



# Youth Select Committee

## Oral evidence: Barriers to Work

Friday 13 July 2018

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Members present: Claudia Quinn (Chair), Mun Wu (Vice Chair), Caitlin O'Regan, Daria Eckert, Dominic Jones, George Pearce, Jack Payne, Jason Stewart, Max Parry, Sanah Kashyap, Zara Janahi.

Questions 306-398

### Witnesses

**I:** Mike Davies, Deputy Director for Technical Education Policy, Department for Education; and Clare McDonald, Deputy Director for Careers and Basic Skills, Department for Education.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Department for Education](#)

### Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Mike Davies and Clare McDonald.

**Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to the Youth Select Committee oral evidence session. Thank you for taking time out of your schedule to be here today. Will you please introduce yourselves for the record?

**Mike Davies:** I am Mike Davies. I am Deputy Director for T-level Development at the Department for Education.

**Clare MacDonald:** I am Clare MacDonald. I am Deputy Director for Careers and Basic Skills at the Department for Education.

Q306 **Chair:** The first question is for either of you. What in the Department's view is the purpose of work experience?

**Clare MacDonald:** Work experience is vital for a whole range of different reasons, and it depends on the needs of the individual. The most important thing is that it is a meaningful experience for the young person, that they are getting what they want out of it. That can be about particular insights into a particular industry that they think they might want to work in, or equally they might discover from the work experience that they don't want to work in it. It can be about understanding what workplaces



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are like, and getting that kind of experience, and it can be about skills development, how to serve customers, how to transact different kinds of business or how financial services work. There is a whole range of different things that work experience can be valuable for.

**Mike Davies:** I echo that. For T-levels, which is my policy, the industry placement is designed to be more of an occupationally specific, focused experienced, relevant to the area that you are studying through your T-level and external to the college, but making sure that it is meeting a consistent standard. But I think the range of work experience opportunities and choices all play a role around and leading into those industry placements.

Q307 **Jack Payne:** Young people have told our inquiry that they would like to see formal work experience at 14 to 16 reinstated. Does the Department have any plans formally to review and evaluate the effect of the decision to remove the obligation on schools to do compulsory work experience?

**Clare MacDonald:** For us now, seven years on from the Wolf review recommendations in 2011, it is really the careers strategy that was published last year, in December 2017, that sets out the Government's view of how we should approach careers overall and work experience within that.

Our view is that the requirements set out in the careers strategy set quite a high standard for what schools and colleges should now be offering. Rather than one mandatory work experience placement at key stage 4, what the careers strategy sets out, based on the Gatsby benchmarks, which I know John Holman talked to you about last week, is that there should be an employer encounter every year during secondary education, and that there should be two kinds of work experience—one which is experience of the workplace up to the age of 16, and another by the age of 18. We have put that in our statutory guidance to schools and colleges, which was published in January. That is the expectation of what schools should be delivering. We have also said that all schools should be meeting everything in the Gatsby benchmarks—so work experience, but also much broader—by 2020. We have put in various parts of support to help them do that.

Our view is that we have set a very high standard, which we are now expecting schools to meet. We absolutely recognise that part of the reason the careers strategy was necessary was because people's experience of work experience has been very patchy around the country. We absolutely acknowledge the evidence that suggests that.

Q308 **Jack Payne:** Okay. So you initiated the Gatsby benchmarks as things to support schools. If you say it is not compulsory for 14 to 16-year-olds, how else can the Department ensure that young people who want the opportunities can get them?

**Clare MacDonald:** When you say it's not compulsory, obviously there are legal duties for schools on independent careers advice and there is statutory guidance that schools are asked to have regard to. That is



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obviously something that Ofsted looks at when it inspects schools and colleges—it is a mandatory line of inquiry for Ofsted to look at careers advice in colleges.

We are doing a whole range of things to improve what the picture looks like across the country. The careers strategy was very much the first step of that. Schools have said to us for quite a long time that they are not clear what “good” looks like, and there has been a real focus on independent careers guidance, perhaps to the exclusion of work experience and some of the other aspects of the Gatsby benchmarks—they include not only work experience, but how you integrate these kinds of studies into the curriculum as well.

One of the things that the careers strategy has done is to make it clear what “good” looks like and what our expectation is—which I don’t think has been there before—but it has also put in place quite a lot of support. I know that you have heard from the Careers and Enterprise Company, and that is one of the ways in which the Government are investing in support for schools. Over 2,000 schools and colleges now have an enterprise adviser—a senior business volunteer who is provided by the Careers and Enterprise Company and who works with schools to help them plan strategic programmes of careers advice that include work experience and building those links with employers in the local area that might provide work experience.

That is a clear example of the sort of support that we are providing. The careers strategy also launched a number of pilots—things like careers hubs, and we announced just this week where they will be, which will support schools to work together in order to do all this. Sometimes it can be very hard for an individual school to sort all the work experience placements that it wants. If you have groups of 20 or more schools and colleges all coming together in a local area, and making one approach to employers, we have seen in the north-east, where there was a pilot, that that can be a really effective way of helping schools to do something with fewer resources.

**Q309 Chair:** Has the Department considered a requirement for work-related learning to start in primary school? We have had a lot of evidence on this today.

**Clare MacDonald:** Interesting. I’m sorry that we weren’t here for the morning session. I think the career strategy recognised for the first time the Government’s position that primary schools are an incredibly important part of the careers picture. Certainly we see a lot of evidence both in terms of work experience and careers advice, but also in terms of gender stereotypes and the really early age at which people pick up perceptions about what is normal for people like them and what is possible. I absolutely agree that this is something we need to start talking about in primary schools. A lot of primary schools are doing really great and interesting work. The careers strategy said that we need to test more in terms of what works, then look at how we can build on that. So I don’t think the evidence base is yet clear enough to say to all primary



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schools, "You need to do this. We know this will work if you do this for everyone when they are age six, eight or 11." That is why we announced £2 million of funding and a careers strategy that will test out various things that work in primary school, which we would then help to build on. I absolutely agree that they are a really important part of the picture.

**Q310 Chair:** To follow up on that, when do you think we might have these results and then be able to implement something?

**Clare MacDonald:** The careers strategy looks up until 2020, which is the end of the current Government spending review period. We are doing work with the Careers and Enterprise Company at the moment that is collecting all the existing evidence together in a really clear way so that we can make that available to primary schools. I think that will happen in the next few months or so. That is quite a short-term bit of work. In terms of then testing new things and seeing what impact they have, that will take a few years to come through, because, in order to evaluate it properly, you need to wait and see what the effect is. I have seen from the research in these areas that there can be a lot of reliance on someone saying, "I liked what you did," or, "I found it useful," but does that actually have any impact on what they then go on to study or choose to do? That is what you need to test the impact of.

**Q311 Caitlin O'Regan:** That is really interesting. To follow on from it, has the Department made any assessment of the links between work placements and employer encounters at 14 to 16-years-old and young people choosing to take up technical education at 16 to 19-years-old? I will come back to you, Mike, since you mentioned T-levels earlier.

**Mike Davies:** It might be more relevant on the careers strategy on Clare's side. I mentioned that the focus for T-levels is 16 to 19. We are very clear that an extensive work or industry placement should feature as a core part of that. We suggested it should be quite extensive as well: 45 to 60 days. That is something that I guess you would not want to be doing as your first experience of work experience, but hopefully prior work experience would set you up to make a better decision about that.

**Clare MacDonald:** That is not something I have seen any formal evaluated evidence about. Most of the evidence about the impact of work experience and different employer encounters is about your chances of employment later and your chances of attainment and wages, rather than which career or profession you end up going into. None the less, our view, strongly based on what people tell us and what seems evident, is that the more experiences you have of different workplaces early on, the better equipped you are to make choices, whether that is at 16 or 18, or later in life between different pathways. There is obviously a particular choice at 16 between academic and technical routes. I don't think we have any view that more experiences of workplaces necessarily make you more likely to choose a technical route rather than something else.

If you have only had one work experience placement or only been exposed to one kind of industry or had conversations with one sort of employer, it obviously gives you quite a skewed picture, as opposed to



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in-depth placements or longer-term work experience that maybe goes on across two weeks. That is why these regular employer encounters, which could be a range of people coming in to talk to schools or assemblies, or different kinds of careers fairs and competitions, are all a really important part of the picture. There are so many options out there that there is no chance ever that just one work experience placement will give you all that you need.

**Mike Davies:** That came through very clearly on the student research that we did on T-levels as well. They really liked the opportunity to make a clear choice at 16, but they want to have that range of experiences and encounters to inform that.

Q312 **Caitlin O'Regan:** Does the Department plan to do any formal research on this? Something we have heard a lot in evidence is that there is not a lot of research on the correlation between doing work experience and choosing a career path. It would be interesting to know whether there are any plans to do in-depth research on this topic in the future.

**Clare McDonald:** There is a difference between in-depth research—something that goes on for five to 10 years and has robust, randomised control trial-type evidence—and the sort of thing we are building day to day into the policy decisions we make and the advice we give to Ministers. That is often based on surveys that we have done, asking 5,000 people from a random sample for their views on different things, or more intense focus groups where we go out to different schools and get groups of 20 people to work with us to brainstorm different ideas and talk us through how they would react in different circumstances. There is a huge amount going on that is building those conversations with young people into the design of our work. We don't have a specific project planned to do exactly the research that you identify, but we are constantly planning and looking at our research programme and it is definitely something we would consider.

Q313 **Chair:** Sorry. My question will be brief, I promise. Is any of the evidence you have mentioned publicly available? Can we access it?

**Clare MacDonald:** I think all the evidence I have mentioned is publicly available.

**Mike Davies:** I was just going to mention that we have selected 54 providers initially for the first roll-out of T-levels. Part of what we will be looking at with them in their experience of delivering those courses in practice is, "What sorts of work experience and employer engagement opportunities allow students to commit and stay through the course on their T-level?" and whether there is any impact on that.

Q314 **Mun Wu:** Moving on from that, why will the Careers and Enterprise Company succeed in driving up the quality of careers provision in schools and colleges when previous attempts to improve that have resulted in inconsistent provision?

**Clare MacDonald:** One of the things that sets the Careers and Enterprise Company up for success is that they have a nationally consistent



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approach, but they are tailoring it locally to what works. Although the model of things such as an enterprise adviser network is consistent across the country and they are working with every local enterprise partnership in every region of the country with that consistent model, it is also very flexible: the diversity of the volunteers they have recruited to be enterprise advisers is really good compared with other similar things I have seen in the past. Particularly when we think about work experience, loads of those people, for example, are drawn from small and medium enterprises, so it is not the case that all those people will work for a big consultancy firm or a big financial services firm and only bring that. The diversity of the people they have working with them is a real benefit.

There is also increasing recognition in schools of how important this is. Since we published the careers strategy, we have found it interesting how much positivity there has been from the schools and colleges we work with about the time being right for them to take a more strategic look at how they identify their careers programme. The Careers and Enterprise Company has someone in schools to connect with, and that is where the careers leaders programme, which the careers strategy talks about, is really important. However much support you put in from the outside through an organisation such as the Careers and Enterprise Company, when you look internationally and from a pilot that the Gatsby Charitable Foundation did in the north-east, the evidence suggests that there has to be someone in the school who is connected into the senior leadership team, who sees it as their job to plan a strategic careers programme that includes work experience and all those employer encounters, and is thinking for each year group, "What does this year group need? What do the individual students in that class need? How am I going to design that?"

What we think will be really successful, as we start training these careers leaders and as we have people who have had proper training against each of the Gatsby benchmarks fulfilling this role in these schools, is that there will then be someone for the Careers and Enterprise Company and enterprise advisers to clearly interact with. I am sure you have heard that there is often a lack of employers who really want to offer fantastic work experience and fantastic support for schools. It is often about that connection, with the schools having the time to set something up and deal with all those different interactions, so the careers leader role will help with that.

**Q315 Chair:** In line with what you have just said, are we not relying heavily on local enterprise partnerships, where there is inconsistent interest among them?

**Clare MacDonald:** It is absolutely right that we work closely with local enterprise partnerships in the role they had. Obviously they have had different starts in terms of how far they have been able to get, but I think it was absolutely the right decision to work really closely with them and we are seeing real benefits of that in many areas. I know that that is what the Careers and Enterprise Company would say.



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I think there are inconsistencies everywhere. There is a difference between an inconsistency and the need for there to be a different approach in different areas, where the reality of the local labour market is different. I think there are benefits. But that is also why, while we work through the LEPs, the Careers and Enterprise Company is a national organisation, and we have national policy. This is not an area that is entirely devolved to local areas. I agree that that is important.

Q316 **Chair:** Do you think that there is a need to try to solve this inconsistency?

**Clare MacDonald:** I think the Government in general are already doing a lot to work with different local enterprise partnerships and support them in different ways. Where they need more support, we are already working on it.

Q317 **Mun Wu:** Moving on from my initial question, how are you planning to evaluate CEC's success in achieving objectives?

**Clare MacDonald:** This is a really important question. I would say two things. First, they were set up with a very specific purpose around employer encounters. The careers strategy has widened out their role, so what we are asking them to do is changing. How we measure and evaluate their success will also, therefore, need to change.

The other thing is that as a relatively new organisation, they are on a journey and how we evaluate them is on a journey. Initially, it has been quite focused on what I would describe as inputs. How many schools are signed up? How many local enterprise partnerships are they working with? How many volunteers have they got? Obviously, as we now move through into that network being established across the country, we want to see what the impact of that network is and, in particular, what young people are saying about how they experienced those employer encounters and the work experience they got as a result of those networks, and what difference that has made. We are talking to the Careers and Enterprise Company about that. We are starting to build that into the contracts and the grant agreements that we have with them, in terms of what we are expecting them to measure.

There are various things that the careers strategy set up in their pilots—for example, the careers hubs and how those will work around the country. We are building into those conversations what we want those areas to report back to us, which will include starting to look at what young people say they have got from that and what skills they have gained as a result. Even that is still just an intermediate measure, because ultimately we don't want people just to say, "I got great advice and the work experience was helpful." We want people to be going on to jobs that they enjoy, to be in employment or training and to have reached successful destinations. That is where it gets incredibly long term, especially if you are looking at primary school, where you are looking at someone from age eight to where they are at 30, and then trying to track back what impact their work experience had on their earnings and employment at 30. That is clearly a much longer-term game. There are



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opportunities for us to start looking at that with some of the really big datasets that we have. It is something that we need to start to think now about building in, but it will be some years before we can really demonstrate the impact.

Q318 **Chair:** When will we see an evaluation of the success of the Careers and Enterprise Company?

**Clare MacDonald:** As I am sure they told you, they build evaluations into all of their programmes, so there are already various published evaluations of specific funds that they have run and how effective they were, how many people it reached, what the satisfaction was and all of those things. It is something that they build into all of their programmes. It is something that we ask them to report on in their financial agreement with us. We are also in conversations with them about how we start to make some of that information more transparent and more publicly available. Some of that information about what we are tracking will be coming out in the next few months or so. In terms of looking at the impact on the skills of young people, that is something we will start to see coming through from next year. The really long-term destination stuff is more of a five to 10-year game.

Q319 **Max Parry:** Can we be confident that schools have the resources they need to deliver careers advice and guidance in line with the Gatsby benchmarks?

**Clare MacDonald:** We have seen from some of the pilots that were done with the Gatsby benchmarks that it is possible for schools to improve very quickly against the Gatsby benchmarks. I go back to referencing the careers leader role and also the collaborative careers hubs that we are trying in various areas. In the north-east, John Holman reflected to you that they made a huge amount of progress in two years—from none of the schools meeting any of the benchmarks, to quite high numbers meeting six to eight of the benchmarks. That was not about lots of additional funding.

What made the difference was them all coming together and working as a group to solve the things that they could do more easily as a group, such as sharing information about the similar jobs market they are all in and bringing employers together to run careers fairs, and things like that. Also, because they had a careers leader in every school who had undergone training, that connection into the school made a real difference. That is why we are now testing that approach in 20 different areas around the country over the next couple of years. There are real benefits that can be made out of that collaboration.

I recognise that schools have a huge amount to do. I am an enterprise adviser myself. I have worked with a school and I see how difficult it is to organise work experience placements for 3,000 people every year—that is a challenge. Also, where schools have made a real improvement quite quickly, it has usually been not because they have spent a lot more money



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on it, but because they have someone in the school who is spending dedicated time on it and knows what they are aiming to do strategically.

**Q320 Max Parry:** Is there a case for funding dedicated careers leaders in every school?

**Clare MacDonald:** In the careers strategy, we have said we will fund training for at least 500 careers leaders. Our analysis, and the work that the Careers and Enterprise Company did on the subject for us, shows that most schools have someone who sees their job as being about careers and work experience, but they often do not have training and are not connected through to the headteacher or the senior leadership team of the school, and they are often trying to do that on top of a number of different jobs. Our assessment is that the issue is not that there is no one in schools doing it and they need to fund a new post; it is about the status of that person and the training that they have. That is what we are looking to address with the training for careers leaders.

**Q321 Max Parry:** So you are going to commit to funding the training of only 500 leaders.

**Clare MacDonald:** At this stage, yes.

**Q322 Chair:** Do you plan to expand on that in the future, or do you think you should expand on that in the future?

**Clare MacDonald:** We are obviously interested to see what the impact of that is. In general, it is better to test something on a smaller scale before rolling it out. The Careers and Enterprise Company is doing work on our behalf to select the training providers that will provide that training, so obviously some of it is about developing that model and seeing which forms of training work. We are hoping to get lots of different training providers, so some might be better suited to colleges and some to schools, and some might provide training that is specific to schools supporting children with special educational needs. Part of it is seeing which of those training packages work and what those who are being trained say is helpful before we look to expand.

**Q323 Daria Eckert:** On a slightly different note, we know that the National Careers Service website is being relaunched. Do you know when it will be relaunched?

**Clare MacDonald:** In the careers strategy, we said that we are moving towards the National Careers Service being the online repository for all careers information by 2020. We expect that the updated website will be launched in the autumn, but then there will be a series of staging posts through to 2020. So there will be an improved website in the autumn and then a series of different tools or functions that will come online between now and 2020.

**Q324 Daria Eckert:** Could you expand on what it will contain, who it is aimed at and whether young people were involved in the design of the website?



**Clare MacDonald:** In terms of what it will contain, the main thing in the autumn will be an expanded set of 800 job profiles that have all been designed with input from people who work in those fields, so they accurately reflect what those job roles involve. They contain things such as salary information, the route through to that job and the hours that you might work. In some cases, that will be linked to a course directory about the study programmes that you could take to support you to achieve that job.

In terms of who it is aimed at, it is aimed at and available for everyone. It also has a webchat function, which you can use to talk to a careers adviser. That is something that is available for everyone but, again, is going to be expanded from the autumn in terms of what that service provides. A huge number of different periods of user design have gone into the website. Young people have been involved in designing the website. There was a three-month project earlier this year, in fact, looking specifically at that question of how the website can be made most effective for young people, so they have been involved in the design.

Q325 **Daria Eckert:** Would you be able to expand on how much of that website is around work experience?

**Clare MacDonald:** I think it is fair to say that there is not a specific plan for the website currently that involves something specific on work experience.

Q326 **Daria Eckert:** Thank you. When the service is relaunched in the autumn, what are you going to do to publicise that? Are young people going to have a role in doing that?

**Clare MacDonald:** Yes, we are going to publicise it and make people aware of it. I don't think we have particularly thought about having young people involved in it, but that sounds like a great idea and we would be really happy to pursue that.

Q327 **Dominic Jones:** Can you tell us about how the Department for Education works jointly with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to ensure careers provision is aligned with the industrial strategy produced by the Government?

**Clare MacDonald:** Obviously, we did a lot of work with the Business Department leading up to the industrial strategy, which is why the industrial strategy talks about careers advice and work experience—that is in it reasonably centrally. The Government is totally clear as a policy position that careers advice and work experience is a central bit of its industrial strategy both nationally and locally. We work closely with the Business Department on a whole range of things. One of the areas that touches on lots of different bits of Government and also careers is science, technology, engineering and maths. That is something on which we do a lot of work with the Business Department, because there are so many different links across Government in terms of the different programmes trying to encourage people to think about STEM careers.



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**Mike Davies:** We have a cross-Government group specifically looking at the role that the Government can play in setting up industry placements for T-levels. BEIS obviously has quite an important role to play in that.

Q328 **Dominic Jones:** Is that in progress now?

**Mike Davies:** That is up and running now. It is looking both at how we can use the levers at the Government's disposal to encourage the sectors that they cover to offer industry placements and at how we, as the public sector, can step up and offer our share of those placements. They are one of the Departments that—

Q329 **Dominic Jones:** How successful has that been so far?

**Mike Davies:** It is still in its early days. We are still at the stage of piloting industry placements. The first T-levels will not start to be rolled out until 2020. I can say a bit more later about the funding we are putting in to pump prime that, but at this stage it is about growing the infrastructure around the country to provide industry placements.

**Clare MacDonald:** I would also say that we have a group of civil servants—officials—from all the different Government Departments who work together on the careers strategy. That is particularly useful when you think about different sectors. Obviously, the Health Department does a huge amount of stuff about encouraging people into health careers. Actually, it has just done some really interesting research on a tool for primary schools for explaining the whole range of different careers there are and getting people to think about the NHS not just as doctors and nurses but as all the different allied health professionals, as well as chefs and architects and all those different things. One of the really helpful things about bringing all those different Government Departments together to think about careers and work experience is that they often bring really in-depth knowledge of the employers in different sectors and how we can harness that and use it to its best potential.

Q330 **Dominic Jones:** Are there any areas where more co-operation from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy would be more helpful?

**Clare MacDonald:** Nothing immediately comes to mind. We are working very effectively and closely together. There is always a challenge for Government when it asks things of employers. There are lots of asks of employers around placements for T-levels and work experience, but lots of other Government Departments would also like to ask employers to do lots of different things—on energy efficiency, for example. It is really important that we stay joined up, make sure that we prioritise for employers and help them understand what is most important to us and what we want them to do first.

Q331 **Sanah Kashyap:** From a departmental perspective, whose responsibility is it, and whose should it be, to ensure that a sufficient range and volume of businesses offer work experience placements, and why?



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**Clare MacDonald:** It is a cross-Government effort, but in terms of formal responsibility it sits with the Department for Education, which is largely why we are here. Obviously we need to draw in other Government Departments.

**Mike Davies:** Certainly for T-levels we are asking other Departments to help us to set up placements, but we are putting in the funding to grow that—£16 million in the next year—because we recognise the challenge it constitutes both for schools and for employers. We very much see it as our role to support providers and employers to set those up.

Q332 **Mun Wu:** To interject there, the possible pressures that the introduction of T-levels could have on employers was mentioned by a previous panel. Can you see what possible impacts that could have on work experience? Obviously, if employers have to offer a 45 to 60-day placement, there could be less capacity for work experience students at companies and businesses.

**Mike Davies:** Sure. The first thing to say is, as we have described, they are quite different in nature, in terms of what the industry placement looks like as opposed to an average work experience opportunity. But we recognise that it is a big challenge. The full roll-out will require a lot of placements to be available, and they are a mandatory element of the T-level, so every student will have to complete one to complete the course.

Q333 **Mun Wu:** Will you provide any support for employers to offer work experience as well? They will not want to be too strained.

**Mike Davies:** Exactly. We have been doing a number of things, including initially piloting the industry placements, working with a smaller number of providers and around 1,000 employers. Some quite big names like Boots and Stagecoach have been involved in that. Their experiences have been very positive, and many of them have now committed to offer those placements at a much larger scale. I mentioned that we are also putting some money into the system, with £16 million going out to more than 400 providers to start to grow the availability of industry placements around the country. That is very much for them to set up those networks with local employers so that the capacity is there.

Our experience so far is that the employers involved have found it very positive and have really seen the benefits of offering placements. So I do not think it would necessarily compete and be seen as a replacement for the other types of work experience they are offering. Indeed, we would hope that the infrastructure that this will help to fund in schools and other providers will have a positive effect in terms of building those networks and perhaps more formal brokerage arrangements that they could also use to arrange other forms of work experience.

**Clare MacDonald:** There is definitely an argument that once you have got employers around the country used to the idea that a standard part of their business model is to offer these 45 to 60-day placements, it becomes to some extent much easier to offer a one-week placement, because they have got all the infrastructure in place. Obviously we will need to watch it



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really closely and test how it goes, but there is a strong argument that all of that infrastructure will make it easier.

**Q334 Chair:** You said that placements for T-level students would be good for work experience placements. Do you think that places that offer apprenticeships would also be good for work experience placements? Should they be focused on that?

**Clare MacDonald:** I do not think we have any view about where work experience should be limited to. It is about the needs of the individual and what they want to get out of it. Absolutely, almost anything goes as long as it meets what someone thinks they want and they have been offered a range of options. All different options for work experience are worth considering.

**Q335 Max Parry:** This question is similar to Mun's but about the Gatsby benchmarks. Does the Government recognise the risk that employers could be overburdened with demand for placements due to the requirement for schools to deliver the Gatsby benchmarks?

**Clare MacDonald:** Partly in the light of the conversation we have had about the 45 to 60-day placements, if employers are gearing up for that, one person from a large institution coming into a school to give a 15-minute talk feels like a relatively easy ask. The Careers and Enterprise Company has been working in some areas with what they call cornerstone employers. It is working with 50 so far and is looking to expand that to 150. They are all really keen and signed up to offering different kinds of employer encounters and work experience.

My experience from having talked to lots of schools, colleges and employers is that there are so many different ways of meeting the Gatsby benchmarks and meeting the needs of young people, and there is so much enthusiasm. I have yet to speak to an organisation that does not really want to help out with schools; they are just looking for the best way to do that that fits their business model and is the easiest way to interact with schools. That is often where the Careers and Enterprise Company and the enterprise advisers can help. I acknowledge that it is a risk, that employers often face a difficult environment and that they are trying to balance a lot of different things. Having seen it myself, in terms of getting 20 employers into a school to give 15-minute talks, I know that they love doing it. Even for quite a small organisation, one employee taking an hour out of their day to go and speak to a local school, or spending one day having someone shadow them, is not a big ask.

**Q336 Max Parry:** So you have not put in any controls to mitigate this.

**Clare MacDonald:** I think that would be a reasonable assessment. The control we have put in is adopting the Gatsby benchmarks, rather than a more stringent requirement that says your responsibility as an employer is to offer everyone a placement that is two weeks or a month long. By adapting the Gatsby benchmarks based on international best practice, we have given them the flexibility to arrange that in the way that best suits them, including in discussion with the school about what the needs of their



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parents are. That is the way that we have mitigated the risk—by not having one really rigid rule for what work experience looks like and what it should entail.

Let me go back to the earlier question about the original legal duty for work experience. Some of the people who have spoken to you have said—and I echo this—that there is a risk of low quality and tick-box. People may think, “Everyone in the year group went out for two weeks, so I have met my responsibilities,” but they are not looking at whether that placement was in any way suitable for that person and what they got out of it. That is why the Gatsby benchmarks are a higher bar as a measure of whether the young person found it meaningful or not.

**Q337 Max Parry:** Doesn't flexibility have a risk as well? Some schools might take it more seriously than others.

**Clare MacDonald:** That absolutely is a risk. That is a choice you make when you think about what the different levers are. You can put in place a more stringent, rigid lever and the risk you get is that it is the lowest common denominator and everyone does something to a low quality. If you allow flexibility, you stand more chance of getting something high quality that is designed around the needs of the individual. But there is always a bigger risk of that flexibility being taken advantage of in some cases, I agree. It is a balancing act.

**Mike Davies:** If schools are going to be delivering T-levels, there will be quite a high quality threshold for the industry placement that they will have to arrange for their students. We are talking to Ofsted about how they might look at that as part of their inspections, to ensure that providers do everything we expect of them and that they are good quality placements.

**Q338 Chair:** To come back to what you were saying about fitting needs, which flexibility does not allow I suppose, what is the Department doing to help SMEs provide work experience? We have heard that they really struggle with resources.

**Clare MacDonald:** We do a range of things. There is always a role for guidance and best practice information. The Department and the Careers and Enterprise Company have published various tools for businesses that have been aimed at making it clear how easy it is to offer different placements. They have particularly looked at some concerns that organisations may have about health and safety and legal requirements, to remove some of those barriers. The Careers and Enterprise Company is very strong in this area, partly because of their enterprise adviser network, around half of whom are drawn from SMEs. That is helping to make the connection. As well as working with the school, the enterprise advisers are taking back to their organisation the knowledge of what works for the schools and how they can be helpful in offering those kinds of employer encounters and work experience.

**Mike Davies:** On the T-levels front we are quite conscious of the demand that the 45 to 60-day placement puts on employers, so we are making £5



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million available this year to the National Apprenticeship Service to extend their support service to employers to provide T-level placements. That will set up a national contact centre so they can use a one-stop shop for any advice and guidance. It will involve national account managers for the largest companies who want support to engage with providers around the country, but it will also include some hands-on support for SMEs who ask for it. As part of that, as well, we have asked them to look at what options there could be for an online portal, on which industry placements could be advertised and employers could be matched to students in colleges.

**Q339 George Pearce:** What is the Department doing to encourage businesses in sectors that offer low rates of placements to offer them?

**Clare MacDonald:** I think the Department does a range of things working with different skills partners. We have the skills partner scheme: the Department for Education employers that we are working closely with. I think this is where the cross-Government networks come in. If we are thinking about the food and drink industry and the challenges that they face, often that might be a conversation for us with the relevant Department that has the closest links to that sector. We are then thinking "What are the barriers there?" There can be specific barriers around, for example, health and safety or the requirements that people think they might need, or sometimes wanting to take students at an older age or with a certain number of qualifications. So I think it does need to be a tailored approach, and we tend to do that on a sector-by-sector basis where we become aware of issues.

**Mike Davies:** Yes, and I mentioned some of the support we are putting in through the National Apprenticeship Service. That is also aimed at encouraging employers to engage and to come forward and offer placements. One of the things that came out of the pilots that we have just run, which were run by the Challenge on our behalf, was a business case for employers about the value of offering industry placements, to make the case, really, to them as to why this is good for them.

**Q340 Chair:** Could you provide a few examples of what you do with the different sectors, and how that varies?

**Clare MacDonald:** I gave the example earlier of some work that was going on with the Health Department about the range of different roles that go into the health service. We did some work with the Ministry of Justice. We are really interested in the diversity of different people going into the judiciary, so we worked with them and they worked with the Careers and Enterprise Company to look at how they are encouraging people in the legal profession and judges—who may be a bit rarefied in their background and sitting behind a desk—to go out and connect with schools. We have done a piece of work with them on that.

This year is the Year of Engineering, so we have done some work with the Business Department on careers in engineering, looking in particular at women going into careers in engineering. Various campaigns have gone on around that and specific materials have been produced for schools. So

often it can be about giving schools a really easy way—a kind of tailor-made lesson plan—which might include interactive videos or exercises that students can do, so that teachers can just look at the website and pick that off as something that they know is tried and tested and is going to work with a particular year group. Those are a few examples.

Q341 **Chair:** Have you done that with primary schools or just secondary schools?

**Clare MacDonald:** I think there is a range. I think we have done more work in secondary schools, partly because that is where the legal duty exists, but the thing that was looking at the diversity of roles in the NHS was specifically with primary schools.

Q342 **Daria Eckert:** Would you consider a Department for Education-backed kitemark for employers offering placements and experiences to young people?

**Clare MacDonald:** Can I just clarify? Would that be for the employer to say, “You have done good work, well done,” or for the young person to say “I know if I go and have a work placement here, it will be high quality”?

**Daria Eckert:** I think both. For example, you would only send young people on a work placement that had a kitemark.

**Mike Davies:** This was one of the questions we specifically asked when we consulted recently on T-level delivery, and there were mixed views in response. A few people advocated it, but I think that, for T-levels, we want to know at the outset that every placement offered is going to be of a good standard, which means that it is occupationally specific for the area the student is learning in, that the type of work they are going to do will reflect the industry requirements if they go into that area of work, and that it is outside the school or college environment so that they are getting experience of a real working environment. We think at the moment that those are the kinds of quality requirements that we will put in place. I have mentioned then getting Ofsted to perhaps come in and make sure that the providers are putting arrangements in place to monitor those and to check in with the learners, when they are on work placements, that their experience has been good. It would have that effect. But we are open to the idea of a kitemarking scheme if it becomes clear that it would serve a purpose.

**Clare MacDonald:** I would say that this is where the difference between a longer-term placement and what might be a one-day shadowing or two weeks becomes, possibly, harder to quality assure, in terms of what the standards are for those different visits, without restricting flexibility. If you are talking about the risks of employers not wanting to offer work experience, there is obviously a danger, if there is a hoop that they need to go through to offer things, that that could put them off. That applies particularly if you are thinking about small organisations. If you say to them, “If you’re going to offer a work experience placement, you need to



have a kitemark," that could be a significant incentive for them not to offer one, so that's something you would have to think about.

I would also say: is that really where we think the problem lies? Where people have had a low-quality placement, that is probably often more about the fact that the placement was not suitable in the first place and wasn't something that they were interested in. The problem was the point at which they were not offered enough options, or help and support, in setting up the placement, rather than that they turned up, the placement was of really low quality and they were left to sit and make the tea for a couple of weeks. My sense, from all the conversations I have had, is that the problem is more the former than the latter, so where we are asking people to invest what is limited energy, I would focus on making sure that schools are really having individual conversations with young people and supporting them to get a placement that meets their needs, rather than saying to businesses, "You need to try a lot harder to offer a quality placement."

**Q343 Daria Eckert:** Apart from the recommendation you have just made, how might we balance ensuring good-quality placements with not overburdening employers?

**Clare MacDonald:** There is always more to do to make sure that the good practice examples and the guidance that we have are out there in a really accessible way. There isn't a lack of documents or guidance or of good will from employers to set things up, but can we do more to make sure that guidance is reaching the right people and, in particular, SMEs and that it is really easy for them to build up a structured programme that works for a young person? That's always where it's worth putting more effort in.

**Q344 Daria Eckert:** How would you make that more accessible for employers?

**Clare MacDonald:** I don't have an immediate answer. This is the bit that is always the really hard job, because it needs to be on an individual and a local basis. Potentially, there is work that we could do through the Careers and Enterprise Company or through the local enterprise partnerships, in terms of training and support that we provide for the staff who are working there and for the enterprise advisers who are working with schools.

**Q345 Daria Eckert:** Finally, how would you audit the quality of provision that young people receive? How would you assess it?

**Clare MacDonald:** The work experience that they receive? We don't assess that in a formal way. It is not something that we audit or collect data on. I think it's something that Ofsted look at as part of the big picture—when they look at, overall, how a school or college is delivering against its legal duty in relation to careers, of which work experience is one part. They might well, as part of that, speak to students about what their experience was, but again, if you think about the flexibility and the really wide range of placements, if we asked schools to report and collect data every time a student has contact with an employer about how



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effective they found that, I think that would be quite a big data collection. I would question whether it would necessarily add a lot of value.

Q346 **Dominic Jones:** Earlier witnesses have said that they would prefer a benchmark model where progress happens over time and there is a gradual competition between providers in terms of standards. Would you, as the Government, prefer that, or would you prefer a kitemark approach?

**Clare MacDonald:** Could you explain that again? I am unfamiliar with the idea.

**Dominic Jones:** In terms of setting a maximum standard, which some providers said earlier might be harder to meet quite quickly, it would be better for the Government to set a benchmark approach that over time could be bettered and improved on through gradual progress and competition.

**Chair:** They specifically mentioned that the benchmark here compares peers against each other, rather than comparing them against a set standard so it can induce healthy competition.

**Dominic Jones:** Over time, rather than immediate and short term.

**Clare MacDonald:** I am not quite clear who is competing with whom. Do you mean employers competing with each other for how good their work experience placements are?

**Dominic Jones:** Yes, providers and that sort of thing.

**Clare MacDonald:** I suppose my initial view is that we have a set of benchmarks with standards—the Gatsby benchmarks. I would question the need for additional standards. I think we have got best practice out there in terms of what a good quality placement looks like. I suppose we are tied back into the original questions about the kitemark and whether it is really identifying the heart of the problem.

I don't think I have a strong view about this. If we did have a kite mark, with all the caveats we set out earlier about the potential disincentives for business, I think there are a range of ways in which you could do that. I suppose my concern would be about whether, in practice, employers would really start to compete with each other for the kitemark, or whether there is a risk that they might see it as a burden.

Q347 **Dominic Jones:** Have you talked about awards or league tables based on the Gatsby benchmarks?

**Clare MacDonald:** There is a Quality in Careers standard. I should probably have raised that earlier. I think that would be a helpful thing to have a look at. That is, again, across the whole careers programme and all the Gatsby benchmarks, but it includes work experience. It is an award that schools can work towards. There are different providers and it has bronze, silver and gold. It is actually in the process of a bit of reform in response to the careers strategy, to look at how it really reflects the



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Gatsby benchmarks. That is an award for schools rather than employers, in terms of how well the school is doing.

Q348 **Dominic Jones:** Would you look at a similar model for providers and employers that offer these sorts of placements, or do you think it wouldn't work?

**Clare MacDonald:** As Mike said, there are always pros and cons, and there is definitely no reason why we couldn't look at it. I suppose it is the balance between an award or kitemark that businesses see as a really positive and good thing to have, which they start to work towards, and when it becomes a negative thing and you say, "You can't offer work experience unless you've ticked all these boxes." That is what I worry about.

Q349 **Dominic Jones:** The emphasis we have found so far is on a partnership between schools. If schools are having an award, we want your perspective on whether it would be fair for providers to have one and for it to be consistent throughout the work experience process.

**Clare MacDonald:** That is something we would need to talk to a lot of employers about. I suppose my instinct is that we would want to make it an incentive for employers to work towards. We would want them to see it as a positive thing—and valuable for their brand—to have the kitemark as a company. I don't know if there is anything you want to add, Mike.

**Mike Davies:** From my perspective on T-levels, the immediate challenge is whether we can deliver the volume so that everybody who wants one can have the opportunity. I would be a bit wary of putting anything in place that might limit those opportunities and therefore limit the opportunities that students have to progress. Having said that, different colleges will form links with different employers, and you might find students selecting colleges on the basis that they have really good links with certain employers that they really want to get into. That is perhaps more likely than trying to make a judgment on the quality of the placement.

**Clare MacDonald:** The other thing worth looking at is whether any existing awards can be built into. I won't pretend to know a lot about Investors in People, but that is the sort of brand that has quite a lot of traction. Another thing is whether employers are already working towards other things, in terms of standards, that work experience could be built into.

Q350 **Dominic Jones:** So the Government would prefer to expand current award systems, rather than create a new one that matches the Gatsby benchmarks?

**Clare MacDonald:** I think that would be a good place to start, if we were going to look at it.

Q351 **Jason Stewart:** Reliance on personal networks to facilitate work experience disadvantages some young people, such as those from low-income households. How will you ensure that Department for Education-

funded programmes to mitigate that reach the young people who need them the most?

**Clare MacDonald:** We are very aware of what the data suggests about access to work experience for people from all different groups, and the challenges that that can present for social mobility. We have tried to address that by making sure that all the programmes funded through the Careers and Enterprise Company are heavily targeted.

They may have mentioned their analysis on the country's cold spots. They take different kinds of data that might be about academic attainment but might also be about girls taking STEM A-levels and similar metrics. They have used that to target their funding so that it is heavily skewed towards the areas of the country that the data suggests are in need of more support.

It is also built specifically into some of their programmes. We have a £1.7 million fund that supports careers activities and is focused on people with special educational needs, people in care, looked-after children, and care leavers and people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

There is geographic targeting—targeting the schools in a particular geography that might need more support—and within that there is targeting of the students most in need of support. They have invested quite a lot over the last few years in mentoring programmes, which, again, are not only targeted by area and school but look specifically within the schools for the people who need more support. The funding that we have is strongly targeted with that in mind.

Q352 **Jason Stewart:** Is there a case for placing stronger requirements on schools to use professional brokers and mediators to arrange work experience?

**Clare MacDonald:** I think that, in some areas, they can provide useful services. However, this again goes back to careers leaders in schools, their training and status and how good they are at buying these services. Done well, that could be really helpful, but I have also heard schools talk about having bought those services and them not working successfully and providing a lot of low-value placements that weren't what their students wanted. It is less about that necessarily being the right route for schools to go down and more about supporting and training people in schools so that, when they buy in services, they can make intelligent, good decisions about what they are buying.

Q353 **Chair:** How do we share best practice if there is a disparity in the quality of brokers?

**Clare MacDonald:** The fact that we are setting clear standards for what their training should involve will make sure that careers leaders have consistent training. We also work, for example, with the professional body, the Career Development Institute. They have just re-published a helpful guide for schools on how to commission and buy different careers



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services—whether that is independent careers guidance or using these kind of brokering services to organise work experience.

I know that the Gatsby Charitable Foundation has also produced a handbook of best practice that they have sent out to all schools and colleges, which we are very grateful for. It is good to email, but schools often tell us that they pay attention when they get something in the post. It is about looking at all those different ways to get that information out there.

**Q354 Jack Payne:** Following on from the last question, how will the Department ensure that disabled young people in mainstream schools are able to access work experience and work inspiration on an equal footing to non-disabled young people?

**Mike Davies:** All the issues that Clare has been talking about are equally relevant for the industry placements that form a part of T-levels. We are conscious, as I said, because they are managed under the course, that they are accessible to every student and that every student gets the same consistent quality of placement and can access them in a way that is appropriate for them. Providers and employers will be under their existing statutory duties to make the appropriate adjustments that are necessary. It is something that we have been looking at through the pilots and will continue to look at as we make the capacity funding available over the next couple of years to see what is most effective, and we will make guidance available on that. Particularly where students may have more difficulty travelling to a placement, we are making bursary funding available for that particular issue.

**Clare McDonald:** The Careers and Enterprise Company also works with schools that support people with educational needs and disabilities, and they have enterprise advisers that work in over 200 specialist schools. The fund that I mentioned, the £1.7 million, is specifically about testing for what works for those groups so that we can then look at how we can scale it up in terms of best practice around the country.

**Q355 Chair:** Who can apply for the travel bursary fund?

**Mike Davies:** I do not know exactly what the eligibility requirements are, but it would be available to anybody—I think it is available currently and we are extending it because of the increase in scale that will apply when T-levels are introduced.

**Q356 Chair:** Is it just T-level students?

**Mike Davies:** I don't believe it is. It is an existing bursary fund that we are extending.

**Q357 George Pearce:** What are you doing to address gender stereotyping in the provision and uptake of work experience, and how will we know if it is working?

**Clare McDonald:** I think this is something that we are thinking about less specifically in terms of work experience and more about the whole careers programme strategically. It is obviously something that is



addressed to some extent in the Gatsby benchmarks. You will see it reflected in things such as, in the careers strategy, talking about the importance of all students making sure they get at least one encounter with a STEM employer, because we recognise how important it is that that isn't something that is just made available to people that have expressed an interest or people with a particular background. It also lies behind quite a lot of the work that we are looking to do with primary schools. You often have to do the work earlier on in order to make different people demand different things. I can see it is challenging if schools think they are meeting what their students are asking for. Often the issue is that young people themselves have a gendered view of the sort of roles that they might want to go into, and so that is what they ask for. If a woman says, "I really want to go into childcare", it might be challenging for the school to challenge that perception.

Actually, there should have been collective work done earlier to make sure that, before that young person reached the point where they were absolutely convinced that this was the only career route for them, they had been exposed to a range of different careers. I think that is where some of the things about lots of different employer encounters come in in terms of making sure that people are exposed early on to a lot of different things. I don't think we are doing anything that specifically says, "At the point at which you choose work experience, we want to challenge you to do something different." It is more looking at the whole programme of activities going on in the school. It is aimed at countering those kinds of gender stereotypes.

**Q358 George Pearce:** So in a way it is trial and error. You are not sure if you are going to try this or try that. You try something and, if it doesn't work, you try something else just to open up the perspective.

**Clare McDonald:** Yes.

**Q359 George Pearce:** Would you like to add anything else, Mike?

**Mike Davies:** I don't think so. We are keen that the T-levels don't follow gender stereotypes and that we do get a mix of students doing the full range of things. A lot of that will depend on their confidence in picking certain subjects at age 16 for their future career, so it ties in closely to what those primary experiences have been and that they have had those employer encounters and been encouraged to think of those opportunities.

**Mun Wu:** Moving on from that, do businesses have a role to play in addressing disparities in provision and uptake in work experience between different groups: for example, through a recruitment process? I would like to clarify that by "different groups" we mean those with disabilities, from different social and economic backgrounds, those in rural areas and those who are BAME.

**Clare McDonald:** Do you mean recruitment for work experience or recruitment more generally?

**Mun Wu:** Recruitment for work experience.



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**Clare McDonald:** Yes, absolutely, employers have a responsibility, similarly to if they were recruiting more broadly. There is an interesting question about where, in practice, they are not recruiting, but just making available an opportunity. The question is who gets in touch with them to take up that opportunity. There is sometimes a question about selection, where I would say, absolutely, that if they are running a recruitment process, and they are asking people to come in for interviews and submit application forms, then it is their responsibility to ensure that they are reaching out to a diverse range of people. Sometimes, however, there is an inherent bias if you say, "Here are four opportunities," and you see who the first person is to give you a call. It is likely to be either the proactive school or the most proactive young person—or, indeed, their parent—and that has its own bias.

Q360 **Mun Wu:** What is the Government doing to help and support businesses fulfil this role?

**Clare McDonald:** That is the responsibility of businesses, rather than Government.

Q361 **Sanah Kashyap:** Has the Department considered the case for embedding work experience, to a much greater extent, in the national curriculum? For example, we have received evidence from the Edge Foundation, which submitted the idea that the provision of guidance of schools is patchy and in many cases poor, and that there should be the creation of a fully-integrated 14 to 19 curriculum that relates directly to the world of work.

**Clare McDonald:** I have spoken to the Edge Foundation and I have looked at the stuff they submitted. The case studies they have are amazing. The schools that they are citing are doing fantastic work. I would say two things. First, this is in the fourth Gatsby benchmark, in terms of the importance of integrating careers advice and employers into all curriculum subjects. That is incredibly important and, from the data we have, one of the things that schools struggle with the most. That is about how to make maths accessible to everyone by explaining really clearly how it is used, and why it is important in lots of different industries and jobs that people might be interested in going into. My observation, having looked at some of the schools that they are referencing, is that all these schools are managing to do this within the flexibilities and freedoms that exist already, in terms of how they can structure these programmes. They are all doing fantastic work, working closely with local employers, to absolutely build and integrate that work with employers into all of their core curriculum classes. It is challenging and fantastic, but it does not require us to do anything different in terms of the curriculum. I think the capacity is absolutely there for schools to build in those links with employers into all of their teaching, as these schools are demonstrating it is possible to do.

**Mike Davies:** I would just add that the T-level form, in itself, is quite a major change in the 16 to 19 space. That is already something we are



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having to get to grips with. An even more substantial reform across the 14 to 16 spectrum as well might be a bit much in one go.

**Q362 Sanah Kashyap:** Would you say that the Department has in fact considered the case, but, as it stands, it does not feel the need to do any more than it is currently doing?

**Clare McDonald:** Certainly in terms of the 14 to 16 space, the reform of GCSEs in particular has obviously been quite a substantial programme of reform that has just completed. Ministers have made a commitment that they will limit any changes to that curriculum over the next few years, precisely because there has been so much change. Yes, in terms of the formal position, we would say that we have considered it and we have reformed GCSEs to ensure that they are a high-quality academic qualification that is serving people's needs. In addition, what the Edge Foundation is talking about is deliverable with the qualifications and the curriculum that we have. It is about those contacts with employers and having them really embedded in schools, and about teachers feeling the confidence to know how to integrate those conversations—about how the subject links to different industries—into their lessons.

**Mike Davies:** In the conversation we had on T-levels recently, we did indicate and acknowledge the need to look at other technical provision, both at 16 to 19 and a technical offer at 14 to 16, but only once T-levels are introduced. Some of that work will be going on, but through a slightly slower timetable.

**Chair:** Thank you for your evidence. We are going to delve into what you have said a little bit more. We will start with Caitlin.

**Q363 Caitlin O'Regan:** It was really interesting hearing about the travel bursary funds from work. We know that access to work experience is an important part of improving work experience opportunities for all young people. My question is how the Department advertises travel bursary funds now?

**Mike Davies:** That's a good question. I don't know whether we would advertise it as a Department. It is probably part of the funding that we make available to colleges, which it is then down to them to inform their students about.

**Q364 Caitlin O'Regan:** So it is not part of something that you would make available on, say, the website, saying, "If you need to gain or access work experience there is this opportunity available."

**Mike Davies:** It's a really good point, and one we could look at. At the moment, we do not have a national website to advertise industry placements. As we put that infrastructure in place, we would want to flag that this is available, but it is certainly something that we could look at.

**Q365 Caitlin O'Regan:** You mentioned how it is given to colleges. Could colleges advertise it more, do you think?



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**Mike Davies:** As I say, only a small number of colleges have been piloting T-levels, but I am sure that there is more that we could do as we roll them out to make students aware. We do not want it to be a disincentive for students to choose T-levels. It is certainly something that we will follow up with the first wave of providers.

Q366 **Caitlin O'Regan:** So that is something you are planning to maybe look at in the next year or so?

**Mike Davies:** Yes.

Q367 **Chair:** Just to clarify, is the travel bursary for people who are just on T-levels, or for anyone?

**Mike Davies:** No, it exists now, but we are topping it up as T-levels are introduced.

Q368 **Chair:** Do you have any data on how many people use it, given that you said it isn't nationally advertised?

**Mike Davies:** I don't at the moment, sorry.

Q369 **Chair:** Is that available, or do you just not have it?

**Clare McDonald:** I feel like this is an area where we don't know all the details. If we just send you a really brief summary of the data that we have after this, it would probably be helpful. I feel like you are not getting quite what you need from us.

Q370 **Mun Wu:** We went on a visit yesterday to Transport for London. They felt that public sector organisations should be required to offer a certain number or proportion of work experience placements to young people on free school meals. What do you feel about that?

**Clare McDonald:** I think it is an interesting idea. I definitely think that there is more that the public sector could do to make work experience available. I know that is something that people have been looking at for some time. I do not know whether a target, and one that is based around free school meals, is necessarily the best or only route. It is also about, again, the type of work experience and when it is done.

For example, I know that the civil service does some internship placements, which I think are more in the 17 to 20 age category. That is looking at two months or so over the summer holidays, focused not on pupils with free school meals, but on diversity and people from BAME backgrounds. Various programmes already exist in the civil service, but different mechanisms to ensure that we do more are always worth considering.

Q371 **Jack Payne:** Following up on young and disabled people and the issue of accessibility, what role could the Department for Education play in ensuring that all employers meet their obligation to provide reasonable adjustments to young people on their work experience placements?

**Chair:** Has the Department considered diverting some of the



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apprenticeship fund to work experience?

**Clare McDonald:** Sorry. I don't think we answered Jack's question—I was just taking a breath there. Again, this is mostly about the information that we put out. Obviously the requirements on all businesses to make adjustments for their employees are very well understood. All business will have a really clear programme that they go through for making reasonable adjustments for anyone who needs it in their staff. I don't see any reason, in principle, why exactly the same thing shouldn't apply for work experience.

My sense is that it is probably more of a recruitment issue, in terms of the people coming into work experience placements. The issue is probably less that employers don't make adjustments and more that there would be a risk that they might not take on students that they thought there would need to be a lot of adjustments for. That is when you then come back to some of the work that we are doing, through the Careers and Enterprise Company and through the funds that we have, about what works.

Q372 **Jack Payne:** On adjustments, could you see the Department for Education backing a fairer, more equal system of interviews for young disabled people? Ambitious about Autism put forward that applications should be in a variety of accessible forms, such as A3 or online forms. Do you see the Department backing any formal legislation that would make employers offer accessible interviews when looking to employ disabled young people for placements?

**Clare McDonald:** I think this is probably where you stray slightly outside our knowledge, in terms of requirements on business, as compared with education requirements. Legislation is always quite a blunt tool to address complex sets of issues, so I have some instinctive nervousness about that. The question we need to ask ourselves is why businesses are not doing that and what more we can do to support them.

I am not actually aware, from the evidence I have seen, that there is a particular issue with people applying for work experience and being turned down because of their background. If you have evidence of that or have seen it, we would be interested to look at it and to have a conversation with the Business Department about it.

Q373 **Chair:** I will ask that question again. Sorry. Has the Department considered diverting some of the apprenticeship funds to work experience?

**Clare McDonald:** The apprenticeship levy is still bedding in. It is still relatively new. We have a comprehensive plan to make sure that there are more high-quality apprenticeships. Going back to the idea of a period of stability in the system, there are a lot calls on the Government to do something different with the apprenticeship levy, and lots of people would like to see it used for different things. It is clear that there is a real challenge in making sure that it goes to the purpose it was initially intended for and supports those really high-quality apprenticeships, including for young people. There are a lot of questions and asks of



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Government on the use of the apprenticeship levy from employers and young people, which are always seriously considered. However, the Government have been reasonably clear on the need for a period of stability for the apprenticeship levy.

Q374 **Chair:** Another follow-up then. Do you consider young people's views when working out your policies?

**Clare McDonald:** The Department for Education as a whole is doing a lot of work to make sure that we are much more focused on the users of our policies, whoever that may be. Sometimes that will be headteachers or teachers, sometimes it will be employers and sometimes it will be young people. We build that in in different ways, depending on what sort of work it is and the stage it is at. We might rely on surveys and qualitative-focused interviews. Sometimes we come out to schools and run, essentially, games and tests. There has been a lot of thinking about that, in terms of the choices that people make. Mike might be able to say a bit more about the development of the T-level programme in that sense.

I do not think we are saying that every single decision we make has always been made after having a conversation with a young person. There are lots of different ways that we can feed in those views. However, we recognise that that is something that we have not always been great at, but we are getting better at it over time. It is increasingly becoming normal business to make sure that we have found a way, through the most appropriate mechanism, to have a conversation with a diverse range of people.

**Mike Davies:** That's right. Certainly during my time on T-levels, we have been quite careful to consult at every different stage, which has taken different forms. As Clare says, there is now a real focus on listening in the Department. There is now a particular team in the Department that helps other policy teams and that specialises in user research, if you like.

They did some work for us testing the T-level model with students in schools and colleges. We were trying to find out from them what they liked about it, what they were not so sure about, what things would make them choose a T-level and what things about the offer they really valued. It was from that that we really came to understand that the extended placement was one of the things that students thought was so beneficial, but also that they really value having a range of interactions with employers. It has really helped us to understand what would influence their choices at different stages—different decision points—and it will definitely feed into our work as we implement this.

Q375 **Chair:** Could you possibly provide a note mapping out how you have involved young people, particularly with work experience policy?

**Clare McDonald:** Sure.

Q376 **Chair:** Thank you. Also, we want to ask you about parents. We have heard quite a lot of evidence on this. Given that parents are so influential, what are you doing to better educate parents about opportunities with



apprenticeships or with work experience?

**Clare McDonald:** There is a whole range of things. I will say, though, that obviously parents are almost everyone, when you look at one particular section of the population. It's a really large group of people and parents are not all the same. There's an issue about how you use primary schools and secondary schools. There are quite a lot of conversations about how engaged parents often are with primary schools and how they may be slightly more distant from secondary schools, so again, it's a case of looking at what the opportunities are in primary school to start bringing parents into some of those conversations. You will also see this in a few bits of the Gatsby benchmarks, in terms of something that we are asking schools to work towards. We are thinking in quite an active way about what the best way is for us to support schools to have those conversations with parents, because it's certainly the case, when you look at all the surveys of where people are getting their information from, that it is their parents—that's the biggest thing. Even your most trusted teacher comes quite a long way down the road after that.

There are really specific things we do on big programmes—things like apprenticeships. There are national campaigns and efforts to reach people in that way, in a very visible way, but there are also programmes we fund that go out and work with schools directly, running events that often they may invite parents along to. You will absolutely find with apprenticeships sometimes that someone comes back from school and says, "I've just heard about this fantastic thing; I want to be an apprentice," and their parent says, "Absolutely not." So in terms of the design of the support we give schools to run those events, we often think about whether you can plan them for a time when you can invite parents to come along as well.

Obviously, if the parents don't want to come and are really disengaged, that is a real challenge, and it's something that Government experience across a range of things. You used the phrase "educate people". Again, there is the work we do looking at how people experience information. There is a real risk of Government being seen to tell people what to do. Often, schools are our best friends in terms of being the people to mediate those messages, as opposed to how effective a Government campaign is if you put one out. I recognise this is a real challenge. I think it's one of the hardest things for Government to do, and as we look to make progress on the careers strategy, we need to think about it more.

Q377 **Chair:** I would also like to ask you about self-employed people. Obviously, this sector is really fast growing, but what are you doing to encourage young people to go into it or even to consider that?

**Clare McDonald:** I think I would return to some of the things around the diversity of the people that the Careers and Enterprise Company are working with and the diversity of the employer encounters. Certainly this is something that we would say to schools in guidance. If you look at our statutory guidance and search for the term "self-employed", it does reference a few times the fact that one of the things a school should be thinking about, when it is bringing in a diverse range of employers, is



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bringing in people who are self-employed or who have a portfolio career, where they do a whole range of things, because that is absolutely the direction more and more people are going in.

This is one of those areas where the evidence in terms of just seeing someone else having done it is not necessarily enough. Whether it's a question of being self-employed or going into any particular profession or taking up a particular subject, we know a lot less about what works and over how much time and how sustained the conversation needs to be to really persuade someone: "You thought you were going down one track, but actually we need to open your eyes to other possibilities." We know a lot less about what really works in convincing people to do one thing versus another. I think there is also a question about the fact that, obviously, all careers advisers are impartial and there is exposing people to things and letting them make a choice; and then there is where we are being more directive about saying "We think you should know more about this." Mostly our view is the aim is to expose people to a lot of different options, and then make sure they have the career guidance that allows them to weigh up those different experiences and to think about what is the best route for them.

**Q378 Dominic Jones:** We heard earlier from one of the witnesses about problems and barriers that children in care and care leavers faced. Are there any Government plans or future Government plans to tackle those barriers in terms of contact with employers and obtaining work experience placements?

**Clare McDonald:** That is the fund that I talked about earlier—the £1.7 million that the Careers and Enterprise Company have got out at the moment that is focused on three different groups: children with special educational needs, those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, but also those who are in care or previously looked-after children. We have got a dedicated stream of work that the Careers and Enterprise Company are running. They have got a document out at the moment that is asking for bids from around the country and from different providers, and that will then be up and running in the early part of next year and we will then take the learning from that to say "Okay, what do we now know about what's worked, and is that something that we need to scale up or share the learning from?"

**Q379 Dominic Jones:** Do you know what plans they have specifically to combat barriers facing children in care? You said there were three. Do you know if there are any plans specifically yet?

**Clare McDonald:** A portion of money is definitely going to go to that purpose. So we could send you the link to the prospectus that the Careers and Enterprise Company have got that says "These are the sorts of activities that we are looking for bids for people from and these are the kind of things that we are looking for them to provide," and then they will evaluate what has worked and write up a document that says "Of the things that we funded here is what we have learned about what was effective and what wasn't."



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**Q380 Chair:** You mentioned that careers leaders get training and obviously they have a really influential role. Does their training include how to challenge young people's own misconceptions such as the constraints on them if they have a disability or the constraints due to gender, or apprenticeships?

**Clare McDonald:** This is where there is the balance between the career leader as the person designing the careers programme in the school and the training of the person who actually sits down with the young person and gives them individual guidance. They could be the same person, but when we are talking about careers leaders we are talking about the person who will sit there and plan: what are the activities that are going to happen in year 7, is everyone going to go out on work experience in year 11 or is that actually going to happen in year 9 instead and how are they going to organise that? Their training at a high level, absolutely, and will cover all of the Gatsby benchmarks, in particular the one about the need to make sure that in planning that programme it has been tailored to the individual student, but they will be setting the programme at a school level.

I think when you are looking at the person who will be sitting down with an individual person and challenging them about the choice they have made about a particular work experience placement, that might well be an independent careers adviser the school has brought in and, absolutely, it is part of the—all schools should have a duty to provide independent careers advice and they should be buying that from someone who is trained in providing careers advice, and absolutely part of that training will be about challenging those kinds of barriers and conceptions.

**Q381 Chair:** The Government cannot ensure that?

**Clare McDonald:** The Government has a limited ability to ensure many things, sadly. So what we do, in terms of ensuring it, is there is the legal requirement about independent careers advice, so that means that all schools should be providing that. There is a professional register of people. In order to be a careers adviser you need to have done some level of training and the guidance that we provide to all schools that they legally have to have regard to says "You should be buying independent careers advice from someone who is trained and qualified to an appropriate level." While we cannot absolutely make sure it happens we have used all of those tools to try and provide pretty clear guidance to schools about how they should be going about it.

**Q382 Max Parry:** Could you just clarify whether the relaunched National Careers Service website would contain information about work experience?

**Clare McDonald:** I think I covered earlier that at the moment the plan isn't for the National Careers Service website specifically to contain a bit on work experience, but Mike might want to say a bit about plans for work placements being online.



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**Mike Davies:** That is one of the things that we are asking the National Apprenticeship Service: to look at part of its employer-support service on T-levels and the options for an online portal on which we could either connect employers and colleges, or potentially advertise placements.

Q383 **Max Parry:** What would it contain?

**Mike Davies:** That is what we have asked it to look at.

**Clare McDonald:** Just to say a bit more about that, in terms of our sense of work experience and online portals, I know you have heard a range of different views, but certainly some companies are providing something already. There are a lot of great things out there already, and I definitely think that there is a question of whether some of those can be built on, but is that best done at a national, regional or local level, and which placements would that be geared towards. Mike is saying that where we think there is real value in looking at that initially is in an online portal, which considers the case for T-level placement, but as to our point about how that might be extended, that would be the first step, and I think we would then ask whether that might have more benefits at a future date for containing more work experience.

Some local portals work quite well in providing that information, and I guess that I would question—even given the point about travel bursaries—how far the majority of people are going to want to travel to take up work experience opportunities. I also think that there are a lot of products in the market already—Barclays Life Skills is one and Workfinder is another one that you could look at, which matches people with work experience placements. There are a lot of people in this space. When you consider the range and diversity of different experiences that people are offering, there is quite a challenge in maintaining a national database of every single placement—think about the number of employers across the country and the number of potential placements, and then making sure that all that information is kept up to date. That feels like quite a significant challenge to me, which makes me ask whether it might be better done with some big employers or locally.

Q384 **Max Parry:** When will that research be completed?

**Mike Davies:** That is funding over the next year. As I mentioned, T-levels will first be introduced in 2020, so that is something we want to look at over the next year so we can then put something in place for that date.

**Chair:** Thank you very much for your evidence. It has been really useful. Thank you.