



House of Commons

Children, Schools and Families  
Committee

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# From Baker to Balls: the foundations of the education system

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*Report, together with formal minutes and oral  
evidence*

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## The Children, Schools and Families Committee

The Children, Schools and Families Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Children, Schools and Families and its associated public bodies.

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# 1 From Baker to Balls: the foundations of the education system

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1. This Committee, soon after it first met in November 2007, took the decision to hold inquiries into each of the pillars of the schools system: the National Curriculum, national testing and assessment, accountability structures, and the training of teachers. In doing so, we were conscious of the twenty years which had elapsed since the passing of the Education Reform Act 1988, which underpins so much of what schools do today.

2. The purpose of this short Report is to draw attention to some of the themes which unify these Reports and to provide a little historical context. We attach as Appendices the conclusions and recommendations from each of the four Reports. We also publish alongside the Report oral evidence taken from four former Secretaries of State and from the current Secretary of State, each speaking about the direction of education policy over the last twenty years and into the future.

3. It was illuminating and instructive to hear four former Secretaries of State engage in discussion with us—and amongst themselves—on the principles of education policy. We are most grateful to them and to the current Secretary of State for being candid and forthcoming in their reflections, and we have drawn on their evidence in this Report. We encourage future select committees to take the opportunity, if and when former Ministers are willing, to hold similar evidence sessions and to gather a historical perspective.

## Centralism or localism?

4. The most persistent theme running through each of the three inquiries was the tension between central and local responsibility and control. This was especially marked in evidence on the level of prescription within the National Curriculum and the guidance on how it is to be taught; the balance between testing according to a national standard and assessment performed by a teacher with knowledge of a pupil's capacity and wider understanding; and inspection of school performance against criteria common to schools across the country as opposed to self-evaluation by a school.

5. The thrust of our Reports has been to urge a move away from central control. We believe that governments need to provide broad frameworks rather than seeking to micro-manage the day to day work of teachers. We favour:

- a National Curriculum which prescribes as little as possible and with decisions being made at the lowest appropriate level;<sup>1</sup>
- an extension to all maintained schools of the freedom enjoyed by many Academies not to follow the National Curriculum in its entirety;<sup>2</sup>

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1 *National Curriculum*, Fourth Report from the Committee, Session 2008–09, HC 344-I, paragraphs 53 and 56

2 *National Curriculum*, Fourth Report from the Committee, Session 2008–09, HC 344-I, paragraph 73

- an accountability system which encourages and supports schools towards a meaningful, continuous self-assessment process, with true self-evaluation being at the heart of what a good school does<sup>3</sup> and schools being genuinely responsible for their own improvement;<sup>4</sup> and
- teacher assessment as a significant part of a national assessment regime, with the purposes of national testing being more carefully defined.<sup>5</sup>

6. The challenge is to achieve a balance which respects the expectation from employers, parents and further and higher education institutions that children will leave school with a core of knowledge,<sup>6</sup> and which at the same time allows schools and teachers the freedom to experiment in the quest to provide a learning environment which is stimulating for teachers and pupils alike. The difficulties of achieving this balance, while pressing forward with personal convictions, were familiar to the former Secretaries of State who gave evidence.<sup>7</sup> Mr Blunkett said that “we’re all full of contradictions” and gave examples<sup>8</sup> (as indeed did Mr Balls);<sup>9</sup> and he spoke of the need to have “levers to pull” to implement some of his policy objectives. One previous incumbent has recorded their frustration at finding, when arriving in office, that “there were no levers to pull at all”.<sup>10</sup>

7. In all of the four areas which we looked at, there has, over most of the last twenty years, been a relentless trend towards increased central control, although there are recent signs that the balance may now be starting to be redressed. We criticised the level of prescription and central control both in the National Curriculum as it stood in 2009 and in the National Strategies which were designed to support it; but that criticism of the Curriculum would have been equally valid—in fact, more so—when the National Curriculum was first introduced, under a Conservative Government, following the passage of the Education Reform Act 1988. Lord Baker readily accepted this in evidence to us.<sup>11</sup>

8. The current Government has decided to end the contract to run the National Strategies first introduced by Mr Blunkett in the early years of a previous term of this Labour Government. Mr Balls described the National Strategies as being “exactly the right reform 12 years ago” but added that “twelve years on, we are in a more mature place than a national central field force giving advice to schools ... the National Strategies have had their day, but those days are gone”.<sup>12</sup>

9. We were pleased to hear Mr Balls speak of the need to “have the confidence to devolve more resource and decision-making down to the individual school level” and to aim for

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3 *School Accountability*, First Report from the Committee, Session 2009–10, HC 88-I, paragraph 63

4 *School Accountability*, First Report from the Committee, Session 2009–10, HC 88-I, paragraph 260

5 *Testing and Assessment*, Third Report from the Committee, Session 2007–08, HC 169-I, paragraphs 58 and 61

6 See Baroness Morris, Q 8

7 Lord Baker distinguished between the right of the state to decide a framework of education and the role of teachers in teaching and applying that framework: Q 2

8 Q 5

9 Q 51

10 Rt Hon Baroness Shephard of Northwold: see Q 6

11 Q 10, Lord Baker was agreeing that the curriculum had been ‘over prescriptive’ and ‘too long’.

12 Q 55

more local accountability.<sup>13</sup> Our only concern—and one which we voiced in our report on School Accountability—is whether actions will match rhetoric. We found ample evidence in that inquiry that the Government, contrary to the statement in the recent White Paper that each school was responsible for its own improvement,<sup>14</sup> was trying to drive improvement through central programmes and targets, some of which had a distorting effect and were perceived as harmful.<sup>15</sup> A better approach would be for the Government to place more faith in the professionalism of teachers and to support them with a simplified accountability and improvement system which challenges and which encourages good practice rather than stigmatising and undermining those who are struggling.<sup>16</sup>

10. Central control is manifest in national curriculum testing. We were surprised by the wholehearted support from former Secretaries of State for the level of testing that we have now.<sup>17</sup> We re-iterate that we are not opposed to the principle of national testing. Where we do have concerns is the use of the same test for a range of purposes that cannot all be met at the same time. If pupils' attainment is used to judge teachers and schools, teachers cannot be expected to be dispassionate assessors of that attainment, and teaching to the test is a likely consequence. We therefore have reservations—as does Ofsted—about the effects of national testing in concentrating teachers' efforts upon certain areas of the National Curriculum.<sup>18</sup> We disagree with the former Secretaries of State, and we believe that there is clear evidence that current approaches to testing reduce teachers' scope to use their skills in innovation and creativity.<sup>19</sup>

11. Even when the tide within political circles has been in favour of devolution and greater local freedom, the opportunity to exercise locally a right to deviate from central prescription has not always been embraced. As Baroness Morris acknowledged, little use had been made by schools or local authorities of the power to innovate under the Education Act 2002.<sup>20</sup> Mr Clarke made the same point and spoke of “a set of cultures” within schools “that was extremely conservative and inflexible”.<sup>21</sup> However, in order to take up these opportunities, schools need a mixture of inspired leadership and sufficient financial resources.

12. The instinct to manage from the centre has led to a greater involvement in the operation of non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) than is necessarily desirable. We challenged the Department on the role played by its observers at meetings of the Qualifications and Curriculum Agency (QCA),<sup>22</sup> and Baroness Morris spoke of finding “a whole Department that was mirroring what went on at the QCA and had people who were

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13 Q 55

14 *Your child, your schools, our future*, DCSF, Cm 7588, paragraph 4.1

15 *School Accountability*, First Report from the Committee, Session 2009–10, HC 88-I, paragraphs 252 and 260

16 *School Accountability*, First Report from the Committee, Session 2009–10, HC 88-I, paragraph 266

17 Q 22 to 26

18 *Testing and Assessment*, Third Report from the Committee, Session 2007–08, HC 169-I, paragraphs 58 and 119

19 See Mr Clarke Q 23

20 Qq 31 and 32

21 Q 17

22 *Policy and delivery: the National Curriculum tests delivery failure in 2008*, Sixth Report from the Committee, Session 2008–09, HC 205, paragraph 35

sitting through the meetings”. For her, the relationship between the Department and its non-departmental public bodies was “messy” and “not quite right”, and it had certainly clouded lines of accountability.<sup>23</sup>

## Coherence

13. A second theme running through the Reports is coherence and the need to bring forward change as part of an overall vision, rather than fiddling with elements of the whole while failing to give due regard to the consequences elsewhere. We found this particularly striking in the piecemeal approach taken by the Government in reviewing different stages of the National Curriculum.<sup>24</sup> We also found a lack of coherence in an accountability system for schools which is of such complexity, with so many different forces and structures driving improvement, that school leaders and teachers risk becoming confused and disheartened.<sup>25</sup> A further example of incoherence is the absence of clear and recognised pathways for teacher professional development.<sup>26</sup>

14. Perhaps the most striking example of a lack of coherence is in the 14–19 sector. Our predecessors on the Education and Skills Committee, while welcoming the pragmatic approach taken by many in working for the success of the Diploma as a high quality qualification, saw the Government’s decision not to implement in full the recommendations made by Sir Mike Tomlinson and the Working Group on 14–19 Reform as a lost opportunity for a more coherently structured 14–19 curriculum.<sup>27</sup> Mr Clarke strongly agreed: indeed this was one of his chief regrets.<sup>28</sup> Others suggested more radical solutions: Baroness Morris told us that “as long as we’ve got this system whereby the national curriculum finishes at 16 and yet we talk about a cohesive 14–19 strategy, [the curriculum] will never work”.<sup>29</sup> Lord Baker agreed on the need for “a fundamental overhaul of the curriculum” at the “watershed” age of 14.<sup>30</sup>

15. Mr Clarke made a separate and strong point on coherence, arguing that work should be “a continuous part of what children experience” during the 14–19 phase, including for those with particular academic ability.<sup>31</sup> The journey through the curriculum should, as far as possible, remain seamless even as it continues into the world of work.

16. A lack of coherence must be ascribed at least partly to the churn in ministerial responsibility—and indeed in senior officials at the higher levels of the Department.<sup>32</sup> Mr Balls pointed out that he was the second longest-serving Secretary of State since Lord

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23 Q 18

24 *National Curriculum*, Fourth Report from the Committee, Session 2008–09, HC 344-I, paragraphs 103 and 105

25 *School Accountability*, First Report from the Committee, Session 2009–10, HC 88-I, paragraph 249

26 *Training of Teachers*, Fourth Report from the Committee, Session 2009–10, HC 275-I, paragraph 145

27 *14–19 Diplomas*, Fifth Report from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2006–07, HC 249, paragraph 14

28 Q 10

29 Q 10

30 Q 10

31 Q 10

32 Mr Clarke Q 34



Baker,<sup>33</sup> yet he has served for fewer than three years. Almost inevitably, the constant turnover at ministerial level has led to initiative overload, which we concluded had taken its toll on schools and their capacity to deliver a balanced education to their pupils.<sup>34</sup> For a new administration, the pressure for change is especially great, as Mr Blunkett cheerfully acknowledged.<sup>35</sup> We also note the steady slide towards the inclusion of a portmanteau education bill of disparate measures in the Government's legislative programme for each Parliamentary session.

## The next Parliament

17. We could not have made the recommendations which we did, for instance on the need to trust to the professionalism of teachers, had we not had a degree of confidence in the standards of teaching in schools today. Not everyone accepts the claim by Ofsted that we now have “the best teachers ever”;<sup>36</sup> but both Baroness Morris and Mr Blunkett had no doubt that the quality of teaching had improved substantially in recent years.<sup>37</sup> Baroness Morris spoke of teachers’ “sheer professionalism”,<sup>38</sup> and Lord Baker took the view that the demands on teachers nowadays were “infinitely greater in terms of managing their classes” than when he was at school himself or in office, adding that teaching was now “a very difficult task”.<sup>39</sup> A priority for the next Government will be to continue to encourage improvement in teaching standards.

18. Our Reports on the National Curriculum, Testing and Assessment, School Accountability and Training of Teachers went into considerable detail about the strengths and failures of current policy, and they are contemporary documents. However, the two threads running through each of them and which we have identified in this short Report—achieving a suitable balance between local and central control, and the need for coherence of policy—have dogged education policy for decades. They are, however, real and urgent challenges, and the education policies of the Government in the next Parliament will be judged by their success in meeting them.

19. This Committee has found good quality evidence vital in reaching its conclusions in these four Reports. Equally, Government policies must be based on the best available evidence. We urge the next Government to ensure that it draws upon a sound and well-resourced educational research base in developing its policies.

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33 Q 44

34 *School accountability*, First Report from the Committee, Session 2009–10, HC 88-I, paragraph 239

35 Q 34. See also Baroness Morris Q 35

36 See Mr Balls Q 45

37 Q 34 and Q 40

38 Q 41

39 Q 42

## Appendix 1: *Testing and Assessment:* Conclusions and Recommendations

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### The need for national testing

1. We consider that the weight of evidence in favour of the need for a system of national testing is persuasive and we are content that the principle of national testing is sound. Appropriate testing can help to ensure that teachers focus on achievement and often that has meant excellent teaching, which is very welcome. (Paragraph 25)

### The purposes of national testing

2. The evidence we have received strongly favours the view that national tests do not serve all of the purposes for which they are, in fact used. The fact that the results of these tests are used for so many purposes, with high-stakes attached to the outcomes, creates tensions in the system leading to undesirable consequences, including distortion of the education experience of many children. In addition, the data derived from the testing system do not necessarily provide an accurate or complete picture of the performance of schools and teachers, yet they are relied upon by the Government, the QCA and Ofsted to make important decisions affecting the education system in general and individual schools, teachers and pupils in particular. In short, we consider that the current national testing system is being applied to serve too many purposes. (Paragraph 44)
3. We consider that the over-emphasis on the importance of national tests, which address only a limited part of the National Curriculum and a limited range of children's skills and knowledge has resulted in teachers narrowing their focus. Teachers who feel compelled to focus on that part of the curriculum which is likely to be tested may feel less able to use the full range of their creative abilities in the classroom and find it more difficult to explore the curriculum in an interesting and motivational way. We are concerned that the professional abilities of teachers are, therefore, under-used and that some children may suffer as a result of a limited educational diet focussed on testing. We feel that teacher assessment should form a significant part of a national assessment regime. As the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors states, "A system of external testing alone is not ideal and government's recent policy initiatives in progress checks and diplomas have made some move towards addressing an imbalance between external testing and internal judgements made by those closest to the students, i.e. the teachers, in line with other European countries". (Paragraph 58)
4. We are concerned about the Government's stance on the merits of the current testing system. We remain unconvinced by the Government's assumption that one set of national tests can serve a range of purposes at the national, local, institutional and individual levels. We recommend that the Government sets out clearly the purposes of national testing in order of priority and, for each purpose, gives an accurate assessment of the fitness of the relevant test instrument for that purpose, taking into account the issues of validity and reliability. (Paragraph 61)

5. We recommend further that estimates of statistical measurement error be published alongside test data and statistics derived from those data to allow users of that information to interpret it in a more informed manner. We urge the Government to consider further the evidence of Dr Ken Boston, that multiple test instruments, each serving fewer purposes, would be a more valid approach to national testing. (Paragraph 62)

### Performance targets and tables

6. We endorse the Government's view that much can and should be done to assist children who struggle to meet expected standards. However, we are concerned that the Government's target-based system may actually be contributing to the problems of some children. (Paragraph 81)
7. We believe that the system is now out of balance in the sense that the drive to meet government-set targets has too often become the goal rather than the means to the end of providing the best possible education for all children. This is demonstrated in phenomena such as teaching to the test, narrowing the curriculum and focussing disproportionate resources on borderline pupils. We urge the Government to reconsider its approach in order to create incentives to schools to teach the whole curriculum and acknowledge children's achievements in the full range of the curriculum. The priority should be a system which gives teachers, parents and children accurate information about children's progress. (Paragraph 82)
8. Whilst we consider that Contextualised Value Added scores are potentially a valuable addition to the range of information available to parents and the public at large when making judgments about particular schools, we recommend that the information be presented in a more accessible form, for example graphically, so that it can more easily be interpreted. (Paragraph 98)
9. We are concerned about the underlying assumptions on which Contextualised Value Added scores are based. Whilst it may be true that the sub-groups adjusted for in the Contextualised Value Added measure may statistically perform less well than other sub-groups, we do not consider that it should be accepted that they will always perform less well than others. (Paragraph 99)
10. In addition to these specific recommendations about Contextual Value Added scores, we recommend that the Government rethinks the way it publishes the information presented in the Achievement and Attainment Tables generally. We believe that this information should be presented in a more accessible manner so that parents and others can make a holistic evaluation of a school more easily. In addition, there should be a statement with the Achievement and Attainment Tables that they should not be read in isolation, but in conjunction with the relevant Ofsted report in order to get a more rounded view of a school's performance and a link to the Ofsted site should be provided. (Paragraph 100)
11. The scope of this inquiry does not extend to a thorough examination of the way Ofsted uses data from the performance tables under the new, lighter touch, inspection regime. However, we would be concerned if Ofsted were, in fact, using

test result data as primary inspection evidence in a disproportionate manner because of our view that national test data are evidence only of a very limited amount of the important and wide-ranging work that schools do. (Paragraph 102)

12. We consider that schools are being held accountable for only a very narrow part of their essential activities and we recommend that the Government reforms the performance tables to include a wider range of measures, including those from the recent Ofsted report. (Paragraph 106)

### The consequences of high-stakes uses of testing

13. We received substantial evidence that teaching to the test, to an extent which narrows the curriculum and puts sustained learning at risk, is widespread. Whilst the Government has allocated resources to tackle this phenomenon and improve practice they fail to accept the extent to which teaching to the test exists and the damage it can do to a child's learning. We have no doubt that teachers generally have the very best intentions in terms of providing the best education they can for their pupils. However, the way that many teachers have responded to the Government's approach to accountability has meant that test results are pursued at the expense of a rounded education for children. (Paragraph 130)
14. We believe that teaching to the test and this inappropriate focus on test results may leave young people unprepared for higher education and employment. We recommend that the Government reconsiders the evidence on teaching to the test and that it commissions systematic and wide-ranging research to discover the nature and full extent of the problem. (Paragraph 131)
15. A creative, linked curriculum which addresses the interests, needs and talents of all pupils is the casualty of the narrow focus of teaching which we have identified. Narrowing of the curriculum is problematic in two ways: core subjects are emphasised to the detriment of other, important elements of the broader curriculum; and, for those subjects which are tested in public examinations, the scope and creativity of what is taught is compromised by a focus on the requirements of the test. We are concerned that any efforts the Government makes to introduce more breadth into the school curriculum are likely to be undermined by the enduring imperative for schools, created by the accountability measures, to ensure that their pupils perform well in national tests. (Paragraph 140)
16. We acknowledge the reforms the Government has made to GCSE and A-level examinations. However, the Government must address the concerns expressed by witnesses, among them Dr Ken Boston of the QCA, who see the burden of assessment more in terms of the amount of time and effort spent in preparation for high-stakes tests than in the time taken to sit the tests themselves. This could be achieved by discouraging some of the most inappropriate forms of preparation and reducing the number of occasions on which a child is tested. (Paragraph 149)
17. We are persuaded by the evidence that it is entirely possible to improve test scores through mechanisms such as teaching to the test, narrowing the curriculum and concentrating effort and resources on borderline students. It follows that this

apparent improvement may not always be evidence of an underlying enhancement of learning and understanding in pupils. (Paragraph 161)

18. We consider that the measurement of standards across the full curriculum is virtually impossible under the current testing regime because national tests measure only a small sample of pupils' achievements; and because teaching to the test means that pupils may not retain, or may not even possess in the first place, the skills which are supposedly evidenced by their test results. (Paragraph 162)
19. It is not possible for us to come to a definitive view on grade inflation in the context of such a wide-ranging inquiry. However, it seems clear to us from the evidence that we have received that the Government has not engaged with the complexity of the technical arguments about grade inflation and standards over time. We recommend that the Government addresses these issues head-on, starting with a mandate to the QCA or the proposed new regulator to undertake a full review of assessment standards. (Paragraph 171)
20. Whilst we do not doubt the Government's intentions when it states that "The National Curriculum sets out a clear, full and statutory entitlement to learning for all pupils, irrespective of background or ability", we are persuaded that in practice many children have not received their entitlement and many witnesses believe that this is due to the demands of national testing. (Paragraph 183)
21. We are persuaded that the current system of national tests should be reformed in order to decouple the multiple purposes of measuring pupil attainment, school and teacher accountability and national monitoring. The negative impacts of national testing arise more from the targets that schools are expected to achieve and schools' responses to them than from the tests themselves. (Paragraph 184)
22. School accountability should be separated from this system of pupil testing, and we recommend that the Government consult widely on methods of assuring school accountability which do not impact on the right of children to a balanced education. (Paragraph 185)
23. We recommend that the purpose of national monitoring of the education system, particularly for policy formation, is best served by sample testing to measure standards over time and that cohort testing is neither appropriate nor, in our view, desirable for this purpose. We recommend further that, in the interests of public confidence, such sample testing should be carried out by a body at arms length from the Government and suggest that it is a task either for the new regulator or a body answerable to it. (Paragraph 186)

### Single-level tests

24. Our predecessors warned the Government about bringing in new tests with undue haste. We recommend that the Government allows sufficient time for a full pilot of the new single-level tests and ensures that any issues and problems arising out of that pilot are fully addressed before any formal roll-out of the new regime to schools. (Paragraph 198)

25. *Making Good Progress* characterises single-level tests as integral to personalised learning and Assessment for Learning yet also the means by which to generate summative data. We agree with the National Foundation for Educational Research that this single assessment instrument cannot validly perform these functions simultaneously and, if it is attempted, there is a danger that the single-level tests will work for neither purpose. The single-level tests may be useful, however, if their purpose is carefully defined and the tests are developed to ensure they are valid and reliable specifically for those purposes. (Paragraph 210)
26. We recommend that, if single-level tests are introduced, they are used for summative purposes only and that Assessment for Learning and personalised learning are supported separately by enhanced professional development for teachers, backed up with a centralised bank of formative and diagnostic assessment materials on which teachers can draw as necessary on a regular basis. (Paragraph 211)
27. Single-level tests may have some positive effects and we certainly approve of the Government's new emphasis on the personalised approach. However, the Government has structured the single-level testing system in such a way as to risk a transposition of existing, systemic problems into the new arrangements. Without structural modification, we foresee that the existing problems—including teaching to the test, narrowing of the taught curriculum and the focus on borderline candidates to the detriment of others—will continue under the single-level test regime. (Paragraph 215)
28. We believe that true personalised learning is incompatible with a high-stakes single-level test which focuses on academic learning and does not assess a range of other skills which children might possess. Children who struggle with the core subjects may receive more targeted assistance in those subjects. However, if this means that children who are struggling with core subjects get less opportunity to access the wider curriculum, they risk being put off learning at an early age. We call upon the Government to invest in ways to help and, if necessary, train teachers to improve the basic skills of struggling pupils while enhancing their enjoyment of learning and guaranteeing their access to a broad curriculum. (Paragraph 216)
29. We are concerned about the “one-way ratchet” on the attainment of test levels under the single-level testing regime and we find persuasive the evidence that this may lead to an apparent, but artificial, improvement in performance standards. We recommend that the Government consider further whether it is in children's best interests that they may be certified to have achieved a level of knowledge and understanding which they do not, in truth, possess. We suspect that this may lead to further disillusionment and children perceiving themselves as ‘failures’. (Paragraph 217)
30. We recommend that the Government urgently rethinks its decision to use progression targets, based on pupils' achievement in single-level tests, for the purposes of school accountability. If such high-stakes accountability measures are combined with more frequent testing of children, the negative effect on children's education experiences promises to be greater than it is at present. We urge the Government to listen to the QCA, which has already warned of the dangers of

saddling the single-level tests with the same range of purposes which the Key Stage tests demonstrably cannot bear. (Paragraph 218)

## Diplomas

31. We welcome the Government's stated intentions that both the vocational and the general elements of Diplomas should be reflected in the methods of assessment used. We caution the Government against any haste in shifting this delicate balance in future until the full implications of such a shift have been understood. (Paragraph 225)
32. Schools and colleges, who are required to work in collaboration with each other to provide a rounded education for Diploma students, cannot be expected to do so effectively when the accountability regime places them in direct competition with each other. We welcome the introduction of the Diploma and recognise the determination of all concerned to make it work, but we have some concerns about how it will work in a competitive environment. (Paragraph 233)
33. Given its complexity, the Diploma must, in our view, be given an opportunity to settle into its operational phase without undue intervention from the Government. We consider that this is an area best left to the proposed new regulator who we hope will approach Diplomas with a light touch and at a strategic level in the first few years as the initial problems are ironed out over time. (Paragraph 234)
34. The whole education sector would welcome greater clarity on the future direction of Diplomas. We urge the Government to make clear what its intentions are for the future of Diplomas and other 14–19 qualifications and whether it is, in fact, heading towards one, overarching framework for all 14–19 qualifications as Mike Tomlinson's Working Group on 14–19 Reform proposed in 2004. (Paragraph 235)

## Regulation and development: the new arrangements

35. We welcome the creation of a development agency and separate, independent regulator on the logical grounds that it is right that development and regulation should be the responsibility of two separate organisations. That assessment standards will now be overseen by a regulator demonstrably free from government control and responsible to Parliament through the Children, Schools and Families Committee is a positive step. (Paragraph 249)
36. However, the Government has failed to address the issue of the standards themselves. In the context of the current testing system, with its ever-changing curriculum and endless test reforms, no regulator, however independent, can assure assessment standards as they are not capable of accurate measurement using the data available. Until the Government allows for standardised sample testing for monitoring purposes, the regulator will be left without the tools required to fulfil its primary function. (Paragraph 250)

## Appendix 2: *National Curriculum:* Conclusions and Recommendations

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### Standpoints on the National Curriculum

1. The evidence that we received revealed a consensus that the nature and particularly the management of the National Curriculum is in urgent need of significant reform. (Paragraph 43)

### Limiting the reach of the National Curriculum

2. We would like to see the National Curriculum underpinned by the principle that it should seek to prescribe as little as possible and by the principle of subsidiarity, with decisions made at the lowest appropriate level. (Paragraph 53)
3. In order to keep the amount of prescription through the National Curriculum to an absolute minimum we recommend that a cap is placed on the proportion of teaching time that it accounts for. Our view is that it should be less than half of teaching time. (Paragraph 56)
4. Parents should be provided with a copy of the National Curriculum for their child's Key Stage so that they might be better informed of the curriculum that their child should experience. (Paragraph 58)

### Recent and ongoing reform of the primary and secondary curriculum

5. The very welcome Cambridge Primary Review report on the primary curriculum contains extensive analysis of the problems but has not enough to say about what might be done in practice to address them. The Rose Review and the Cambridge Review both recognise that the primary curriculum is overly full, but neither offers a practical basis that appeals to us for reducing the load. As we have indicated, we would see greater merit in stipulating a basic entitlement for literacy and numeracy and offering general guidelines on breadth and balance to be interpreted by schools and teachers themselves. (Paragraph 59)
6. In our view, the Programmes of Study for the new secondary curriculum are overly complex and lack clear and concise statements on what should be taught. We believe that there is much to be learned from other countries in this regard. (Paragraph 61)

### The Early Years—getting the entitlement right

7. We welcome the Department's decision to review two of the communication, language and literacy Early Learning Goals within the Early Years Foundation Stage. Nevertheless, we draw the Department's attention to the near universal support for the reconsideration of the Early Learning Goals directly concerned with reading, writing and punctuation. (Paragraph 65)



8. We recommend that the Early Learning Goals directly concerned with reading, writing and punctuation be removed from the Early Years Foundation Stage pending the review of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2010. (Paragraph 66)
9. We recommend that, through its review of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2010, the Department takes the opportunity to evaluate whether the statutory framework as set out in *Setting the Standards for Learning and Development and Care for Children from Birth to Five* is too prescriptive and too detailed. (Paragraph 67)
10. We recommend that the Rose Review does not pursue its interim recommendation that entry into reception class in the September immediately following a child's fourth birthday should become the norm. (Paragraph 69)

### Extending Academies' freedoms

11. We recommend that the freedoms that Academies enjoy in relation to the National Curriculum be immediately extended to all maintained schools. (Paragraph 73)
12. We note that the roll-out of extended schools will offer all maintained schools more time in the school day in which to deliver the curriculum. In the meantime, no reason has been brought to our attention for the discrepancy between different categories of schools in terms of the processes that they must follow if they wish to extend the school day. We believe that the greater freedom that Foundation and Voluntary-Aided schools and Academies enjoy in relation to changing the length of the school day should be immediately granted to all maintained schools. This would offer all maintained schools maximum scope to shape their delivery of the National Curriculum around the needs of their pupils. (Paragraph 75)

### Promoting local ownership of the National Curriculum

13. Further to our *Testing and Assessment* Report we again draw the Department's attention to concerns that a system of Single Level Tests linked to targets, and potentially to funding, could further narrow the curriculum as experienced by all or some pupils. (Paragraph 79)
14. The idea that there is one best way to teach is not supported by the research evidence and so should not be the basis for the delivery of the National Curriculum. (Paragraph 85)
15. The Department must not place pressure on schools to follow certain sets of non-statutory guidance, such as it has done in the case of *Letters and Sounds*. We recommend that the Department send a much stronger message to Ofsted, local authorities, school improvement partners and schools as to the non-statutory nature of National Strategies guidance. (Paragraph 86)

### Central control and teacher professionalism

16. We urge the Department to cease presenting the National Strategies guidance as a prop for the teaching profession and to adopt a more positive understanding of how

schools and teachers might be empowered in relation to the National Curriculum. (Paragraph 89)

### **Supporting teachers as researchers and reflective practitioners**

17. We recommend that the Department diverts resources away from the production of guidance to the funding and dissemination of research findings to teachers in the spirit of informing local professional decision-making. (Paragraph 91)
18. We recommend that the Department and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority develop facilities to disseminate research about teaching and support teachers in sharing effective practice. (Paragraph 93)

### **Supporting local ownership of the National Curriculum**

19. We recommend that both the theory and practice of curriculum design is given a much higher profile within the standards for Qualified Teacher Status. (Paragraph 97)
20. We expect the Department to set out how its role and that of its relevant agencies will change in relation to the National Curriculum over the next five to ten years in order to support the move to a much less prescriptive curriculum and less centrally-directed approach to its delivery. (Paragraph 101)

### **Curriculum coherence**

21. Alongside the extent of central control over the curriculum, our other main concern to emerge from our inquiry was the poor level of continuity and coherence in the current National Curriculum—and across the National Curriculum, Early Years Foundation Stage and 14–19 arrangements. (Paragraph 102)

### **Transforming curriculum reform**

22. Despite the Department's emphasis on pupil voice in schools, nowhere in the evidence submitted to us did we get a sense that the Department particularly concerns itself with how the National Curriculum is experienced by children and young people. If it had, we suggest, it would have tackled the disjunction that children and young people face in their learning as they move from one phase of education to the next. While this matter forms a key strand of the ongoing Rose Review of the primary curriculum, we are not convinced that the Rose Review alone will be able to tackle this enduring problem with the National Curriculum. (Paragraph 104)
23. We recommend that the Department's highest priority be to review the Early Years Foundation Stage, the National Curriculum and 14–19 arrangements as a whole in order to establish a coherent national framework that offers children and young people a seamless journey through their education from 0 to 19. (Paragraph 105)

24. In order to reduce the number of ad hoc changes made to the National Curriculum we recommend that the Department put in place a cycle, of around five years, for curriculum review and reform and avoid initiating additional change outside that cycle. Reviews should scrutinise the Early Years Foundation Stage, National Curriculum and 14–19 arrangements as a continuum, not as discrete ‘chunks’. (Paragraph 106)
25. If the National Curriculum is to be managed more proactively and strategically it is essential that the agency with main responsibility for the development of the National Curriculum is truly independent from the Department and carries authority. (Paragraph 107)
26. We recommend that, as with the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator, the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency is made independent of Ministers and instead required to report to Parliament through the Select Committee. (Paragraph 109)
27. The involvement of this Committee, albeit in an advisory role, in holding pre-appointment hearings with the nominee for the post of Chair of the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency will play an important part in maintaining the independence of the Agency from the Government. (Paragraph 110)

### Establishing an overarching structure for learning 0–19

28. We strongly recommend that an overarching statement of aims for the National Curriculum—encompassing the Early Years Foundation Stage, National Curriculum and 14–19 learners—be introduced, properly embedded in the content of the National Curriculum, in order to provide it with a stronger sense of purpose, continuity and coherence. (Paragraph 112)
29. In addition, we recommend that a statement of provision for learners from 0 to 19 is introduced, setting out the fundamental knowledge and skills that young people should have acquired at the end of compulsory education. (Paragraph 113)
30. We recommend that the Early Years Foundation Stage is brought within the National Curriculum—and run through the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority rather than, as at present, the Department. (Paragraph 114)
31. Bringing 14–19 provision under a shared set of aims for the National Curriculum would have been easier under the Tomlinson proposals for the Diploma. Our predecessor Committee, the Education and Skills Committee, voiced its opinion on the Tomlinson proposals in its 2007 Report *14–19 Diplomas*. We share the preference, outlined then, for an overarching diploma that replaced all other qualifications for learners aged 14 to 19. (Paragraph 115)
32. We suggest that the review and reform of the Early Years Foundation Stage, National Curriculum and 14–19 provision as a continuum and the bringing together of these frameworks underneath an overarching statement of aims represent necessary first steps to improving the continuity and coherence of the learning opportunities presented to children and young people. These changes must be accompanied by

improved communication and co-ordination between teachers and practitioners across the different phases of education. (Paragraph 116)

## Appendix 3: *School Accountability:* Conclusions and Recommendations

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1. We are satisfied that schools should be held publicly accountable for their performance as providers of an important public service. We concur with the views expressed in evidence to us that the two major consequences of the accountability system should be school improvement and improvement in broader outcomes for children and young people, including well-being. (Paragraph 15)
2. The New Relationship with Schools policy was a laudable attempt by the Government to simplify the school accountability system, particularly in relation to inspection. However, the Government has continued to subject schools to a bewildering array of new initiatives and this has in many ways negated the good work started in New Relationship with Schools. (Paragraph 24)
3. We are concerned that the Government's 21st Century Schools White Paper signals even greater complexity in an already overly complex system of school accountability and improvement initiatives. There is a real danger that schools may become overwhelmed by the intricacies of the proposed reforms and that School Improvement Partners and local authorities may not have sufficient time or resources to mediate effectively between schools and the myriad providers of school improvement support. (Paragraph 36)

### **Schools' Self-Evaluation, Self-Improvement Partners and Local Authorities**

4. We note that Ofsted is actively considering ways of involving governing bodies more in the inspection process, particularly where inspections are conducted without notice. However, it would have been preferable had the 2009 inspection framework been introduced following a satisfactory resolution of this issue. We recommend that Ofsted bring forward at the earliest opportunity firm proposals setting out how governing bodies will be appropriately involved in all inspections. (Paragraph 45)
5. We urge the Government to reconsider the proposals to place additional statutory duties on governors. We support the principle of better training for governors, but we recommend that the Government set out a detailed strategy for encouraging governors to take up training opportunities without training requirements becoming a barrier to recruitment. (Paragraph 47)
6. We are persuaded that self-evaluation—as an iterative, reflexive and continuous process, embedded in the culture of a school—is a highly effective means for a school to consolidate success and secure improvement across the full range of its activities. It is applicable, not just to its academic performance, but across the full range of a school's influence over the well-being of the children who learn there and the community outside. (Paragraph 53)
7. We believe that Ofsted should do more to encourage schools to be creative and produce evidence of the self-evaluation process which works for them and speaks to

the true culture and ethos of their own school. Ofsted should ensure that its own inspection processes are flexible enough to accommodate and give appropriate weight to alternative forms of evidence of self-evaluation. (Paragraph 59)

8. We are attracted to a model of accountability which encourages and supports schools towards a meaningful, continuous self-evaluation process, evidenced in a form which the school considers most appropriate and verified through inspection. We are persuaded that true self-evaluation is at the heart of what a good school does. For a school which is performing at a good level, embedding processes which encourage continuous self-improvement are likely to be of far more practical benefit than an inspection every few years. The latter is necessary mainly as a check to see that a school is performing at the appropriate level. Inspection should be a positive experience, reinforcing good practice and fostering dialogue with schools in relation to areas where further improvement can be made. The Government and Ofsted should endeavour to do more to help schools which have not yet come to terms with the concept of self-evaluation in its fullest sense. (Paragraph 63)
9. We welcome the fact that the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services is being asked to review its training and accreditation procedures to support School Improvement Partners in their new role. (Paragraph 76)
10. The Government must take care that it does not exacerbate the existing problems with recruitment of School Improvement Partners by increasing the training burden and introducing requirements that existing School Improvement Partners be re-accredited and that they all carry an ongoing licence to practice. (Paragraph 77)
11. We recommend that the Government produce clear plans to show how and from where enough School Improvement Partners (SIPs) with appropriate skills and experience will be recruited with sufficient time to dedicate to the expanded remit for SIPs which is proposed in the Government's White Paper. (Paragraph 84)
12. We agree with the Audit Commission that local authorities should be more involved with monitoring, supporting and, where necessary, intervening in school budgets and finance. It is indefensible that the expenditure of such vast sums should attract so little scrutiny. Central government should make clear that schools must make a proper accounting of their expenditure to local authorities; and that local authorities should be as engaged with the monitoring of finance as they are expected to be with the monitoring of performance and standards. We do not advocate an erosion of schools' autonomy, but we consider it important that the correct level of financial support is available to them in order to derive maximum value for money from the schools budget. (Paragraph 91)
13. We approve of the collaborative approach to school improvement taken by some local authorities; and we consider that partnership working between local authorities and all schools in the local area is a valuable means of providing support and spreading best practice. We urge central and local government to work together to ensure a more consistent approach across local authorities in this regard. (Paragraph 96)

14. We urge the Government to recognise the good work done in the local authorities which demonstrate a systematic, collaborative approach towards the identification of schools in need of improvement and the provision of support in raising their standards of performance. We recommend that the Government should be sparing in the use of its extended statutory powers to intervene in relation to school improvement. We consider that these powers should be used only in cases where the relevant local authority has failed in its duty to secure school improvement. They should not be used as a mechanism for central government to increase its control over the way in which schools are managed. (Paragraph 102)

### The Inspectorate

15. In general terms, we support the approach to inspection set out in the 2009 inspection framework. We consider that a frequency of inspection in proportion to a school's current levels of performance is sensible, although some concerns remain about identification of schools where there is an unexpected slide in performance. We consider that a short notice period for inspection is sensible, but schools must be given sufficient time to collate all the necessary evidence and ensure attendance of key personnel. Without-notice inspection is appropriate where there are particular concerns about performance, and safeguarding in particular, but this approach should not be used without good reason. (Paragraph 111)
16. If visits to schools are to be as short as two days—and bearing in mind that some of those days will be taken up by preliminaries rather than by inspection itself—inspectors will need to be highly trained and well qualified if they are to make an accurate evaluation of school provision (Paragraph 112)
17. We remind Ofsted of the need for transparency and publicity for the way in which inspection data are combined to form final judgments on schools. (Paragraph 113)
18. We support the principle of increased emphasis on the views of pupils and parents, but we have some reservations about the level of responses to questionnaires, particularly for schools with a challenging intake. We urge Ofsted to make transparent the approach that inspectors will take when forming judgements on schools where there has been a low level of response to questionnaires from parents; and it should not rule out the possibility of meetings with parents. (Paragraph 114)
19. We are persuaded of the need for an inspectorate, independent of government, which can assure the quality of provision in individual schools, as well as producing more general reports on aspects of the education system at a national level. We consider that the latter are particularly important, not least because they should provide a sound evidential basis for policy-making by the Government. (Paragraph 121)
20. Both Ofsted and the Government should be alert to any sign that the growth of Ofsted's responsibilities is causing it to become an unwieldy and unco-ordinated body. (Paragraph 122)

21. We believe that Ofsted should aspire to have HMIs lead all inspections. Schools causing concern should always be inspected by a team headed by an HMI. (Paragraph 127)
22. We note that Ofsted has a duty to encourage improvement in schools. However, we do not accept that Ofsted necessarily has an active role to play in school improvement. It is Ofsted's role to evaluate a school's performance across its many areas of responsibility and to identify issues which need to be addressed so that a school can be set on the path to improvement. Ofsted has neither the time nor resources to be an active participant in the improvement process which takes place following inspection, aside from the occasional monitoring visit to verify progress. (Paragraph 137)
23. We recommend that Ofsted's role in school improvement be clarified so that the lines of responsibility are made clear to all those involved in the school system. Ofsted's function is a vital one: it is, in the purest sense, to hold schools to account for their performance. It is for others—schools themselves, assisted by School Improvement Partners, local authorities and other providers of support—to do the work to secure actual improvement in performance. The Chief Inspector already has a wide and important remit: she should feel no compulsion to make it wider. (Paragraph 138)
24. We recommend a review of the data underlying comparator measures or sets of measures to ensure that they accurately reflect the range of factors that can impact on school performance. (Paragraph 150)
25. We consider that the quality of school provision beyond the teaching of academic subjects is extremely important and that Ofsted has a duty to reflect this in a fair and balanced manner in its inspection reports. (Paragraph 157)
26. We urge Ofsted to rebalance its inspection framework in two ways, in order to reflect better the true essence of the school. First, when evaluating academic attainment, we recommend that Ofsted gives less evidential weight given to test results and derivative measures and gives more weight to the quality of teaching and learning observed by inspectors in the classroom. Second, when evaluating a school's performance in terms of pupil well-being and other non-academic areas, we recommend that Ofsted should move beyond the search for quantitative measures of performance and that it should focus more effort on developing qualitative measures which capture a broader range of a school's activity. (Paragraph 161)

### **Achievement and Attainment Tables and the School Report Card**

27. Performance data have been a part of the educational landscape in England for some years. Like it or not, they are a feature of the school accountability system and we recognise the manifest difficulties in retreating from that position, even if a watchful eye should be kept on the consequences of the abandonment of performance tables linked to test results in other parts of the United Kingdom. If such data is to be collected, much can be done to mitigate the more unfortunate aspects of the publication. We take a pragmatic view and believe that the focus of debate should



move towards a more fruitful discussion of the types of data and information collected and the method of presentation. (Paragraph 167)

28. The Achievement and Attainment Tables present a very narrow view of school performance and there are inherent methodological and statistical problems with the way they are constructed. For instance, they are likely to favour independent and selective schools, which have a lower intake of deprived children or of children with Special Educational Needs. It is unsurprising, therefore, if such schools consistently top the academic league tables. Yet most of those who may wish to use the Tables, particularly parents, remain unaware of the very serious defects associated with them and will interpret the data presented without taking account of their inherent flaws. As a result, many schools feel so constrained by the fear of failure according to the narrow criteria of the Tables that they resort to measures such as teaching to the test, narrowing the curriculum, an inappropriate focusing of resources on borderline candidates, and encouraging pupils towards 'easier' qualifications, all in an effort to maximise their performance data. There is an urgent need for the Government to move away from these damaging Achievement and Attainment Tables and towards a system which gives a full and rounded account of a school's provision. (Paragraph 176)
29. We urge the Government to work closely with Ofsted in order to produce a model of the school report card appropriate for use by the inspectorate. However, if in Ofsted's view the school report card ultimately takes a form which is unsuitable for the purpose of risk assessment, as an independent regulator, Ofsted should not feel compelled to adopt the school report card as a replacement for its interim assessment. (Paragraph 184)
30. We welcome in principle the introduction of the school report card as a rationalisation of current accountability mechanisms and an attempt at providing a broader evidence base for assessing schools' performance. However, the Government must take care in developing its proposals that it tailors the school report card to the particular needs of the English schools system. Lessons can be learned from international practices and the case of the New York school report card will be particularly relevant; but the Government should not assume that what works elsewhere will necessarily work in the English system. (Paragraph 196)
31. Schools should be strongly incentivised by the accountability system to take on challenging pupils and work hard to raise their levels of attainment. To this end, we support the proposals to introduce credits on the school report card for narrowing the gaps in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. However, we strongly caution the Government against the introduction of any penalties for increasing gaps in achievement. If the Government were to attach such penalties, it is likely that schools would seek to deny school places to challenging pupils in order to avoid the risk of a lower school report card score. They might also create incentives for schools not to push gifted and talented students to reach really high levels of achievement. (Paragraph 206)
32. We have been struck by the weight of evidence we have received which argues against an overall score on the school report card. It is true that Ofsted comes to an

overall judgement on a four point scale, but this judgement is meant to be the result of a very extensive analysis of a school's provision across the board, relying on quantitative and qualitative evidence and first-hand experience of the school at work. A school report card is not, and in our view never can be, a full account of a school's performance, yet the inclusion of an overall score suggests that it is. (Paragraph 211)

33. The range of discrete measures proposed for inclusion in the school report card certainly present a broader picture of a school than the current Achievement and Attainment Tables; but they cannot be the basis for a definitive judgement of overall performance in the same way as we are entitled to expect an Ofsted judgement to be. On balance, we think that parents and others should be able to decide for themselves those measures of performance most important to them. We approve of the proposal both to grade and rate performance in each category on the school report card, but we are not persuaded of the appropriateness of and need for an overall score. (Paragraph 212)
34. We recommend that the Government guards against serial changes to reporting criteria for the school report card once it is introduced nationally. The ability to track school performance on a range of issues over time is potentially a valuable feature of the reformed system, but this will not be possible if the reporting criteria are in a constant state of flux. (Paragraph 216)
35. There is potential for substantial confusion to be introduced if the reasons for differences between scores on the school report card and Ofsted judgements are not clear, leading to a perception of incoherence in the accountability system. This would be unfortunate, as the success of any accountability system depends on the extent to which users have confidence in it. We recommend that DCSF and Ofsted work together to find a way to eradicate, or at least minimise the impact of, this problem. If the Government accepts our recommendation not to include an overall score in the school report card, the potential for conflicting accounts of school performance would be greatly reduced. (Paragraph 217)
36. The Government must address the methodological problems inherent in basing important indicators on survey evidence. It is unacceptable that schools with the most challenging intakes might suffer skewed performance scores because of a low response rate to surveys for the purposes of the school report card. (Paragraph 222)
37. Academic research in the field of school effectiveness is lacking in the field of pupil well-being and wider outcomes beyond assessment results. In the absence of robust, independent research evidence, the Government should exercise great caution in pursuing its otherwise laudable aim of widening the accountability system beyond simple test scores. (Paragraph 223)
38. We do not believe that the indicators based on parent and pupil surveys, together with data on attendance, exclusions, the amount of sport provided and the uptake of school lunches, provide a balanced picture of a school's performance. In the absence of a set of performance indicators which are able to provide a fully rounded and accurate picture of how well a school is supporting and enhancing the well-being and outcomes of its pupils, the school report card should not purport to give a balanced

view of a school's overall performance in this or any other area. The Government should make clear on the face of the school report card that its contents should only be considered as a partial picture of the work of a school. This is not to say that we do not consider the inclusion of well-being indicators to be a welcome development: we are merely concerned that parents and others should understand the limits of the information which is presented to them on the school report card. (Paragraph 224)

39. We are pleased that the Government is now moving away from the Achievement and Attainment Tables based on a narrow set of measures of academic achievement derived from test results. We believe that the move towards the broader evidence base proposed for the school report card is a step in the right direction. However, we reiterate our warning to the Government that it should not make claims for the school report card which do not stand up to scrutiny. It will never constitute a definitive view of a school's performance but it might, if properly constructed, be a useful tool in assessing a broader range of aspects of a school's performance than is possible at present. (Paragraph 225)
40. At the start of the pilot study of the school report card, it is too early for us to make detailed recommendations about its precise contents. At this stage, we simply urge the Government to take account of the concerns raised by witnesses to this inquiry. There is still much work to be done in developing the school report card into a workable format. (Paragraph 226)

### **Conclusion: complexity, consistency and coercion**

41. The complexity of the school accountability and improvement system in England is creating a barrier to genuine school improvement based on the needs of individual schools and their pupils. We support the message in the 21st Century Schools White Paper, that schools should be empowered to take charge of their own improvement processes. However, the Government's continuing tendency to impose serial policy initiatives on schools belies this message and the relentless pace of reform has taken its toll on schools and their capacity to deliver a balanced education to their pupils. We urge the Government to refrain from introducing frequent reforms and allow schools a period of consolidation. (Paragraph 239)
42. Inconsistencies in the approach to school accountability and improvement and inconsistencies in the judgments which are made in different parts of the accountability system are both confusing and damaging. Confusion undermines the credibility of the accountability system and schools which find themselves pulled in different directions are unlikely to be able to give their full attention to the fundamental task of providing their pupils with a broad and balanced education. (Paragraph 249)
43. We recommend that the Government revisits the proposals for reform of the school accountability and improvement system set out in the 21st Century Schools White Paper with a view to giving more substance to its claims that schools are responsible for their own improvement. We have received strong evidence that schools feel coerced and constrained by the outcomes of Ofsted inspection and programmes set up by central government, such as National Challenge. We have consistently noted

the adverse effects that targets have had on the education of children and young people. The Government should seek means of delivering support and challenge to schools without what many witnesses perceived as a harmful ‘naming and shaming’ approach endemic in the current system. (Paragraph 260)

44. The problem with the Government’s assessment of the accountability system is that it implies that schools welcome the opportunity to take “ownership of their own improvement” but then provides the perfect example of how they have been prevented from doing just that. The “flexibility” of the system, allowing a constant shift in priorities by central government, is precisely the reason why schools are struggling to engage with the accountability regime and myriad school improvement mechanisms. The Government refers to the flexibility of the accountability system as if this is an inherent benefit. The opposite is true. Schools and, indeed, local authorities are in sore need of a period of stability so that they can regroup, take the necessary time to identify where their priorities lie and then work, with appropriate support, to secure the necessary improvements. (Paragraph 262)
45. It is time for the Government to allow schools to refocus their efforts on what matters: children. For too long, schools have struggled to cope with changing priorities, constant waves of new initiatives from central government, and the stresses and distortions caused by performance tables and targets. (Paragraph 265)
46. The Government should place more faith in the professionalism of teachers and should support them with a simplified accountability and improvement system which challenges and encourages good practice rather than stigmatising and undermining those who are struggling. In doing so, it is vital for effective accountability that the independence of HM Inspectorate be safeguarded and maintained at all times. We believe that the Government should revisit the plans set out in its 21st Century Schools White Paper and simplify considerably the accountability framework and improvement strategies it proposes. (Paragraph 266)

## Appendix 4: *Training of Teachers:* Conclusions and Recommendations

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### Recruiting the best to teaching

1. It is essential that there is in place a robust mechanism for ensuring that entrants to the teaching profession have a sound grasp of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. It is clear that the Training and Development Agency's skills tests are not at present providing a sufficiently high hurdle in this regard. We recommend that the tests be made an entry requirement for initial teacher training, rather than an exit requirement, with a maximum of just two attempts at each test permitted. (Paragraph 32)
2. Having examined the level of entry qualifications that trainees bring to both under- and post-graduate initial teacher training programmes, we are clear that the bar must be raised across the board. It is of great concern to us that those with no A-levels, or those with just a pass degree can gain entry to the teaching profession. (Paragraph 41)
3. The entry qualifications for undergraduate programmes for those wanting to train to be secondary teachers are particularly low. We recommend that funding for these programmes be discontinued. (Paragraph 42)
4. The entry requirements for undergraduate programmes for those wanting to train to be primary teachers should be raised. These programmes should be designed so that there is parallel development in subject and initial teacher training components. They should provide rigorous preparation in both subject knowledge and education. (Paragraph 43)
5. The entry qualifications that postgraduate trainees bring to initial teacher training programmes must be improved—substantially so in some subject areas. We recognise that continuing recruitment difficulties may prevent the Department and the Training and Development Agency from simply raising entry requirements overnight. Nonetheless, we would like to see access to postgraduate initial teacher training programmes restricted to those with at least a lower-second degree as soon as possible. The Department must take concerted action to make a career in teaching a much more attractive option for high-achieving graduates. This should be with a view to moving, in time, to higher entry requirements still—to an upper-second degree or above. (Paragraph 44)
6. We recommend that the Department and the Training and Development Agency for Schools explore the potential for increasing the number of school-centred initial teacher training places. (Paragraph 47)
7. Employment-based initial teacher training is to be welcomed as a means of enabling high calibre career changers to join the teaching profession. However, any significant expansion of employment-based initial teacher training should take place only once Ofsted is confident of the general quality of these programmes. (Paragraph 49)

8. At present, school-centred and employment-based initial teacher training accounts for 15% of training places. We believe that expanding the proportion of these training places to around 30% should be feasible in the medium term, taking into account the issue of capacity within the schools system to offer high quality training. (Paragraph 50)
9. Consideration should be given to how employment-based trainees could improve their understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of teaching practice. We recommend that all employment-based trainees be entitled to complete a Professional/Postgraduate Certificate in Education as part of their initial training. (Paragraph 53)

### Equipping teachers with high quality initial training

10. We are concerned that the extent of centrally-prescribed requirements for initial teacher training provision, and the way in which Ofsted assesses compliance with them, are having a deadening effect on initial teacher training. We call on the Department and the Training and Development Agency to take urgent steps to minimise the regulatory burden on providers and to encourage genuine local autonomy to respond to wider policy change. (Paragraph 61)
11. We recommend that Ofsted conducts regular survey inspections of initial teacher training provision in specific subject areas as a means of supporting the development of subject pedagogies and helping to spread good practice. This should be combined with wider research on effective subject pedagogies—to inform initial teacher training as well as teachers' early career and on-going professional development. (Paragraph 63)
12. We recommend that schools be required to participate in a training partnership if they are to receive the top grade in their Ofsted inspections. Such a requirement obviously places a much stronger onus on higher education institution partners to be fully responsive to the needs of the schools that they work with if partnerships are to be secured over the longer-term. Equally, if schools are to be required to participate in an initial teacher training partnership then they should receive a more appropriate share of the resources than they do at present. (Paragraph 71)
13. Teaching needs to be a learning profession. A vital aspect of this is teachers reflecting on their own practice and supporting colleagues. In particular, good quality mentoring for trainee teachers, and newly qualified teachers, should be of the highest priority. (Paragraph 74)
14. We recommend that those who mentor trainees on school placement should have at least three years' teaching experience and should have completed specific mentor training. Involvement in mentoring should be made a more explicit criterion with regard to teachers' career progression. (Paragraph 75)
15. We recommend that the Department take forward a 'new blood scheme' for initial teacher training. This should fund lectureships and doctoral places with a view to maintaining the expertise of the teacher training workforce. (Paragraph 81)

16. Higher education institutions are important in bringing rigour and status to initial teacher training. With this in mind we were disappointed that their research-active staff do not make a greater contribution to training provision. We recommend that the Training and Development Agency and Ofsted pay greater attention to this aspect of provision when accrediting and inspecting initial teacher training providers. Providers' arrangements for developing the research skills and profile of other teacher training staff should also be taken into consideration. (Paragraph 82)
17. There is a need to raise the status of school teachers who are involved in delivering initial teacher training in schools (including but not limited to mentoring). We recommend that a nationally recognised 'clinical practitioner' grade is introduced. These staff should have a formal attachment to a higher education institution. (Paragraph 83)

### Early career teachers

18. We are concerned that the Training and Development Agency's efforts to improve the transition of trainees from their initial training to their induction year do not in themselves address the 'front-loaded' nature of teacher training. We would like to see changes that embed a perception of newly qualified teachers as 'novice' teachers with much learning still to complete, and who require close supervision by teaching colleagues who are experienced mentors. (Paragraph 95)
19. To signal the importance of the induction process we recommend that trainees should remain provisionally registered with the General Teaching Council for England until they have successfully completed their induction year, only then gaining full registration to teach. (Paragraph 99)
20. We strongly support the principle of establishing teaching as a masters-level profession, as well as the notion that newly qualified teachers should have the space to continue their training and development. (Paragraph 111)
21. If it is to be credible and worthwhile the Masters in Teaching and Learning must be a demanding qualification that has a demonstrable impact on a teacher's effectiveness—and not allowed to become an easy milestone for career progression. (Paragraph 112)
22. The introduction of the Masters in Teaching and Learning must not restrict the access that newly qualified and early career teachers have to other qualifications at masters level or above. (Paragraph 113)
23. While we do not believe that the Masters in Teaching and Learning should be compulsory, we would like to see introduced much stronger incentives for teachers to complete a relevant qualification at masters level or above. We recommend that this is achieved by putting in place a single national framework for teachers' professional development, through which professional standards are linked to specific qualification requirements/accredited training and to salary progression. (Paragraph 114)

## Professional development

24. We believe that the specification of a minimum level of spending on professional development (as a percentage of the school's overall budget) would support wider efforts to embed a culture of professional development within the schools workforce. We recommend that such ring-fencing of funds is put in place at the earliest opportunity. (Paragraph 124)
25. We are very concerned that an unintended consequence of the 'rarely cover' policy will be to restrict teachers' access to professional development. The Department should monitor the impact of the policy in this regard. (Paragraph 125)
26. While we welcome the Training and Development Agency's efforts to improve the standard of professional development provision, particularly non-award bearing provision, through its database of provision we are not convinced that this will offer a sufficient block on ineffective provision—characterised as “death by PowerPoint” by one of our witnesses. (Paragraph 133)
27. We believe that members of the teaching profession in England should be required to hold a licence to practise, and to renew that licence on a regular basis. (Paragraph 142)
28. It is essential that the licence to practise is accompanied by an appropriately resourced, generous and guaranteed entitlement to professional development for teachers. (Paragraph 143)
29. We suggest that current arrangements for dismissing teachers on performance grounds are too cumbersome. The licence to practise must assist schools in weeding out poor performers from the teaching profession. We recommend that the licence to practise must itself offer, or be accompanied by, a more streamlined process for addressing under-performance. (Paragraph 144)
30. We recommend that a single, overarching 'Chartered Teacher Status' framework, linking professional development, qualifications, pay and the licence to practise, be introduced as a means of structuring teachers' career progression. (Paragraph 147)
31. We believe that our proposed Chartered Teacher Status framework would have greater potential than the status quo for establishing a clearly articulated set of expectations for teachers and progression routes. It would also offer more explicit recognition of the qualifications, training and expertise that a teacher had gained in the course of his/her career. It would, we suggest, make a profound difference to the status of the teaching profession and quality of teaching. (Paragraph 148)
32. There is a real problem in relation to supply teachers. They serve an essential role but remain a neglected part of the teaching workforce. The Department must bring supply teachers into the mainstream of the teaching profession. (Paragraph 159)
33. Regular teachers are paid to undertake professional development during the working day, supply teachers are not. This basic inequality must urgently be addressed. (Paragraph 160)



34. The Department must put in place arrangements to ensure that all supply teachers participate in annual performance reviews and are easily able to access information about professional development opportunities. The Department should also satisfy itself that all supply teachers are trained to the highest standard. (Paragraph 161)

### Teachers in the early years and further education sectors

35. The Department must develop its policies in relation to early years provision in line with the findings from a range of studies, many of which it funded, showing the critical importance of qualified teachers in early years settings. We call on the Department to provide a clear statement on the respective roles of qualified teachers and Early Years Professionals in early years settings. (Paragraph 169)
36. For too long, early years provision has been associated with the least skilled and lowest status section of the children's workforce. We recommend that the Training and Development Agency for Schools be given a remit to oversee initial teacher training programmes that train teachers in relation to the 0–5 age group. The standards for Qualified Teacher Status should be modified as necessary to support such 0–5 training. (Paragraph 175)
37. At the very least, teachers with Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills status should immediately be able to work as a qualified teacher in schools if they are teaching post-16, even post-14, pupils. (Paragraph 184)
38. In the context of the 14–19 reforms, the Department should put in place a mechanism for assessing vocational or professional qualifications as equivalent to degree status. (Paragraph 185)
39. Over the longer term we recommend that the training of early years teachers, school teachers and further education teachers become harmonised through generic standards. Alongside this, we envisage Qualified Teacher Status becoming more specific, clearly denoting the age ranges and the subjects for which a trainee was qualified to teach. Chartered Teacher Status we would see as becoming similarly specific. (Paragraph 186)
40. Diplomas represent one of the most significant initiatives in our education system for many years, and will be expanded considerably this year. This demands greater fluidity—and shared development opportunities—across the school and further education sectors. (Paragraph 187)
41. In order to enhance collaboration between schools and further education in the development of the 14–19 curriculum, we support the establishment of a centre that would provide joint professional development provision for school and further education teachers in the neglected area of pedagogy and assessment in vocational education. (Paragraph 188)

# Formal Minutes

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**Wednesday 24 March 2010**

Members present:

Mr Barry Sheerman, in the Chair

Annette Brooke

Paul Holmes

Mr David Chaytor

Mr Edward Timpson

Draft Report (*From Baker to Balls: The foundations of the education system*), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

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

Paragraphs 1 to 19 read and agreed to.

Papers were appended to the Report as Appendices 1 to 4.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Ninth Report of the Committee to the House.

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

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

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[Adjourned till Monday 29 March at 3.30 pm

## Witnesses

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### Monday 8 March 2010

Page

**Rt Hon the Lord Baker of Dorking CH; Rt Hon David Blunkett MP; Rt Hon Charles Clarke MP, and Rt Hon the Baroness Morris of Yardley** Ev 1

### Wednesday 10 March 2010

**Rt Hon Ed Balls MP, Secretary of State, and Jon Coles, Director General for Schools, Department for Children, Schools and Families** Ev 17

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

### Session 2009–10

First Report	School Accountability	HC 88-I and II ( <i>HC 486</i> )
Second Report	Elective Home Education	HC 39-I and II ( <i>HC 423</i> )
Third Report	The Work of the Committee in 2008–09	HC 187
Fourth Report	Training of Teachers	HC 275-I and II
Fifth Report	Sure Start Children's Centres	HC 130-I and -II
Sixth Report	Transforming Education Outside the Classroom	HC 418
Seventh Report	The Early Years Single Funding Formula	HC 131
Eighth Report	Young people not in education, employment or training	HC 316-I and -II
Ninth Report	From Baker to Balls: the foundations of the education system	HC 422

### Session 2008–09

First Report	Public Expenditure	HC 46 ( <i>HC 405</i> )
Second Report	The Work of the Committee in 2007–08	HC 47
Third Report	Looked-after Children	HC 111-I and II ( <i>HC 787</i> )
Fourth Report	National Curriculum	HC 344-I and II ( <i>HC 645</i> )
Fifth Report	Allegations Against School Staff	HC 695 ( <i>HC 1000</i> )

Sixth Report	Policy and delivery: the National Curriculum tests delivery failure in 2008	HC 205 ( <i>HC 1037</i> )
Seventh Report	Training of Children and Families Social Workers	HC 527-I and II ( <i>HC 358 of Session 2009–10</i> )
Eighth Report	Appointment of the Children’s Commissioner for England	HC 998-I and II

**Session 2007–08**

First Special Report	Creative Partnerships and the Curriculum: Government Response to the Eleventh Report from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2006–07	HC 266
Second Special Report	Special Educational Needs: Assessment and Funding: Government Response to the Tenth Report from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2006–07	HC 298
First Report	Children and Young Persons Bill [Lords]	HC 359 ( <i>HC 711</i> )
Second Report	The Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Children’s Plan	HC 213 ( <i>HC 888</i> )
Third Report	Testing and Assessment	HC 169-I and II ( <i>HC 1003</i> )
Fourth Report	The Draft Apprenticeships Bill	HC 1082 ( <i>HC 259 of Session 2008–09</i> )

# Oral evidence

## Taken before the Children, Schools and Families Committee

on Monday 8 March 2010

Members present

Mr Barry Sheerman (Chair)

Annette Brooke  
Mr Douglas Carswell  
Paul Holmes

Mr Andrew Pelling  
Helen Southworth  
Mr Graham Stuart

*Witnesses:* **Rt hon the Lord Baker of Dorking CH, Rt hon David Blunkett MP, Rt hon Charles Clarke MP and Rt hon the Baroness Morris of Yardley**, former Secretaries of State for Education, gave evidence.

**Q1 Chair:** I welcome four former Secretaries of State for Education, which is shorthand, as there have been slight changes in the name of the Department: David Blunkett, Charles Clarke, Lord Baker and Baroness Morris. Thank you very much for responding to our invitation. As you know, this Committee, over the last period, has been looking at some of the major reforms and threads in education policy, and you have had the synopses of those reports on the influence of testing and assessment, and the influence of changes in the National Curriculum, followed by the school accountability report. We wrapped that round with the training of teachers. I keep referring to that as my Baker to Balls box set, which has now leaked out into the media, but never mind. The general view is that there have been some long-term trends in English education, and we thought, what better group of people to invite in than the four of you? We had to be reasonably selective, as it would be ridiculous if we had six or seven. We could have had Baroness Shephard, Ruth Kelly and others in front of us, but we thought you were a pretty fair selection. Could I start with you, Lord Baker? You know what we have been up to and—sometimes quite unfairly—everything is laid at your door in terms of the Education Reform Act 1988. In one sense, school accountability was not your big thing, was it, but you were very concerned about the national curriculum, testing and assessment? Is that a fair reflection?

**Lord Baker:** Yes. The last time I appeared before this Committee was when I announced that we were going to have a national curriculum in 1986—they never had me back. It was announced before your Committee, because I thought the Committee was important. Certainly the National Curriculum was probably one of the biggest changes that I introduced. It had all started with Jim Callaghan in his famous Ruskin speech. He wanted to set it in hand, but the Department was totally opposed to it. Shirley Williams, as Secretary of State, argued against it very strongly, on the grounds that it was not the job of politicians to get involved in the vineyard of education—“Take your big clumsy boots out”—and very little was done. When Keith Joseph took over, he set up some curriculum studies that were quite interesting, but did not progress very

far. There was a general feeling that a national curriculum was needed. I think a national curriculum was needed for the very simple reason that if you looked at the curriculum in schools before the Bill, you found that good schools had good curriculums, mediocre schools had mediocre curriculums, and poor schools had poor curriculums. You had a great inconsistency over the country, so when children moved from Newcastle to Portsmouth, they could not slot easily into the framework of education. They were all doing different things; some schools had done dinosaurs three times and very little else. There was therefore a strong movement for a national curriculum, and that was why the National Curriculum was established. I think that now—I have strong views on this—it needs modification in certain ways, but the framework of a national curriculum is still needed in our country for those reasons. I am strongly in support of testing. Before 1988, there was only one test in British education—the GCSE at 16. That was most remarkable. It was unique in the world that there was only one test—apart from the 11-plus, but that was for a minority of schools. I would strongly support the general framework of a national curriculum, testing and league tables.

**Q2 Chair:** So, in a fashion, Callaghan had made this speech and Keith Joseph was interested in the curriculum. There was a trend towards talking about a national curriculum at that time.

**Lord Baker:** Yes. I think it is legitimate for the state to be deciding—because virtually every state does it—what the framework of education should be for its children. What I never attempted to do was to tell teachers how to teach it or how they should do it. I don't think that that is the job of the Secretary of State for Education, any more than the Secretary of State for Health should tell surgeons how to operate. It is up to teachers to decide how it should be done. The professionalism of teachers decides it, but it is legitimate to establish a framework.

**Q3 Chair:** Did you have a battle at that time? Looking at some of the stuff, you had a kind of Adonis of his day in Stuart Sexton, didn't you? He took a rather different view of the National Curriculum from you.

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and Rt hon the Baroness Morris of Yardley MP

**Lord Baker:** There were a few noises off, but you have to cope with that. It was very interesting setting up the National Curriculum. I had to set up groups to cover the subjects. I thought that some, like maths, would be easy. I said, “They must agree about maths,” but I found that armies were marching across the maths plain: those who were in favour of using calculators and those who weren’t; those who were in favour of learning tables by heart; and those who were in favour of doing calculus before 16, and those against. I discovered that passion raged over maths. I knew that passion would rage over history and over English, so in English I appointed the most right-wing team I could discover, because I wanted a bit of rigour—I wanted punctuation and grammar and all that—and they came up with the wettest thing you could imagine. I had to appoint another one to firm them up. It was a real battle to get the framework of the curriculum established at certain times.

**Mr Blunkett:** Who says that education is politics-free?

**Lord Baker:** It is not entirely politics-free.

**Q4 Chair:** Ken, I want to nail you on that a bit. There was a debate. Someone said to me that there is a *Times* article on Michael Gove’s view of the National Curriculum that very much reflects a battle that you had with Stuart Sexton at that time.

**Lord Baker:** Yes. I was also in favour of learning poetry by heart in primary school, so that was inserted into the National Curriculum, and I was very much in favour of a timeline in history. I did not want youngsters to be thrown into classes and told, “Imagine that you’re living in a mediaeval village and the plague has broken out. How do you cope with it?” because you cannot do that without background knowledge of the social structure of a mediaeval village, the political structure of the country around, the relationships of the various people and their relative wealth and prosperity. You have to have information; you have to have facts.

**Q5 Chair:** Can I hold you there for a moment, Ken, and turn to David? David, when you came in, in 1997, was the curriculum a big issue for you?

**Mr Blunkett:** There had been a substantial development of the curriculum by that time. The arguments were already—13 years ago—about slowing it down. There was a very strong rearguard from Ofsted about not changing the National Curriculum very much, so when we came to the review for 2000, very modest changes were made—specifically, the decision to introduce citizenship into the curriculum, which Ken Baker was strongly in favour of, because he served on the working group. I was very grateful to him for that so that we would have a consensus. I can’t see how you can update and reshape what is done in your school system as a whole if you don’t have a national curriculum. If you have a national curriculum, is it determined by the Department or some revamped QCDA? Michael Gove—you mentioned this, so I will pick up on it—said in *The Times* on Saturday, “We want to rewrite

the whole thing. We’re going to start as soon as we get in.” I can’t see how you can rewrite the whole thing and then leave it to schools to determine what curriculum they follow. This is not new, by the way. We’re all full of contradictions. We want schools to have the freedom to determine their own direction and to determine their own phonics, so long as they teach phonics. We want to pick up on them when they don’t teach the phonics that we like, like Ken’s history lessons and the way we teach poetry. So all Education Secretaries, or Children and Schools Secretaries, have these contradictions inside their head.

**Q6 Chair:** When you came into office, David, what did you see as the great challenges? The Government had been elected on the triple education pledge, and you had a Prime Minister who was very keen on education generally. What were your priorities, out of the things that we have been discussing over these past two or three years? Was the National Curriculum at the top? Was it targets for literacy and numeracy? What was top of your priorities?

**Mr Blunkett:** Two contradictory things. The first was to reinforce what we had accepted, which was that schools manage schools and that, therefore, school leadership and quality teaching was the prime issue. Nothing else can trump it, because that’s where the difference is made. At the same time, we wanted to say that because so many schools, particularly in the primary sector at the time, were failing to teach even the most modest tools for continuing learning—four schools in my constituency alone didn’t get more than one in five children aged 11 through Level 4—we would need to have a dramatic change. Implementing the literacy and numeracy strategies—Estelle and Charles both played a part in that stage before going on to be Secretaries of State—was the prime concern. To do that, we needed some levers to pull. Gillian Shephard, in her book *Shephard’s Watch*—I think it’s page 153, because I like quoting it—says that she came in after John Patten and found there were no levers to pull at all. We’ve moved from one extreme to the other, as we often do. We’ve moved from having to take levers to going back to wanting to have no levers again. I know we’ll move back again once people have discovered, à la Michael Gove, that you do need levers to pull if you want to change what’s happening in the classroom.

**Q7 Chair:** But before Lord Baker was Secretary of State—certainly around that time—I remember from reading some of the autobiographies of leading politicians of the time, particularly Labour politicians, that they did not want to be Secretary of State for Education, because education was dealt with in local government and Education was a small Department and not a high priority in the Cabinet.

**Mr Blunkett:** I very much wanted to be Education and Employment Secretary. I thought that being Education Secretary was profound in terms of the impact it could have on the future of our country, not just in terms of young people’s own ability to fulfil

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their capabilities, but in terms of our social and economic well-being. I still do think that. I believe that the progress that Ken made, both in the local management of schools and the curriculum, set a foundation on which we were able to build and to bring about further reforms, which is how building blocks occur. Charles and Estelle were able to build on things that I had done, as were subsequent Secretaries of State. That is how it works. In other words, there is no day zero where you wave a magic wand and it's done.

**Q8 Chair:** No, that's true, David. Chronologically, you come next, Estelle, don't you? What is your view? There is a view, if you look at this issue reasonably historically, that there was a time when Education was a small Department and local government delivered education. That has changed, partly because of Ministers in the 1980s, significantly Lord Baker. So, to some extent, power was wrested away from local government and given to a much larger, centralised Education Department, was it not?

**Baroness Morris:** To some extent, that is true. However, you have to look at the context. The nation's aspiration for education had changed as well. Although teachers have always wanted high standards for all their children and they go to work every day wanting all their children to succeed, what we knew in terms of what the economy needed was that we did not need every child to leave education with a bunch of GCSEs, A-levels and a degree. I do not think that you can look at this issue without looking at the pressure that was coming on to the politics from other parts of society. The economy needs more skilled people and we need more people to be studying beyond 18. Married with that, of course, was the increasing amount of knowledge that we had about the consequences of children leaving school with no qualifications, in terms of the juvenile justice system, health and the rest of it. So, when we are talking about this issue, Education was a hugely important Department. I never had any doubt but that it was important. And the pressure, certainly from the Prime Minister and indeed the rest of Whitehall, was that education mattered. However, I do not think that you can therefore say that it was about centralising education policy making. I think that that centralisation did happen, but it was in response to things that were happening in wider society and in response to demands from more parents who were far more critical of public services and from far more parents from a much broader background who wanted their kids to do well. That is sort of the demand side on Ministers, in terms of education policy. The only other thing that I would say about that context is that it was not just education that was, I suppose, breaking away from local authorities. I think that there was a politics at the time—certainly very heavily so under Mrs Thatcher, with rate capping and the rest of it, and that continued somewhat under Tony Blair—about a lack of faith in the ability of local authorities to deliver. So, for both those reasons, I think that your

conclusion is absolutely right, and that by the time that we got to the Department in 1997, things were quite centralised. May I just say one more thing? I think that there is a line of development that it is important to get, because it runs into some of your reports. Ken said that he felt that it was the politicians' job to talk about what was in the National Curriculum, and I would not disagree with that. In a democracy, that is absolutely right; in a totalitarian state, it is absolutely wrong. I think that the community is entitled, through its politicians, to have a debate about the knowledge that we want to transfer from one generation to another. I think that that is absolutely key. However, Ken then went on to say that it was not his job to tell teachers how to teach. I think that by the time we came to power in 1997, one of the reasons why we were less concerned with the curriculum was that we were more concerned with teaching and learning in the classroom. If you look at our early policies, from 1997 right the way onwards, what we learned was that just telling teachers what to teach did not, by itself, raise standards for every child. We really had to say, "Well, we have now said what you are teaching under the accountability mechanism," but once you have got all that information from Ken's accountability mechanism, you have to do something about it, if you really want to have those levers of change. I think that shift under us—that's a phrase that runs through your reports—to concentrating much more on what happened in the classroom, was probably one of the most significant shifts when Labour came to power in 1997.

**Q9 Chair:** But Charles, what's your take on this? Were you tempted then or do you think we as a Government in 1997 moved to quality of teaching and learning in the classroom as the priority, as Estelle said? Was that going to be delivered by investment in teachers' higher pay or more rugged inspection? What's your particular view?

**Mr Clarke:** Just a preliminary point first, Mr Sheerman. You'll recall that Fred Mulley, Jim Callaghan's Education Secretary, said that the only power he had as Education Secretary was over air raid shelters—that was a rather obscure reference to some piece of law. Just to reinforce that, I'm glad that Ken Baker referred to the Ruskin speech as a key element in the whole process. I think the reason why this process has gone forward was because of a big discussion in the Labour party in response to Ken Baker's initiatives in Government, when I think Jack Straw was the shadow Education Secretary—Neil Kinnock as leader had been very involved in education—as to whether we were to go along with these fundamental proposals or not. The decision was taken—for Labour it was a big decision—that we would, broadly speaking, go along with the decisions, although there were various arguments as we went around. That meant that by the time we got to 1997, we were in the position that you described in discussion with David Blunkett. On the local authority point, just to say again that there had been a process of key changes, one of the most significant

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of which was the Labour Government's decision to establish the Manpower Services Commission and to take post-16 education away from local authorities. Then the polytechnics and FE came away from local authorities—

**Lord Baker:** I did that.

**Mr Clarke:** I know you did, but Labour set up the MSC in the first place. I am trying to point to a process all the way down the line of moving away from the idea that local education authorities could run things in this way. That led to the process. My priorities were twofold, although I'd say that neither was completely successful. First, I thought it was extremely important to discuss the way in which subjects were taught. In fact, when I was Secretary of State, I gave responsibilities for subjects to Ministers and developed the principle of subject advisers—for example in mathematics and other areas—to try to get a coalition between the teachers, the technology, which was moving forward as well in those areas, and the assessment forms, to try really to revitalise education. One of my contributions was to fund the National Poetry Archive, which the poet laureate Andrew Motion wanted to establish, to try and bring poetry directly into the classroom. My answer for secondary education, in particular, was to try and enthuse the teachers by reference to their subjects: for example, to try to encourage maths teachers who wanted to teach but also wanted to do maths and to move that forward. I thought that enthusiasm was far and away the most powerful mechanism to do it—more important even than inspection. There were certain inspection aspects that were important, but enthusiasm was also important, although I wouldn't say we fully achieved that. The second dimension that comes through your documents is the involvement of parents. I think that the fact that school was a secret garden that parents weren't really supposed to know about was a core problem—I would say that it remains a serious problem to this day. I used to hate that NUT bumper sticker that you used to see saying, "If you can read this, thank a teacher". I don't know if you remember it, but it was a big theme and I hated it.

**Mr Blunkett:** So much so you didn't go to its conference. You were a wise man, I thought.

**Mr Clarke:** Quite so. But why? Because for most children their parents or carers and their teachers both play roles in educating them from a young age. That needs to be recognised far more than it is. We tried to make some changes in that direction. For example, recommendations on making parents able to have fuller access to the curriculum that their children are doing and so on remain, for me, an important element. Fundamentally, however, I was an enthuser rather than an enforcer in my approach to trying to improve educational standards.

**Chair:** I'm going to call on my colleague, Paul Holmes, to carry on some questioning.

**Q10 Paul Holmes:** Thanks. I should like to return to the National Curriculum, which has already been touched on. Last April, this Committee produced a

report on the National Curriculum, probably one of the key recommendations of which was that it should be slimmed down, should be a minimum entitlement and should not take up 100% of the time in any subject, to return more flexibility to schools and teachers. Indeed, there has been some slimming down of the National Curriculum. When it was first introduced, I was the head of a history department. It was incredibly detailed and massively over-prescriptive. There were rows and volumes of ring binders telling me exactly what I had to do every lesson, every day, every week from 11 to 18. Does anybody want to comment on that?

**Lord Baker:** When the curriculum had to be fashioned, I had to start somewhere. I entirely agree that it was over-prescriptive and too long, but I knew perfectly well it would be whittled down. Being a realistic politician, I knew that it was a beginning. For example, we had history and foreign languages up to 16. They were dropped by Ken Clarke later because it was too much to do. The biggest regret I have about the formation of the National Curriculum is that I did not extend the teaching day by one period. I wanted to do that, but had just settled the teachers' strike. One settlement of the teachers' strike was the number of hours in the contract that a teacher was allowed to teach each year. I would have had to open up the whole negotiation on that again and could not do it. If there had been one more teaching period, it would have relieved you to some extent, although not entirely because it was over-prescriptive, I agree. Coming to your report, I think what is needed now is a fundamental overhaul of the curriculum, particularly at the age of 14. There is still a very strong argument for a National Curriculum of quite a prescriptive nature up to 14, but at that point there is a watershed. I have come to the conclusion that 14 is the watershed in education. I would like to see the transfer age moved from 11 to 14. Two years ago, Ron Dearing and I started to send around documents on a new type of college for 14–19. There have been several interesting changes under Labour. The literacy and numeracy initiative that David took was very important. The big change is the 14–19 curriculum, which I think can now transform English education. If you are going to have a 14–19 curriculum, which was one of the great discoveries of the Labour Government under Mike Tomlinson four or five years ago, you have to have institutions that can deliver it. That means you have to have colleges and schools that can teach at 14 specialisms such as engineering or the building trade alongside the GCSE subjects. I suspect that that will be the biggest change over the next five to 10 years in English education. I think it will transform everything in English education and lead to an enormous improvement, because alongside the vocational and technical specialism subjects such as engineering, you will learn maths for engineering and English for the building trade. That has never been achieved in the English education system. We commissioned research at Exeter, which I have left with you, to show how all the initiatives in English



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education in the past have failed and how we hope that this time we will succeed. This is a fundamental change to the curriculum.

**Baroness Morris:** Yes, on Ken's point, I wanted to say something more general about the curriculum that Paul mentioned. I think that is right about 14–19. As long as we've got this system whereby the National Curriculum finishes at 16 and yet we talk about a cohesive 14–19 strategy, it will never work. I would say two things. I think GCSEs ought to be at 14. I see no reason for an exam at 16. It used to be called a school leaving exam and in fact some people still call it that. On the one hand, we are saying that it's the biggest exam you've ever done, yet it comes two years through a cohesive four-year programme when we are trying to give the message to children and young people that they need to stay in learning. I think one way in which we could really ratchet up the pace of learning is to do the National Curriculum exams at the age of 14, at the end of either year 8 or year 9. I would want to look at the details. If we did that, it would free us and open up 14–19 so that children could learn in one or more institutions, but not have to make key decisions twice. At the moment, we want them to make a key decision at 14 and a key decision at 16. We are finding ourselves putting into play all sorts of partnerships and relationships to make that cohesive, whereas the question we ought to ask is, what is stopping it being cohesive? I feel strongly that it is GCSEs at 16. I would abolish them and, although I am not sure it's doable, I would have 5–14 and 14–19. There is no reason to change schools now at 11, because we used to do that for the 11-plus. Can I just say one thing about the curriculum in general? It's all right saying we ought to thin down the curriculum, but that means every one of us giving up our favourite subject, or our favourite bit of a subject, which we demand that children be taught. My favourite thing is listening to the "Today" programme when somebody is on about some woe in society or some problem with the youth of today. You can time these things on your watch; you can give them a minute and a half before someone says, "Why don't the schools teach this?" Too often, politicians respond by saying, "We will get the schools to teach it" or "We'll advise the schools to teach it." I could be persuaded, maybe, that we ought to go for a slimmer curriculum, but don't pretend that that doesn't leave really tough decisions. I think it means a change of approach from politicians, the media and parents, because once you take that lever away from national government, it no longer rests with them. The last thing I would say is that I experienced this when I gave schools the decision about whether to teach modern foreign languages in Key Stage 4. That's exactly what you're recommending. I freed things up, trusted the teachers, trusted the head teachers and said, "You do exactly what you want." Ever since, there's been nothing but complaints that children no longer have to do a modern foreign language. That was the right decision, and it will be proven right in time, but the decision that I took in 2001–02 had consequences. So it's easy to say we'll

free things up and slim them down, but it really creates a different curriculum, and I would want to see the agreement about what was in the freed-up curriculum before I came to a final decision.

**Mr Blunkett:** Very briefly, this is a very interesting part of the discussion; it reveals the contradictions. As with Estelle and languages, I regret not maintaining history as a mandatory subject post-14, yet other people would—

**Baroness Morris:** That's because you like history, David.

**Mr Blunkett:** That is because I like history. I think it's really important and we learn lessons from it.

**Lord Baker:** And the only other country in Europe that drops history at 14 is Albania.

**Mr Blunkett:** Right. I shall reflect on that in due course. The point I was going to make was about the early part of the discussion initiated by the question. We actually address the curriculum as though it is the curriculum that was overloaded, rather than the curriculum we have. We address the curriculum in a world where we have fewer teaching hours than we did when I was a child, and Ken Baker has referred to that. I didn't leave school until four o'clock, and that was taken for granted. We now have extended days to compensate for that, but I gather the Secretary of State is cutting some of the cash for that, so we perhaps won't have so many extended days in future. The point I really want to make is that in every sphere, if you're going to examine—whether it's at 14 rather than 16 or whether it's A-levels, which are the most rigid part of the curriculum, by the way, for those who are great enthusiasts for them—you have to have an assurance that the young people who are being assessed, tested or examined have actually covered that area; you just have to. If you don't want that and you don't want children across the country to have a pretty good grasp, wherever they are, of what we need to do, and you want to go back to the free-for-all that led schools to let children down so very badly, let's do it, but let's do it with our eyes wide open.

**Mr Clarke:** Two or three things. First, I agree 100% on 14–19. The biggest failure over this period of the Labour Government is that we didn't finally implement the Tomlinson proposals on 14–19. We should have done that just before the 2005 general election, shortly after I left office, for a variety of reasons. Actually, that was largely associated with what David has just said about people's attachment to A-levels. We should have gone for it, difficult though that was. I have to say to Ken that there were also issues on the Conservative side of the fence; it was not as though there was a consensus on this. People were making direct arguments based on ignorance. Secondly, on 14–19, I found it very difficult to sort out the financing issues between local education authorities funding schools and other institutions funding post-16 institutions, and that has not been tackled. It is very tough to tackle. The key point—this is why I agree with what Ken says—is the relationship between work and education. I believed, and continue to believe, that we should have a phase from 14–19 where work is a continuous

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part of what children experience. There are many examples that I could give of people on pre-apprenticeships moving to apprenticeships and so on. But children with a great deal of academic ability should also be doing more work experience in schools. Work experience is a fly-by-night operation—it is not done properly and it is not carried through effectively. Actually, in a proper 14–19 diploma framework, there are many opportunities that have a virtue of saying not that education is a matter for the schools, but that it is a matter for all of us, including employers, that would be extremely interesting and worthwhile. The fourth point, or the third point, rather—I told you maths wasn't my special subject—relates to the question of teaching and training. With all respect to Ken, I am very sad about the way the Baker days developed. It was correctly done for training, but I still don't believe to this day that there is any reason why you can't do a lot of teacher training outside the school terms and operate on that basis. David set up a tremendous institution—the national centre for educating head teachers—and I remember talking to heads there and asking why we have to spend so much on training because we have to get in cover and why there can't be a routine whereby teachers routinely do training, as happens in many other walks of life, either at weekends or even after school.

**Baroness Morris:** But—

**Mr Clarke:** I know that there is some, but there should be far more. The truth is that at the end of the day we did not succeed in really grappling with the problem of teacher professionalism in that area, for a variety of reasons, and it goes right back to the disputes and strikes in schools in the '80s. They are all difficult to resolve and all problematic, but at the end of the day you will not get what you need until you get a greater commitment from teachers both to teach and to train themselves to teach better. That has been a massive constraint on development in any of these areas.

**Q11 Mr Carswell:** I have a couple of questions for you, Lord Baker. I have a very different view, so I would be fascinated to find out a bit more about why you hold your view. You justified the National Curriculum with the need for consistency. The reason you gave, when pressed, was the need for that consistency and the idea of transportability. I find it very difficult to believe that mums and dads around the country were screaming out for harmonisation because little Johnny was finding it too difficult when he went from one school to another. We visited Canada, where there are different curriculums in different provinces and very high rates of labour mobility between them. Folk adapt, and there are many aspects of life in which the state doesn't define the terms of interoperability and we are capable of managing ourselves. At the same time, when you have centralisation, you get difference, but paradoxically it is arbitrary difference. Surely creating standardisation is just an excuse for big

Government that suppresses difference, innovation and dynamism. Surely it is a sledgehammer to miss a nut to say that interoperability demands it.

**Lord Baker:** I don't think that has been the consequence of the National Curriculum. You must appreciate that I also introduced technology colleges and devolving budgets to local schools so that they could run themselves. They then said, "We'll give them breakfast, and then we'll teach till 6 o'clock." They had considerable flexibility to adapt the National Curriculum. I still think, however, that there is a need for a framework. I remember Bill Bennett, a former US Education Secretary, bemoaning the fact that he couldn't do that in America and was very depressed about it. If you speak to those in the American education system, time and again they will say that they are lacking a framework. The French Minister, Monsieur Chevènement, was much more amusing. He has now disappeared from the scene, but he was a highly cultivated and cultured man. He wasn't left-wing: he was a Jacobin. He said one day, "I'm going to write the French National Curriculum this weekend myself." That is prescriptive, and I wouldn't favour that.

**Mr Carswell:** And one country invented the internet and the other didn't.

**Lord Baker:** Well, one man invented the internet. I think you needn't be so afraid of being prescriptive in the National Curriculum, because it is immensely flexible and can be developed. I would like to see it developed in all sorts of ways post-14. If you accept 14 as a watershed, you'll get all the flexibility you want.

**Q12 Mr Carswell:** But it did, with respect, put in place the architecture of central control. When you set it up, did you envisage the kind of quangos presiding over it that we have today? I was interested to hear that you wanted right-wing maths, whatever that happens to be. Some people would say that the architecture—

**Lord Baker:** I didn't say that right-wing maths—

**Mr Carswell:** Some people would say that the architecture of central control is inherently leftist, and that, far from ridding the curriculum and the schools of a loony left agenda, you put in place the architecture of central control that has been subject to capture by the leftist educational establishment. How do you respond to that?

**Lord Baker:** I really don't think that that has happened. It is not for me to apologise for the moderate nature of the Ministers around me today, but I just don't think that that has happened.

**Lord Baker:** I can see your concern about central control, but I don't think that I was a centralist. The only way I was a centralist was in relation to the National Curriculum, and you are quite right to identify that. If you want to look at it in political terms, I feel that socialism is about the hub of the wheel and that conservatism is about the rim of the wheel. What I was trying to do was to extend as much power as possible to the rim of the wheel.

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**Q13 Mr Carswell:** So the National Curriculum was about localism?

**Lord Baker:** Schools are left to run their own budgets. That's tremendous localism. I can tell you that I found about 50 schools in the curriculum doing peace studies. As a Tory, do you think that that is a good idea in a school? That's what local organisation in the curriculum means, and as a Tory you'd welcome that, would you?

**Chair:** We must now suspend the sitting for a Division, but I want us to resume as soon as we are quorate.

*Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.*

*On resuming—*

**Chair:** That was a nice little natural break. Shall we have a competition to see if anyone who voted knows what we voted on? There are no offers. I just remind you of last week when we had free votes and everyone looked like lost sheep, asking which pen to go into.

**Q14 Mr Carswell:** We were in the middle of talking about how the National Curriculum was decentralist. If we did not have a National Curriculum, Lord Baker, would there really not still be a core body of knowledge that every schoolchild would know? There are lots of things that we don't have state determination of. We don't have a state menu but miraculously, when I go into a supermarket, the same range of breakfast cereals is available in almost any part of the country.

**Mr Blunkett:** But you are not examined on your diet.

**Q15 Mr Carswell:** With respect, Mr Blunkett, this is a serious point about consumer choice. If you have institutions that answer outwardly to people, rather than inwardly and upwardly to officials, the paradox is that you quite often get standardisation, because people essentially want the same things, particularly for their children. If you didn't have a state-determined National Curriculum, or if you allowed schools to opt out of the National Curriculum, would you not still in effect have an organic National Curriculum that was determined by parents and schools rather than officials?

**Lord Baker:** What in the Carswell system would be the broad body of knowledge you would expect children to have?

**Mr Carswell:** For many years we didn't have a National Curriculum, but that broad body of knowledge was self-defining.

**Lord Baker:** With great respect, we have had a National Curriculum and curriculum studies since the middle of the 19th century. Read the research paper that I sent you. At Exeter University, they tell you all about it. There was a series of National Curriculums, but for when the school leaving age was 12, you must remember. It was only 14 in 1918. So the National Curriculum existed up until 1914. There was a broad body, basically for the generality of schools. There is a whole literature on this. There is a very good report by the policy group.

**Q16 Mr Carswell:** By the Select Committee?

**Lord Baker:** No, no, no; better than that. There was a very good policy paper before Christmas by Civitas on the development of the National Curriculum from which everybody could learn a lot. Such a body of knowledge existed. I do not know what your body would be when you say there is a broad agreement on what people should know. All I can say is that I came across schools where dinosaurs were being taught for the third time because the teacher was not up to teaching anything else. Do you think knowing about dinosaurs would be in your broad body of knowledge?

**Q17 Mr Carswell:** I hope that we would know about dinosaurs. I will not make the obvious pun. It has become commonplace for people to say that we need a National Curriculum, but it needs to be slimmed down. It has become a cliché to say that. You said that you thought that if you had a National Curriculum it would inevitably be whittled down. Is the opposite not the case? If you create a National Curriculum, it then becomes a question of what to put in it. There is this ratcheting up of pressure. Politicians—Tory ones—often say we have to have proper British history, whatever that is. Sometimes left-wing politicians demand certain things. An event will happen that will lead people to demand some sort of addition to the curriculum. Is there not a danger that, far from slimming down the National Curriculum, by having one you are always going to have this ratcheting up?

**Lord Baker:** It will only ratchet up if subjects are added. Citizenship was added, and now public health and PHS are going to be added as well, which means that there is a squeeze on the rest of the curriculum. Since 1987 or 1988, the teaching day in most schools has extended. I remember what David said. I went to a Church of England primary school and we never left school before 4 or 4.30. When you drive around England today, you will find children wandering around the streets at about 2.30 or 3. Quite a lot has changed. Many schools have decided themselves, using the powers that they got in independence, to extend the teaching day and do very much more. To believe that there is great prescription from the centre is something of an illusion in English education.

**Chair:** Does anyone else want to come in on that?

**Mr Clarke:** I should like to add one point. Of course I agree with what Ken Baker said, but there is also a self-censoring approach of the school world—of the profession—even when freedoms are given. When Estelle was Secretary of State, significant freedoms were given to schools of the kind that Kenneth described. There was the so-called freedom to innovate, and various things of that kind. What was so striking was that, even on the variation of the time starting the school day, there was not a great coming forward of people saying that they wanted to do this. A set of cultures had evolved that was extremely conservative and inflexible. I think Ken Baker is telling the truth when he says that this Government, too, were trying in various respects to give more

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powers to local schools to enable them to take on certain areas. The question is a more deeply cultural point than the formal control mechanisms or the formal financing mechanisms.

**Q18 Mr Carswell:** Baroness Morris, I have a slightly different question and it is more to do with how the state institutions that oversee the curriculum are made properly accountable. I was not an MP then, but I remember watching on television the fiasco over A-levels, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, and the reduction in A-level grades, and thinking that you were being unfairly treated because you as the Minister were being asked to make and justify decisions when the quango had failed to deliver public policy properly. Do you think that these quangos are properly accountable to Parliament and Ministers? Do you think that the old method of accountability by these institutions for what is a very important area of public policy works? Do you not think that Ministers are sometimes forced either to decide to play it safe and, in effect, be a mouthpiece for the quango apparatus, or to take them on and therefore be put in this difficult and invidious position?

**Baroness Morris:** I think it's an important and difficult question. Ofsted has it easier in that it is accountable to Parliament. Its annual report goes to Parliament, and I think that that works quite well. I have not thought as to whether that might be possible with more quangos. I never ever felt that I was there to speak on behalf of the quango. Sometimes the issue was that something I personally wanted to do wasn't the recommendation of the quango, and then you would have to go into long negotiations. But in terms of, for example, the A-levels, that is just life and that is politics, and that is the position we find ourselves in. Much as we devolve power to other people, we remain accountable as the elected politicians. I, too, thought it wasn't fair on many occasions during those difficult few weeks, but I think I learned to accept that. David has talked about this in the past as well. There is a line of thought that says, if we devolve it, it's got to be a deal, and if we say it's QCA that's checking the A-levels and looking at the syllabuses, society as a whole has to realise that and stop demanding of politicians that they do something about it; otherwise, they will go in and control quangos. I think it is a messy relationship, and one thing that's come out in your Select Committee reports—not this one, but in previous ones—is that the relationship between civil servants and the education quangos is not quite right. I found, during those A-level difficulties, that I'd got a whole Department that was mirroring what went on at the QCA, and had people who were sitting through the meetings. What they were doing there, and how this had happened, given that they were there, I think was always a bit of a mystery to me. So I think it's a bit of an uneasy relationship, but do we want to bring them back into the centre? No. It's as simple as that. Did I, as a politician, want to lose all influence?

No, I didn't. The truth is that when it works, it works, but when it goes wrong, it's a really big thing that goes wrong. I think that's the problem.

**Mr Clarke:** You could always give a role to the Select Committees. The Treasury Committee in the 1997–2001 Parliament, of which I was a member, agreed during the Parliament to have a formal set of hearings into every non-departmental body that was under the Treasury's remit, into the Treasury itself, and also the international organisations—the International Monetary Fund, and so on—although there was no apparent need. We set up a sub-committee of the Treasury Committee to do this, and the effect was accountability and an opening up of issues, which gave opportunities to both the quangos and parliamentarians to develop a process to set up accountability. It was interesting and an innovation. I think what many of those organisations need is regular, consistent, predictable parliamentary and public accountability.

**Q19 Mr Carswell:** So it would be like a confirmation hearing to appoint the head, and perhaps an annual hearing?

**Mr Clarke:** I was also in favour of confirmation hearings for certain key roles. I wouldn't say necessarily for the heads of all organisations, but I argued that in Parliament for the Governor of the Bank of England, for example, and there are issues here as well. It wasn't simply for the formality; it was for having a formal set of hearings of whatever length the Select Committee decided into all the non-departmental bodies. That is quite a formidable piece of work. When I was Secretary of State, there was a large number. I cannot remember what it was, but it was about 20 or 25 organisations that you would have been talking about to do it over a four-year period.

**Q20 Chair:** We tried to do it, Charles, but as soon as it became Children, Schools and Families, it was very large. We see Ofsted regularly, and we have tried confirmation hearings, but you may remember that we were the ones who caused a certain amount of—

**Mr Clarke:** I do. You will recall, Mr Sheerman, that I was on your side in the discussion. I genuinely think that these organisations that sit at arm's length from government and have no public exposure, perhaps for a long period, other than in the relationship with the Secretary of State—I, and I am sure others, used to have formal meetings with the chair and chief executive of each of the organisations. There was an annual letter of appointment, and they had to report to Parliament, and there is a set of procedures, but putting more guts into it, which the Select Committee can do, is a good thing.

**Q21 Chair:** To extrapolate from Douglas's question, if you just look at the size—I haven't looked at the personnel, but I get the feeling that the number of people working in Ofsted, and for QCA, now

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QCDA, and Ofqual is very large now compared to what it was, certainly when you were Secretary of State, Ken, and you, David.

**Mr Blunkett:** We didn't have Ofqual either. There is a danger in all the education service of duplication of people checking each other, to the point where you wonder in the end where it will stop.

**Lord Baker:** On the whole social welfare side, the role has become so much greater. I personally think it was a mistake to combine the social welfare of children with education. I think the skills, the experiences of the staff and the areas are totally different. Ofsted has to report on assessing schools for education ability, and also to assess local authorities on their care of children in care. I hope that an incoming Government will break that link totally. I think that the skills required to run an education service are very different from those required to run a social welfare service.

**Q22 Chair:** I want to move to Andrew in a second, but first want to return to something with Douglas that crosses the reports that we have produced. You took the logic that he put to you and responded, Lord Baker—I think Estelle did, too, to a certain extent—that more power has been given to schools. There is no doubt that, if you are looking at the major players, this run of nearly 20 years has seen a move away from local authority power, and greater power to schools and much greater power to a centralised education Department. But what we picked up when we looked at testing and assessment is that, if teachers were so busy teaching to the test, the space to be inventive, to think about the curriculum and to innovate was squeezed out of them. There was a real problem. If you expect that kind of innovation, flexibility and so on at school level, you do not get it if you have so many tests and so many teachers' lives dominated by them.

**Lord Baker:** I am in favour of a testing regime.

**Q23 Chair:** At seven; 11; 14; 16; 18?

**Lord Baker:** Absolutely. I think that children should be assessed at those ages. I can see no reason why not. I am sure that you have looked at other systems around the world. In the American system, they test every term in many states—every term. I went to a Church of England primary school and remember the old report books. Looking through them, I discovered that I was tested every term and marked, marked out and so on. I've still got them. That was a state primary system and the old-fashioned way of doing it.

**Mr Blunkett:** And, Chairman, the private sector tests to destruction. It really does.

**Lord Baker:** Yes, what David says is perfectly true.

**Mr Blunkett:** It does. The question is whether teachers and heads, who should be able to see what is happening, are imaginative enough. Do they have leadership skills? Have they got a grasp of their own profession? Do any of the four of us not agree with proper, organised and sensible testing?

**Mr Clarke:** I am afraid, Barry, that I am completely with Ken Baker and David Blunkett on this. I have read your report and many other things on this, and I do not agree with the charge that teaching to the test is destroying the quality of education in schools, and I do not believe that there are too many tests. I would not abolish the tests in the way that the Government currently intend. Maybe I am just a distorted victim of the type of vicious private school system that David just described, but I had a substantial amount of testing throughout my life. Everybody did it. It did not reduce innovation or creativity in any respect whatsoever. I think there is an issue about fashion, and the approach of parents and their fears if their children do not perform, to which schools sometimes have to respond. There are some quite difficult issues there.

**Chair:** This is most interesting.

**Mr Clarke:** The whole trend of opinion for 10 years has been to reduce testing and say that it is dangerous, distorting and so on. I just don't believe it.

**Chair:** To be fair to our Committee, we didn't say that.

**Mr Clarke:** I know you didn't, but others did.

**Q24 Chair:** We said that if there is a pendulum, it has swung too far towards too much testing and that it needs to swing back a bit. We actually started the report by saying that we believe in a system of national testing. We believe in it, but—the Government and the Department certainly did not want to hear this—a lot of people who gave evidence to the Committee said that it had gone that much further and that there was an inability to innovate. Everyone became obsessed long before the tests were due, so that was all they were doing in the classroom.

**Lord Baker:** One of the classic tests is that, if the Conservatives win the election, I understand that they are going to introduce the Swedish system, which I strongly support, and various groups of parents will come together and form schools. Local communities will form schools. You can bet your bottom dollar that those schools will be tested to destruction. The parents will want to know.

**Q25 Paul Holmes:** I must say—it must be the former schoolteacher in me; I was obviously rubbish in my job—that I can't believe what I am hearing. Sweden has a National Curriculum that is nine to 18 pages long for the entire curriculum—not for one subject, but for the whole curriculum. I have visited Sweden's schools and they do not do testing like that. That is true across Scandinavia. It is true in Finland, which tops the PISA studies for educational success all the time. Ofsted, which was your creation between you, said that teaching to the test is utterly destroying and distorting what is happening in our schools—in junior schools and at secondary level. It is all, totally, at odds with what you are saying. Do you not understand the difference when you talk about the testing that went on when you were at junior school? I was tested when I was a pupil in David Blunkett's constituency in Sheffield.

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When I was a teacher we tested all the time, but it was formative testing. It was assessing the children. It was looking at how they were doing each week, each term and so forth so that you knew what to do to move them on. It was not high-stakes testing where you, as a teacher, and the school as a whole, would be crucified by league tables. We are told that you must have league tables. We are about the only country in the world that has league tables. Even Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland don't have league tables.

**Mr Blunkett:** They have information. We get hung up on titles. There is no way we are ever going to go back to not giving parents—and, for good professionals, schools—real sensible comparators. You have discussed this in this Committee. To have comparators, you need information. To get information, you need some form of assessment testing that ensures there is consistency.

**Q26 Chair:** But surely the difference, David, is between testing for pupil attainment to check that a child is making progress, and testing for school accountability that will end up in a published table? We were walking across to vote with another former Secretary of State for Education who boasted that he was the man who introduced SATs and he was the person who introduced all the testing and the publication of the test scores. We cannot put it down to any of you four because we have just had a confession outside this room.

**Lord Baker:** Who was that?

**Chair:** Ken Clarke.

**Baroness Morris:** I apologise because I have not got the greatest of voices today, but I think it is a bit more complex than that. To complete the quartet, I am absolutely in favour of testing. When I think of what we know, on a national level, a school level and a pupil level, because we assess children's progress, I think it has helped to transform the education system. I am absolutely in favour of testing. If we went away from testing at key points in the education system we would be doing a huge disservice to children. That is my fundamental belief. Paul, I know what you saying. I talk to teachers and some of them say that. I think there are three groups. There are those people who have never liked testing. They don't think it is right to do it. They think it shows up schools that have more difficult children to teach. They have always been against it and they are against it now. There are those like us four who have always been in favour of assessment, and then there is a group in the middle who I think are in favour of testing, but say that there could be improvements in the current system. I think that that group has grown. I think that group ought to be listened to. The problem with the debate—it was proven exactly here—is that the minute the issue of testing is introduced, we go into our polarised positions. We all four said that we were in favour of testing; it would be awful if we dropped it. You didn't say—well, you almost said it, to tell you truth—that it is terrible because some schools are made to look bad. That is gone. That is a past argument. Where there

is a debate to be had it is this, and I think this is the most challenging thing that faces the education system. There is no need to test more than four times. There is no need to do practice tests. There is no need to teach to the test. There is no need to narrow the curriculum. In fact all the evidence shows that the schools that do best in the tests are those that do art, drama, sports, citizenship and self-esteem and do it well. Your confident head teacher knows that. The problem we've got is that the head teacher who is not that confident teaches to the test. To some extent, our education system is as good as the average teacher, not as good as the very able teacher. I think the challenge is: how do government, or how do the agencies, give that clear message to schools that you don't need to do the testing and standards will rise? It is somehow in there. We never talk about it. The minute it was mentioned, you went to one end and we went to the other. What I would say, Mr Chairman, is that from your report there is an issue to be discussed, and it ought to be discussed, but it ought to be against the background that testing is good, information in the public domain is right, and comparators are inevitable in the sort of society we live in.

**Q27 Paul Holmes:** So you all think that Ofsted is entirely wrong in its report on teaching to the test and the way it distorts schools? Four Secretaries of State all think that Ofsted got it completely wrong?

**Baroness Morris:** I do not think that schools need to teach to the test. I do not think good schools need to do it—it is not required by the testing system. You're a teacher, Paul. You must go to heads in Chesterfield who don't teach to the test but get really good results. The challenge is how we give the rest of the schools the confidence to know that that's possible. Where we are in error is that all too often when the issue is raised we go back to saying, "Testing's got to stay," because we are frightened of the reaction. We are nervous about what the press will say. We have to grow up and get over that. How many years are we on from the introduction of national testing, Ken? It's not wrong to look at some of the fallout from national testing, but it would be wrong to have a debate that questioned the importance of and the need for testing.

**Chair:** You know that our report looked very much at that balance of testing for what, and at balancing testing with assessment.

**Baroness Morris:** That's the most interesting point.

**Chair:** Andrew, do you want to ask a question?

**Q28 Mr Pelling:** I come with the prejudice of having been involved with Donald Naismith and the Croydon curriculum, and introducing some of the first CTCs, and having fights with trade unions about testing. Why do you feel that the Conservative party has made this very long journey back to being very sceptical about the role of setting curriculum and testing?

**Lord Baker:** Why has the Conservative party become sceptical about that? I think only certain elements of the Conservative party are sceptical

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about that. The party hasn't been in office for some time, and I think that when it is in office it will find the virtues of some of the things I have been talking about. I think it will find that lots of parents want to see tests, and that lots of parents rather like the National Curriculum because there is a broad body of knowledge. It is very interesting that, in the middle of the 19th century, Matthew Arnold wrote out a National Curriculum that is broadly what we have today. Rab Butler and the Board of Education in 1941 decided that after the war there should be three types of schools: grammar schools, technical schools and secondary modern schools—high schools. Very interestingly, in 1941 they said the change should be at 13. Rab Butler said he wanted children from 11 to 13 to go through a common mill of experience, and I think that that is what we have been talking about. The National Curriculum is, if you like, a common mill of experience. But I do think that that is now necessary up to 14, but at 14 you need to have a real fundamental examination of where you go, and where the English education system is going to go. I agree with Estelle that this is the age of transfer. I think that this is the next big change in English education. That raises all sorts of very interesting possibilities. It requires schools not only to have technical and vocational education alongside English, maths and science. You might have schools post-14 specialising in classics, the broad humanities, or art and drama—all sorts of things—and that gives you tremendous flexibility. I think 14 is the watershed.

**Mr Blunkett:** Perhaps Ken might agree with this: lessons should celebrate, not denigrate, the empire. English classes putting more emphasis on classics is Michael Gove's stance. Is it a framework or is it a curriculum?

**Lord Baker:** Changing the nature of the curriculum, as Michael will want to, takes a bit of time.

**Mr Blunkett:** It will take him about 20 years.

**Q29 Annette Brooke:** I have two fairly quick questions. Why is it appropriate that some schools should not have the National Curriculum applied to them and state schools for the most part should? Why do we have two tiers?

**Baroness Morris:** It's not logical. It's not appropriate.

**Q30 Chair:** But it is what we have, isn't it?

**Lord Baker:** When we established the city technology colleges way back in 1986–87, I was opposed by a large body of traditional Conservative LEAs. We wanted to inject as much variety as we could into the system, and the only way to do it was to establish institutions and give them as much freedom as possible. That was the reason we did it. They could vary the National Curriculum, but in fact city technology colleges now follow it quite closely. They did the things that in those days were revolutionary, such as staying open later at night, opening for breakfast, and specialising much more in computer technologies and IT. We wanted them to give that degree of variation to people.

**Mr Clarke:** A similar logic worked with the academies. The theory with the academies, in the early days, was that the achievement had been so poor in the areas that we were talking about—the problems were so great—that you needed to have the ability to innovate in whatever way was thought necessary to deal with those kinds of problems. However, you raise some serious issues. The question of consistency is important. But, the one thing I would say is—I am not suggesting you are saying this—that you can't say that you want to move away from the National Curriculum and, at the same time, abandon all forms of testing. The whole point was that there might be better curricular ways of getting to the test results that were necessary for children in those areas. It is not consistent to deal with the two matters in that way. I hoped—we certainly were in favour of innovation in the curriculum—that there would be some positive things to come through that would teach us how we might better be able to enable children to perform.

**Mr Blunkett:** I always saw it as being much more a case of laboratory schools, rather than the abandonment of the curriculum. You need to be able to experiment to move forward.

**Baroness Morris:** I don't think that freedom ought to remain with any one category of school. It is not logical and I think it is a nonsense. In the Education Bill that was passed when I was Secretary of State, I think clause 1 referred to the power to innovate. In actual fact, schools that are not academies—or in those days, city technology colleges—could take the power to innovate and have quite remarkable freedoms.

**Q31 Chair:** They hardly ever used it, Estelle, did they?

**Baroness Morris:** I know that. That is part of the challenge. There are many freedoms that schools don't use. That's the problem, to tell you the truth. Schools don't use the flexibilities they've got—it is not that there is not enough flexibility.

**Chair:** They were all terrified of the Department and the National Strategies.

**Baroness Morris:** Sorry?

**Q32 Chair:** As I said earlier, I am not going back to testing and assessment, but people were rather terrified that they were going to displease someone, like the Department, Ofsted or whoever. Okay, the National Strategies are now going to be abandoned, but when we were taking our evidence, we found that many people thought they had to follow the national strategy and that it wasn't optional.

**Baroness Morris:** Some people felt that, but I think it was a decreasing number. There is a lot of innovation in schools, but our problem, Mr Chairman, was that they did not apply to the Department to use the power to innovate. They tended just to say, "Well, we'll get on with it." Innovation was there, but you're right—although I don't know what the figures are now—that the power to innovate was not hugely popular when we introduced it. The point I was making in the context

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of this question was that it shouldn't only be one category. That power to innovate right across the state sector was a bit of a match for the freedoms the academies had. The academies haven't used their freedom and flexibility in the curriculum much.

**Q33 Annette Brooke:** I still find it quite odd that, for example, the independent sector, much of which is admired by people, obviously does not have to follow the National Curriculum. Yet similar schools—grammar schools—in my constituency have been refused permission to do various things recently by the Department. How can that be? If it is good for independent schools, why is it not good for all state schools?

**Mr Clarke:** I don't know about the cases of schools in your constituency, but I am surprised to hear that. Certainly, when I was Secretary of State, the culture was to allow proposals for innovation, rather than to stop them. I don't know the reasons in the cases of the schools you are talking about, but I was certainly keen to encourage that ethic, and I think I was being faithful to my predecessors' desires—David's and Estelle's—to encourage innovation of that type. But I don't know enough about the detail of what you're actually describing.

**Q34 Annette Brooke:** My second brief question is on initiative overload. I will exclude the National Curriculum aspect from my question if I may, but I think at least three Secretaries of State probably introduced a number of initiatives. I would like to ask you which initiatives you think can really be defended and which ones were really too much and over the top.

**Chair:** We'll start with you, David.

**Mr Blunkett:** I plead guilty to initiative overload, because there seemed to be so much that needed tackling all at once. Most of the criticisms afterwards are, as ever, that you did not do enough on this or that area, particularly in relation to secondary. I suppose that we could have eased off a little bit in relation to what we were doing in demanding changes in teaching, but if we had done that, we would have reduced the change on quality. We were demanding the most enormous amount of change from teachers, but frankly it was needed. I am a trained teacher. It was just desperately needed. We had a crap teaching profession. We haven't any more.

**Mr Clarke:** I think initiatives like the literacy and numeracy hour, which were extremely controversial with lots of people, were necessary, and I think they have improved standards of education in a very important and significant way. That said, I think there is an absolutely core problem in education, certainly over the recent period, of too many initiatives, too much change, lack of consistency and change of personnel both in terms of Ministers and senior officials, which has been a problem in the whole process. The biggest kind of structural failure has been failure to be able to build serious partnership with the teaching profession on change. As I said earlier, I was in favour of trying to do it

around particular subjects—trying to get an agreement with maths teachers on how you should develop in maths, what training was needed and so on and so forth; but it has not been a healthy set of relationships. I think that is still true. I think it has been true over quite a period. Why is it the case? All four of my grandparents were teachers. I respect the teaching profession very deeply. I respect the teachers who taught my children in our local schools a great deal; but fundamentally I think there is a real problem, which is that the pace of change in life is so fast for everybody now—I don't mean the schools—and the equipment people need to deal with that changing life is essentially education. People have to be able to update themselves the whole time on everything that's happening, and I think that the teaching world is a very conservative—with a small “c”—world. And I think that is a real problem. Unfortunately, I share David's view. The issues that needed to be addressed in 1997 were very deep. I had a school in my constituency that was in the worst five—not per cent. but five—primary schools in the country, where all the teachers, when you went in, said, “It's nothing to do with us—it's the parents.”

**Baroness Morris:** Or it's the kids.

**Mr Clarke:** Yes. It made me weep. It was absolutely unacceptable. It may be that we took the wrong powers, and did not do it in the right way, or whatever. I think there's room for debate about whether we did the right things, but I honestly believe there is no room for debate that action needed to be taken and the structure that was there was not adequate to deal with the problems the system faced.

**Mr Blunkett:** Estelle had to go and calm them down when I upset them. Isn't that right Estelle?

**Baroness Morris:** Frequently.

**Q35 Chair:** Estelle, do you share that opinion?

**Baroness Morris:** Yes, there have been too many initiatives, but each by themselves could be justified; that's the problem. The best initiatives are those which are now owned by the schools and the professions, and they've forgotten it's an initiative. But changing the ship of state that is schools, you have to have some pushing and tugging and levers. I just jotted a few down: after-school learning, holiday learning and breakfast clubs. Schools do that now because they know it's the right thing to do and it helps raise attainment of students. All those were initiatives in our first two years. We put money behind it and we almost made schools have them. I remember those first summer holiday schools for catching up on literacy before the transfer to secondary schools. Now no one would say, “We've got a breakfast club tomorrow morning. It's an initiative, and isn't it terrible?” The best initiatives are those that have now been owned by the schools. Some of them were things we wanted to do, but we should have let go on. The one I can think of is the homework initiative—I think David sent me out to justify it, to tell you the truth, but I think I was in favour of it at the time. Homework is a good thing, but that the Government should have a policy that



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said 10-year-olds should do 30 minutes and 14-year-olds should do 45 minutes isn't worth the effort. It's not worth it.

**Mr Blunkett:** That's the failure one.

**Baroness Morris:** That was good, David, for me to think of a failure one on our behalf. There's always a reason for doing it. I know why we did the homework initiative, but sometimes—I can say this now because I'm not an MP any longer—heads would say to me, "I got a letter from the Department last week. There it is. You know what I did with it? I threw it in the bin." And I would say, "Good for you. If your judgment was that it wasn't of use to you and your school, the bin is where it should be." Heads did that thinking I would say, "That's terrible." It goes back to what I said before—good heads chose the initiatives they wanted to take on, but unconfident heads tried to react to every one, and that was absolutely impossible. There have been too many initiatives. There is no doubt about it. We need a different way of managing and introducing change.

**Lord Baker:** Let us leave National Curriculum and testing aside. When you want to reform education, you have a choice. You can either try to reform the existing institutions or set up new institutions. It is a very clear choice. I began by asking, "Can we reform existing institutions?" I found that there were too many vested interests, for the reasons that David and others have given. That is why I started city technology colleges. They were the first institutions free from local education authority control and state money. It was a breakthrough and from that, the academies developed, as did special schools, which gave schools the freedom that they wanted. They would not be told what to do by the LEAs. We must not underestimate the degree of freedom for grant-maintained schools and the rest of it. It will clearly be the pattern in the future. That is the rim of the wheel. I have no apology to make. It was the right decision. It was not the hub of the wheel. I hope that Mr Carswell will recognise that.

**Q36 Mr Stuart:** A former Secretary of State, like yourselves, once said to me that he thought that collectively the teaching unions had done more damage to the social fabric of this country than any other group since the second world war. I won't say which party he was. To what extent do you think the unions crippled positive change in the system?

**Lord Baker:** The most depressing things were the Easter conferences of the trade unions. At the worst, loud-mouthed teachers seemed to get on to television expounding the most dreadful policies and diminishing the status of teaching in the eyes of the public. That is a great disservice to education services. I get very depressed each time it happens, every Easter. We were all invited as Secretaries of State to speak to the conferences.

**Mr Clarke:** I refused.

**Lord Baker:** That was very wise. I only did one, and that was enough.

**Mr Clarke:** This is a very serious and problematic question. I didn't go to the NUT one year when they invited me. The reason was that I thought the way they treated previous politicians, including David, with very outrageous behaviour, was completely unacceptable for people who thought they were teaching people about society and how things should operate. I looked for some guarantees that they would operate in a respectful way, and they were not ready to do that. That said, we had a tremendous set of agreements with the trade unions on workforce reform, which was extremely positive. The teaching unions involved were absolutely positive about what has transformed an important set of working relationships in schools and improved educational standards. The NUT stood outside that, and still stands outside it—for reasons that utterly defeat me. It is an awful thing to say, but I came to the view that there was not much point in talking to the NUT about education. I felt there was not a useful dialogue to be had, and I very much regret that. I have asked myself whether we made mistakes when I was a junior Minister under David, and whether we should have tried to work in a less performance-related pay approach to teachers and have a more partnership approach in the way we did things. The question whether our industrial relations strategy was the right strategy is interesting. Could we have done it better? Why? Because we cannot go past teachers. Teachers are fundamental to the success of the education system, and to have a stand-off relationship is terrible. I tried to talk to the NUT leadership successively when I was Education Secretary. Obviously, we had plenty of dialogue, but I would not say that it was fruitful and positive. I would not associate myself with the remarks a previous Secretary of State made—there are a number of institutions that are more serious—but teachers and their organisations have to embrace change, because education is about change. Simply saying that you cannot change, unless you get the money for it or whatever, is just wrong. It is not the way other professions or other employees operate in many walks of life, if you look at the attitude to training and to change in any area. I would say, certainly for my period, that I have to plead guilty to having failed to put it on the right footing, with the important exception of the work force reform programme, which was and is an important period of change. There has to be a cultural change in all this. I have written a piece about it which I shall let you have if anyone is interested. We need to go back to square one. People like me have to do a mea culpa and say we were wrong in the way we handled some aspects of it. The trade unions concerned have to do a mea culpa, and we have to say, "Okay, what can we do to improve the situation?" We are in a total laager—a bunker position—in which I don't see any positives at the moment.

**Baroness Morris:** The phrase goes too far, but there is no doubt that unions have opposed change a lot of the time. It needs to be said that some individual union members are brilliant teachers—very innovative and committed. We're talking about the

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institution of the union. Some of the most radical unionists I knew when I was teaching were some of the best teachers in our school. I always felt that if only people could see them teach rather than demonstrating at the Easter conference the perceptions would be different. Teachers for some reason are always fighting the last reform but one. They get into a habit. They come round to it two reforms later and say, "Well, maybe the one two times ago wasn't that bad." They're always behind the pace of change. One of the things that I find amazing is that they are very innovative in their schools. They cope with change all the time. Anyone who has done any teaching knows the amount of change you have to cope with when there are 30 children in your class. They're actually skilled at it. But the minute it comes on a strategic, school or system level, they resist change. I think to some extent in the past they were badly led by unions that opposed things almost for the sake of it rather than asking what the issue was. Charles is absolutely right. The work force reform, which was the most important bit of work I did in terms of setting it up, was right. When you think why that went right, there were lots of reasons why the unions, apart from the NUT—and I don't understand that either—wanted to buy into it at the time. If there is a lesson to be learned, Charles, it's probably about trying to buy them in, rather than politicians—I occasionally do—thinking the row will look good with the public. I think that politicians in the past have been guilty of that—if the unions disagree with them, the parents will think it's a good policy—and we really ought to move on from that. We've grown up. The last thing I would say is that the unions, certainly over the past three to five years, have behaved differently, with the exception of the NUT—I don't know if they're still talking to the Department or not. But I think we have had some very good union leaders in recent years. John Dunford is to stand down at Easter, and no one could say that he has not been a positive contributor to education in this country.

**Mr Blunkett:** I still talk to some people in the NUT.

**Baroness Morris:** I'm still a member.

**Mr Blunkett:** We had some terrible fall-outs, but the daftest thing was when they got a much better barrister than the Department to stop us putting pay up under the work force development scheme. That was one of the saddest moments. You have to remember that Michael Barber once worked in the research unit at the NUT, and there was a time when the NUT had a terrific research unit, where they actually did address educational change, so it comes and it goes and we have to put up with it. But it is sad. I'd like to pay tribute to a very nice former general secretary, Fred Jarvis, who I see regularly. As he brings me a really nice bottle of wine from France, I can't possibly criticise him.

**Q37 Mr Stuart:** Can I take you to the subject of standards? Looking back over 13 years of a Labour Government with education, education, education—the pledge—the big increase in expenditure and the deployment of top guns like

yourselves to run the Department, there was a real hope for the transformational change that Estelle mentioned earlier. Can you sum up what you think are the great glories of the new Labour years in education, and perhaps the shortcomings?

**Chair:** Shall we do it chronologically and go back to you, David? I'll come back to you in a moment, Ken.

**Mr Blunkett:** First, accepting that the world had changed and being prepared to modify but to roll with the changes that had taken place and address the future rather than the past. It's hard to remember now what it was like in '94, '95, '96, but it was a seminal moment when we weren't prepared to simply chuck everything out and start again. Secondly, Charles has been very generous about the National College for School Leadership, but I think that leadership, quality of teaching and changing the teacher training programmes—Teach First among them—was absolutely fundamental. I started with this and I finished with it. It didn't matter what we did. As crucial as literacy and numeracy programmes were, and as crucial as freeing up what we were doing in terms of funding, which we have not mentioned—funding did make an enormous difference to the quality of the teaching and learning experience—those things apart, in the end it is what takes place in the classroom that matters. Whatever happens after the election and whoever wins it, if they keep their eye on standards, not structures, which was my mantra in the build-up to the '97 election, it might help.

**Q38 Chair:** David, is the biggest difference between you and what went before you—in terms of Ken and his colleagues in the Conservative party—a question of ideology? Are there deep ideological differences? I ask that because what has come out of this exchange is that you agree on a great number of things and you have refined them, moved them on and developed them; they include Ofsted, testing and assessment and much else. However, I suppose that the profound difference for you was that you had a Prime Minister totally obsessed with education—that must have been good—and who was willing to spend an awful lot of money.

**Mr Blunkett:** John Major restricted what Gillian wanted to do. There is no question about that; she said so publicly. He wanted her to calm everything down and not rock the boat at all, after her predecessor—not the two Kens, but the predecessor who came in between them. Therefore, she had her arms tied behind her back. By contrast, the Prime Minister from '97 onwards wanted us to act. It was not an obsession of his, but it was an absolute priority for him, and that helped. My main task from 1994, when I was shadow Secretary of State, was immediately to stop the total obsession with structures. More than half the Labour party press releases that went out in 1993 were about grant-maintained status. They had nothing to do with the issue of standards; I will get shot for this, but they did not. We had to turn that around. We had to accept that information was here to stay and we had to try to concentrate on what we believed really

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mattered, which was a transformation for the lives of those children that we all in this room represent and that we want to see improved. The mantra of “Give us more money and leave us alone” was a pathetic answer to the drive that we were trying to put in place. That mantra still exists, by the way. The curmudgeon in the corner of the staff room that we used to talk about, who is against everything and everybody, and who believes that nothing can change and nothing can improve—

**Q39 Mr Stuart:** But David, have things improved? If I look for a crude proxy for the education system—  
**Mr Blunkett:** A 20 percentage point improvement in literacy and numeracy is undeniable. We had all the inquiries as to whether that was a con or not. Rose had to come in and do the business and have a look. There is no question about that.

**Q40 Mr Stuart:** My crude proxy, though, is the number of NEETs. Even before we got to the credit crunch, the number of people who were left without employment, education or training was unchanged, and of course it is now higher than it was in 1997. It seems to me that with a Labour Government who genuinely committed resources in a bid to tackle disadvantage—to close the gap and ensure that opportunity was there for all, and not just for those in the leafy suburbs—if that NEETs number is correct, it does not look like change for those at the bottom has been delivered.

**Mr Blunkett:** That would be true, except that nobody over the age of 16 has experienced any of the changes that Charles, Estelle and I brought in.

**Baroness Morris:** I think that it is immeasurably better. I am not complacent and I too could pick out things that we could have done better, and the statistics do not show the improvement that we would have hoped for. However, to add to what David has said, at the end of the day everything has to be judged by the improvement in teacher quality in the classroom. Nothing else will actually bring about transformation, or whatever word you want to use. The teacher matters and I think that so many of our policies supported that, from the National College for School Leadership to the national professional qualification for headship and professional development for teachers. For me, the biggest change is that when you go into schools now—I left teaching in 1992—teachers talk about teaching and learning. They have a language and a structure so that they can talk about their jobs, which is utterly transformed from when I left teaching in 1992. All the initiatives that have brought that about, from literacy and numeracy initiatives onwards, have done that, I think. I would just throw back two statistics: the fact that London, with all the problems we know London has, is now the highest-achieving region for 16-year-olds with five GCSEs, including English and maths, and the fact that Tower Hamlets is the most improved local authority. Something in those statistics tells us that we have delivered for children from less affluent backgrounds too. If we had not done so, those

statistics would not be true. If I was you and if I was challenging somebody from a different political party, of course I could find statistics to use. But do I sleep easy at night, thinking that the time that I spent in the Department—seven years, or whatever—was well spent and did improvements happen? Yes, it was well spent, and there is improvement. I defy anybody to go into most of our schools and not feel and sense the utter professionalism and higher-quality teaching and school leadership that is there.

**Q41 Chair:** So it’s not just money, it is a change in the culture of the school.

**Baroness Morris:** Absolutely. When I taught, there was no professional development. To be honest—I’m going to talk about myself, Paul, and not about you—the staff room conversations weren’t about pedagogy. They were about kids, they weren’t about pedagogy and there is a bit of a difference. Over the past 10 to 15 years, just the sheer professionalism of teachers has improved, although I know there are still some who are not good enough. Charles was absolutely right: professional development needs to be at the centre of what we do, but I’m with David on this—I’m old-school Labour on this. It is standards not structures, and if ever we’ve gone wrong over the past 13 years, it was when we started to believe again that it was about structures not standards. I do believe that standards are higher now because professionalism is higher.

**Q42 Chair:** Shall we peep into structures now?

**Mr Clarke:** There are pluses and minuses. For the pluses, I agree with everything that David and Estelle have said about quality. Secondly, the fabric of schools, the investment in schools and what has actually taken place is enormous—a lot of money. The number of people working in schools—teaching assistants—and the number of teachers helping students significantly transforms the actual environment. I’m glad that Estelle mentioned London. When I lived in the London borough of Hackney, there were real questions about which secondary schools were any good in the borough of Hackney; now we have a multiplicity of choice, which is incredible. The London initiative has been extraordinary. The higher proportion of people going to university, and the higher proportion of people from poorer backgrounds going to university is completely different, as is the relationship and the quality of education for children with special educational needs, which is much greater. Standards generally, as David statistically illustrates, are going up right across the range. That is a fantastic record that I would defend with absolute strength. Anybody who tries to knock it back is seriously mistaken. Things we didn’t do that we should have done are the minuses. I have mentioned already Tomlinson, 14–19—we should have done that and didn’t do it. In big terms, we have done nothing like enough to change the relationship, particularly after age 14, between work and education. There is a set of issues—a big agenda that has to be looked at.

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Thirdly, there is a bit of an improvement for parents, but nothing like as much as we could have and should have done. That is a big thing that we could have led on. Estelle is right about teaching quality, but I would have liked to see far more on subject-led teaching and all the aspects I talked about there. The final point is on NEETs. The social exclusion unit was a big, big aspect of Labour, right from the very beginning. It went to schools, it went to housing and to many, many different aspects. We have to say that we were right to go for it, but the problems in fighting social exclusion have been more intractable than I certainly expected. I would have expected over a 10 to 13-year period that we would have done better. I think we have done fantastically well in many ways, and there have been big improvements, but there are still important socially excluded groups, and the NEETs are an example. We have to ask ourselves—it is not a question of us not putting enough money in—whether we did the right things and could have done it better. If I was in your position, Graham, I'd be saying, "Okay, you didn't do as well on the NEETs as you needed to, what are the policies that now need to be done—whether those are IDS policies or whatever—for the whole thing?" That is a good discussion to have. However, do not say that the whole panoply of enormous achievements and transformation has not been very important on that one basis.

**Chair:** I think we ought to give Lord Baker a view on this.

**Lord Baker:** Even with the prospect of an election only a few days away, I wouldn't dissent roughly from what has been said. I think I was very grateful in 1997 that an incoming Labour Government broadly accepted the changes that were in place. The initial reaction in the 1980s was to virtually vote against everything I did. They changed their views, and I think that was a good idea and was for the better. I applauded very much the initiative that David took on literacy and numeracy; I thought it was very imaginative, and I think there have been improvements. There is no question about that. I think we have to recognise that the sheer difficulty of teaching young children today is much greater than it was 20 years ago. The collapse of parental authority has changed things, and the relationship of the pupils to teachers is different. The demands that are made on teachers now are infinitely greater in terms of managing their classes than when I was at school, or even when I was Secretary of State for Education. That should be recognised. It is a very difficult task. I welcome what has been said about the quality of teaching. The great opportunity in the recession is to attract into the teaching profession people of higher scholastic attainment, which I think will be very, very important indeed. I would only say this: when you are talking about what's gone wrong in the English education system, focus on those years

12–14. That is when most goes wrong in education. That is when youngsters at the local comprehensive are totally fed up with what the school is doing, they do not think it is relevant or interesting and they want to leave. That is why I think that Tomlinson 14–19 is the answer to a lot of our problems. If youngsters can be given motivation to stay on at school and learn something—training and skills, as well as academic subjects—from 14, a lot of the problems with secondary education will disappear, because you improve the quality in the schools they leave. They will have huge improvements in GCSE at 16 when they leave their schools and you will give them quality training and education, supported by a university. You will have a transformation in our society.

**Q43 Mr Stuart:** Could I follow up on that point, Lord Baker? I wonder about creating another artificial line at 19. A lot of people, perhaps particularly those who haven't done very well at school up to the age of 16, need a longer period. When we visited Holland recently looking at NEETs, we found that there were a lot of programmes from 16–20. Is there a danger that in some sense we need to look holistically all the way into modern adulthood, which is probably not 19, but is probably more into the 20s?

**Lord Baker:** Let's get 14–19 established first. One step at a time. You are not only speaking to four former Secretaries of State for Education but also to three former Home Secretaries. I think that I may say on behalf of us all that we all found the job of Secretary of State for Education infinitely more interesting and rewarding than the job of Home Secretary. A Home Secretary can't change much—it's too big a boat to turn round. Every night when you put your head on your pillow, you hope that one of the people you are responsible for isn't going to destroy your career. That is the position. Being Home Secretary is not a creative job. Secretary of State for Education is creative; you can actually change things for the better and see some results. Do I speak for all of us in that?

**Mr Blunkett:** You do indeed.

**Mr Clarke:** Not in my case, no. I am more optimistic about the capacity of the Home Secretary to change things than you are, but maybe that is naive optimism.

**Chair:** Members of the Committee would love to ask more questions. I think they will be very frustrated, but we promised you 7 o'clock at the latest. We had a Division and have gone on a little bit longer than that, but I found it, and I am sure the rest of our team found it, absolutely fascinating.

**Mr Blunkett:** Thank you very much, Chairman. There is only one problem—none of the four of us will get another go at doing it.

**Chair:** You never know. Thank you very much.

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## Wednesday 10 March 2010

Members present

Mr Barry Sheerman (Chair)

Annette Brooke  
Ms Karen Buck  
Paul Holmes

Mr Andrew Pelling  
Mr Graham Stuart

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*Witnesses:* **Rt hon Ed Balls MP**, Secretary of State, and **Jon Coles**, Director General for Schools, Department for Children, Schools and Families, gave evidence.

**Q44 Chair:** May I welcome the Secretary of State and Jon Coles to this Committee session? It is a pleasure, as ever, to see the Secretary of State. Secretary of State, you know that we tend to see you at this time of year anyway, and we are very close to a general election. It is nice to see you at this time. It is a sign of spring, I always think, seeing the Secretary of State. You will also know that when this Committee started scrutinising the new Department, it would have been easy to say, "Well, this is in our comfort zone, looking at schools," but the new challenges are around children and families, and we determined to look at the major aspects of reform over the past 20 years. I know, Secretary of State, that you have read the transcript of the session that we had on Monday with four former Secretaries of State, and I think that you rather enjoyed reading it. We enjoyed, and learned a lot from, the experience. We hope that this session will be an attempt to get from you what you think about those big areas that have shaped and are shaping education, and about where we are going. I don't know if you've heard this, but we intend to publish all four of our major reports—Testing and Assessment, National Curriculum, and School Accountability, wrapped around with the training of teachers—as a box set, "From Baker to Balls", and we hope we can use your photograph. I can see Baker on the front and you on the back.

**Ed Balls:** I am very happy to allow you to use my photo. I am not sure whether "From Baker to Balls" would be the title I would choose, but that is really a matter for you.

**Chair:** People seem to like it.

**Ed Balls:** The first time I was here in front of your Committee, I was a novice, and I am now a veteran—the second longest-serving Secretary of State since Kenneth Baker. That probably says more about the short terms of some of my predecessors than about my particular length of office. I am very happy to be part of this reflective discussion and, as I said, I enjoyed reading the transcripts.

**Chair:** Is there anything you want to say to kick us off, or do you want to go straight into questions?

**Ed Balls:** I am very happy to go straight into questions.

**Q45 Chair:** Let's start by reflecting on this. One of the interesting things that came out of the session on Monday was that towards the end there was a kind of unanimity, an agreement on the challenge of a high-quality work force—there was a lot of

agreement across all of the four former Secretaries of State. Do you think that over these past four years, or these past 13 years, we have cracked that challenge? When we look at the training of teachers, we like to think, and I have often said, that we have the best trained teachers ever. We couldn't actually find the evidence for that, but a lot of people like to think it. Have we cracked it? David Blunkett made some not very complimentary remarks about the teaching work force when he became Secretary of State. Have we cracked that?

**Ed Balls:** I don't know whether we have cracked it in the sense that the work is complete, but there has been a pretty big transformation. I was on the way to the ASCL conference on Friday and I popped into the Science Museum where the Teacher Development Agency was doing a fair for people who want to move into teaching. This is not for people who are thinking about doing an undergraduate degree but for people who are already in other careers who want to switch. Some 1,000 people came through the door of the Science Museum in the first hour of the two-day event. A number of men and women from a range of different careers want to move into teaching now because they see it as a well paid, high-status profession that is respected and one in which you can make progress. That is all very encouraging. Ofsted says that this is the best generation of teachers that we have ever had. There is still more to do to ensure that when there is underperformance, heads and the General Teaching Council deal with it. That is something that we continue to work on. In general, Ofsted is right; we have really high-quality people coming into teaching. We have a very strong teaching profession. We are doing more to ensure that this is a profession in which a teacher has training and professional development all the way through their career. I feel very positive about it.

**Q46 Chair:** Another thing from Monday was this challenge of continuing professional development. That is essential if we are to have good, bright and committed people coming into the profession from diverse sources and if we are to keep the work force up to speed in terms of new ways of teaching and learning. Is that a challenge? On Monday, people kept coming back to the importance of continuing professional development.

**Ed Balls:** I think it is a challenge. It is about really making teaching a proper profession. If you are a hospital consultant and you reach the stage of

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becoming a consultant in your late 30s or early 40s, you would have been doing research, training and professional development all the way through the previous 20 years of your career. The same would be true of the law as well. Historically, probably, people trained as teachers, became qualified and then became teachers. Having a culture of professional development right through a teacher's career is very important. That is what we are trying to do with the Masters, which is now already being delivered for newly qualified teachers in the north-west and in National Challenge schools. As for professional development, the money is there in school budgets, but it is very important that it is being spent on continuing professional development. We need to keep the pressure on schools to ensure that they deliver for teachers in the way in which PPA time and wider professional development are used.

**Q47 Chair:** Evidence given to the Committee suggests that schools are becoming more reluctant to allow staff to get out of the school place to get CPD. Is that a concern? We took some worrying evidence on "rarely cover". Someone said to the Committee that the new science learning centres in York and the nine regions will fail if we cannot get teachers to use that wonderful facility to learn how better to teach science.

**Ed Balls:** It would be a huge collective failure of head teachers—both secondary and primary—and teaching unions if "rarely cover" did become an obstacle to school trips or continuous professional development. The feedback we have is that that is not what is happening at the moment. I spoke to head teachers on Friday. Although particular schools have difficulties for one side or the other, in general "rarely cover" is not proving to be an obstacle to those things, but we need to be vigilant the whole time. That is absolutely not what is intended.

**Q48 Chair:** We are not going to be able to talk to you about a report that we are finalising on Sure Start and children's centres. This Committee has not approved a report at all. There was worrying evidence as we went through that that, on the one hand, here is the first amazingly innovative way of absolutely joined-up service for pre-school children that is breaking down the silos between health, education and much else, but there was a worry that under any government after the election the funding would cease to flow for children's centres. What is your view on that?

**Ed Balls:** I don't think there should be a worry about that because, at least from this Government's perspective, we guarantee the funding for children's centres until 2013. The funding is there in our baseline within the 75% of ring-fenced money, which is rising in real terms overall from the pre-Budget report. So the money from us is there for Sure Start through to 2013. Clearly, that is not a commitment that has cross-party support at the moment. The issue is at least as much about commissioning and non-core children's service, children's centre funding. We have many examples around the

country of joint commissioning into children's centres, particularly from health as well as children's services, with pooled budgets and joint staff. I was in Exeter a few weeks ago and saw an excellent children's centre where there are a lot of health PCT staff employed in the children's centre, but that is not yet universally commonplace. Those issues are about resource, but also about people being willing to reshape how they work to really use children's centres to the full. My instinct is that if there aren't midwives doing pre and post-natal visits in the children's centre, that is a concern. If the health visitors are not working from the children's centre, that is a missed opportunity, but those require local decisions.

**Q49 Chair:** Some of the evidence given to us was that children's centres were probably the most innovative and radical policy in the past 20 years for changing children's lives. Do you rate that, or do you think that is an exaggeration?

**Ed Balls:** No, I don't think so. I think that is what people will look back and say. Within the post-1945 welfare state there was a gap for 0 to five year-olds. Other than the post-natal visits from the health visitor and an injection from the GP, parents did not really get much support at all until their children started full-time schooling. Obviously, free nursery for 3 and 4-year-olds changed that in part, but all the evidence is that child development in learning is formative in the first 20 to 25 months and children's centres fill a gap. That was not there before. I was there at the beginning of the children's centre work. Norman Glass and the Treasury led a review that the Treasury, the Department of Health and the then Department of Education were all involved in. The aim was always for this to be a universal service. We started in the lowest income areas. There is a real obligation on children's centres to prioritise outreach to the families who need the help most, but this is a universal service and that is very important. It is important that we fund it in that way.

**Q50 Chair:** If that's so innovative and creative at getting rid of the silos in terms of that age group, do you think that the Government have been much less successful in that joined-up approach from 14–19 right across both education and youth services? We have tried to make a large point, in one of our last reports, on NEETs. All the time in your mind, you're comparing what we have done as a Government in terms of children's centres and Sure Start with some of the problems we have faced with a lack of joined-upness for the later age group.

**Ed Balls:** When you have different services provided by different agencies, different Departments, different management structures and different professional structures, there is always a challenge to make their services really work closely together. I actually think that it is a blind alley to try to have bigger and bigger Departments. The right thing to do is to get multi-professional teams in the same room, not on the phone but working together. In the case of children's centres, I was saying to you that the big challenge is to try to get money and

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commissioning across children's services and health working closely together. In the case of 14–19, the big change we heralded when the new Department was established was to change the commissioning of 16–18 funding back to the local authority. That was a very important step towards more effective education commissioning across 14–19. Without that, the discontinuity at 16 in commissioning was a real obstacle to effective thinking across an area for 14–19 provision. That includes entry to employment and foundation learning. Having a broad approach to commissioning for young people is important. You ask about the broader issue of young people who are getting into difficulty with school, dropping out and the role of youth services. That almost takes us into some of the wider youth areas.

**Chair:** Okay, enough from me. Graham is going to ask you some questions, starting with the National Curriculum.

**Q51 Mr Stuart:** The former Secretaries of State suggested that all Ministers, regardless of party, tended to carry contradictions in their head. They had preferences, whether from a right-wing or left-wing menu, while they also talked about freedoms. Every Minister seems to have contradicted him or herself by talking about letting go, at the same time as insisting, "You must teach traditional history, or you must teach this or that." As you are now the second longest-serving since Baker, how do you think that balance is best struck?

**Ed Balls:** Of course, that's true. Look at myself and my shadow at the moment. We both say we want more flexibility in the National Curriculum. In saying that, we are carrying on a tradition that goes back to the Dearing report of the early 1990s and probably back to Kenneth Baker himself. Kenneth Baker said in his evidence to you that he knew that he should start maximalist, because he knew there would be a move away from the maximal view of the National Curriculum and he wanted to reach an equilibrium which he thought covered the areas. When I arrived, the first thing I inherited was the Key Stage 3 curriculum changes, which had been essentially agreed and were announced soon after. The first run-in I had with *The Sun* newspaper was about whether Winston Churchill was going to be taught in the Key Stage 3 curriculum. There was a bit of a row about that. I said that the curriculum specifies that you have to teach world war one and world war two, and I don't see how you could teach world war two without Churchill being in the curriculum. That is where I started. The Key Stage 3 curriculum change was a deregulation giving more flexibility. However, I have added cooking to the Key Stage 3 curriculum, which I think is important. I have also introduced statutory PSHE—sexual, health and financial education—into Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 curricula and into primary. You could say that that is my contradiction. I want there to be a shift towards more flexibility but I have added some things. Take my shadow: he says there should be more flexibility but he also wants to specify exactly what history and what kings are

taught, and what is actually taught in poetry lessons—as we read in *The Times*. He says that children—

**Mr Stuart:** Let's not dwell too much on your opponent.

**Ed Balls:** Don't interrupt me—I was making a non-partisan point. I should have thought you would appreciate that, Mr Stuart. The second thing is that there is a contradiction between saying that every child must learn synthetic phonics in Key Stage 1, and saying that our aim is to have more primary schools opt out of the National Curriculum entirely and become academies. The point I am making is that there are contradictions in the views of my shadow on the National Curriculum and tensions in what I have done as well. The wise former Secretaries of State explained why that is the case.

**Q52 Mr Stuart:** I can't remember that any of the former Secretaries of State had a good word to say for the role and contribution of the unions to the development of standards of education. The NUT particularly came in for criticism. How do you think the relationship with the unions can be made more constructive and wiser? Successive Governments haven't been able to make that a more effective and positive partnership.

**Ed Balls:** With due respect, that is slightly out of date. That is more a reflection of how things were for Kenneth Baker and David Blunkett, who were the main people who said those things. Going back to the 1980s, the National Curriculum was born at a time of huge strife between the Government and the unions. A lot of that conflict was about pay, and also about policy. Quite a lot of that conflict carried on through the '90s. David Blunkett had some very difficult times with the NUT over performance pay and over a number of those reforms. That was in part a reflection of the teaching profession at that time being, in its own view and in the views of the public, less professional. What we have seen in the past 10 years is a real rise in the standing, professionalism, training and quality of teachers. From the nadir of those relations, at that transition from Conservative to Labour Governments, we saw a big change through the partnership. It is a matter of regret to me that the National Union of Teachers has been outside the partnership all the time that I've been Secretary of State. I had conversations with Steve Sinnott about whether that could change, and it wasn't possible. Then, very tragically, he died. On the other hand, the NUT at a local level has been very active in implementing agreements that were reached between the Government, the employers, the ASCL, NAHT, and NASUWT and ATL in particular, and other social partners, in which there has been a huge amount of progress on work force remodelling, the role of teaching assistants, the space for professional development within the working day, and getting the balance right between extra work and working hours. The partnership has been a very important contributor to policy making. There are always going to be particular issues from time to time, where the professional organisations and the teaching world become more representative

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of their members on a particular issue. I have had the odd dispute over the past two or three years, but in general I think that there is a depth of partnership around the work force but also more widely in education policy between the employers, heads and teachers than there has been at any time in teaching for decades. That is a really strong and positive thing, which has led to much better outcomes for young people. What you're describing is very much an artefact.

**Q53 Mr Stuart:** It's hard to square that with the fact that they are threatening to go on strike against the SATs tests.

**Ed Balls:** Who are "they"? The teaching unions?

**Mr Stuart:** It suggests a ballot on industrial action against—

**Ed Balls:** You have to distinguish between different unions in the partnership.

**Q54 Mr Stuart:** Yes, but none the less, what is your view? If after the general election there are ballots on industrial action to oppose an elected government's policy on examinations, that hardly suggests the positive partnership that you've just described.

**Ed Balls:** I said there will be particular points. The strength of the partnership is that at times there can be different views expressed. At the moment, the NAHT is taking a particular view of Key Stage 2 tests in primary schools, which I disagree with. ASCL—the head teachers' union—and the NASUWT publicly agree with the position that we take on Key Stage 2 tests and disagree with the NAHT. So this is not a blanket issue for the teaching unions—there is a difference of views within the teaching world. But that doesn't stop all those organisations getting round the table and discussing things that are of great importance to pupils and parents. I would turn it the other way round. I'll have to have a conversation in particular about the NAHT, but if you're asking for a more general view about the relationships with teachers and teachers' leaders, I think the fact that you can have a particular issue where there's a dispute, but still have a collaborative approach to these things more generally, is a sign of strength and maturity in the relationship.

**Chair:** There are a couple of areas on National Strategies that we must cover before we move on.

**Ed Balls:** I am very happy to talk at any point. I presume we're going to come back to testing later. I'll be happy to talk about those issues whenever you want.

**Q55 Mr Stuart:** I, too, want to move on. On the National Strategies, you said in your conference speech that the Labour Government are committed to opening up excellence and opportunity for all, and yet there is a sense, with the closing down of the National Strategies, that the Gifted and Talented programme is likely to be diluted. Can you explain how those aspects of the National Strategies, which were not seen as overly prescriptive, join-the-dot

teaching guidance but were about focusing education generally on areas that were otherwise easily left, will be delivered?

**Ed Balls:** As Kenneth Baker, I think it was, said earlier in the week, for Secretaries of State there are always tensions and sometimes apparent inconsistencies. Obviously the same thing could apply to members of select committees as well, because the issue is about devolution and local decision making rather than central prescription. I think that national strategies was exactly the right reform 12 years ago. David Blunkett and others talked about the importance of the literacy hour and the numeracy hour. That was a big struggle, but I think that that argument has been won. Twelve years on, we are in a more mature place than a national central field force giving advice to schools about how they must do Gifted and Talented, teacher professional development or the literacy hour. The right thing for us to do, within the accountability framework we have, is to expect schools to be accountable for outcomes, which we do in a very tough way, but also have the confidence to devolve more resource and decision making down to the individual school level. We are saying that the National Strategies have had their day, but those days are gone, which is why we are ending the National Strategies contract. The right thing to do is to shift the resources for school improvement and programmes, such as Gifted and Talented, from central prescription to individual head teachers, in consultation with their SIP, so they make their own decisions and be accountable for that. That is something that you should support because it is about devolving decision making to the head and getting rid of central bureaucracy.

**Q56 Mr Stuart:** Can I follow on from that? Perhaps one of the reasons for parts of the National Strategies was about trying to compensate for the incentives in the system, where they had a distorting influence. Can I take you to the issue—

**Ed Balls:** Sorry, you'll have to explain that bit.

**Mr Stuart:** Let me explain. On testing, because of how the idea of five good GCSEs works, there are well rehearsed arguments about teaching to the test and the narrowing of the curriculum—perhaps only in those schools where the heads or the teachers lack confidence. There can be teaching to the test, which can lead to, and we've heard evidence of it, ignoring those who are likely to do well and ignoring those at the bottom. Can we, in tandem with giving more power to the schools to decide how best to focus on these issues, create a more sophisticated accountability system, so that every pupil's performance scores points, so that every single child matters and we don't have an artificial divide on whether it is a National Challenge school or whether it gets 30% A to C grades? For people who don't fit into that, especially when you're close to the line and have very high stakes for the leaders of the school in particular, can we not have a system in which every child's performance matters equally to the teacher and thus to the institution, if we are going to carry on with high stakes testing?



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**Chair:** You're getting very long questions.

**Ed Balls:** Sure, it's called the School Report Card and that is exactly what it is about. I thought that you might have asked me at the beginning, Mr Chairman, why we made the change in our Department in the way we did and why it happened. I was thinking about that as I read the transcripts. I think that early on—and in a way national strategies are a reflection of this—after '88, the focus was very much on institutions and the profession. It was necessary in those stages to get in place the National Curriculum and force schools to face up to their responsibilities over the literacy hour and such things. The change that has happened, as we've made progress and more children have done well, I think rightly—this was heralded before I became Secretary of State and the Department changed—was a shift away from thinking about institutions to thinking about outcomes for children. One of the great strengths of our Department is that our perspective is, and in a sense this is what you are saying, “Are children doing well?” It is not, “Are schools or teachers doing well?”, but, “Are all children doing well?” Are we making sure that we tackle the barriers to progress for every child, which are sometimes in the school, but sometimes outside? Therefore, having a Department that is as concerned about children's mental health, early years or support for parents as it is about teachers' professional development is very important in terms of tackling those wider barriers. The change in the report card is towards a more child-centred approach to accountability, which says that we want to know that every school is ensuring that every child is succeeding. We will measure schools' performance on the basis of whether all children progress. As you say, that is about having a child who starts behind catching up and the brightest child being stretched. It is a much more child-centred approach to accountability, and is much closer to where teachers and head teachers are thinking these days. The report card is the best way to do that, because you are completely right—the league table can only ever give you an average measure, and of course it incentivises the school to care about children who are just below the score.

**Chair:** That's a very interesting response. You've done two things. First, you've ruined all my wind-up questions to you because you've answered them now. Also, you've wandered into the second section of our questions, which Annette is going to go to now.

**Ed Balls:** I apologise. I wanted to contextualise it. It seemed the interesting thing to say.

**Chair:** Secretary of State, that was fine.

**Q57 Annette Brooke:** I am going to be direct and to the point here. From the evidence session on Monday, it was clear that there is general agreement about the need for a good inspection process, and I suspect everyone in the room agrees with that. But we have some interesting meeting of minds on views about Ofsted at the moment, with Chris Woodhead suggesting that it should be abolished. Even Professor Tim Brighouse has been very critical. John

Dunford was also very critical of the way that it is currently operating. On the “Today” programme this morning, we had a teacher very unhappy about the reliance on test results. Is Ofsted currently fit for purpose?

**Ed Balls:** I don't think for a moment that John Dunford or Tim Brighouse would suggest that Ofsted should be abolished.

**Annette Brooke:** I didn't say that.

**Ed Balls:** I know you didn't. I don't think Chris Woodhead has ever supported anything I have done at any point in the last three years. So it won't be a great surprise to hear that I disagree with him on the abolition of Ofsted. Ofsted itself has gone through some changes, because of its broader remit. Fundamentally, we've also gone to a new inspection regime. That regime raises the bar and moves to a more risk-based system. That is exactly the right thing to do. There is less notice. Inspections are shorter, and are much less frequent for higher performing schools, but more frequent and tough for schools that have not been performing so well. That is the right way to go, rather than having the same inspection cycle for every school. There has never been, as Jon Coles always tells me, a new inspection regime that has not been difficult for the first few months. That is where we have been in the last few months with the new one. But once it settles down, I think we will be in a better place than we would have been if we were still operating the old inspection regime.

**Q58 Annette Brooke:** Could I press you on the tick-box mentality, coming back to the schools SATs and GCSE results, which seem to have a great impact on the overall evaluation of the school, however much the Chief Inspector might deny it? There seems to be a great deal of evidence and opinion about this matter, both a year ago and now, with the new system. Can you comment particularly on this great emphasis on the results? We hear that head teachers are concerned that if they have a particular cohort, their results might be down in the year the snap inspection comes.

**Ed Balls:** The interesting thing in the evidence from previous Secretaries of State was their universal view that testing is important. They supported it, and wouldn't want to see a move away from that. Testing is important because it is important for individual children to be prepared and able to do a test—to show that they've learnt to deal with that situation. They are also important for individual schools. What is bad is if you only care about the average result. Clearly, you should be focused on the attainment and progress of every child. I think it would be perverse to have an inspection regime which did not focus on around attainment and progression. Of course they aren't the only things that matter. If there were a tick-box culture that would be a bad thing. As for Ofsted, Christine has been very clear to me, and in public in the last couple of months since some concerns were raised, that in this regime there is a focus on results, but attainment is not a limiting factor. A school with good or outstanding leadership or progression, even with

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lower absolute results, can be an outstanding school. I know that some teachers feared that attainment can just limit them, but that would be counter to the whole philosophy which I tried to describe around the report card and the direction which we are all trying to go in. I am not going to hand on heart say that no school has had an inspection which has felt like a tick-box exercise, but at the same time I don't think that that is the intention or the common practice of Ofsted inspectors.

**Q59 Annette Brooke:** So Ofsted doesn't need any reform?

**Chair:** Annette did ask whether it is fit for purpose.

**Ed Balls:** Ofsted is independent of the Executive as an inspector that reports directly to Parliament. Even if I did think that Ofsted needed reform, I would have to be quite careful about how I said that. I don't want to compromise its independence. As it happens, I don't think that Ofsted needs fundamental reform. Of course it is the case that in the first few weeks and months of a new inspection regime, there is some learning that schools have to do to understand the new regime. But some of the inspectors will take a bit of time to fully understand the nature of the new regime in which they are progressing. But do I think that the new inspection framework is right? I do. Do I think it is right that Ofsted is looking more widely across children's services? I do. I think we have the right inspection regime, and I don't think that Ofsted needs a big reform.

**Q60 Chair:** The evidence that the Committee has been given is that Ofsted gets bigger and bigger.

**Ed Balls:** It's a bit like your Committee, with respect, Mr Chairman. Your remit has broadened and so has the remit of Ofsted.

**Chair:** That is because we reflect your Department. That is the reason we have got bigger.

**Ed Balls:** But my Department reflected what was happening to Ofsted as well, which reflected what was happening in the wider—

**Q61 Chair:** What we worry about is that Ofsted—we are currently looking at its fitness for purpose, particularly looking at children's services and child protection—has got bigger and bigger; it has gone into further and higher education and down into early years. Now it is going to go into children's centres. It is a massive organisation, and while it may be fit for purpose in some parts of its remit, it may not be in others. You talked about the risk-based procedures. It may be perfectly good for schools, but not as good as it could be for children's services.

**Ed Balls:** Clearly, a school inspection and the expertise needed to do it are different from a child protection inspection. They are done by different people. Some came from old Ofsted and some came from CSCI. The question is whether you try to have coherence across the whole piece or whether you do them in different silos. Again, reading the evidence, there are some people who would be very critical of Ofsted, my Department and Every Child Matters because they think that schools should just be about

education in a narrow curriculum sense and that these wider issues are a diversion. I disagree with that. There is a rather old-fashioned view that says, "Is it standards, or is it the well-being of every child?" and that if you are focusing on these wider issues around the well-being of children it is a diversion from standards. I don't think that is the reality of leadership in schools.

**Chair:** This Committee has never been in that camp at all.

**Ed Balls:** Exactly. So I think there is a real issue for schools. Do they get the kind of support they need from the CAMHS service in a responsive way? Do they have ways in which they can manage behaviour across groups of schools with expert support? The ways in which they deal with, for example, family support, family intervention projects or housing issues are very important for schools. Looking across the piece, which is really Ofsted's job, and asking whether the area has the capacity to manage children's services in a way that delivers for children and schools, is important. It would be a step backwards for the inspection regime to look only at classroom practice, because that would be disempowering for schools.

**Q62 Chair:** We were worried when we took evidence. Most of us in the education sector agree that the quality of teaching is absolutely paramount to the quality of learning in the classroom, and we became worried about the specific quality and training for inspectors in the inspectorate for particular purposes. The evidence to the Committee was that very few people inspecting children's services and child protection had training in that area. That was the sort of thing that worried us.

**Ed Balls:** I saw your recommendation, and you saw our response. It is a matter for Ofsted and it must make sure that its inspectors meet the highest professional standards. We don't see evidence that HMIs and other inspectors have a different level of professional standard or that the organisations used by Ofsted are second class, but it is something that we need to be efficient about. Do you want to say something, Jon?

**Jon Coles:** If you don't mind my jumping back a bit, I wanted to say something on the much earlier question of a tick-box approach.

**Chair:** We are back to Annette, that's good.

**Jon Coles:** I want to say two things—from a historical perspective, if that is the perspective that the Committee is taking. The current inspection framework is less tick box than what has gone before in two important respects, if you want to use that way of analysing it. First, the last two inspection frameworks have been based rather heavily on the school's self-evaluation. That is a good thing. The inspectors are looking at the school's evaluation of its own strength and weaknesses; they are looking at the quality of its evaluation and at the conclusions that it has come to. That helps the inspectors to have the broad view of what is going on. Secondly, the inspection framework means that the HMI actually looks at more of the practice in the classroom and in the school generally than was the case in the previous

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inspection framework. In other words, the inspection team gets a better view of what is going on in the classroom than would have been the case under the previous inspection regime. It is also true that, under the last two versions of the framework, each inspection team has been led by an HMI—the most professional inspector in the system—which was not the case in the previous version of the framework in 2005 and earlier. In a number of important ways, as the framework has evolved, it has become stronger and more robust, and a better professional way of understanding what is going in the school as a whole. Of course, that has come alongside some toughening and broadening of some of the criteria, which has obviously led to concern and the issues that you are raising. It is not fair to say that it is a tick-box approach to inspection. It is, of course, true that how well children do and the data and evidence of that are important parts of the framework. That is as it should be, but it is not the only thing. There must be a professional look across the school and its process.

**Q63 Annette Brooke:** I want to develop that point to cover Ofsted's wider remit. Jon, you talked about how things are improving all the time, but our Committee was concerned when we heard from Dame Denise Platt that very few of the senior people from CSCI had actually transferred to Ofsted. Should more base work have been carried out before the function was passed over to Ofsted, because it is probably true to say that Ofsted is clearly having to run to catch up with how to inspect children's services and child protection? It didn't appear to be ready to take on the functions that it was given. As you said, Jon, things are developing all the time, but surely we should take the greatest care, particularly with the inspection of child protection services.

**Ed Balls:** Of course, the answer is yes, we must take the greatest care, but it would not be appropriate for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to come along to the Committee and comment on whether the Bank of England had the right balance between economists with expertise in monetary policy or financial stability. The same thing applies here. Those are really matters for Ofsted; it operates independently of us and reports to Parliament. It has to get the balance of training and professionalism right, and be accountable for it. I don't think it is right for us to give a running commentary on the way in which Ofsted goes about those things.

**Q64 Chair:** But it's you, the Government, who have kept expanding its role. We are talking about the suitability of the expanded role that you as a Government—

**Ed Balls:** Which I am accountable for and absolutely defend to the hilt. The issue about how many people from CSCI do or don't play a senior management role—

**Annette Brooke:** That was just to illustrate my point.

**Ed Balls:** I understand that. I am just explaining why it is quite hard for us to get into that level of micro detail. The thing I care about is: are we addressing all barriers to the progress of children? And do you

have, across an area, proper engagement of schools, children's services, early years and, critically, health professionals? That might also apply to youth offending teams and police. It is very important that inspection looks across the capacity of everybody who needs to work together to provide services for children. It is really important for schools that that broad look is being taken. If you only had inspectors looking at particular elements within it, rather than across the piece, that would be unsatisfactory. I pushed Ofsted very hard to look at the capacity of children's trusts and the ability of individual services to work together, but that does not take away from the fact that we also need to have the particular expertise to be concerned about maths teaching in the classroom or social work practice at the front door when referrals for child protection cases are received. What you need to have is the expertise to look not only at the micro issue, but across the piece. If you don't have both of those things, I don't think you are really doing a good job. Ofsted needs both, but I think that silo-based inspection would be wrong. I don't think that really worked for us.

**Chair:** We have a lot of territory to cover. I am going to move on to Paul, who is going to talk about school improvement and academies.

**Q65 Paul Holmes:** Before I do that, may I ask one more question about accountability, but from a different angle? How many countries publish league tables of exam results in the way we do?

**Ed Balls:** I don't know.

**Jon Coles:** I wouldn't like to put a number on it. We are not the only ones. There are plenty of other jurisdictions. US states do, and I believe that Australian states do as well.

**Q66 Paul Holmes:** So some individual states do, but all the US states do not?

**Jon Coles:** I am sure it is true that not all US states do.

**Q67 Paul Holmes:** The reality is that we are constantly told—I am thinking of the four former Secretaries of State who gave evidence on Monday as well as you today—that league tables are the only way, or the key way, to monitor and drive school improvement. In fact, however, most western European-style countries do not publish league tables. Scotland does not and Wales has stopped doing it.

**Ed Balls:** We have better results now on the international surveys than any of those European countries.

**Q68 Paul Holmes:** Better than Finland, which does not publish league tables and tops the PISA league tables every single time?

**Ed Balls:** If you look across the bulk of western European countries, we have been better than them.

**Jon Coles:** A very interesting study by Eurydice shows that the level of school-based testing, and the use of that for accountability purposes, is much more widespread than you might suspect.

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**Q69 Paul Holmes:** But isn't that the key difference—in my exasperation, I tried to get this across to the four former Secretaries of State on Monday—that testing within schools and school departments is as old as the hills? I was tested as a child, and I tested my kids as a teacher and as head of department, as did every school I ever worked at, but never on this national scale where it is all high-stakes testing, following which the school and the teacher will either be pilloried or praised.

**Jon Coles:** But it is also true, as one of the Secretaries of State said on Monday, that there are US states where there are annual state-wide tests for every child. One of the Secretaries of State said “termly.” I don't know about a termly case, but I know about annual cases.

**Paul Holmes:** And there are many where there are not.

**Q70 Chair:** Paul is pushing on testing for assessment, and testing for accountability. He is in favour of assessment, not accountability.

**Ed Balls:** I am in favour of both, but they have to be done in the right way. We have come quite a long way since the original Baker conception of National Curriculum tests, which I think was to have a test in every one of the National Curriculum subjects. We have removed the Key Stage 3 tests, following your Select Committee report, and we have made substantial changes at Key Stage 2. Of course, teachers need to test to track progress much more regularly than you need testing for accountability purposes. I've been very clear about my views about league tables, but I still think you need testing for accountability purposes.

**Q71 Paul Holmes:** We went to Ontario, and one of the things we looked at was exactly this. Ontario, as a province of Canada, if you took it out of Canada as a whole, would come very high up in the PISA league tables. They don't publish their league tables, deliberately. They do have all this accountability testing within schools, and they have highly proactive local authorities that go into the schools that are not doing as well as they should and do something about it, like replacing the head teacher and all sorts of other things, but they deliberately will not publish a nationwide or province-wide league table, because they think it is far too counterproductive.

**Ed Balls:** Of course, we don't publish them, but we have a culture in our country of freedom of information now, and also of scrutiny, which means that it is not possible to say to parents or newspapers or websites, “You shouldn't have the information. You can't make these comparisons,” and think that's going to happen. The issue is whether you can do this in a way which is fair rather than unfair and whether it is used properly in the accountability process rather than overemphasis being placed on particular measures. That's a challenge for us all.

**Q72 Paul Holmes:** In terms of whether you can claw back from here, Wales has stopped doing that, deliberately. We can move back from it. Scotland

never did it. I just note, on the statement about “We're doing better than all these other western European countries,” that in PISA 2006 we were 24th for maths and 13th in science. That doesn't exactly show us doing better than other countries. Moving on to academies, would you say that academies have been a success? Doubtless you will, in which case, why?

**Ed Balls:** On PISA for a second: from 1995 to 2007—this is TIMSS, actually—we have gone from 17th to seventh for primary maths, with Scotland 22nd and Sweden 18th; from eighth to seventh for primary science, with Scotland 23rd and Sweden 16th; from 25th to seventh for secondary maths, with Scotland 17th and Sweden 15th; and from eighth to fifth for secondary science, with Scotland 15th and Sweden 14th. So I think we can make the case.

**Q73 Paul Holmes:** So you're looking at TIMSS and not PISA?

**Ed Balls:** Well, TIMSS is probably a better survey than PISA, isn't it? Why I chose Sweden, I have no idea. Draw no conclusions from the use of Sweden in those comparisons, unless you want to.

**Jon Coles:** It is really worth looking at trajectories of improvement for England as against Scotland and Wales in relation to this policy issue. That is all I would add to that. TIMSS is a very good example. Scotland was ahead of us in 1995.

**Q74 Paul Holmes:** Are academies a success, and if so, why?

**Ed Balls:** I think academies are a success, because they have raised results faster in disproportionately disadvantaged areas, taking a catchment which is more disproportionately disadvantaged than the catchment area would suggest they needed to take. They show that with the right kind of investment and leadership, you can deliver faster rising results for students from the poorest backgrounds. That is what we're all about, I would have thought: raising standards and breaking those historic links. I was talking about this on Friday to the head teachers' conference. I'll say the same thing to you that I said to them. There is one view of academies which says that the reason why they succeed is because they are independent of other state schools, and that that is the key to their success: their independence. The trouble is that if that were the case, it would mean by definition that any state school that was not an academy must be an unsuccessful school. That is clearly not true. The reason, I think, why academies succeed is that they have a set of ingredients which we know are what work more generally in our best maintained schools, which is strong leadership—sometimes, in the case of academies, new leadership—external support and impetus to improve, a culture of high aspirations and sometimes an injection of investment and a new building, but not always. Also, at the time of turnaround, there is the use of extra curriculum freedoms when you need to have that new start. We know that that is what our best maintained schools are doing all the time, so it's not about independence. It's actually fundamentally about

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leadership. When we accredited our first group of schools, which we think should be playing a wider role across the school system, we had Harris, a multi-academy chain, Barnfield, a sixth-form college, and two state schools that had just become academies—Greenwood Dale and Outwood Grange—but we also had well over 10 high-performing maintained schools. Those schools are distinguished and need to play that wider school improvement role, and although they are not academies they have all the ingredients that we know work for academies. That is my answer.

**Q75 Paul Holmes:** On the general picture, a piece of research some time ago looked at the old Excellence in Cities programme and compared it with the early academies. It showed that improvement in the Excellence in Cities areas was as fast as in the best academies, but cost a lot less financially. Other research has argued that about a third of academies do less well than the schools that were taken over, and about a third do the same and a third do better. The statistical research does not just universally say that academies do better.

**Ed Balls:** That goes back to my previous point. If, as a matter of principle, simply being an academy and being independent of other state schools was enough, every academy would succeed and every school that wasn't an academy wouldn't. It would be silly to say that; it's not true. That is not really what makes for academies. At the time of turnaround, when you have to break out of underperformance, the responsibility that is placed on the school to turn things around, which an academy in particular takes on for the new start, plus some of the curricular freedoms at that time, are important, so I am not trying to deny the importance of some of the things that are particular about academies. Having said that, the things that make for academies succeeding are also those that make good maintained schools succeed. An academy that does not have those ingredients in place won't succeed, and we've had some academies that haven't succeeded.

**Q76 Paul Holmes:** Looking at the individual points that have come out of what you've said, one argument that people make about why academies might be improving is that their intake alters, that the numbers of children who qualify for free school meals and have special educational needs start to fall rapidly when a school becomes an academy. On Monday, Kenneth Baker was constantly extolling the advantage of the city technology colleges that he set up—academies are basically the same thing under another name. But when you analyse the intake of CTCs, which have been running for more than 20 years, it bears no resemblance whatsoever to the social make-up of the catchment area they were set up to serve. They were set up like academies were supposed to be, to serve poor inner-city areas, by and large, but their intake does not represent in the slightest that area. They have become selective, in whatever process.

**Ed Balls:** Which is why the premise of your question, that CTCs and academies are the same thing, is wrong. Academies operate in an entirely different environment, which is essentially framed by the admissions code, and there is an obligation on them within that code to have fair admissions. Of course, you want a local academy to take the cross-section of children who live in that area. If they are taking over from a school that was disproportionately made up of children from a certain income group or whatever, you would want to let there be some shift towards a more comprehensive intake, but unlike CTCs, academies are all doing—must be doing—fair admissions because of the admissions code, and they can't be doing parental interviews or the kind of things that used to go on. I go back to my starting point, which is that it is not simply that academies set up in disadvantaged communities, but the evidence that I have seen is that the pupils going to the academies are more disadvantaged on a free-school-meals basis than the catchment area would suggest, and therefore they achieve these rising results while taking pupils from a disproportionately disadvantaged background, which is why I think we should be pleased about it. They are completely different from the CTCs—that is a completely different world.

**Q77 Paul Holmes:** I gave the CTC example because they have been around for more than 20 years and most academies are too young to be judged properly. The evidence so far—

**Ed Balls:** I support academies, but I wouldn't support CTCs.

**Paul Holmes:** Their intake is changing away from what their catchment area is, but obviously the jury's out on that—we'll have to see.

**Ed Balls:** But in part, that is what you would want if they were succeeding.

**Paul Holmes:** As long as they stopped when they got to the balance, rather than going past the balance.

**Ed Balls:** Exactly. But the key anchor there—this goes back to the work of this Committee—is the admissions code. People who say that CTCs were the model and grant-maintained schools were the key—their independence wasn't really the issue—also tend to be people who don't like the admissions code. They tend to be people who think that schools should decide their own admissions, and what they are really saying is that schools should be able to select the kind of parents they would like to come along. Parents would like their children to go to the kind of school that selects parents. The trouble is that that is totally unfair and takes us right away from what we are trying to do in terms of social justice. The key anchor is the admissions code and its legal basis.

**Q78 Paul Holmes:** I quite accept the direction you have been trying to move that in. I visit academies that say, "Of course, we don't select. We can't. We don't interview. We are not allowed to any more." But children have to attend two or three Saturday

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sessions with their parents before they can apply and put their names down. There are ways round the admissions code.

**Ed Balls:** If that is being used as a sift, it is totally contrary to the admissions code and they can't do that.

**Paul Holmes:** It is being done.

**Ed Balls:** In that case, you should tell me and we'll deal with it.

**Q79 Paul Holmes:** Another point might be the question of funding. Do they lead to improvements because they get more cash? Kenneth Baker on Monday said that CTCs introduced breakfast clubs and after-school activities. They were given more money and therefore could afford to pay for that. A National Audit Office report on academies said on the front page that academies only get the same funding as schools but on the second or third page it gave all the statistics that showed that they actually got a lot more money than other schools. Some people would argue that a lot of the things that we hear academies can deliver are predicated on having all that extra money. Just recently we learned that the Government are now going to withdraw the £100 million start-up fund for after-school activities in mainstream schools. How can you deliver all those enhancements to the curriculum that academies are supposed to be so good at, if you don't have the extra cash to do it?

**Ed Balls:** I think in your questioning you slightly slip into the academies exceptionalism argument. I am saying that academies are doing well and, from a low base, turning round under-performing schools, because that is where we have focused the programme, and they have been achieving faster results. As I said, most of the schools that we have accredited as top-performing schools aren't academies; they are maintained schools. One good statistic concerns schools with more than 70% of their children getting five good GCSEs. In 1997, that was one in 20 schools; now that is one in three. That is a massive change and almost all of that is due to improvement in maintained schools. Academies aren't driving that. If I were to read out the list to you of accredited school providers of secondary schools, almost all are maintained schools. The divide of academies as good, advantaged, better-funded schools, and other maintained schools as less good and less well-funded is a completely ideological view.

**Q80 Paul Holmes:** I am interested that you are playing down that divide in all the answers you are giving.

**Ed Balls:** Because I think that is the right way to do it.

**Q81 Paul Holmes:** So is that why the Government seem to be moving away from what they said was going to be policy of having a big expansion of academies among primary schools?

**Ed Balls:** In terms of expansion of academies, I am proud to say that I have expanded academies faster than any previous Secretary of State. To be honest, if the Independent Academies Association has a

criticism of me it would be that I am going too fast. It quite likes being a small group. Because of National Challenge and our determination to address under-performance wherever it was, we have really pushed the academies programme. We have gone from five universities sponsoring academies to more than 50—a big change—because it works. I think that academies have reciprocal responsibilities. They are part of the family of schools but they have also gained from their curriculum flexibility and I think it works. We have been absolutely clear that the academies model would not work in primary schools and we will not extend academies into primary schools. The teaching of the National Curriculum in primary schools across the piece is very important. The expense and cost of stand-alone primary schools would be very poor value for money. We are keen to see our new accredited providers taking on primary schools individually or groups of primaries, but they would be as maintained schools. Mr Stuart's party is in favour of primary academies, we are not. With regard to all-through schools, as previous Secretaries of State said on Monday it is very important to have room in the schools world for some innovations and experimentation. We have a small number of all-through schools and I support them. I am also keen to have academies sponsoring or federating with primary schools in their group. But making them stand-alone primaries is expensive, unnecessary and a real diversion.

**Jon Coles:** Could I just say on the funding and on the admissions point that I have a team of people in the Department whose job is to replicate the local funding formula and make sure that the academies are funded on the same basis as other schools locally? If anybody has any concerns about whether that has been done properly, I would be grateful if that could be brought to my attention. On the issue of admissions, if anybody has any examples of concerns about whether academies are following the admissions code, again, I would be really grateful if people would bring that to my attention, because they are in breach of their funding agreement if they are breaching the admissions code.

**Ed Balls:** If you go back to the survey we did almost two years ago, the one group of schools that was unequivocally following the admissions code was academies, because all of their admissions policies had been checked. If you remember the dispute we had at the time, it wasn't academies who were causing the difficulty.

**Chair:** We're very keen on admissions. Karen.

**Q82 Ms Buck:** Can I just pick up on a couple of points on academies before we finish? As an interest, I think I am the only MP who has a child in an academy, and I believe that academies utterly transformed the landscape of education for the good. I confess to being completely baffled as to why anybody would argue that, if a school is replacing a failing school in one of the most deprived communities, they shouldn't actually be better resourced and we shouldn't aim to have a more mixed intake. That seems to me to completely miss the point. Just a couple of specific points. One

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thing worries me, and you have already implied the possibility of this. Academies are seen as a solution for failing schools in deprived communities in many cases. Not all academies succeed, we know that. We know that some individual academies do not succeed. Some groups of academies are not doing as well as they should. Are you confident that within the Department you have the knowledge and capacity to effectively duplicate the role of the education authority to support and change those academies that are not working?

**Ed Balls:** First, in National Challenge, we had the fastest improvement in schools coming through the floor last year than we have ever had in the past 10 years. That is because we have really focused on doing what it takes to get schools that are below that floor on the right track if they needed change. That has sometimes—often—been done through an academy, but we have also used a different model called National Challenge Trust, which is a federated partnership between a stronger local school and that school. Sometimes it has just needed some extra resource and support for the leadership, so it is not one-size fits all. Academies are not the only way we have done it, but they have been an important part of the turnaround. Secondly, you are right; they don't always work. We have had some issues that are in the public domain with individual schools. We clearly had problems a year or two ago with the Richard Rose Academy in Carlisle. We have also had documented issues with some of our multi-sponsors—just before Christmas with the United Learning Trust. In terms of individual schools, first of all, I did not feel as though we were in the right place when the problems happened with Richard Rose. What became clear was that nobody else really thought it was their responsibility to understand what was actually happening. Carlisle is quite a long way from London. The anecdotal feedback coming through was that there were some difficulties. It ended up with me saying to the then Schools Minister Jim Knight, "You need to go to Carlisle on the train". He went up when the Ofsted report had come across our desk. He then made a phone call. We got Mike Gibbons in. I was just opening their buildings virtually two weeks ago and there has been a huge turnaround, but we cannot micro-manage school improvement, or school turnaround, from the centre in that way. That is why we have delegated authority for that monitoring and support to the new Young People's Learning Agency, the 16–18 funding organisation, which has a regional presence concerned about 16–18 funding, but also the academies programme. So we will have a group in every region of the country supporting and working with local academies, and also supporting on start-up, who will be the first port of call if things are getting difficult. While the powers come back to the Secretary of State, I would expect them to know at a much earlier stage what is going on. I will say just one other thing. The thinking behind the accredited providers and groups is to make sure that schools or organisations who want to take on that school leadership role are coming through. We need to make sure that they have got that educational

capacity, track record and experience. Harris is excellent and was accredited in the first wave, but it is our intention to make sure that that is how we keep a grip on that.

**Q83 Ms Buck:** The reality is that the Department culture with the academies couldn't fail because academies were the last stop. You still have a problem there, and there is a necessity for micro-management. One of the things that was worrying me about your solution, which may work with individual schools, is exactly as you say: when you get into a sponsor of multiple schools spread in different parts of the country, the regional response is going to be problematic.

**Ed Balls:** I hear what you are saying. When I arrived at the Department, we only had 40 to 45 academies open. It was a little like this famous phrase. Ronald Reagan was walking into the US Department of Agriculture and was going past someone's desk. A man was sitting there crying. Ronald Reagan asked him why. The man said that his farmer had died. There was a slight sense where we could always man-for-man mark every academy with a team. That was possible when we only had 40. But you can't do that when you've got 130 and another 100 coming through—we are aiming for more than that. You just can't have that capacity at the centre. Therefore, we need eyes and ears out there in the regions. The other thing is that what National Challenge has done is uncompromising for all schools. We've said that, if you are a school that has become an academy, we will give you a couple of years to turn things round, but three years is enough. If after three years, you aren't on track in going through the threshold, the rule for academies will not be different from that for other schools. That is one check. Clearly, more generally, in the accountability system and the accreditation process, we aren't having a different rule for academies. To be fair, while I understand what you're saying, I think probably the Department has genuinely been a bit tougher on academies than on other schools. However, it was easier to do that when we had a smaller number.

**Jon Coles:** May I add one small thing on that? A number of the schools we're talking about—I remember North Westminster Community School in 2003–04—had been in difficulty for some considerable period. Local authorities faced with that situation, particularly with quite large secondary schools and serious difficulty, tended not to have the capacity or people to deal with the sorts of problems that they were facing, particularly in small metropolitan authorities. What the academies programme and other programmes such as National Challenge have done for us is to make sure that there is a system nationally to ensure that for each of the schools in very difficult circumstances or failing, there is a solution in place. That doesn't mean that we have to provide it from the centre. As the Secretary of State was saying, often it will be provided by having another, strong school either to take over or come alongside the school that is struggling to transform standards. That is the model that we've used successfully in a number of cases. I

don't think it requires us to have a sort of very large advisory service, because that is not the most effective way of doing things.

**Q84 Ms Buck:** I am just saying that it worries me.

**Ed Balls:** In recent months we have been pretty tough, and rightly so.

**Q85 Ms Buck:** Do you still see a role for education authorities?

**Ed Balls:** What I have done is implemented the 2006 Act as shaped by this Committee. The Act has a very clear role for the local authority as the commissioner of education and as the second line of intervention, after the governing body and the SIP, in school improvement. When I started out this job, I said I thought that we had sent mixed messages in the recent past, because we had both talked about the 2006 Act and underplayed the local authorities' role as if they didn't exist.

**Q86 Ms Buck:** Do you share my concern that my education authority will effectively be abolished to save £2 million in Westminster? It is going to get rid of the education authority completely.

**Ed Balls:** As far as I am concerned, the local authority has a responsibility to ensure that all schools are succeeding for our children. The first line of intervention is the head teacher and the governing body, and there is a local authority responsibility before it comes to the Secretary of State. We have been pretty tough. We have been very tough on Leicester, Milton Keynes, Gloucestershire and Kent. Sometimes, the comeback is, "Why are you talking to us about this? On average, our children do well." The answer is that that is great for the average child, but if you have tens of schools below the 30% threshold, the local authority has a responsibility in terms of its commissioning and its resourcing. The same is true of primary schools. We wrote to 12 primary schools earlier in the year to say that we needed to know why they had a disproportionately poor progression. As far as I am concerned, a local authority, including Westminster, has a statutory responsibility in secondary and in primary education, and it has to fulfil those functions. If it does not, that is something that I will take very seriously indeed. It is not good enough to say, "On average, our schools are all right." The culture that we have shifted to, which requires a local authority to play its role—it can't be done from the centre—is that we care about every child succeeding in every school. It was really hard in 1997, because we had 1,600 schools below the threshold. I now expect the Schools Minister to be able to tell me exactly what we are doing about the fewer than 40 schools that we still have concerns about. You can do that when it's 40, but you can't when it's 1,600. It was beyond our ability. I need to talk about after-school clubs at some point, because I was asked about them.

**Q87 Ms Buck:** I was about to go on to that. Sadly, I could not attend the evidence session with the former Secretaries of State, but one of the regrets expressed by Lord Baker—I think that David

Blunkett made the same point—was that the school day is now shorter than it used to be. Lord Baker said he regretted that he had not extended the school day. First, is that something that we should do? Secondly, I think that extended services work in fulfilling two or three different functions that we have never quite got entirely clear. Is the extended school service intended to replicate or to extend the learning experience? Is it intended to provide child care to allow parents to work? There has always been a lack of clarity at the heart of the extended school system. Can you provide clarification?

**Ed Balls:** Having read the record of Monday's session, I thought I had better check the facts. The position on the length of the school day and the school week is that we do not determine the length of the school day. We set out a suggested minimum number of hours in a school week for children of different ages, but schools decide that. There isn't a statutory minimum on the length of the school day. There are certain procedures that any maintained school has to follow in regulation if it wants to change its hours. In terms of the year, we have regulations specifying that schools should be open to pupils for a minimum of 380 half-day sessions in a school year, but we don't say how long those sessions should be. Teachers work 195 days in a school year under the contract, with five non-contact days for teacher training. That is the sort of framework within which schools then make their own decisions. We do not mandate a shorter or a longer day. My experience of academies, which have more curriculum flexibility, is that some of them have used that flexibility to have a different configuration of hours during the week and a different configuration of terms. An academy in Leeds that I know very well starts its year 7 in July and does not have the school holiday until later on. Children come straight from primary into secondary school and then have the summer holiday later on, after they have started secondary school. I have not heard anybody advocating a longer school day or a longer school week in terms of hours.

**Q88 Ms Buck:** Lord Baker said that his biggest regret was that he had not extended the teaching day by one period.

**Chair:** As did David Blunkett.

**Ed Balls:** I was talking about people who are currently involved in schools.

**Chair:** An unkind cut!

**Ed Balls:** I didn't hear David Blunkett advocate that during his evidence. Maybe I missed that.

**Q89 Chair:** Yes, he said that he notices kids going home really early in the afternoon and that in his day he didn't leave until 4 o'clock. He said that.

**Ed Balls:** I have known no harder-working Secretary of State than David Blunkett. His work ethic is renowned.

**Q90 Chair:** The Committee saw some really



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innovative programmes in New York. They run nine-to-five schools. Some of our academies are copying that, aren't they? They see that as a protection.

**Ed Balls:** You are now moving us on to a different issue, which is about extended schools. The thing that I was talking about there was the school day in terms of hours of teaching in the normal day. There was then the issue about what you do before and after. I have seen lots of academies and maintained schools that essentially operate a seven-to-seven school, with before and after-school clubs. Just to clarify where we are on funding, I have to find, as you know, £500 million-worth of savings in 2013 from my non-protected budgets and 75% of our budgets are ring-fenced and rising in real terms. Then there are teachers' pensions and so I have to find £500 million from about 10% of my budget. That is quite a difficult thing to do because there are lots of very important programmes within that. Within the ring-fenced part of our settlement we have £300 million a year, which is ring-fenced and rising in real terms, for before and after-school clubs for extended schools. That is about sustainability and making sure that the schools can keep them going; they get £155 million a year and then also subsidise children from low-income families to participate in after-school clubs—the figure is £167 million a year. That approximately £300 million is protected in real terms in the settlement. Outside that protected settlement we also had £100 million a year, which we were using to subsidise start-up. So how would a school that did not have after-school clubs get the capacity in to do that? Some 95% of schools have got them already and as we expect all schools to have them by the end of this year I judged that I could take that £100 million of start-up money out of the budget. But the ongoing support for after-school clubs—£300 million a year—is there and protected. So there is no excuse at all for anybody to withdraw from the provision of before and after-school clubs or extended services because of this change. The answer to your question is that it is both, but there are three dimensions in my experience. Dimension one is, “I work Mondays and Wednesdays and need to drop my children off at school at 8 o'clock and they go to the breakfast club because that makes it possible for me to balance work and family life.” That is an important part of before and after-school clubs and is not to be discounted at all, but it is not the only thing that they are for. The second thing is to participate in activities that are about broader learning after school which, to be honest, we know from the evidence is the kind of thing that children from low-income backgrounds may not get a chance to do. They are fun, but are also in some sense about their wider development, which is really important and that is why we subsidise them. Thirdly, if I ask head teachers who are tracking the progress of individual children and are making sure that every child succeeds, “What's your breakfast club for?”, they will always say that in every year there will be, depending on the school, five or 10 children who, if they can get into breakfast club between 8 am and 9 am, it will impact on their

learning and their behaviour over the course of the day to such an extent that the school will pay for it because that is what they need to succeed. If they don't get to the breakfast club, they may not have eaten since the day before and sometimes they may not have gone home. The chances of them calming down enough to learn anything before lunch are zero. I think this is about convenience for parents, about fun for kids and about getting those fun and enriching activities to children who might not otherwise have the chance. However, it is also a targeted intervention that heads and heads of year will use for children for whom this actually makes a massive difference to their day. All those things are vital.

**Q91 Ms Buck:** I would love to ask more questions about that, but I know that we haven't got time, unfortunately. My last question goes back to the admissions debate. There is unpublished evidence from the Sutton Trust about the continuing extent to which admissions to the highest-performing comprehensives are heavily skewed against children from lower-income backgrounds. Looking at my own authority and the data on everything from free school dinners entitlement to ethnicity, I find that, if anything, a polarisation is occurring. It is not something that has happened in the last year or two; this is a long-term polarisation. You'll look at schools that vary from having 70% free school dinner intake to 10%. What do you think would be the next step to reverse that polarisation and deal with the extent to which the highest-performing schools, both faith schools and maintained comprehensives, clearly do not have the mixed intake that they should have?

**Ed Balls:** The first things to say is that the admissions code is a very important safeguard against people using certain techniques to skew the intake, of which parental interview and asking about parental occupation are some of the old practices. We don't have evidence that that is now widespread in the schools system. We have been pretty tough about that and that is right. In general, what you are talking about reflects the nature of the communities that the schools are serving, rather than the particular admissions policies of the schools. That leads into a wider debate about what kind of schools and what kind of admissions arrangements you want to have, rather than about the admissions code itself. Some people advocate a wholesale move to lotteries. Personally, I have always been sceptical about that. We asked the schools adjudicator to look at lotteries. He said that almost all the time, lotteries were essentially used as a tie-breaker when you had two children from equal distance away who were the last two children. Other than in the Brighton experience, which I understand and was particular to Brighton's circumstances, there is not a widespread use of lotteries. I am cautious about lotteries—maybe this is from personal experience, but it is also more general—because the transition from primary to secondary school is difficult. It's good that children move with their peers and friends from primary to secondary school. Having a

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complete lottery on who moves where is destabilising to children and bad for their welfare. People being able to go to their local school is a good thing. At the same time, if going to your local school becomes entirely driven by house prices and whether you can afford to move, that is not very fair. So the direction that we have been moving in, which local areas have been moving in—this is not something that we mandate—is towards banded admissions. Banded admissions allow you to have the combination of proximity and a more comprehensive intake. It does mean that within the primary school class, some children who live further away have less chance of getting into the school, but, at the same time, the intake will be more comprehensive. If a school is within a wider local authority that has more high-income housing around it, the chances are that the lowest ability band will take from a wider catchment than the highest ability band and *vice versa* for other schools. For example, Mossbourne has always had a much wider catchment for its highest 20 or 25% ability band than for the lowest because that is how it brings them in. This is something that you grapple with all the time in my job. You also probably feel thankful that these are local decisions. We have had conversations and have thought about this internally. Andrew Adonis and I sat and talked about it a couple of years ago when we were thinking about the admissions code. My view is that banded admissions are the best way to have local schools, to be fair to children and to get to a more comprehensive intake. I think they are better than a free-for-all or having no admissions code or having lotteries.

**Chair:** I hate to remember how long ago it was that this Committee recommended banded admissions. It was a very long time ago.

**Mr Pelling:** I appreciate that time is running out so I will try to be reasonably clipped, but I probably won't be.

**Ed Balls:** I apologise. These are big questions you are raising so we are trying to answer them.

**Chair:** Good.

**Q92 Mr Pelling:** I think that the admissions thing is a very emotive thing and potentially a powerful tool of social progress. What do you see as the right balance between parents, Government, local government and school governing bodies? The Liberal Whip is trying to put through a private Member's Bill on dropping the Greenwich judgment. That is a big controversy in Croydon and Sutton because we like the grammar schools and we export lots of pupils to Sutton. One of the issues that is upsetting parents in London is that because of the unexpected rise in the number of pupils attending primary schools, one-form entry schools are being transformed into two-form entry schools, and that is not the type of school that they wanted to send their children to. It is not an easy issue. We are pursuing a holy grail. Is it possible to give more power to parents?

**Ed Balls:** Yes, definitely, and we are. You describe

particular London issues where you have relatively small geographical authorities with parents who are more used to their children travelling larger distances and where you have individual authorities choosing different admissions arrangements, so it is a very complex mix which you do not see in most other parts of the country. In my constituency, 94% of parents got their first-choice schools last year; there would be very few children crossing a local authority boundary to go to secondary school. That is probably more similar to the pattern across the country than in London. It is good to have a London-wide admissions system, but it is very complex to try to navigate your way through different admissions arrangements in different schools. Secondly, you always want successful schools to expand. As you said, that sounds like a good idea until you are the parent of a child going into year 1 and you suddenly find out that the classes are bigger. The approach that we have taken to school improvement, chains and accreditation is to try to allow the best school leaders to be running more than one school—running schools that may have increasingly close links with each other—rather than simply saying that the individual school should just get bigger and bigger; that is potentially quite difficult to manage. Thirdly, you need all the different pressures. We have said that we will introduce the right of parents to say, "We as parents would like to look at whether the whole leadership of our school should change." You can imagine parents saying, "Well, actually down the road we now see that Kemnal Trust state school is running two other schools in our area and that is really good and we would quite like to be part of the Kemnal Trust group." If that is what a critical mass of parents say, then it is right that the local authority and governing body should respond to that demand. I know that some of my teaching union colleagues are a bit worried about that, but it is right that parents should have that voice, and have it in a very direct way. Increasingly, as you have multi-chains, that parental voice might be quite powerful. On the other hand, let's think about why the academy movement has been so successful. Often parents in some communities have been willing to tolerate low results and underperformance, without a voice for generations; sometimes, the parental voice has been the opposite of powerful when it comes to asking for change. You cannot, therefore, rely only on parental voices. I will not be critical today, but I think that parental voice is really good. The idea that you have to walk down the road to go to another school, or set up your own school and try and pay for that is deeply flawed. I shall put that to one side.

**Chair:** And now—

**Ed Balls:** No, hang on a second. There is a parental voice, but at the same time there is a role for the governing body to hold a school to account as well as to defend it. It is really hard to be a chair of governors, because you ought to be holding your head teacher to account as well as being the defender of the head teacher to the wider world. There is also a role for the local authority, which is to challenge and to use powers if there is underperformance. In

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the end, I have powers as the Secretary of State. I personally think that central intervention power should be used very much in the last resort. At the same time, we need to have that power in order to breathe down the neck of the local authority or the governing body and say, "If you don't face up to your responsibilities, we can require you to do so."

**Q93 Mr Pelling:** I very much appreciate that answer. I just want to pick up on a point that Karen Buck made earlier. In some ways that reprise that we enjoyed on Monday was very interesting. All the former Secretaries of State seem to have a sort of lament: they said that they had been too interventionist, and then they felt it was all about pulling back. Do you think that it's right to have that kind of scepticism about the ability of government to change things?

**Ed Balls:** The most honest answer was David Blunkett's when he said, "Yeah, I probably was too interventionist, but there was so much to do and I really wanted to get on with it." There is a tension. I'm the longest-serving education Secretary of State since the '80s, other than David Blunkett. There was always a slight element of thinking, "I've got to take my chance while I can." Therefore you need to try to hold back. Don't forget that initiatives are often the Secretary of State's. If you think of the changes we're currently making around accountability, this is responding to the demands of schools themselves to have a fairer way of schools being accountable than current league tables. The pressure for change isn't always or often from the centre. When reading those discussions, I felt that we had succeeded. I'm quite happy to say that, since the late '80s, both Conservative and Labour Governments have succeeded over 20 years in getting ourselves to a much better place than where we were at the start. When we started out, there were so many schools not doing as well as they should have done; we were doing it in a piecemeal way, one by one, school by school. That sort of made sense. When you get to the position we're in now, and especially if you care about social justice, you think to yourself, "It's great that there are good schools, but I want every school to be a good school. How can I do that?" I've learned that there are two things. One is that not being satisfied with best practice, but trying to make that common practice, requires you to be tough from the centre. But at the same time, if you think you can make best practice good practice by mandating from the centre, it fails, because you know that the key to great schools is local leadership. National Challenge is really interesting. It's been one of the most successful things we've done. It's very tough, and is both centralist and localist. It's centralist and we say, "No excuses. If you're not sorted out, in the end we'll step in." But the solutions have all been local. The solutions have all been a local school supporting another school or the local community changing the school leadership, or the local school community saying, "Okay, we do want an academy." It's not about mandated outcomes; it's locally led outcomes. Trying to get that balance between universal and locally led is really hard. It's more a dilemma for me

than it was for the other Secretaries of State, because to be honest it wasn't possible for them 10 to 15 years ago.

**Q94 Mr Pelling:** It's interesting that you talk about—after all the strife that you've had—the balanced and effective way forward. In his speech in Hackney last month, the Prime Minister had a very ambitious target in terms of science and maths. It was a very relevant speech as we try to move the economy away from its over-reliance on financial services. I suppose in some way that speech could have been made by Jim Callaghan—it probably was, in a way. How do you think that the Government can go about delivering on what is a very important ambition in terms of delivery on science and maths?

**Ed Balls:** The interesting thing is that while there are differences at the margin, there was a consistency of view from Jim Callaghan through to Kenneth Baker, David Blunkett and my predecessors. I feel at the moment, though, that that consensus is in danger of being ripped up. That consensus was based on the National Curriculum, on accountability for all, on allowing innovation within that system of National Curriculum accountability and on focusing on improving the schools that we have. The political debate in this general election is much more pulled apart. I feel as though I am continuing the tradition. The argument that I'm having is with a much more market-based approach—not schools collaborating and driving up standards but using competitive pressures to drive up standards. As I said, the reason why I think that it is flawed is that the Swedish example shows that it leads to lower standards and more social inequality. It might be quite good for some people in some schools, where they get some more money. That is the flawed view of academies, which I think we have moved away from. The best way to do this is to keep focusing on great teaching in good schools with locally empowered leadership, but not making the whole thing a competition for "my pupils versus your pupils". Continuity would be the right way to do it.

**Q95 Mr Pelling:** Coming specifically to the ambitions on science and maths, how are they going to be delivered by you or your Labour successor in the next five years?

**Ed Balls:** We looked at those ambitions and at the progress we've made in both the OECD PISA survey and the TIMSS survey, and concluded that those were ambitions that were deliverable if we maintained and accelerated progress. The speech that the Prime Minister made was a speech in which we essentially set out the accredited groups—the first set. I think that that is the key ingredient. The key thing now is that we have great teaching in general, the National Curriculum working in a more decentralised way and an accountability system that will be fairer in the future, but you can't get those standards consistently across the whole country with 18,000 individual and separate leadership teams—one in every primary school—

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and 3,500 separate and individual leadership teams in every secondary school. I don't think that it is sensible to think that every leader will be an outstanding leader. The right thing for us to do is to take experience and track record and put it to work. The thing that is very exciting when you look at accredited providers and how they operate, if they are running four or five schools, is that they have really deep leadership teams, where people are moving into leadership roles at an early stage in their career and spending time in other schools working as heads of maths, getting experience and developing that strength of leadership. Karen Buck is right to counsel that being a multi-chain does not by definition make you good, but it certainly makes sense for our best leaders to be playing a wider role across the system and using that to bring on the next generation of leaders. I think that that is probably the biggest change. We can use our best leaders to work more widely across the system.

**Q96 Chair:** We're running out of time. I want to ask you two questions to finish up; one is about child well-being. Evidence suggests that there is great room for improvement on that. I found that Monday's evidence session was very upbeat and positive about the achievements made over the past number of years by all parties and Governments. The indices on child well-being in our country are not good, however. Why is that?

**Ed Balls:** I think that the scars of past decades are very deep and take a long time to turn round. When I think of underperformance in education or high unemployment, I can be thinking about the 1970s as well as the 1980s, so I don't need to make this a party political point.

**Chair:** No, no.

**Ed Balls:** Turning that round is deep and takes a very long time. We had a spat a couple of days ago about young people from low-income backgrounds in schools going to Oxbridge, but of course quite a lot of those children had no opportunity to go through a Sure Start children's centre or nursery education aged three and four, because of the age they are at. It is true that we now have a generation of young people coming out of our schools who started primary school in 1997, but we don't have anybody who has been through a Sure Start children's centre coming out of our secondary schools.

**Q97 Chair:** So you are upbeat about the future?

**Ed Balls:** I am really upbeat about the future, and the more the polls narrow, the more upbeat I get.

**Q98 Chair:** I am taking over the questions because we have run out of time. I have one last question on 14–19s. Former Secretaries of State said quite extraordinary things on Monday, one of which was that the big failure was not accepting the Tomlinson report. There was a radical proposal from Baroness Estelle Morris about the whole change in GCSEs

at 14 level, and about 14–19 being a separate phase of education entirely. What did you think?

**Ed Balls:** The reason why we got rid of Key Stage 3 tests was that we didn't think that a staging post National Curriculum assessment at 14 made sense when you also have GCSEs at 16. That is also why we kept Key Stage 2 tests at 11. The schools Minister and I have today written to primary school heads about the way in which we are reforming accountability for primary schools in the future, and urging them to continue to work with us. We are producing a guide that responds partly to the expert group and your report on how the best schools avoid teaching to the test as part of the preparation for Key Stage 2 tests. That was a slight digression, but our thinking is increasingly around 14–19, and the Key Stage 4 curriculum into post-16. We have clearly changed the funding arrangements, and we also have education to 18 becoming the law. If you are thinking about those young people who are going through school to university, there may be a case for an accountability measure at 14 and then when they come out of the school system at 18 or 19. Within our education to 18 policy, a lot of young people leave school at 16 and go into an apprenticeship or into work with training. For them, it would not make sense for the accountability test to be at 14 rather than at 16. It is right for us to think about 14 to 19 holistically in terms of how we fund and provide, but I am not sure that that necessarily means that it is the wrong point to allow all young people of 16 to make a change. I have an open mind on that. An opportunity to implement Tomlinson was not taken at the time. Charles Clarke made clear his views about that to your Committee. We have subsequently implemented 90% of Tomlinson. Mr Stuart talked about inconsistencies. One of the striking inconsistencies that I have to deal with on a weekly basis is those people who berate me for the fact that A-levels fail to provide young people with, in their view, the skills and qualifications to succeed in university, business or professional life but say, simultaneously—often the same people—“Whatever you do, you must keep the gold standard of A-levels at all costs rather than have it replaced by a new qualification.” I have to navigate my way through that by saying that we will make A-levels better. We shall introduce diplomas, which will be a better qualification in the end and which are very close to Tomlinson thinking. We will not centrally mandate, but we will allow schools, universities, parents and employers to see what works best for them, and that can evolve.

**Q99 Chair:** You have been the second longest-serving Secretary of State since Ken Baker. Do you have any regrets about things that you have left undone or that you have not yet been able to achieve?

**Ed Balls:** Things take time. There is always a frustration that you cannot see things you believe

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can make a real difference come to fruition more quickly. You don't always know how things are going to develop. Our agenda for the next few years

is very rich. I hope that we can get a consensus for taking it forward rather than ripping it up, and in a sense shifting away from the Baker-Balls view.

**Chair:** Secretary of State, it has been a pleasure. Thank you very much.

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