

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
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Public Bill Committee

EDUCATION (CAREERS GUIDANCE IN SCHOOLS) BILL

Wednesday 27 October 2021

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CLAUSES 1 to 3 agreed to.
Bill to be reported, without amendment.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

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Sunday 31 October 2021

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chair:* GERAINT DAVIES

† Bailey, Shaun (*West Bromwich West*) (Con)
 † Baynes, Simon (*Clwyd South*) (Con)
 Brown, Alan (*Kilmarnock and Loudoun*) (SNP)
 † Burghart, Alex (*Parliamentary Under-Secretary of
 State for Education*)
 Farron, Tim (*Westmorland and Lonsdale*) (LD)
 † Fell, Simon (*Barrow and Furness*) (Con)
 † Gibson, Peter (*Darlington*) (Con)
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Denton and Reddish*) (Lab)
 † Hart, Sally-Ann (*Hastings and Rye*) (Con)
 † Hopkins, Rachel (*Luton South*) (Lab)

† Jenkinson, Mark (*Workington*) (Con)
 Johnson, Kim (*Liverpool, Riverside*) (Lab)
 † Johnston, David (*Wantage*) (Con)
 † Kyle, Peter (*Hove*) (Lab)
 † Nici, Lia (*Great Grimsby*) (Con)
 † Perkins, Mr Toby (*Chesterfield*) (Lab)
 † Richards, Nicola (*West Bromwich East*) (Con)

Adam Mellows-Facer, *Committee Clerk*† **attended the Committee**

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 27 October 2021

[GERAINT DAVIES *in the Chair*]

Education (Careers Guidance in Schools) Bill

9.25 am

The Chair: Good morning. Before we begin our scrutiny, I have to make a few preliminary remarks. I remind members of the Committee to switch off or silence any electronic devices. I encourage hon. Members to wear masks when they are not speaking; this is in line with the current guidance of the House of Commons Commission. Please also give one another and members of staff space, both while seated and when entering and leaving the room. I remind everyone that they are asked by the House to have a lateral flow test twice a week if they are coming on to the parliamentary estate; this can be done either at the testing centre in the House or at home. *Hansard* colleagues would be grateful if hon. Members emailed their speaking notes to hansardnotes@parliament.uk.

My selection and grouping list for today's sitting is available online and in the Committee Room. No amendments have been tabled.

Clause 1

EXTENSION OF DUTY TO PROVIDE CAREERS GUIDANCE IN SCHOOLS

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Clause 2 stand part.

Clause 3 stand part.

Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I am grateful to you and to fellow Committee members for joining me today. We have an opportunity to drill down into the finer detail of this important legislation, which will ultimately make a positive difference in the lives of young people across England.

At present, the statutory duty to provide careers guidance falls on maintained schools, special schools and pupil referral units, but not academies, although many academies now have that duty through their funding agreement. The Bill would address that anomaly by placing the same requirement on all types of state-funded secondary school.

Addressing these disparities will ensure consistency across the board, and is central to the creation of a more level playing field. We cannot leave the future of our young people to blind chance. Whether a child succeeds or fails cannot be determined by a postcode lottery. If we mean what we say when we talk about levelling up—if the phrase is to be more than a political slogan—we are duty-bound to address these anomalies and embrace the spirit of greater fairness.

Equality of opportunity must be embedded in the education system. Advice must be consistent, of the highest quality and accessible to everyone. It is also important that we give our young people the best careers advice as early as possible. It has to start at the very earliest opportunity, and it must be regular and ongoing as they make their journey through school towards their chosen career. Such early, regular interventions will not only equip them for the world of work, but stop them straying down a dead end. It will light their way to greater things.

Many of us spend much of our life in work. It is therefore important that we give our young people the tools to find a career that suits their personality and talents and that they find rewarding. Choices made at school help to define what we achieve, and even how happy and fulfilled we are later in life.

I am not surprised that many young people are anxious and uncertain about their education and employment prospects in these unprecedented times. Covid has brought huge disruption and forced many young people to re-evaluate their options. Unexpected change and challenges can open new doors, encourage us to be adaptable in our goals and help us to discover reserves of resilience and even talents that we did not know we had, but we must also have the appropriate support and guidance in place to help young people negotiate the obstacles and encourage them to make the most of their talents.

I am deeply conscious of the stark disadvantages facing many young people who have so much to contribute but are often written off too soon. Giving children access to good careers advice is one of the most effective ways of addressing that inequality. Providing enhanced careers guidance also makes financial sense as we build back better, because it will contribute to the high-skills, high-productivity recovery that we seek to develop. It will support all young people in developing the skills and attributes to succeed in the workplace, and in some cases it will nurture the community leaders of the future. The Bill would therefore extend careers guidance from year 8 down to year 7 to ensure that our children are given the best information to make the best choices.

Creating this level playing field will also give Ofsted the tools that it needs to guarantee that our children benefit from first-rate careers advice. As a direct result of the Bill, approximately 650,000 year 7 pupils across England will be entitled to additional careers guidance. The Bill will introduce additional provision for 2,700 academies. It will put into statute the Government's commitment in the White Paper, "Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth", to the UK's post-pandemic recovery, and it will build on the important work already under way to develop a coherent and well established career guidance system.

9.30 am

Education and training providers and careers services in my constituency of Workington are already rising to the challenge, and that is successfully being replicated across the country, with 45% of secondary schools and colleges now in careers hubs. We are seeing rapid improvements in hubs, and there are disadvantaged areas among the best performers, but it is not enough to nurture talent; we must also work to retain and attract it. The Bill will help to ensure that young people are

aware of the opportunities both on their doorstep and further afield. Young people often tell us that one of the biggest barriers is not knowing which careers exist. Making it easier for them to engage with employers from an early age can help them relate career opportunities to their own life, skills and interests.

I thank everyone from across the House for their support today, and for their input in Committee as the Bill takes shape. We are moving a step closer to helping our young people realise and unleash their vast potential, for their own good and that of the country.

Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing this private Member's Bill forward, and thank the Minister for his hard work in this field. As we know, the matter of skills in schools is absolutely, utterly vital. The extension of careers guidance to those in year 7 is important, because as my hon. Friend said, quite often, children and teachers do not really know what opportunities are available on their doorstep. In seats such as mine of Great Grimsby, and in Workington and other red wall seats, we see a disparity: children do well in primary school, but we lose that impetus when they get into secondary school. Careers guidance, making school relevant to young people, and teachers interacting more effectively with local business leaders and companies will make a real change to progress and attainment in schools. I congratulate and support my hon. Friend wholeheartedly.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): It is the first time I have served under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, and I am grateful for the chance to do so. I again pay tribute to the hon. Member for Workington for bringing forward the Bill; I did so on the Floor of the House, and am happy to repeat the compliment today, because it is a real tribute to him that he has got the Bill this far. Speaking as a relatively new MP, I have to say to him that getting a private Member's Bill past Second Reading on the Floor of the Commons and into Committee is the political equivalent of getting a golden ticket to Willy Wonka's chocolate factory—not that I am calling anybody here an Oompa-Loompa, and especially not you, Mr Davies.

At a time when businesses around the country are facing massive skills shortages, it is vital that careers education matches the scale of the challenge, and the hon. Member for Workington understands this. We welcome the Bill. It is short, but its significance is not dampened by its brevity—if anything, it is enhanced by it.

For years, both main parties have been gripped by the debate on structural reforms in schools. Academies were, after all, a Labour invention spearheaded by Lord Adonis and others as a way of turning around failing schools. We stood against the forced academisation of large swathes of schools throughout the 2010s, and do not support universal academisation now, but given the years of disruption caused by structural reform, our immediate focus now must be on making sure that all schools deliver top-quality preparation for life, no matter their governance arrangements. Many academies have replaced local authority control with governance by a multi-academy trust that pools expertise and resources among a group of similar schools. Most of these trusts are highly effective, but a minority has been marred by accusations of off-rolling and high executive pay.

All schools, regardless of their governance structure, should provide excellent careers education. That is the outcome that the hon. Gentleman's Bill seeks to deliver. The Labour party will always welcome steps towards embedding careers education in schools, and elevating its position and importance, yet only 30% of schools and colleges have stable careers programmes. That is not in the interests of pupils, schools, businesses or the whole economy—a point worth making on Budget day.

Expansion of the legal duty is welcome, but the Government must go further. Cuts to schools' budgets have had a real-terms impact on the ability to provide high-quality careers education. When budgets are tight, school leaders are forced to prioritise traditional academic subjects. That is not helped by the Government's narrow curriculum reforms over recent years. Where is the Government's engagement with business? Where is the strategic vision? During the Labour conference, the Leader of the Opposition laid out an ambitious programme to ensure that every child leaves school job-ready and life-ready. Now is the time for the Government to meet that ambition for young people. Once again, I congratulate the hon. Member for Workington.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Alex Burghart): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship in this, my first Bill Committee as a Minister, Mr Davies. I hope it is not my last. I must congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Workington; he is, as the hon. Member for Hove said, the boy with the golden ticket. He may remember what happens to the boy who finds that golden ticket: Charlie goes on to run the chocolate factory. I can think of no finer job for my hon. Friend. It is a real achievement to get this Bill into Committee, and we in the Government are delighted to support it, because it really supports the aims of our skills reform agenda, which will drive up the quality and availability of technical skills for young people, and that will help them to get the great jobs that they deserve—the great jobs of tomorrow.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), who has gone on to an even greater job, in the Department of Health. I cannot hope to match her panache and stylishness, but I promise the House that I will do my best for this agenda, because it is something I believe in deeply. I also thank the Opposition for their support for the Bill and the cross-party consensus that has broken out over this important agenda. I hope such consensus will continue throughout the day, as we go on to the Chancellor's statement.

The Government support the Bill because we want to level up opportunity. The reforms set out in our "Skills for Jobs" White Paper will give people a genuine choice between a high-quality technical route and a high-quality academic route. As part of that, it is vital that everyone has access to careers guidance of the very highest standard.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab) *rose*—

Alex Burghart: I am honoured to give way to my opposite number for the first time.

Mr Perkins: Does the Minister agree that in order to meet the careers guidance needs of every child, we need

[Mr Perkins]

to meet every child, and so every child should be entitled to face-to-face careers guidance during their career journey?

Alex Burghart: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution. I know that we will not always agree as we stand opposite each other, but I know that he cares deeply about the prospects for young people, and I hope he respects that I do, too. Obviously, it is important that young people get high-quality careers advice, and it would be difficult to justify giving that without a degree of face-to-face support, but we respect schools' abilities to find new, interesting ways of delivering this agenda.

As we emerge from the pandemic, it is important that we make sure that all young people have access to high-quality guidance, because if they do not, they will not know whether they are making the right choices and taking the right opportunities.

Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con) *rose*—

The Chair: I call Nicola Richards.

Sally-Ann Hart: It is Sally-Ann Hart.

The Chair: Oh God. I am sorry.

Sally-Ann Hart: Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that the fact that the Bill has been extended to alternative provision academies matters a lot, because some of the most vulnerable children from disadvantaged backgrounds are in alternative provision, and we really need to get them the same opportunities as all other children?

Alex Burghart: I could not have put it better myself. It is very important that everyone in state education, particularly young people with the most disadvantaged starts in life, has these opportunities, and that is what the Bill will achieve. Having at different times of my career worked closely with those who run alternative provision, I know, as does my hon. Friend, that they have an extraordinary job on their hands. The contribution that they make to young people's lives is often really remarkable.

Now more than ever, good-quality careers advice, information and guidance is essential to build a workforce that is dynamic and flexible. It is critical that young people are provided with good-quality information about future labour market opportunities in growth sectors, so that they can learn the skills that they need to be successful in our fast-paced, changing jobs market.

Many in-demand jobs and sectors are a product of the modern world, including space exploration, green energy, digital architects and data scientists. As new technologies and industries emerge, young people need insights into the breadth of careers and opportunities available to them, so that they can make informed decisions about the future, including, crucially for my brief, the value of technical and vocational pathways to employment. Good-quality careers advice is essential if we are to ensure that we meet the higher technical skills needs in our country. That is why the Government are investing over £100 million in the financial year 2021-22 in the direct delivery of careers information, advice and guidance. That funds the direct delivery of careers

advice to people of all ages through the National Careers Service. We also support the development of careers infrastructure through the Careers & Enterprise Company to help schools and colleges to improve their careers programmes in line with the world-class Gatsby benchmarks. The Bill will support the Government's wider skills reforms, and will provide a legal framework for guaranteeing high-quality, independent careers guidance to all young people in state secondary schools.

It takes a wise man to devise a simple Bill, and this is a simple Bill. Clause 1 amends the scope of section 42A of the Education Act 1997—the statutory duty on schools to secure independent careers guidance. The Bill extends career advice provision to all pupils in state secondary schools, bringing year 7 pupils into scope for the first time. It also extends the duty to all academy schools and alternative provision academies. Clause 2 covers consequential amendments and revokes 2013 regulations that extended the careers guidance obligations to pupils aged 13 to 18; they are no longer needed, because the Bill extends to all secondary-age pupils.

What the clauses mean in practice is that all pupils, in all types of state-funded secondary school in England, will be legally entitled to independent careers guidance throughout their secondary education. That means high-quality guidance for every single child in every single secondary state school in every single local authority, without exception.

Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con): I would like to put on record my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington for bringing the Bill to the House and to this Committee. I want to clarify a point: page 6 of the explanatory notes says that the provisions do not extend to Wales—I speak as a Welsh MP—but where the notes say,

“Would corresponding provision be within the competence of Senedd Cymru?”,

the answer is “Yes” for both clauses 1 and 2. Has the Minister had any contact with the Welsh Government to see whether they are bringing in a similar programme of careers guidance in Wales?

Alex Burghart: We are in constant contact with our colleagues in Wales, but I am as yet unaware of whether they have similar plans. I am happy to write to my hon. Friend if I discover that they do.

By extending the lower age limit to those in year 7, the Bill brings the career guidance duty in line with the Government's careers framework for schools, the Gatsby benchmarks, which apply from years 7 to 13. This fulfils a commitment in our “Skills for Jobs” White Paper and will reach over 600,000 pupils in year 7 every year. By starting in year 7, we can give children early exposure to a range of employers, so that they gain experience of the workplace, ask questions and develop networks. They can begin to learn about the local labour market, because the skills needs of Cumbria may be different from those of Essex. Early careers guidance can support important decisions that need to be made from year 14—for example, on the choice of GCSE subjects or on whether to go to a university technical college.

The Bill will establish consistency by applying the statutory careers duty to all types of state-school settings. This will bring approximately 2,700 academy schools and 130 alternative provision placements into scope. We

support the Bill's intention to require all academies via statute to have regard to statutory careers guidance. That is already the case for maintained schools. If the Bill is passed, we will make it easy for schools to understand the changes to the law, and what actions they need to take. These changes to the law will allow Ofsted to focus clearly and consistently on how every school is meeting its statutory duty by providing independent careers guidance to every pupil throughout their secondary education.

9.45 am

We cannot overestimate how important careers guidance is. The Bill will help to make sure that every young person in a state secondary school, whatever their background and wherever they are in the country, can get on in life. The Bill—an essential element of our skills reforms—will help every school in every part of the country to level up. High-quality careers guidance from a young age that is built around employer engagement and informed by data on national and local skills needs will inspire and inform young people in all communities. I thank all Members for the way that they have engaged with the legislation so far. It is wonderful to work on legislation for which there is cross-party support. Again, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Workington for the passion and commitment he has shown to this cause, and I commend the Bill to the Committee.

The Chair: Finally, back to the author: our Roald Dahl, Mark Jenkinson.

Mark Jenkinson: May I put on record my thanks to everyone who has contributed to this short, constructive debate, and to all Members who agreed to serve on this Committee? I thank all those who contributed more widely to the small but incredibly important changes in the Bill, and ask that everyone continues their cross-party support until we get the Bill over the line.

I thank my local enterprise partnership, careers hub and education leaders for their input as the Bill took shape. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris) and the Minister for their support throughout, and Opposition Members, particularly the hon. Member for Hove. May I also thank you, Mr Davies, the officials from the Department, the *Hansard* writers, and the Clerk, Adam Mellows-Facer, who has been incredibly supportive throughout the process? I look forward to Third Reading, hopefully on 14 January.

The Chair: Well done.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 1 accordingly ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 2 and 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill to be reported, without amendment.

9.48 am

Committee rose.

