



Work of the Ad Hoc Committees in 2015–16: House of Lords Social Mobility Committee

Summary

The House of Lords Social Mobility Committee's report considered the degree to which there was the potential for movement from one social class to another by young people during the transition from school into work. The Committee concluded that, for the majority of young people who left academic education after their GCSEs to enter work, there were significant barriers to social mobility. This, the Committee argued, was because the transition into work was often confusing and was badly organised by the Government, education providers and employers. For example, young people found themselves missing out on opportunities for entering skilled employment because they did not know what skills were needed by local employers.

The Committee made a number of recommendations, including that the Government change the way education is structured, creating a new 'transition period' starting at age 14 and continuing until 18 or 19. The Committee proposed that this stage should have its own core curriculum, with tailor-made academic and vocational courses available. Young people would be guided during this period to make decisions that would impact their future career options. They would also be provided with greater support by schools, working with employers, to develop the skills needed in their local economy.

In its response to the Committee's report, the Government rejected the proposal to create a new extended transition stage. Instead, it argued that it was already taking steps to improve social mobility through its reforms to the curriculum, changes to technical education and by increasing the number of apprenticeships available. The Government's response was subsequently criticised by members of the Committee during a debate in the House of Lords in December 2016, including by the chair, Baroness Corston (Labour), who said that the Committee's conclusions had not been fully addressed.

Subsequently, the Government has made a number of further policy announcements related to the issues considered by the Committee, including technical education, apprenticeships and careers education and support. These were summarised in January 2018, by the then Secretary of State for Education, Justine Greening, who published an update on the Government's response to the Social Mobility Committee's report, following the request of the Senior Deputy Speaker and chairman of the House of Lords Liaison Committee, Lord McFall of Alcluith.

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I. Background

On 11 June 2015, the House of Lords appointed a committee “to consider social mobility in the transition from school to work”.¹ The House of Lords Social Mobility Committee defined social mobility for the purposes of its inquiry as follows:

Social mobility is about where a person ends up in life compared to where they started. To put it another way it is about the movement of a person from one social class to another.²

As part of its inquiry, the Committee considered issues including the opportunities available to young people to enter skilled employment and how skills education was structured.

The Committee took evidence from a number of witnesses including the then chair of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, Alan Milburn, and the then Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills, Sir Michael Wilshaw. It conducted both an online survey of school leavers and a focus group of young people regarding their personal experience of the transition from school into work.³ It also conducted a number of visits, including to the Lilian Baylis Technology School in Lambeth, Derby College, the International Centre for Guidance Studies and Rolls-Royce PLC to look at how they supported young people during this transition.⁵ Following its inquiry, the Committee published its report, *Overlooked and Left Behind: Improving the Transition from School to Work for the Majority of Young People*, on 8 April 2016.⁶

This Briefing summarises the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee’s report. It then outlines the Government’s response and summarises the subsequent debate in the House of Lords. It concludes with a summary of more recent policy announcements relevant to the issues identified by the Committee.

¹ [HL Hansard, 11 June 2015, cols 892–3.](#)

² House of Lords Social Mobility Committee, [Overlooked and Left Behind: Improving the Transition from School to Work for the Majority of Young People](#), 8 April 2016, HL Paper 120 of session 2015–16, p 23.

³ The survey received responses from 672 people. Details of the findings of this survey were published by the Committee separately to the report in [Survey for 14–24 year olds](#) (2016).

⁴ The findings of this focus group were published in Annex 4 of the report: House of Lords Social Mobility Committee, [Overlooked and Left Behind: Improving the Transition from School to Work for the Majority of Young People](#), 8 April 2016, HL Paper 120 of session 2015–16, pp 125–35.

⁵ Details of these visits are provided in Appendices 5 and 6 of the report: *ibid*, pp 136–42.

⁶ *ibid*.

2. Committee Report

The Committee concluded that, for young people who did not go to university, the transition from school into work lacked a coherent structure and was confusing both for young people and employers.⁷ This, it argued, presented a barrier to social mobility as young people were not able to navigate where and what opportunities to enter skilled work were available.

The Committee argued that this situation had arisen for a number of reasons. This included that previous attempts to improve social mobility in the youth labour market had only been targeted toward a minority of young people. The Committee argued the focus of policy-makers tended to be on the two ends of the ‘social ladder’: those moving from A-level into higher education at the top; and those classified as not in education, employment and training (NEET) at the bottom.⁸ The Committee said that this had ignored those in the middle, namely those leaving education at 16 but not classified as NEET. Although this group constituted the majority of young people entering work, the Committee argued that they were “forgotten” and “overlooked” by policy makers.⁹

The Committee focused its inquiry on this middle group and identified the following barriers to social mobility faced by these young people:¹⁰

- **Life Skills:** the Committee argued that students were not leaving education with the life skills that they needed if they were to succeed in the work place. These life skills were identified as: communication; team working; resilience; and self-management. The Committee concluded that, while schools should be able to help develop some of these life skills, life skills had not been effectively embedded within the curriculum.
- **Recruitment Practices:** Existing recruitment practices amongst employers needed to be improved, the Committee argued. It identified small and medium sized businesses in particular as relying too much on word-of-mouth as a means of recruitment which hindered upward social mobility, giving an advantage to those with existing social connections and networks.
- **Lack of Clarity Regarding Non-academic Routes into Work:** The Committee argued that existing non-academic routes into work were often “complex, confusing and

⁷ House of Lords Social Mobility Committee, [Overlooked and Left Behind: Improving the Transition from School to Work for the Majority of Young People](#), 8 April 2016, HL Paper 120 of session 2015–16, p 4.

⁸ *ibid*, p 13.

⁹ *ibid*.

¹⁰ *ibid*, pp 6–12.

incoherent”.¹¹ It also argued that there was rarely any guarantee of work at the end of these routes. The Committee said that there was confusion amongst employers as to the value of non-academic qualifications because the qualifications system had been constantly changed.

- **Inequality between Academic and Vocational Routes:** A structural unfairness existed between the academic and vocational routes into employment, the Committee said, specifically the way these two routes were funded. For example, the Committee argued, while the Government had recently protected funding for schools and universities, it had not protected funding to the post-16 institutions that provided education for the majority of young people who did not go into higher education. The Committee also suggested there was a deep-rooted “culture of inequality” between the academic and vocational routes into work that was disadvantaging those not continuing with academic education after GCSEs.¹²
- **Apprenticeships:** The Committee concluded apprenticeship schemes were well regarded and had a positive record for providing the training needed to enter a profession. However, the Committee identified two risks that might adversely affect social mobility: efforts by the Government to increase the number of apprenticeships by 3 million by 2020 might impact on their quality; and a focus on apprenticeship schemes might lead to the other non-academic routes into employment being further neglected.¹³
- **Careers Guidance:** The Committee said that the careers education and guidance provided to young people should be improved. It argued that careers education provided at schools should ensure that young people were able to make informed decisions about their education and the future employment options available to them. It also recommended that face-to-face professional careers advice should be provided to young people independently of schools and colleges. The Committee further argued there should be more access to work experience for 14 to 16 year olds.
- **Length of ‘Transition Period’:** The Committee concluded that the transition from education into work should begin as early as possible. It argued that, for some young people, the transition from education into work took longer than the currently recognised transition stage—from the end of the

¹¹ Previous reforms to vocational education had been made by the Coalition Government, following the recommendations of the 2011 Wolf Report. A summary of these reforms is provided in: House of Commons Library, [Technical Education Reforms](#), 8 January 2018, p 4.

¹² House of Lords Social Mobility Committee, [Overlooked and Left Behind: Improving the Transition from School to Work for the Majority of Young People](#), 8 April 2016, HL Paper 120 of session 2015–16, p 7.

¹³ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, [‘Government Kick-starts Plans to Reach 3 Million Apprenticeships’](#), 14 June 2015.

national curriculum at 16 until either 18 or 19. The Committee recommended that the current national curriculum should instead end at 14 and that a new 14 to 19 transition stage should be introduced with its own tailor made core curriculum with academic and/or vocational courses. This would enable the route into work for each young person to be better tailored for the individual. The Committee also recommended that careers education and life skills be included in education from at least Key Stage 3 (aged 11 to 14) and that young people over 16 should be offered more opportunities to gain a Level 3 qualification after they have entered employment.

- **Availability of Data:** The Committee concluded that the existing data available to measure social mobility in education and employment was “unreliable and inconsistent”.¹⁴ Too little was known about those young people who did not pursue higher education, it argued, including what qualifications they studied for and where they were employed.
The Committee also argued that local labour information should be used by schools and colleges. This would help match the training made available to young people with the needs of the local economy.
- **Employer Involvement with Schools:** The Committee concluded that an “increased role for employers [was] fundamental to improving school-to-work transitions” and that it should be made easier for employers to be involved in this process.¹⁵ While there were some local examples where this had worked, the Committee argued that practice across the UK varied.

The Committee also noted that some of the issues it had identified were being considered as part of the review of technical and further education, chaired by Lord Sainsbury of Turville (Labour), which at that point was still ongoing. In particular, this included the inequality between academic and vocational routes into employment. The Committee welcomed the Review’s focus on the progression of lower attaining students. It also expressed the hope that the Review recommend improvements the situation of those ‘middle attainers’ which were the focus of the Committee’s enquiry.¹⁶

¹⁴ House of Lords Social Mobility Committee, [Overlooked and Left Behind: Improving the Transition from School to Work for the Majority of Young People](#), 8 April 2016, HL Paper 120 of session 2015–16, pp 9–10.

¹⁵ *ibid*, p 10.

¹⁶ *ibid*, p 7.

Recommendations

In the light of these conclusions, the Committee made the following eight recommendations:

- **Recommendation 1:** The Government should establish a more coherent policy governing the transition of young people into the workforce. As part of this policy, the Government should focus on those entering work who did not do A-Levels or go on to higher education, what the Committee referred to as the “middle route” into work. The Government should also ensure that best practice in this area was shared across the UK.¹⁷
- **Recommendation 2:** The Government should introduce a ‘framework’ for the transition of young people from age 14 to 19 into the workplace. The Committee argued that the decision-making process about which route to take into employment should begin from the start of this transition period. One of the objectives for this transition stage also would be to get as many people as possible to achieve a Level 3 qualification. The Committee argued that this framework should provide: a clearer route into good quality work; a “gold standard” of careers advice and experience including face-to-face advice and access to information about the local labour market; and improved careers education in schools.¹⁸
- **Recommendations 3 and 5:** There should be a cabinet-level minister who is responsible for this transition framework. This Minister should also report annually to Parliament on the Government’s progress on improving the transition of young people from school into work.¹⁹
- **Recommendation 4:** Government departments should compile data on the transition from school into work and this data should be publicly available. Researchers should also have access to existing data that was not currently available, including earnings data, study patterns and different demographic patterns.
- **Recommendation 6:** The Committee said that responsibility for local labour markets and skills was increasingly being devolved to local authorities, including the newly created combined authorities for city regions. It argued that local administrative structures were still in flux as the Government sought to increase the power devolved to local areas. Therefore, the Committee recommended the Government take on a greater role coordinating collaboration between local bodies, such as further education authorities, local enterprise

¹⁷ House of Lords Social Mobility Committee, [Overlooked and Left Behind: Improving the Transition from School to Work for the Majority of Young People](#), 8 April 2016, HL Paper 120 of session 2015–16, p 10.

¹⁸ *ibid*, pp 10–11.

¹⁹ *ibid* p 11.

partnerships and employers.²⁰

- **Recommendation 7:** The Government should keep under “constant review” the transition into work of those who leave school after GCSEs.²¹ It recommended that the transition into work by this group should also be monitored by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission.
- **Recommendation 8:** Before the end of the 2016–17 session, the Government should publish a cost-benefit analysis of increasing funding for both careers education in school and independent careers advice outside school.

3. Government Response

Introducing a New Policy on Transition (Recommendations 1 and 2)

The Government published its response to the Committee’s report in July 2016.²² The Government did not agree to implement the specific policy changes recommended by the Committee. Instead, it argued that it was already taking action to help ensure that young people were better able to transition successfully into work. The Government said that it was ensuring young people had the skills and knowledge valued by employers through reforms to GCSEs and A-levels, which were intended to make these qualifications more rigorous.²³ It also said it was reforming apprenticeships to ensure that employers had a greater degree of involvement in their design.

The Government committed to reforming technical education to ensure that the skills young people developed were more suited to the needs of employers. Details of these reforms would be revealed when the Sainsbury Review Panel of technical and vocational education had been completed. The report was subsequently published in July 2016, at the same time as the Government’s new *Post-16 Skills Plan*.²⁴

²⁰ House of Lords Social Mobility Committee, [Overlooked and Left Behind: Improving the Transition from School to Work for the Majority of Young People](#), 8 April 2016, HL Paper 120 of session 2015–16, p 12.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Department for Education, [The Government’s Response to the House Of Lords Select Committee Report on Social Mobility in the Transition from School to Work](#), July 2016, Cm 9274.

²³ *ibid.*, p 5.

²⁴ Sainsbury Review Panel, [Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education](#), April 2016; and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016.

Careers Education and Guidance (Recommendations 1 and 2)

The Government stated that it would publish a strategy on improving careers education and guidance later in 2016.²⁵ This was subsequently delayed and was published in 2017.²⁶ New statutory guidance would also be issued to schools and colleges about careers education.²⁷ This was published in 2018.²⁸

The Government said that the Career's Strategy would focus on a series of career advice benchmarks set out in 2014 by the Gatsby Foundation, a charitable foundation set up by Lord Sainsbury of Turville (Labour).²⁹ The so-called 'Gatsby benchmarks' were:

- A stable careers programme.
- Learning from career and labour market information.
- Addressing the needs of each pupil.
- Linking curriculum learning to careers.
- Encounters with employers and employees.
- Experiences of workplaces.
- Encounters with further and higher education.
- Personal guidance.³⁰

Information about Alternative Providers (Recommendations 1 and 2)

Further to the Committee's recommendation that more information be made available to young people about the vocational and technical education options available to them, the Government stated that it would make it a requirement for schools to cooperate with other education and training providers to give pupils information about the courses they offered.³¹

²⁵ Department for Education, [The Government's Response to the House Of Lords Select Committee Report on Social Mobility in the Transition from School to Work](#), July 2016, Cm 9274, p 7.

²⁶ Department for Education, [Careers Strategy: Making the Most of Everyone's Skills and Talents](#), December 2017.

²⁷ Department for Education, [The Government's Response to the House Of Lords Select Committee Report on Social Mobility in the Transition from School to Work](#), July 2016, Cm 9274, p 7.

²⁸ Department for Education, [Careers Guidance and Access for Education and Training Providers](#), January 2018.

²⁹ Gatsby Foundation, [Good Career Guidance](#), 2014.

³⁰ *ibid*, p 7.

³¹ Department for Education, [The Government's Response to the House Of Lords Select Committee Report on Social Mobility in the Transition from School to Work](#), July 2016, Cm 9274. This was eventually included as a provision in the Technical and Further Education Act 2016 following the passing of an amendment tabled by Lord Baker of Dorking (Conservative): [HL Hansard, 22 February 2016, cols 50–92GC](#).

Ministerial Responsibility (Recommendation 3)

The Government did not agree to the Committee's recommendation that there be a minister with responsibility for the transition from school into work. The Government said that key ministers and officials met on a regular basis as part of the Earn or Learn Implementation Task Force. The remit of this Task Force included the delivery of apprenticeships and policies to support young people classified as NEET.

Availability of Data (Recommendation 4)

Regarding the Committee's recommendation that a minister report annually to Parliament, the Government stated that it was instead taking steps to increase the information provided in existing education statistical releases.³² The Government also stated the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act 2015 would make combining certain forms of information from multiple sources possible for the first time.³³ Specifically this would allow for the collation of destinations data on young people leaving education with employment, benefits and earnings information from HM Revenue and Customs and the Department for Work and Pensions. The Government also said that it was looking for ways to enable public-sector held information to be made available to researchers.

Devolution and Central Government (Recommendation 6)

The Government disagreed with the Committee's recommendation that it should take on a greater role in the coordination of local labour markets, arguing that local areas should not be dependent on "leadership from Whitehall".³⁴ Instead, the Government argued that there were already systems in place to support the devolution of responsibility for local labour markets: it argued that post-16 area reviews were helping to improve the provision of post-16 education.³⁵ These reviews were shaped both by education providers, local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships.

Monitoring the 'Forgotten Middle' (Recommendation 7)

Further to the Committee's recommendation that the transition into work of those in the middle of the social ladder should be kept under "constant review", the Government stated that it was important to continually review the success of transitions in general.³⁶ It also stated that it would continue to

³² Department for Education, [The Government's Response to the House Of Lords Select Committee Report on Social Mobility in the Transition from School to Work](#), July 2016, Cm 9274, p 8.

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ *ibid.*, p 9.

³⁵ Further information on post-16 skill reviews is provided in the House of Commons Library briefing, [Further Education: Post-16 Area Reviews](#) (28 March 2017).

³⁶ *ibid.*, p 10.

work with the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission.

Cost-benefit Analysis of Careers Advice Reforms (Recommendation 8)

The Government declined to conduct a cost-benefit analysis on reforms to careers advice and education on the terms recommended by the Committee. The Government instead stated that it would invest £90 million as part of its careers policy over the course of (what would have been) the 2015–20 parliament. Much of this funding would be spent by the Careers and Enterprise Company, a body established by the Coalition Government in 2014 with a remit for supporting careers education and advice in schools.³⁷ During the subsequent House of Lords debate on the Committee's report, the Government stated that a cost-benefit analysis was not necessary because reviewing what worked was already undertaken by the Careers and Enterprise Company when it made funding decisions.³⁸

Life Skills (Recommendation 2)

The Government argued that, following the introduction of study programmes for 14 to 19 year olds in August 2013, all students should be offered the opportunity to undertake work experience by their school, college or training provider.³⁹ The Government argued that it would also support schools to help young people develop life skills by establishing a web-presence where teachers could access resources and share best practice with colleagues.

Recruitment Processes (Conclusions)

Responding to the Committee's concerns about the impact of informal recruitment processes on social mobility, the Government stated that 200 businesses had signed the Social Mobility Business Compact. Introduced by the Coalition Government, the Social Mobility Business Compact asked employers to agree to improve social mobility through its recruitment processes.⁴⁰

Improving the Qualification System (Conclusions)

The Government agreed with the Committee that the large number of different qualifications available for 16 to 18 year olds was confusing and that

³⁷ Department for Education, '[New Careers and Enterprise Company for Schools](#)', 10 December 2014.

³⁸ [HL Hansard, 20 December 2016, col 1620](#).

³⁹ Department for Education, '[The Government's Response to the House Of Lords Select Committee Report on Social Mobility in the Transition from School to Work](#)', July 2016, Cm 9274, p 11.

⁴⁰ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Deputy Prime Minister's Office, '[2010 to 2015 Government Policy: Social Mobility](#)', 8 May 2015.

some of these qualifications were not valued by employers.⁴¹ The Government said that this issue was being considered by the Sainsbury Review Panel and it would seek to address any recommendations in due course. This was subsequently addressed in the report of the Sainsbury Review Panel, published in July 2016, which recommended the creation of a set number of technical routes into work, each with a study programme tailored to the needs of a specific area of employment.⁴²

4. Reforms to Technical Education

After the publication of the Social Mobility Committee's report, the Sainsbury Review Panel on Technical Education published its final report in July 2016.⁴³ Similarly to the Social Mobility Committee, the Sainsbury Review Panel argued that existing technical education qualifications lacked the confidence of employers.⁴⁴ The Review Panel said that technical education needed to be reformed to ensure that qualifications provided students with the skills employers needed. It recommended the Government implement a national system of technical qualifications which was simpler to navigate by students. It also recommended that the content of these qualifications and the method of assessment should be established by experts in industry.

The Government accepted the findings of the Sainsbury Review and proposed a number of reforms to technical education in the light of these recommendations.⁴⁵ These were set out in its *Post-16 Skills Plan*, also published in July 2016.⁴⁶ The Government announced the creation of 15 new technical routes into employment, grouped by types of profession. The quality of technical education delivered as part of this reformed system would be regulated by the Institute for Apprenticeships, whose existing remit would be expanded.⁴⁷ This, the Government argued, would ensure employers were able to shape the quality and content of the new technical education qualifications.

The Government announced that these new technical routes would consist of both college-based and employment-based learning. The college-based component would include a Level 3 and 4 classroom-based study programme. The Level 3 qualification has been subsequently referred to as

⁴¹ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Deputy Prime Minister's Office, '[2010 to 2015 Government Policy: Social Mobility](#)', 8 May 2015, p 13.

⁴² Sainsbury Review Panel, [Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education](#), April 2016, p 9.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p 6.

⁴⁵ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016.

⁴⁶ Further information on the Government's reforms to technical education is provided in the House of Commons Library briefing, [Reforms to Technical Education](#) (8 January 2018).

⁴⁷ This and other changes outlined in the *Post-16 Plan* were implemented by the Technical and Further Education Act 2017.

the ‘T-level’.⁴⁸ 16 to 18 year old students pursuing a two-year college-based technical education programme would also be entitled to a work placement.⁴⁹ The Government said this new system would be introduced gradually, reaching completion in 2020.⁵⁰

5. House of Lords Debate

The House of Lords debated the Social Mobility Committee’s report on 20 December 2016.⁵¹ During the debate, the chair of the Committee, Baroness Corston (Labour), restated the Committee’s conclusion that the majority of young people leaving school and entering work were being ignored by policy makers. She characterised the experience of these young people as follows:

We found that [they] knew that they were not work ready and had to navigate a chaotic landscape, and that many of them did not have life skills.⁵²

While the focus of recent governments on apprenticeships and higher education could work well to improve social mobility, she argued these routes into employment were not suitable for everyone.⁵³

Baroness Corston was also critical of the way in which the Government had responded to the Committee’s report, arguing that many of its conclusions had not been addressed:

I was very disappointed in the response because it seemed to be a list of what the Government were doing rather than engagement with the points that we were making about these young people and their life chances.⁵⁴

Baroness Morris of Yardley (Labour), a member of the Committee, argued that the Committee’s recommendation that there should be a transitional stage was important as this would help reduce the disruption to a young person’s transition into work on leaving the academic route at 16.⁵⁵ She argued that repeated changes to vocational education meant that these young people were “plonked into a system that [was] not coherent”.⁵⁶ In

⁴⁸ Department for Education, [Post-16 Technical Education Reforms: T-level Action Plan](#), October 2017.

⁴⁹ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, p 13.

⁵⁰ *ibid*, p 9.

⁵¹ [HL Hansard, 20 December 2016, cols 1579–623](#).

⁵² *ibid*, col 1580.

⁵³ *ibid*, col 1581.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, col 1580.

⁵⁵ *ibid*, cols 1592–4.

⁵⁶ *ibid*.

contrast, Baroness Morris said those who continued on an academic route to employment after 16 received a high degree of coherence and continuity regarding their education. Lord Baker of Dorking (Conservative) also stated his support for the recommendation that the transfer into work should begin at 14, arguing that pupils at that age were ready to make decisions about their career.⁵⁷

Baroness Tyler of Enfield (Liberal Democrat), a member of the Committee, welcomed many of the reforms outlined by the Government in its *Post-16 Skills Plan*.⁵⁸ However, she argued that the Government had missed the opportunity to stop the inequality and unfairness that the Committee had identified regarding funding between academic and technical education. The Earl of Kinnoull (Crossbench)—another Committee member—argued that the action that the Government had taken regarding making HM Revenue and Customs data more widely available did not go far enough, as someone had to be approved by the Secretary of State before they were able to gain access to this data.⁵⁹

Responding to the debate, the then Government Spokesperson on Higher Education, Viscount Younger of Leckie, argued that the Government had put social mobility “at the heart of [its] education agenda”.⁶⁰ In support, he cited government reforms to technical education, outlined in its response to the Sainsbury Review, which he said would improve the skills young people had going into employment. Viscount Younger also repeated the Government’s commitment to increase the number of apprenticeship starts in England by 3 million by 2020.

On the subject of careers guidance and advice, he repeated the commitment, made in the response to the Committee’s report, that the Government would be publishing a new careers strategy. However, Viscount Younger said that it would now be published in 2017 rather than 2016.⁶¹

Viscount Younger repeated that the Government would not follow the Committee’s recommendation to create an extended transition stage from 14 to 18. He argued that the core academic subjects should be the focus of young people’s education until 16. He also argued concentrating on these core subjects until 16 was in line with other “leading international systems”.⁶²

⁵⁷ [HL Hansard, 20 December 2016, col 1590.](#)

⁵⁸ *ibid*, col 1585.

⁵⁹ *ibid*, col 1600.

⁶⁰ *ibid*, col 1619.

⁶¹ *ibid*, col 1620.

⁶² *ibid*, col 1619.

6. Recent Developments

Since the publication of the Social Mobility Committee's report and the Government's response, the Government has made a number of further announcements intended to reform technical education, increase the number of apprenticeships and improve careers education. Many of these were summarised by the then Secretary of State for Education, Justine Greening, when she provided an update on the Government's response to the Social Mobility Committee's report in January 2018, following the request of the Senior Deputy Speaker and chairman of the House of Lords Liaison Committee, Lord McFall of Alcluith.⁶³ In this, she argued that the Government had sought to increase social mobility through the introduction of new technical education routes, increased funding for new apprenticeships and the publication of a new careers strategy.

6.1 Technical Education

In her January 2018 update, Justine Greening outlined the following additional policy announcements regarding technical education:

- The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond, announced in his March 2017 Budget that additional funding would be provided for technical education.⁶⁴ This, he said, would enable there to be an increase in the amount of study time available. The Chancellor also announced that further education maintenance loans would be made available for students on Level 4 to 6 technical education courses from 2019–20.⁶⁵
- In November 2017, the Department for Education launched a consultation which included a proposal that the work placement forming part of the Level 3 technical qualification—the T-level—should last between 45 and 60 days.⁶⁶

Reforming technical education has also featured as a policy objective in two strategy documents produced by the Government since 2016: The *Industrial Strategy* and the Government's education strategy, *Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential*.⁶⁷

⁶³ House of Lords Liaison Committee, '[Letter from Rt Hon Justine Greening MP to Rt Hon Lord McFall of Alcluith](#)', 8 January 2018.

⁶⁴ HM Treasury, [Spring Budget 2017](#), March 2017, HC 1025 of session 2016–17, p 2.

⁶⁵ *ibid*, p 41.

⁶⁶ Department for Education, [Implementation of T level Programmes](#), November 2017.

⁶⁷ HM Government, [Industrial Strategy: Building a Britain Fit For The Future](#), November 2017; and Department for Education, [Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential: A Plan for Improving Social Mobility through Education](#), December 2017, Cm 9541.

Technical Education and Industrial Strategy

The Government's 2017 *Industrial Strategy* included improving the technical education system as one of its objectives for improving the UK's productivity.⁶⁸ The *Industrial Strategy* repeated some of the actions already outlined in the *Post-16 Skills Plan*, such as the creation of 15 new technical education routes and the introduction of the T-level.⁶⁹ This, the Government argued, would ensure that technical education would become as well respected as academic education.

The inclusion of improving skills as part of the draft *Industrial Strategy*, in January 2017, was welcomed by the House of Commons Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee.⁷⁰ The Committee agreed with the Government that skills deficiencies in the UK workforce were a barrier both to social mobility and productivity. However, the Committee said it was "sceptical" that the incremental proposals outlined by the Government were going to be able to deliver on this objective.⁷¹

Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential

Justine Greening, in her 2018 letter to Lord McFall, also said that the Government's reforms to technical education formed four key strands of the Government's education policy, as set out in its December 2017 document *Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential*.⁷² She argued that the changes to technical education the Government were introducing would improve social mobility:

By strengthening the world-class academic route as well as reforming technical education to create a high quality and equally world class technical route, we are ensuring that whatever their background, needs and aspirations, all pupils have access to the high quality education they need in their chosen route to a career.⁷³

Post-18 Technical Education

Subsequent to Justine Greening's January 2018 update, the Government announced a further review. On 19 February 2018, the Prime Minister,

⁶⁸ HM Government, [Industrial Strategy: Building a Britain Fit For The Future](#), November 2017, p 11.

⁶⁹ *ibid*, p 102.

⁷⁰ House of Commons Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, [Industrial Strategy: First Review](#), 3 March 2017, HC 616 of session 2016–17, pp 12–13.

⁷¹ *ibid*, p 13.

⁷² Department for Education, [Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential: A Plan for Improving Social Mobility through Education](#), December 2017, Cm 9541.

⁷³ House of Lords Liaison Committee, '[Letter from Rt Hon Justine Greening MP to Rt Hon Lord McFall of Alcluith](#)', 8 January 2018.

Theresa May, announced in a speech that there would be a review of post-18 technical education.⁷⁴

6.2 Life Skills

The Social Mobility Committee's conclusions concerning life skills were not directly addressed by Justine Greening in her January 2018 letter. However, the Government has indicated separately that life skills would form part of new Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) lessons in schools.

Prior to Justine Greening's letter, in April 2017, members of the Social Mobility Committee, including Lord Farmer (Conservative), and the chair, Baroness Corston (Labour), raised the issues of life skills in an oral question in the House of Lords.⁷⁵ Lord Farmer asked the Government what it was doing to ensure that young people entered employment with interpersonal skills. The then Parliamentary Under Secretary at the Department for Education, Lord Nash, responded that the inclusion of employers in the development of T-levels would ensure that all the skills required to enter a particular profession would form part of the technical education route into work. He also said that T-levels would include a work placement where people would be able to develop workplace skills.

Baroness Corston argued the Government had rejected the Committee's recommendation that more should be done to enable young people to develop life skills, such as "problem solving, cooperating with others, timekeeping and making persuasive phone calls".⁷⁶ Lord Nash responded that the skills Baroness Corston described would form part of PSHE teaching in schools, when these were included as part of the curriculum.⁷⁷ The Secretary of State for Education was given the power under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to introduce regulations making PSHE teaching compulsory in schools.⁷⁸ The Government held a consultation on the content of PSHE teaching between December 2017 and February 2018 but has yet to publish its response to that consultation.⁷⁹

6.3 Apprenticeships

Since the publication of the Social Mobility Committee's report in April 2016, there has also been a number of developments regarding the

⁷⁴ Department for Education '[PM to Give Speech on Education to Mark Launch of Post-18 Education and Funding Review](#)', 31 October 2017. Further information on the Government's reforms to technical education is provided in the House of Commons Library briefing, [Reforms to Technical Education](#) (8 January 2018).

⁷⁵ [HL Hansard, 5 April 2017, cols 1051–3](#).

⁷⁶ *ibid*, col 1052.

⁷⁷ *ibid*.

⁷⁸ Department for Education, [Policy Statement: Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education, and Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education](#), March 2017, p 2.

⁷⁹ Department for Education, '[Changes to Teaching of Sex and Relationship Education, and PSHE](#)', 19 December 2017.

Government's policy to increase the number of apprenticeships.⁸⁰

- In April 2017, the Apprenticeship Levy came into effect.⁸¹ This applies to employers with a pay bill of more than £3 million. The Levy is paid by the company into a levy account which is then used to contribute to apprenticeships, with the Government paying the remaining portion.⁸² Employers paying the Apprenticeship Levy have been able to choose who to run their apprenticeship schemes from a register of apprenticeship providers.⁸³
- In his 2018 Spring Statement, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond, announced that part of the funding allocated for increasing the apprenticeship schemes would be provided to help small to medium sized companies.

In her January 2018 update on the government response to the Social Mobility Committee's report, Justine Greening argued that increasing investment in apprenticeships would increase the number of young people able to enter skilled employment.⁸⁴ This, she argued, was consistent with the Committee's recommendations regarding supporting young people to transition successfully from education into work.

Quality of New Apprenticeships

Since the publication of the Social Mobility Committee's report, the National Audit Office (NAO) and several parliamentary select committees have considered the Government's policy on apprenticeships. Concerns have been raised regarding the types of apprentices that will be created as a result of the Government's policy and whether there were enough safeguards in place to guarantee their quality.

In September 2016, the NAO published a report on the Government's proposals to increase the number of apprenticeships available.⁸⁵ The NAO recommended that there needed to be a mix of different types of new apprenticeships available, including those apprenticeships which more often led to higher-income employment, such as in the engineering and

⁸⁰ Further information on the Government's policy on apprenticeships is provided in the House of Commons Library briefing, [Apprenticeships Policy in England](#) (29 June 2017).

⁸¹ Department for Education, ['Apprenticeship Funding: How It Works'](#), 15 February 2018.

⁸² Further information of the Apprenticeship Levy is provided in the House of Commons Library briefing, [Apprenticeships Policy in England](#) (29 June 2017, pp 8–13).

⁸³ Skills Funding Agency and Education and Skills Funding Agency, ['Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers'](#), 14 March 2017.

⁸⁴ House of Lords Liaison Committee, ['Letter from Rt Hon Justine Greening MP to Rt Hon Lord McFall of Alcluith'](#), 8 January 2018.

⁸⁵ National Audit Office, [Delivering Value Through the Apprenticeships Programme](#), 6 September 2016, HC 624 of session 2016–17.

construction sectors.⁸⁶

In November 2016, the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee argued that the Government needed to be clearer about how the success of its apprenticeships programme would be measured.⁸⁷ It warned that the programme might be exploited by some employers seeking to offer low-quality apprenticeships. The chair of the Committee, Meg Hillier, stated:

The Government must demonstrate it is delivering real value throughout the programme and, where weaknesses are identified, address them promptly. Such fundamental measures as whether apprenticeships are meeting the needs of employers and the wider economy, or enhancing the prospects and earning power of apprentices, must be properly monitored.⁸⁸

During the 2017–19 session, the House of Commons Education Committee took evidence on the quality of apprenticeships and skills training.⁸⁹ Speaking in February 2018, the Director of Employment and Skills Policy at the manufacturer’s organisation EEF, Tim Thomas, criticised the Government’s plans for creating three million new apprenticeships.⁹⁰ He argued the Government was not providing adequate funding for this increase and said that this would lead to the creation of more poor quality apprenticeships. During the same oral evidence session, Head of Business Environment and Skills Policy at the British Chambers of Commerce, Jane Gratton, told the Committee that the creation of the Institute of Apprenticeships was having a positive impact on the quality of apprenticeships. However, she believed it needed to increase the pace at which it worked with employers to ensure the funds from the Apprenticeship Levy were well spent.⁹¹

The issue of the quality of new apprenticeships has been raised by members of the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee as part of that Committee’s inquiry into the structure of post-school education and the way it is financed.⁹² In her oral evidence to the Committee in March 2018, the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills, Anne Milton, said that successive governments had previously attempted to increase the number of

⁸⁶ National Audit Office, [Delivering Value Through the Apprenticeships Programme](#), 6 September 2016, HC 624 of session 2016–17, p 23.

⁸⁷ House of Commons Public Account Committee, [The Apprenticeships Programme](#), 30 November 2016, HC 709 of session 2016–17, p 5.

⁸⁸ House of Commons Public Account Committee, [‘More Measures Needed to Assess the Success of Apprenticeships’](#), 30 November 2016.

⁸⁹ House of Commons Education Committee, [‘Quality of Apprenticeships and Skills Training Inquiry Launched’](#), 16 November 2017. At the time of publication, this Committee was still taking evidence.

⁹⁰ House of Commons Education Committee, [Oral Evidence: Quality of Apprenticeships and Skills Training, HC 344](#), 27 February 2018, Q80.

⁹¹ *ibid*, Q91–3.

⁹² House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, [Economics of Higher Education, Further Education and Vocational Training: Call for Evidence](#), 25 July 2017. At the time of publication of this briefing, the Committee had yet to publish its final report.

apprenticeships available and this had been achieved at the expense of quality, with some employers being allowed to abuse the system.⁹³ However, she said the system of quality control introduced by the Government and regulated by the Institute for Apprenticeships would help ensure that new apprenticeships were of a high quality.

6.4 Careers Strategy

The Government published its *Careers Strategy* in December 2017.⁹⁴ Justine Greening stated that this new strategy would enable the UK to establish a “world class careers system”, stating that Government had been working with the Gatsby Foundation to incorporate its careers benchmarks into this strategy.⁹⁵ In her update to Lord McFall on the Government’s response to the House of Lords Social Mobility Committee’s report, Ms Greening outlined the following funding which would be made available:

The strategy announces a range of initiatives to help schools and colleges meet the [Gatsby careers benchmarks]. These include: £5 million for a new round of the Careers and Enterprise Company’s Investment Fund; £5 million to trial “career hubs” in 20 areas linking schools, colleges and others; and £4 million to fund the development of training programmes to develop Career Leaders in schools and colleges.⁹⁶

The publication of the *Careers Strategy* was welcomed by organisations including the Association of Colleges and the Career Development Institute, who said measures included in the strategy would improve access to good quality and impartial careers advice and education.⁹⁷ However, the strategy was criticised by UNISON, which argued the strategy did not address gaps in skills in the UK and accused the Government of not investing properly in careers advice services.⁹⁸

6.5 Post-16 Education Area Reviews

In its report, the Social Mobility Committee had raised concerns regarding the way in which responsibility for local labour markets was being devolved,

⁹³ House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, [Uncorrected Oral Evidence: The Economics of Higher, Further and Technical Education, Tuesday 13 March 2018](#), 15 March 2018, Q167–8.

⁹⁴ Department for Education, [Careers Strategy: Making the Most of Everyone’s Skills and Talents](#), December 2017. Statutory guidance implementing the Government’s Careers Strategy, [Careers Guidance and Access for Education and Training Providers](#), was published in January 2018.

⁹⁵ House of Lords Liaison Committee, [Letter from Rt Hon Justine Greening MP to Rt Hon Lord McFall of Alcluith](#), 8 January 2018.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Times Educational Supplement*, [‘Government Launches New Careers Strategy’](#), 4 December 2017; and Career Development Institute, [‘The CDI Response to the Government’s New Careers Strategy’](#), 4 December 2017.

⁹⁸ UNISON, [‘UNISON Responds to Government’s Careers Strategy’](#), 4 December 2017.

arguing that there needed to be a “focal point” to help establish what skills were needed in a particular area.⁹⁹ The Government responded by arguing that post-16 education area reviews would provide this focal point and would help to ensure that the needs of local labour markets for skills would be met.¹⁰⁰

In October and November 2016, the House of Commons Education Committee took evidence on the impact of post-16 education area reviews.¹⁰¹ Witnesses, including the Six Form College Association and the Westminster Kingsway and City and Islington College Group, criticised these reviews arguing there had been too great a focus on reducing costs and not enough of a focus on the quality of further education provision.¹⁰²

During his oral evidence session to the Committee, Sir David Collins, the then Further Education Commissioner at the Department for Education, defended the way in which post-16 education area reviews had been conducted.¹⁰³ However, he acknowledged they had, up to that point, concentrated on improving the financial stability of further education colleges. On the issue of whether further education colleges were providing the skills needed by employers, he argued he had found that, in most local areas, colleges were responsive to the needs of local employers.¹⁰⁴

6.6 Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission

Although the Government did not amend the remit of the Social Mobility Commission, as recommended by the House of Lords Social Mobility Committee, the Commission subsequently reported on some of the issues raised in the Social Mobility Committee’s report. In its June 2017 review of the previous 20 years of government policies on social mobility, the Commission argued that the transition of young people from school into work was “one of the biggest determinants of future life chances and [was] therefore critical for social mobility”.¹⁰⁵ The Commission concluded that, between 1997 and 2017, careers education and work experience had both

⁹⁹ House of Lords Social Mobility Committee, [Overlooked and Left Behind: Improving the Transition from School to Work for the Majority of Young People](#), 8 April 2016, HL Paper 120 of session 2015–16, p 12.

¹⁰⁰ Department for Education, [The Government’s Response to the House of Lords Select Committee Report on Social Mobility in the Transition from School to Work](#), July 2016, Cm 9274, p 9.

¹⁰¹ House of Commons Education Committee, [‘Post-16 Education Area Reviews’](#), accessed 16 March 2018.

¹⁰² Six Form College Association, [‘Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy: Post-16 Education Area Reviews Inquiry’](#), 28 September 2016; and House of Commons Education Committee, [Oral Evidence: Area Reviews of Post-16 Education, HC 559](#), 26 October 2016, Q5.

¹⁰³ House of Commons Education Committee, [Oral Evidence: Area Reviews of Post-16 Education, HC 559](#), 26 October 2016, Q38.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*, Q46–7.

¹⁰⁵ Social Mobility Commission, [Time for Change: An Assessment of Government Policies on Social Mobility 1997–2017](#), June 2017, p 49.

deteriorated. It summarised the impact of changes to technical and further education during this period as follows:

Vocational education, an important route to improve social mobility and the post-school destination for the majority of lower-income children, remains the poor relation of academic education both in terms of resources and esteem. And this is despite a bewildering array of reforms over the last two decades. One of the few positives has been a renewed focus on apprenticeships over the past two decades but even here the emphasis has been on quantity not quality and more new apprenticeships have gone to older workers than younger ones.¹⁰⁶

In its 2017 annual *State of the Nation* report, the Commission criticised the Government's approach to improving social mobility, arguing that it had no national strategy to tackle social injustice.¹⁰⁷ It argued that, as a result, there was a large degree of variation across the UK when it came to social mobility. The Commission described this variation as follows:

In a heavily resource-constrained climate, local councils are continually having to make difficult choices about where to allocate resources and focus efforts in order to get the biggest bang for their buck. But all too often schemes start up and then wither away. Initiatives often lack scale. Experience is usually not pooled. Most worryingly of all, evidence about what works to improve social mobility is, at best, not properly embedded in local policies and programmes.¹⁰⁸

The four members of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, including its chair, Alan Milburn, resigned in December 2017.¹⁰⁹ Mr Milburn said that, despite support the Commission had received from some ministers, the Government was unwilling to support the work of the Commission or to focus on improving social mobility. The then Education Secretary, Justine Greening, subsequently stated that the Government remained committed to working with the Commission and that a new chair and new commissioners would be appointed as soon as possible.¹¹⁰

6.7 Data on Transition into Work

The Digital Economy Act 2017 allows for increased access to public sector-held data to be granted for research purposes where there is a public

¹⁰⁶ Social Mobility Commission, [Time for Change: An Assessment of Government Policies on Social Mobility 1997–2017](#), June 2017, p 49.

¹⁰⁷ Social Mobility Commission, [State of the Nation 2017](#), 28 November 2017, pp v–vii.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*, p vi.

¹⁰⁹ Alan Milburn, [‘The Government is Unable to Commit to the Social Mobility Challenge’](#), *Guardian*, 2 December 2017.

¹¹⁰ House of Lords Liaison Committee, [‘Letter from Rt Hon Justine Greening MP to Rt Hon Lord McFall of Alcluith’](#), 8 January 2018.

benefit.¹¹¹ In her January 2018 update on the Government's response to the Social Mobility Committee's Report, Justine Greening said that these provisions would enable data to be shared regarding the transitions from education into work. She stated in her response:

The Government agrees that data to help young people make transitions to work should be available. We will place all Government careers information in one place and are considering how to ensure this information is available to schools and colleges in the most effective way possible. The Government also announced in the *Careers Strategy* that we will look into the long-term tracking of student outcomes, and are considering how best to do this.¹¹²

Subsequently, in his 2018 Spring Statement, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond, announced that he had requested that the way in which data on human capital is collated in the national statistics be improved. He said:

Because we currently understand more about the economic payback from investing in our infrastructure than we do about investing in our people, I have asked the Office for National Statistics to work with us on developing a more sophisticated measure of human capital so that future investment can be better targeted.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Further information on these provisions is included in the House of Commons Library briefing, [Digital Economy Bill: Lords Amendments](#) (24 April 2017, pp 14–15).

¹¹² House of Lords Liaison Committee, '[Letter from Rt Hon Justine Greening MP to Rt Hon Lord McFall of Alcluith](#)', 8 January 2018.

¹¹³ [HC Hansard, 13 March 2018, col 721](#).