

Insight Public Affairs
Boys' Reading Commission
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Commission Members

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Baroness Prashar (Crossbench Peer)

Andrew Percy MP (Conservative MP for Brigg and Goole)

Robert Halfon MP (Conservative MP for Harlow)

Craig Whittaker MP (Conservative MP for Calder Valley)

Baroness Perry (Conservative Peer)

Panel One

Chair

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much indeed for joining us here today at the first evidence session of the Commission on Boys' Reading, which is a joint piece of work that has been set up by the All-Party Parliamentary Literacy Group, which I chair, and the National Literacy Trust (NLT). What we have this afternoon is three sessions of evidence, each of about 40 minutes in length. Before I ask the first set of witnesses to introduce themselves and to make short opening statements, I thought it would be helpful if the members of the Commission sitting up here introduce themselves.

Lord Tope

I am Graham Tope from the House of Lords. In another life, I am a councillor in the London Borough of Sutton, where I have responsibility for the library service amongst other things.

Baroness Prashar

I am Usha Prashar; I am in the House of Lords as a crossbencher. I have another responsibility as the former Chairman of the National Literacy Trust and am currently its President, so I wear two hats here.

Robert Halfon MP

My name is Robert Halfon; I am Member of Parliament (MP) for in Essex. Some of you may have seen the film in Pear Tree Mead School as well; we have a huge literacy problem in my constituency.

Craig Whittaker MP

I am Craig Whittaker; I am the MP for the Calder Valley in West Yorkshire, and I am also a member of the Education Select Committee.

Chair

Finally, my name is Gavin Barwell and I am the MP for Croydon Central. I am also the father of three very young boys, and am particularly passionate about getting boys reading. For the first evidence session that we have, perhaps I could ask each of the four witnesses in turn to introduce themselves? I believe each of you is going to make a short statement.

Sue Jones OBE, Senior Project Manager, The Reading Agency

I am Sue Jones; I am Programme Manager for the Reading Agency, which you probably know is a charity whose mission is to inspire more people to read more. We work primarily in partnership with public libraries.

Teresa Cremin, Professor of Education (Literacy), The Open University; Past President of the United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA)

I am Teresa Cremin; I work at the Open University. I am involved in the Poetry Archive and Booktrust, as a member of their boards, and also the United Kingdom Literacy Association.

Andrea Quincey, Senior Strategic Publisher, Primary Education Division, Oxford University Press

I am Andrea Quincey; I am a Senior Strategic Publisher for Oxford University Press, working in the Primary Education Division, so developing literacy resources. I have had a specific remit of looking at boys' reading and boys' writing, and how we might address that as publishers.

Michael Rosen, Writer and Broadcaster

I am Michael Rosen; I am an ex-boy and a parent of several boys and girls. I am a former Children's Laureate, and a writer and broadcaster.

Chair

Okay, could I ask each of you if you would like to make a short opening statement, and then we will ask some questions?

Sue Jones

First of all, I would just like to say that I am a librarian. I am very proud of that. Before I joined the Reading Agency, my whole career was spent working in public libraries, a school library and the school-library service. What I would like to say first of all is do not overlook the importance of the public library and school libraries in this work. Public libraries particularly have a really good track record for out-of-school activities that attract high numbers of boys. As you will be aware, public libraries are statutory; school libraries and school-library services are not. I think that plays a big part in the educational field in boys' lack of attainment and achievement in reading, because they do not have the guidance always. Obviously there are librarians in schools, but for too many schools it is too easy to overlook that. I think I would make a plea for the post-school librarian to be statutory in primary and secondary schools.

What I am going to talk about in the time I have is the biggest programme we run, in co-operation with public libraries, the Summer Reading Challenge. It is absolutely huge, and Michael is our patron. It has been running very successfully in libraries for 13 years and it has a very strong track record of encouraging boys to read. Last year, 780,000 children took part in the Challenge. They are challenged over the summer holiday to read a minimum of six books. Of those children, 44% were boys. The number of boys is going up incrementally every year. The number of participants overall goes up, but the number of boys is also going up.

I think there are a number of reasons why we are successful in libraries in attracting boys to the Challenge. One, I think there is a very strong narrative built around the Challenge; there is a very strong theme. This year, we are working with the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (LOCOG). It is called Story Lab and it reflects stories around the world as part of the Cultural Olympiad. It is built around a Story Lab, which looks like a Tardis. Professor Cortex, who is the brain in it, is worried that stories are leaking from the world, so the children are challenged to help him bring stories from all around the world back into this Tardis-like machine so they can go around the world. We have built a narrative for children supporting him. The real children who take part in the Challenge identify with them. They can follow their adventures on the website; they can join in the games.

I think the key part of the Challenge, though, is when the children taking part – who are aged four to 11 – have read their books, they go back to the library and they talk to somebody, either a member of staff or a volunteer, about what they have read. I think it is that engagement, that interest that people show in their reading, in talking to them about what they have read, in opening their eyes to other things that they might read, which is part of the success. Children gain confidence and self-esteem, as well as broadening their awareness and their knowledge of reading.

The Challenge is supported by volunteers. Last year, we had 4,000 young volunteers aged between 12 and 25 supporting libraries. Many of those young volunteers were boys and young men, and I think that role model is really important. We have a lot of evidence from libraries saying that the number of boys participating, and the number of boys who completed and actually managed to read the six books, went up. They attribute that very directly to the interest and the support of these young men that they wanted to emulate. Many of them were going back into the library on a particular day because their volunteer buddy was there and they wanted to talk to them.

Chair

Okay, thank you very much. Teresa, we will take a short statement from each member of the panel. Jim, do you just want to introduce yourself first?

Lord Knight

I am Jim Knight, Lord Knight at the moment.

Teresa Cremin

I am only a professor. I have been a teacher and a teacher educator, and do research into teaching reading. That is what I am drawing on in making this statement.

You have asked us for concerns and priorities. One of the concerns and priorities I have is that in recent years, it may be – and I would argue that it has been – that teachers and teacher educators have been expected and positioned to develop children's reading skills, at the expense of developing readers. Readers are individuals who develop that lifelong capacity, desire and motivation to read and to find out more through their reading and to take pleasure in their reading, whereas the focus through the pedagogy and through the wider assessment structure has been on focusing on the skills, on the instructional process of reading. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data tells us very clearly that the will to read influences the skill to read. We have been focusing as a nation, I think, on the skill at the considerable expense of developing the desire, motivation and positive attitude Sue was referring to, which surface in the Summer Reading Challenge.

My second point is around teachers' knowledge of children's literature. The UKLA and the Open University undertook a survey some years back now, in 2009, of 1,200 teachers – not primary literacy consultants – from 11 different local authorities in the country. The results were pretty sobering; they raised cause for concern that teachers' knowledge of children's literature was poor. For example, 24% of the sample could not or did not in that survey name a single picture-fiction creator. 18% could not or did not name a single poet. Michael did get lots of mentions, but that is nearly 20% of the 1,200 teachers from 11 different local authorities right across England. That question on poetry was not the last one; they answered all the other ones following that, but were asked for six significant poets. They did much better in the section on children's fiction, in which 64% of those who responded were able to identify six significant children's authors in terms of novels and fiction.

However, when you look at the nature of the folk they named, we are really dealing with Children's Laureates and the canon of the good and the great significant children's authors who had been named in the 95 curriculum. For example, many of the authors that boys might choose to read – and there is evidence that they do – enjoy fantasy or graphic novels. We are dealing with one reference – one, a single reference – to the work of Philip Reeve, who is a significant children's writer for boys, out of the whole 1,200. One teacher named him, which is very sobering. That may be to do with being women, as a large proportion of the survey were and a large proportion of the primary are. However, it also relates to the point Sue was making about teachers' knowledge and where they gain more knowledge. A lot of these teachers were saying they rely upon their

childhood favourites. They are leaning on what they knew and loved, which is Dahl and many others, but Dahl significantly.

There is a problem there, because in primary schools teachers do not have a full-time librarian. I am involved at the moment in an evaluation and research project on the Carnegie Shadowing award, which is a book award given every year by librarians for significant children's writers. I was visiting last week a school where the secondary-school librarian has such a significant knowledge he can make a difference to the English department. However, an English primary teacher does not have that knowledge. If she does not have a librarian to support her, what does she do? Go to Waterstones? Turn to a publisher perhaps? We are dealing with a problem there, I think, on our hands. Teachers are not able on that basis, therefore, to make one-to-one recommendations to foster readers. They rely upon literature to develop reading, and they miss a significant trick in the process.

My third point, on which I will be quick, relates to teachers' pedagogy. It is all very well to have a wide knowledge of children's literature, but if you cannot exercise it in the context of a classroom it is a waste of time anyway. In our research, which we followed up after the survey because that represented concern, we worked with five local authorities – Birmingham, Barking and Dagenham, Medway, Suffolk, and Kent – to explore how to develop a reading-for-pleasure pedagogy in the class, a pedagogy that focuses on developing and fostering readers and communities of readers within and beyond the classroom. The teachers focused on children who can but do not choose to read, and I am using Gemma Moss's terminology there.

I think that is our big problem. I do not think it is about boys who are massively unable to or are underachieving or cannot read. Personally, I think it is about a significant number of children who can read but who do not choose to, because for whatever complex reasons it does not motivate them sufficiently; it has not worked for them. Margaret Meek used to say we have to find the book that works for the right child, as it were, and unlock the door for what is significant for them.

In our research project, which took over a year, we looked at teachers who exercise that ability to be reading teachers, who are teachers who read themselves and readers who teach, and who explore the interplay between making connections between my habits, practices and strategies that I use as a reader. For example, I might flick over in bed and flick back to find out what I read before because I have lost it, because I cannot remember it, because it was last night. Do we teach children that reading back to read forwards may be a strategy that is useful in order to read on, or do they just read on and then not know where they are going and as a consequence are not able to take that journey?

Key features of their pedagogy for the reading teachers were – none of them are surprising – elements like: reading aloud; having a reading environment; significant amounts of book talk, as Sue referred to; insider text talk where they are talking around books and within books; high levels of book recommendations peer to peer, as well as teacher to peer and indeed child to teacher – 'Read this, Miss. It is really good and let me know what you think of it', so you have that reciprocity; and quality reading time, where there is time both to read and then to talk about what we have read.

My sense is that if we need to get a better profile on what the aim of the journey is: is it a Level 5 or is it life? If it is a lifelong reader we want, we have to say, 'Is it only the skill we

need or is it the will and the skill?' If we need both, we need knowledge and pedagogic practice that can substantiate that in the classroom more effectively.

Chair

Thank you. Andrea?

Andrea Quincey

My role is in educational publishing, and researching and developing resources to try to touch on the engagement and motivation of boys. Just to pick up on Teresa's last point, all the work I have done over six or seven years working with actual boys – going into actual classrooms and sitting these kids down – what the research says and drawing on it is all very well, when asking what matters to them, the thing that comes across most strongly to me is that boys want to know why. We talk about creating readers and we talk about improving literacy; boys want to know, 'Why do we do that?' Reading is not an end in itself; it is a skill for life.

I think we put a lot of focus on teaching them the mechanics. We are moving towards the motivation and engagement of reading for pleasure, and giving them the will as well as the skill. However, above all I think we need to try somehow to get across through our schools and through parents: why bother? A lot of what you see and a lot of what teachers will feed back to me is that the girls do what they are told because they are keen to please. This is at the primary level, by the way. Girls like to please; that is the way they are generally in school. Boys want to know what is in it for them, because they are actually quite smart creatures and they are not going to do anything unless they can see a purpose in it for them personally. Therefore, I think there is a lot we need to do to produce resources that engage, motivate and really tap into the things that matter to those children.

Some of the work I have been doing is drawing on the power of character, because the things the boys read tend to have a very strong character focus. The things they experience outside school – multimedia, games, computers, we have been working with 3D illustration, 3D imagery – need a strong character sense so that the children come to their books and it is not a new experience every time; it is something that is familiar and it is something that builds play and talk around the reading experience. Reading in isolation is not enough; reading is just one part of how we build ourselves as people and how we build ourselves as communicators. That is what we want ultimately: children that can communicate and articulate themselves in the wider world. You can make children understand the part that reading plays in that, and by being a good reader you are someone who can access facts, access information, interpret information, analyse it and come up with your own opinions. As a reader of fiction you can develop empathy and understanding with people. It is all those other things that wrap around what reading means, which I think we somehow need to crystallise, capture and get into our pedagogy

The other thing I would say just from the work I have been doing is that we need to challenge some of the stereotypes around what boys like reading. I went into my research project thinking, 'Well, we have to do lots of non-fiction and lots of facts, because that is what boys love, and we have to have books about football.' Books about football are quite honestly the worst kind of book. The reason boys like football is that they want to go and play it; they do not want to sit and read a book about it. Actually,

most boys love a good story. It is adventure, action and fiction that really engage boys. That is why films and computer games appeal to them. In looking at certain publishers, I think we need to challenge some of those stereotypes and not just feed boys a diet of non-fiction and *Guinness Book of Records* kinds of reading. It is great if those are the things that hook them in; if comics hook them in or Guinness World Records hook them in, great, but it has to be part of a journey and you have to lead them to places that are beneficial to them as people.

I think that first of all we have to ensure that they can, and there is lots of work going on to ensure that they can read and do the mechanics. We then have to ensure that they want to, so give them things that will stimulate them and motivate them. Finally, and I think this is crucial for the whole primary curriculum, we have to give them time. Often for some children, school is the only time and space they get to read and to talk about books and literacy. I think having time in the school curriculum to develop reading for pleasure should not just be 20 minutes on a Thursday afternoon; it is a key part of every day.

Chair

Thank you, Andrea. Michael?

Michael Rosen

For a bit of context, you have in front of you in the House of Commons – and I guess in the Ministry – the first time any high governmental body has produced a recommendation that schools should produce a policy on reading for enjoyment. That is the recommendation coming from *Moving English Forward*, the Ofsted report that came out in March. That was never ever in any government report; if you go back to Bullock or any of these reports in the past, that has never happened before. The issue is really whether the Minister is going to take any notice; that seems to me absolutely crucial. If you look over the past 50 years of education, there has never been any necessity for a school to develop a policy on reading for enjoyment. Plenty of schools did and have done, of course, but there has never been any necessity.

When confronted with the great steamroller of something like the National Literacy Strategy, even when schools wanted to they felt that they did not have time. Not only did they not have time, they also had the police turning up at the door in the form of Ofsted or the local authority coming in and saying, 'Sorry, chums, but you do not have time to be sitting reading books because you have to get on with your SATs preparation.' If you think this is a thing of the past, I have a Year 6 daughter who cannot get on with writing her novel and finishing *Ribblestrop* because she has been preparing all year for her SATs. It sounds like dad boasting, but she does not have a problem. There is really no need for her to be spending every night doing comprehension, and yet she is. Why is she doing that and not reading a book and writing her novel? There does not seem to be any purpose on this whatsoever. That is where we are at this very moment.

We are also at a point where what is going on is what I call 'hyperbole creep'. That is to say, we have in place – as Jim Rose and Nick Gibb put it – the alphabetic principle. This is the Year 1 teaching of synthetic phonics. What is not absolutely clear is whether people fully understand – in education or in the Ministry or anywhere – that decoding, as they call it, is only one condition for reading. It is anyway not reading; it is decoding. I watched an argument on television between two people, who will remain nameless for the

moment, who talked about the test coming up in a couple of weeks' time as a reading test. It is not a reading test; it is a 'barking at print' test. That is fine; I am not saying it in a pejorative way. I bark at print when I read Italian; I am not bad at reading Italian out loud, but I only understand one word in five. I can do it, though. That is decoding.

We have to be absolutely clear, no matter whether we think the synthetic-phonetics teaching and the method and all the rest of it is fine, that it is not reading. Reading is something else. Reading is, broadly speaking, reading for meaning. We have to decode; we also have to say we need to put as much money and effort into reading for meaning. How can we do it? Teresa has described brilliantly many of the ways in which we can do it. However, we also have to address not only how we help reading for meaning, but what we are doing that hinders it. Are we, in schools right the way through from nursery to university for that matter, doing all sorts of things which prevent children from reading for meaning?

If we want to know how important it is, I would love to put before the Committee an immensely important piece of research. It is called, rather dully, 'Family Scholarly Culture and Educational Success: Books and Schooling in 27 Nations'. It comes from the University of Nevada in a journal that appears not to be anything to do with reading, *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 28 2010 171-197. 'Children growing up in homes with many books get three years' more schooling than children from bookless homes, independent' – this is the important bit – 'independent of their parents' education, occupation, and class.' There seems to be some power about books hanging around children and children hanging around books, which enables them to access this stuff that we call schooling and the curriculum.

What is the magic? Well, those of us who study this and have studied our children can see the magic working. Sometimes it is as Teresa has partly described. I will just give you one image. This is of my six-year-old boy, sitting on the stairs and then in the loo and then at the table, with piles of comics. He is shuffling the copies of *The Beano* and I am saying to him, 'Why do you do that?' He says, 'Well, this pile here, those are the Roger the Dodger ones, the best Roger the Dodger ones. These ones over here are the best ones I got from Joe and Eddie', his older brothers. 'These are the best ones that have come in new.' What is he doing? He is doing what we want anybody to do throughout education, which is to take texts, compare and contrast them, come up with categories and rationale for it, and do it themselves. He is his own learner; he is making himself, through shuffling copies of *The Beano*. What looks like a trivial activity is in fact an immensely profound activity.

One other quick picture, as it happens of my daughter. We were sitting, reading a Greek myth, Persephone and the pomegranate seeds. We arrive at the word 'pity' and she says, 'What is pity?' Along the way she has been very anxious about Persephone. What is she doing? She moves from the concrete of what has happened to Persephone in the story to the abstract of the word 'pity', back to the concrete, and relates it to her own life. That is the way reading does its magic: through talk, through concrete to abstract and back again, and through comparison from one text to another and what in the jargon is called intertextuality. All we have to do is make that available for every single child. We must not do things that prevent it and hinder it.

Chair

I thank all four of you for those very interesting opening statements. Who would like to go first with a question?

Baroness Prashar

Those are very, very interesting insights. I am particularly struck by the connection you make between skill and reading. I am very encouraged by your project, the Challenge. Do you have the analysis of the socioeconomic background of the boys who are reading? From what Michael was saying, that is not the case in the Nevada research. Have you done any analysis on that?

Sue Jones

No, I think we have not. I think that is quite difficult for libraries to do, and so I do not think we have that detailed breakdown. However, I agree it would be extremely helpful. We know anecdotally a lot of libraries work very hard at supporting children in care, for example. Most library authorities now will send specific invitations to looked-after children, and will go in and talk to them to motivate them to join the library. We know that where they do take part – and we have evidence of that – that is very powerful and they will continue, having joined the library for the Challenge, as library members. We hope they will then become involved in the other things that the library has to offer. However, we do not have that very detailed breakdown on the 780,000 children.

Baroness Prashar

I agree with what you said about inspiring teachers, motivation and so on. None of you mentioned the question of role models. While I accept the writing about sport may not be interesting, there are issues about role models. If they have people like footballers seen to be reading, they might. Is there a role for what parents can do and what role models can do?

Andrea Quincey

I think the most important role models are actually their peers and their friends. It might in the abstract be very interesting to see Wayne Rooney reading a book, but I think what is more real to those children is to see their peers and their friends reading and their parents reading. One of the projects that has been run by one of the experts I have been working with, Gary Wilson who runs something he calls Transformers, involves taking those peer leaders in the school – the boys who are the cool kids, the peer leaders – who may not be the most educationally advanced but they are the crowd pullers. You take those children and transform them from leaders who distract children from learning, and see reading or learning as not cool, and turn them into advocates for learning within the school. That kind of project has been very successful in a lot of schools.

Baroness Prashar

That is very interesting.

Andrea Quincey

I think that is more powerful than posters of Wayne Rooney reading *The Beano*.

Chair

Robert wants to come in on that question, and then I think Jim wants to come in on the previous one.

Michael Rosen

Could I add just a little bit to that one? Absolutely amongst peers, I watched Anthony's books go up and down the line at my children's school, which is a school with a very, very high level of free school meals if that is the index we are going to use. Anthony's books were shunted to and fro along the line many, many times by all the children. It is what Edward Blishen many, many years ago said: 'When children spread books like contagion, that is when you succeed.' You have to get the contagion to happen. You will be pleased to know you are the plague, Anthony.

Robert Halfon MP

Getting back to the role models, have you done any studies on boys from single-parent families, where the single parent is usually a mum, where it shows that the reading is either worse or better? What do you think should be done because, according to the evidence in this, when the father gets involved the kids change their behaviour? They read 30 minutes a day more or whatever it may be. That was also shown by the experiment in the Pear Tree Mead School with Gareth Malone, when he went to the homes of the parents and the father started reading to the kid at night. Have you done any studies of that and looked at what can be done to try to improve that?

Teresa Cremin

The only project I have been involved with was the original National Year of Reading with Maureen Lewis, and something that was called Curiosity Kits at the time. They were large bags encompassing children's fiction, magazines, adult magazines as well as children's magazines, which had a focus. It might be a football bag; it might be a dinosaur bag or all sorts of generative things focused on children's interests. The interests were identified by peers within the school, not by the teachers' presumptions. The bags were collected together, also with objects within that you could play with like small puppets and so forth, so there was plenty of opportunity for father and son or mother and son. It was targeted at boys, but there were also bags for girls. That was written up a few years back, and it seemed to show – not about single parents – that the opportunity to have something in common, when there is a magazine for example about cars or whatever as well as small cars and fiction and non-fiction books about cars, gave the parent and child something to have dialogue around and to flick over together. That produced new opportunities for dialogue around reading, but also investment in reading on the part of both father and son. That is the only one I know.

Sue Jones

There have been several very successful projects in libraries, usually called 'Dads and Lads' or something like that. They have become like reading groups for dads and lads or carers and boys to go to, and they have been incredibly successful in encouraging fathers or male carers to take that interest in what their boys are reading. They go and have an activity together, to enjoy and discover reading. There are lots of entry points and because it is like free choice in a public library, they have been able to pick a comic, a graphic novel and fiction or non-fiction. It has opened up a lot and they have discovered lots of common interests, so they have been able to talk to each other and share their reading, and then go back and share it with the rest of the group. Lancashire, for example, has a very successful and big project in doing that sort of thing. Just as when I was referring to the role models for the young volunteers, I think they have been very powerful in encouraging boys to keep up their reading.

Lord Knight

I was also interested in Michael's Nevada study. The initial cut of academic evidence that the Literacy Trust gave us showed the gender gap emerging pre-school. I am just interested in what your guess or evidence is around the explanation for that.

Michael Rosen

One of the problems is around how we label literacy. In actual fact, we are all owners, possessors and practitioners of many literacies. The problem is that we only have one word, literacy, as if it is one thing. In order to unpack the world, we need multiple literacies. What you need to surf and scan is actually a bit different from the things you need to read *The Beano* or a football programme or fiction. We are so focused on the mechanics of reading that we have lost sight of the fact that reading is about reading what the linguist M.A.K. Halliday calls wording, not words but wording. That is to say, strings of words that produce meaning. This is an incredibly important distinction because the reason why teachers are saying that in Years 2, 3 and 4 they are meeting children who are barking at print, or children who are mystified by print, is partly because they cannot relate the wording to the stuff that they have, which is their oral language. 99% of the children are talking; they are using language but then they meet this other stuff. It is not letters and it is not words; it is wording.

The point is it is many different kinds of wording in different contexts that are doing different jobs: the sauce bottle, the book, the football programme, whatever. We have to work very hard at not simply saying – and I say this as someone who produces picture books – that literacy is not a picture book; literacy is not a piece of fiction. We have many literacies, and of course quite often boys are working in areas – not always – that do not quite fit the model of the picture book, the fiction. They do, but sometimes they do not. Sometimes they are operating around a hinterland of other magazines and so on.

To take another example from one of my own children, he basically taught himself to read and went on reading Arsenal football programmes, which in actual fact are a bloody difficult read. They are not easy, because there are many kinds of expressions in them, many kinds of relationships between number and word, obviously, many different layouts on the page. It was incredibly complex. Be a Martian and look at a football programme aged five and six and you can see how difficult it is. That is how he taught himself to

read, so right from the very youngest kids we have to show that we are talking about many literacies and they are all welcome in school. They are all welcome; it is not just one and we do not have a hierarchy. We cannot afford to have a hierarchy of literacies. We cannot say that literacy comes with this voice or that voice, that it comes from a dead white male or a dead white female. We are looking at many literacies and we have to make sure that children can produce these literacies and they can access them.

Teresa Cremin

We also have – and I think it is a really important point – to help teachers recognise them. If a system of assessment only reifies and recognises one form of literacy or reading, teachers by necessity are driven to focus on that. As Michael is saying, clearly in the 21st century we have multiple literacies; we need to reconceptualise reading for the profession, on behalf of the profession, and enable the profession to reconceptualise reading. In one of the research projects I was involved in more latterly, teachers from five different local authorities went in to visit homes as learners. They did not go in to take knowledge about Nathan or Imran into the homes; they went in to find out about what Nathan is reading, what his literacy practices are like in the home, and what his parents' practices are like.

By and large, they were shocked, amazed, astonished and surprised at the wide range of literacy practices that were going on when their previous assumptions on tape recorder were, 'Well, there will not be much going on there. They will not have any books in the home.' The assumption they were taking in, perhaps, was that books represented literacy, that novels or picture books did, depending on the age of these children.

I think I totally endorse what you are saying. There is plenty of research evidence to suggest that multiple literacies in the 21st century exist, but not as much evidence to suggest that the profession recognises them, nor that we foster professional recognition and then build on that by looking at the interplay between them. If, as a teacher, you recognise the diverse ways in which you engage with print in multiple forms and multiple modes, you can begin to see, 'Well, actually I read magazines personally. I read a wide range of different books. I read the computer, I read emails, I text people I tweet, and all of that engagement is me engaging with meaning with others.' That is 21st century reading and meaning. I have to say they are parallel for my children, rather than saying 'It is only the book', particularly at the GCSE.

Lord Knight

I see all of that and I understand the different forms of literacy. That is a very fair challenge around what we value in schools, what we value generally and how we define literacy. Is it a fair implication, then, that certainly the two of you might be saying maybe there is not such a great gender gap after all, or maybe what we are seeing pre-school is not the gender gap we think it is because it is just a gender gap around the sorts of literacy that we measure and we value?

Michael Rosen

There is an issue that has to be addressed, which I might not necessarily frame in quite that way. Of course, people talk over and over again about access to the language of

power. We in this room are using the language of power. We are speaking mostly in forms that are pretty related to standard written English, even me; I seem mostly to be talking in sentences. There is an issue as to how people with less power in society have access to that language of power. We cannot be unrealistic and say, 'If they get access to the language of power, they will therefore take power.' I am not suggesting that, but they are entitled to understand it, interpret it, deconstruct it, and work out whether someone is lying to them or not, which seems to be one of the most important things we have to learn in society.

That is an issue, but the question is: what do you build on? What are your building blocks? In a sense, I think what both Teresa and I are saying is that you have to look to see the literacies that are there in the home. People do have a reference there: Hilary Minns's *Read It To Me Now!* documents this home-literacy issue in a wonderful book, going into parents' homes and so on. How do we use that to support that access to the language of power for the bridge to it, however it appears to the children in the form of standard English or the form of these genres that have come through in the National Literacy Strategy of persuasive writing and so on? That is all totally legitimate, but if the bridge is enormous they will not get it. They will not do it because you are saying, 'That stuff you have is not worth anything. It is not valuable enough.' You have to support in order then to make the transition to that language of power. It is when people feel confident with what they have that they can move to the next stage.

Chair

I am going to try to squeeze in three more questions in the next five or six minutes, so I am going to go to Graham first and then Craig.

Lord Tope

I want to go back to where Sue started, which was the school-library service. My impression, and I would like you to tell me whether it was a true impression, was that even before the severe budget cuts recently, school-library services were in decline. More and more primary schools particularly were saying, 'We do not want to pay for it. We can do it ourselves.' Is that right and what is the effect of that?

Sue Jones

I think it is true that it has not just declined in the past two or three years. There has been an issue around the choices that schools make about how schools spend their budgets. There has been a shift over a number of years in the role that school-library services play. I think the effect of that has been detrimental to the work that primary schools can do. I think it goes back to the points that have already been made about teachers not having the breadth of understanding or the awareness of the literature that is out there. They simply do not have the time to keep up to speed, and rely on school-library services very much to provide them with appropriate material and increasingly material in other languages as well. I think authorities invest a lot of time in making sure that they have material that is suitable and reflects their population. When the children took the books home, there would be somebody at home who could read that book with them if they were not themselves fluent English teachers.

I think it has a knock-on effect not just for supporting the curriculum, because I think librarians are very good at that balance of the most suitable material that is available across the piece. They can weigh up the merits of a book against an online resource and can make sure that the best resources, in whatever form, are there for teachers. I think it does affect the way the curriculum can be supported, but I think it also has a very big effect on the understanding and awareness that goes into schools around how they can support this whole reading-for-pleasure agenda.

Teresa Cremin

Can I just add something to that? There is research evidence by Steve Hurd in 2006 that makes it very clear there is a significant decline in primary-school spending on literature or on books. When you think that we now have a government that is offering £3,000 to each school to match funding for buying materials to teach synthetic phonics, as it were, we have a tension in the system that is skewing the teachers still towards instruction of mechanical elements rather than supporting reading to develop readers.

Craig Whittaker MP

I have two questions if I can. If you look at the Singaporean teaching system, the initial teacher training is purely about pedagogy. My question really is about home life. When I was a young boy, we did not have books in our home because my parents never had books in their home. Quite interestingly, my brother's children today do not have books in their home, so it follows through. When I discovered books, it was Biggles and it was the Hardy Boys because that is what turned me on. However, that was a sign of the times. We also had TV from six until 10 in the evening where I lived and grew up. We did not have computer games and all the things they have today. My mum was at home. What work is being done to put the re-emphasis back on the family and what we can do to support the family to support children? That is incredibly important in my book.

The second question really is to Sue and it is around the library service and looked-after children. I am also Chairman of TLC, which is Together for Looked-after Children, in my constituency. We support the Letterbox campaign for our looked-after children. What proportion of children using the summer reading schemes are looked-after? What do you do to promote it, particularly for boys, because that is the key thing?

Sue Jones

I think the proportion of looked-after children doing the Challenge is still small. It probably only represents 5-6% overall of that huge number of children who are doing it, but libraries are working positively to get that number up. Library authorities will take a different point of view, but the ones that I am aware of will actually work very closely with the teams in the local authority and the other organisations in the local authority that are involved in working with looked-after children. They will issue personal invitations to all those children. They will go into the home if they are in a residential home, or they will work with foster carers.

In Hertfordshire, where I work, we used to have open-house sessions for foster carers and people who were responsible for looked-after children. We would invite them for a cup of coffee and then we would talk to them about the library service in general, about

the power of the Challenge, and try to get them involved that way so they felt involved. We also had a way of marking the card so we could track them and we could track how many books they read. This meant that if they had nearly completed the Challenge, we could say, 'Right, you have read five books. If you read a sixth, you get a medal.' I think a lot of those sorts of things are the things that go on.

I could not tell you the proportion of boys to girls. All I know is that in our authority the number of children in care was about half and half. I would say that about two-thirds of the girls and a third of the boys actually stayed with it and completed it.

Michael Rosen

On Singapore, I think we have to be incredibly cautious about extrapolating anything from other cultures. One has to be very careful. Singaporean culture – like Japanese or Chinese, although they are not the same by any means – has very different attitudes to the self, to authority, to parents and to achievement. You cannot simply go in there and say, 'Look what they are doing. They are in classes of 50, they are doing rote learning and they are beating us at maths or reading.' You are dealing with a very different substrate, and you have to deal with how people are in the society.

Craig Whittaker MP

To be fair, my point was about pedagogy, which is what they focus on.

Michael Rosen

Indeed, but the pedagogy if you had a different substrate – in other words, your constituency, your clients, your kids – they would be very different in their attitudes to self, to achievement and so on. You cannot do the same things to very different children. They are very different culturally and have very different attitudes to authority, to age, and to male/female than this society. It is a very different place. Interestingly, Singapore as it happens is a quadrilingual society. They actually try to teach in four languages, which is quite extraordinary. However, basically at the heart of it you cannot simply extrapolate and say, 'Can we import Singapore to here?' The culture is fundamentally very, very different in those attitudes.

Your other point was about yourself. Is it possible to come from a home that, in a sense, is not sharing books or looking at books and arrive where you have arrived in society? Well, yes, of course it is. That does indeed direct the attention back at school. I do not think anyone here is saying, 'Let us forget pedagogy and look at that.' I have produced – I think people know about it – a 20-point plan. It was only meant to be a loose blueprint I put up online at www.readingrevolution.co.uk. It is precisely about how a school can develop a policy on reading for enjoyment.

We have the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education that has a programme called 'The Power of Reading'. We have Teresa who has done work with the different ways. Yes, absolutely, of course it is home and school; it is not an either/or. Deborah Bullivant has a huge programme on reading in the home and the school in Calderdale, and of course Dolly Parton was involved as well. Deborah Bullivant leads a lot of that, about how to make the links

The crucial thing in our particular culture with the way we are and the level of consumerism – it does not apply in Singapore – is to think much more that, particularly when it comes to reading, we should not be making distinctions between home and school. When the children come home with a book or the child takes something from home to the school, it should be much more fluid than we have hitherto thought. Of course, it would be very interesting to know why there were people like you and other people who did not have books in the home, but there was this moment of pedagogy that must have clicked, I am guessing. That has to be addressed as well.

Chair

With profound apologies, I am going to draw the session to a close because we have to be out of the room at four o'clock and I want to be fair to the other two panels. Can I thank our four panellists? Michael, I was going to ask you a question. Perhaps I can say it now and you can maybe send in your thoughts. You talked about things we do right up to university that hinder reading for meaning. I would love to hear some examples of what those things are. We do not have time, unfortunately, to do it on the record now. Perhaps you could email them in.

Michael Rosen

Yes.

Panel Two

Chair

In the interests of time and giving as much time as possible for people to ask you questions, perhaps I could ask each of you to introduce yourself and give your introductory statement at the same time. Liz, can we start with you?

Liz Twist, Head of Assessment, National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)

Thank you. I am Liz Twist from the National Foundation for Educational Research. I can specifically talk about some of the research evidence about boys' achievement in reading.

There are two particular studies that you may have heard of that I just want to mention: PISA, the Programme for International Student Assessment, that we run for the Department for Education in this country, which is an OECD programme; and PIRLS, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study. The issue of boys' lower achievement in reading is an international phenomenon, so I think we just need to be clear that there is a significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls. The way in which we measure reading in these surveys is one snapshot of reading, undoubtedly. However, it is the case through all the countries participating in the surveys that girls achieve higher than boys, as measured in the surveys. I am talking about reading because there is limited or no real international evidence about writing. Similarly, we do not have the evidence for

speaking and listening. The position for the UK for PISA at the age of 15 is that the difference between boys and girls is just below the international OECD mean. It is around about the middle, just slightly narrower than that. For PIRLS it is slightly wider, and that is evidence at the age of 10.

Another set of assessment data looking nationally is the difference in the formal assessments that children take in this country, from the Foundation Stage at age five, the profile that measures communication skills and beginning literacy skills, right through the various phases of education and Key Stages up to GCSE. The pattern is consistent that girls still perform more strongly on those measures than boys.

Thirdly, I think one of the interesting things is the wide range of attainment that we see in reading in the studies. There is a very wide span, and it is a feature of English-speaking countries that the spread between the highest-attaining children and the lowest-attaining children as measured on the surveys and by national assessments is greater in countries where English is the language of education. You can contrast it with the Netherlands, for instance, where it is particularly narrow. There may be all sorts of reasons for that, but I just want to put that on the table as well.

There is evidence on engagement. You have heard already from the other witnesses about the hugely significant role of reading engagement and its association with attainment. Again, surveys give us some very sound evidence about this. There is oft-quoted evidence from PISA that high engagement can get over some effects of deprivation; engagement in the process of reading and engagement in literacy can mitigate some effects. It is a very powerful one and perhaps not as widely spoken about.

Finally, I suppose I speak because much of my work deals with very large numbers of students. I can talk about boys' reading, talking about tens and hundreds of thousands of bits of evidence from children. However, when I taught, it was very much that you did not talk about the reading of 'boys'; it was the reading of John, of Ahmed, of Ali, of Susan. They are individuals and I think the message from the previous group was that we know we have good reading material that might engage boys and that might engage girls, I think, rather than separating it out.

Again, we have some evidence of the impact of the home, but I think I am probably at my two minutes so I shall stop.

Phil Jarrett, National Adviser for English, Ofsted

I am Phil Jarrett; I am the National Adviser for English at Ofsted, which means that I manage the English-inspection programme and write English reports, including *Moving English Forward*. I want to focus on aspects of pedagogy in my two or three minutes, relying on inspection evidence and the reports we have published. I have four recommendations, although other people have touched on them already.

The first is that schools do need to be better at encouraging reading for enjoyment. It seems to me that boys take an essentially functional and practical view of reading. I was struck by something the Bullock Report said over 30 years ago. 'When pupils admitted to an adult literacy scheme were asked why they failed to read at school, the common factor that emerged was that they did not learn from the process of learning to read that it was something that other people did for pleasure.' I think we have to prioritise far more

reading for pleasure in schools. I think at the moment there is an emphasis on what we could broadly call the skills of reading and preparing pupils for tests and examinations.

The second point I would make is that schools need to value and teach a wider range of texts than currently. We know that boys tend to read different kinds of texts from girls – non-fiction, autobiographies, newspapers and so on – yet the English curriculum largely values certain kinds of narrative-fiction texts, I think. I think for boys it often seems that what they read outside school does not matter; it does not count in relation to the classroom. We need to bring those resources much more into the classroom.

Thirdly, a point made by Teresa, I think there is an issue of subject knowledge, particularly in primary schools. Understandably, because they are not specialists, too few teachers in primary schools have a detailed knowledge of literature, either classic or contemporary children's literature. I think this makes it more difficult for them to choose the right kinds of text to share with children, and also how to recommend books individually to boys that they might read outside school.

My fourth and final point is that it is not just about reading. It is about the nature of the whole English curriculum, in that reading feeds into and is supported by writing. Someone else touched on this earlier. I think boys need to feel that the English curriculum matters, and that English as a subject is active, practical and productive. Therefore, work in English needs to engage with the world outside school involving real audiences and real contexts for reading. I would include, within that, modern technology when we think about the different kinds of reading available to pupils today. Therefore, it seems to me that reading in schools should involve both a study of Dickens and Shakespeare, but it also needs to be seen as contemporary, exciting and making imaginative use of the modern technology that can motivate all boys to read with pleasure.

Di Hatchett, Director, Every Child a Chance Trust

I am Di Hatchett. I am Director of the Every Child a Chance Trust, which is a charity formed by the business community and which has developed two highly successful programmes directed to tackle the children at the bottom of the pile in literacy and numeracy in primary schools. By children at the bottom of the pile, I mean those falling into the bottom 6% of the achievement band. However you measure it, either by national assessments or teachers' assessments, it is the children who are at the bottom and the kind of background that they come from.

My background is over 40 years at the frontline of primary education. I was a primary teacher. I started in a mining village in north Warwickshire with a class of nine year olds, and my induction into teaching was being told by the headteacher, 'There are 38 of them. They are junior remedials' – a lovely phrase from the 1970s – 'and they cannot read. Hear them read every day.' That was my induction into how to tackle children who had failed right up until the age of nine. That started me on the journey I am still on now, 40 years later, and I will come back to some of the shameful statistics that we have to face in this country in a minute.

I am going to focus on some of the cultural issues within which we operate, in terms of tackling this issue that faces us. Many of the things I was going to say have been said, but I may reiterate one or two of them. I am going to start with some of the headlines in the press two weeks ago when we appointed a new England football manager. The

overall tenor of most of those headlines was, 'Can a man who reads novels run the England football team?' When you took the trouble to read those articles – and that is the truth from the press over that period – not only was it the fact of astonishment that a man who publicly said he read novels could be very successful in the field of football, but he read rather weighty novels as well, not light reading. What does that say about our image in our society of the value of reading? They are saying real men do not read books. What message does that give to our young boys in school who love playing football and love doing lots of other things but are struggling to read? Maybe they even like reading but now think, 'Perhaps I had better not. It is not cool.'

The big picture is always crucial. I am also very concerned about the badge of honour about not being able to do maths that we wear in this country, which has a profound impact. Whatever you try to do, you are always operating within this cultural view. If we do not attend to the big picture, the smaller things we do will not have the impact. They limit the impact.

I certainly reiterate all the points that were made about the lack of recognition in the range of reading in which children engage from an early age. Michael called it the hinterland; I am not sure whether hinterland is a negative or positive word. I have been thinking about that since he used it. However, boys particularly do read in lots of places and lots of things, and we do not always recognise it as reading. There is what goes on in the street and in real life as well. One of the things that I think does not help is a culture that we have at the moment of reading the electronic form of the book, as opposed to the paper book, and whether it is a bad thing. Does it matter? No, I read both; both are of value and both are of value for children as well. We should absolutely recognise that and the range of reading that has been mentioned, in terms of reading on screen or how reading does not mean that you start at the beginning of the book, go to the end and then stop. You start in the place that you need to start and you go through it in different ways to get to the information you need.

There is culture of the family and the adults to whom children are closest. Schools sometimes are stuck in a culture themselves where they send the reading book in the bag to the child's home. It goes to some children's homes and it either does not come back, so then it does not get sent any more, or it goes home and it does not get read. For some children, it does get read. Teachers will say, 'Well, what did you expect? They never read with him at home.' They do not think, 'Maybe we need to do something about that.' There are two ways. We do something else because he does not read at home but we also think, 'Actually, how do we engage the parents, where it is not that they will not but they cannot?' We have a huge problem with adult illiteracy in this country, and we have a huge number of boys and girls in homes where their adults cannot help them. Perhaps they cannot read in English, perhaps they cannot read at all, or perhaps they are too scared to try. They certainly are not going to turn up to a reading workshop in school, and yet schools go on putting on reading workshops with which many parents cannot engage.

Next, there is the culture within which schools operate. I have been around a long time – 42 years – in the frontline of primary education, as I said earlier. I have been through the reading wars over and over and over again. I have been through phonics. I have been through real books. I have been through the Literacy Strategy. I am back to phonics again. It used to be individual schools; then you thought, 'Thank goodness we have some kind of coherent national policy.' It has exploded again. We have to stop the political pendulum that is getting in the way; it undermines teachers and it undermines ultimately

what goes on in schools. Let us learn from what works. Look at the schools that do the best – they are the experts – and the rest of the world so we stop having this terrible 'forget everything that went on before and start again'.

Finally, I just want to highlight the statistics that motivated the business community to put up the initial £5 million to help the lowest-achieving children. 21,000 children went through our 'Every Child a Reader' programme last year with expert teachers. These are the bottom 6% of six year olds. The majority are boys. Why is it the bottom 6%? Since 2005, if you look at the end of Key Stage 2 data for 11 year olds – you might disagree with the measure, but that is not the point; data is data – 35,000 children every year leave primary school at 11 with a reading age of a seven year old or worse. Most are boys; most are boys living in poor circumstances and most are white boys living in poor circumstances. That has been going on through all these years of massive government investment.

Therefore, the message from me is: get in early; get that love of reading, the skill and the will, into the Early Years Foundation Stage; stop shutting doors after horses have bolted, spending millions of the public purse on the social exclusion that results; and let us stop having the reading wars, please.

Paul Keenleyside, Assistant Director, Dyslexia Action

Thank you. Firstly, thank you for the opportunity to give evidence today. I am Paul Keenleyside; I am Director of Services at Dyslexia Action, which is a national charity working with children, adults, teachers and schools. The reason I am here is that for the past 20 years I have worked in special education, mostly with boys, challenging boys and challenging environments. The reason I came to literacy and dyslexia is that a huge percentage of those boys – wherever it was in the country I was working, but especially in London – had huge issues. In my time in Camden, for instance, I had a Pupil Referral Unit that was about 80% boys, 11 to 14, 20% girls. The girls were reading much better than the boys, and this started me down the track that I am on here.

I think I am going to offer some ideas supporting colleagues, and some that may not. The first is that I think we have to accept that dyslexia is a learning difficulty; it is a disability. It affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent reading and spelling. Michael talked about barking at words; yes, it is. For some of the people that we work with, adults and children, it is barking at words because that is what they can do. I think we have to move them to a point where they are connected to this wider sense of literacy.

Some people have said that 80% of dyslexics are male. We have just recently done a YouGov survey, which says that probably 60% of people identifying themselves as dyslexic in that survey were male and 40% were female. This is quite a weird fact because, looking back at the data of the young people that my previous organisation worked with over 10 years, it reflects the number of boys to girls at risk of social exclusion that they were working in annually. I do not think there is a direct correlation – there certainly is not a direct correlation – but there is something of interest around literacy and social exclusion that we still have not reached the bottom of. I think Di's point goes straight to that today.

We also know that research about dyslexia from Maggie Snowling indicates that male and female brains are different. I think we may have to accept this. This is contentious, but

we have to accept that there is a spatial advantage for males and a verbal advantage for females. This may push at what happens very early on in their education. This means that language development and communication skills emerge earlier in girls. This therefore means that boys may not be ready for formal literacy learning at the same time that girls are. I said 'formal'; that is not no literacy learning. Learning about the pleasure of reading and books is something completely different, but boys may not be ready for formal literacy learning. If you look at some of the Scandinavian countries, they do not start on these programmes until the boys are seven or eight.

There is also a problem around teaching styles in Key Stage 1, which may alienate boys. Lots of our colleagues in primary schools do incredibly good work to overcome that, but again we have to be realistic that there is an issue there.

The other thing that I think I want to point out today is that this over-representation by boys is exacerbated by the fact that dyslexia as a barrier to learning has a strong hereditary element. We get so many mums through the door who say, 'You know, he is just like his dad.' You were talking about not reading for pleasure. I was talking to a boy and his father: 'We do not read for pleasure. We have never read for pleasure. I wish we could read for pleasure.' We are talking not about the 'will not read'; it is the 'maybe cannot read but would love to read.' It is not the great sweep of literacy; I am talking about those people who really want to push their skills and really want to be engaged. As these parents have struggled and still struggle, they find it ever so hard to provide support for their children around reading. They find it very hard to be a role model. The worst of them were parents coming in saying they are scared of schools. They are scared of activities to do with reading in school, because they hated it.

What I am pushing at is that people who have dyslexia – I am here to promote that cause and I am very transparent about it – really want to connect into the wider literacy picture that we have all been talking about. However, they still find it incredibly difficult. If it is 10% of the population, they need to be taken account of. I think that we need to think about dyslexia awareness and dyslexia-friendly practice, and engaging boys in different ways on that journey into reading. Thank you.

Chair

Thank you very much. I will try to take a question from each member of the panel.

Craig Whittaker MP

Phil, could I just you a very quick question about your third point, which was about the subject knowledge of teachers? Will the current government quest to get a higher degree level for those going into teaching go some way to address that problem?

Phil Jarrett

Well, I think it might do. It was one of the recommendations of the *Moving English Forward* report. If the government is focusing on specialist subject knowledge in maths and science, it should also consider that in English. I was talking particularly about primary schools, where I think there is an issue. There are obvious practical issues about very small primary schools, which have three or four teachers. How

can you have a literacy expert in each school? However, I think it is key in terms of moving children's reading along and recommending the right kinds of books. I think it is an issue both of initial training but then of continuing professional development. That was really what I was hoping the report might stimulate.

Lord Tope

I want to go back to basics, really. Liz began by saying that this is an international phenomenon; it is broadly repeated everywhere. Paul ended by saying that boys' and girls' brains are different. Maybe boys are not ready for formal literacy learning. It is a simple question: are we trying to push against nature? Why should we be concerned particularly about boys' literacy, as against everybody's literacy?

Liz Twist

I think someone mentioned the age of starting school. Finland is one of the oft-cited countries in PISA because it has a history of doing very well. However, it also has the biggest gender difference between girls' and boys' reading. It is 51 score points, which is actually very big. It is not as simple as 'delaying the start of school might reduce this gap'. I think it is so much more complicated than that. I am not a neuroscientist, so I cannot comment on boys' and girls' brains and the possible differences. I know when I have taught them they certainly play very differently, I have to say, and from a very young age there are very evident differences in all sorts of ways.

Baroness Prashar

My question is really about pedagogy, and this is really about improving literacy for everybody. The four recommendations that you make are important. What I really want to find out is whether there is any good practice currently to which we can point. In a way you can make general recommendations, but are there schools that are actually doing something about this, which can be promoted as good practice? The second point is that I agree with you about the big picture. I do think that the issue about no reading was a very important one, so I will just underline that. I just would like to know if there is any good practice.

Phil Jarrett

There is, of course. In fact, I think you will be hearing from one shortly. One of the things that Ofsted has done recently, which has been very valuable, is set up a good-practice website. There are a number of examples there that you can visit, both in English and in other subjects. We conducted a survey a year or so ago and published a report called *Excellence in English* that focused on 12 schools, six primary and six secondary schools, that were being effective. Of course there are many schools out there that are doing a really good job, and I think it is up to Ofsted and other organisations to capture that. I hope we will continue to do more work of that kind. You will be hearing from one of them shortly.

Robert Halfon MP

I have two questions for Ofsted's Mr Jarrett, if I may. Is there a correlation between the strength of a school's library and literacy in the school? The second question refers to what you said about electronic books. I have a view that nobody will be buying books as we know them in 10 years' time, apart from big coffee-table types of books, because everyone will have gone to Kindles in the same way they have gone to downloading and hardly buying CDs any more. There was a secondary school in my constituency that had literacy problems, and has had a dramatic improvement by handing out Kindles to male pupils. The school controls what is downloaded onto the Kindles, and it has been an enormous success because the kids like electronic things. They do not like walking around with an old-fashioned book; it is not seen as cool, but they are seen as very cool with their Kindles. The results show a dramatic improvement in a very short space of time. Could I just ask if you could comment?

Philip Jarrett

I think other people in the room would certainly want to give you an answer about school libraries. I think there is a very strong link there. When we are talking about school libraries, essentially we are talking about secondary schools. Primary schools may have libraries, but they do not have librarians and so on. Many of them manage very well without what we would regard as a library. Going back to your question, I think the best practice will show that librarians work really closely both with the English department and with the full range of teachers. It is the librarians very often who stimulate a lot of reading activity, book events, book weeks and things of that kind. I think that where schools are very strong in relation to reading, usually you will find a strong librarian.

Robert Halfon MP

Is that evidential? Is that backed up in evidence?

Philip Jarrett

Librarians here will give you a load of that. Ofsted published a report five years ago called *Good School Libraries: Making a Difference to Learning*. In that, we tried to capture some of the schools that were doing that. I think there is that kind of evidence.

Di Hatchett

On the subject of the electronic book, I think people still will be buying books in 10 years' time. Vinyl records are even coming back these days. I think they serve different purposes. I am extremely wary of magic bullets. I do not think synthetic phonics is the magic bullet. I think synthetic phonics is really important. I think love of reading is really important. I think motivation and engagement are hugely important. I think recognising reading in a range of formats and through a range of media is enormously important. However, I do not think that we should go down the road – without rigorous research – of saying that the Kindle is the magic bullet, or that the iPad is the magic bullet. It is one element in the equation. Recognising its value more fully and stopping arguing about it publicly would be very helpful to kids who find it the preferred mode.

Paul Keenleyside

In terms of the good practice that you were asking about, there is a very good scheme in Lambeth, the Lambeth laptop scheme. From the City Learning Centre, the laptops go back home with the kids and both the parents and the children get to use them together. Although it is in Stockwell, not one laptop has gone missing. There is massive value attributed to it by the families, and there is really good evidence about parents improving their skills and their employability as well. I think that is one thing that is really important for us to stress. I think I should also say that the publishers are very aware that media reading is going to be done in a lot of different ways. I think we should welcome the work that the publishers are doing about making textbooks and texts available to children in different formats, because there is a lot of work going into it and they understand the value both to the children and to the educational settings.

Lord Knight

I have a brief question to Liz first, and then if I may there is a wider, more fundamental question. Liz, you were talking about English-speaking countries and the wide span between best and worst. Earlier on, Michael talked about Singapore having four languages; there was a technical word with quad in it that I cannot remember. Is learning other languages earlier helpful in being more confident as a reader and in literacy in the native language?

Liz Twist

I do not know what evidence there is for that. On the reason why there is such a wide spread of attainment in the English-speaking countries, we may have our top 10 pupils scoring very highly and our bottom 10% scoring very low compared with other countries. There is a whole raft of possibilities. Some people will talk about the complexity of the English letter-sound relationships, English being a complex language. Other people might say there are similar cultural features between some of the English-speaking countries – Australia, New Zealand, the UK, the US – in terms of background factors and socioeconomic spread. There are all sorts of possibilities as to what it may be.

Lord Knight

The wider question is probably more to Phil than to anybody else, but all contributions are welcome. It is a difficult question for me, particularly as the former Schools Minister. To what extent have we designed in a problem through high-stakes testing, through valuing particular measures of literacy and particular forms of literacy over others, through starting children in their formal learning at a particular age? We have that pedagogy discussion, which we have had, but there are also some policy-design issues that could be getting in the way of particularly boys and their reading.

Phil Jarrett

It is a difficult question. I mean, there are three different questions in there, so I am not entirely sure how to react to it. I think you are right; I think we have designed in some of those problems. Some of the contributory factors are tests, for instance. We mentioned that in the most recent report. Nevertheless, I think there are real opportunities for pupils.

One of the things I would have said if we had more time is that these issues about boys and literacy do seem to get worse as students get older. I am really interested in the nature of the curriculum we provide for pupils at Key Stage 3. I think there are real opportunities for pupils there to design a creative, exciting curriculum that values reading for pleasure. That does not need to be affected unduly at that stage, I would suggest, by external exams or even Ofsted inspections. I think there are opportunities there for teachers. Maybe now is the time to take them.

Chair

Di, were you trying to come in on those two questions?

Di Hatchett

Yes, please. Just backtracking a little bit to the query about learning another language earlier, I suspect that there may be some advantage in it, although there is no research on whether learning a new language on top of English as a first language would help. However, there is research that shows that bilingualism – i.e. children whose first language is not English learning English as an additional language – for a great many pupils and learners does confer intellectual advantage. It grows parts of the brain; quadrilingualism must grow it mightily. It is a bit like taxi drivers learning the Knowledge, and that grows part of their brain. Contrary to the much-perceived myth that coming into this country not being able to speak English is a disadvantage, the overwhelming majority of those children overtake their peers rapidly. It is particular groups that do not, and they tend to be those who are economically disadvantaged as well.

I always get a bit irritated about Finland, because Finnish is a phonically regular language in a way English is not. I have a friend who hails from Finland, and I have learned how to pronounce the Finnish alphabet. I can read the back of a cereal packet, but I do not have a clue what it says. Finnish is not a good analogy to this one.

In terms of designing in a problem, if we have designed in a problem we did it a very long time ago because we have had a persistent issue with children not learning to read, particularly boys, since time immemorial. Ever since we have had figures, since time immemorial, we have had a problem. The research the KPMG Foundation did at the beginning of the Trust programmes showed an economic analysis between lack of literacy and later life chances, and showed the irrefutable connection between not being able to read and finishing up probably in prison but certainly socially excluded and definitely in a low-paid job.

Jim Knight

The trend is constant too, so all those decisions we make are bugging about with it.

Di Hatchett

Yes. At the beginning of the Literacy Strategy, the percentage as measured on national assessments went down year on year from about 7.5% of the national cohort at 11 to around 5.5%, and then it stuck again.

Paul Keenleyside

I think we are still designing the problems in. Yesterday, we were starting to look at doing the Key Stage 2 tests, which my little one is going to be doing, around punctuation, grammar and spelling. That is fine and important, but it is at the end of Key Stage 2 in June and it is not going to affect anything they are going to do after that. They are leaving primary school, so why do it? Why put that person through that hurdle again, destroying some of the love of reading we are talking about? Some of these kids have worked really hard to get to that point where they are enjoying their reading, and they have something that is a barrier to them that we are still putting in. We are still putting in these hurdles and barriers for children and their families, for no reason other than to collect data. I actually have a real objection around that.

Baroness Prashar

I have a very brief practical question, really for Phil about Ofsted inspections. One gets mixed reports about them. Can you do something indirectly with what you value when you go in for inspections? These are your observations, but could you not shift the emphasis when you actually go in for inspections on what you look at? Do you have the discretion for that?

Phil Jarrett

It is probably a question for Michael rather than me. I do think there is a lot of work at the moment on inspectors and inspector training. For instance, the English report that has come out is one of several that we have published, but it is the first time that we have been able to provide some training for all inspectors about English and what to look for in future when they are inspecting. They are not doing an English inspection; they are inspecting a school and going to an English lesson. I think we are getting better at providing guidance for all inspectors about what to look for. The English report, which I hope will be influential for inspectors, does say to them that they need to look very closely at learning rather than teaching, and that teachers need to be aware of that as well. If it is a lesson where the teacher is not apparently doing a great deal but the children are reading, for instance, we might be able to say that there is effective learning coming from that. I think there are some developments at the moment that might help all inspectors in future when they come to look at English in whole-school inspections.

Baroness Prashar

Is there some scope for the recommendations from this Commission to be aimed at Ofsted?

Phil Jarrett

I do not see why not. There is a new inspection framework coming out in September, so it is a good time to influence that debate, I would have thought.

Chair

I do not think there is time for me to put my question, so I will do the same again; I will just ask and perhaps someone could submit some answers to the team. On your second point, Phil, you talked about the importance of having a wider range of texts available in schools. What is the situation at the moment in terms of the advice schools are given about what texts should be covered? Is the curriculum specific in the way that it might be in an English Literature GCSE? Is there guidance that comes from Ofsted? Are schools left themselves to decide what material is available in their school library and what texts are covered?

Paul, I was very interested in your point about dyslexia – you said about 60% male and 40% female – and how that interacts with the statistic that Di gave. If I heard her right, she said there were 35,000 young people who failed to reach the reading age of seven by the end of Key Stage 2. I would be interested to know how many young people in each school year are diagnosed with dyslexia. How many of those 35,000 actually formally have diagnoses of dyslexia? It would be interesting to see how much that is a contribution to that effect and how much it is other issues that lead into that.

Can I thank the second set of witnesses? I apologise for having to rush through, but I am very keen to give each panel the same amount of time. Thank you very much for your time.

Panel Three**Chair**

Perhaps we could proceed in the same way with people introducing themselves. Where we have two witnesses from one institution, perhaps one of you could give an opening statement.

Patrick Winston, Headteacher, St Paul's Academy, Greenwich

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to present information. I am Patrick Winston, Principal at St Paul's Academy in Greenwich. I am joined today by Emily Tudor, a key member of my leadership team as Assistant Principal who oversees English and Communication.

St Paul's Academy is now completing seven years. We were the unusual ones, in that we came from a position of strength as a beacon school. We were a small, oversubscribed Catholic school and it was the local authority that approached our dioceses to ask whether we could become a larger institution that would welcome not only people from the Catholic community but also people from the local community. It was made very clear by the Academies team before we opened that we had done well, but they wanted a significant transformation. For us, the statement 'Academy' means better opportunities for students. I will say straightaway that one of the things we are into is having a much longer school day. Now having a fantastic campus, our students can come in early in the

morning to use the facilities and similarly stay late at night. Probably with the exception of bank holidays, we are open nearly all the time to allow students to use the facilities.

In terms of curriculum development, it has been very much about personalising the curriculum to meet the needs of our students. You are going to hear from Emily in a moment about the magnificent work that has been done in English in our school. The curriculum is certainly enjoyed by boys. Significant progress has been made and there is a considerable amount of learning outside the taught curriculum. The development of the staff teams, with a key focus on pedagogy, has been absolutely key to our success. The role of Learning Support Assistants to support teachers has been key. Outcomes have demonstrated that young people arrive with us at 11, and by 16 they leave significantly above.

All of what we have achieved to date was achieved very much on an old campus, a Victorian building designed for 400 plus that finished up in December 2009 with 800 students. We moved in the early days of 2010 and on our sixth day we received the Ofsted phone call about our English department being inspected. Emily will tell you what life is really like.

Emily Tudor, Deputy Headteacher, St Paul's Academy, Greenwich

My story really focuses on how we have changed the curriculum over the past few years. 10 years ago in a school made up predominantly of boys, the Year 11 lower-ability English exam took place in a separate room to the higher ability. It was a painful scene for me to behold. There were the empty seats of the boys who did not bother to turn up, and then there was that moment when they would start to put their pens down 25 minutes into a two-hour exam. The reason is they were disaffected. They had spent much of the year sat in front of an exam-board anthology of poems that did not mean anything to them or to their lives. Coursework was a bone of contention. Teachers nagged them, but parents – particularly of our white, free-school-meal boys – told them to ignore us. Poor self-esteem was masked by being one of the lads, and tempers frayed.

We jumped at the chance to pilot the Edexcel new-style GCSE in 2006. Spoken English, Digital Communications and Film were put on the syllabus. We piloted it with our fast-track group, but also with our lower-ability boys. We named the class the Progress Group; we still use this term today. When asked why by visitors, our students reply, 'Because we make the most progress.' We took the boys out of their seats and often out of school, filming, transcribing talk and building websites. We hooked them into English and when we got them back in the classroom there was a buzz.

As a teacher, I was energised. Boys were enjoying the practical nature of the subject. I squeezed in the analysis, theory and poetry and they no longer minded it so much. In a time exploding with technology, we took the students to the computers. Boys who could not or would not write neatly breathed a sigh of relief. On the Edexcel pilot, students could bank their units across the year like the modular courses that became national in 2010. Boys took more responsibility for their learning, could weigh up their own strengths and weaknesses, and set themselves targets. They became more motivated. Michael Gove has recently scrapped the modular course. From September this year, it is linear again. We have taken a huge step backwards for boys who struggle with literacy.

The Key Stage 3 terms 'purpose and audience' and 'learning beyond the classroom' are behind the high achievement of boys at my school now. Boys like a clear end product, for example a leaflet or a podcast. Studying poetry can be enriched by busking their performances around the school building. Understanding the social context of *Pride and Prejudice* calls for a whole-class experience of 18th century formation dancing, which was interesting. Projects with a media focus increase literacy and fun and technical ways. Having the design of a blog or a website valued makes boys work hard to produce quality text to match it. In my English department, writing on lined paper is still valued, but if we want to keep our students engaged we need to move with them.

Finally, the key to boys' literacy is talk. We must have high expectations of boys when it comes to discussing emotional responses to text. Speaking must be planned for in the majority of lessons. With a greater impetus on talk, it becomes the norm and peer pressure amongst boys becomes less of an issue. In my school, boys' achievement in English is high because they are involved in so much drama, dialogue and speaking on film. In regional Debate Mate competitions, these boys from a Southeast London estate have been competing with boys from public schools. They are a force to be reckoned with.

Anthony Horowitz, Author

My name is Anthony Horowitz and I am a writer. It says I am an expert witness, but I do not bring expertise to this room, I am afraid. There will be no statistics from me, just enthusiasm and experience, which I hope will do instead. I never even wanted to be a children's author. When I was about eight years old, I was sent to a particularly unpleasant school in North London – a place called Orley Farm – where any creativity or any hope for the future was crushed out of me very carefully by the staff. I was the most stupid member in the school by far, and I still remember being fat, slow and being told over and over again that I was a waste of space. I hated the place; it was an atmosphere of bullying and violence.

I only found myself in one single room in that horrible place, and that was the library, a room not dissimilar to this one but with more books. It was there that I first discovered books, literature and reading above all. I was not a bright kid; I could not read novels. I read Tintin comic strips. The reason I have to leave at four o'clock, I am afraid, is because I have a phone call coming in about the screenplay of a Tintin film I am currently working on. I also remember very vividly the Willard Price books. They are still in print, so it just shows you how books can last: *Elephant Adventure*, *Amazon Adventure*, *Whale Adventure*, *Hamster Adventure* – not one of his best. *Cannibal Adventure* was the one I particularly liked. I still have strong memories of waiting by the door for that next book to come in, and wanting with all my heart simply to forget French, maths and geography and lose myself in a book. That is why, at 23, one rainy afternoon I decided I would write a children's book of my own. Of course, I was an overnight success. The night unfortunately lasted 15 years until I wrote the first Alex Rider book, which then did take off.

It is interesting that it does have a pretty much 50-50 between boys and girls, certainly from the emails that I receive. Boys do not read books. I was amazed to hear Phil, I think, say they have an essentially practical and functional approach to reading, but they do not read books; they devour them. My experience of boys and books is that if you give them the right incentives, they will immerse themselves in books. They want to meet the

writers, live the characters, buy the merchandise, and see the films. The impact of books on boys cannot be underestimated. I have sat in a hospital with a boy about to go into an operation for cancer, clutching a copy of Alex Rider to his chest. It is an extraordinary thing to see.

In Washington I was approached by a huge, burly African-American guy who had clearly never read a book in his life. He had not; the area around the edge of Washington is full of gangs. He came up to me and said that he was a gang member, but his brother had not joined the gang. He thought that reading Alex Rider was one of the reasons why that had happened, and he just wanted to shake my hands. I met an actor doing *Foyle's War* quite recently. He was 17 years old and it was his first part. I asked him why he became an actor. He said, 'Well, actually I used to read your books and that is what got me into this.' I think we should never forget as children's authors that we are planting a molecule, a seed into every child that can grow and take them in wonderful directions. It is one of the few good things about being old as a children's author, that you begin to see the fruits of your work.

I have not been campaigning against library closures. I have not had a voice on that, because I believe it actually misses the point. School libraries are much, much more important. I have visited hundreds of schools in my time, and I think you were asking about whether they have any effect. I can tell you that I can tell if a school has a good library five minutes after entering it. It is everywhere; you see it on the walls, in the pictures, and you see it in the eyes of the kids. You see how articulate and confident they are. Schools that read do have a marked difference, and I can each time tell the difference. One of my favourite schools was in Acton, where I think something like 65% of the kids had English as a second language. They had 13 different languages within the school, and yet at the time I visited they also had one hour of shared reading every week, one hour of dedicated reading for pleasure. It had no purpose, no National Curriculum and no exams; it was just reading and sharing their texts. Incidentally, Lord Sacks has written very, very well about this. The point about this was that this school in Acton was extraordinary, just simply the way these kids presented themselves to me. I could imagine those kids walking into an interview for a job, and you would see the difference the moment they turned up.

I am very much a supporter of shared texts. I am of course a supporter of reading for pleasure. I support reading out loud. My next book, *Oblivion*, has 740 pages in it and I still do not think that is a challenge for boys, because if the book is right they will embrace it. All I can say is that boys can and should, of course, read. You will provide, I hope, the environment and the support, and writers like me will continue to write the books.

Eve Bearne, Past President, United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA); Fellow of the English Association

I belong to the United Kingdom Literacy Association, but I was also involved in the Raising Boys' Achievements research run from Cambridge University by Mike Younger and Molly Warrington. I want to make some comments about things like that.

First of all, I wanted to reiterate the point that everybody has made about talk, and most particularly about the reflective and analytic kinds of talk that people have mentioned. The most successful schools that started on the Raising Boys' Achievements research project were those where talk was a major component in the curriculum.

I have been involved with another area of research, which brings me to a point that was made right at the beginning. We are not just talking about boys and girls as separate entities. My reading was very similar to Anthony's. My approach to literacy is, if you like, like a boy's. I think we need to be careful not to over-stereotype. That has been mentioned by the Literacy Trust and all the rest of it. If we are going to look at some generalities about boys' and girls' preferences, I have certainly done research on multi-modal texts; that is, texts which operate with several models together. It may be film which uses all of them, or picture books and comics using words and images together, or information text that similarly uses words and images together, or it might be books alone where voices echo off the pages in novels. Certainly for boys, that visual impact is very important. In Nottinghamshire, a great deal of work has been done in using multi-modal texts to raise boys' achievement and girls' achievement in reading and writing. I think that that is important. Incidentally, in Nottinghamshire there has also been some very good work in using multi-modal text with looked-after children. There is a recent project just going into its second year.

The point I want to make about that is not just to celebrate the fact that texts have widened since I was a girl. Teachers quite understandably teach to what the test is going to demand of them. As teachers, that is our duty; that is what we are supposed to do and honoured to do for the young people we meet. However, the tests do not use the notion of multi-modal texts at all. The tests in reading and writing at the moment up to now – I know they are due to change – are only about the printed word. Now, if we are genuinely going to assess what young people can do and will be able to do in the future, then assessments arrangements need to take into account their reading and construction of all those different kinds of text. There has been work done by UKLA on those if anybody is interested in following that up, so that is one thing.

Another thing is the importance – and it was mentioned a lot earlier – of peers. I wanted to look at just one project, which Keith Topping has done a massive amount of work on, and that I witnessed working beautifully in Newham. That is getting older boys, who may themselves be not committed or not very successful readers, to work with younger not successful or not committed readers, most importantly teaching them how to talk about reading before you buddy them up. You teach them how to teach reading. I witnessed some of the most amazing things, interviewing boys who were saying, 'Well, of course Nazim is not very good at reading the words, so if he cannot do the phonics I cover the word over and say, "Can you read that bit?", or I show him a picture.' I was listening to 10-year-old boys who could teach the reading strategies as adequately as some teachers did. The result of that, similar to the result of giving people Kindles, was that the reading standards of the younger and the older boys were raised.

That brings to me to my third point. Whenever attention is paid to reading, or any other aspect of literacy, it is likely to get better because of the commitment surrounding it. If we want professional development, that subject knowledge from teachers, and the young people in our schools to improve, the way we handle professional development needs to be not just training. We have been trained for some years, but we need it for the longer term. You can call them action-research projects if you like, or critical-enquiry projects, which last over a term or longer and look carefully at a problem that the school itself identifies, which they are supported to work on, and which gives them then the germ of an idea for how to take something forward. That is a model of professional development where a small amount of money really can go a long way.

Owen Thomas, Service Development Manager, Working with Men

I am Owen Thomas, a Service Development Manager at a smallish to medium-sized charity called Working with Men. We deliver projects around fatherhood, conflict resolution, engagement of young men who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), and other issues. We consider ourselves to deliver unique practice for boys and young men. We reach approximately 6,000 individuals across a year with our work. We are mainly based in the Southeast in London.

I have made a few bullet points that I will talk about. First of all, in our experience modelling behaviour is key, whether within the home, within an educational setting, within the wider community and society, or through the media, in that order we have found. With all of them, if you are lacking in one then the other areas become more important.

Secondly, although there are now good steps and practice towards including fathers more in early-years setting and in educational settings, there is still far too little investment and will around engaging men in these settings formally. Those who tend to be involved are those who are already keen dads who want to be involved. Those dads who are harder to reach, or for whom it is not the norm and where reading was not the done thing in the family, they are left where they are and there is no real effort, apart from isolated cases, for example where agencies like us are commissioned to go out and engage. It is still far too rare, and I have been in this field seven years now. These establishments really need to make sure there is a culture change in terms of accepting and embracing fathers, men and boys within the school and early-years settings. That is really important.

We have identified that some men, especially those with complex needs such as younger fathers – we run a few teenage-pregnancy projects for fathers as well – and for non-resident fathers, there is still a lack of confidence about what their role is in educating their children. Should I be the teacher? Should I be the disciplinarian? It is very interesting, because being a disciplinarian means to teach. What is my role? The government needs to mandate for society as a whole what that role is and what we want it to be. We are very keen to tell people we do not want to interfere with their private and personal lives, but if we want to improve outcomes we should be making statements about what we expect fathers to do.

Acceptance that boys from certain backgrounds are going to fail is still very prevalent. From some socioeconomic, racial or cultural backgrounds, there is still a low expectation. We have learned this from boys ourselves. Young boys who have gone on to become teenage fathers have tended to think that, 'I found ways of drifting through school and no one really challenged me. I knew that at seven or eight, if I did not want to answer or get up and read in class, I started exhibiting a certain type of behaviour and they would just leave me alone at the back.' These are not all boys who were excluded, kicked out or left; some were. Some finished and had some degree of qualifications, but in English and reading they do not want to be seen to be failing. Fear of failure is the biggest fear that a lot of young men have: 'If I cannot be good at something, I will not attempt it.' That is really important.

In family homes where there is no father or significant male role model, mothers should be supported to understand the different behavioural and developmental stages of their sons. We run a programme called the Boys' Development Programme for mums in fatherless households, which looks at your boy's behaviour and his different

developmental rate from yours, as you remember it. There were a couple of points about this. I am also not an expert on boys' and girls' brains, but in society our roles as men – the vast majority of men, apart from the elite – were defined by physicality as opposed to intellectual pursuits. That has only really changed in the past 50 or 100 years. In certain strata of society, they still want to express themselves through physicality. It does not mean that you have to, but that is your motivation. If your skills were fine motor skills, being a soldier or a mechanic, you will read about that. Once you have learned reading and enjoy it, you will find other things you read that you find interesting as well, like fiction or comics. As was mentioned earlier on, all the latest blockbuster films coming out are all based on graphic novels and comics. What does that say?

There is a change in societal norms and the role of gender in society. Certain groups of men are being left behind. When that happens, as mothers become the breadwinner in their family homes, men and boys tend to try to express their masculinity through über-displays of machismo. One of those is not submitting to anything they faintly associate with being feminine, like learning or listening to the teacher. Schools are very female-dominated environments. I think there was a recommendation 15-20 years ago about 20% of school staff being male. I do not think we are anywhere near that target. That is a big factor.

A lot of people today have talked about technology. Evolving methods of communication and receiving information have changed the way children navigate their way through the world. Many young people I work with did not attain any qualification around literacy or English, but are very well versed at communicating, receiving information and finding information they want to find across multimedia platforms. However, maybe they cannot write with good grammar in a text or an email.

I do not want to belittle any projects at all, because I think role modelling, peer support and the use of Kindles is very good. However, I think far too often teachers – who are a lot older than the students they are trying to teach – impose on them what they think is cool to try to make reading exciting. As someone said about football books, football books were written last year about last season. By the time I read it this year, it is out of date so it is of no interest to me. You have to keep things very, very relevant for boys, or they will not be interested.

Finally, there is proper consideration of the interests of boys, as others have also touched on. Encourage and value any form of reading, including non-fiction. Use a multimedia platform, political and religious texts, historic texts to help boys understand the context of the world we live in today, and stuff about counterculture. A lot of the young men I work with who are becoming fathers are very interested in subversiveness and counterculture. Boys tend to want to be rebels at some stage in their life, and they are interested in understanding other rebels and how they become a rebel. You do not do that through conversation; you can read and learn history.

Similarly, some of the boys I work with are ex-offenders. Although many of them are interested in developing their bodies while they are at Her Majesty's pleasure, a lot of them want to develop their mind and come out with an extensive list of books they have read while they were detained. That was the first time they had ever read, when they had a lot of time on their hands. I think we are doing them a massive disservice in believing they are not interested in reading. We should be finding what motivates them and asking them. You said to me as we were standing outside that it was funny there are no boys

here. It would be really good for the panel to speak to some young men and some boys. We have access to loads of them, but I did not think of this before I came today unfortunately.

That is where I will finish. There are examples of good practice out there, where men's involvement, fathers' involvement and what works for boys is relevant. We need to take those examples and disseminate them locally, nationally and across the board.

Chair

We have a couple of minutes before Anthony has to go. Jim, do you want to go first?

Lord Knight

We have talked a lot about the importance of talk. We have talked a certain amount about the importance of parental engagement and home engagement. With the Alex Rider books, which are great, do you think they are marketed in a way that dads will want to read them as well as their kids?

Anthony Horowitz

It is one of the hardest things to get across. I am a huge supporter of parents reading with their kids. When I give talks around the country, I always say it is the one occasion in your life when you are on a level playing field with your child. They are not going to share their computer games with you. If you want to get close to your kids, read with them at night. 20 minutes a night spent reading with a kid makes a fantastic difference and brings you together in a way nothing else can.

Lord Knight

I was fortunate when I was sent a bunch of books by the School Library Association for boys of about 11-12. I read your books; I read a bunch of other people's books that I would not otherwise have read, because they are not pitched at me even though I have a 12-year-old son.

Anthony Horowitz

My books are marketed in such a way that they should always be appealing slightly above a child's interest. In other words, a child should reach up to the books rather than have them patronising and reaching down.

The gentleman who is just leaving was talking about e-books. I cannot tell you how much I disagree with what you said. The physicality of a book is so much a part of it. The Alex Rider books have just been reissued with new covers; they look stunning. Ownership of books and having books around you is something which I think is very, very special for all children. That is of course something you do not get with e-books. I did wonder how many of the children who downloaded books – and I do not the decry success; it is an interesting thing to be trying – actually read what was on the computers. That is a harder test.

Robert Halfon MP

I am not saying I agree with it; I am just asking the question.

Anthony Horowitz

I completely understand. Anything that extends reading is of course valuable, but your question was about marketing. Marketing is a very, very quick part of it. The presence and physicality of books is a very big part of the argument, hence the need to have books in schools. They need to be updated all the time in school libraries, so they are not just there with old books on the shelves. They should constantly be morphing, with funds to afford new books from new writers.

Baroness Prashar

I have a quick question. From all the evidence we have heard this afternoon, the message I am getting is that there are certain generic things we need to do to promote reading right across the board. Do you think that by focusing just on boys we will be detracting from that bigger message? Is it a positive thing or is it counterproductive?

Anthony Horowitz

I think it is an interesting question. I do not want to upset Jonathan, but to a certain extent I think you are right. There is a danger. Why do we worry about boys versus girls, as opposed to tall children versus short children, black children or white children, poor children or rich children? It is all children. Nonetheless, this gap does mean that girls do seem to be starting with an unfair advantage. I think that does have to be addressed.

Baroness Prashar

That is a diplomatic answer, thank you.

Owen Thomas

I failed to mention the real importance impressed on all of us – teachers, schools and parents – to inform boys of the correlation between literacy and improved life chances. From a very young age, boys can identify the people in their neighbourhoods who are good, bad, rich, poor, role models and not role models. We could say to them that reading – understanding text, reading outside the norm – leads to achievement and attainment. A-Levels and university are pie in the sky to a lot of these guys, but reading is something on which we can all get a grip. We have to impress upon them, and on their parents, the importance of literacy. I think someone said that you need a generational change. In some families, the parents are struggling with English as a second language or they just did not do very well themselves, being born and bred here. I think that is a culture we need to change, and we need to support them all as a family. We need to impress upon them all, rather than leaving them where they are because are a little bit challenging with their behaviour or a little bit difficult. That is only going to work through joined-up working across agencies within a local authority: education, social services, teenage pregnancy and health services. We all need to communicate a lot better

between ourselves to track families and understand that a child who is failing in literacy may have a range of other complex issues attached to them.

Lord Knight

Could I just ask a related question to that? I agree with you about talking up the relationship between literacy and wider life chances and achievement. There was some nervousness about us doing this inquiry because, if we start to talk about the gender gap, does it not become a self-fulfilling prophecy? Not because we talk about it, but generally there is a bigger shout about this bigger problem.

Owen Thomas

I think it is already happening. When I go back and the kids ask why I was not in my usual role today, and I tell them where I was, I will tell them about being in the House of Commons for literacy for boys. They will say, 'What do you mean?' I have to day 'reading with boys' to a lot of them. They do not identify with this literacy, achievement and getting exams. 'That is for softer boys; that is for girls. I will make my way on my wits.'

Emily Tudor

We decided to give boys a choice with the text that they study as their novel at GCSE. We sent out adverts; one was for *Pride and Prejudice* and one was for *Animal Farm*. We let them choose the texts. There are more boys in the school anyway, but half the class who studied *Pride and Prejudice* were boys. I think it was very important that they were choosing to go to that text, because we did not mention gender.

Eve Bearne

Picking up on both of those points, if we want to educate the parents of the future to be able to support the reading of children, all of the things we have talked about need to be made explicit to them. We need to talk with them about not only why reading is important for ourselves as individuals, but how much we enjoy reading and talking to everybody else about it. UKLA evaluated the Summer Reading Challenge a couple of years ago. While teachers were not aware that the young people in their classes talked about reading a lot, all of the children who responded self-reported loving to talk about reading with friends, family, librarians and everybody. If we want to encourage parents of the future to be able to talk about reading, that is where we need to put a bit of attention. Making choices and becoming discriminating is a part of that.

Chair

Can I ask a question of Patrick and Emily? One of the points you made was about lengthening the school day. What was the rationale for that and how long ago did you do it? Assuming it was a few years ago, what has the effect been both in terms of the feedback from parents and pupils and do you think it has contributed to an improvement in attainment?

Patrick Winston

The challenge was we were coming from a position of strength, which was very unusual in 2004-05. I had the opportunity to visit a range of schools nationwide, and saw some outstanding practice and some practice you would not want to adopt. We knew at some stage we would go to a brand-new campus. It seemed crazy to go to a campus costing £21 million or thereabouts and have these facilities available on a typical school day of nine to three. We saw many benefits from lengthening the school day, so we are teaching 29 hours a week as opposed to 25. If you multiply that over five years, it is quite phenomenal.

We have also learned to be flexible with staff. As an organisation, we moved away from controlling staff to actually giving greater autonomy. We start the school day at 08.15. People said that would not work; there was no issue. There was no issue of punctuality; students are there on time. We give a much broader curriculum. Recent government directives have in actual fact pulled back the breadth, so we are now giving more depth and less breadth. For example, at Key Stage 4 we have increased from next September the amount of time for literacy and for numeracy. Clearly, we see those as being two really important areas. If youngsters have difficulty with literacy and numeracy, what is the point of them actually taking those skills into other areas where they cannot succeed? It has been really well fashioned and well welcomed by students. Parents really like it. Members of staff have liked the flexibility, and we have been very accommodating.

One of the most famous students to have come from St Paul's is the rapper Tinie Tempah. He puts down the fact of his success today to the way he was taught Shakespeare by Emily and her team. Learning outside the curriculum is a really big area. Plumstead and Abbey Wood might not seem a long way away, but if we do not take the students to London to the theatre, to musicals and to the opera, they will not go themselves.

Emily Tudor

They do not go. They will not take a train ride from Plumstead to the centre of London. It does not happen, so they need to be taken out of school, into the local woods or whatever it might be, but out of that seat in which they are otherwise stuck.

Lord Knight

Do you call it literacy to the children?

Patrick Winston

No.

Chair

The initial rationale, then, was to make better use of this fantastic new facility you had.

Patrick Winston

We had to go five years without it.

Chair

It was not explicitly, though, that you thought a lot of the pupils were not getting the support they needed at home, and therefore you wanted to keep them in the school.

Patrick Winston

No, we saw a situation to give young people better opportunities. It was an 11-16 school that never had a plan to have a sixth form because we had outstanding sixth-form provision. It was actually going to increase their opportunities to get better qualifications at Level 2.

I will come back to Emily's point. She spoke about the 'bottom group', but I am not allowed to use that term, the Progress Group. Those young people are making phenomenal progress. Young people are coming in not even on the scale at Key Stage 2, but walking out with Ds and Es. The progress is absolutely phenomenal. We felt that it was a much better way to give greater opportunities. As I say, Academies were a contentious issue back in 2003-05. We have turned it around and said it has brought us transformation and greater opportunities for students. It is there for the students, and not for the staff.

Emily Tudor

Before we moved to the new site, children used to hang around before school. By going to the new building and giving them learning to do straightaway, they were fulfilling their time. They were not going home and doing their learning there, so we let them do it in the building with us.

Craig Whittaker MP

I have a very quick question for Emily about something you said around modular teaching. My understanding was that there is a huge amount of evidence to suggest that modular teaching actually showed a definite decline in standards. Everything else you spoke about, though, was about pedagogy. I just wondered whether we are mixing the two, if you have the pedagogy right.

Emily Tudor

I think you have to have strong pedagogy. You have to have excellent teachers, who take modules and build on the assessment focuses with each module that goes by. In the past, there was this elusive exam day in June and particularly these boys were having to learn Thomas Hardy poetry or whatever. It was not happening for them like that, so at least now they are taking on their skills. They might forget some of the things, but they are going to take their skills on. It is about giving them things they take beyond school: about reading information, writing a letter, making choices, and making judgements.

Patrick Winston

To back up what Emily has done, a decision we made right from the start was that we saw for some of us as adults it was the old-fashioned Third Year, now Year 9. We then saw the National Curriculum brought in for Year 8. As a school, we made a decision straightaway that Key Stage 3 would only be over two years, and we would move into Key Stage 4 for the start of Year 9. I have to say to you that we went back the first day after the Easter break, and all these Year 9s were coming out of the gate because they all had their first maths module. 'What did you get?' Invariably, they were very high grades. 'How does it match up in relation to what you were expecting?' 'I am one grade above, two grades above.' That is fantastic for motivation, and it is about motivation. You actually look to build on this. Okay, we do not have a sixth form, but these people are better prepared now for post-16 than when we operated the old-fashioned system of a three-year Key Stage 3 and two-year Key Stage 4. There are real benefits if there is top-quality learning. For us, it is not just about getting thresholds at Grade C or better; it is about A and A*. It is also about three levels of progress or better.

Chair

I thank the third panel of witnesses for their time, and the other witnesses who have stayed in the room to listen to the rest of the evidence. There was a suggestion about getting some evidence from some boys and some young men. There is actually going to be a panel that the NLT is setting up, and there are a series of questions. If any of the Commission members or witnesses have thoughts about the questions we might put to that group, feed them to Jonathan. Having said that, can I thank all the Commission members, NLT staff and Steph from my office for setting today up? Thank you all very much for giving up your time.

This Full Transcript was produced by Ubiquus UK ☐ +44 (0) 20 7269 0370

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