your parents wisely, but is that not just a case of saying, "It was not me, it is not my responsibility, it is not my fault"? You have gone through this afternoon producing a variety of explanations which in a sense are alibis for yourselves on the basis that if blame is dispersed so widely that everybody is responsible, then in effect nobody is responsible and no blame or criticism can then be levelled at universities. Does that seem like a reasonable way of approaching what you have said this afternoon?

(Mr Normington) I have not said anything of the sort. I have said nothing of that at all. I do not accept that any part of the education system is yet doing well enough in terms of its work for children from lower socio-economic groups. There is a need to tackle that at every point in the education system. I do not accept alibis, the Government's policy is not based on alibis, it is tougher in some places to break down the barriers there are, but I do not accept you cannot get more children from the poorer parts of the country or the lower socio-economic groups into higher education. I am absolutely committed to that and I think the universities have a very important part to play in that. I do not think it is just about the schools, I really do not. The universities have to look at their admissions policies, they have to reach back into the system and I think they have a major role to play in raising aspirations.

216. Would you accept that it is not unreasonable for me to have gained the impression that these objectives are not objectives by which you are particularly excited?

(Mr Normington) I am very excited by the objectives, I think they are really tough. If, by the time I retire, which will just be around here I guess, we have hit these targets, I will be proud.

217. I wonder if I could turn to page 15 and paragraph 2.17, the last sentence, where it says, "The Funding Council discourages providers from taking account of students' postcodes when processing applications." I wonder if you could clarify for me what that means. It can be read in two ways, neither of which reflect much credit on the systems in their different ways. It could either be that there are universities which discriminate against people from poor backgrounds, or there are universities which discriminate in favour of people from poor backgrounds simply to get the money. Could you clarify which it is?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) I have referred earlier to the fact that the premium itself is a rather diffuse measure, but let me take the point you raise head on. It is very important that judgments which are being made by admissions tutors on whether or not a particular student could or could not benefit from higher education in that institution are not distorted by these kind of considerations. At the point of admission, the decision must be made on wholly educational grounds and not on some rather

distorted perception that in taking this student rather than that one, the university will gain financially by doing so.

218. And some universities are doing that?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) We have no evidence that has happened.

219. Why say it then?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) Because we wanted to pre-emptively ensure as far as we could that that would not happen.

220. We have a situation where the documents here tell us really that working class students are less likely to get into the elite universities, they are certainly less likely to get on some courses particularly the professions of medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine, and they are less likely to go away from home. As far as I am aware, it has been virtually ever thus. Is there nothing that can be done which is actually going to make any difference at all here?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) Let me take you through those three factors in turn, if I may. The differential in students from poor backgrounds going to particular universities is almost wholly related to their previous educational attainment, not to the fact they were from poor backgrounds *per se*. However, there are some professions, like medicine, veterinary science and others, where there is some evidence that the proportion from poorer backgrounds entering those subjects, even if you were to hold educational attainment constant, is not what it should be. We have discussed this with the Council for Heads of Medical Schools, and have persuaded them to introduce a whole set of innovative measures which would encourage medical schools to go out and seek well-qualified students, high-attaining students, who nevertheless have probably not aspired to a medical career for some of the cultural reasons you are implying. There are some experiments operating in five or six medical schools up and down the country now. My former university of Southampton is running one of them. I have to say that not only are they being successful in attracting in non-conventional students, but they are also, and this is very crucial, retaining the confidence of the medical profession in taking in this entry.

221. How long have these experiments been running?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) Only for the last two years.

222. So in all the recorded time up to then nobody has felt that this was desirable, so all of those who are in positions of authority in all the universities just now have never previously believed this was an issue which required addressing? Have I got that right?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) Not quite, no. Up until now the professions like those you have referred to were primarily admitting students solely on the basis of A-level scores plus an interview, and they realised over time that such was the increasing demand for those subjects that was leading to a more and more socially-selective entry, and therefore they are taking positive steps to diversify the students coming in.

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Davidson Cont]

223. But only in the last two years. It only occurred to them recently that the professions were socially-exclusive?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) That is correct because it is only in the last four or five years that the data has become available on which we can draw accurate measures of this.

224. They must have been fairly out of touch with the nature of life outside university, surely, if they did not realise the students who were appearing in front of them were not socially representative?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) I think the professions concerned were much more interested at that time in the educational qualifications on entry than they were with the social representativeness of the students they received. That is now changing.

225. I think that is possibly a generous way of putting it. What guarantee is there that if we give universities more money they do not simply continue to reinforce privilege? If the Government had not come along and forced you to do some of these things, what evidence is there that you would ever have done any of these on your own?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) First of all, the Government should not give us money in the hope we would simply not reinforce privilege, it has to be done on the basis we have in place a set of procedures which will ensure that money allocated for widening participation is indeed directed towards those ends.

226. It is a pretty damning indictment, is it not, of the universities that we have as a Government to specifically give you money to widen participation? There is nothing in the universities themselves which would make you want to do that of your own volition?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) No, I think most universities have always wished to admit students on perceived academic merit irrespective of the financial background of the student. What has changed I think is that as the numbers entering higher education has grown and grown and grown, the system as a whole has become less elitist, and then measuring this kind of issue has become more and more important.

227. So if successive Governments had not come along and put more money into the system in order, presumably, to dilute it and make it less elitist, the universities in terms of their own momentum would just have kept on reinforcing privilege and replicating themselves?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) For the reasons we have discussed, in a time when university entrance was highly selective in terms of educational qualifications, that meant also it was highly selective in terms of social background.

228. And all these highly intelligent, sophisticated individuals were incapable, were they, of looking beyond the presented examination results and realising they reflected an imbalance in society? They never thought of doing anything about it on their own, did they?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) I think that is unfair. There are some parts of the higher education sector which did quite a lot actually, and I, for one, and a number of others have benefited from that. I repeat, whilst universities were admitting a very small

proportion of the population on the basis of educational qualification alone, it was bound to have this impact. It is still true today that there are major incentives for institutions to admit on the basis of educational qualifications alone and not look beyond that. We have had to do something to redress that balance.

229. Can I clarify this then? The University of Oxford and the University of Wolverhampton, at opposite ends of the spectrum, presumably have different entry qualifications for the same courses?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) Yes.

230. Do they produce different degrees? Is a degree from one better than a degree from the other? Is the academic standard higher?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) All of the degrees, whether at Oxford or Wolverhampton, or any other institution, have to meet a minimum threshold of standards laid down by the Quality Assurance Agency.

231. A point you made earlier on was that when people were being assessed, they were being assessed on the basis—and I think I quote you correctly—they could or could not benefit from the experience. It is clear from what you said just now, is it not, that everybody who went to the University of Wolverhampton, provided there was an appropriate course at Oxford, could have benefited from a course at Oxford?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) In the past I would agree with that.

232. Well, this year for example.

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) Yes, but the number of places available at Oxford were very restricted.

233. I understand that, I am coming on to that. Can I clarify the extent to which the higher qualifications demanded by places like Oxford and Cambridge and others are just simply a mechanism for filtering out rather than actually being essential? I remember speaking to a major Scottish employer who said they had hundreds and hundreds of applications in, they threw out everybody from bar about three universities simply on the basis it was the only way administratively they could cope with the system. Am I right in thinking therefore there are literally thousands of people who could benefit, and the main reason why Oxford and Cambridge and other elite universities have a much higher level is simply to filter them out and make it easier to determine who gets in?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) I am sure that those two universities and a number of other universities have far more well-qualified applicants than they have places available.

234. Is that a yes to the question?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) Yes.

235. Okay. The same presumably then would apply to things like medicine where it has struck me for a long time that the high level of qualifications required is not actually necessary to undertake the course, it is just a means of filtering out? This is a Scottish example I can give you but I assume it is appropriate here as well: there were students in schools in an area I represented who were unable to

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Davidson Cont]

apply for medicine because they were not able to do five Highers in the fifth year because the school they were at did not have that combination of Highers to allow them to apply, so simply because of their backgrounds they were disqualified from going on to university, and the system did not seem to have any self-regulatory mechanisms to recognise any of that.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) In the past that is true, and what we have had to do is work with the professional bodies in medicine to ensure there is a greater diversity of entry qualifications into medical schools. To put it crudely, that they are looking not just for three As at A-level but for other factors as well.

236. What was the motivation for that change? Was it internally generated or did the Government do it?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I am not sure I can answer that question, to be honest.

237. That in itself is an answer actually. It confirms my view that if we left universities to themselves, they would never have changed, and that universities in many ways cannot be trusted to self-regulate. Can I ask about Chart 16 on page 18? There is an issue here about the proportion of higher education providers undertaking various things, and I think the highest number is them visiting schools and colleges, and that is very welcome. I presume you undertake some sort of review of this. What evidence do you have that the elite universities are widespread in the schools and colleges they visit? I would hate to think, for example, that Oxford only visited public schools. Does Wolverhampton go to Eton, for example, to try and recruit from there? Is there a pattern and what does it tell us?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Before we hand over the money to the institutions for their widening participation activities we demand a plan from them, and the money is handed over in relation to that and how they spend it is monitored and subject to audit.

238. How they spend it is then audited? We do that, and that is to stop them stealing it, so you know that the money to be spent on travel to university is spent on travel to university. It does not say they have not spent it all going to public schools, does it?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Well, the plan that we agree with them would indicate the kinds of activities they have in mind. To answer your question very directly, in the two universities you have mentioned, Oxford and Cambridge, their plan does include specifically targeting schools which have not had a tradition of sending students to Oxford and Cambridge, and we monitor that.

239. What proportion of the visits are to schools which they have not previously recruited from?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I do not have that information available.

240. Is it above 50 per cent?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I would expect it to be but I do not have the direct information.

241. You expect it to be above 50 per cent but—

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I would expect it to be but I can give the information later.¹¹

242. I think it would be very helpful if we could have a note on that, Chairman, indicating where the various establishments go. I am surprised, in a sense, you do not have that. I want to move on to page 20 and Chart 18. It seems to me here that only 58 per cent provide specialist training for admissions staff, therefore 42 per cent do not have specialist training for admissions staff. Is it just done on tradition then? You come along and check whether or not somebody's dad is in the Masons and, if he is, he gets in? Or is it that he has been at the right school or plays the right sports? Does this mean these people have no training whatsoever?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) No, it does not. This is in respect of, first of all, where specialist training for admissions staff is deemed necessary because those institutions are below their benchmark in terms of the pattern of admissions they have on students from poorer backgrounds. In some institutions this is part of their institutional mission, it is actually embedded into the institution and this is one of their main foci.

243. That must be pretty recent though, because none of them were doing it until recently. We have already agreed they were not seeking to widen the catchment until the Government came along and forced them.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) It depends what you mean by "recently", but some institutions have been doing this for some considerable time.

244. The final question I want to ask you is about interviewing. I take it that it is fair to assume that youngsters like yourselves are going to be much better prepared for a university interview than youngsters from other schools. What evidence is there that that is genuinely taken adequately into account by the institution interviewing them?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I think the first thing I should say is that the vast majority of institutions these days do not use the interview as the major diagnostic test on admissions, because they simply do not have the resources available to interview anything like the majority of applicants who apply to universities.

245. So they have already weeded out people on the basis of inadequate results, even though, to use your quote, they could have benefited from that course of study?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) No, I am saying that that judgment is based for the majority of applicants in most institutions on a paper-based exercise rather than on the basis of an interview.

246. Which comes back to the question, you weed out a lot of people who could benefit but who will have been adversely affected by their circumstances and perhaps under-achieved?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) That is why we have in mind to introduce good practice advice on admissions to universities, and there is a group, jointly with the Department, tailoring that advice.

247. Only now are you doing a good practice guide.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes, because it is only in the recent past we have had the data available which has drawn this problem to our attention.

¹¹ Ev 52, Appendix 2.

28 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

Chairman

248. I have a couple of quick questions which colleagues have put in which I must ask on their behalf. Mr Richard Bacon asks about the review of student finance. We appreciate you cannot be exact as to a publication date but you will appreciate this is a matter of great public interest, can you indicate when it is likely to be published? Is it going to be next week, next month, in the next six months? It was promised in the New Year apparently.

(*Mr Normington*) It was, and I cannot go beyond saying we hope it will be soon. I cannot say when it is going to be, we have not finished it yet.

249. It is regrettable that you have no idea. May I also ask this on behalf of Mr David Rendel, you said and repeated that current participation is 41 per cent, you will recall that answer. We had a members' brief which was supplied to us by the National Audit Office, which said, "Improvements have levelled off at a participation rate reported in February 2001 as 44 per cent", and that is apparently taken from oral evidence from the Minister for Higher Education to the Education and Employment Select Committee.

You will appreciate these two figures are significantly different. Can I ask you to clear this up or could the Comptroller and Auditor General comment on this? Why is one group of advisers saying 41 per cent and another group saying 44 per cent?

(*Mr Normington*) I do not know what the 44 per cent figure is, it may be something different. I would love it to be 44 per cent, of course, but I am afraid it is just over 41 per cent.¹²

(*Sir John Bourn*) It is difficult, Chairman, to comment on why there is that difference but I would be very pleased to work with the Permanent Secretary and produce a note on it.

250. I am very grateful to Mr David Rendel for highlighting that. Professor Newby and Mr Normington, I am afraid you have been in the hot seat now for exactly three hours with injury time. May I thank you very much for answering our questions in a very forthright way, especially as I think you are both new to this Committee.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes, we are.

Chairman: Thank you. We are very grateful to you for the skilful way you have answered our questions.

¹² Ev 49, Appendix 1.

WEDNESDAY 30 JANUARY 2002

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Richard Bacon
Mr Ian Davidson
Geraint Davies
Mr Barry Gardiner
Mr Nick Gibb
Mr Brian Jenkins

Mr George Osborne
Mr David Rendel
Mr Gerry Steinberg
Mr Jon Trickett
Mr Alan Williams

SIR JOHN BOURN KCB, Comptroller and Auditor General and MR JEFF JONES, Director, National Audit Office further examined.

MR GLENN HULL, Second Treasury Officer of Accounts, HM Treasury, further examined.

REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL:

Improving student achievement in English higher education (HC 486)

Examination of Witnesses

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education and Skills, and PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE, Chief Executive, Higher Education Funding Council for England, further examined.

Chairman

251. Good afternoon and welcome to the Committee of Public Accounts. Today we are considering the Comptroller and Auditor General's Report on Improving Student Achievement in English Higher Education. This is part two of the

drama that we started on Monday because we have back with us Mr David Normington and Sir Howard Newby to talk to us. Colleagues are free if they wish to return to any unanswered questions on Monday, if the witnesses are very happy with that. I should say that we are very honoured to welcome also in the public gallery the Nepalese Public Accounts

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Chairman Cont]

Committee to whom I was very privileged to talk about our work before the meeting. We are also very privileged to welcome to the public gallery Mrs Sekoula who is President of the Supreme Chamber of Control of Poland. I suggested to Sir John Bourn that he should now be known as the Supreme Controller as well. Back to business. I was going to ask you, Mr Normington, by way of a general introduction, if you think you can widen participation, maintain standards and raise achievement all at the same time. Please answer that if you feel able to. You were telling us a bit about Government targets on Monday. Do you want to say a bit more about targets and how you are going to ensure that you succeed in meeting them?

(*Mr Normington*) I think I said on Monday that it was a major challenge to widen participation and maintain standards. If you add to that maintaining and improving on this non-completion rate which a lot of this report is about, that is a really tough set of challenges. The interesting thing about this report is that it brings us back to where we were to some extent on Monday in that it talks about the importance of prior attainment. Once again, once you get A-level results, what level of A-level results you get has a major impact on whether students have a greater propensity or not to complete their course and to achieve. That is the central issue in the report. I rehearsed at some length some of the ways in which we are trying to widen participation and maintain standards.

252. Do not do it now.

(*Mr Normington*) I will not do it now.

253. You get the next two and a half hours to do that, bit by bit. Can I ask you to go straight to the heart of the matter as far as I can see it, that with many universities awarding their own degrees how will you ensure that claimed achievement rates are not improved by lowering standards?

(*Mr Normington*) It is a key issue and to some extent the sector is self-regulating and it is very important therefore that the system that we have for maintaining standards and for which the Funding Council is responsible is maintained. It really is for Sir Howard to explain a bit more about that.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) The sector has established the Quality Assurance Agency which is doing two things. First of all it has already established benchmark standards on a subject by subject basis for all higher education institutions which are awarding higher education qualifications. It is also of course just completing now its first sweep of reviews of provision in higher education institutions to ensure they meet up with the claims which they themselves have made.

254. You have mentioned benchmarks so I will go straight into that. Only a few institutions are significantly outside their benchmarks. Do benchmarks hide the need for action by some institutions?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) No. I think that the purpose of introducing benchmarks and making them publicly available—they are published by us, and they do appear in the newspapers—was first of all to hold up a mirror to the institutions' own performance so that they must question themselves

about how well they are doing against the rest of the sector and, having done that, where there is clear evidence of under-performance we take that in hand to ensure that those institutions are putting in place effective measures which will ensure that they come up to benchmark in the future.

255. Can I go back to you, Mr Normington? You made a pretty obvious point on Monday that there was a need for further improvement in secondary education. How far is success in schools and sixth form colleges a prerequisite to improving performance in higher education, do you think?

(*Mr Normington*) I think it is a very important part of it. It is schools, sixth form colleges and further education colleges because a lot of A-levels and vocational qualifications are taken there. Yes, I think it is a very important part of getting people from the lower socio-economic groups into higher education and, as we can see, the levels of attainment you achieve before you go in do seem to be correlated to what happens when you are there and your likelihood of staying and completing the course successfully.

256. We know from this report, particularly from page 29, that there is widespread concern amongst staff about numeracy, so can I ask you a question about numeracy skills? Why do you think students are unprepared at such a basic level of higher education and what are you doing about it?

(*Mr Normington*) In terms of numeracy?

257. Yes.

(*Mr Normington*) In terms of what we are doing pre-university, we are concentrating very much on numeracy in primary schools where this must start with the numeracy strategy really, improving the teaching of mathematics in primary schools. We have just moved on in secondary schools to focus on maths and English teaching between 11 and 14 where it could be equipping students with the basics before they get to GCSE and move on. It is a major problem. There is a significant improvement but it remains an issue.

258. I am told anecdotally that some business studies courses are even having to water down their courses to remove the mathematical bits of them because their students simply cannot cope.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I think that is regrettable if they are. Let me say about the general problem that it is the case that over a number of years now many universities have had to offer (the nomenclature varies) remedial or catch-up courses in mathematics in the first year. It is not limited to mathematics, I might say. There are also problems in modern languages. The reasons from the sector's point of view are partly concerned with modular A-levels in which, in a subject like mathematics, which is what I would call, if you will forgive the jargon, a linear additive subject; that is, you cannot—

259. No, I do not forgive the jargon.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) You cannot do one stage until you have done the one prior to it because one building block adds on another. Modularity has meant that students are to some extent in the A-level syllabus able to choose some areas of mathematics and not others, and when they come to university

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Chairman Cont]

therefore one cannot make the same assumptions that one could have made perhaps a generation ago that everyone has the same knowledge and level of mathematics today that they had then. We do find in mathematics and in modern languages that the same problem applies, that quite a lot of intensive tuition has to go on in the first year to bring everyone up to the level of mathematics that one might have expected a generation ago.

260. I know that a lot of universities are having to do this but this of course is a very expensive way of doing it, is it not? It is much cheaper to do it in school.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) It is very resource intensive, yes.

261. If you look at page 19 you can see that the proportion of students succeeding in their studies varies from nearly 100 per cent to under half. Perhaps, Sir Howard, you could tell us a bit about why there should be such variation between different institutions.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) That variation is largely a correlation, as Mr Normington said just now, of the prior educational qualifications with which students enter, so that in general progression rates are related to that prior educational qualification. I have to say that at the Funding Council we would recognise that this variation is too wide and we do need, to use the former Secretary of State's phrase, to bear down upon this problem, which is what we are doing.

(*Mr Normington*) We have in fact in the previous recommendations (not the most recent ones but the previous ones that the Secretary of State sent) focused on this issue and asked the Council particularly to focus on the under-performing institutions. It is important that they do that because the variations are wide, even within bands.¹³

262. Carrying on this theme, obviously it is the entry qualifications that may determine success in higher education, but I think what many people may want to ask is why are we encouraging applicants with low qualifications into these institutions and what are we doing to encourage them to take more appropriate courses for their qualifications and their aptitudes?

(*Mr Normington*) Overall the performance is excellent. It is important that everything we say today is set against that. We have the second lowest drop-out rate from universities in the OECD and therefore, although there is a very wide variation—and there are some reasons for that—and the variation needs bearing down on, it is against a backdrop of success. We are talking about a relative issue, is the first thing to say.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) There is, as the report makes clear and we agree, a problem about students having the quantity and quality of information they need to make informed choices about the kind of course and the kind of institution which most suits them. Sometimes there are wider factors involved in their choice because, as you know, many students move away from home when they

enter higher education and sometimes the factors which are involved here include whether they have managed to settle into a new town or city in a different part of the country that they are not familiar with. We have worked hard to try to improve both the quantity and the quality of information available, and there are examples of that in the report which we can examine in a moment if you wish, but we do recognise that we need to continue to improve on this issue; it is vitally important to the students and their parents.

263. If you look at paragraph 2.19 on page 16, and this was I think taking up a point which one of my colleagues asked on Monday, some institutions have not been honest with applicants because of financial pressure to increase student numbers. I think you will recall you had a question on this theme on Monday. Some students, it seems, do not discover until too late that their courses are not professionally accredited. What are you doing to prevent this mis-selling?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) This is an issue which the Quality Assurance Agency specifically looks at. It looks at the claims which are made in both prospectuses and other kinds of course material which students receive either just before they go to university or immediately on entry, and to ensure that the aims and objectives that are set out there are valid and that they are indeed met over the lifetime of the course. We do indeed need to ensure that, as the report puts it, there is no over-selling either deliberately or inadvertently.

264. If you turn to paragraph 2.8 on page 15, this is now the subject of students who actually leave their courses, more than half of students who leave do not talk it over with staff. What are you trying to do to ensure that students are given more support, more encouragement, staff more help to ensure that they talk to each other?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) We have instituted a programme as part of the former Secretary of State's recommendations that we bear down on non-completion and that involves them working through this team we have created called Action on Access which is both establishing and disseminating good practice on matters like this and then advising specific institutions, particularly those which are below their benchmark, on how they can improve their particular performance and effectiveness. I have to remind the Committee, however, that this performance is taking place against a very considerable drop (until three years ago) in the amount of money which universities received per student and of course staff/student ratios have gone up over that same period, and it has been more difficult to sustain one of the traditional strengths of British higher education, which is the personal nature of the tuition between student and teacher.

265. Can I ask you ask you about a specific point? I know you want to give an entirely honest reply to this from your very long experience in this world. Despite all the fine words that we have been hearing are we in danger of having a two-tier system in our universities of the sort that exists in America, that there is a huge difference in the sort of degree that you get from some of the older institutions and some of the very newest ones?

¹³ *Note by witness:* The 'recommendations' referred to were contained in a letter *Higher Education Funding and Delivery to 2003-04*, to the Chairman of HEFCE from the Secretary of State for Education and Skills dated 29 November 2001.

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Chairman Cont]

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) My honest answer is that describing it in terms of a two-tier system is too simplistic. We have a much wider diversity of higher education institutions than can be categorised in simply two tiers. As you know, they range from leading research intensive, world class universities on the one hand through very strong civic universities with a mixed economy of research and teaching through to the new universities with their emphasis on vocational teaching and on into very specialist colleges of higher education in areas like the performing arts and so on. Yes, there is wider differentiation. That will probably continue, that diversity, but to call it two-tier is frankly too simplistic.

266. You did mention in the question I asked you before—this was your own answer—that one of the strengths of the older universities is that there is still much more personal contact because they are based on the old tutorial system. Is it fair to say that in some of the new universities that simply does not exist, that they say they have not the money to do it, and often students may only see their tutor once a term as opposed to every week and this means that if things start to go wrong, particularly in the early stages, they are not being given the sort of advice they should be given?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I would not go so far as to say it does not exist but what I would say is that the degree of personal contact between teachers and their students has been very much attenuated over the last generation and it is particularly prominent in the newer institutions.

267. My last question is on promotion. In the universities you do not get promoted, do you, because of your skill in dealing with your students? You get promoted because of the learned papers you have been writing and the books you have been publishing. In the older universities there always was the don who may not have been the foremost research authority but he was absolutely brilliant with students. Do you see this as a problem in terms of promotion?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes, I do see it as a problem. There is an issue about how we can redress the balance between the rewards for research and for teaching in higher education institutions and that is something my Board will wish to address in the next few months. Many institutions are beginning to develop schemes for rewarding outstanding teachers but I think we need to do a lot more. We also need to do what we can to develop a parity of esteem between research and teaching. I am afraid it is true all over the world that on the whole the academic profession gives higher esteem to excellence in research than to excellence in teaching. That means that we have to work that much harder to go against the grain of that kind of culture and ensure that outstanding teaching is recognised and appropriately rewarded.

Mr Steinberg

268. Higher education is now in my view much broader in definition than it was, say, 15 years ago. Would you agree with that?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes.

269. Fifteen years ago it would have been unthinkable that anybody would get into a university if they did not have GCSE or GCE in English and maths. They might as well not even apply because unless they had those two subjects at that particular level they would not have got into university. Is that fair?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Not quite. I am sorry to be so personal about this. When I applied to university in the mid sixties even at that stage not every university by any means demanded an O-level (as it then was) in both English and maths, although most did.

270. So every university did not. My experience was that it was very difficult to get into university if you did not have the basic subjects. It appears now that we are moving down a road where the basic education that one would expect a student to have they do not need any more and yet they go into higher education and I just think that is an anomaly; misnomer would probably be a better word. How can you go into higher education if you have not got the lower education?

(*Mr Normington*) In fact what has happened in the last 15 years, particularly as higher education has expanded, is that the A-level points you require to get in have gone up, not down. It has gone up to 19 from 18, the average A-level points score. I understand what you are saying and I think there probably is some evidence of that, but in terms of A-level performance there has been a slight increase, despite the increasing numbers of places that are on offer and the new institutions coming into the sector, so it does not all point one way in this evidence.

271. On page 7, paragraph 1.5, it talks about institutions and it says: "Some are able to set the highest GCE A-level entry requirements, while others have to more actively recruit to fill places on their programmes." I have got real mixed feelings about this. I was a teacher from, I suppose, the old school where one expected people to have reasonably good GCSE or GCE results before they went to university and now they do not. Is that not quite simply lowering standards for people who are going into higher education?

(*Mr Normington*) I do not think it is. None of us has any interest in seeing standards going into decline. We want people in universities who can benefit from those courses. As we were saying on Monday it has never really been the case that A-levels or GCSEs, formal qualifications, are the only thing that will be taken into account in terms of entry. It is really important that universities have very good admissions procedures and are assessing whether the individual can complete the course. I do not think there is lots of evidence that standards are in decline. On the contrary, the A-level points score is slightly higher.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) As you say, it is a complex issue. If we are talking about standards in higher education we should be focusing, I would submit, on output standards. We have to ensure that the standard of the degree or other qualification which students leave with has not declined. That is rather different from assuming that standards have declined because the entry into higher education has been broadened. The danger is that if you broaden

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Steinberg Cont]

entry and retain standards of graduation then it is possible that universities would take more risk over admissions and I think what is pleasing about this report is that the evidence is there that on the whole they have not, that they police entry, if I can put it that way, compared with most other countries really quite effectively.

272. I will come back to that in terms of drop-out and results. I understand that if you want to have a higher participation rate it is common sense that you have to reduce the qualifications to get in because everybody is not brilliant; everybody cannot get three A-levels at A grade. Therefore you have to lower the qualification rates. What I do not like is discriminating in favour of people who have not actually done well in the basic education. This worries me, that by doing that you are lowering standards because you are discriminating. Take, for example, something which was in the first report that we did on Monday. I think it was an example of Bristol University. It was example five. Have you got that with you today?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) I have.

273. It was Bristol University. They examined their relationships between what students got at A-level and what they did not achieve and what they had achieved at school. As it is written down it looks as though they are really innovative but in fact what they are doing is just looking for ways to get people into university who have not got the necessary qualifications. I am not sure whether that is a good thing or not.

(Mr Normington) If they were doing that I do not think it would be acceptable. If I can just take your first point, it is possible for us to go on working at getting more potential students to higher levels of A-level performance and equivalent. That has been happening steadily over the last ten to 15 years. It is possible and it is really important that we go on doing that because that is the best way of ensuring quality of entry. I entirely agree with you. I do not want to see—the Government does not want to see—standards being lowered in order to achieve this target. It just not in any of our interests. It is not in the universities' interests.

274. And it is not in the students' interests either.

(Mr Normington) It is not in the students' interest.

275. I am in favour of discrimination, if you like. We talk about social classes 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. I am in favour of discrimination in favour of class 5 provided that they have the qualifications. Would you agree with that?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) Yes, I would agree, but I would also add that discrimination implies that this is a zero sum game: if we take in more students from one category we must necessarily take in fewer from another. I would just point out that that is not the case. Looking forward, to meet the target there will have to be an overall expansion of the numbers coming into higher education from which everybody can gain. What we are really talking about therefore is whether, looking forward, there will be proportionately more people coming in from social classes 4 and 5. We all intend that there will be. The

point I want to make is that they can come in and it will not be at the expense of other well qualified students elsewhere.

276. If I understood you correctly you talked about lowering standards to be able to get in but ensuring that at the end of the course the degree was of the same quality. Is that basically what you said?

(Mr Normington) That is what he said. I think we have to be really cautious about "lowering standards". I think it is right to look at what the student is capable of. Sometimes you will take more than just their raw A-level performance and that is what some universities do.

277. We lower entry qualification standards; we do not lower standards. Students get into university but because they are not capable of doing the course they then drop out. Is that not a huge waste of resources?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) Yes, it can be a waste of resources and that is why we need to bear down on this problem. I come back to the point that despite the very large expansion in the numbers going into higher education over the last decade, the drop-out rate has remained steady. That shows to my mind that the universities have done a good job in making very difficult judgements about whether any particular student would benefit from higher education, even where their formal academic qualifications are lower than might have been deemed acceptable a generation ago.

278. You say that the drop-out rate, if I interpret you right, has not worsened over the years.

(Mr Normington) That has not changed.

279. That is not the impression I get, I must admit. If you turn to page 4, figure 1, you tell us that in some cases you can have a situation where—ah, that is not so much drop-out; that is more on the qualifications at the end of the day.

(Mr Normington) That is drop-out. The middle line there is drop-out.

280. Let us combine the two. The situation is that you have a success rate in some universities of something like 48 per cent. You have also a drop-out rate in some universities of over 20 per cent. That cannot be classed as being very successful.

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) No, I agree. I agree that those figures are, both of them, too high. I was referring to the overall sector performance. Within the sector there are indeed some institutions where we need to work much harder with them to ensure that they are improving both their practice on admissions and their effectiveness in retaining students once they have been admitted. I absolutely accept that.

281. It has taken me a long time to get to this. Is it not true to say that the pre-1992 universities have a drop-out of approximately two per cent and that the post-1992 universities have a drop-out of over 20 per cent? What does that show?

(Mr Normington) There is quite a range. The drop-out in the post-1992 universities is higher.

282. I did some research myself, not to this particular report. I think it was a report that we did on further education. I rang round the universities in my area, not in my constituency, although I did ring Durham University. The drop-out there was pretty

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Steinberg Cont]

minimal. I then contacted York University. Again the drop-out was minimal. I contacted Newcastle University. The drop-out was minimal. I then contacted other universities post-1992 and their drop-out was frankly abysmal, something like 20-22 per cent. It was not because of financial problems. It was because of failure in being able to do the courses.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) You are quite right to say that the average rate of drop-out is higher in the post-1992 institutions, but even there, and there is evidence of this in the report, there are post-1992 institutions with really very good practice in retaining students. What we need to do is understand much better how they are able to do that without jeopardising standards and then spread that good practice to the others.¹⁴

283. The question that I want to ask, if that is the case, is this. Is it cost effective to trawl around looking for students who you know at the end of the day are not going to make the grade?

(*Mr Normington*) If that is what they are doing it is not cost effective.

284. I am not going to give you names, obviously. I am not going to give you universities. I know of students who, when they went to university, in my own experience knew that they were not going to make the grade and they dropped out and they failed. That is not fair on them as well as not being fair on the taxpayer.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I agree. Absolutely. I would just add that it is not only a waste of public money; it is also rank bad educational practice. As I said on Monday, this is simply bad admissions practice. It should not happen in that way.

285. Give me the reasons why you believe that the majority of students leave higher education.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I think the majority of reasons are two-fold. One is that they have found when they entered the university that the course which they had applied for, which they thought would suit them, turns out not to suit them, and that goes back to the Chairman's previous question about improving on the quality of information they receive. The other one quite honestly is personal problems, and I do mean personal problems. They are homesick, they have personal relationships which are suffering because they have moved away and matters of that kind, and they find that living away from home, combined with the challenges of higher education, are just too much for them.

286. Figure 10 on page 15. I looked at this graph and drew some conclusions from the graph. One of the conclusions that I drew was one that I found myself doing a bit of research on. The financial reason was not really the main reason why they left university. Then I read the report and I realised that personal reasons could include financial reasons, so that is misleading, but then I realised that in fact this only represented 40 per cent of those who drop out.

In other words you do not know why 60 per cent drop out. The biggest section of dropping out, ie, for personal reasons, you do not know what those personal reasons are, so at the end of the day you cannot tell me why people are leaving university, can you?

(*Mr Normington*) We are not sure. We have just done some more research to try to get to this. It has not yet been published but it will not be long before it is published. It still does not tell us for sure. Financial hardship is only quoted by 18 per cent of people. Personal reasons continue to dominate. Wrong course, wrong institution is the one that is at the top of the list. It is the same story. Of course it may be all those things. The personal reason may be that they cannot do the course, it may be that they have not got enough money, it could be all interlinked, and that is the problem. We have not found a way of getting behind that.

287. What I am saying is that the numbers are only 40 per cent anyway so 60 per cent you do not know.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Tracking these people down is a hugely difficult task and, having tracked them down, when we want to ask them about something that they would probably regard as a personal failure, they often do not want to answer the question. It is a very difficult research issue.

Mr Jenkins

288. I was very interested in the question that Mr Steinberg asked because I am totally amazed by the report that says that we do not know why young people left. They probably walked away. If you write to them they will chuck it straight in the bin. They do not bother answering. Have we not tried some sampling? Have we not tried some in-depth survey work on some of these young people to get to the real crux of the problem?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes, there have been some projects of that kind. There is a piece of research done at the Liverpool John Moore University on this. I think Mr Steinberg's question was really about, is this a valid sample? Is a 40 per cent sample giving us valid answers? I have some sympathy with his question because even I do not know and by definition none of us can know whether this is representative or not.

289. There is what is known as a statistical base for doing random observations and random sampling through a population that would give you fairly accurate answers but you need a format. You have an in-depth interview with these people. It will not be that costly because there are not large numbers. I am just amazed that we are at this stage and we have not done this.

(*Mr Normington*) We have actually got two recent surveys which get closer to this but it does not tell us anything more than is here. Even when you get behind the personal reasons they break down into some of the things that are here: wrong course, wrong institution, financial issues, family and personal issues in terms of relationships and so on, just not liking being away from home. Those are the things that it breaks down into.

¹⁴ *Note by witness:* Details of non-continuation rates and achievement rates are contained in the C&AG's Report *Improving student achievement in English higher education* (HC 486, Session 2001-02), Appendix 3. This shows that, although, on average, non-continuation rates are higher in post 1992 than pre 1992 institutions, there is considerable overlap between the two.

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Jenkins Cont]

290. I notice on page 9 that you are going to publish a target for bearing down on rates of non-completion and you are going to try and improve this. You have got this in mind now?

(*Mr Normington*) One of the things we have asked the Funding Council to do is very much to bear down on non-completion, particularly in those institutions where performance is not good enough. We have been working with the Funding Council on the issue of targets and your Board discussed this the other day.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes, that is right. We are intending to report formally back to the Department on this very shortly, by which I mean within the next month. We produced an interim report last year and if you wish you can ask me further questions on that. It is essentially dealing with some of the issues I have referred to already, identifying good and bad practice, taking effective measures to deal with bad practice and ensuring that good practice is disseminated as widely as possible around the sector, and also through a more coherent form of training over admissions practices and also over counselling and other forms of tutorial support.

291. What powers will you have to make sure that the institutions comply with your recommendations?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) This is a difficult area.

292. I know.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I do not need to underline the fact that the most effective action will be taken at the institution level by the institutions themselves and they are of course autonomous. What we can do is initially to offer guidance to them, including best practice guidance, to which we would ask them formally to conform. We can audit them against that practice and we could (and possibly will) set targets, especially for those which are under-performing. The final sanction we have, which we use very rarely but is there available to us and the sector knows this, is to make any particular form of action a condition of grant. We use that very sparingly indeed.

293. If I can word this correctly, we know that socio-economic group 5 in particular has amongst its population some very bright youngsters but, given the sorts of conditions they live in, the schools they go to, they do not achieve the grades that their potential would allow them to if they were put into a better environment, and yet these are sent through the system like anybody else. I notice that Mr Normington said that some universities look at potential. Name them, because most universities actually get their sheets of paper, get their grades, they get more nominated for finance than they can service, they chuck them to one side, and you know that there is a pecking order in this country at universities. The best ones still take the best students based on those grades and, if necessary, interview. How are we going to overcome this problem?

(*Mr Normington*) I accept that A-level grades remain the key determinant.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I accept also that of course there are big disparities in supply and demand for places between different institutions and therefore those institutions with very high demand from students can do, and have in the past done,

what you just said, which is why we have had to bring in the proposal we have over benchmarking and other factors of that kind, to ask them to examine their own practices and begin to operate a rather more sophisticated admissions policy. That having been said, there are a number of other factors which are outside my Council's control which act as powerful causes of admissions practices in universities, and I am thinking in particular of the way in which newspaper league tables are constructed which also provide a very powerful incentive to do precisely what you have said. We are finding therefore at times that we are working somewhat against the grain with some universities to persuade them to operate on a rather more broad front over their admissions.

294. So we have got a situation where some universities now select students who they believe will complete the course, do well, so maintaining their position in the league table. They also have none of the problems associated with the extra work that is required in taking these through the courses. They have lower drop-out rates and they are high in the league table. I would compare them with what are mainly the post-1992 universities that do not have this choice because they in the main are left with the remaining students to pick from. It was said about one institution on qualifications and entrance examinations, that if you walked past on the day they started and they had got empty spaces they would drag you in because they needed bums on seats to get the money in. What is the alternative? They were not going to get paid if the students were not there. If the students fell out after the end of the year at least they got some money. They are lower down the ranking table. What have you done to overcome this?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Institutions do not receive money if students drop out in the first year and therefore there is a powerful incentive for them not to admit students only to fail them at the end of the first year. The technical term we use is clawback. We claw money back from those institutions if they have not successfully got students through the end of their first year against the numbers that they are contracted to provide.

295. If, for instance, a student goes through more than one year of a course and the university does get paid for that first year there is some money in the bank for the university. If the student then drops out, Mr Steinberg said, it is a waste of public money. I do not believe this. I believe that many students, even though they have undergone just a year of higher education, do get some benefit from undergoing that year. It makes them realise what it is about, what the demands and challenges are, and they may re-enter higher education at some later date. Have you got any evidence in regard to this?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes. Of the 23 per cent who do not continue beyond their first year ten per cent return to continue their studies at a later date, sometimes in another institution; in fact usually in another institution.¹⁵

¹⁵ Note by witness: "77 per cent of full-time first degree students will achieve a degree at the institution at which they started. One per cent will obtain a different qualification and a further five per cent are expected to transfer to another institution". C&AG's Report *Improving student achievement in English higher education* (HC 486, Session 2001-02) para 2.2.

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Jenkins Cont]

296. It is said that schools very often, because there is this system of exam grades and passes, spoon-feed students to get them through the exam, but when these students go off to university they find that the different style of the institution throws them for a while and they lose their way. It is quite noticeable that students who take GNVQs as against A-levels do much better in the first year in mostly the post-1992 institutions, but the A-level people catch up. What is being done to make schools prepare youngsters for higher education rather than merely pass the exam?

(*Mr Normington*) The report does say that and it is reporting the views of people at a focus group. I am surprised at this. I have been to lots of schools, quite a few colleges, quite a few sixth form colleges, and the trend is in sixth forms to have more self-learning. It is more of a step on the road to the kind of education you get at university than it used to be. That is what I have seen and I do not see that. I have to believe what the staff are saying but I have not seen it for myself. Most students when they get post-16 will not accept sitting in rows being spoon-fed. That is not how they learn. They expect to have much more self-directed learning, much more project work, much more working on their own, much more doing their research, and that is the trend in post-16 education.

297. I am sorry. I think you need to re-visit some schools in this country because I can assure you that if the students were left to do their own research, their own work, they would never get through the course because there is such a condensed amount of information transference that you have to spoon-feed them so much information before they are able to undertake any type of project.

(*Mr Normington*) What happens post-16 is nothing like what happens in university, I accept that, but it is quite different from what is happening pre-16 in most places. It is less different often in schools. It is certainly different in FE colleges. Of course there has to be discipline, of course there has to be teaching, but it is more of a stepping stone to higher education than it was when I was in school. That is the trend. I have been to dozens of institutions in the last few years.

298. All right. Maybe you are getting a different view. Maybe you should have to work in one and see what it is like.

(*Mr Normington*) I have sat in schools and watched it happening.

299. One of the things I notice is that universities with accommodation provided for their students have a lower drop-out rate. I have always been surprised because I know that with some of my children's cohort, their parents have bought accommodation and they occupied it for the three or four years they were there with their colleagues and then they sold it at the end and made a profit on the transaction. Why is it that universities have not woken up to the fact that they can make a going concern of providing student accommodation because after all they have got a captive audience and very often it is a growing asset? Why have we not got more accommodation provided for these students in what is a very vulnerable first year period?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I think we would say it is good practice for all universities where possible to provide the offer, the opportunity, of accommodation to students in their first year. The first year is particularly important in handling these students for the reasons we have been discussing. Many institutions are able to do that. The new universities in particular which have traditionally recruited locally when they were polytechnics do have a deficit with regard to student accommodation and we have targeted support to universities through what we call our poor estates scheme which they can use to both develop accommodation themselves and also, where appropriate (and this is an emerging trend) enter into public/private partnerships with the private sector on lease-back and other kinds of schemes whereby that accommodation can be provided more quickly and without cost to the university, at least not up-front cost.¹⁶

300. Are you quite satisfied with the support and tutorial support that students get in the main across all these universities or does it vary so dramatically that it is from good to appalling?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I am not satisfied because I do not think you can ever be satisfied. It does vary. I do not think I could agree with you that it is from good to appalling but I think it is from excellent to mediocre. That is why we do need to ensure through our quality assurance mechanisms that the mediocre is raised consistently to the level of the excellent.

301. When some of our students leave university they find that the course that they were on was not quite fitted to the profession they want to undertake or they misunderstood what the profession involved and how the course would benefit them. Some of these students undoubtedly would benefit from undergoing some work experience. Some people would say that they would be better off if they took a year off to conduct work experience before they went on, and yet very few universities are linked up with any opportunity for work experience to take place for their students while they are at university. Do you think they should be encouraged?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I certainly do think it should be encouraged. I would dispute your comment that very few universities do this. I would say that most universities now do this. I would also add, however, that the trend at the present time—this is from employers, not from the university side—is not to organise work experience in one year away in what used to be called a sandwich course, but rather to do more little and often and have shorter bursts of work experience integrated into the course.

Mr Jenkins: I agree with you. In fact I think that a lot of work based learning should be accredited towards the degree course and we should look at people doing a lifelong learning process rather than a continuation of what started off as a three-year

¹⁶ *Note by witness:* Support is provided to universities through project capital funds, which they can use to enhance their accommodation, not through the poor estates scheme as stated. Additional funds may be provided to assist with the professional fees involved in entering into public/private partnerships.

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Jenkins Cont]

finishing school, and in some of our more elite universities they tend to treat it very much the same today.

Mr Rendel

302. I apologise that I was out of the room for a little bit for some of the earlier questions. Have you been able to resolve the 41 per cent/44 per cent current participation?

(*Mr Normington*) We did say we would provide a note for you and we will do that. I did not know this until I looked into it with my colleagues behind me, but when the Minister of State gave her evidence to the Select Committee and quoted 44 per cent that was indeed what we thought the figure was. What we then set in place, because we knew it was going to become such an important issue, with the Funding Council was a major look again at what the figure was. We decided we were counting some students twice and therefore we revised it down. We have actually taken some students out, so it is down to 41.¹⁷

303. So at the time the 50 per cent target was set, you thought you were already at 44 per cent and had 6 per cent to go, and now it is only 41 per cent and you have 9 per cent to go?

(*Mr Normington*) I do not know that we based the setting of the 50 per cent target on the 44 per cent, I am not sure it was that way round. I am not sure we knew where precisely we were, we decided we needed to have another look at it.

304. I am not suggesting you based the 50 per cent target on 44 per cent, but the fact of the matter is that at the time the 50 per cent target was set you thought you had 6 per cent to go, and now you have 9 per cent to go, so your task has become one and a half times as hard as you thought it was.

(*Mr Normington*) Well, of course, the task is exactly the same, it is just the count we did was inaccurate.

305. Therefore the task is one and a half times as much as you thought. Maybe the task is still 50 per cent but that task is one and a half times as hard as you thought it was going to be.

(*Mr Normington*) Of course.

306. I am not surprised the Government is now looking at other ways of measuring the target. The Government announced today exactly how they were going to measure this, I understand in response to questions asked on Monday. It is very good news they have said what they are going to do now, but it does seem rather different, by the way, from what the Prime Minister said originally, when he talked about "over 50 per cent at university". He is now talking about "trying to get to the 50 per cent in all higher education", which is obviously a much easier target to reach, no doubt because of the problems you have just highlighted. They do say now that progress is to be measured through the initial entry rate. Can you explain that a bit more?

(*Mr Normington*) That is what I was explaining on Monday in fact. The first time we said we would use the initial entry rate was in 1999. In fact there has

always been a measure called the APR—I will not go into it—which was about 18 to 21 year olds. That is a well-tested measure of 18 to 21 year olds who are projected to go into higher education courses, that is courses which lead to qualifications awarded by higher education institutions of one year or more. That is a long-standing measure. All we have done with the initial entry rate is taken that same measure, which we always used, and moved it forward, projected it, to 30. In other words, used the same measure for 18 to 30 year olds as opposed to 18 to 21 year olds.

307. So that everyone knows, what does "measuring the initial entry rate" mean? What are you measuring there?

(*Mr Normington*) It is actually a projection of how many 18 year olds entering at a particular point will have a higher education experience of the sort I have described by the time they get to 30. That is a long-standing measure. It is the only measure—

308. I do not mind whether it is long-standing or not, I am trying to understand what on earth it means. You seem to be saying that in any one year as a certain number of people become 18, you are going to guess how many of those will have had some sort of higher education experience in the next 12 years.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) May I try and help?

309. I hope you can.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) The way of measuring it in the past was called the Age Participation Index and you took the number of 18 to 21 year olds in the population and the number of 18 to 21 year olds in higher education, you divided one into the other and that gave you your percentage.¹⁸

310. That makes obvious sense.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) How the initial entry rate differs is that because the target is set in terms of 18 to 30 year olds, what you have to do is take those who are entering each year when they are 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 et cetera up to the age of 30, and calculate the sum of those against the total population at that point in time. Does that help?

311. I think I understand.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Let me put it the other way around: if you took the old measure, which I agree was simpler, you took the number of 18 to 21 year olds in the general population, the number of 18 to 21 year olds in higher education and divided one into the other, that would ignore the fact that some of those 18 to 21 year olds went on to enter higher education after the age of 21 and, if your target is 18 to 30 year olds, you need to include them.

312. Let me put it round the other way: supposing in the year 2010 we look at everybody up to the age of 30 and say, "How many people are there between 18 and 30 and what percentage of those have by now started some sort of higher education during their lifetime", is that not the obvious way of doing it?

¹⁷ Ev 49, Appendix 1.

¹⁸ *Note by witness*: The Age Participation Index is defined as the number of home domiciled young (under 21) initial entrants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses of higher education, expressed as a proportion of the average 18-19 year-old population of Great Britain.

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Rendel Cont]

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I am not sure whether it is the obvious way of measuring it, but that is not the initial entry rate, because over that period of time we believe that the rate of participation will increase.

313. Let me see if I can get this. In the year 2010 you are going to say, “How many 18 year olds entered this year”, and you are also going to say, “Of those 18 year olds who did not enter this year, how many do we expect to enter when they are 19 next year? Of those who did not enter either this year at age 18 or next year at 19, how many do we expect to enter when they are 20”, and you go right through that process up to age 30.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) That is right.

314. So for most of the 50 per cent you are measuring, you are actually guessing what is going to happen to the current 18 year old cohort over the next 12 years, and you are presumably guessing that on the basis of—I do not know—what the current entry rate is or current entry rate plus a little factor you are going to add on which is conveniently going to allow you to add on a few people because you are going to guess that the rate will increase over the next few years? That seems to be what you are saying.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I would not use that vocabulary but the basic methodology you describe is correct.

315. Thank you. That is very interesting indeed.

(*Mr Normington*) This is absolutely in the public domain.

316. I am not suggesting it was not. I am not suggesting you were trying to hide anything! I was just saying that I have never met anybody who actually understood it.

(*Mr Normington*) It is the only measure we have. We could construct other measures of course.

317. Indeed, like the measure I suggested.

(*Mr Normington*) This is the one which we know and we use.

318. I may be being extremely rude to the rest of the population of Great Britain but given that I am the Higher Education spokesperson for my Party, I probably have looked into this about as much as most people in the country, and I certainly have not until this moment understood at all how you were expecting to measure it. I certainly had not understood there was a great deal of guesswork involved and that you were expecting to predict an increasing rate which is quite clearly going to make it a lot easier to hit the target, although you really do not know if that increasing rate is going to continue. It is an extraordinary measure to my mind.

(*Mr Normington*) I do not go along with “guesswork”.¹⁹

319. It is a prediction.

(*Mr Normington*) It is a projection—

320. It is a prediction.

(*Mr Normington*)—based on the best evidence you have at the time done by the statisticians.

321. I do not mind if you choose to call a projection guesswork or not, I call most projections pure guesswork, it may be informed guesswork but it is still guesswork. Can I go on to ask about courses that may collapse. We know one of the problems with further education colleges is that they set up a number of courses, try to involve the students, try to encourage students to join them, and then they do not get enough students to make it worthwhile, so they cancel the course. Does that happen at all in higher education?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Only in exceptional circumstances, by which I mean that some members of staff may leave unexpectedly to go to another institution. In some cases there has been a collapse in admissions or in applications, which means the course is non-viable, but I have to say where that occurs the responsibility to existing students is always taken seriously and they are what we call “taught out”, that is the first year students continue through their course. One can never say never in this sort of instance, but it is very rare that what you describe would take place.

322. Let me tell you why I am concerned about this. I met an old university friend only yesterday, since our last meeting, and he told me his daughter had been due to go to a further education college and had been accepted, all was fine, she went up there the very first day and found the course had been cancelled because not enough people had gone on the course and they had to cancel it otherwise they would have lost money on it. As a result of that, she went on to a different course at the same college—they found her another course but it was a different course—and within a fairly short period of time she realised the course was not quite her thing, in very much the way this Report says often this is the reason why students drop out. Clearly, if you have to change courses at the last minute because your course has been cancelled, there is a much higher chance the course is going to prove to be “not your thing”. If this were a serious problem in the higher education field, it might be one reason for the drop out rate.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Indeed, but I can assure you it is not a serious problem. One reason for that is that we do not fund courses, unlike the Learning and Skills Council, we fund in the form of a block grant to universities, so the universities can and often do run courses at a loss in order not to produce the situation you have just described.

323. Another problem which I guess we have all met as MPs is when people write to us to say they are worried as mature students about going back into university because they are told when they become students they lose all rights to benefits and they have to go on to student loans. Particularly where it is a married person, that can be a very, very big incentive not to take up higher education again. Have you looked into what effect it would have if you changed the benefit system in some way, so people could at least retain part of their benefits while studying?

(*Mr Normington*) The way we have chosen to tackle it is to greatly increase the support, for instance through child care grants and other support for mature students, which does appear to have had an effect. It was very concerning that there began to be a serious decline in mature students in the late

¹⁹ Ev 49, Appendix 1.

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Rendel Cont]

1990s. What has happened in the last in-take last autumn is that there has been a really significant turn round, which I think one can only put down to the changes in support. There has been a 9.5 per cent increase in mature students coming into university last autumn, which is a really encouraging turn round, and it suggests actually the way in which we have introduced support for mature students has had a real impact on that. We do keep the benefit issues pretty closely under review, we have a standing group with the Department of Work and Pensions to have a look at that all the time. I think the benefits system can act as a disincentive and we do not want it to.

324. I went to a very strange school—

Chairman: We all know about that!

Mr Rendel:—and qualified by the age of 15 to go to university but decided not to and stayed on to do a whole series of more A-levels and then to take no less than two years of gap year. I have to say I am very pleased I did that, I would have been quite useless as a student at the sort of age when I first could have gone up. I suspect those who take gap years, from my experience of my own children and their friends, tend to get a lot more out of their university than those who do not. They go up a lot maturer, they carry out their university courses a lot more effectively as a result. Do you think that is true and, if so, do you encourage people to take gap years? Do you encourage institutions to encourage people to take gap years?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) We do not encourage institutions to do that although institutions and UCAS—the Admissions Service—do allow students to defer their entry in order to take a gap year without penalty so to speak. My view on this is that the gap year can be useful because it separates two processes which otherwise are combined, that is the process of leaving home and establishing yourself as an independent person to live your own life on the one hand, and the inevitable educational challenges which are involved in going to university on the other. I would only say that I think it is important that the experience of that gap year is used constructively and in a way as far as possible which has some relevance to the eventual university course which students take.

325. Have you done any analysis of whether the drop out rate is higher or lower amongst those who have gap years?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I am not aware we have.

326. I would have thought it would be very useful research to do.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Thank you.

327. Can I then ask about what I call “first term blues”. It seems to me that a lot of students go up to university with enormous optimism, thinking they are going to have a really good time, they have been told by their older friends it is wonderful to be at university, and a lot of them then find in their first term everybody else seems to be having a good time but they are not, and it is usually in the second term and particularly the third term and the second year that students really find how worthwhile the university experience is. I wonder if there is any value in putting particular effort into more pastoral care or

perhaps giving people better information about what university is, leading them to expect not to enjoy their first term very much, because most of them will not, and to expect that things will get better thereafter.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) First of all, I very much accept the analysis you have made. It is indeed true that the highest drop out rates are in the first year and often in the first term of the first year, and the factors you have mentioned I have no doubt have some role in that. Indeed, my personal experience as a university teacher would support that view. Yes, there is a rather romantic image of university education, which is clutches of students talking about Jean-Paul Sartre over mugs of Nescafé into the early hours of the morning, and I am afraid I can report that university education is not like that for the great generality of students. What are we doing about it? We are doing a lot more, first of all, to offer students the opportunity of coming up during the summer before entry to university to learn more about what actually goes on and also, where appropriate, to give them some learning skills tuition. Secondly, the student counselling services are very well aware of this problem and I would say a disproportionate effort goes in during the first year from both student counselling services and—and I have to pay tribute to them here—the student unions as well in assisting the students through these, as you rightly say, first term blues.

328. What effect do you think the introduction of AS-levels has had in encouraging people to stay on at school and then go on to university?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I would say it has been positive. I would also say it has allowed universities to make conditional offers to students with a good deal more reliability and certainty than was the case over A-level offers when you had no examination experience to go on. I think students who are now doing A-levels this year will have a much clearer idea of where they stand in terms of their own educational performance and how realistically they can achieve the standard offer which has been offered to them.

Mr Bacon

329. I would like to start where Mr Rendel left off. Sir Howard, if you think gap years are a good thing, will you start encouraging institutions to encourage it, and will you do research on whether there is a difference in the drop out between those who have taken them and those who do not?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I am certainly prepared to do the research, I think that is very important. I just want to caution though. I do not think gap years are an unalloyed good thing. I think a lot of students waste a gap year by having an experience, of whatever kind, which is not really appropriate to their study, and I think a lot of them lose what I can only describe as the routine of learning and the rhythm of learning and find it quite difficult sometimes to re-enter into that.

330. I am interested to hear you say that. I do not want to spend too long on this but has there been any academic work done on this?

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Bacon Cont]

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) Not that I am aware of.

331. So what you are saying is just anecdotal then?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) Indeed. Well, my own experience as a university teacher.

332. I sold coconut rum punches in the Caribbean in my gap year, it had no bearing on what I did in my studies—

Mr Jenkins: Look where you finished up!

Mr Bacon: If Mr Rendel is right, and we do not know this, that there is a big difference between those who have done gap years and those who have not in terms of the continuation rate, there is actually public interest in finding out more about gap years, is there not?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) Yes, there is. I accept, I think we do need to find that out and, on the basis of what that research will tell us, that is the time we need to formulate the appropriate guidance.

333. You mentioned in your experience as a teacher of students that the first term blues is the big problem. Paragraph 2.8, on page 14, talks about the fact that, “Less than half of the non-completers involved in [the] qualitative research had talked over their decision [to leave] with staff.” What steps are you and the universities taking to encourage staff to become better pastoral carers?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) That refers to the action we are proposing to take on the bearing down, which the previous Secretary of State invited us to do on this. We do recognise there is a need, first of all, to offer more training to not just counselling staff at universities but to lecturing staff at universities, so they can recognise problems early and either refer them to the experts who can help or tackle the problem earlier themselves. There is more we can also do to inform students more about the services which are available and to encourage them to be more active in presenting themselves to both counselling staff and lecturing staff during their first year.

(Mr Normington) There is also a quite urgent review looking at student support services which we are doing jointly with the universities to get at this best practice, so we have a basis for spreading it.

334. Can I ask more about this bearing down. I notice you and Mr Normington used the phrase, which was used in the 29 November 2000 letter of guidance to Sir Michael Checkland, who was the Chairman of HEFCE, from the Secretary of State, and you just said, “the bearing down you were proposing to do”. This Education Report was published in March 2001, and the letter was November 2000, that is a year, 14, 15 months ago. You actually were explicit in your last answer that you have not yet started the bearing down. You said, “the bearing down we are proposing to do”.

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) I was explicit in my last answer that the report back to the Department on what we are doing and what we propose to do will be with them very shortly. We have already been bearing down through the range of activities which are set out in the Report on page 11.

335. What results has that bearing down had so far, or is it too early to measure?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) It is too early, I am afraid. If you think of the timescale you describe, the letter of guidance came to the Council in November 2000, therefore any bearing down we would do to initiate it at the level of the institution would only take place with regard to students coming in this year, and of course they have only been there less than six months at present.

336. I appreciate what you said at the beginning, that we do have one of the lowest drop out rates, and it is surprising how low it has stayed given the expansion which has taken place, but, looking at your own performance indicators, it may only be 8 per cent—and this is non-continuation following year of entry—which is a respectably low figure, as I said, nonetheless it is 17,000 people who are plainly in the wrong place. I hear what Mr Jenkins said earlier about the fact they may gain something out of it, but there is all the emotional as well as the financial problem of being in the wrong place, which comes back to the question of more information at an early stage, paragraph 2.19, which the Chairman was talking about earlier. What steps are being taken to make sure that institutions do provide better information? The Report talks about, again in paragraph 2.19, “Students described prospectuses which gave out misleading information . . .”, and you said yourself earlier that there was a need to do more to push out more information earlier.

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) Yes, I think we need to operate on many fronts at once. First of all, we must clearly, if I may use the phrase again, bear down very heavily on clear cases of misselling and we must do that and we do do that, but, as you will appreciate, this is a much wider problem than that. A new technology has come to our aid a very great deal here. UCAS, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, now has an array of services which students can obtain on-line. We have also established HERO, the Higher Education and Research Opportunities database, which is another web-based service, and the vast majority of students these days get their information that way. The private sector has also helped. There is now a plethora of student guides, some of which purport to give the low-down on what particular universities and courses are really like. In this case, I think the more relevant information that students can obtain, the better.

337. Nonetheless, the Dearing Report was talking about it five years ago, was it not?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) It was, yes.

338. How much has been done in five years, would you say?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) We have established HERO in the last five years and UCAS has established its website in the last years. I remain somewhat alarmed—and I am being anecdotal here—by the number of students I encounter who still seem to pick up a lot of rather anecdotal information about the universities and courses rather than going to these kind of sources.

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Bacon Cont]

339. Can you say how much in total the 8 per cent, the 17,000, who do not continue into the next year—and I want to include mature entrants—costs? I know there are lots of different figures bandied around.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) The best estimate we can offer is £90 million.²⁰

340. I had heard £91 million. I have also seen the Mantz Yorke figure of £200 million. Is that wrong?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) We would sustain our view it is £90 million.

341. It was work commissioned by you yourselves, was it not?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes, it was but, I am sure you appreciate, we do not control the outcome of research projects we commission. We would simply agree to differ on the precise costings.

342. It is a very big difference, which begs the question of how you do the measurement.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Indeed it does.

343. How do you do the measurement?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) It is a very complicated issue because you have to work out the fee income which a student will lose by non-continuation—they pay the fee, or someone has to pay the fee on their behalf. There is the cost of non-completion after the end of the first year where, as I explained earlier, there will be costs which the institution will have incurred. There are the student's own living costs which are involved here as well, which it could be said is a cost they have not received a return on, as well as some direct costs as well in terms of provision of teaching materials and equipment and so on.

344. Whether it is £200 million or £90 million, it is a big allocation of resources.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) It is indeed. All I would say to you is, we must all continue to work to get that down but we must not get it down so far that we then begin to worry about the fact that students who have clearly failed their courses—we are back to a standards issue—will be somehow retained within their courses because we do not want to see this figure too large. In other words, we must not give distorted incentives to institutions to lower standards.

345. I understand that. That brings me on to standards. I was interested in what you said about modularity. I take it you mean modular courses?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes.

346. “Modularity has contributed to students not having the same basic level of attainment one might have expected a generation ago.” How much money do you think is being spent by universities or by the British education system in the universities on teaching students things which they ought to have known before they got there?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I did not say that the general level of attainment was lower, I said that modular courses at A-level meant that students could

know an awful lot, in fact a lot more than they used to know, about some areas of, let us say, mathematics—

347. But they did not have the basic tool kit?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*)—but in other areas they would know very little, if anything. That is the difficulty. When they come to university—and the example raised in the Report was engineering courses—we cannot assume that all students have the particular kinds of mathematical knowledge which are suitable for engineering.

348. There is obviously a curriculum point here.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) It is indeed.

349. Is that being addressed? If modularity is not working because it is producing this outcome—

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Two things have happened. One is that the number of examination boards at A-level has been reduced and that has helped substantially. The variance now is much less than it was a decade ago, and that is a good thing, but we are still finding in the university world that additional first year teaching in mathematics is still required to deal with the problems you have just described.

350. You mentioned claw-back earlier and therefore if people do not complete the first year the universities do not get the money. Is there a difference in the way you account for this between the students who do not complete the first year and non-continuation following the year of entry, in other words, people who complete the first year but then do not go on?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes. What happens is, if they do not complete the first year we apply—a technical term—an in-year claw back, that is to say, the universities do not get their money for those students.

351. How much money do you get back via claw-back?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I will send you a note on that. We do know the figure.²¹

352. I take it this £91 million is the net, net, net cost?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) It is indeed.

353. It is all wrapped up in this claw-back?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes. If a student drops out in the second year, the institution will have received funding in respect of that student for their first year but they will not receive it for the second year.

354. We discussed on Monday the fact that the present finance system is in itself, as they indicate in Scotland, a deterrent and that it is possibly not as economically effective as a finance system could be. Do you think there would be merit in simplifying the

²⁰ *Note by witness:* According to the performance indicators relating to 1998-99, 10 per cent of all full-time first degree entrants (young and mature) were not in higher education following the year of entry. This represents approximately 23,000 higher education students in England.

²¹ *Note by witness:* The gross holdback (also known as ‘clawback’) figure for 2000-01 is £41.7 million and for 2001-02 is £29.3 million. This is not solely holdback related to non-retention. This is the sum of holdback exceeding the contract range plus holdback for not delivering additional student numbers at the first attempt. It does not take into account Maximum Student Number (MaSN) holdback, the reinstatement of grant for delivering additional student numbers at the second attempt, or moderation.

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Bacon Cont]

system of student finance, not least so that you can identify more accurately the cost of an individual student going through, the cost of completion or dropping out, more clearly?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I think it is common ground between ministers and my colleagues in the Funding Council that we do need to simplify the system. As I understand it, that is one of the objectives of the review.

355. Perhaps I should ask Mr Normington: are you therefore proposing to give each student a student number or something like that? How do you propose to measure more accurately the total cost involved of taking each student through?

(*Mr Normington*) I am not sure we are going down that route.

356. I thought Sir Howard just said it was common ground between you.

(*Mr Normington*) It was common ground, he said, we need to simplify funding and the student finance system.

357. Would not one of the outcomes of simplifying it be that you would more accurately and more easily be able to measure the cost of an individual going through?

(*Mr Normington*) That could be the case.

358. Part of the point is that some of the money appears to be going to people who do not need it and that increases the deterrent effect on the cusp of the people who really do need it.

(*Mr Normington*) That may be so, but that is a bit different from tracking every student with a number.

359. Indeed, but if you cannot measure accurately where all the money is going, it is difficult to say where you should put it instead.

(*Mr Normington*) But we can measure accurately what we are giving in terms of student—

360. Hang on, Sir Howard has just told me that his figure was £91 million as the cost of dropping out, the Higher Education Funding Council itself commissioned research which came up with a figure of £200 million. There is quite a big argument about how much money is being lost here.

(*Mr Normington*) But there are a lot of factors. I was saying there that one of them is the cost of funding a student through, ie the actual student finance, but that is only one of the issues. We do know what that costs because we are funding through contributions to tuition fees and loans. We do know about that.

361. You see you can identify the total cost of taking an individual student through.

(*Mr Normington*) Not in individual cases.

362. Would it not be helpful if you could? Then you would know more accurately how to redistribute your resources.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) May I come back on this? I think you will find that the £90 million figure is the cost to the Department, to the Exchequer. The Yorke Report added on to that other costs which are borne by students or their families which are not borne by the Exchequer and the taxpayer.

363. Nonetheless, it would be very helpful to have a picture of the total cost of taking a student through because, as we discussed on Monday, the Scottish Report referred to the current system as being insufficient, and the average student in this country spends more than they get from the system which is made up in other ways. Would it not be helpful to have a complete picture for each student of the cost of going through?

(*Mr Normington*) It might be. I would have to take some advice on that, it might be very, very administratively complicated and it might not be worth the effort of doing it. I am certainly prepared to think about it. I just do not know the answer to your question, it may be. It sounds as though tracking every student in that precise way probably would not get us to the kind of answer we wanted; it would not help us particularly. We think £91 million is near, it is around that figure. We think the research which has been done adds some other factors in and that explains the difference. I do not know but I am prepared to think about it.

Mr Davidson

364. Could I start off with one of the points the Chairman made about standards. He raised the point about first and second class degrees. I do not know whether, Professor Newby, you ever played rugby at all as a young lad, but your side step on that question was really quite remarkable. Could you clarify this point for me. As I understand the point about A-levels, the standard across subject and across institution would be the same; it is a national examination. Would you say it is fair to say the same applies to degrees?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) No.

365. If a degree is not a degree, as it were, if one degree is not the same as another degree, how are employers and others who are making assessments meant to work out what standard a student seeking employment has actually reached?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) What we can guarantee to employers and the students themselves, and I think their interests should come first here, is that any degree must conform to a minimum threshold standard which is set out, subject by subject, by the Quality Assurance Agency. The variations then come above that threshold in terms of both the content of the degree and, to be quite honest, the level to which students are taken.

366. It would be known by people in this country which are the best institutions, but suppose a Japanese firm is locating here and wants to recruit graduates for something or other, there is no guide to what a first class degree, second class, third class is worth, and I accept your point it is not just first and second, it is more complicated than that. If there is no hierarchy of values of degree, how do people outside the magic circle know?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) All institutions now have to set out what it is students have to know and to achieve in order to obtain a particular standard of degree in each subject. That is the information which the Quality Assurance Agency requires and actually checks up on.

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Davidson Cont]

367. But I do not have time for all that, I do not want to delve into that, I just want to appoint some graduates.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) It is true that across institutions there is not the same system of national conformity that there would be at A-level or in pre-16 education. There never has been because institutions are autonomous.

368. So it is meaningless?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) No, not meaningless.

369. One degree is not then equivalent to other degrees. Some degrees are far better than other degrees.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) They are different.

370. I appreciate they are in different subjects.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) No, they are different even within the same subject. A physics degree in one university may cover different aspects of physics from a physics degree in another university.

371. If I am wanting to employ people, it would be reasonable to expect somebody with A-levels is the same as somebody else with A-levels but that does not apply with degrees. You accept that is a major difficulty?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) It is true that any employer would expect any degree in physics to conform to a minimum threshold standard. Beyond that, there is indeed a good deal of variability.

372. Can I come on to the question of a cycle of enhancement. The most prosperous universities have the best students, they get the best results, the best teachers and so on. It seems perfectly clear that is what happens and has happened for a while. What are you doing to redistribute resources in order to raise the lower performers?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I think I have to divide my answer to that question, if I may, by dividing resources into two, because the answer is different in each case. With regard to research resources, we do have a policy of allocating resources with respect to the quality of research as measured.

373. Can we stick to teaching?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) On teaching, very well. On teaching I think a very different imperative applies, because we are dealing with students here, and students need to be assured that whichever institution they go to, the kind of resources available to teach them are broadly similar, and they are to within a plus or minus 5 per cent band.

374. That is interesting. So you are saying that within 5 per cent, however that is assessed, the teaching which somebody would receive from the best of our universities is within 5 per cent of that which they would receive from every other institution in the country?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) No, I am saying that the resources which we allocate to those universities are within a plus or minus 5 per cent band. Of course, they may be able to draw on other resources.

375. So if it varies within 5 per cent, and there are already inequalities, then all you are doing is continuing these inequalities?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) No, because a number of years ago—let us say, a decade ago—that variation was much greater than that, and we have converged the resources together; in other words, we have taken resources away from those institutions which had a very large amount of money per capita student and redistributed those to the very low levels, we have converged them together.

376. You just said to me that it is within a 5 per cent variation.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Now. It did not used to be. We have worked actually to swing that around.

377. Since there are still major discrepancies in the quality of degrees, which I think we have agreed, surely you ought to be making major discrepancies in the allocation of resources even yet. It is very much my impression that working-class students tend to go to former polytechnics where they get poorer facilities, where the teachers, if they are good, seek and go off to other institutions with better reputations because there is not parity of esteem as between institutions, there is not parity of esteem as between research and teaching. Does that not seem to be inadequate action being taken by yourselves?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) That is why we introduced factors like the widening participation premium, and why I accept that we need to look sympathetically at whether that covers sufficiently the costs; in other words, that a differentiation would be introduced into the teaching funding model in respect of that premium. Could I also add, by the way, that there is another factor which is relevant to your question, and that is that the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act specifically forbids the Funding Council from taking into account the other resources which institutions receive in making their allocations.

378. That is helpful. In terms of taking action, though, would it be fair to say that unless you are a bit more radical in redistributing, then the inequalities will continue?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I accept that we need to be much more vigorous in identifying the costs of taking in students from poorer backgrounds, in order that we can cover those costs for those universities which focus on those students.

379. That may be an answer, but it is not quite the answer to the question I asked about the inequalities between institutions, in that clearly some institutions are much less well funded than others, have much less capital, have a long tradition of being underfunded, particularly those which have moved up a stage. Are you undertaking a programme of radical redistribution of resources?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) With regard to capital, yes. There are many institutions, as you will know, especially the post-1992 institutions, which have inherited a backlog of very poor estates, of run-down buildings. We have a poor estates fund specifically to address that issue.

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Davidson Cont]

380. When can we expect the poorest to be raised to the level of the best?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I think I can best answer that question after the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review. I have to say that we have made considerable strides over the last decade.

381. Can you quantify that for me? I am not quite sure how you do so. Give me a feel for this.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) We have made strides with regard to teaching resources, as I have described. We have actually converged the resources into a narrower band.

382. So that just continues to reflect the inequalities. If you are seeking to improve the standard of teaching in the lowest institutions, surely they ought to be getting much more?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) With respect, that is why I need to run through each funding stream in turn, so you build up the overall picture. As I say, we have done that with regard to teaching. Research is something rather different where I do not believe that we should be aiming at equality of funding for research, for reasons I can go into. Then you raised the issue of capital funding where, I agree, there is a historical backlog there which we have addressed and continue to address.

383. Could I ask Mr Normington, to what extent do you think it is possible for the universities themselves to redistribute amongst themselves so that they all have competing internal pressures? Would it not be better if this were handled directly by the Department? The self-interest amongst the universities must be substantial. Would it not be better if we had greater centralised control of these methods of distribution?

(*Mr Normington*) You mean in terms of the distribution of money?

384. Yes.

(*Mr Normington*) We do have the Funding Council.

385. So you run it, do you?

(*Mr Normington*) They run the funding system within a framework which the Government sets, which is updated each year. There are some things we cannot do.

386. What can you not do?

(*Mr Normington*) We cannot interfere with admissions, we cannot interfere with the way in which universities recruit their staff, and there are some other things too.

387. In terms of the inequalities of funding, you can sort all that, so if that is not sorted within a reasonably short period, that is your fault, is it?

(*Mr Normington*) The Government could attach conditions of grant. It has actually been part of this process of the convergence of changing the way the capital is issued and the widening participation; the Government has been part of that. So governments can influence that. They do set the framework.

388. It is a bit slow, though, is it not?

(*Mr Normington*) I do not know. I think it has moved quite a way in the last ten years.

389. So with the rate of progress that we have at the moment, when can we expect there to be equality between institutions?

(*Mr Normington*) I think it depends what you mean by that.

390. Absolutely. You indicated to me that you are moving in the right direction, so you must have had something in mind about how you assess it.

(*Mr Normington*) I was answering the question in terms of funding. There will always be, I imagine, a hierarchy of universities. I do not see how one will ever get away from that. That will be related to the nature of the degrees which are offered above the minimum standard and the people who are taken in.

391. There will always be a hierarchy of universities, and presumably there will always be a hierarchy of people in society generally. That is a fairly fatalistic view. Anyway, can I turn to a slightly different subject.

(*Mr Normington*) I am not saying that. I just think it is unrealistic not to think there will not be a range of universities offering a range of degrees.

392. We are all going to die eventually, so there is not much point in making an effort in the meantime, is that right?

(*Mr Normington*) No, I am not saying that.

393. I see. Can I ask you a point about added value of universities. I have seen some statistics in here, and I am not sure whether they are all highly satisfactory. When I was involved in education in Scotland we used to rate schools and departments by expectations, in terms of measuring, say, the inner social deprivation and what the anticipated results would be. We found that some of the schools with the best results were in fact delivering the least added value. I am not certain, from the statistics here, whether or not that is done by yourselves for not only individual universities, but also individual subjects, because we did find that the added value by subject within individual schools varied really quite considerably. Can you clarify that?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) No, we do not do that at the moment, but I said on Monday, you may recall, that we were looking at the basis for our widening participation premia, and I certainly do not rule out looking at added value as one measure we might use.

394. You astonish me actually. I am not just raising this in the context of bringing in students from poorer backgrounds but in terms of simple value of money. I would have thought you would want to know whether students coming from the same backgrounds—and this comes back to choosing your parents well—were doing as well in one institution as in another, and to find out you have no statistics on that at all I find astonishing. Why have you never developed that in the past?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I think we are talking at cross-purposes perhaps. There is data available on the educational performance in higher education from students from poorer backgrounds, whether by gender, social class or ethnicity, but I did not think that was your point.

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Davidson Cont]

395. No, it was not actually. If you have students coming from the same social class who are expected to do well, you do not know—is this right—whether or not they are doing better than anticipated at one institution rather than another in one subject rather than another because you do not do that sort of research? Is that right?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) That has been true so far. As I said, I think that is something we need to look at.

396. Is it not surprising that you have never done any of that up to now?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) No, because it is only very recently we have had a sufficient range of students entering higher education from different backgrounds to make any kind of measure meaningful.

397. Not even students from the same background, even the same school background, from public school backgrounds who have been going to universities for some considerable time? Is it not a matter of interest to discover whether or not students from the same background going to different institutions in different subjects get more value added in one than another? You have never bothered assessing that before?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) By “value added” do you mean over their lifetimes? Whether, for example, they have earned more over a lifetime or added value in terms of their educational experience?

398. Mr Rendel went to Eton I think. If everybody who went to Eton who went to Manchester came out with thirds, yet if they went to Oxford they all came out with firsts, all other things being equal I would assume that Oxford had given them a better education and added more value than Manchester. Maybe it is the other way round. But you do not assess that at all?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) No, we do not.

399. Okay. Mr Normington, do you think this is evidence that the universities are just too cosy, too comfortable, and examine their entrails insufficiently to see whether or not they are providing value for money?

(*Mr Normington*) If the question is about value for money, I think the universities do have systems for looking at their value for money. If the question is, have they been sufficiently focused on widening participation, we said on Monday and would repeat, until recently I do not think some of them have.

400. Okay, perhaps I can ask about dropping out. Presumably the only sure-fire way of avoiding any dropping out is to have no entry, but presumably we are going to take people in. I am not sure about the risk assessment exercise you undertake and the professionalism of that approach. We have had quite a lot here at various times on risk assessment. Have we learnt anything for university departments on risk assessment procedures adopted by other parts of the government service?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I can answer that. Yes, we have. It tends to be applied more in other areas of the university world, such as forward financial planning, capital needs and so on than in regard to admissions policies and drop outs. I would

say, there has been a rather unprofessional approach to assessing the risk of particular categories of students, and that is why we do want to professionalise the action on access we are taking, so there is best practice guidance to admissions tutors which will involve the kind of methods you are referring to.

Mr Gibb

401. Are some degrees better than others?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) That depends on what it is the students want to get from them.

402. Is a physics degree at a university where they just keep the minimum standards worse than a degree, say, from Oxford on that same subject?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I do not know the answer to that question, I do not think anybody can know the answer to that question, because you are asking me to compare an unknown institution with Oxford University, and I am afraid you will have to be a bit more specific.

403. Can it be possible in our education system for any degree to be better than any other degree?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes, it can.

404. What I was trying to establish from you was that you are able to utter qualitative value judgments. I get the impression from a lot of the answers that you seem incapable of uttering qualitative value judgments but, thank you, you have just uttered one and I needed to have that before I asked these next questions. The kind of “all must have prizes” ethos of educational establishments is a major problem. Thank you for that. Mr Normington, am I right in thinking that in your dialogue with Gerry Steinberg you accepted that, because of the expansion of the proportion of the population which now go to universities, there has been overall a lowering of the entry qualifications?

(*Mr Normington*) No, I actually said there has been a rise in the A-level entry standard; a slight rise from 18 points to 19 during the period of the great expansion in the mid-90s. We also did admit there were some other factors being taken into account and we talked about one institution in the other report, Bristol, which is looking at other ways of assessing pupils than just by raw A-level qualifications.

405. So there has or there has not been a lowering of entry?

(*Mr Normington*) In terms of A-level entry, there has not. There are some universities which are widening—I do not think it is a dropping of standards—

406. I did not use the word “dropping”; lowering.

(*Mr Normington*) Well, lowering. I do not think there is any evidence of that.

407. Even taking into account those people who came in on these other criteria, there is still no lowering? Or have we got to take these people out?

(*Mr Normington*) Let me be quite clear about this. I think you have to be very cautious before you depart far from the normal entry qualifications, otherwise you have to be very sure why you are doing it and that you are not dropping your standards. There is no interest in dropping standards of entry.

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Gibb Cont]

408. What year are you talking about the 18 points average? How many universities were there in that year?

(*Mr Normington*) I am talking about a period post-1992. I do not know the exact period but roughly 8 years, to about now.²²

409. So roughly from 1992 to 2000 where the number of universities rose from 53 to 90, is that right?

(*Mr Normington*) This is when all the post-1992 institutions started coming in.

410. So when there were 53 universities, when there were however many students 53 universities take—say 10,000 a university—half a million—

(*Mr Normington*) Yes.

411. By 2000 there were 90 universities teaching how many pupils? A million?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) About that, 850,000.²³

412. So from 500,000 to 850,000, you are saying that when there were 500,000 places the average A-level points you needed to get one of those 500,000 places was 18—

(*Mr Normington*) It has gone up from 18 to 19.

413. Now, when there are 90 universities taking 850,000 pupils, you need 19 points.

(*Mr Normington*) That is what I am advised. That is what the figures show.

414. I am not that good at maths, I cannot do the figures, but that shows, assuming the units have remained of the same value, we are looking at an increasing standard of attainment at A-level of a phenomenal percentage, a 30 or 40 per cent increase, in the absolute standards of A-level points now being earned by sixth formers. Is that right? Is that the kind of level of increasing standard of education we are achieving in this country?

(*Mr Normington*) It is from a low base.

415. 1992 was a low base?

(*Mr Normington*) In terms of A-levels.

416. A-levels were rubbish in 1992, now they are great?

(*Mr Normington*) No.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) The number of students being entered for A-levels in 1992 was very low compared with 2000. The numbers going into A-levels, the 16 to 18 retention rate, has steadily improved even though it is not nearly as good as perhaps it could be.

417. It just seems to me that you have a huge expansion in the number of students going into university, and you are saying the A-level points required has gone up not down, yet the value of that point is still as valuable in 2000 as it was in 1992?

²² *Note by witness:* This refers to the period 1996-99, when the average 'A' level points score increased from 18 points to 19 points.

²³ *Note by witness:* The headcount figure for universities in 2000 was 1,398,000. The 850,000 quoted corresponds more closely to the full time equivalent (FTE) figure.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Can I just be clear. It is not the number of points which are required, it is the average number of points which students entering higher education have.

418. All right, it is roughly that. What I am trying to assess here is whether the A level point is as valuable in the year 2000 in terms of the absolute level of education achieved in our sixth forms as it was in 1992, and you are saying that not only—

(*Mr Normington*) I do not have any evidence that there has been a decline in the standards of A levels.

419. Are you saying, therefore, that the absolute level of education required, achievement to get into the worst university, the easiest courses in the most mediocre university in 1992, is the same as that which is required to get into the easiest course in the most mediocre university in the year 2000?

(*Mr Normington*) I do not think I know that, because I am talking about an average year. Various things will have contributed to that average. It is possible that there are some lower entry qualifications at the lower end. It is possible that it will also be getting larger at the top end as well.

420. I do not think we will get much further on that on this occasion. Can I refer you to page 29 of the Report, which the Chairman has touched on at the beginning and others have touched on, at paragraph 5.9: "Focus groups and discussions with higher education revealed a widespread concern over the number of students who struggle with numeracy skills." Mr Newby, you said that you are tackling that problem by concentrating on numeracy in primary schools that leads to the numeracy hour, and you are also focussing on maths and English teaching between 11 and 14. What exactly does that mean, "focussing on maths and English teaching"?

(*Mr Normington*) What I mean is that the Government has launched a strategy for Key Stage 3 which has a programme for retraining all Key Stage 3 teachers in maths and English—obviously there are various levels—against best practice of how you teach maths and how you get the best out of the students. There is a great investment going at this moment into the teachers in secondary schools.

421. When will we see the first teachers from these better schools actually teaching?

(*Mr Normington*) We will see, we will measure, the first Key Stage 3 results, this summer. We will begin to measure them over a period.

422. Will that be measured in the first year or the first two years?

(*Mr Normington*) It will be measuring the effect of doing it for the first year, one year.

423. If we had had these focus groups and discussions over a period of years, about the numeracy skills in universities, what would we have seen in those focus groups and discussions in previous years? Basically, has the position been improving or deteriorating up until the date of this Report?

(*Mr Normington*) I do not know, but I think it is likely that it has been deteriorating over quite some period.

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Gibb Cont]

424. Right. How does that tie in with the great, huge improvements we are seeing in A-level standards and absolute levels of achievement in the sixth forms of 30 to 40 per cent, that we have demonstrated over the last ten to 15 years or the ten years from 1992 to 2000?

(*Mr Normington*) There is an issue about maths teaching and about what the content of maths A-level is and whether it is preparing people for university. There is that issue, I agree.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) If I might add, there has also been a decline over that same period in the number of students taking maths and science A-levels.

425. It does not seem to tally. Maths is quite a common subject at A-level.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) With respect, it is not any longer.

426. But it is more common than, say, Latin?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes.

427. Or Greek or Russian?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes, but that is not saying much.

428. Or probably German. It is pretty bog standard, is it not?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) With respect, it is not a bog standard A-level, as you put it.

(*Mr Normington*) It is a very difficult A-level.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) There is a smaller, certainly declining number of students taking it at A-level.

429. It seems odd that there is a decline in that numeracy at maths, when I think you said, Mr Normington, that there had been improvements over the last ten to 15 years, and here these A-level figures seem to be saying they are improving over these years. It seems odd that the maths—that is, the one that we can see an outcome of being measured—is declining. Why? Do you not feel that there is something odd about this claim that the output from our sixth forms is really improving over the last eight to ten years? Does that not raise alarm bells that perhaps the hope that the standards are improving is actually the case?

(*Mr Normington*) There are some alarm bells ringing about maths. We can see that in terms of what happened with the maths AS-level this year where there was a very significant failure rate in maths, much higher than in any other subject. That is raising alarm bells about what the standard is and what is being taught in the schools. That is the subject at the moment of quite an investigation by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, because it is a matter of great concern if we have not got the standard right in maths AS-levels and/or a significant number of students are not attaining that, because of course we need people to get maths A-levels, we need more maths teachers in the schools. So it is an issue.

430. But it does not lead you to have alarm bells about the value of the A-level point in terms of its absolute level of achievement?

(*Mr Normington*) There has just been a report from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority which put this question in the hands of some international

experts who have been looking at standards over time at A-levels. Their view has been that there has not been a decline in A-level standards.

431. What about international comparisons of this level of numeracy problems in our universities? Have there been any comparisons about the problem highlighted in 5.9 with other universities in other countries? Are they experiencing the same problems?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) The answer is that yes, they are.

432. At the same level as we are?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) It varies obviously from country to country, but this is a problem which is widely recognised in higher education worldwide at the present time. The only part of the world where the numbers of students in mathematics and maths-based subjects like engineering and physics and so on are holding up, is in the Far East.

433. Going back to some of the questions that we had on Monday, Mr Normington, you raised this OECD Report. I did not realise, until I went away and looked, that that report actually includes the private sector in Britain as well as the comparative countries, which I think invalidates the whole comparison as far as I am concerned, because I do not believe there is a concern—I do not have a concern—about standards in the private sector. I wondered whether there were any similar studies which compare just the state sectors of education in those countries, which you have seen?

(*Mr Normington*) I do not know that. This was a valid sample of 15 year olds in this country.

434. With 4,000 it would be.

(*Mr Normington*) Yes, but it is a statistically valid sample, and it would include some people at private school.

435. Yes, but then it is not measuring the state sector, it is measuring the state sector and the private sector?

(*Mr Normington*) It is measuring the achievements of our 15 year olds, and many, many of them, the vast majority of them, go to state schools, so they are included in that.

436. I am sure, and I am sure they are all very good people. I am not interested in measuring good people, I am interested in measuring the state system. I just wondered whether there were any studies that just measure the state sector?

(*Mr Normington*) I do not know. Not that I know of. I think that this is the biggest international study there has ever been. I do not know whether the previous one, which was of maths, did include the private sector. I imagine it did, because it was of pupils. I do not know the answer, but I can find out.²⁴

437. We also talked a little bit about the ethos of comprehensive schools in Britain, the general ethos in schools. I asked you whether you thought that the ethos of Bradford Grammar School could be used and taken to the comprehensive sector more widely. There are some comprehensives which do have that ethos, and those are the ones that people bust a gut to move into the catchment area of. You said in your

²⁴ Ev 49-50, Appendix 1.

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Gibb Cont]

response to me that Bradford Grammar School can always be highly selective. Do you believe that children of lower academic ability, from whatever social class they are from, would not benefit from the type of ethos that exists in schools like Bradford Grammar School?

(*Mr Normington*) They certainly would benefit.

438. Then why can we not extend that ethos across to the comprehensive group? By "ethos" I do not just mean let us all do better and work harder. You know what I mean. Why can we not extend that ethos across to comprehensive schools?

(*Mr Normington*) I agree with you that we need, in our state sector, very effective leaders creating an ethos of discipline and learning. That is the key. Actually the key to the effective comprehensives is to have very effective leaders with a very effective team of teachers around them. That is where you start, and they do then address issues of ethos, of discipline, of the quality of teaching, of links with parents and so on. That is how you do it. Of course, wherever you get a school like that, it is going to perform well.

439. I wish I had detected that. I have been round schools all over the country and some leading headmasters just do not accept that ethos, they find it elitist, non-egalitarian, they object to it in principle. Do you come across that attitude at all in the educational establishment?

(*Mr Normington*) Sometimes.

440. Do you think it needs to be tackled?

(*Mr Normington*) In the sense we want to improve schools, I do think it needs to be tackled, and I think it is being tackled through some of the things the Government is doing on greater diversity in the secondary sector. That is some of what that is about. Getting really effective headteachers is a really important part of that.

Geraint Davies

441. Following on from Mr Gibb's point, I agree with this thing about ethos, but I should say the head of a very large comprehensive school where I originally went, Mr Haynes was his name, tracked the performance of children who were from owner-occupied houses versus non-owner occupied houses and found that on average something like 50 per cent from owner-occupied got 5 O-levels, as they then were, and the figure was 10 per cent from the other group, and he found if you applied those figures to any school he could predict outputs within a couple of percentage points. Does that suggest to you, and have you any other supporting evidence, what is paramount in the attitudes of schools is not the whole school environment perhaps, although that is clearly important, but the social background in the first place, and does that not make it much more difficult to meet the challenging targets you have for higher education given you have to get them through these hoops of GCSEs and A-levels?

(*Mr Normington*) I think the danger with that is that it becomes an excuse and I do not think that is acceptable. It is clearly the case in, let us say, a secondary school which has pupils from mainly the lower socio-economic groups with perhaps a lot of single parent families, a lot of social problems, that

barriers to achievement there are greater, but you can do it. Effective headteachers in good schools can do it. They can overcome that. It is tough but it can be done.

442. Let me focus in on this a bit. You will know that of the adult population something like 1:5 is functionally illiterate and 1:4 is functionally innumerate, in the sense they cannot work out the change if they buy a few groceries and they cannot cope with the *Yellow Pages*. Given a background where parents are functionally illiterate and innumerate, do you agree that obviously that is a massive hold-back on the performance of those children?

(*Mr Normington*) Of course, if they are disadvantaged.

443. Would you also agree that when you combine that with a trend towards project-based work in A-levels to be done at home, which inevitably of course is done by middle-class parents themselves, that those two factors combined are conspiring to ensure failure amongst those people from more deprived educational and social backgrounds?

(*Mr Normington*) I do not know. It might be the case. I do not think we have any evidence of that.

444. Do you not think it is obvious that if a large proportion of the points for A-level is on the basis of work at home, and in one case the parents have a tendency for poor literacy and numeracy and in the other they have not, and there is no tradition of going to college or further education, no provision of books at home, maybe overcrowding, constant television and all the rest of it, the simple fact we rely so much on at-home project work inherently discriminates against the socially deprived?

(*Mr Normington*) It does not have to be at-home project work, it can be project work done in all sorts of places. What I do agree with is that support from the family all through education is a great assistance, and if you do not have that support you are disadvantaged.

445. Therefore, in terms of the rational targeting of limited resources to deliver our widening objectives, do you not think more should be done at an earlier level in Education Action Zones, or whatever it is, to work with children to raise self-esteem and indeed the self-esteem and ambition of their parents?

(*Mr Normington*) I do, and I do actually think you have to work on the parents from the year nought.

446. Do you think it is worth reviewing, as we have just discussed, the level of project-based parental help that is factored into a child's success?

(*Mr Normington*) I do not know whether any work has been done on that.

447. Perhaps you might like to do some.

(*Mr Normington*) I will certainly look at that.²⁵

²⁵ *Note by witness:* We have no knowledge of any UK research into this issue. Recent review of the research literature on homework did find one American study into this issue. UK research has examined parents attitudes to their children's homework but has not explored the extent to which they over-assist in their children's project work.

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Geraint Davies Cont]

448. I do think this is of critical importance. Are you aware of certain schools playing the A-level market? What I mean by that is, looking at statistics and finding where it is easier to get higher grades—I am thinking of private schools obviously where there is a tendency to play this game—and perhaps finding the authorities which do a range of A-levels and cherry-picking them according to outcomes. Are you aware of that?

(*Mr Normington*) Do you mean—

449. What happens is that a school would send their maths A-levels to one authority, Wales or wherever, French A-levels to the Oxford authority, and so on, and they do this on the basis of the statistical probability they will get higher grades and the net output is they get higher A-levels than if they just used their home authority. Are you aware of that?

(*Mr Normington*) I personally am not aware of it.

450. It is happening and it is delivering results. Would you be surprised if I tell you that I spoke to a headteacher who taught A-level history and had pupils who he estimated would manage to get a D grade A-level who then got an A grade partly as a result of that?

(*Mr Normington*) I would be surprised at that, yes.

451. That is happening. I think there are issues there about universal standards. Mr Gibb and others have talked about declining generic standards but within that there is a bigger tapestry of varying standards. Obviously, it is the case that the actual questions are different in different exam boards, but in the case of mathematics, which is perhaps slightly more objective than some of the subjects, is there any evidence to suggest that in any given year some exam papers are a lot easier than others? Or have you not looked at that?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) There have been studies of whether or not the overall difficulty of mathematics A-level papers has gone up or down or remained the same, which is rather a different question from the year-on-year fluctuations to which your question refers, but I am not aware—

452. No, I have asked two questions. One is the range of different authorities offering different exams but then the trend changing over time.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I am aware that there have been allegations of variations between different exam authorities. I am aware that some schools do indeed, as you put it, play that game.

(*Mr Normington*) We have a Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, whose role is to try and audit the standards of what are now only three examining boards. There used to be many more and the scope for variations in standards was much greater I think. We do not just sit back here. This is what the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority is about, trying to maintain standards and maintain standards across the three boards.

453. I asked at the last hearing about colleges phoning up to make up their numbers and saying if anybody has got three Us they could get in. I notice in the Report there were various expected benchmark drop-out rates for different organisations. Can I infer from that—I think it is Figure 11—that in the case of

Thames Valley, whose benchmark is 15 per cent drop out, but they actually achieved a 21 per cent drop out, it means in some sense they are funded in such a way that there is a presumption of a 15 per cent drop out? Do you see what I mean?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I see what you mean. We do not fund them on that presumption but it is true, given the prior education and qualifications of the students they admit and the mix of the subjects which that university offers, we would expect them to achieve a figure of a 15 per cent drop out rate, whereas in fact it is worse than that at 21 per cent. You will recall that in the not too far distant past the Funding Council took quite draconian action against Thames Valley University because there were concerns established by the QAA about its standards and quality.

454. I do not think this is in the Report but in terms of the balance of so-called female and male subject propensity—boys do more science and girls not in mixed schools—would you agree that there is a much higher propensity for girls to do science in single sex schools, and girls do better educationally in single sex schools, other things being equal?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) There has been some recent research which suggests that.

455. If our objective is educational output in terms of higher education, would that point towards more single sex schools so girls do better? I know boys are not very happy already because girls already do better, but I do not mind that.

(*Mr Normington*) I suppose it might point to that. I do not think the Government is about to go down the road of promoting single sex schools.

456. Can I ask something about benefits for single mothers in higher education? I am not sure whether there has been a change. You mentioned a change. Are you happy now that single-parent mothers who want to go into higher education do not lose more benefits than they gain when they go into higher education, or are they essentially being discriminated against? Has it improved?

(*Mr Normington*) It has become quite a lot better. I am happy that we have in place a much better package now.

457. So theoretically, taking a single-parent mother who, for argument's sake, is on benefit from the state, and say she is working in Tesco's, she is looking after her child, she wants to move from stacking shelves to get a degree and add value to her productivity; if she moved from that working families tax credit into university, would she not face an enormous reduction in her income?

(*Mr Normington*) She might do. I am right at the limits of my understanding of this, I am afraid.

458. It would be interesting to have a note on this. Obviously there would be different variations. I am talking about someone on minimum wage or on working families tax credit, the lowest level of employment, versus income from being a student. Also I would like to compare people who are not employed. Hopefully it means that people are not going to be worse off. I would be interested to know if that was the case.

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Geraint Davies Cont]

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) What I can say is that recently students of that kind have moved from a position where really the kind of financial support they were entitled to was extremely uncertain—essentially it was through hardship funds—to a situation where there now are entitlements in place, but whether it removes them from that kind of poverty trap, I am afraid I do not know.

(*Mr Normington*) They can now retain some benefits, as well as getting the childcare grant, but whether it deals with your specific point, I do not know.²⁶

Chairman: You have the people in your Department for Education and Skills who perhaps could provide a note on that.

459. It would be interesting to know what the relationship is, and whether it is putting pressure on other departments to provide much more for people who could be getting value in that way. I think Mr Steinberg mentioned earlier that you have to have English and maths O-level to go to university. Is it still the case that places like Oxford still discriminate against people if they do not have a foreign languages O-level or GCSE?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I do not know for certain, I have to say. My belief is that they do not, but I simply would have to check on that.²⁷

460. You used to have to have a French O-level to do history, I think, which seems strange to me. In terms of the reasons why people drop out, you mentioned that most of them are personal. Is it possible to provide any further information on exactly what the breakdown of personal reasons is, or is that just an unknown factor now? If you cannot, can I ask this question. I have not read the Report fully enough. Is there a demographic breakdown of dropout rates?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes, there is. We know that older, more mature students are more likely to drop out than 18 to 21 year olds.²⁸

461. What about people from poorer backgrounds?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) They are also more likely to drop out.

462. What about men and women?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Men are more likely to drop out than women, but married men are more likely to stay in.

463. You mentioned the relationship between teaching and research in terms of parity of esteem. Do you think there is institutional sexism in that? I mentioned this issue at the last hearing, you remember, that if a woman, for argument's sake, does a certain amount of research, has a child, then

carries on teaching, changes from a teacher to a situation where she does more research, in that window where she is hanging on there will be a lot of pressure to get her out of the statistics in terms of outputs, in terms of your monies. Do you think that is happening?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) As I said, I think, on Monday, I believe there have been isolated examples that I am aware of, and I said that we do have to ensure—which is why we established an Equality Challenge Unit—that there are no examples of what you describe as institutional sexism of that kind.

464. I am sure there are lots. That is why I wondered whether it is possible to recognise the machinery that is making people be pushed in that direction?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Indeed it is. I think this comes down to the fine print of some of the evaluations we do, especially the research assessment exercise which I suspect is in the back of your mind. We did offer very specific guidance on that issue for the 2001 research assessment exercise, following issues drawn to the Funding Council's attention as part of the 1996 exercise.

465. Finally—again this is anecdotal to a certain extent—I am led to believe that in cases like economics, where people go for degrees in economics, you have cases where often the standard of literacy involving people being admitted is declining all the time. These are in terms of people using proper grammar and spelling and that sort of thing. Is there any reason to think this is declining?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I think it is very difficult to draw a conclusion right across the board. One does hear complaints that in terms of grammar, paragraphing, sentence structure, things of that kind, students are not quite so proficient now as they have been in the past. On the other hand, when one looks at other skills that are relative here, like students' IT skills, of course they far surpass the kinds of skills of students only a few years ago.

466. Finally, in terms of the nationality of new lecturers, given the low incomes of lecturers, is there an increasing drift, in cases like economics, to have more and more foreign lecturers coming in to get the brand, if you like, of British universities, because British abroad would get more money if they just went into normal teaching or a normal job? Is this a chronic problem, do you feel, in the higher education system?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) There are a number of shortage subjects where it has been difficult to recruit UK residents into lecturing posts. The Government is currently proposing to offer golden hellos for lecturers in those subjects. You mentioned economics. It is true that recruitment in certain kinds of economics, especially macroeconomics and the more mathematical end of economics, has been extremely difficult for a number of years now. We have been fortunate to be able to recruit some very highly qualified and high-calibre people from other countries where, for example, there has not been a tradition of a PhD in Economics and they have come

²⁶ Ev 50-51, Appendix 1.

²⁷ Ev 53, Appendix 2.

²⁸ *Note from witness*: Further details and the breakdown of personal reasons for dropping out are available in *Undergraduate non-completion in higher education in England* (HEFCE 97/29), Table 3.2. These show that the most frequently indicated reason for withdrawal are: "Chose the wrong field of study" (40% of respondents indicated that this was a moderate or considerable influence), "Lack of commitment to the programme" (39%), "Financial problems" (39%), "Programme not what I expected" (38%) and "Insufficient academic progress" (36%).

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Geraint Davies Cont]

to this country to obtain one and stayed on. I am thinking of countries especially like Italy where that has been the case.

Mr Williams

467. We have had an interesting two sessions. The problem is that you do not know where to push hardest in the education system to obtain the result which you want. In terms of quality of end-product for the nation, the high priority must be to produce as quick a result as possible in producing more and better graduates, if we are to remain successful in the modern economy. In that respect, have you done any cost benefit of the advantages of recognising that students are coming into university not as well qualified as you would like them to be, not as conditioned to the self-teaching ethic? Has there been any cost/benefit assessment of how much more effective it might be to build the teaching element into the university, rather than while at the same time you are trying to do a broad sweep across education? It is like focussing a teaching element—which is almost a dirty word in many of our universities—into the university. Could not that have a relatively rapid effect in quality and in numbers, because fewer might drop out? I am not sure you should answer that. I would not even answer it.

(*Mr Normington*) I want to say just one thing, which is that a graduate still is likely to earn on average substantially more—35 per cent more—over his or her lifetime.

468. Yes, but that is irrelevant to what I am asking about here.

(*Mr Normington*) That has not changed. In fact, if anything, it has become wider. So to get a degree is still a very good thing, because it gives you a very good economic return.

469. You are missing my point. What you are saying is a symptom of the problem which I am trying to address. The problem is that you do not have enough well-qualified people, that is why their earning differential is improving. What I am asking is, has there been any consideration given to the idea that those in the teaching element in the university might actually bring in a teaching element, that more teaching priority into the university might be a quicker and more cost-effective way of rapidly improving the number and quality of graduates?

(*Mr Normington*) It might be. I am not sure we have done the cost benefit analysis on that but I think we agree there needs to be a higher priority given to teaching and to investment in teaching. There still appears to be a considerable demand for graduates and therefore you would have to expand the numbers as well but you would need to improve the quality of teaching. I may be missing your point.

470. I think you are. Read the minutes and put a note in later, as we are short of time.²⁹ I think that is the best thing to say there. Looking at the number of people who are wasted from university—and not all of them are wasted when they drop out obviously—and Table 10, we are told in paragraph 2.8 that 26,000 students in the first year of their

course were recorded as leaving early. Then we are told in the footnote to Table 10, which Mr Steinberg referred to, that the estimate of the number recorded is around 60 per cent of all withdrawals. So we have to take it that the total number dropping out must therefore be somewhere round about 40,000. Do we have a total figure?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes, we do.

471. Can you give us it?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) The total drop out figure which is given in the Report does include the 60 per cent who could not be traced through this exercise. So what we have here is a picture of the 40 per cent who responded to this survey. The total figure includes all the students who dropped out.

472. In fact it is higher, it is 60 per cent are not recorded.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Yes.

473. So if 26,000 were recorded, 39,000 were not recorded, which means there is a total of 65,000 who drop out. Does that sound right?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) That sounds about right.

474. Going back to the table, what surprises me is the absence of self-criticism. If you look at those individual categories and you put together the almost meaningless “personal reasons” plus “other” plus “unknown”, you have 60 per cent of the people who are included in that list. It seems to me there is no systematic analysis being made at all of why drop out occurs. Where in there is the element of consumer dissatisfaction? Where is anything which says that the universities are at fault, that they are not providing what students want, the students were not happy and so on? Where do we find that? There must be an element of that, must there not?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I am not sure, with respect, whether this is directed to me or the NAO, but I would say that the Report states clearly that no student stated their main reason for dropping out was their dissatisfaction with the teaching.

475. Maybe no one asked them. Do we know they were asked? The C&AG did not have a chance to go round 65,000 students and ask why they were dropping out. Who asked them? Do the colleges automatically ask them?

(*Mr Jones*) The universities provide this information through HESAU, the Higher Education Statistical Analysis Unit. We were only collecting the data and that data was not collected by the universities.

(*Mr Normington*) Some of the independent analysis we have done, and we have had a number of goes at this, shows that students sometimes are asked and of course they are dissatisfied with the quality they have received on the course, that they have not had enough support from the tutor, they have not seen the tutor, but it does not come through very strongly. It is often tied up with, “I was on the wrong course”, “I chose the wrong institution”. Wrong course and wrong institution can cover a whole range of things and in there maybe is quality of teaching.

²⁹ Ev 51-52, Appendix 1.

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Williams Cont]

476. Yes, teaching is almost a dirty word in some colleges. Coming back to the issue of finance, which is shown as very low here, the Library of the House of Commons shows that if the grant level for students was the same today—and it does not exist of course but if it were—as in 1979, it would be £3,500 a year, which is for an under-graduate on a three year course, £10,500 that they would have received had the grant system been sustained. Can you not see that to people from the sort of family Mr Davies was talking about, the sort of families who have low income, often single parents and so on, the difference between having a £10,500 grant over three years and ending up with an £11,000 debt over three years is a mountainous difference? Do you not recognise that?

(Mr Normington) It is a big difference, yes.

477. These figures are almost frighteningly large. I do not mean this in a nasty sense but are you aware that to many of our constituents the sheer thought of getting into that sort of debt, with no guarantee that you are going to be able to pay it off because they cannot see a guarantee, is a massive deterrent? This must help to explain why students from the lower income groups do not come in or are not able to stay in university.

(Mr Normington) I think we have accepted all through these two hearings that debt and the fear of debt is a deterrent to people from lower income families, and that is why the Government is looking at it again.

478. I am glad they are looking at it again. Can I feed some extra thought in then. You talk of the extra earnings that people get from being graduates, but pay back starts at half national earnings, so youngsters who could be earning in three years' time instead face the prospect of getting as far as half national earnings and then having to start paying back this debt from what is really a relatively low level of income.

(Mr Normington) They have to start paying back at £10,000. There is a cap on what they have to pay back. They pay back—

479. Yes, I appreciate that, but they are caught in all ways if they do not have any sort of family support, because if they aspire to have a mortgage as they get a bit older this debt is taken into account in assessing their mortgage eligibility as well, is it not? Can you not see how it stacks up?

(Mr Normington) Mr Williams, I do understand this. The Government changed the funding system—

Mr Williams: We know what happened!

(Mr Normington)—and when it did that it also put in a number of things that were designed to ensure that there was some extra help for students from poor families. I accept the general proposition that if you move from a grant system to a loans system then some people will be put off by the prospect of building up a large debt. That does follow, of course.

480. How soon do we hope to get the result of this review which is being carried out?

(Mr Normington) As soon as we can but I cannot be sure, we have not finished the review. I was asked this several times on Monday and I cannot elaborate beyond saying it will be as soon as we can do it.

481. Why should we be optimistic about it? This Report was only produced earlier this year, right at the beginning of this year?

(Mr Jones) Yes.

482. A few weeks ago. So this is about as up-to-date statistics as you can get. What statistical base are you going to have to make a sounder analysis that is different? Throughout much of the questioning on Monday you were not able to answer questions because the statistical information was not available.

(Mr Normington) But it is a question of the solution, is it not, not the analysis? That is what the review is about, looking at the solution.

483. Coming back to you, Professor, you gave the interesting figure the other day about tuition fees. You said that yes, in so far as tuition fees have gone to the universities, in effect their grant has been diminished by a similar amount. Is that correct?

(Professor Sir Howard Newby) What Mr Steinberg asked me actually was a question specifically in relation to teaching and whether or not the funding for teaching had been supplemented by the income from tuition fees. I said that no, it had not, and that is true.

484. That brings me right back to my very first question. That is marvellous. Thank you. So here we have a situation where it is recognised that the schools are not able to teach at this stage, most of them are not able to teach in the way or to the level required traditionally for university entrance, in terms of aptitude for the course; the universities have not remedied that by putting money in themselves, and we now find that the money that has been accepted for tuition has not been going to tuition at all. That is a ripe piece of achievement, is it not? It seems counterproductive economy.

(Mr Normington) A whole range of things have been funded over that period.

485. But it comes back to my initial point about the priority. If the deficiency is in the schools because they are not teaching to the level that the university want to receive at, if the university now are not getting the money they need and the students are paying for tuition, but they are not getting the money to provide extra and better tuition, it seems to me that it is a self-defeating exercise.

(Mr Normington) The money has gone into a range of things. It has enabled the unit of support for students to go up for the first time, to be stabilised. It will go up next year for the first time. Of course, a lot of the money has gone into research, into widening participation. It is going into the university staff's pay.

486. But the students pay for tuition. If it were a consumer product, it would be a Trades Descriptions Act case. People are being charged for

30 January 2002]

MR DAVID NORMINGTON CB
AND PROFESSOR SIR HOWARD NEWBY CBE

[Continued

[Mr Williams Cont]

tuition and the money is not going to them. That should have been extra money going to tuition, but it is not.

(*Mr Normington*) It is going into a whole range of things. It has not gone directly to increase the money for tuition.

Mr Williams: Thank you.

Chairman

487. Thank you, Mr Williams. We are now at the end of our session, but I have two or three very short questions to wrap things up today. Sir Howard, in answer to Mr Jenkins you made very briefly an interesting reference to league tables which you seem to be suggesting were distorting the system in some way. Do you want to add anything to that?

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) I simply observed that all of the newspaper league tables have an element in them which is heavily weighted towards the A-level points qualification entry of the students they admit. That actually is a very considerable element in determining where a university sits in the league table. Therefore, when an admissions tutor is faced with attempting to choose between very large numbers of students applying for a finite number of places, I am saying there is a powerful incentive there, unless we do something otherwise, for them always to go for the student with the highest A-level points, irrespective of the other qualities which a student may have. That is a barrier, an obstacle, I should say, to some admissions tutors taking their responsibilities seriously over widening participation.

488. Thank you. There is a question from one of my colleagues which was a bit on the edge of what we are talking about, but I think it is relevant. This

afternoon there was an important meeting attended by MPs from all parties, Mr Normington. They met with head teachers from the state boarding schools. I actually have one of these state boarding schools in my constituency, and one of my colleagues has already raised this because he has one or more. There are only 60,000 boarders, and only 4,000 are in the state boarding sector, so it is quite a small sector, but it is important, particularly in terms of disadvantaged groups, maybe people with social need problems, armed services, and it may impact on entry into higher education, although I accept it is at the margin. As we have had this meeting today, will you undertake to acquaint yourself with these worries of this small group?

(*Mr Normington*) Yes, certainly.

489. Turning now to a completely different subject, why are you removing the compulsion to study a modern language after age 14?

(*Mr Normington*) We have not said that is what we are going to do yet. The Government is about to produce a 14 to 19 Green Paper which will discuss the curriculum. The Government has not made that announcement.

490. You have been before us for the best part of 5½ hours this week. I hope you have found it instructive. We have certainly found it very interesting indeed, and you really have made an honest attempt to answer our questions in a very direct way. We are very grateful to both of you. Thank you very much.

(*Professor Sir Howard Newby*) Thank you, Chairman. We are very grateful to you for your courtesy.

Chairman: Thank you. The session is closed.

APPENDIX 1

Supplementary memorandum submitted by Mr David Normington CB, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education and Skills

Question 118: Sale of student loans?

Loans were sold at face value, with subsidies to compensate buyers for the non-commercial terms of the loans. For the first sale of £1 billion in 1998, the net present value (in discounted terms at 1997 prices) of subsidy payments was estimated to be in the region of £50 million more than the estimated present value cost which would have been incurred by the Government if the loans had not been sold (ie the continuing cost to the Government itself of the non-commercial nature of the loans). The net present value of the subsidy payments for the second sale of £1 billion in 1999 was estimated to be in the region of £85 million–£100 million above the cost of keeping the loans in the public sector. Part of the subsidy payments will flow back to Government through administration charges by the Student Loans Company (which administers both portfolios) and tax receipts on private sector profits.

Questions 132, 169 and 178: The relationship between grammar schools and participation in HE?

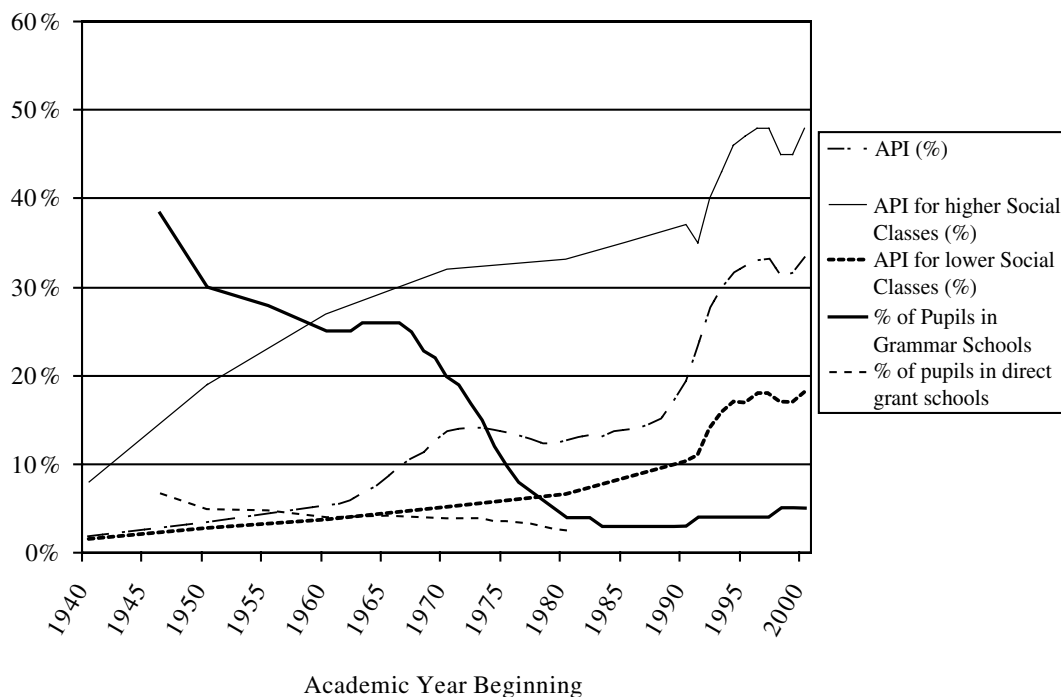
The graph below shows that since 1960, the Age Participation Index (API) including the API for poorer social classes has risen very significantly, while the percentage of pupils in grammar and direct grant schools has fallen. Although there are no direct grant schools now, there are still 164 grammar schools, educating about 4.4 per cent of secondary school pupils in England. The future of the remaining grammar schools is a matter for local parents to decide, by petitioning for a ballot.

It has not been possible to provide information on the numbers of entrants from state schools into individual institutions in relation to the decline of grammar schools.

30 January 2002]

[Continued

**The GB Age Participation Index (API) for Young People in Higher Education,
by the proportion of secondary school pupils in Grammar schools and Direct
Grant Schools**



Questions 186, 249, 302 and 318: Clarification of the Initial Entry Rate (IER)?

The Department uses the Initial Entry Rate (IER) to measure progress towards the target of 50 per cent participation in higher education by young people by the time they reach the age of 30. It is an extension of the well-established and familiar Age Participation Index (API) which measures the proportion of UK domiciled young people who enter full-time HE courses for the first time by the time they are 20. The IER extends this to include part-timers, and those aged over 20 and up to and including age 30. The IER uses comprehensive student data collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) from HEIs and by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) from FE colleges.

The Department first used this calculation for 1998–99. Using the available data, it calculated then that the IER was 43 per cent.

As part of their quality assurance procedures, the Department and HEFCE carried out a thorough investigation of the student data used in calculating the IER and found that a small number of the entrant figures had been over-estimated. This was due to some students being recorded by institutions as “initial entrants” when they had in fact already been in higher education in previous years.

Using the revised, and more robust data, as a measure of entrants we are now able to calculate the IER to be more accurately at 41.5 per cent for 2001–02.

References to the IER are made in the Service Delivery Agreement section of the Department’s website: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/sda2000/psa_notes.shtml; and the notion of the IER was mentioned in a Departmental Press Release of 28 September 1999: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=1999_0612.

Question 436: International comparisons of the performance of school children in state schools?

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is the most comprehensive international student assessment study to date. Thirty-two countries participated, including all the major OECD countries. 15-year-old students were assessed in Spring 2000 in tests of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy. The “major domain” was reading literacy, and around two-thirds of the questions were devoted to this. PISA is being repeated in 2003 and 2006, when mathematical and then scientific literacy will be the major domains.

30 January 2002]

[Continued

In England, a representative sample of 4,120 students in 155 randomly selected schools took the tests. Of these, 71 per cent were in local education authority (LEA) maintained schools, 20 per cent were in grant maintained schools, which later in 2000 reverted to LEA control or became Foundation Schools, and 9 per cent were in independent schools. This is in proportion to the national picture and is the usual practice in international comparisons studies such as the earlier International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) studies of mathematics and science performance, TIMSS. We are not aware of any studies, which look only at performance in state schools.

PISA was administered in England on behalf of the Department by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), within a technical framework laid down by the OECD PISA consortium to which all participating countries had to adhere. The consortium was also responsible for developing the test items and implementing strict quality assurance procedures, including the translation verification of items, standardised procedures for school and student sampling, precise instructions for the implementation of the survey, the selection and use of test administrators, the use of monitors from the PISA consortium to visit all national centres to review data collection procedures and the production of software specially designed for PISA data collection.

The OECD PISA consortium also undertook the analyses of PISA data, culminating in the OECD report, Knowledge and Skills for Life, which was published on 4 December 2001. The report found that UK performance was significantly above the OECD average. The UK scored seventh-highest out of 32 countries on the reading literacy scale, eighth-highest on the mathematical literacy scale and fourth-highest on the scientific literacy scale. On the “reflecting and evaluation” reading literacy scale, skills, which, as the OECD put it, are “increasingly valued in knowledge-based societies”, the UK’s score was second-highest.

Question 458: Comparison of financial position of a lone parent on benefits, and in higher education?

Making direct comparisons with a previously unemployed student, or one in low paid work are problematic due to the many variables involved.

An unemployed person would be expected to look after children and would not be entitled to Government funds for childcare. Basic entitlement to income support would be supplemented by housing benefit, which would vary according to circumstances and geographical area. We believe most lone parents with formal childcare would find the new student package attractive by comparison with continued dependence on benefits.

The total income as, for example, a low paid employee would depend on the level of earnings. If they were earning £5,000 per year with two children, and assuming that they worked at least 16 hours a week, they might receive Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) of £146 including a childcare credit of 70 per cent of their childcare costs. So their income as a student would not drop substantially. The loan element in student support, however, would have to be repaid.

EXAMPLE: A LONE PARENT WITH ONE CHILD AGED 6

Income Support

£100.50 a week (which includes child benefit at £15.50 a week)

Housing Benefit—depending on level of rent.

Council Tax Benefit

Will also receive free school meals and other “passported benefits” such as free prescriptions.

Student Support¹

£90.83 a week student loan (£3,815 a year) (of which £67.05 taken into account by Benefits Agency)²

£51.79 a week Dependants Grant (£2,175 a year)

£5.95 extra dependants grant (£250 a year) (disregarded as income by Benefits Agency)

£11.90 Books, Travel and Equipment grant (£500 a year) (disregarded as income by Benefits Agency)

¹ The weekly amount shown is reached by dividing the elements of student support over the 42 benefit weeks (September to June) over which student support is paid.

² The Benefits Agency disregards £260 for travel, and £319 for books and equipment from the student loan. In addition, £10 a week is disregarded from the loan.

30 January 2002]

[Continued

£5.95 School Meals Grant (£250 a year) (disregarded as income by Benefits Agency)

£11.90 Access Bursary (Discretionary from institution) (up to £500 a year)(disregarded as income by Benefits Agency)

Childcare Grant—up to £114.75 a week, depending on childcare costs (disregarded by Benefits Agency)

In addition, Child Benefit of £15.50 a week is payable on top of the student support (this is taken into account by Benefits Agency)

(Full-time students are exempt from Council Tax).

Total Weekly Income £193.82

(Including child benefit but excluding childcare grant)

Total weekly income taken into account by Benefits Agency £134.34

During term-time, while the student's income that is taken into account is above the threshold for Income Support, they may be eligible for some Housing Benefit, depending on the level of their rent. During July and August, the Benefits Agency considers that the student has no income from student support, and the student will be eligible for Income Support and Housing Benefit, providing they have no income from employment.

Any income from employment during term-time or the vacations is not taken into account when calculating the student's entitlement to student support, although it will impact on their Income Support. If a lone parent student works at least 16 hours a week during term-time, they may be entitled to receive WFTC. The childcare credit of WFTC is payable at 70 per cent of actual costs (maximum of £94.50 a week for one child), so it would be more advantageous for such a student to claim the childcare grant through the student support system which will pay at 85 per cent of actual costs—a maximum of £114.75 a week during term-time and the short vacations, although it pays at the 70 per cent rate during the long vacation.

Question 470: Research into the Benefits of Enhancing the Initial Period of Teaching for New Students to Higher Education?

Retention rates are closely related to levels of prior attainment. Therefore any efforts to raise students' attainment and preparation for higher education should reduce the likelihood of students dropping out.

The Department is not aware of any published research on enhanced teaching for students in the first year of HE courses. However, using work commissioned by HEFCE from KPMG, areas where additional costs might occur in the retention and progression of students have been identified: additional pastoral and academic care; ongoing study skills; literacy; numeracy; and IT courses. HEFCE recommend that higher education institutions should provide these services when students enter higher education and that they be sustained throughout their study to help aid retention. No cost-benefit analysis has been undertaken of these different activities partly because it is difficult to isolate and quantify the effect that each of these activities has on retention. As a result, the evidence available is generally based on case studies.

For example, many institutions have recognised the need for more targeted support for learning during the first year of a course and have implemented strategies to include practices such as:

Shifting the balance of funding from the, usually more costly, final year to the first year of study.

Introducing a module in the first year which deals with the fundamental issues of studying the particular subject.

Introducing diagnostic testing to determine whether students need more or less direct support ie additional lectures, one to one tuition etc.

Having more explicit outcomes in the programme specifications for the first year of study.

Using Progress Files or similar approaches to monitor individual students' learning and progress.

Last year HEFCE produced best practice guides on strategies to widen participation and learning and teaching. These, and related seminars, highlighted that "the learning and teaching strategy is central to comprehensive attempts to widen participation". These guides highlight the importance of learning and teaching from the first term/semester and throughout the rest of the HE course. HEFCE's guidance states: "The greater the investment in this period [first term/semester] the less likely a student is to leave, as they feel more supported."

This subject was also raised at a recent symposium held by the Institute of Learning and Teaching. One academic had undertaken some private research into student retention: some institutions with a high

30 January 2002]

[Continued

proportion of non-traditional students had better retention rates than the norm. This was attributed, amongst other things, to a greater balance of resources devoted to Year 1 at university, rather than, as is commonly the case, having large first year classes and individual support only for final year projects.

David Normington CB,
Permanent Secretary
Department for Education and Skills

March 2002

APPENDIX 2

Supplementary memorandum submitted by the Higher Education Funding Council for England

Question 239-241: What proportion of visits are to schools which they [Oxford and Cambridge Universities] have not previously recruited from?

Neither of the Universities were able to provide a specific response to this question in the time available. All the colleges undertake recruitment activities, and it would take some time to collate the statistical information required to formulate an accurate response. We have therefore prepared a more general note on activities by these two universities to widen participation. This note is drawn together from documentation and information provided by the Universities to the Council.

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

The University of Oxford has an extensive widening participation programme aimed at the post-16 sector, but it also has programmes for the pre-16 sector, which it intends to expand with HEFCE funding. All colleges and schools receive regular mailings to inform heads, principals, and teachers about access activities. Their widening participation strategy involves a wide set of focused activities with the maintained sector in general and maintained schools and colleges with no or little history of sending applicants to Oxford. HEFCE funding for widening participation is not used for visits involving students from the independent sector. These visits are funded from college or Oxford College Admissions Office funds and form part of a general programme of schools liaison activities

Tutors, admissions office staff, and student groups visit schools or colleges, or groups of schools, throughout the year. The University also has a Sutton Trust Recruitment Officer who targets the FE sector specifically. They also hold several major regional events, which enable them to reach out to hundreds of schools and colleges across the country. Last year the University held conferences at St James' Park (Newcastle FC), and the Dylan Thomas Centre (Swansea). Jointly, with the University of Cambridge, they participated in events at Old Trafford (Manchester United FC), Wembley, and Murrayfield (Edinburgh). These events involved over 6,000 students and teachers. A similar programme is planned this year.

Students from over 1,500 schools and colleges were reached outside Oxford last year. The vast majority of these (around 90 per cent) will have been from the maintained sector. Many will have had little, or no experience of submitting candidates to the University of Oxford. The Admissions Office, for instance, arranged visits to and from 53 schools and colleges in 2001 of which 91 per cent were from the maintained sector.

They also have an extensive programme of visits to the University, with students from up to 2,000 schools and colleges visiting them. The University believes that this is what schools and colleges find especially effective in breaking down barriers and encouraging participation. Many of the visits to Oxford are for students in younger age groups and some from schools without a sixth-form, for which they will not have an historical record of applications. These visits focus on raising aspirations to higher education in general. For example, one visit involved representatives giving a presentation to students from Key Stage three and a return visit from these students to Oxford. In addition, they organise an established programme of summer schools. The University's Sutton Trust Summer School involves over 250 year 12 students from maintained sector schools with priority given to those with little or no experience of sending candidates to Oxford and/or little family history of higher education. The University also runs a HEFCE Summer school for around 100 year 11 students from maintained sector schools, once again with priority being given to those with little or no experience of sending applicants to Oxford and/or little family history of higher education. To improve their service and the opportunities for potential applicants to visit the university they will be opening an Admissions Information Office in March 2002 in the centre of Oxford.

For entry in October 2002 the University of Oxford had an increase of 16.2 per cent in its applications from 9,548 to 11,097. The numbers applying from the maintained sector rose by 24 per cent, compared with a 6.7

30 January 2002]

[Continued

per cent rise from the independent sector. This increase in applications from the maintained sector came from a total of 1,390 maintained schools compared with 1,265 maintained schools in the previous year.

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

The University is addressing the issue of widening access and participation to students from state schools through a number of initiatives:

- The Cambridge University Students Union (CUSU) Target Campaign involves around 1,000 undergraduate volunteers currently studying at Cambridge going into maintained schools and colleges in their home area during the Easter vacation. Every state sixth form in the country receives a mailing in the autumn, inviting requests for a Target visit.
- The Target Campaign also offers shadowing weekends, where sixth formers from all over the country come to Cambridge for three days and shadow someone doing a subject that they are interested in. The scheme is aimed at applicants from people whose schools have very little or no previous contact with Oxbridge.
- The University has two Access/Schools Liaison Officers and a Further Education Liaison Officer. These posts have been appointed to visit schools and colleges to talk to pupils and teachers about applying to Cambridge.
- The University is involved in the Excellence Challenge initiative, and has developed links with the LEAs to advance this work.
- The University is one of a number of universities to host a summer school financed by the Sutton Trust. All state schools are invited to put forward the names of one or two candidates for the summer courses.
- Another access initiative by St John's College called "Eagle" aims to help bright young people from inner city Lambeth. Funding, from a donor wishing to remain anonymous, is worth £125,000 a year for five years.
- The colleges cooperate in a programme of links with schools and colleges in particular LEA areas. Each college deals with one or more LEA. For example, Jesus College assists students from the Newcastle area.
- The University is an active member of the Four Counties widening participation group (with Anglia Polytechnic University, Essex University, Norwich School of Art & Design, University of East Anglia, the Open University and Writtle College). One of the main areas of activity is the "Children into universities" project which involves providing a range of events aimed at year 8 and 9 pupils (and parents) from schools in areas of low HE participation.
- There is a major programme of undergraduate bursaries.

Latest figures for admissions and applications to the University (published in January 2002) show that the proportion of state schools applicants has increased. Applicants from the maintained sector now make up 53 per cent of the home intake compared to last year's 50 per cent.

Question 459: Do places like [Oxford and Cambridge Universities] still discriminate against applicants that do not have a foreign language O Level or GCSE?

The University of Oxford does not have a general stipulation that entrants should have a qualification in a language other than English.

The University of Cambridge's minimum entrance requirements are qualifications in five subjects: English, a language other than English, an approved mathematical or scientific subject, and two other approved subjects. For candidates with GCSE and GCE, at least two of these subjects must be at Advanced GCE, the others in GCSE at grades A, B or C. If there are good reasons why applicants are not able to satisfy the matriculation requirements, they can consult the Admissions Tutor of their preferred college, to find out if the college would be able to ask the University to waive the requirement.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England

February 2002

*30 January 2002]**[Continued*

APPENDIX 3**Supplementary memorandum submitted by The Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE)**

The NAO report on Widening Participation does not fully address the conundrum that lies at the heart of Government policy in this area. The Government's target that 50 per cent of young people should have some experience of higher education through a widening of current participation relies on the performance of Further Education colleges and certain Higher Education institutions. It is those with current high intakes from non-traditional backgrounds that offer the environment, support, courses and processes of learning that are most likely to appeal to such students. Yet it is also those institutions that are currently most financially vulnerable. Without changes in the financial support regime they will have to curtail their current activities. Further expansion would be most unlikely, especially if capabilities in certain disciplines or geographical locations were lost.

It is understandable that those institutions running deficits should not be cross-subsidised indefinitely by the rest of the sector. A central issue is how improved efficiency can be combined with the effectiveness such institutions have at delivering the widening participation agenda.

Funding methodologies are at the heart of this issue. First, there are high costs in reaching out and attracting those from non-traditional backgrounds into higher education. Secondly, there are higher costs in providing the education and personal support needed to enable such students to be retained and progress through their learning. Current funding methodologies do not offer long-term differentiated solutions at levels high enough to meet those costs. Certain "city challenge" initiatives are neither universal nor mainstream, while "5 per cent postcode premium" is inadequate and badly targeted.

Thirdly, the removal of maintenance grants and their replacement by income contingent loans with a low repayment threshold, plus a myriad of confusing bursaries, leads to student debt, the spectre of debt and often excessive term-time paid work. Since employers appear not to value as much people from non-traditional backgrounds, the risk/reward equation is not so favourable for them. Their decision not to stay on at school and progress to higher education may well be perfectly rational. The returns to higher education are not evenly spread across social groups.

Finally, lower retention is the flip-side of the widening participation coin. People from non-traditional backgrounds suffer a variety of personal, financial and other pressures. A London university with high non-retention rates surveyed students and found that only 4 per cent left for academic reasons. A recent IES report noted that many students change institutions and courses while others return (sometimes years later) to complete their studies. The Funding Councils' policy of seeking to claw-back funds where students have not completed the course on which they embarked, takes no account of this. It can affect the financial fortunes of precisely those institutions whose very survival and growth are central to the widening participation agenda. In further education, institutions received funding for those students in place at three census points in a year. This recognises, supports and rewards those institutions that have helped individuals take steps along the road. In higher education individuals could interrupt their studies, having completed a semester and gained academic credits, but be considered a drop out, leaving the institution having to repay all the funds. One London institution may have £2.5 million clawed back resulting in serious implications for its ability to deliver its widening participation mission. A closer alignment of the funding approaches would benefit institutions, students and help the Government achieve its widening participation and growth targets for higher education.

We would make one other argument to expand a point made earlier: unless employers send signals that they value equally people from all backgrounds and can show evidence that they put this into practice, then many people from non-traditional backgrounds will continue (rightly) to be sceptical about the value of a degree. The risk/reward equation is weighted against them and no amount of exhortation or raising awareness about the higher education experience will change that. All links in the chain have to be considered and worked on. A focus on the HE/FE or HE/school interface (while important) is insufficient.

Mr Richard A Brown,
Chief Executive
The Council for Industry and Higher Education

January 2002

REPORTS BY THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS
SESSION 2001–02

		<i>Publication Date</i>
1	Managing Risk in Government Departments (HC 336)	23/11/01
	Government Reply (Cm 5393)	14/02/02
2	Improving Construction Performance (HC 337)	05/12/01
	Government Reply (Cm 5393)	14/02/02
3	The Cancellation of the Benefits Payment Card Project (HC 358)	06/12/01
	Government Reply (Cm 5393)	14/02/02
4	The Renegotiation of the PFI-type Deal for the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds (HC 359)	12/12/01
	Government Reply (Cm 5450)	28/02/02
5	Ministry of Defence: Major Projects Report 2000 (HC 368)	28/11/01
	Government Reply (Cm 5450)	28/02/02
6	Ministry of Defence: Major Projects Report 2000—The Role of the Equipment Capability Customer (HC 369)	28/11/01
	Government Reply (Cm 5450)	28/02/02
7	Sale of Part of the UK Gold Reserves (HC 396)	19/12/01
	Government Reply (Cm 5470)	14/03/02
8	Office of Water Services (OFWAT): Leakage and Water Efficiency (HC 397)	04/01/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5470)	14/03/02
9	Tackling Obesity in England (HC 421)	16/01/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5477)	20/03/02
10	The Acquisition of German Parcel (HC 422)	11/01/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5477)	20/03/02
11	Office of Gas and Electricity Markets: Giving Domestic Customers a Choice of Electricity Supplier (HC 446)	17/01/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5481)	09/05/02
12	The Radiocommunications Agency's Joint Venture with CMG (HC 447)	23/01/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5470)	14/03/02
13	Regulating Housing Associations' Management of Financial Risk (HC 470) ..	09/01/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5470)	14/03/02
14	The Millennium Dome (HC 516)	01/02/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5487)	25/04/02

15	How English Further Education Colleges can Improve Student Performance (HC 528)	07/02/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5487)	25/04/02
16	Access to the Victoria and Albert Museum (HC 559)	14/02/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5487)	25/04/02
17	Ministry of Defence: Maximising the Benefits of Defence Equipment Co-operation (HC 586)	15/02/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5487)	25/04/02
18	Inland Flood Defence (HC 587)	01/03/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5512)	23/05/02
19	Ship Surveys and Inspections (HC 608)	15/03/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5512)	23/05/02
20	Educating and Training the Future Health Professional Workforce for England (HC 609)	08/03/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5512)	23/05/02
21	Better Value for Money from Professional Services (HC 309)	14/03/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5512)	23/05/02
22	The Channel Tunnel Rail Link (HC 630)	21/03/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5512)	23/05/02
23	Report on Inland Revenue Appropriation Account (HC 631)	22/03/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5524)	20/06/02
24	Ministry of Defence: The Risk of Fraud in Property Management (HC 647) ..	20/03/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5512)	23/05/02
25	Excess Votes 2000–2001 (HC 648)	07/03/02
26	Better Regulation: Making Good Use of Regulatory Impact Assessments (HC 682)	12/04/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5524)	20/06/02
27	The Medical Assessment of Incapacity and Disability Benefits (HC 683)	10/04/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5524)	20/06/02
28	Better Public Services Through Joint Working (HC 471)	18/04/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5524)	20/06/02
29	Non-competitive Procurement in the Ministry of Defence (HC 370)	19/04/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5524)	20/06/02

30	The Auction of Radio Spectrum for the Third Generation of Mobile Telephones (HC 436)	26/04/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5524)	20/06/02
31	Postcomm: Opening the Post (HC 632)	01/05/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5549)	16/07/02
32	The Implementation of the National Probation Service Information Systems Strategy (HC 357)	03/05/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5549)	16/07/02
33	Income Tax Self Assessment (HC 296)	09/05/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5549)	16/07/02
34	Policy Development: Improving Air Quality (HC 560)	24/05/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5549)	16/07/02
35	Losses to the Revenue from Frauds on Alcohol Duty (HC 331)	17/05/02
	Government Reply (Cm 5549)	16/07/02
36	Progress on Resource Accounting (HC 349)	19/06/02
37	Handling Clinical Negligence Claims in England (HC 280)	13/06/02
38	NIRS 2: Contract Extension (HC 423)	07/08/02
39	Giving Confidently: The Role of the Charity Commission in Regulating Charities (HC 412)	03/07/02
40	NHS Direct in England (HC 610)	10/07/02
41	Ministry of Defence: Major Projects Report 2001 (HC 448)	04/07/02
42	Managing the Relationship to Secure a Professional Partnership in PFI Projects (HC 460)	11/07/02
43	The Use of Funding Competitions in PFI Projects: The Treasury Building (HC 398)	17/07/02
44	The Misuse and Smuggling of Hydrocarbon Oils (HC 649)	18/07/02
45	Inpatient and Outpatient Waiting in the NHS (HC 376)	18/09/02
46	Inappropriate Adjustments to NHS Waiting Lists (HC 517)	18/09/02
47	The Landfill Tax Credit Scheme (HC 338)	25/07/02
48	Department for International Development: Performance Management— Helping to Reduce World Poverty (HC 793)	01/08/02

49	Ensuring that Policies Deliver Value for Money (HC 541)	31/07/02
50	Pipes and Wires (HC 831)	08/08/02
51	Agricultural fraud: The case of Joseph Bowden (HC 684)	22/08/02
52	e-Revenue (HC 707)	29/08/02
53	Reducing Prisoner Reoffending (HC 619)	05/09/02
54	Improving Public Services through e-Government (HC 845)	28/08/02
55	Fraud and Error in Income Support (HC 595)	11/09/02
56	Ministry of Defence: Combat Identification (HC 759)	21/08/02
57	The Operation and Wind-up of Teesside Development Corporation (HC 675)	14/08/02
58	Improving Student Achievement and Widening Participation in Higher Education in England (HC 588)	12/09/02

ISBN 0-215-00549-X



9 780215 005496