

HOUSE OF COMMONS
ORAL EVIDENCE
TAKEN BEFORE THE
EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS AND CO-OPERATION

WEDNESDAY 19 JUNE 2013

SIR DAVID CARTER, PETER MAUNDER, MERVYN WILSON AND
LEO WINKLEY

DR JOHN DUNFORD, DR CAROLINE KENNY, JAMES O'SHAUGHNESSY AND
DAVID SIMS

Evidence heard in Public

Questions 1 - 112

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Oral Evidence

Taken before the Education Select Committee

on Wednesday 19 June 2013

Members present:

Mr Graham Stuart (Chair)
 Neil Carmichael
 Alex Cunningham
 Bill Esterson
 Siobhain McDonagh
 Ian Mearns
 Chris Skidmore
 Mr David Ward

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Sir David Carter**, Executive Principal, Cabot Learning Federation, Bristol, **Peter Maunder**, Headteacher, Oldway School, Paignton, **Mervyn Wilson**, Chief Executive, The Co-Operative College, and **Leo Winkley**, Headmaster, St. Peter's School, York, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Good morning and welcome to this session of the Education Committee. It is a delight to have such a distinguished panel before us and I do not know until the sword has ascended on the shoulder whether it is formally true or not, but Sir David Carter, congratulations on your ennoblement. It is lovely to have you here and to have such a distinguished panel accompanied by such a distinguished audience, in which I see Geoff Whitty. It is a great pleasure to see you all here today. We are looking at school partnerships and co-operation. You are generally all enthusiasts for partnerships and co-operation, so tell me what is so great for a headteacher about sending his best teachers out, away from their classrooms, to help out in another school?

Sir David Carter: Any partnership work that I have ever been involved in has been a two-way process and there are benefits for the schools that are receiving the support, but also in what you learn as a provider of the support to bring back into your own school. In my own organisation, the Cabot Learning Federation, we take the view that the talent pool of staff is a talent pool that is there for the benefit of all our students, not just the children who attend one particular building. Any support that is done where teachers are moving between school buildings or across school organisations has to be judged by the quality of the impact on the work of those children. Successful partnerships take that collective responsibility for a large number of children and direct their talent pool to give the maximum benefit to as many children as possible.

Q2 Chair: So there is nothing but upside, Leo.

Leo Winkley: I think it is pretty much all upside, because I entirely agree that there is a sense of positive infection, if you like, when enthusiastic colleagues come together and talk about the things that really matter, i.e. how you inspire the young. You have to commit the staff to it and you have to be willing to allow them to make this a priority, and that obviously

implies an investment of time and energy and, in some cases, money, but the upsides are so significant.

Q3 Chair: Have you had any negative feedback from parents or others in your school community suggesting that perhaps you should be concentrating a bit more on the pupils in your school rather than helping somewhere else?

Leo Winkley: No, far from it. Anything that helps interact and create a permeable membrane, if you like, between schools is a positive thing, and I think parents understand that any child growing up having a sense of the world around them and what you can learn from others is a good thing. We have certainly had no negatives from parents.

Q4 Chair: No chinks in your armour so far. Peter, are there no risks to this approach? Are there no ways it could undermine the core purpose of the school, which is to educate the pupils within?

Peter Maunder: Obviously, I am extremely keen and in favour of as much co-operation as possible. There is always a challenge within the school or on my very best teachers to get a balance between my very best teachers teaching children, coaching and developing other teachers in my school and carrying out outreach work. However, we have been involved in this for a long time and we can definitely see great benefits. It would benefit from more funding, quite simply.

Q5 Chair: What do you need the money for?

Peter Maunder: To have more teachers there, so you can get a balance of very high quality teachers and to provide opportunities for the most talented teachers within an area to work together. If we look abroad in terms of action research and teachers looking at working in classrooms, working with higher education and other teachers carrying out that research and then bringing those benefits back to school, the knowledge is in the school. We need to create the opportunities for the most talented teachers in a whole area in different schools to work together to benefit that wider group of pupils.

Q6 Chair: Mervyn, is there any evidence of where a school is co-operating happily with other schools and then has a dip in results? Have there ever been any cases where there has been a bit of a panic and maths has dipped fairly horribly and the top maths teacher is suddenly withdrawn from the co-operative programme? Does that ever happen?

Mervyn Wilson: I am not aware of those circumstances, although I think that there can be pieces where cohorts from individual year groups can affect performance, but the principle of working together that others have spoken of is very, very clear. I do not think any school has all the answers, and our experience is that the schools that can be perceived as the stronger ones benefit as much as the schools that they are supporting.

Q7 Chair: How would you evidence that?

Mervyn Wilson: A really good example would be one of the early National Challenge Trusts that used a co-operative model in High Wycombe, Cressex School, which is a very challenging school in an area with selection and a very, very high proportion of BME students in challenging circumstances. Its partner institution within the model is one of the highest performing independent schools in the country, Wycombe Abbey School. The head there has said over the years how their learners have benefited. It is not just the teachers benefiting; they have used learners working on reading schemes and other activities with the students at Cressex. It is really emphasising the enormous mutual benefits that have come from that and the benefits through the trust model of institutionalising what was an informal relationship

previously. That is critically important now, because the head of the independent school, who is about to retire, was absolutely determined that that institutional partnership carries forward so the model embeds that collaboration that has developed.

Q8 Bill Esterson: I am going to follow up with a question to the answer that Mervyn just gave. In that example, was the benefit partly because the learners at the school giving the support were involved in supporting students in the other school as well, rather than just the teachers and the head?

Mervyn Wilson: I certainly think the strongest of these collaborations and co-operative trusts and partnerships benefit where it is a multi-level engagement. The co-operative models are multi-stakeholder models that engage parents, staff, learners and the local community. One of the really important pieces that we are seeing from the most successful trusts is multi-level opportunities for those stakeholders to engage, so opportunities for teachers to meet and share issues, but also opportunities for learners to come together and celebrate activities and achievements as well.

Q9 Bill Esterson: A number of headteachers have said to me that they are concerned particularly with pressures on budgets, and if they are taken out of school or one of their high performing members of staff is taken out of school for any length of time, they have noticed a dip in performance and then they have had to come back. Are you all saying that that is not a concern? I think you were saying earlier that was not a concern.

Sir David Carter: You know in advance that is a risk, so the best leaders will mitigate that risk and look very carefully at what capacity they can create. I would agree that in the days when there was funding available for this work that was easier, but those days have gone, so we have to develop the talent pool that we have in our organisations so that the backfill comes from, possibly, the school that you are supporting. There is a real need to look at the long-term partnership and not the quick-fix solution. When you see examples of schools that begin to see their own performance erode it is because they have not anticipated what that will look like in six, 12 or 18 months' time and looked at ways in which they also have to perform in a different way. The model of the successful school working alongside a school that is on an improvement journey is enhanced when the results of both schools are expected to improve.

Q10 Bill Esterson: Does anybody have anything to add to that?

Leo Winkley: I would agree with that, and certainly our experience in York is that it has been successful because there has been a sense of a partnership of strengths rather than one school being perceived to bail out or improve another; there is a sense of mutuality about it, which is really important. The initial pump-priming of funding got the momentum going, but it is now running really on peanuts financially and a real sense of collective identity, which has been built up over a period of time. The success of these federations of partnerships is to do with identifying small, doable projects in the first stages, operating within the parameters of the possible and building up the trust over a period of time, and then all kinds of other things are generated from that. It is also important to consider the local factors—that there are some things going your way in terms of the simple geography of where the schools are. For example, in York you have that on your side: you have a communal kind of city, which is again going in your favour, and you have two universities and quite a number of other things. There has to be the right soil, if you like, as well.

Q11 Bill Esterson: In terms of the impact on the school giving the advice, a lot of it is about long-term planning and watching for any impact as well. That is broadly what you were saying.

Leo Winkley: Absolutely.

Q12 Bill Esterson: If I can turn to the different types of partnerships now, we have heard evidence of a great diversity. Do you see this as an advantage, and specifically when it comes to academy chains and teaching school alliances, are those the best ways for schools to work in partnership?

Sir David Carter: If I can perhaps come in first on that one, the thing that binds the answer to your question together is about locality and geography. We have 11 schools in our academy chain and another six schools that are part of our teaching school alliance that probably never will be in the Federation. However, they are all, in terms of driving distance, probably within 25 to 30 minutes of each other and probably within three or four square miles and a couple of postcodes in Bristol. The locality bit for me really makes the difference, and I struggle to see how a national chain would be able to do some of the things that we can do so easily in terms of the movement of staff between the schools and the movement of students between the schools. Our post-16 offer, for example, is a good illustration of a question that somebody asked earlier about where students fit into this. Our four academy sites in Bristol and South Gloucestershire run a really diverse curriculum that enables 600 children to access a range of curricula that a single school will struggle to offer in the future given the way that sixth-form funding is developing. For me, it is about the locality part of that, and I would go back to the phrase I used earlier: it is about the resource. I do not mean the financial resource, but the staff expertise that you have. For example, we employ 60 to 70 qualified science teachers to work across our secondary academies. That talent pool is best placed to look at what the best science curriculum is that we can offer to our students in that way.

In the first question that Graham put to us about whether there are any disadvantages, I do not see it as a disadvantage but there is a real communication issue with parents and the wider community about why a federation is working in the way it is. The best federations are not just about a governance structure and about a central back-office team that provides support. They are about the front end of education delivery.

Q13 Bill Esterson: Do any of the rest of you think that geography does not have to be a problem?

Peter Maunder: It is hugely important. David Hargreaves in one of his self-improving system papers—and we have done a lot of work with David—says that, in our case, in the teaching school alliance in Torbay, nearly every single school in the Bay, with four exceptions, is part of that alliance. There is very much a shared moral purpose for the education of children in Torbay, and that is a significant factor. That helps us in our case as well work in partnership with a local authority as opposed to being seen as a threat to the local authority.

Mervyn Wilson: In our case, there are now well over 500 schools that have adopted co-operative models, but they are essentially local, autonomous, co-operative structures. I strongly agree with the point about localism: most of those are now geographically based clusters that are serving distinct communities and are rooted within those communities. They have developed innovative ways of collaborating vertically so that they can work together on a regional or sub-regional basis on things like staff development aspects of procurement. It is very different from a national command and control top-down chain. It is a bottom-up, locally geographically rooted network that works together at different levels to bring about other savings as well.

Q14 Bill Esterson: Sure. So are some models of partnership and collaboration stronger than others?

Mervyn Wilson: One of the reasons that we were so interested, after the 2006 Act, to develop a model for co-operative trusts was the experience, through working with a number of schools on specialism, that direction could change quite drastically with a change of head or a change in aspects of funding that looked to other priorities. What we were looking for was a structure that helped embrace aspects of an ethos and made it more difficult to walk away from good collaborative arrangements that had been established—not unbreakable but sustainable beyond individuals. That is one of the crucial things about the difference sometimes between soft federations and more informal partnerships that could implode when either funding stopped or individuals who had been very committed to that changed. That was a very, very strong view expressed by many of the heads that we were working with.

Q15 Mr Ward: Before we move off point, you were talking about the locality; how important to all of this are local authorities?

Peter Maunder: I think it is different, because they are very, very different. In my experience talking to headteachers across the country, it varies incredibly. I did some work for our local authority, which is a small unitary authority in Torbay. At that time, I was really telling them that the quality of school improvement work was not good enough, because the expertise resided in schools and not in top-down systems through advisers and consultants who had been out of schools for a very long time. They moved with us and we reduced the local authority adviser workforce. I would like to be accurate in this setting, so I will not give figures, but it was a large number of advisers and consultants, and we have just one head of school leadership now and they work with us.

Q16 Mr Ward: The reason I ask is because obviously there are capacity issues for many local authorities as budgets have devolved.

Peter Maunder: Absolutely.

Mr Ward: I was just wondering whether that capacity still exists.

Sir David Carter: It is a new relationship that has been developing. We work with four local authorities that our academies are in, and I think the relationship is different with all four. However, one of the things that local authorities still have a key role to play in, which is why we work very closely with them and we have local authority representatives within our governing structure, is the soft intelligence, as I call it, that local authorities often have about the history of schools over time, not necessarily how they are being judged at that moment. One of the challenging things in the system at the moment is that that soft intelligence is being lost as employees who have had that traditional role are either back in schools or are retiring or moving into other areas. No matter how effective my academy group will be, it will never have the knowledge of Bristol as a city that people who have been in charge of that authority for 20 years will have had, so I think there is something about that. There is also something about the role in joining up the strategies. My simplistic view of it is that the parents of the children in our academies pay their council tax into those local authorities and have a right to expect that we have a relationship with the local authority and join up some of that thinking. In my experience, where the local authorities recognise that the relationship has changed with schools, it is working really effectively. Where the local authorities are still trying to work in the Venn diagram intersect between the old and the new, I think it is more difficult.

Mervyn Wilson: Can I just add to that?

Chair: Briefly, Mervyn, because I am conscious of time.

Mervyn Wilson: Sure. The experience with local authorities varies absolutely enormously, and one of the challenges for them has been seeing that fundamental difference in the role. As the others have said, we largely use the trust model and we strongly encourage schools to consider inviting the local authority to be a partner in those trusts to maintain those links. The crucial thing for local authorities is to help create what I would describe as an enabling environment through which such collaborative arrangements can be made. I would just say that is not done by policies that say, for example, every school should be part of a co-operative trust or any other model. It is encouraging people to look at diversity and look at what is appropriate for them.

Q17 Bill Esterson: Mervyn, you told us about the particular strengths of the model that you use. Perhaps I can ask the other three panellists to give the equivalent strengths for your own models. Leo, do you want to start?

Leo Winkley: I mentioned some of them earlier on: the initial momentum of an injection of funding, and therefore a really close scrutiny of the viability of the project that is set up—that it looks like it is going to be productive. Starting small and building up has been a key element, and that is building up the trust between colleagues. Quite a key element there is the continuity of staff involved. Obviously you cannot manage that always, but one of the ways it has worked in York is we have had a longstanding co-ordinator since the inception of the project in 2007. They bind it all together and are now co-funded by one of the academies and by my school, which is ensuring that continuity which I think is very important. We have touched on the active commitment and involvement of heads and deputies in allowing their staff the time to get involved in this; I think that is very important. Also, it is important the schools themselves are not defensive. It is not a threatening process. It is a partnership of strengths, and there is the assumption embedded at the start that everyone is going to learn and benefit from the partnership. There is a flexibility about this particular model, because it can adapt, it can change direction, and it can operate on relatively low amounts of funding and quite a lot of goodwill. Some of the experiences that staff get out of it are pretty rewarding, such as being able to teach diverse classes, for example through master classes who have opted to be there, so that is another element.

Q18 Chair: Are these classes outside normal school hours?

Leo Winkley: They are, yes. Saturday sessions for pupils across the schools in York, which they can sign up to and they can be themed. It brings in, as we talked about, the talent pool of the teachers across the city. Initially, the tutors of these courses were doubled up because there was quite generous funding, so there was a lot of sharing of ideas. As the funding diminished, the enthusiasm did not, and I think colleagues see this as a way to extend their professional development, which is a really positive thing to build on. People get very excited about the master classes and other things have spun off—bilateral partnerships between schools, whether it is offering rowing sessions to other schools or exchange programmes, sharing of teaching expertise and so on.

Q19 Chair: I did want to pick up on sport. We are just doing a school sport inquiry. Has sport been a beneficiary of this co-operation? It sounds like it has been in your case.

Leo Winkley: We have just begun to look into that area. We started very much focused on extending provision for the able academically and interested folk. We have run a pilot programme between my school and York High in rowing, getting people out on the river and doing dry training, which has been pretty successful. We have just looked at some other areas recently, such as a Combined Cadet Force, which again is not something that is very easy to put together, but we have pupils coming from another local school, Canon Lee,

joining our CCF. We are just looking at little spin-off projects, I guess. Linking back to my observation at the outset, we have to be a bit careful about over-diversifying, because the quality has to be kept high.

Peter Maunder: For ours, because of the geographical location and the unitary authority, one of its strengths is it is built on high social capital trust. People choose to come into it or they do not. That enables our school to be made up of academies, church schools, grammar schools, secondary modern schools—all of those different types of schools—and we are all trying to work together for the benefit of pupils in Torbay. We have this close relationship with the local authority in that much of the work and improvement work is carried out by talented teachers and leaders within our schools, so they come from within that school community. Likewise, local authorities sit on our strategic board and they employ me part-time on their leadership board, so we have this joined-up thinking.

I think we are missing a trick with Ofsted, if we are going to get on to that, and accountability. With the soft intelligence that David talked about, there is the combination of the intelligence we have as a group of schools working together and wanting to support those leaders who perhaps need a little bit of support, for the benefit of the pupils, in working with the local authority. If we worked a little bit more sensibly and sharper with Ofsted and cut out some of the inconsistencies around that and worked more with perhaps the more highly qualified Ofsted inspectors, we would have a much sharper system benefiting our pupils.

Sir David Carter: I know time is of the essence, so I will give you four bullets that I think underpin that. The first one is around accountability: the tighter your structure, the better the accountability. I am accountable for what happens in my Federation. I am under no illusion as to what would happen to my role if the Federation failed. We are three to 19 in terms of age range; we educate 6,000 children in Bristol and South Gloucestershire. We have no more excuses. We cannot blame the local authority; it is us. That is number one.

Number two, working really effectively with our sponsors, Rolls-Royce and the University of the West of England, has brought a sharper business dimension and focus to our quality assurance. We have leaned down the governance model. We have tried to capitalise upon well-meaning volunteers, balancing that with people who have something professional to offer to our organisation.

The third point is the issue about the sharing of staff. I get frustrated when I hear people talking only about best practice. Yes, that is important, but if it does not have any impact, it is just a conversation, so turning best practice into something that happens in somebody else's classroom is something that I am tasked to do.

The fourth one is when you have an organisation such as ours, which has an income now of over £50 million, there are efficiencies in back-office function and benefits of procurement, and the benefit of going to contract en masse gives us the opportunity to keep pumping resources into the front-line classrooms by thinking very carefully about how we manage ourselves.

Chair: Thank you very much, and we do have a lot to cover and limited time.

Q20 Chris Skidmore: Looking a bit closer at the mechanics of your structure, I am intrigued to find out, Sir David, for instance why the co-operative model that Mervyn has been talking about would not work for you and the Cabot Learning Federation, and why the Cabot Learning Federation model would not work for the co-operative. What is different about those structures that means you would not turn the Cabot Learning Federation into a co-operative model?

Sir David Carter: Part of that is history. We are not a new organisation. We have been set up since 2007. At this stage of our development I would not want the distraction of rethinking our trust model. It works. It is fit for purpose. People have transferred into it and

have chosen to do so on the basis of how we set ourselves up. I think our sponsors would have a view about a different form of structure, so it is not an issue for me.

Q21 Chris Skidmore: It is not a different philosophy as such. Some of the evidence we have received, for instance from the Tiverton Co-Operative Learning Partnership, talked about choosing the form of their partnership, the co-operative model, because it was non-paternalistic. Do you consider yourself paternalistic in your model when you take over schools?

Sir David Carter: I certainly welcome your reference to the family structure. You have a model in the Federation of what I would call “earned autonomy”, so schools such as John Cabot Academy, which has been “outstanding” for five years, need less intervention support from me and my team than a school that joined us last September in special measures. I want to have the authority, if that is the right word, to decide at what point the autonomy becomes looser and less tight.

Q22 Chris Skidmore: Mervyn, in terms of the co-operative model, the evidence we have received talked about shared moral values and a focus on success rather than competition and fear of failure. However, if you take on a school that is in special measures, then surely there comes a point when there has to be that fear of failure there—when you want to say to that school, “Come on.”

Mervyn Wilson: Absolutely, and within the current Ofsted framework, there is that fear all the time. The overwhelming desire of schools that have adopted the model is the belief that working together co-operatively can address those issues—that there is sufficient strength within the network to do so. It is also fair to say that a co-operative model is not a solution for a failing school. The model does not address the weaknesses within a school in that way.

For us, the most critical aspects are trying to have a sustainable transformation of achievement by directly engaging those key stakeholders. In many of the really challenging areas where those schools are, it is about seeing how you can transform aspirations in the community by having a governance model that directly engages those stakeholders and the parents and the local community as well. It is one of the differences of the sponsor model; where sovereignty, governance and accountability lie makes the models very, very different.

Q23 Chris Skidmore: I should probably declare an interest and say that John Cabot Academy is in my constituency in Kingswood and also the Learning Federation recently took over Kingsfield School, which has now become King’s Oak Academy. Also, Sir David, you will know that the Kingswood Partnership was an entirely separate organisation of a local authority chain of schools run by Sir Bernard Lovell School principally. Kingsfield had to come out of the Kingswood Partnership to join the Cabot Learning Federation, which broke up one partnership in order to join yours. I just wondered whether you find that there is something to be said about more formal partnerships posing barriers to co-operation with schools outside the partnership. Do you entirely look inwards or would you collaborate with schools outside the chain and cluster itself?

Sir David Carter: Absolutely, and I refer you to the answer I gave to Bill’s question earlier about the teaching school alliance. We have partners in Bristol and South Gloucestershire that are already academies working with other groups that will never be part of the Federation formally, but want to be part of the teaching school alliance. In specific reference to the Kingswood Partnership, we could have a debate offline about how effective that was for the school. I made the judgment that coming into our post-16 collaboration was the best fit for the children, and that is what we did. King’s Oak Academy is an example of a

school that joined us in an Ofsted category, and last week it had a very successful Ofsted, in 18 months, so I think the model for them has worked really effectively.

Q24 Chris Skidmore: You talked about geography, but I am also interested in size. Is there a point where you say, “Right, that is it. We are shutting the doors now. We have the size we can cope with. We have £50 million turnover. We have reached a point where, even if there were other schools just outside, even though they are close by geographically, we will say, ‘I am sorry, but we are full’”?

Sir David Carter: That is a really good question, and I am not going to give you a numerical answer, because I do not think it exists. We wrote a protocol at our board level to determine under what circumstances we would say yes or no to a new partner. That has been very helpful, because we need to be accountable for that decision if a school is looking for help. I am very conscious that all of our schools, apart from John Cabot, which you know well, have joined us as a result of being in an Ofsted category or significantly below floor targets. I am also conscious that it is probably their last chance. If we fail with them, I am not quite sure what happens next. So we have to balance the size of the organisation against the capacity it has to improve those schools, because I think it is dishonest to continue to take schools into a chain when you know you do not have the capacity to improve them.

Q25 Chris Skidmore: Leo, I wanted to talk about independent school partnerships as well. The Independent Schools Council is saying that 80% of independent schools are working in partnership with the state sector in some form. You have touched on it already, but how far does that go beyond just allowing people to use their playing fields? Where do you think independent schools could be working further to create concrete partnerships that go into the classroom?

Leo Winkley: The figure may be even higher than 80%, and it is really important that it is. There is a genuine desire in the independent sector to engage locally in meaningful partnerships. They add value both ways through bringing colleagues into contact with each other, bringing pupils into contact with each other, and it is not about sharing AstroTurfs and swimming pools and things like that. It is about much more. Particularly in York, it is about the young of the city—inspiring them and ensuring that there is a collective sense that we all have a responsibility to the young of the city and the generations coming through.

Q26 Chris Skidmore: I talked about the paternalistic relationship; if you have the independent sector coming in to help the state sector, how can you not have a paternalistic relationship where you say, “We are the independent school with the better results and the money, and you are the state school”? How do you overcome those barriers? I am sure there must be hostility philosophically or politically.

Leo Winkley: What we have found is that some of it is about people getting to know each other, spending time together and agreeing on the thing that everybody can agree on, which is: do young people matter? You can debate the models that you then pursue, but if that is your ultimate focus, the barriers begin to fall away, the trust builds and because you are working collaboratively with no other agenda than these high-minded and idealistic aims, that is a unifying principle.

Q27 Mr Ward: Moving specifically on to teaching schools—I know we have mentioned it before—in terms of the head of the teaching school, where is the accountability for that responsibility?

Sir David Carter: The head of a teaching school is not the same as the head of an academy. It is a leadership post at the level and pay level in our organisation of a vice-

principal. The accountability in our model is directly to me for educational standards and the impact of the teaching school work. On our board we have one particular member who has oversight of the teaching school and reports back to the chair of the board on the expenditure of teaching school grant and the evidence of the impact of that work.

Mr Ward: Peter, is it the same?

Peter Maunder: Yes. In terms of designation, there is a DfE National College designation based on the performance of your own school. This goes back to the earlier question from Bill: if your own performance drops, that is a weakness in that system. If it does happen, you can build up a very effective collaboration of schools. We have 37 schools in our alliance. If we were Ofsted tomorrow and downgraded, there is a question mark about what would happen.

Mr Ward: Embarrassing.

Peter Maunder: Possibly, yes.

Q28 Mr Ward: That is a large group that you mentioned. Going back to an earlier question, you are either in or you are out. What if you are not in? What happens to those schools?

Peter Maunder: It is through choice. The only primary school in Torbay not in is part of a national academy chain, and they have chosen not to buy in; every other school has. The other three schools are all grammar schools in Torbay, and they have chosen not to be part of that alliance. All the other schools work together. It is choice.

Q29 Mr Ward: You say it is choice but, Sir David, you were saying that you have to reach a point that you really cannot go beyond in terms of capacity.

Sir David Carter: That answer was more directed to the academies that might join us permanently. We have different levels of engagement in the teaching school, and in a maturing education system some of it has to be about schools seeking the support as well as waiting for it to come to them. As an example, schools that join our Teaching Alliance would be contributors to the delivery of support as well as recipients of it. Schools who are not members of the Alliance would be people who would receive some of that support, whether it was support for their newly qualified teachers or support for their leaders in the school. Like many teaching schools have done, we have devised a series of school improvement strategies almost like a menu, for which they can come to us and broker that support. A secondary school in Bristol that is not part of our Federation but is part of the Alliance commissioned a teaching and learning review from us where we watched 50 or 60 lessons over a two-day period and wrote them a report about what we felt the standard of teaching was in that school at that time. They have used that as an action plan for their own development. That is possibly the only interaction we will have with that school, other than going back and reviewing the teaching in six months' time to see if any change has happened. It is really important that, when you do that school-to-school support, you follow it up. There has to be a "so what" consequence to that amount of work.

Q30 Mr Ward: There is a requirement, as I understand it, for self-sufficiency within two years for the teaching schools.

Sir David Carter: Yes.

Q31 Mr Ward: Is there a conflict there between offering what you feel is right and having to make a living?

Sir David Carter: No. I think it is absolutely appropriate to apply a business model to that. It is very clear that the teaching school grant was there to get us started. The first year

was £60,000 and we are now in the £40,000 grant category. That is not going to employ one vice-principal, so you have to use that money to grow other aspects of commercial work that can sustain this should teaching schools no longer exist or if the grant goes. So we have had, for some time, a trading company linked to the Federation that is the vehicle for any commercial school-to-school support, national leaders of education work, for example. Any surplus from that money is then Gift Aided back to the Federation to support that work and to subsidise those programmes. If I give you an example, we run the National Professional Qualification for Headship, the NPQH. The recommended retail price from the National College is about £1,800. We deliver that for £800 because we can subsidise it, but we cannot do it for free.

Mr Ward: Peter, you smiled when I asked the question.

Peter Maunder: Our model is very different. Our schools do not all come and buy services off us. It is not that we do not know how to do it; our model works on acknowledging that there is talent in lots of different schools. Those schools choose to pay in and give us a budget that is run through the teaching school. If we know one school is particularly good at leading ICT, they develop that work and the best ICT teachers go. We lead a maths network. We work with the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics, and all of the maths leaders in the different schools come in from that network. The entire budget is owned by the 37 schools, so there is total transparency and we continually go back to them and say, “Do we have the right networks to meet your needs? Are we running the right leadership programmes?” We similarly have a licence to run NPQH and the National Curriculum programmes. “Are we offering the same leadership development policies? Are we developing national and local leaders of education to help in school support? Can we match the right support from one school to another?” We do not do all of that support; we broker that support from the talent across a range of schools. It is a very different structure.

Q32 Neil Carmichael: Good morning. I want to talk a little bit about incentives and then accountability, basically. I was just wondering what sort of financial incentives there are for collaboration and if you think that is sufficient to motivate schools to collaborate.

Leo Winkley: In our particular model, the initial investment was quite generous, quite significant.

Chair: From?

Leo Winkley: From the Government programme. That helped to get it going, but we have proved that in York we can run on quite modest funding, which is provided, I think, out of the maintained sector’s independent gifted and talented budget, with the independent schools contributing. That money can then go on to incentivise tutors to get involved, but the main incentivisation is to do with the professional reward and satisfaction you get out of working with colleagues who share the same vision and working with classes of engaged and interested pupils. It feeds on itself very positively.

Q33 Neil Carmichael: So, essentially, the financial incentives are basically a pump-priming mechanism.

Leo Winkley: That is what we found. If it is more significant and more sustained, there are more possibilities that open up, and we have certainly had to be judicious about which projects we invest in and take forward. The simple truth is if there is more cash there, you can do more, but you do need to ensure that the quality is there.

Mervyn Wilson: It is interesting. It was the previous Schools Minister who described collaboration as the suppression of mutual hatred in the pursuit of Government money. We are rather cautious about the over-incentivising that creates the wrong motives for doing so.

The vast majority of the schools that we are working with are looking to adopt trust models. One problem is that the Supported Schools Programme, which did give schools some funding towards the cost of conversion, was stopped in 2010. That does create some problems particularly for smaller primary schools, because the legal costs have no relationship to the size of your budget. You have to deal with land and asset transfers, company registration, etc. Some small funding to help that would, I am sure, help smaller primaries. That is really important because they desperately want to work in collaborative clusters, because they do not have the capacity. Even, for example, if they have “outstanding” Ofsted grades, they do not have the capacity to run effectively as academies on their own. Some incentives to help schools—there is funding available to schools that wish to convert using the academy model, but not for the trust model—would be extremely helpful.

If there were a begging bowl, the other thing that is worth saying is that, when you are doing these profound models, there is a critical piece about getting them up and working. It is one thing putting structures in place, but there is a short-term culture change that is required, and there was a small piece of funding at one stage to help develop those membership models. Something short term might be helpful to make sure these things work.

Sir David Carter: I would not add any more to that, other than the fact that how you sustain that incentivisation over a period of time is critical. For me, it is why I feel so strongly that the hard federation model works, because the schools that are in pay a small contribution into the central team in order to create that resource—to create those people who can do the school-to-school support and provide HR, finance and IT support. One of the challenges of pump-priming is that you become over-reliant on it and you do not use that window you have to think about what you are going to do when it stops. I think that is why you saw, five or six years ago, some of the very difficult schools turn around very quickly but find it hard to continue that momentum. I hope that building a structure for the long term and having a plan in place that enables us to sustain it will reap benefits for us.

Q34 Neil Carmichael: Is there any danger that incentives, and certainly financial ones, might pressurise schools into collaboration when perhaps they do not really want to go there?

Peter Maunder: I would not have thought that was a big issue, personally. Clearly, the motivations to collaborate go well beyond, as Leo said, the issue of finance.

Sir David Carter: I do not think it is a problem, but it is something that needs real accountability around it. If I look back to the early part of the last decade with specialist schools when the SSAT was at its peak and every secondary school in the country had a specialism—and I would probably say I was guilty of this—I do not think we were held to account that rigorously for how that money was spent. So we have to be really careful; if we are going to use public money to incentivise that kind of partnership, part of the outcome has to be that you have a plan, as I have just mentioned, for what you do when that money runs out. The bit that concerns me about the incentivisation model, to make it start happening, is that whilst that pilot or whatever you want to call it is taking place, there are children going through school. We need to demonstrate the benefit for them; they cannot be guinea pigs in this. Entrepreneurial heads are very good at accessing resources, but they need to create impact with it.

Q35 Neil Carmichael: Let us talk about accountability now, because that is really where I want to go. The first question I want to ask is about governance. Obviously, governance does have a role here, and I would like you to talk a little bit about how it contributes to the collaboration and then how it manages to affect accountability.

Chair: Neil, may I take this opportunity to remind the panellists that what we do is conduct inquiries into things, write a report and make recommendations to Government. If there are elements of the current system that you think might be at risk and need to be protected and you would like to see us recommending such protection, let us know. If there are things that need to change, let us know. Please do not leave here today without letting us know the things you think need to be in our report. Indeed, if you think of them afterwards, do feel free to write, but just remember that. Make sure that if you have a recommendation, you make it clear to us and spell it out in nice simple terms, so even we can understand. Thank you.

Neil Carmichael: That is an invitation to do a shopping list, isn't it?

Sir David Carter: Can I start, in answer to your question, with something on my shopping list? In a system whereby we are becoming so divorced of a middle tier, to call it something else, where the accountability for academy chains and individual academies is still untested, the role of chair of governors becomes a really vital one. I would like to see chairs of governors properly trained, I would like to see them performance managed and I would like to see them paid.

Neil Carmichael: I would like all of those three things as well, and we are doing a report that probably will not say that, but that is certainly a direction of travel we need to go in, so thank you very much for that.

Chair: It would of course be contempt of Parliament to declare what our report was going to say before it said what it said, Neil, which I know you are very aware of.

Q36 Neil Carmichael: I said "probably". Moving on, but still on the subject of governance, is there a case for collaboration to effectively federalise the governance structure in some way, and how might that work in your various models?

Mervyn Wilson: It is really important that we strengthen accountability downwards to local communities as well as the way that the academy, and particularly the sponsored academy, model works in terms of accountability to the Secretary of State through funding agreements, etc. I think there is a democratic deficit emerging in some of the models. One of the strongest aspects of the co-operative model is that it attempts to reconcile that by building strong accountability into those key stakeholder groups and also treating staff as real professionals and co-partners within the model by opening up membership to them, with a strong voice for learners and a strong voice for the community. That aspect is absolutely crucial so we do not end up with a very crude accountability mechanism that is based on largely performance accountability and, if you do not perform, we will take the sponsorship away and hand it to another sponsor, which is a very simplistic way of looking at it. The accountability has to be strengthened to local communities.

Q37 Neil Carmichael: Have any of you seen a need to adjust governance either through membership or structure or just basic practice as a result of the collaboration?

Sir David Carter: I will be brief. A federated model of governance looks fundamentally different from a single school model, and it has to. The Cabot Learning Federation board is, in effect, the governing body, as we understand that term, but they cannot be visible or have a governance role over 11 academies. So some of the responsibilities are delegated to what we call "academy councils", which is where the local representation is; the elected parents, elected teachers, the support staff and the headteacher of the school would sit on that group. The chair of the academy council and I, in my role, are both members of the board and we are both members of that academy council, so that is how we transmit the information from the council up to the board and the board back down. The

academy council is not accountable for any of the traditional governor responsibilities other than the quality of standards in that school, and that is what they are held to account for.

Peter Maunder: We are in that middle tier level of accountability, because our problem in our country is this gap between performance and poverty. That link between performance and poverty is the issue that we face as a country. If we strengthened the accountability by looking at a whole area—the children and the education of those children across an area—between schools in terms of school improvement, teaching school alliances, federations all working together, with that soft intelligence David talked about being there with a local authority, but working alongside Ofsted, you are combining that, which means working together so it really does become a risk-based Ofsted system. Ofsted should be the independent guardian of educational standards. That is what I have always understood them to be, and increasingly they seem to be enforcers of Government policy, and I do not think that is their role. They need to step back and work alongside them, so if they take that objective and bring that hard cutting edge to accountability for pupils' achievement across an area, I think it would be far more productive working with a smaller group. Then you can shift a bit of funding from the accountability system into the teaching system, and that would surely be a good thing.

Leo Winkley: Could I just slightly go into shopping list mode?

Chair: As long as it is a very short one.

Leo Winkley: It will be. I think the guidelines need to encourage inspiration and not limit and be too focused on accountability, because that may risk stifling some of these looser partnerships. I refer back to an Ofsted trial inspection of the City of York ISSP, which talked about it being exemplary partnership working and being used as the model for development in this field in the future. I think that is right, because it has identified the fact that it is not a paternalistic model. Independent schools benefit as much as state schools do, and these sorts of federations are very valuable. If funding to the tune of two quid a pupil in the area was available, it would make a massive difference in our setting, focusing on York as an example.

If we are looking at measurability of outcomes, it is quite difficult to measure things like growing aspiration, growing confidence, but we feel very strongly that we have made impacts on that. This model has made impacts on social cohesion and it has encouraged youngsters who might not have thought about certain subject choices at A-Level and, indeed, university, to pursue those, all of which are more qualitatively assessable and incredibly important.

Q38 Siobhain McDonagh: Does the fact that you are competing with other schools make you less likely to form partnerships with them? At the moment, do schools co-operate with one another in spite of competitive pressures, or does collaborating give schools a competitive edge?

Sir David Carter: The latter. I do not think you will ever have a system where competition is removed and I do not think we should have; I think it is really healthy. When my leadership team meetings take place, there are 11 academy principals sitting around the table who all want their school to perform well in the Federation. For me, that is healthy, because it means that the children are getting the best possible deal with that. You can have both. It is not an either/or situation. What you can do in the strongest local collaborations is think very carefully about how you articulate the responsibility that we have for all of those children. For example, we will publish the results of all our 16-year-olds in the Federation as well as by individual academy, because that is a healthy thing to do. It does not start creating a league table from one to 10, because everybody is contributing results to that whole. So collaboration and competition can work really effectively in partnership. I do not think there is a tension between that and schools that are not in our Federation either.

Q39 Siobhain McDonagh: I just want to ask a quick question of both you and Peter: do the schools that are not part of your partnership or collaboration hate you?

Peter Maunder: I do not think so. Certainly the one that is in the national academy chain wants to join next year. Despite getting bucket loads of money, they were quibbling about paying in to join us and asking what they would gain from it. That is fine. I think those children miss out, but that is a personal view. We have three grammar schools within the Bay and they collaborate with other grammar schools up the south coast. We do some work with them and clearly we are inclusive, we invited them, but they choose not to be part of it.

Sir David Carter: I suspect it is probably a similar relationship that the system has with politicians.

Siobhain McDonagh: So they do dislike you really, don't they?

Q40 Mr Ward: For both those within your groups and those without, would you say that completely fair admissions criteria are applied and there is no difference at all between the intake in terms of free school meals, children with special educational needs, maybe ethnic minority background?

Peter Maunder: As far as I am aware, the admissions basically go around the geographical location and catchment area. I am not aware of any distortion in that.

Sir David Carter: It is not equal, because the communities we serve are different. In central Bristol we have schools where the ethnic population is much higher than it is in Weston-super-Mare, for example, where it is predominantly white working class, but the admissions policies are the same across the Federation from primary transfer to secondary.

Q41 Mr Ward: There is no Stanine, no taking them from postal areas.

Sir David Carter: The John Cabot Academy has a Stanine system simply because of the number of children who apply, and it is the only transparent way we can communicate to parents why a student would have access to a place. The legacy of the City Technology College when we negotiated with Bristol and South Gloucestershire to become an academy was that they wanted us to get as close as possible to an even split of children from the two authorities, because not to do that would have had an impact upon secondary schools in Bristol and South Gloucestershire. It is not done by postcode, but we do have a lottery system to achieve that.

Mervyn Wilson: In the case of the co-operative schools, there is an absolute commitment to inclusivity, and that is absolutely fundamental to the value system. I am really impressed with the way that a whole number of schools have stated categorically that they see the need to serve the whole of their community. Perhaps the answer to your earlier point, Siobhain, is that the very common message from co-operative trusts is that they are there to see that all schools within their network succeed—that they take as much pride in helping one of the weaker schools improve their performance. Rather than the sharp elbows of the over-competition in some areas—of almost being pleased with the weaker school down the road because it puts them in a better light—there is an absolute commitment to all succeeding.

Q42 Siobhain McDonagh: I see it the other way. I see an academy sponsor who is enormously successful and who I am desperate to have take over a primary school, but all the other primary school heads do not want them in because it is going to be pretty challenging for them if they do so.

Mervyn Wilson: If you look at where some of the very strong trusts are, there is now an ecology of educational forms out there, and there is no doubt at all that that means that everybody has to look for the highest possible standards within that variety of models. The

one piece for that co-operative model is the commitment. The biggest trust at the moment is 22 schools, but they want every one of those 22 schools to meet the highest standards possible.

Q43 Ian Mearns: Does anyone think that there is a need for any kind of middle tier above schools helping to broker support for schools that may need it, or do you think the model that you have talked about among yourselves this morning is going to be the way of the future?

Peter Maunder: Certainly within our model, in my experience—and I am talking of a small unitary authority—that could be strengthened if we had a balance of professional accountability amongst our teaching school alliance, working alongside external accountability through Ofsted. This would show up in a stronger relationship with a slimmed down, new relationship with the local authority. I am not suggesting going back to the old system in any way at all, but if it is just a new, slimmed down relationship, then I think yes—if we are going to truly look at closing the gap and look at the achievement of children from all different parts of society.

Q44 Chair: Sorry, was that a yes or a no?

Peter Maunder: Yes.

Q45 Chair: A slimmed down local authority working with schools that co-operate.

Peter Maunder: And Ofsted.

Q46 Chair: And Ofsted, and there is no need for anyone else. So there is no missing middle tier if all those people step up, is that right?

Peter Maunder: For me.

Mervyn Wilson: I would agree. I do not think you need any more than that.

Q47 Alex Cunningham: We have seen a considerable reduction in the ability of local authorities to support schools comprehensively as their spending has been cut. Can you define that role for the local authority? Is it the same as the academy chain that is controlling a number of schools across the piece, or what is it? What are they going to do?

Peter Maunder: Not controlling. They will be monitoring and working with teaching school alliances. In the role that Ofsted has now given them and are checking up on, basically they expect local authorities to be aware of the performance of all children within that area. Whether they are academies or church schools or free schools, they still have that role of monitoring. My understanding is that if they are not happy with the performance of those schools, they challenge the academy or they challenge an academy chain or they write to the Secretary of State, but they do not have a role in controlling it. That work should still come from where the expertise is, which is within schools.

Alex Cunningham: The Secretary of State does not see it that way, does he? He does not see a situation where local authorities have any role whatsoever. He wants it elsewhere.

Siobhain McDonagh: Sir Michael Wilshaw did not.

Q48 Ian Mearns: There are a couple of problems with that, because there are a number of schools that are not part of chains at the moment. As the academisation programme has gone on, an awful lot of money that used to reside with local authorities now resides with schools themselves, and that is understandable. So if you want to slim down local authorities having a monitoring role, who is going to pay for that? All of that money

that used to go to local authorities and then to schools is now going to be going to academies. Are academies going to buy back into that in some way?

Peter Maunders: No, but they have to at the moment. Ofsted turn up to the local authority and expect that. In the new legislation, the new subject framework, they expect local authorities to be able to tell them about all the schools. That is happening now; that is not new.

Q49 Ian Mearns: Except that within the last three to four years local authorities across the country have suffered significant cuts.

Peter Maunders: Are struggling to do that, absolutely.

Ian Mearns: The infrastructure that they have previously had in order to do that role or to develop that role has been dramatically undermined, and they are not going to be able to reinvent that without some resource.

Sir David Carter: I think you have hit on a really interesting point there.

Peter Maunders: Absolutely.

Sir David Carter: When we have a system where every single school in the country is an academy, which I guess is the direction of travel we are heading for at some point in the future, then that description you have just given is going to come true, isn't it?

I do not think the local authority has any role in school improvement anymore, and I think many of them have not for some time. However, I do think they have a role as the guardians of vulnerable children. Unless an academy chain runs an entire city or town, you are always going to have a need for someone to be monitoring admissions, SEN, school transport—all of those things whereby if they break down, the vulnerable children lose out first. So when we get to a system where in an entire local authority every single school is an academy and benefiting from that money coming into the schools, there is then an argument to talk about what you do collectively to take care of every child in the city, even if they are not in your schools.

Q50 Ian Mearns: That is the possible flaw in having the fragmentation of the schools into different regimes of accountability, inasmuch as making sure that every child has a place in an appropriate school for their needs may be much more difficult.

Sir David Carter: Can I just add one thing to that? I agree with everything you have just said except I would change the word “appropriate” for “good”, because if this system is going to be self-improving, that has to be the goal. At some point the Chief Inspector for Ofsted's annual report will say, “100% of schools in this country were judged to be ‘good’.” When we have that, we will have closed the gap that Pete talked about, which is such a challenge.

Mervyn Wilson: In respect of that middle tier role, it is not about control, it is not about delivery, but it is about a strategic oversight. It is also about joined-up services. We have looked here specifically at schools. When we look at children and young people, there is a wider range of services where it is the local authority that has traditionally provided that joined-up piece. As time develops, there is the potential, particular for the larger trusts, the larger groupings of schools, to be the deliverers of some of those services that we saw originally envisaged in the Children's Trust. However, that does require some form of strategic oversight at some form of local level. I am not saying that is necessarily local authorities, regional or sub-regional, but it does need that joined-up approach, otherwise that will be lost and people will be left vulnerable.

Q51 Ian Mearns: There is the simple thing of school place planning, for instance. When you look at the number of live births in a particular area, you know that in three years,

five years you are going to need an appropriate number of school places, and of course those things vary. When I took over as chair of the education committee in Gateshead, we had 19 secondary schools; we currently have nine, but that does not mean to say that we have worse education. In fact, we have much better education than we had when we had 19 schools, but who would have done that without the local authority, I wonder?

Chair: Thank you for that. Gentlemen, thank you very much for being our first panel on this new inquiry and stimulating us.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Dr John Dunford**, Education Consultant, **Dr Caroline Kenny**, Research Officer, SSRU, Institute of Education, London, **James O'Shaughnessy**, former Deputy Director, Policy Exchange, and **David Sims**, Research Director, National Foundation for Educational Research, gave evidence.

Q52 Chair: Thank you all very much for joining us today as we continue to inquire into school partnerships and co-operation. Reflecting on that first session and straying into an area that we will come to later anyway, where schools co-operate what is the benefit of having all the schools in an area co-operating, an example or two of which we have heard today? It could also be said that rather than wanting all the schools in an area to co-operate, you would not want too many schools in one area to be with any one chain or organisation, because you need to have some form of competition. Otherwise once you have a monopoly provider, you will not have the sufficient challenge where it goes wrong. Does anyone have any thoughts on that?

Dr Dunford: I do not think there is any evidence on this one way or the other, except perhaps that the kind of chain that David Carter is developing in Bristol and the Harris academy chains are very clearly geographically located. They do not form all the schools in a single area, but they are tight geographically. I was involved in a research project for the National College on school chains, and we could see that where chains were not geographically coherent—that does not mean necessarily all in one place, but geographically coherent with groups of schools together—they met problems. If a chain takes on a school in difficulty in an area where it does not have a good school, there is not the leadership capacity in that area to bring the other school up to standard. So I would say what you need to look for is geographical coherence, but not a geographical entity, if you like.

Q53 Chair: What does the pattern of schools within the ARK academy chain look like?

Dr Dunford: There is a degree of coherence there, because you have more than one school in every area, and where ARK is looking to develop into new areas, it makes sure it has leadership capacity in that area. Of course, ARK is big enough to have a leadership super-structure whereby they have regional people in charge of groups of academies overseeing the principals of those academies.

David Sims: In addition to that sense of place, there are logistics to be considered very carefully, because the resources that schools have to link together are limited; they are not endless. We did research on the Gaining Ground strategy. This was a strategy aimed at so-called “coasting” schools, where coasting schools were partnered with better performing schools. The heads that we interviewed said, “We do not want to be linked with a school

more than about 45 minutes' drive away from our school.” We need to use that resource very, very carefully and very efficiently.

Q54 Chair: At the moment it feels like a bit of a free for all—bits have been thrown in the air and there is a hope that out of all this diversity excellence will flourish. Can we start to understand the criteria required for success? Would there be any use in formalising those and, in a sense, having rules to stop people repeating errors of the past, perhaps? If somebody came along with a new chain and they wanted it to be national but not geographically coherent, would it be sensible to stop that happening rather than let some wealthy sponsor risk the interests of children and their own finances in seeking to do it? Does anyone have any thoughts on codification?

Dr Dunford: For the last 10 years, during this period when school-to-school support has been developing—and that has been continuous through from the Labour Government to the Coalition Government—it has always felt to me that the Government has never had a coherent strategy on school-to-school support, on school partnerships. It has allowed 1,000 flowers to bloom and some of those flowers, as with the John Cabot group of academies, have done fantastic work; others have not been so good. There is evidence that the harder end of federation improves performance better than the softer, “let’s get together and be nice to each other” end.

Chair: It is worth remembering that what we do is conduct inquiries, write reports and make recommendations to Government, to which they are obliged to reply within two months. So whether on these lines or others, if you have any particular recommendations as to—

Dr Dunford: Arising out of that, Chair, I would look for a recommendation from you that the Government needs to have a strategic approach to partnership working between schools.

James O’Shaughnessy: Yes, I would make the same point. You described the policy environment as being laissez-faire up to now, i.e. to encourage many academies to convert—obviously there is a sponsorship route, the conversion route—and indeed free schools to start up. That has been important in terms of changing the assumptions about school autonomy. There was a need to break the mould, so there was a purpose for that. I would say it is slightly more strategic than you would, John, but nevertheless there was a purpose to it, which was to break the mould. As the programme matures and we learn more about it, frankly—from the work that John, Christine Gilbert and Chris Chapman for the National College have done on this—there is a growing body of work that suggests that chains can, on average, be more effective. They are more effective because they can share leadership and expertise and, ultimately, people, which is why the geographical thing is so important, because the best people have to get round these schools. As we begin to understand that, I have argued that there is more of a need for an industrial policy type attitude, which is, “Well, hang on; we are learning some things about the way that the best ones work and the circumstances in which they do not work.” Therefore, the DfE needs to take more of a view about what works and, indeed, try to encourage chains to grow where there are none; to potentially stop them where they are growing and there is no evidence of success or there is a threat that they might become a monopoly; and encourage schools through a variety of means to join into harder forms of collaboration, precisely because we think that they can be more effective, on average.

Q55 Chair: Did you think long before you came up with the term “industrial policy” on this? It did not strike me as a very Policy Exchange term. It took me wafting back to the 1970s and the onset of punk.

James O'Shaughnessy: Well, I do not know, maybe. An important point to make here is, okay, it is centre-right think tank, but I do not think anybody apart from a few extremists on the libertarian side would say that they want a completely free market in education. It is not a free market. No one is arguing for it to be a free market. The Government I served certainly did not. The price is fixed, but quality is heavily regulated, admissions and so on, so it is not a free market and no one wants it to be a free market. Given that, it has to have, at some point, some direction from the Government about how it should expand, precisely because it is not subject to the same effects that a free market would have, so I do not think it is inconsistent.

Q56 Chair: In health, the transformation under this Government has been instead of having managerial types in PCTs running the Health Service, we are going to have it led by the clinicians and it might be on the same geographic arrangement. They might have pretty much the same responsibilities, but having clinical leads is somehow going to lead to better outcomes. That is the theory and time will tell whether the practice delivers on that. Is that the kind of vision you have for education? Some people would say that if you end up in a geographical area with all the schools, even those part of a national academy chain, joining in to the local organisation, you are just recreating the local authority, but without the democratic accountability. What is going to make that in the long term any more successful than the local authority?

James O'Shaughnessy: I would not disagree. I think there is a commonality of public sector reform approaches if you look across, say, social housing, health services and schools, which is devolution of power to autonomous institutions: housing associations, foundation trusts, and increasingly academies. Then you see quality regulation and economic regulation to make sure that you do not get monopolies or you do not over-borrow, or whatever economic problems mean the market is not working. Ultimately, you see the state subsidising and people choosing. Probably social housing got there first. The NHS has followed and schools are going this way. Again, this is not some great and unique invention particularly, and it has a bipartisan pedigree in education and, indeed, across all these things, but you can see in it the themes of public sector reform that are common not just in this country and in other public services but worldwide.

Dr Kenny: I would take a slightly different stance from the one that has been put forward so far, in that I think there is a growing body of evidence around school partnerships, but that is at a very early stage. Plainly and simply, I just do not think that we know enough about how they work, whether they are effective, and what the outcome is on pupil learning outcomes. Going forward, we need to know more about school partnerships in terms of the impact that they are having, and also what type of partnerships work for what aims and in what contexts, if we are going to make it a sustainable and successful policy.

Q57 Chair: Is there a risk that they will be like specialist schools were—a passing fad and all the evangelicals in the system take it up? It looks at first like it is brilliant because all brilliant people take it up, and everyone thinks, “If we give it to everyone, they will all be brilliant.” Then they find out that they are not all and they will not be.

Dr Kenny: Exactly. There is the assumption that you give the power to schools and they can run with the ball and make improvements, but some schools or some leaders do not have the capacity to do that. So there needs to be that level of support given to them to enable them to do that, and I do not think that is the case at the moment

David Sims: I would echo what Caroline has just said. There is not really a rigorous evidence base on the impact of partnerships on attainment and attendance, for instance. There are pockets of qualitative evidence that we have, but in terms of hard, measurable evidence

there is very little. If claims are made that certain partnerships, federations or trusts are having an impact, where is the evidence for that and how testable is it? I think we have a long way to go to provide that kind of evidence.

Q58 Bill Esterson: What measures would you use to determine success?

David Sims: We would have to focus on pupil attainment, so are students' grades increasing? We should also look at their progression in terms of going on to further education, higher education, apprenticeships—jobs with training.

Q59 Bill Esterson: Would you be able to attribute those results to a specific contributory factor?

David Sims: That is a good question. You would have to do a comparison study of schools that are in federations or partnerships and schools that are not, and compare their results and the impacts.

Dr Kenny: What is also needed as well as the evidence base on impact is to evaluate the partnerships in and of themselves. Whenever an evaluation takes place, you are trying to identify the key mechanisms of change—what factors led to the change. That needs to happen by investigating the partnership itself: what are the important things in the partnerships? Is it the individuals involved who make the difference? Is it the structural or the institutional arrangements? It is a two-stage process.

Q60 Chris Skidmore: You want to evaluate partnerships in a way that we have never really done for local authorities either, in the longer term. If you wanted to ask how some local authorities work better than others, in terms of the evidence, we do not have it for them either, do we?

Dr Kenny: No, but that is not to say that that is right, and we are at the stage now where the Government is encouraging school partnerships and co-operation on a big scale. That seems the way to go and seems a positive move, and this is the perfect time, in a sense, to build that evaluation and that research element in, before it goes out on an even larger scale.

Q61 Chris Skidmore: I know you said the evidence is limited at the moment, but if you just take the act of collaboration, can you divorce that from everything else and say the act of collaboration in itself helps to drive improvement as opposed to anything else? Do you need to have the collaboration there and the partnerships, the hard federations, in place, or do you believe that the evidence suggests it can be done without that taking place?

Dr Kenny: In terms of partnerships between schools, we just do not know. All we can look at is qualitative information, surveys and interviews with school personnel, who seem to have positive reports about this process, but we just do not have any further hard data about that.

Q62 Chris Skidmore: Take the Cabot Learning Federation, for instance: hard evidence for me seems to be that you have Kingsfield School, a local authority school, in special measures. The Cabot Learning Federation has come in. Kingsfield is now King's Oak Academy; it has had a new Ofsted rating and it has gone up to "good". Surely that is evidence in itself. It must be out there. You are saying there is no evidence, but even I can see there is stuff going on.

Dr Kenny: I agree, but that could be because the teaching practices have changed, so what is going on in the classroom is different now from what was happening before.

Q63 Chris Skidmore: It would not have happened without the catalyst of joining a partnership and the local federation. If it carried on under the local authority model, it would have continued to fail.

Dr Kenny: It may have, but also there is a lot of research evidence to show what works for education. The Education Endowment Foundation produces a learning and teaching toolkit. If we had tried to get that more widely used in schools, that could have had just as big an impact. It is not necessarily the case that the collaboration was the key ingredient.

Q64 Chris Skidmore: I can see where you are coming from. Would you say, in terms of the position of your research, that you would keep the status quo and be overtly hostile to partnerships? Why did you take up this research in the first place? Is it because you think, “Hang on a second. I want to question the value of partnerships because I prefer the values of local authority schools run democratically by elected councillors”?

Dr Kenny: I do not think I am hostile to partnerships in any way, shape or form. I think that they may be a good idea; we just do not know yet. My position is “why not make them the best that they possibly can be?” and I believe you can do that by getting research involved at an early stage.

Q65 Chair: As we have gone sufficiently far, we might as well go even further. So Caroline, what should the research that we require look like and who does it need to be initiated by?

Dr Kenny: It needs to be done on all different levels: at the level of the classroom and teachers. Teachers should not just be taking what works in another classroom for granted and just assuming that “if it works there, then it will work for me”. They need to be questioning those processes, trying to find out why that works for that group of students. If they introduce it in their own classroom, they need to be monitoring and evaluating those processes to make sure that it is having the difference that they think it is going to have. At the level of the school, they need to be monitoring their own progress—they need to be conducting their own mini-evaluations of partnership and what they want to get out of it.

Q66 Chair: Are you sure they are not doing so? If they were doing it, we would not necessarily know, would we? They would just do that internally.

Dr Kenny: They are not making that information publicly available, so if they are doing that, then we need to know about it.

Q67 Chair: Above that, you are operating at another level of research. In terms of the sort of thing that we would recommend and at governmental level, is there a failure or a shortage of research?

Dr Kenny: I think there is a shortage of the use of research. There is a lot of research out there that potentially could be very, very useful to schools, but it is just not being used at the moment.

Q68 Chair: But also for policymakers, because policymakers are creating an environment in which co-operation is encouraged, partnership is encouraged, and you are saying there may not be the evidential base to justify quite such a wholesale move to that. What would that look like? Unless it was on a massive scale and collected, it is not going to come from the classroom, particularly.

James O’Shaughnessy: Ofsted have looked at leadership of more than one school, and John and Robert Hill looked at this for the National College. Chapman et al looked at it

for the National College and I have looked at it. It is true to say that there is not a slam dunk 20-year evidence base to demonstrate exactly what kinds of partnerships work and what impact they have. However, it is probably fair to say that there is an emerging evidence base that suggests that they are effective and there are lots of reasons why they might be effective. There is also international evidence. There is evidence on the impact of chartered management organisations in the US, and they not only demonstrate the effect of being in a collaborative partnership—in these cases, the harder ones—but they suggest that the harder they are, the better they are. As I say, this is still tentative, and everyone who works in research obviously calls for more research, and it is perfectly reasonable that we want to be able to disaggregate the impact of a school just being better led or having better teachers or teaching practices from the effect of being part of a chain, group or federation. It is one of the reasons I suggested that chains in themselves should be inspected and evaluated to see that they are adding value as opposed to exogenous factors that have just happened because they have replaced the head or whatever it is. So I think it is perfectly reasonable to say they should be subject to a level of scrutiny for their value for money that is the same as schools, but I do not think it is fair to say that there is no evidence that they have an impact.

Q69 Mr Ward: What I struggle with is not so much the evidence base but the fact that this is all supposed to be new. I have known of cluster arrangements in postcodes, and I have known about consortia arrangements within a constituency area, collaborations led by a local authority across the whole of the authority, and the hard federations of failing schools and the most successful. I have known this forever. What is so new about all this?

Dr Dunford: I will try to answer that. When I was a headteacher 20 or 30 years ago, there was collaboration between schools that I would describe as being “non-competition” rather than the hard-edged collaboration that you have now. It seems to me that what we have now begun to recognise much more clearly is that the expertise in school improvement lies in schools. We do not look to county hall or universities or the private sector to come in and improve schools. We know that the expertise lies in the leadership of schools. Therefore, if we create systems in which the leaders of successful schools can transfer that successful practice into less successful schools, that seems to me not only to be the right system but a system for which there is already a good deal of evidence that it works.

When I asked to come in just now, Chairman, I was going to say exactly what James has said. I have done some of this research with Robert Hill. Other people have done it too, but you will all have the kind of evidence that Chris suggested. You know of schools that were doing badly and somebody from a really good school has come in, changed the practices in those schools, and changed the fundamentals of classroom teaching and behaviour management in a way that has turned those schools round. You can see that in the way in which the Ofsted grades in those schools have gone up.

David Sims: In addition to that, the higher performing schools say that they also gain from working with schools that are performing less well, because no one has a monopoly on wisdom or practice, so it is beneficial on both grounds.

Q70 Mr Ward: I have seen numerous IEBs do all of that, bring in shared headteachers from better schools—

Dr Dunford: Indeed, and I am not saying that there is any single model that works best, but I do think that a strategic approach that looked at these different models and the way in which the governance of IEBs can play a part here would be useful. However, the fundamental of using good schools to improve less good schools seems to me to be unarguable. The fact is, as David says, that those good schools continue to improve at a faster rate than the national average, as do the schools that they are supporting. That is happening

now within the new teaching school alliances as it did under the previous school-to-school support arrangements.

Q71 Chair: What percentage of the English school system is involved in these co-operations right now?

Dr Dunford: In any kind of collaborations?

Chair: No, take secondary schools, because primaries are separate. Do you have any idea?

David Sims: Have we the evidence?

James O'Shaughnessy: It is a good question. I do not think anyone knows, to be honest with you.

Q72 Chair: All this research you guys have been doing and you do not know how many schools are involved?

James O'Shaughnessy: You can tell which ones are in chains, if they are in multi-academy trusts or under umbrella trusts, so those much more formal arrangements.

Q73 Chair: How many of those are there?

James O'Shaughnessy: I think when you did your research you thought there were about 50 chains of three or more schools. By this September it might be more like 100, and the average size of a chain is probably five or six schools and growing all the time.

Q74 Chair: So it might be 500 then.

Dr Dunford: 15% to 20% of secondary schools I would say are in hard chains, but an awful lot more, most, I would say, of secondary schools are in collaborative arrangements of one sort or other.

James O'Shaughnessy: Particularly with things like teaching schools. The important thing here is that if you step back from the evidence and you think about it theoretically, why would collaborations work? They would work because they take good ideas and they spread them around and you need a transmission mechanism. That transmission mechanism, as John said, is increasingly seen as being most effective when it is school to school and does not involve an intervening authority, particularly one that is rather distant and perhaps not equipped for the task. So the big challenge is how you have those kinds of networks.

It is important to say that not only do you want schools, I believe, to be in hard networks, and indeed for those hard networks to some extent be competing with one another—more for ideas and prestige rather than students, because there are not quite enough school places in this country, as we know—but overlaid with different types of network. That is, using things like, for example, national leaders of education to get out into different schools, teaching schools and so on. Therefore, you do not just want one form of network that schools are in; you want overlays of networks and that they are professionally driven. That will provide the transmission mechanism, which is how the good ideas and the best practice get around and are populated around the school system, which has to be the main policy aim.

Q75 Chair: For every education initiative over the last 40 years there will be a conceptual framework that makes reasonable sense and can be explained in that way. When it is taken out to the first 10%, it seems to work. Stuart's rule would say all new initiatives in education work. They always do, because we get the kind of people involved who will go through walls to make it work, and it does not matter whether they are hanging kids by their toes; they will get a higher educational result. It is when you move to the next 10% and then

you move to the 30%, and the fourth, fifth and sixth decile, but by then there has probably been a change of Government and the whole thing is dropped, whether it was good or bad. What is there to give us confidence? From what you have said, we might be somewhere between the first and the second decile of secondaries, so we are way off the real testing ground, which is maybe when you get to 50% of schools doing it. On a wet Thursday in Stockport with a head who is not that bothered but feels they really ought to get involved, is it going to deliver improvement or not?

Dr Dunford: We are focusing here very much on the delivery part of school-to-school support. In my written evidence to the Committee I set out four parts of the process of school improvement: identification, brokering, commissioning the support and then delivering it, and we have been focusing on the delivery. Whilst within the hard federations and chains all four of those processes take place within that, for any school that is not in a partnership there are some serious questions to be asked about how problems are identified, how support is brokered and who pays for it and commissions it. This comes back to a potential role for a middle tier, which Ian raised with the last panel.

Q76 Bill Esterson: In the evidence you have looked at, have you looked at other fields and the benefits of collaboration there, say in business or elsewhere? The other point is the evidence around the benefits of collaboration and learning, and the logic that collaboration and learning is of a similar nature to collaboration between schools.

Dr Dunford: When I was General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders we commissioned Robert Hill to produce a book for us, which was called *Achieving More Together*. In that book he looked at the ways in which companies work together—pharmaceutical companies, for instance—the way in which police services work together, and the way in which there is collaboration within the health service and so on. He used the lessons from that to suggest ways forward for the education service.

Q77 Bill Esterson: Is that more detailed research?

Dr Dunford: That was a piece of research that was done what must be six years ago now.

Dr Kenny: There is a lot of literature that cites collaboration as important in achieving change. If you look at the health field, the collaboration and interaction between different parties is consistently ranked as one of the most important factors. My research has been looking into research in health, education and other fields of social policy. What I was struck by when looking into that literature is that no one spells out what collaboration means in these contexts. It was “collaboration is good”. Okay, excellent, but how do I go about that? What does it mean to collaborate with someone else? That is where we need more work, whether that is to go back to the existing literature to try to interrogate it further or to undertake more research in these types of collaborations that are going on.

Q78 Bill Esterson: Coming back to partnerships in schools, what is the evidence so far on closing the gap between disadvantaged pupils and others? Is there evidence of experimentation in practice that can help achieve that?

Dr Dunford: The Education Endowment Foundation has, as you probably know, produced a toolkit for schools, which is being used increasingly but is still not being used universally by schools, to help them to close the gap. The evidence is there. The Education Endowment Foundation commissioned Durham University to do a meta-analysis of—

Q79 Chair: Sorry, John, but in the context of partnership working, is there any evidence that school co-operation and partnership leads to a closing of the gap in particular?

Dr Dunford: The only evidence I have seen is that if you look at the gaps local authority by local authority, almost all the top 20 local authorities are in London. Part of that must be around the success of the London Challenge and the way in which best practice in London has raised standards over the average for the country. It has closed the gaps more in London than it has elsewhere.

Q80 Bill Esterson: Just to be clear, we have talked about the improvement of the school overall, but what about the gap between pupils even within some schools?

Dr Dunford: That is what I am referring to. It is both in relation to raising achievement and in relation to closing the gaps. London local authorities are in the lead.

James O'Shaughnessy: Could I make a further point on that? Up until three years ago there were only 200 academies, so if we are thinking of the academies as being the ones that tended to be in these harder forms of federation, you can see why the evidence base is pretty slender, because it is new. However, the LSE looked at the performance of the sponsored academies that were created under the last Labour Government against similar schools that had not gone down the sponsored academy route, and found them to be higher performing, on average. According to Michael Wilshaw, of the 30 academies currently judged by Ofsted to be "outstanding", 22 were in a chain with at least one school. There are a few dots to connect there. I am not saying there is a straight line. You have to follow the logic through, and bearing in mind sponsored academies are obviously dealing with failing schools in, generally speaking, disadvantaged areas, it tends to suggest that the original sponsored academies, many of which are in chains themselves, were being effective in raising standards among the very poorest communities.

Q81 Bill Esterson: So you are saying it is the collaboration within academies—

James O'Shaughnessy: I am not saying that. I do not think you can say that. I am just noting that those sponsored academies improving education in the poorest communities tend to be within collaborative organisations. I am not saying that you can link it causally. I am just saying there is a correlation between the two.

Dr Kenny: Sponsored academies only make up 25% of all academies, so you do need to take that into consideration.

Q82 Bill Esterson: The point that I think John made earlier, and it came from the earlier session as well, was that good schools do better as well from providing support. What is the evidence for that?

Dr Dunford: James, you might know the location of that evidence better than I do, but certainly there was evidence in the analysis that was done of the London Challenge that this happened, and I believe there is evidence that has been replicated in other partnerships.

Q83 Chair: Schools that are already excellent improve their results at a faster rate than other schools that are already excellent that do not partner.

Dr Dunford: Correct.

Chair: According to...?

Dr Dunford: I cannot cite a source, but there is one; it has been done.

Bill Esterson: Could you try to find one?

Dr Dunford: Yes, we will do our best.

Chair: Thanks.

Q84 Alex Cunningham: John, you said that the Government needed a strategy on partnership. What does that look like? Is that about all schools being in partnership in hard networks? Is it about how they should operate, what they should provide? Is it about how they should be accountable? What does that strategy look like, in a couple of sentences?

Dr Dunford: It would analyse the process of one school supporting another in the way that I was just describing in terms of the different stages of support. It would then ascribe clearly to each of those stages how they were going to be done in the different models of collaboration that were being encouraged, such as teaching schools, for example. So there would be ways in which organisations would have clear roles around monitoring data, which local authorities have at the moment and which some local authorities do very well.

On brokering, there would be a strong push by this Committee and the Government to create a database of excellent practice. I think it is quite shocking that Ofsted, which is the repository of the most information around excellent practice in this country, does not do more to get that out there, so that where you have a situation where a school's science department is doing badly, there is somewhere where people can go to find out where the best science departments are in the locality. We are beginning to get that with teaching school alliances using specialist leaders of education. That is to say, in the example I have just given, really good heads of science who can go and support weak science departments.

What you want is both the methodology and the database, and a good strategy would bring those two together. That was two very long sentences, I am afraid.

Q85 Alex Cunningham: Two very helpful sentences though. Just to talk about accountability a little, how do we ensure there are clear lines of accountability when we have a partnership? We have different chains that are controlled by a group compared with loose partnerships. How do we ensure accountability?

Dr Dunford: I would certainly support the accountability of chains as a whole, as James mentioned, and I think the Chief Inspector is beginning to do that now. The two great drivers of school policy behaviour, if you like, are finance and accountability. Both of those are entirely focused on the individual school at the moment, and so if you have four schools in a locality in a chain, they might be inspected at four completely different times on four completely different cycles. It seems to me that Ofsted could do that much more coherently, and certainly, in terms of the publication of performance, it would be very useful to know how well groups of schools are doing as well as individual schools.

Chair: Any thoughts on that, David?

David Sims: I would endorse what has just been said, because increasingly with schools operating in partnerships, if they are only judged on their individual performance, that only gives you a partial picture of what they are doing. So it is important that schools should be assessed, if you like, as working within groups. We need to identify what the schools are gaining from working in those groups—what the group effect is, what the partnership offer is, if you like, and what gain and benefit there is.

Q86 Alex Cunningham: At the moment, the loose federations do not really provide a clear indication of where the accountability lies.

David Sims: I think that is correct, yes.

Q87 Alex Cunningham: Doubtless when there are schools working together there will be tensions, particularly maybe when there is one school that could be seen to be in the lead as the better or the more successful school. How do you overcome that tension and make sure that you foster an ethos of mutual respect to ensure that they achieve success?

Dr Dunford: Sometimes tensions can improve performance in the way that collaboration and competition can co-exist in a very positive way. My direct answer to your question is you can do that by the groups of schools having really solid systems of governance that, as a group, enable this to happen. When we looked at the academy chains, we observed with all the chains, I think, two levels of governance. There was the chain level of governance and there was the individual school level of governance, but on the whole it was about 80/20.

Q88 Alex Cunningham: You have that in the formal chains, but I am interested in how we ensure accountability in the informal federations.

Dr Dunford: I think human nature is probably beyond the scope of the Select Committee's recommendations.

Alex Cunningham: Okay, fair enough.

Dr Dunford: Can I just reflect one more thing? Certainly during my career one of the big changes has been that there is now a preparedness amongst school leaders to recognise that excellent practice exists in other places—that other places do some things better than we do and, therefore, we will go to them for support—in a way that certainly was not the case when I was a headteacher.

Q89 Alex Cunningham: That leads on to my next question. When you have particularly the more successful school helping the less successful school, how does the school leader in the less successful school get on with their job? How do they lead in their school when they have somebody else looking over their shoulder?

Dr Dunford: One of the very interesting things is the way in which younger people are coming in to school leadership prepared to take on what you might describe as “risky” posts, of schools that are in special measures and so on, because it is part of a chain and they have people like David Carter as the executive head over them. There are quite a number of examples around the country of that.

Where you have a school that is an established school not doing very well and going into a chain, then clearly the management and personnel skills of the executive head are paramount in relation to the school that they are taking over. Sometimes that means that they have to do it with a different head.

Alex Cunningham: Are there other views on that?

David Sims: In the research we did on Gaining Ground, which I mentioned earlier, and the so-called “coasting” schools, the headteachers there saw it as bringing a resource or expertise in from another school. They were not intimidated by the higher performing school helping them, but very much saw it as adding something to their school and linking heads of department in the two schools, heads of subject and so on, as a big plus.

Q90 Alex Cunningham: Education is a changing landscape all the time. There are schools in partnerships where it might be better for them to leave one partnership and join another, whether that is a hard chain or a looser fit. How do we make that happen? I just wonder how that can happen. How can they say, “Sorry, this partnership is no longer for me. This one will serve my children better”? How do we make that happen?

James O'Shaughnessy: It is a really good question, because particularly in multi-academy trusts there is no separate trust. What the school is legally is a funding agreement with the Department for Education; otherwise, it is part of a larger body. The lack of a formal exit strategy, if you like, for those schools, particularly if the chain is not doing the job that they expected, is a problem. However, I think there is at least one chain that has disaggregated and others may do so, particularly if they find themselves geographically

stretched. Therefore, one of the things that I expect to happen over the coming years is those that are pretty spread over the country and finding that difficult to manage may end up splitting. That will be done sort of informally by conversation, by agreement, and that is sort of manageable when you have a small number of them. If it becomes the norm across the sector, it is a problem.

Q91 Chair: Should we be recommending formal secession provisions?

James O'Shaughnessy: Yes. You have to be careful about how you do it, because you have to be sure that the reasons are the right ones, if you like, for leaving, because they might not be. They might get lots of help and decide to go off on their own way, and they would be much more vulnerable without that kind of help there. You would have to think about it carefully, but I do think it is a reasonable thing to think about how schools could move between chains or different governance arrangements, particularly if they are "outstanding". As a general rule in school policy, the better a school is, the more autonomy it should be allowed to enjoy, and so I think there is a case for a formal route to do that, but carefully circumscribed.

Q92 Mr Ward: You talked about how school assessments should broaden in terms of the work that they are doing with other schools, but we know very well the *Telegraph & Argus* will produce a list of all the schools with five A to Cs, and that is what people will look at and how they will judge the success of schools. We know about good leadership, good management and all those sorts of things, but the easiest way to change your attainment is to change your intake. The issue of competition and collaboration: how do they impact on each other in terms of admissions policies within a group and making sure that there is a fairness of intake of pupils in those groups?

Dr Kenny: The question of admissions is something that has been picked up specifically in relation to academies. The recent Academies Commission report talks about this quite a lot, in that we cannot just attribute all of the success of academies down to their working practices; some of it is down to a change in the intake of students. It is a very important issue to focus on. Going back to the first session and some of the points that have been made in this session in particular, that is why we need this level of oversight, with these checks and balances to make sure that the admissions policies and the intake are not changing drastically and, if they are, whether that is the reason for success, so we are not just attributing success to the partnership when it is for very different reasons entirely.

James O'Shaughnessy: It is incredibly important that every school is obliged to and follows the admissions code and that it has oversight to do so. There is a difference between a changing intake and gaming the admissions code to change your intake, the latter obviously being undesirable and the former in some cases being desirable. One of the things that has happened to the original sponsored academies is, for example, because they were set up in areas of deprivation and underperformance, as they have got better, a more diverse group of people has wanted to go into them, so they have tended to reflect better the local average in terms of deprivation. Seemingly, they have become more middle class, if you like. I do not think that is a bad thing in itself, because if you want a broad intake, then that must be a good thing. The key thing is isolating that effect from the effect of the teaching.

Q93 Mr Ward: If you are oversubscribed, for every child who gets into a school one does not, and if that one who does not is from the local community, it is likely that the one from outside, if it is a deprived community, is going to be from a more affluent background. So there will be a change in the intake, which will then lead on to the attainment performance of the school as well.

James O'Shaughnessy: There can be, if it is mixed in the entry point, particularly for secondary, of people coming in. However, if the result is that all of the schools become more reflective of the make-up of their local communities so that you do not have sink schools, which have very disadvantaged intakes, and the posh school that has a mainly middle class intake, I think that is a good thing, isn't it? These are supposed to be community schools after all, and that is just something that is happening through parental choice. If the parents are choosing that configuration and, crucially, they are being able to choose among good choices, not among bad choices, then I do not think it matters particularly that the intake has changed, as long as everyone is abiding by the rules.

Q94 Neil Carmichael: What is the balance between competition and collaboration? Where do you see that striking?

James O'Shaughnessy: You need both, and that is the case I make in the title of my Policy Exchange report; it is the case I make through that. Again, some sort of market theory: if you look at how markets work—and I know people are uncomfortable with the idea of describing the school sector as a market, but people are making choices and it has market features, albeit a social market—the most important feature of what goes on is collaboration within organisations, often multi-institution organisations, in order to improve. Competition is the sharp edge that ensures that collaboration does not slip into complacency, because there is always the danger that collaboration is just: “We will collaborate because we will do what we want to do regardless of the impact.” Competition is one way, but not the only accountability mechanism, of making sure that does not happen.

On the other side, if you have an atomised system where there are just single institutions competing against one another vigorously and they do not have the capacity to collaborate and improve, that is a problem too. That was a problem that the New Zealand school system had when they very first went down this set of reforms 20 years or so ago.

There is a happy medium where you have multi-institution groups that have the capacity to innovate and collaborate among themselves, but they are kept in check, if you like, by competition, which also makes sure that what they are collaborating on and innovating is relevant and is going to improve. I think that is what we are inching towards, certainly in some local authorities now.

Q95 Neil Carmichael: Essentially, you have a partnership with collaboration at its core and then another partnership competing with that partnership.

James O'Shaughnessy: Yes. You do not have that everywhere. Some schools will be large enough to be able to do it on their own, particularly secondary schools. We have not talked much about primary schools; it is a very different circumstance, primary versus secondary, and the case for schools grouping together is much, much stronger. It is strong in secondary, but it is much, much stronger in primary, precisely because they are so small.

Q96 Chair: Going back to our recommendations again, you have made it sound as though you are not very keen on the atomised system, and many critics of the whole academy programme worry about atomisation. Should we say going forward we have enough chains now and groupings that we should change the rules or suggest we will change the rules?

James O'Shaughnessy: I do think secondaries are different from primaries. The average secondary school is fairly large; it has a large staff and a big turnover. The fact that primaries are not converting at anything like the rate of secondaries suggests that the convert-on-your-own approach is not very appropriate, and heads and governors know that at the local level. So I do think there is a case for trying to get schools to go in groups. You just run into a pure game theory problem then: there are six heads; who is going to be the one who ends up

as the top dog, who is not and, therefore, who is going to choose to become the second-class citizen in the new group? You just have a very human problem there about who jumps first, so there is an issue there that the current policy framework just does not deal with.

Q97 Alex Cunningham: As you said, let us find half a dozen schools and encourage them. Whose responsibility is it to encourage them? Local authorities do not exist in terms of the level of support they once gave. Are they the ones to push schools?

James O'Shaughnessy: I think they have a role. Some definitely do, others do not. In the report I called for what I termed a “collaborating schools network”—a national education charity rather like the New Schools Network, which has been funded as a charity in order to help free schools, to do the cajoling and brokering role that the Office of the Schools Commissioner does at the moment. However, bear in mind that that is a very small part of the DfE and it has many other responsibilities, so I do think you need some organisation using the evidence about what works, and the size, shape and location of clusters, to go around encouraging schools to do that.

Q98 Neil Carmichael: What about the danger of marginalisation for a school that is not in any partnership? How do we deal with that?

Dr Dunford: Can I just reflect on Neil’s initial question about competition and collaboration? I will just feed into your thoughts the fact that most schools are in a lot of partnerships. Do not think of schools as just being in a single chain or a single partnership. I have heard of schools being in up to 40 different partnerships for different things—with schools in different phases, with local colleges, with groups for different reasons—and that seems to me to be healthy. A lot of schools would see themselves as being in a prime partnership and then doing a lot of partnership working with other schools, other groups of schools, different groups of schools for different reasons. It is a complex field, if you like, and I do think there are risks around marginalisation of some schools that are not in partnerships—those that are comfortable with their performance and do not want to get into the challenge of being in a partnership, which can be a very challenging situation. I also think there are issues around governing bodies. They are very often behind the thinking on this and are focusing entirely on the needs of that individual school and are not always recognising the benefits of the partnership working around the broader quality of education and the ways in which that might improve their test results.

Q99 Ian Mearns: Do you think the financial incentives for school partnerships simply encourage schools to go through the motions at the same time as they suppress their mutual loathing for each other?

Dr Dunford: I do not think it is quite mutual loathing, Ian, as you know, but I do think there are insufficient financial incentives. As I said earlier, financing is entirely focused on the individual school, and then it is up to the individual schools to decide the extent to which they are going to pool any of their finances into a local partnership arrangement. There is no real financing of local partnerships except for the start of teaching school alliances. One of the things I would very much like you to recommend is that the funding of teaching school alliances does not cease after the three years as planned. It is very important that that funding, which is very small anyway, continues to stimulate the collaborative working of teaching school alliances.

James O'Shaughnessy: I think there is something called the School Chain Growth Fund, which is small bits of money but is designed to help schools come together and pay for the infrastructure they might need to do that.

Dr Dunford: That is very important, because of course the small school allowance militates against small schools getting into the kind of federation that evidence suggests they would benefit from.

Q100 Ian Mearns: In terms of the motivation for becoming involved in collaboration and partnership working, is there a risk that the financial incentives for school partnership could crowd out collaboration based on a headteacher's motives, which are based on the purpose of what we are all about: trying to educate children?

Dr Dunford: The incentives are around both improving the performance of your own school and recognising that you can get that improvement partly through learning from elsewhere and partly through schools recognising very clearly that they do not have all the expertise—that some of the expertise lies elsewhere and they need to find ways of capturing it.

Q101 Siobhain McDonagh: How can the school accountability system be used to incentivise schools to work together without simply creating top-down partnerships in name only as schools seek to jump through the hoops presented?

Dr Dunford: As I said earlier, at the moment the accountability system is very much focused on the individual school. Ofsted inspections do not, in my view, sufficiently recognise work that schools are doing in other schools or, indeed, recognise the contribution that other schools are making to the school that is being inspected. I think there are a number of ways in which the Ofsted part of the accountability system could be improved.

Q102 Chair: Do you agree with the Chief Inspector that there should be some new über headship title, where you are an outstanding leader of excellence or something—I forget the exact phrase—which you can only get if you are not only running an “outstanding” school but helping other schools that are lower level performers?

Dr Dunford: I think there is a moral obligation on “outstanding” schools to help other schools, because they are part of a state school system.

Q103 Chair: Yes, but you just said the accountability, not least from Ofsted, should support that, and I have just given you an example of how the Chief Inspector would like to do it.

Dr Dunford: I think that would be a welcome move.

James O'Shaughnessy: There is a moral obligation, and you might be able to incentivise people financially. You want to use every tool in the box, so one of the ones that Michael Wilshaw has suggested is a very good one, which is if you want to become, as the most ambitious heads will do, the best in your field, you have to show system leadership, for want of a better phrase, so leadership across more than one school.

Q104 Chair: The top accolade will be not only do you run an “outstanding” school but you help elsewhere—if you want to be top head in the country.

James O'Shaughnessy: It sends a very clear signal.

Dr Dunford: Also, it has created a very welcome extra step on the ladder of headship. It is not just about being a really good head of a single school now. You can stay in the same school, you do not have to move schools so readily, but you can become head of a group of schools, and that has been a great thing for the leadership of the system.

David Sims: It is all linked to the moral purpose, which was mentioned in the earlier session, where the focus is not just on your own school but is on the group of schools—the community of schools that you work in.

Q105 Alex Cunningham: We have seen the ability of local authorities to monitor and support individual schools diminish as funds have been cut. Who is going to support the individual school in the future? Who is going to identify the weak school that would benefit from partnership that might not recognise it themselves? I suppose the kernel of this is what does your middle tier look like?

Dr Dunford: The middle tier will be small. In school improvement terms, they will not have people sitting in county hall waiting for things to go wrong in schools and then going out to help them, but they will monitor the data and then they will broker people from my database of outstanding practice to come in and improve that. I have seen a particular local authority I was visiting recently where there is a very constructive relationship between a very, very small local authority school improvement service, just two or three people, and the local teaching school alliance. There is a recognition on the part of the local authority that it is within the teaching school alliance that the expertise in school support and improvement exists, and a recognition on the teaching school alliance's part that the local authority has a role in monitoring data, in providing support for vulnerable children and SEN, and so on.

Q106 Alex Cunningham: If you were going to capture a recommendation for the Committee in what you have just said, what would you say?

Dr Dunford: It would be for the first time for many years to create a clear definition of the local authority role around providing services to schools. Those things would embrace SEN, school transport, support for vulnerable children and school places.

Q107 Alex Cunningham: In partnership with third-party organisations.

Dr Dunford: In partnership with third-party organisations, such as local teaching schools.

Q108 Alex Cunningham: That is very helpful. Can schools themselves broker school-to-school support for all schools that need it?

Dr Dunford: For all schools that need it, unfortunately, no, because there are some schools that need support but do not recognise it.

Q109 Alex Cunningham: How do we overcome that?

Dr Dunford: That is where you need the local authority monitoring the data.

Q110 Ian Mearns: The evidence from City Challenge was that expert advisers had a key role and brokering effect on school-to-school collaboration arrangements. What role do you see for such advisers in today's more diverse system? We have already touched on it, but do you think that those advisers would reside in a slimmed down local authority or in some other arrangement?

Dr Dunford: I do not think you want a group of experts sitting at desks in county hall or indeed anywhere. These people need to be in the schools.

Ian Mearns: John, you know they shouldn't do that anyway. They should be out and about in schools—absolutely right.

Dr Dunford: They should be in schools and then using that expertise and having the leadership capacity in the schools that employ them to enable them to go and work in other schools. That is how the system seems to be working best. That is how good teaching school alliances are developing.

James O'Shaughnessy: There is a really important point here about the middle tier, which is a ghastly phrase and everyone is wondering what it amounts to. It seems to me there

is almost no reason why there should be local or bureaucratic oversight of good or better schools. We should be using carrots and nudges to get them to collaborate and realise there are opportunities to help others. However, there is a big responsibility to do something when there is failure or even underperformance. Ofsted has said that as much as 40% of teaching is what was called “satisfactory” and is now called “requiring improvement”, so we still have a big underperformance challenge in this country. The question is: who is going to do something about that? Is it possible for just the DfE on its own to do something about that? My argument is no, I do not see the need for a new middle tier. There are lots of roles that putative middle tiers have been given that can be done better by others. I do think there is a role for some authority. I would prefer to see it as an offshoot of the Office of the Schools Commissioner, which is brokering support in those cases and dealing with the consequences of failure, and harnessing that from other successful schools, school chains or whatever it is. That is what any middle tier has to focus on, which is where there is weakness and failure in brokering support. Otherwise it needs to leave good alone.

Q111 Ian Mearns: The first part of your answer I must admit I disagree with a bit, because even good schools get into that comfort zone and they need to be constantly challenged in order to make sure that they continue to improve.

James O’Shaughnessy: I am not sure they should be challenged by some sort of bureaucratic tier. You can do it through data. You can do it through parental accountability. After all, the people who matter most in this thing are parents.

Q112 Ian Mearns: Is it the parents or is it the kids?

James O’Shaughnessy: Yes, but parents acting on behalf of their children, particularly younger children. By and large, that is where the accountability ought to lie. It is clearly the case that in failing schools that is not sufficient to cause action, and that is where you do need some sort of intervention.

Chair: My ability to bring Ian Mearns and James O’Shaughnessy to a halt needs further improvement, but thank you all very much indeed for contributing in such an interesting way to our discussions this morning.