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GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

TECHNICAL AND FURTHER EDUCATION BILL

Fourth Sitting

Thursday 24 November 2016

(Afternoon)

CONTENTS

SCHEDULE 1 under consideration when the Committee adjourned till
Tuesday 29 November at twenty-five minutes past Nine o'clock.
Written evidence reported to the House.

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,

not later than

Monday 28 November 2016

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chairs: MR ADRIAN BAILEY, † NADINE DORRIES

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| † Argar, Edward (<i>Charnwood</i>) (Con) | † Marsden, Gordon (<i>Blackpool South</i>) (Lab) |
| † Brabin, Tracy (<i>Batley and Spen</i>) (Lab) | † Rutley, David (<i>Macclesfield</i>) (Con) |
| † Donelan, Michelle (<i>Chippenham</i>) (Con) | † Shah, Naz (<i>Bradford West</i>) (Lab) |
| † Evennett, David (<i>Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury</i>) | † Smith, Henry (<i>Crawley</i>) (Con) |
| † Halfon, Robert (<i>Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills</i>) | † Tomlinson, Justin (<i>North Swindon</i>) (Con) |
| † Hopkins, Kelvin (<i>Luton North</i>) (Lab) | Turner, Karl (<i>Kingston upon Hull East</i>) (Lab) |
| † Jayawardena, Mr Ranil (<i>North East Hampshire</i>) (Con) | † Vara, Mr Shailesh (<i>North West Cambridgeshire</i>) (Con) |
| † Kane, Mike (<i>Wythenshawe and Sale East</i>) (Lab) | Kenneth Fox, Marek Kubala, <i>Committee Clerks</i> |
| † Mak, Mr Alan (<i>Havant</i>) (Con) | † attended the Committee |

Public Bill Committee

Thursday 24 November 2016

(Afternoon)

[NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Technical and Further Education Bill

Schedule 1

THE INSTITUTE FOR APPRENTICESHIPS AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

2 pm

Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab): I beg to move amendment 9, in schedule 1, page 21, line 13, at end insert—

“(4) The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education in performing its functions must have regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity in connection with access to and participation in Further and Technical Education.”

This amendment would ensure that the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education must have due regard for widening access and participation.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment 10, in schedule 1, page 21, line 13, at end insert—

“(5) An apprenticeship target shall specify what proportion of new apprenticeships starts is to be applied to apprenticeships for people—

- (a) who have been looked after children; and
- (b) with disabilities.”

This amendment would ensure the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education sets targets to increase the number of apprenticeship starts made by care leavers and people with disabilities.

Gordon Marsden: It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Ms Dorries, and to begin discussing the series of amendments that we have so far tabled to the Bill. As I might have said this morning, having just come off the Committee that considered the Higher Education and Research Bill, I am struck by the fact that the same sorts of issue that we raised in relation to that Bill for students at higher education level are now appropriate to be raised for students at this level—apprenticeships and further and technical education.

Of course the difference, which we might want to contemplate, is that over recent years in higher education not only have issues relating to access and participation been high on the agenda, but, to their credit, both Governments—pre-2010 and subsequently—have taken some steps in that direction. Notably we had the creation under the Labour Government of the Office for Fair Access, but we never had a similar organisation for further education students and apprentices, so it seems appropriate to discuss this amendment today.

I am not necessarily expecting the immediate creation of an FE or technical education equivalent of OFFA, but I am certainly suggesting to the Government that at a time when we are trying to expand the number of apprenticeships and get parity of esteem for technical education, we should perhaps consider what priority that will have in the new Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. Again, the words “Capacity, capacity, capacity” go around in my brain, but I will suspend that for this afternoon and focus simply on the principle and why the principle is very important.

By way of comparison, let me take us back to what the Higher Education and Research Bill said in establishing the office for students—an organisation that is not that dissimilar to the institute, although of course it is in terms of size and reach. Clause 2, entitled “General duties”, states:

“In performing its functions, the OfS must have regard to...the need to promote equality of opportunity in connection with access to and participation in higher education provided by English higher education providers”.

That duty to “have regard to” will of course cut across, in some areas, to technical education, because there will be higher skills in that area and there will be providers—FE colleges, for example—that are providing HE. However, when it comes to the broader picture—concentrating as a matter of public policy on what the Government might need to do to promote equality of opportunity and access to and participation in further and technical education—we have a significant way to go.

Shane Chowen, head of policy and public affairs at the Learning and Work Institute, gave evidence to us on Tuesday. He said that people with disabilities and learning difficulties and people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds have been famously under-represented in apprenticeships for a number of years, so why not use the introduction of this new institute to make a commitment in the Bill to improving access to apprenticeships for traditionally under-represented groups?

FE colleges and providers have already expressed concern to me about the Government’s focus when it comes to the 2 million apprenticeship target, but mandating the institute to widen access and participation would be beneficial for all parties. On top of that, the Government have set out their own laudable agenda to halve the disability employment gap. Only five in 10 disabled people have a job, compared with eight in 10 non-disabled people. Surely the Government should be using apprenticeships as a critical step towards eradicating that gap.

How, in practical terms, do we go about improving access and participation? They are fine words, but how do we actually put some sharp edges on them? One thing that I and many others would like the new institute to do is look at what might be done for groups who have traditionally been under-represented in pre-apprenticeship support and training. The Minister has already spoken about that issue, particularly with regard to traineeships. Again, I will not rehearse the history of traineeships, except to say that they were—I strongly believe that they still are—a good idea.

If we want not only to meet the targets that the Government have set for quality apprenticeships, but to ensure that those quality apprenticeships are evenly and fairly distributed among all groups, we must recognise that some groups will find it much more difficult to get to the frontline of competing for them without some prior training, support, guidance and so on. In my understanding, that was the original role of traineeships. I will not go into the swerves and views of different Ministers and different comments in the period of time since. For a variety of reasons—some to do with the restrictions that the Government placed on promoting anything other than apprenticeships at that time—traineeships did not really get the head start that, in my view, they deserved.

I welcome the Minister's comments about traineeships, particularly about seeing them as an introductory route into apprenticeships. In that respect, traineeships would be particularly appropriate for the groups of people we might be thinking of when it comes to promoting equality of opportunity for access and participation. Traineeships are also appropriate for retraining because, after all, the institute has now been broadened out to take in technical education, not just apprenticeships. Traineeships could be used for retraining and non-apprenticeship skill access for the groups we are looking at.

One helpful option that the Government should utilise in the Bill—I am genuinely quite surprised that they have not, but maybe the commendable speed with which the Maynard review was completed has been a factor—would be to enshrine the Maynard review in law. I think that was mentioned on Second Reading, but I am not sure that I entirely followed where we were up to with the legal procedure. That would send an important signal. Therefore, although I do not want to create otiose legislation, I suggest to the Minister that there might be a mechanism to ensure that that admirable work is enshrined in law. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for North Swindon for his participation in that process, and indeed to the previous Skills Minister, both of whom worked very hard indeed to ensure that the review got its nod before the referendum—and, my goodness, considering what happened, it is just as well that they did. That would be a good thing to do.

We welcomed the opportunity to submit evidence to the taskforce that the Minister commissioned, and we welcome the Government's intention to explore access to apprenticeships for those with learning disabilities and other, not always visible, impairments and to find recommendations for resolving that access. Will the Minister update the Committee on where the Government are on implementing the review's recommendations? It is still early days, but that would be useful.

Schedule 1 is essentially about making sure that access and participation strategies are high up the list of things for the new institute to do, and of course that cannot be divorced from careers advice. I will not stray outwith the amendment, except to say that careers advice, and what has or has not been done for it in the past four or five years, has occupied some lively debates and been a cause of concern both across the sector and across the House. Everyone who has commented on careers advice, particularly careers advice in the school setting, has said that without adequate access to information, advice and guidance that encourages young people to take up apprenticeships, traineeships or, indeed, technical education, we will be hampered in reaching the access and participation strategies that we need.

The Minister has previously commented on the work of the Careers & Enterprise Company, which I have met. The Careers & Enterprise Company has positive goals, although I still have concerns about capacity. If we want to know where people who have become apprentices have found difficulties in access and participation, we need to hear their voice and their commentary.

The excellent 2016 survey by the Industry Apprentice Council, supported by EAL and Semta, produced statistics that strongly underline the importance of careers advice in this area. The Education Secretary has observed that there is no reason to doubt Ofsted's finding that 80% of careers information, advice and guidance is below the

necessary standard, even though schools have a statutory duty to provide impartial and detailed careers IAG. I am afraid that that was reflected in this year's survey. The proportion of respondents from members of the Industry Apprentice Council who said that their information about apprenticeships had been poor or very poor remained high—it was 37% in 2014, 40% in 2015 and 35% in 2016. There was some improvement, but there is a considerable way still to go.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spennings) (Lab): To add to my hon. Friend's statistics, in the evidence sessions we heard that the answer to careers advice was that it should happen in school at key stage 4. Statistically, only one in three teachers think that their school is fulfilling its statutory duty to provide decent careers advice, and 68% of students think that 16 is too early to make career choices. Working-class kids take longer to develop academically, and 42% of students said that they did not receive enough information, advice and guidance before A-levels. I add that to the plea for careers advice to be included in the Bill.

2.15 pm

Gordon Marsden: My hon. Friend has been in the House for only a relatively short period of time, but she is making some absolutely excellent and spot-on points. In this context, we are concerned with the specific ways in which the measure will affect people's ability to take up apprenticeships, and that is what I will focus on.

This is about more than information in schools; it is also about who can come into schools to influence people's career choices. I, for one, have praised a number of companies for what they have done to offer apprenticeships to adults. In terms of young people, British Gas, for example, has for a number of years had a crack team of female ex-apprentices who go into schools and colleges to break down gender stereotypes. Without suggesting that the institute should be prescriptive in that respect, I think that it could and should encourage the breakdown of gender stereotypes in terms of applications for apprenticeships.

It works the other way around, as well. There is a young man in my constituency, a nurse, who has been very active in the campaign for NHS bursaries. We need more men in the nursing professions and the caring professions, and many of those people can come through apprenticeships. Again, there is a role for the institute. Incidentally, another issue is the commitment to continuous professional development, in which the new institute, particularly the technical education side, will play a role. We must be careful there as well to extend continuous professional development outwith the usual groups of people from a professional background.

Those are some of the issues of which we must take cognizance when considering the amendment. Unfortunately, the representative from the National Society of Apprentices was unable to give evidence on Tuesday due to a family illness, but the National Union of Students—it is important to add that the NUS figures are not dissimilar to those from the Industry Apprentice Council—has stated:

“We want the...government to invest in a truly national careers system that delivers impartial careers information, advice and guidance”,

and that in surveys, 21% of apprentices said that they had never received information about apprenticeships.

[Gordon Marsden]

The NUS draws attention to a point that will not have escaped the Minister's attention—I know that he was questioned closely on it by the Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy. The NUS found that the current approach to careers advice is exacerbating skills shortages. Those are some of the arguments that we believe it is important to take on board when considering the amendment.

I had a similar discussion in Committee with the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation. We did not always agree, but we came to some convergence of our views. It is important when establishing a new organisation to give some direction or guidance in the Bill establishing it, in this case in schedule 1. There should be some emphasis on the signals sent to the outside world about what sort of organisation it is going to be. Will it simply be a bog-standard Government quango or non-departmental public body, or will it be a forceful campaigning institution? We had a debate this morning about how campaigning it could be with a relatively modest workforce, but that makes the issue all the more important. Given the references that the Minister made, perfectly reasonably, to the range of people who will not be members of the institute but will be supportive, it is extremely important to send out the message in the Bill that the institute must have regard to that function.

That is extremely important, because governance in this area is relatively underdeveloped, when compared with governance in higher education, which the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation and I discussed during the Higher Education and Research Bill Committee. It may have been reasonable for him to have told me in that Committee that there was no need for me to worry about putting a measure in the Bill regarding the OFS, because the Government had been doing all these other things for years in that area. I did not agree with him, but he had a point. The point about this measure is that although we are not exactly in the stone age when it comes to access and participation, we are certainly nowhere near as far down the line as in higher education.

Amendment 10 continues that theme, but in more specific fashion. It would require the Government to specify in its apprenticeship targets the proportion of new apprenticeship starts for those who were looked-after children, and for people with disabilities. It would ensure that the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education increased the number of apprenticeship starts by care leavers and people with disabilities, so it is linked to the strategy arguments for access and participation that we put in amendment 9.

It is curious how targets are sometimes set; the Government already have targets to increase the proportion of black and minority ethnic apprentices by 20%. It might make sense for them to do the same for people with disabilities and care leavers, though I do not say what the proportion should be. We also seek clarification from the Minister on the progress on the BME targets, if he has those figures to hand. Those targets were set under the previous Government and were never formally incorporated in legislation. It would be helpful if the Minister could confirm that the Government were still working to meet those targets. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), having fought

the good fight, with others, on apprenticeship funding in disadvantaged areas—the Minister listened to his arguments—has also been pressing on these issues due to the nature of his constituency.

The Government's apprenticeship funding proposals last month recognised that 19 to 24-year-old apprentices who had previously been in care, or who had a local education authority health and care plan, might need extra support. The majority of respondents to the Government survey supported that, with more than twice as many agreeing with the proposal than disagreed: 53% to 26%.

I make a more generic observation that it would be helpful for the Minister to consider: in recent years, in debates on apprenticeships and where they should be focused, a dichotomy has often been proposed between adult apprenticeships for those who are over 24, and apprenticeships for those who are 16 to 18-year-olds, with a greater focus on the latter. I have sometimes felt that we needed to shine more light on 19 to 24-year-olds generally as a target area, because that range often includes people who have had all sorts of problems, sometimes of their own making, and sometimes absolutely not; I am thinking of family circumstances and issues of bereavement, and a number of them have been carers. I know of nearly 1,000 young people in Blackpool who are actively caring for family members.

I have always taken the view that the 19-to-24 range is a crucial cohort from which we should be recruiting apprentices. Even though those young people might have fallen by the wayside before 19 for whatever reason, they often bring with them zeal, experience of hard knocks, and a desire to do even better during the apprenticeship period. That is particularly important. Of course, the Government have recognised the importance of looked-after young people by extending the remit of their care plans up to the age of 25. I pay tribute to the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families for that. It is a good start, but it is important to guarantee that every necessary step is then taken to ensure access and opportunity for care leavers.

Looked-after children achieve less highly at GCSE than their counterparts and often miss out on parts of education. There may be a history of abuse in their background.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): I am interested in my hon. Friend's comments on looked-after children. They may have been held back in education not because of a lack of ability, but because of their disturbed personal circumstances. Given a secure environment, they can in fact progress, probably more rapidly than others, and become very effective employees and good citizens.

Gordon Marsden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He raises a whole subset of questions that we cannot go into this afternoon about the strength of support in schools for young people in those circumstances. That ties in with what I was coming on to say. The Special Educational Consortium, which has submitted evidence to the Committee, along with Barnardo's, has made some important points. There are real challenges, because less than half of disabled people are in employment, compared with 80% of the non-disabled population, and only 5.8% of adults with a learning disability who are known to local authorities are in a job, which

underlines the importance of the Maynard review. On top of that, the proportion of apprentices with learning disabilities has decreased: it was 11% in 2010-11 and is only 8% now. But the good news is that for all apprentices, the success rate of completing their frameworks has risen considerably, and that is true for those with disabilities as well.

The climate for advice on apprenticeships for those with disabilities has declined markedly. Jobcentre Plus's own disability employment service has a ratio of only one adviser providing support for every 600 disabled people, which was a key cause of concern highlighted by a Work and Pensions Committee inquiry in 2014. In answer to a written question in October 2015, Ministers revealed that the number of jobcentres employing at least one full-time equivalent disability employment adviser had fallen from 226 in 2011 to just 90 in 2015. The Minister may be familiar with the comprehensive Little and Holland review that in 2012 made some 20 recommendations in this policy area. We are not here today to solve the problems of the Department for Work and Pensions or jobcentres, but all that underlines the importance of those targets being firmly in the mind of the institute and, indeed, in the minds of the Minister and his colleagues.

2.30 pm

We did not put such a category in the amendment because it was difficult to capture in accurate terminology. There is one category we should think hard about: we have talked about girls and apprenticeships, but there is an issue with white working-class boys. I am conscious of the situation in my constituency where the ethnic make-up is 97% to 98% white; other members of the Committee will have similar circumstances. This has been looked at quite hard recently in the context of higher education, including in a recent report from the Higher Education Policy Institute, but it has been looked at less in the context of apprenticeships, possibly because people think white working-class boys would go in for apprenticeships. Actually, many of the structures of 20th century Britain that supported working-class communities, whether trade unions or other structures, to get boys of that calibre to go into apprenticeships have disappeared.

My father was apprenticed at the age of 14 to a company called Crossley Brothers. It was very competitive and he was glad to get it but it was a natural process. He was told by my grandfather that now he had gone to Crossley Brothers he had a job for life. Well, he did not, as it happened, because they made steam engines and we all know what happened to steam engines in the 1960s. The point I am making is that there were automatic, almost informal routes for white working-class boys to get into apprenticeships and many of those routes have disappeared. Many of the social institutions, including trade union groups, have disappeared. Although we do not include that category on the list in our amendment, I am sure that is an issue the Minister will want to give his fullest attention. We are not looking to be combative with the amendments but we would like to hear some positive ruminations from the Minister on the issues we wish to see established in the Bill.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I just want to add a few comments about disabled people, which will come as no surprise given my former

role. I echo the comments on the importance and, crucially, the opportunities that apprenticeships provide to predominantly younger disabled people. That context is right: 81% of non-disabled people in this country expect to be in work, and for those with a disability that is 48%—up 4% since we came to office and an increase of 590,000 jobs in the past three years. That equates to about 500 to 600 extra disabled people into work a day. For those with a learning disability, though, the figure is about 6%.

All political parties and Governments of all persuasions have tried tweaks but very little changes. I saw on my visits that those with a learning disability need patient, one-to-one support to get them into work, and to me, that was an apprenticeship. That is the whole point of an apprenticeship—to give those tangible, real-life skills. I went on some brilliant visits to places that provided the equivalent of an apprenticeship, such as Foxes Academy hotel near Bridgwater. As many as 80% of their students remained in work at the end of their three-year course. The only limitation was that the third year in-work training—the equivalent of the apprenticeship—did not qualify for apprenticeship funding and it was too expensive to have an unlimited cap on those numbers. Of that 80% who stay in work, 48.8% were paid. Not all of them were paid or in full-time work but, having spoken to their parents, I know that that made a real difference to each and every one of them.

That is why I triggered the review carried out by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard). I was delighted to see the outcomes. The then Minister for Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), and I signed it off three days before the reshuffle because we had a feeling that it was important to do that quickly in case something changed. I would welcome an update from the Minister on how he will ensure that the institute prioritises spreading that information. My understanding is that someone who has a learning disability will be exempt from the requirement for a C grade in Maths and English GCSE, which is a hurdle too far for many of these young adults.

During consideration of a previous amendment there was some talk about a target. I understand targets; I did A-level maths, so I get quite geeky with numbers—that is how I remember all these stats. However, I gently caution Members that we need to learn the lessons of HE figures. At each general election, each political party used to suddenly announce that we would have a slightly higher proportion of people going to university. It was like an arms race with students. The reality is that some people who have gone to university to meet those targets would have been better served doing something like an apprenticeship. The wheel has gone full circle, and here we are now.

We do not want to shoehorn some people artificially into doing what we think is the right thing when it is not right for them. A lesson I learned as Minister for Disabled People is that each and every person is an individual with their own unique challenges and opportunities. As tempting as it can be to have targets, because they focus minds, I would be more assured if the Minister committed to meet institute representatives twice a year with this matter the first item on the agenda, and if we as individual MPs met these organisations and sought to hold them to account.

[Justin Tomlinson]

The hon. Member for Blackpool South made a fair point about disability advisers, but the DWP did listen and make changes. Disability advisers are now returning to every single jobcentre—there are roughly 500 more—so we are basically back to where we were at the very beginning. We can call that a score draw. Even when the Department reduced the number of disability advisers, it was not to have less support for people with disabilities; the idea was that all staff would be trained to be fully disability-aware, but it has been recognised that having somebody with specialist skills in every jobcentre is probably better, so things have gone right back to how they were.

Kelvin Hopkins: It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair again this afternoon, Ms Dorries. I strongly support the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South and the case he made for them. I am also sympathetic to what the hon. Member for North Swindon said.

I have some knowledge of these issues. In general, it is so important for all citizens to have a sense of worth, and having some form of education or having a job gives us that. Without that sense of worth, we can become not only alienated and miserable, but difficult people in society. All sorts of problems arise when people do not have a proper role in society. Even if one has disabilities, to be able to have a real role among one's fellow human beings is so important.

I particularly wish to discuss adults with moderate learning difficulties. Some 15 years ago or so, a friend invited me to speak to a class of young adults with moderate learning difficulties at my local college. I spoke fairly briefly about politics and about what I did and then they asked questions. I have to say that I could not answer the first two questions, which were very perceptive and intelligent. One was about benefits—they were very conscious about benefits and the rules governing them. I was not up to speed on that, so I was in difficulty there. The young man's second question was why Tony Blair had abandoned socialism. I have to say that on both counts I was completely floored. I had to say that I could not speak for the Prime Minister, but that I had not abandoned socialism.

That experience showed me that these young adults were not daft. They had things to say and they had an understanding of the world. With the right courses and, if possible, the right apprenticeships, they could find some employment at some point. For example, recently, in one of our supermarkets, the young man who collects the trolleys and pushes them to the collection points for customers has moderate learning difficulties, but he has a job; he is a character; everyone knows him and he is happy. We ought to organise the world so that such things can happen.

Amendments such as the one tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South ought to be on the face of every Bill relating to education, training and employment, so that it becomes deeply embedded in our culture. Some employers and teachers, although they would not necessarily discriminate wittingly, might do so unwittingly without such things in their mind. They need to be aware that they must be fair and provide equal opportunities. Some employers are notorious for discriminating against women. That is changing,

but we still have some way to go to ensure that women have equal shares with men. We do not have equal pay yet.

We have also talked about minority ethnic communities. Again, it is particularly those who are unemployed and live in poorer areas who sometimes get into difficulty or trouble. If they had jobs, it might be different. There was a time in my own town when anybody could literally knock on the door at Vauxhall and get a job. It might not be a very skilled job, but they could get one.

On the difficulties on the streets, an interesting statistic featured in *The Guardian* some years ago: when unemployment rose to 3 million in the early 1980s, street disorder and street crime took off like a rocket. It is not surprising. All those young men whose energy would have been absorbed putting wheels on cars or doing whatever they would have been doing were on the streets, with nothing better to do than cause trouble. I have always been a passionate believer in organising society to ensure full employment. Some years ago, I was chair of a Back-Bench group with outside members called the Full Employment Forum, started by the renowned Bryan Gould, one of the leading Labour politicians, who is still a friend.

On looked-after children, I said in an intervention that it is important for them to be given extra advantage, because they have had disadvantages in early life. Perhaps their education has been disrupted by their being absent from school, moving house or being generally disturbed and unhappy in education, but they might have abilities way beyond the level of education that they received, so it is important that they are given an extra boost through an apprenticeship or a college education. Providing them with security, hope for the future and a stable and predictable environment in life is important to giving them a sense of optimism and increase their self-worth.

I think these two amendments should, in one form or another, be made. I hope that at some point—maybe today, or maybe not—such amendments can be incorporated into the Bill in its final form. I am happy to support them, and I congratulate my hon. Friend on moving them.

The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Robert Halfon): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I will respond to some of the issues raised. The hon. Member for Batley and Spen talked about careers guidance in schools, and I agree with her. The first ever speech that I made in the House of Commons was about the problem of careers guidance in schools not encouraging people to do technical education or apprenticeships. We must consider the issue holistically, from primary school all the way through. Although it is not part of the Bill, I am considering from the start how we deal with the issue.

That said, we are investing £90 million in careers. The Careers & Enterprise Company has 1,190 enterprise advisers and a £5 million careers and enterprise fund. I have seen myself how they go into schools to boost provision on technical education and apprenticeships, to encourage work experience and to build links between businesses and schools. There is also a separate £12 million mentoring fund, which I am very keen on.

2.45 pm

In a thoughtful speech, the hon. Member for Blackpool South talked about the white working class. My first introduction to apprenticeships was not meeting an

apprentice but reading “David Copperfield,” which was one of my favourite books at school. The hon. Gentleman made a powerful point about the structures that used to exist and, by changing the culture and transforming the prestige of apprenticeships in education, we are trying to rebuild some of those structures in a modern format.

Six opportunity areas were announced at the Conservative party conference to focus the whole education community, from early years to employment, on areas where social mobility is lowest. That does not address the whole problem, but it shows that we are taking it seriously. Proper representation is in the DNA of the new IFA.

I will address disabilities but, before I do so, the hon. Gentleman asked me to update him on the statistics. Some 52.8% of all apprentice starts in 2015-16 were females, which is impressive. Even more impressively, the median wage received by female apprentices is higher than that for male apprentices. Some 10.5% of those starting an apprenticeship in 2015-16 were from BME backgrounds. In 2015-16, 50,640 of those starting an apprenticeship declared a disability or learning difficulty, which is 9.9% of the total starts and an increase of 12.9% on 2014-15.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon was a brilliant disabilities Minister. I am wary of targets. Disability is a complex issue, and I would like to review the policies for incentivising businesses. We are giving huge amounts of money—an extra £150 a month—to businesses if they have apprentices with disabilities, and we are giving up to £19,000 for adaptations. He talked about traineeships, and we are investing a huge amount of money: £15 million. More than 19% of those traineeships go to people with a learning difficulty or disability. We are offering internships and considering rolling out transition years, which will significantly help those with disabilities. I want to see how those roll out.

I dread to say to the hon. Member for Blackpool South that we are genuinely implementing the Maynard review as soon as possible, but that is not Sir Humphrey’s “as soon as possible”. I have huge respect for the brilliant officials in my Department, and we are implementing it but, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon said, the process started just before the reshuffle. We are doing every single part of it—lock, stock and barrel—and I am sure that we will report. The hon. Member for Blackpool South will be interested to hear how it is rolling out when it happens, and we completely agree with it.

We are doing a lot on disability. The Bill’s impact assessment, in relation to the institute, shows that those with a special educational need or disability are often high users of technical education and further education. Some 23% of those whom we expect to access technical routes will have special educational needs, compared with 7% of those taking level 3 and 20% of those in the total cohort. This Bill is beneficial because it will improve technical education.

The hon. Gentleman made an important point about the adult budget. He said that there is often huge focus on 16 to 19-year-olds, but he asked what is being done for 19 to 24-year-olds. The whole idea of the reforms, including the investment in apprenticeships, the advanced learner loans—I know he wants a further comment on that, and I am happy to do it—the youth obligation and the apprenticeship funding, will mean that, by 2020,

the adult education budget will have increased by 30% in real terms. That is a significant and important amount.

On representation, I will reflect on what the hon. Gentleman said, but it is important that the Secretary of State has a power to direct the institute, especially in terms of technical education. It is the duty of the institute to represent everybody, as the legislation sets out. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will feel reassured enough to withdraw the amendments, noting that I will reflect on what he said.

Gordon Marsden: I thank the Minister for that positive and thoughtful set of responses. I agree with him on the issue of disabilities. I have had disability in my own family; how disability is defined and classified is not necessarily whether someone is in a wheelchair. We do not need to go into all of that—we all know that. If the Minister is saying that one should not have a target for people with, in inverted commas, “disability”, I would agree with him.

There is one point that he has not replied to, but he does not need to come back to me on it now; he could perhaps write to me. The reason for tabling the amendment was that I understood that the Government already had a set target in relation to black, Asian and minority ethnic people. If that is the case, it is important that we at least consider whether that should be balanced against other targets. Perhaps we need to consider whether we should have targets in the first place, but if that target exists, and the institute comes in without other targets for other people, people will inevitably draw certain conclusions. They may be completely erroneous conclusions, but people may draw them.

Having said that, I am encouraged by what the Minister said. I too will reflect on what we have said. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Gordon Marsden: I beg to move amendment 11, in schedule 1, page 22, line 14, at end insert

“following consultation with institutions, students and employers, and their representatives”.

This amendment would ensure that the Government must consult with institutions, students and employers, and their representatives before making changes to the “occupational categories” or “routes”.

The amendment would ensure that the Government consult with institutions, students, employers and their representatives before making changes to the occupational categories or routes. You were not with us this morning, Ms Dorries, but we had quite a detailed discussion around occupational categories and routes, so I will try not to repeat the arguments that we had—people can read them in *Hansard*.

If there are concerns and controversies about the different routes—for instance, about whether the service sector is adequately represented in the existing routes—that gives even more force to the argument that there should be as broad a consultative and collaborative process as possible. It should not hold up the processes; I am conscious that consultations can go on and on endlessly.

As it stands, the Bill enables the Secretary of State to propose categories for those routes without any further input. It simply requires the Secretary of State to notify the IFA of any changes. I say to the Minister what I said to his counterpart on the Higher Education and Research Bill: although I genuinely have every confidence in his

[*Gordon Marsden*]

wish to consult, and, for that matter, in the Secretary of State's wish to consult, we are setting down legislation that will last for a significant number of years, so we have to be careful that we do not hook everything on to the whim of a Secretary of State. After all—we made this argument about the Higher Education and Research Bill—if a new institution is to succeed, it has to have the active and enthusiastic participation of as many of the people who are affected by it as possible. A consultation with institutions, students, employers and their representatives is a necessary part of the process.

A further point is that there is a balance to be struck—the Minister will be well aware of this, because it is a continuing and intensifying debate—between the bespoke skills that are needed for immediate jobs and the enabling skills for more generic future employment. There will always be a tension between the needs of an employer and the needs of an employee—they might be a student or an apprentice—in whichever skills area. After all, in the 21st century we will not all have, as my father was promised before the second world war, a job for life.

We will probably see young people who—I am sure we have all used this phrase, one way or another—do five careers during their lifetime, two of which have not yet been thought of. It is therefore even more important that we have that broad process of ongoing consultation about how generic, as opposed to bespoke, skills should be, so that not only do we get the skills that we need for the future, but young people and adults wanting to return to work or start a new career get the skills that they need.

Robert Halfon: I welcome the opportunity to debate the amendment, and understand why Opposition Members support it. It is important to understand the purpose of occupational categories, which we refer to as routes in the technical education reforms we are putting in place, and how they relate to the overall system we are developing. The routes are the main ways that learners will find their way around the new system. They provide clear and accurate signposts to the new qualifications.

Lord Sainsbury's report proposed a system that has "employer-designed standards...at its heart", which is what we have created. He urged that there be a common framework of standards, covering both apprenticeships and college-based provision. Those standards are the basis of the new technical education system we have created. In essence, the standards are the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to perform the occupation.

Presentationally, it does not help to have hundreds of different standards, completely distinct from one another. It is better to group them together to make it easier for people to understand how to navigate through the system. The routes give us a mechanism to do that. I shall not go through it again, but on Second Reading I set out

how, if someone went down the engineering route, that would be reflected if they then chose a different branch of engineering.

Earlier, we discussed best practice overseas—I think the hon. Member for Luton North mentioned it—and our system does reflect international best practice. It was reviewed with employers, academics and professional bodies as the Sainsbury panel developed its proposals. The routes are each based on evidence-based occupational maps, on which we have to consult widely. The institute will take on board a wide range of views when developing the occupational mapping, which will then feed into the shape of the routes. It will have to help to ensure that the routes are aligned with the needs of the economy and the industrial strategy, so that young people and adults can make the choices they need to make when they move into skilled technical occupations.

Route panels—panels of professionals—and employers have been consulted to ensure that the institute gets it right, so it is not necessary to consult on the routes separately. Nevertheless, there will of course be an ongoing need to keep the route structure under review—it is flexible—and to continue to listen to the feedback from stakeholders. In view of that, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will feel reassured enough to withdraw the amendment.

Gordon Marsden: I thank the Minister for that explanation, which is helpful. I hear what he says, but I am still not entirely reassured. I understand the process; indeed, I understand the process laid out by Lord Sainsbury in the skills plan. The point I was trying to make, and to which I referred this morning when I discussed the responses from the Association of Employment and Learning Providers and various others, is that there remains considerable unease—I will put it no more strongly than that—about whether the routes cover a large enough area of the skills or sectors we will need for the future. That is separate from the issue I raised about enabling skills.

I am not rubbishing the existing routes at all, but the matter needs to be thought about and watched very carefully. I can understand what the Minister is saying about not having everything chopped into silos, but I would not want him to think that certain areas, particularly the service sector, can be ignored just because he has been told that this is the route to follow. Nevertheless, it was a probing amendment. I was interested in what the Minister had to say, and we can always return to the matter on Report if we are not happy. On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Ordered, That further consideration be now adjourned.—(*David Evennett.*)

3 pm

Adjourned till Tuesday 29 November at twenty-five minutes past Nine o'clock.

Written evidence reported to the House

TFEB 04 Centre for Vocational Education Research,
London School of Economics

TFEB 05 City & Guilds

TFEB 06 Impetus—The Private Equity Foundation

