



House of Commons  
Education Committee

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# Secretary of State: School accountability, qualifications and curriculum

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**Oral Evidence**

***15 May 2013***

*Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for  
Education*

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# Oral evidence

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## Taken before the Education Committee on Wednesday 15 May 2013

Members present:

Mr Graham Stuart (Chair)

Neil Carmichael  
Alex Cunningham  
Bill Esterson  
Pat Glass  
Michael Gove  
Charlotte Leslie

Siobhain McDonagh  
Ian Mearns  
Chris Skidmore  
Mr David Ward  
Craig Whittaker

*Witness:* **Right Hon Michael Gove MP**, Secretary of State for Education, gave evidence.

**Q1 Chair:** Good morning, Secretary of State, and welcome to this session of the Education Committee. It is a pleasure, on my second day back after my accident, to see you before the Committee. I thank you for your kind words at Education questions, even if they were in the past tense. I am glad to say that I am here, and that I am definitely living in the present. We are looking today at accountability measures, and curriculum and exam reform. Cambridge Assessment has suggested that reformed GCSEs should report results on a numerical scale score instead of using the existing grade scale. It thinks the main advantages of that system would be that it was fairer, that exactly what marks a student achieved could be seen and that it would be future-proof because there would be no need to add extra grades. The National Association of Head Teachers greeted it as a good, positive suggestion for a better balance between accountability and assessment. How would a numerical scale fit in with your vision of reformed GCSEs? Would there be any disadvantages?

**Michael Gove:** First, it is a pleasure to see you back in the chair, Mr Chairman and, secondly, I am sorry that I failed the grammar test by using the past tense when talking about you. If it is any consolation, the Leader of the Opposition did the same for Alex Ferguson, so I suspect that it is not an intimation of mortality, but a recognition of greatness.

With respect to your substantive question, there are advantages in a numerical scale score and, as you know better than anyone, the process by which you move from the marker allocating points or marks to a question to a grade being awarded is complex, sometimes opaque and not always helpful in terms of retaining confidence in the integrity of exams overall. There are advantages, but it is also the case that, with respect to some of the advice we have received from Ofqual—I am sure that Ofqual would be happy to share it with you—there are also potential complexities. Ofqual is disposed to moving towards a different approach from the current one of A to F. I do not want to pre-empt whether or not it will move towards a numerical scale score or advise us that it would be the right thing to do, but it does have significant concerns.

**Q2 Chair:** Sticking with the Cambridge Assessment input, it has talked about introducing a level 1, level 2 model for exams in maths and English, based on what is done in Singapore. Does that have any appeal to you in dealing with the tiering issue?

**Michael Gove:** Again, as you will be aware, the history of how we have approached GCSE reform has been heavily influenced—although not determined—by the advice that we have received from Ofqual. One of the things that I wanted to do was to move away as far as possible from tiering, but Glenys Stacey, chief executive of Ofqual, has made her views clear in *The Times Educational Supplement* and elsewhere that while, in many respects, that is an understandable desire, there are specific problems not so much in English curiously, but more in mathematics and potentially in science.

My overall instinct is to try to move away from tiering, but I want to take a pragmatic approach. If there is strong advice—not just from Ofqual, but from one of the awarding bodies—that it would be easier to have a more reliable assessment if we had some form of separation, I will take that into account. Whether that is the current system of tiering whereby you have one paper and another paper overlapping it—what you call a C or a good pass grade—or whether it should be a core and an extension paper, or whether we should have two papers that do not touch, as it were, are matters that we and Ofqual are considering.

**Q3 Chair:** If you stand up strongly for rigour, you are necessarily going to come under a lot of scrutiny. Who did the research for your “Mr Men” speech? Do you think you need to show more care in the headline-grabbing references you use, especially when you are talking about the curriculum, in case it undermines your own position in determining what the curriculum should be?

**Michael Gove:** I do most of the research for the speeches.

**Ian Mearns:** “Mr Men” books?

**Michael Gove:** The specific reference to the “Mr Men” lesson plan came from a blog by a teacher who writes under the pseudonym of Andrew Old. He is a Labour party supporter, as it happens, but also a very informative voice in the education debate. When

something appears in a blog post, even if it is from a respected individual, you check it. I visited the original site, saw the material and was surprised by it. The striking thing about it is that while there have been some people who have been offended or who disagreed with the thrust of the argument, no one has disputed that it is a popular resource. No one has disputed that it was material aimed at 15 to 16-year-olds, and opinion divides on whether it is appropriate. In the same way, there were some comments that I made about the Historical Association's magazine, *Primary History*. Again, the Historical Association said that it took issue with some of the points. We may explore them later. I can share with the Committee a copy of *Primary History*. The sources that I used there were all—I think—pretty robust.

**Chair:** I am glad to see that the initial nervous signs from your special adviser behind you were unwarranted.

**Q4 Alex Cunningham:** How different are the proposals announced in February from those announced in September? Is it really reform or is it EBacc by another name?

**Michael Gove:** There is one big difference between what we originally proposed and what we are now doing, which is essentially market reform. We originally wanted to try to move towards one exam board per subject. We laid out the arguments as to why that might be helpful in dealing with some of the problems of grade inflation and the race to the bottom. I think the Committee understood what those arguments were and did not consider them unrespectable, but the Committee, like others, including Ofqual, pointed out that there were significant risks inherent in pursuing both market reform and also qualification reform. So market reform was, in the phrase I used at the time, a bridge too far. I do not think that what we have explored is, intellectually, a discreditable path to follow, but it is not appropriate at the moment.

Qualification reform is broadly in line with what we announced at the beginning of the consultation process. The changes that we are making are broadly in that direction. As I acknowledged in questions from the Chair earlier, in an ideal world I would rather not have tiering, but I have to acknowledge that it may be appropriate in some subjects.

**Q5 Alex Cunningham:** In your statement in February you referred to the exam board system as one reform too many at this time. That is something that I think you have acknowledged. But you also said that you would keep that position under review. Have you got a timetable to bring that back? Why would you do that?

**Michael Gove:** I don't have a timetable. It is the case that, as I just said, I don't think there is anything intrinsically wrong. It's not like this was a policy avenue that was completely—to coin a phrase—"bonkeroony". It is just that it would have been too much too soon, as it were, so it has therefore been put to one side. We have got something to concentrate on at the moment. We or a future Government, once these reforms are bedded in, might want to look again at the

whole question of market reform, but we or a future Government might conclude that while there is a perfectly good case in theory for it, it is not worth pursuing in practice.

**Alex Cunningham:** So you are ruling it out in this Parliament.

**Michael Gove:** Yes.

**Q6 Alex Cunningham:** There has been a lot of opposition to much of what you said. Are you confident the proposals will actually command a consensus?

**Michael Gove:** Yes, I think they will. One of the things I have found so far is that every time a reform is introduced there are people who are quietly cheering you on, there are one or two enthusiastic voices, and then there are folk who have fears and concerns.

**Alex Cunningham:** And outright opposition.

**Michael Gove:** Indeed. And if you try to meet legitimate fears and concerns, and you also try to look behind the volume of opposition, where there can sometimes be good points, and try to incorporate them, then after a while reforms tend to bed down. Right at the very beginning of this Parliament we had some big structural reforms, which were very controversial. They seem to have bedded down now and commanded a degree of consensus. I think the same thing will apply here.

**Q7 Alex Cunningham:** So within a relatively short period of time teachers will be content and will just get on with the job?

**Michael Gove:** What is interesting is that there are plenty of younger teachers and teachers who are engaged in this debate who are supportive of some of the changes we want to make. Indeed, prior to the consultation exercise, there were lots of teachers who were saying, for example, that controlled assessment was onerous, took up a disproportionate amount of time and took away from teaching.

**Q8 Alex Cunningham:** Are you telling us that it is older, more experienced teachers who are opposing, and the new ones coming through the system are thinking, "Ah yes, the Secretary of State has some radical ideas"?

**Michael Gove:** That is a binary divide, and I may well have tempted you down that path. No, I think that there are teachers in different parts of the country and from different backgrounds. All I would say is something I have said before and I want to repeat here: we have the best generation of head teachers ever and the best ever generation of young teachers coming into the classroom. Those are both reasons to be optimistic.

**Q9 Pat Glass:** In the early days of the Labour Government, in 1997, I cynically used to look at some of the policies that you of course think of as being in the "bonkeroony" area—some of the proposals that were way out there—that were put out to mass opposition; the Government would then withdraw to something that would have been unacceptable previously, but everybody sighed with relief. Is this

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what you are doing now—these things wouldn't have been acceptable, but let's put something out there that is far worse, get rid of all the opposition, everybody sighs with relief and you get what you wanted in the first place?

**Michael Gove:** If you are saying I am the heir to Blair, or a disciple of David Blunkett, I would plead guilty to both—well, I'd plead guilty to being a disciple of David Blunkett; heir to Blair, I don't know. But seriously, my approach is—

**Alex Cunningham:** Could you clarify that for us?

**Michael Gove:** Yes, I will. I am a disciple of David Blunkett. Tony Blair will decide who his heir is, but I am a great fan of his as well. More seriously, my approach—and I think I have said this before—is to try to outline what would be the best possible solution from my point of view. I do not mind if people say, "Please change that," or, "Please change the other," because it is through putting forward a strong case, listening to the contrary case and accepting the strong parts of the contrary case that you end up with the best policy. So rather than my saying that it is a case of saying something outrageous then retreating, it is better to say, "Put forward a strong argument, expect strong response, listen to that strong response and accept those parts of it that are persuasive."

**Q10 Alex Cunningham:** What do you mean when you say that "the value of the qualifications for individuals must take precedence ahead of ensuring the absolute reliability of the assessment"? Is it really acceptable to have qualifications that are not reliable themselves?

**Michael Gove:** I do believe that you need to assess qualifications absolutely reliably; one of the things I would say is that I hope that the changes that we are making will be seen as making assessment more reliable overall. One of the things I would acknowledge is that every time you change assessment, for the very first new or refined qualification that you introduce, by definition, if you change the measure it is more difficult to measure the change. But once you have a qualification in place that makes sure that individuals have the skills and knowledge they need to go on to the next step or progression in their education, that is a good thing. You have to balance the cost, sometimes, of introducing a new qualification, which means that people have to adjust to a new way of doing things, with the strengths that come from having something more robust.

**Q11 Alex Cunningham:** So you remain confident that you are taking the profession with you?

**Michael Gove:** Yes. There will always be voices in the profession that will be unhappy or concerned, but I hope that we can maintain a civilised dialogue. What I have been impressed by, actually, is the way in which the overwhelming response from people in the profession has been thoughtful, reasoned and helpful, even when it has been critical of what we want to do.

**Q12 Alex Cunningham:** One of the areas of particular concern to people out there is the timing of a lot of the changes coming in. Do you not accept

that the timetable for introducing the new GCSEs is challenging—perhaps too challenging? Are you prepared to delay it if necessary?

**Michael Gove:** It is challenging. I know that you are talking about GCSEs, but, with respect to A-levels I have already delayed implementation there following advice from Ofqual. We always keep the timetable under review, but unless you set a challenging timetable, there is always a risk of delivery drift.

**Alex Cunningham:** Do you think that it is possible that it will have to be delayed?

**Michael Gove:** It is always possible that anything could be delayed if a variety of factors strike, but I am not contemplating that.

**Alex Cunningham:** So you are confident that you can make the timetable that you put in place?

**Michael Gove:** At the moment, everything that we are aware of reinforces my belief that we can be confident about it. Ofqual, quite rightly, are ensuring that we provide them and others with the support and resources that they need to deliver this. It is challenging, absolutely, but I also think that it is deliverable.

**Q13 Alex Cunningham:** We have two systems that will operate side by side, so I wonder how you will address the possible confusion over the two types of GCSEs running alongside each other where some students in the same year group could have new-style GCSEs while others have old-style ones. It is confusing, isn't it?

**Michael Gove:** It could be confusing for some, but it is also the case that, at the moment, if you look at the five A\* to C GCSE measure, that includes equivalents and there are many students—if not a majority, certainly a plurality—who take GCSEs along with other qualifications. Students, schools and, indeed, employers are used to acknowledging that folk will have GCSEs and BTECs or other qualifications, and that doing well in each of these qualifications—getting the top, or near top, grade—is a sign of real achievement.

**Q14 Alex Cunningham:** In view of the fact that young people will be operating on two different systems and the tremendous challenge you have to bring this in on time, would it not have been better just to delay it a little, address the challenge of bringing it in and, at the same time, have all young people on the same system at one time?

**Michael Gove:** I take your point, which I think is fair, but it is also the case that you will never have everyone doing exactly the same qualification by definition, because there are already other vocational qualifications that students can, quite rightly, take at the age of 16, which will, quite rightly, count in the accountability system and will not be the same as the GCSEs. So you will not have all folk taking exactly the same qualification at 16 whatever you do with the GCSE implementation timetable.

**Alex Cunningham:** So you do not think that it is a problem.

**Michael Gove:** It is a fair case, but the current implementation timetable seems to me to be the best thing.

**Q15 Ian Mearns:** On 7 February, you said: “There is a consensus that the exams and qualification system we inherited was broken.” What tangible evidence did you have for making that statement, and what conclusive evidence have you seen that standards have declined compared to international benchmarks?

**Michael Gove:** Two things. With respect to the exam system, I would cite a number of things, the first of which is the problem that we had with GCSE English last year. However you interpret what happened then, it was clear that—the judge in the judicial review of Ofqual’s decision-making confirmed this—the design, however well intentioned its authors may have been, created all sorts of problems. Prior to that, as the Committee has acknowledged, there were plenty of examples that reinforced the impression of grade inflation over time. It is certainly the case that there were things that needed to be done to GCSEs, and we can argue about how radical they might have been.

On the broader question of international standards, I accept that there is a debate. There are some who have argued that there has been no relative decline in the UK’s position, and that if you look at two of the PISA cohorts where we were doing better a wee while ago and now we appear to be doing worse, the sample in those was too small to be totally reliable. There are other people who say, “No, it is perfectly possible to track that decline, and the number of the new countries that entered PISA and the sample size does not explain everything.” But even if you do not think that there has been a decline, people such as Andreas Schleicher say that, at best, performance has been stagnant even though there has been increased resource. You can take the view, either that we have declined relative to other countries, as some do, or, if you are more optimistic, you can say we are stagnant. What we have not seen is improvement relative to others, according to external experts.

**Q16 Ian Mearns:** There are a number of things within that that also prompt further questions. For instance, the data put forward for PISA ratings are compiled in different ways in different countries. Therefore it is difficult to make exact comparisons country to country, because of the way in which the data are put together.

**Michael Gove:** You are absolutely right. It is a complex area. We can try to distil it down; different people have at different times. The previous Government—I don’t attempt to criticise them—when there was an uptick in PISA in 2000 said that that was a vindication of their policies. That is what politicians do. I agree that it is important to try to look at all the data and come to a rounded view. There are reasons to be pessimistic and reasons to be stoical, but there are fewer reasons to be optimistic.

**Q17 Ian Mearns:** Have you got a feeling that there is a consensus about what part of the improvement that has been made in schools over the past 20 years has been down to genuine improvement and what has been down to quantifiable grade inflation?

**Michael Gove:** I could not allocate it on the basis of 20:80. No. I hope I have said before and I will say now that it is undoubtedly the case that there has been

genuine improvement. The question is whether that improvement relative to other countries is greater, less or about the same. It is also the case, as we know, that there has been some headline improvement that has been attributable to grade inflation.

**Q18 Ian Mearns:** I think everyone out there is wondering how much has been genuine improvement and how much has been grade inflation. From the perspective of managing the system at the DfE, it would be good if somebody scientifically quantified what is genuine improvement and what is grade inflation. Then we could see what the argument is about.

**Michael Gove:** I quite agree.

**Ian Mearns:** Get on with it, then! What evidence do you have that raising demand will itself lead to a rise in standards? Isn’t there a danger that that might discourage some youngsters? Some at the top may be discouraged because they are expected to do even more. Some at the bottom may be discouraged from even trying at all. Is there a dilemma there for you?

**Michael Gove:** On its own, simply raising the demand in qualifications isn’t enough. You have to do other things, which I believe we are. I think it was acknowledged in the Committee’s report on GCSEs to EBCs that, as part of raising aspiration overall, having a higher level of challenge would be appropriate. That is what good teachers do over time with all of their students; they incorporate a higher level of challenge into their teaching and assessment.

You are also right that we need to ensure that students feel that moving from where they are to a better position, even if they don’t actually scale the highest summits, is a significant achievement. We may go on to discuss the “best eight” points score approach that we were consulting on for secondary school accountability. One thing that that is intended to do is try to encourage schools to give as much attention to helping children who start from a low base get to a decent level, as enabling people who are at a decent level get to the top.

**Q19 Ian Mearns:** I am pretty sure that you are convinced that reformed GCSEs will have a positive impact on equality of opportunity. What evidence have you got to back that up, to show that what you are doing will have the impact that you want it to have; that is, a positive impact on equality of opportunity and closing the attainment gap?

**Michael Gove:** One of the principal things I am hopeful about is that by removing controlled assessment and simply freeing up more time for teaching, there will be an opportunity for more students to benefit. The more high-quality teaching time any student can have, the more likely they are to do well in examinations and subsequent performance. That is the first thing.

The second thing is that modularisation, when it was introduced, tended not just to reduce the level of challenge but encourage or tempt people into a degree of gaming and concentration on exam technique rather than deeper understanding. It seems to me that there are persuasive arguments, but one of the things that we want to do—we have been discussing it with

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Ofqual this week—is ensure that any improvements that we see in GCSE results are real. We want to see whether we can have a form of sampling or a reference test to meet your previous concern about whether the improvement is real and to ensure that we can have an overview of whether the assessment is really helping to drive improved attainment.

**Q20 Ian Mearns:** But would you accept that it is understandable that professionals working in the field have a right to expect some sort of rigour in the evidence base that you are using to justify the actions you are taking?

**Michael Gove:** Yes. One of the things that we saw with both A-levels and GCSEs is that it is often the case that with students, who were sometimes from relatively disadvantaged or poorer backgrounds, or were those with lower levels of attainment, the longer they can enjoy teaching before the assessment takes place, the better they potentially do.

**Q21 Chair:** You were asked specifically about what it was in the reforms that would close the gap. I think that all the points you made were about how it could lead to a better education. It was not obvious that any of the points that you made specifically related to children from poorer homes or of lower prior attainment. It would be equally true of the brightest child that the longer they have teaching, the higher their standard would be. What is there in your reforms that will contribute to the second of the Department for Education’s goals, which is to close the gap?

**Michael Gove:** One of them relates to the point we discussed near the beginning about tiering. I felt that tiering placed a cap on aspiration. If we can remove it wherever possible and still have reliable assessment, that helps. The second is that extra time spent on teaching will, I hope, disproportionately help those students at a lower level of prior attainment. They will benefit more from assessment coming later and from their having enjoyed more teaching.

**Chair:** Is there any evidence for that?

**Michael Gove:** There is some evidence here that I was going to cite, but it relates more to A-levels. I will write back to the Committee, although I may find it in my notes. I do not want to quote the wrong piece of evidence, but I have some evidence here, so as you carry on questioning me, I will come to that.

**Q22 Chair:** We welcome that, Secretary of State. The reforms will have served a good purpose if they raise standards for everybody. The Committee, if I can speak for it, wonders about the Department claiming that the reforms close the gap when we cannot and you cannot even verbalise what it is about them that will close the gap. It may be that they are perfectly good reforms if they raise standards for all, but they will not close the gap unless you can show us evidence to the contrary.

**Michael Gove:** I was just going to say that there is research from Clarke and from Taverner and Wright, which shows that many of the skills that will ensure success subsequently develop progressively through a two-year course. There are, therefore, students who start at a lower level of attainment who are better

equipped at the end of those two years to go on to succeed. I will share that research and one or two other bits with the Committee and you can then make a judgment about whether it proves that case.

**Q23 Chair:** It does not necessarily invalidate the reforms, but if there is not a strong case that they will contribute to closing the gap, the Department should not suggest that they do.

**Michael Gove:** I take your point.

**Q24 Chair:** One more point, just following on from Ian’s questions, if I may. I am trying to work out what “raising the demand” means. If it means making the exam harder, answer, “We will raise the demand in the exam”—make it harder—and then we have Ofqual with a statutory duty to maintain standards over time. It is up to them to interpret that, I suppose, but they will stay in close liaison with you. Does it simply mean that the same number of people will get A grades as do now, it is just that their score will be lower, or does it mean that we will see fewer people getting the top grades, in which case we will have brought in grade deflation?

**Michael Gove:** Yes. We could have a situation where fewer people get top grades in the first introduction of the examination, and it holds its value but more people get top grades over time. You could have, as it were, the pegging of the value of the currency at a lower rate and more people earning the top band in that currency. One of the other things, of course—

**Q25 Chair:** Sorry to interrupt you, but there is of course one other alternative. When first introduced, for every new qualification, especially when there is widespread change, there tends to be greater volatility until the schools and the teachers learn how the marks system and syllabus works. You can get people doing worse in year one because schools do not know how to work the system, and then in the years after that they improve, not because the children are learning more but because the schools learn how to work the system better. This is rather a long question, but that is precisely why Ofqual tries to use its comparable outcomes data to level that out so that you do not end up with the first year being guinea pigs, where nobody gets an A\*, and three years later everyone is saying, “Oh look, brilliant—education has got better,” because suddenly lots of people are getting them. In fact, in educational terms, there has been no improvement or change. How do you deal with those issues?

**Michael Gove:** That is precisely why we are thinking about introducing a reference test, so that we have something that is designed that will, in itself, be administered to a sample of students to act as a benchmark against which we can determine whether or not grade inflation has taken place. That is something that Ofqual is very keen on. We have not come to a definitive conclusion, but the arguments in favour of it seem persuasive and it seems to be a way of dealing with that concern.

**Q26 Chair:** As a Committee we have been supportive of the introduction of sample testing. I

suppose the issue is about how you use it, but anyway we welcome that. However, I am not clear about whether your intention is that you would expect there to be lower numbers getting higher grades at first. Ofqual's current comparable outcomes are predominantly based on key stage 2 data—what happens at the end of primary school—which it triangulates with the results to work it out. If Ofqual is to maintain standards, it would tend to influence grade boundaries so that we do not get a collapse in the number of people getting A\*s, because unless it has reason to believe, based on any other analysis, that there has been a collapse in standards, it would feel that the first year of people doing your new GCSEs should not be disadvantaged against the previous year doing the old GCSEs just because they have been made more demanding. I am not clear as to whether or not you plan to reduce the number of people getting the top grades at first.

**Michael Gove:** The plan that is likely, although not definitive, is that we will change how the exams are graded, so that rather than, for the sake of argument, having A\*, A and B, you may have 1, 2, 3 and 4. It may be that 1, 2, 3 and 4 cover the band of achievement that is currently covered by A\* and A. One of the concerns people have is about differentiation at the top. If you move from the Reichsmark to the Deutschmark, as it were, you can say that these are indications, indices or recognition of a high level of achievement, but they are not directly comparable to the previous one, which we acknowledge is because it is a new qualification. That would help to re-fix the level at which people would recognise outstanding attainment.

**Chair:** Have you not just contradicted yourself?

**Michael Gove:** Probably.

**Q27 Chair:** You said that if you bring in the 1, 2, 3 and 4, you are creating more divisions—there will be subsets of the A\* and subsets of the A, allowing greater differentiation at the top, which is something that you specifically asked for. However, you also said that those would basically—I forget your exact words—be in place of or aligned with the previous A\*s and As, even though they are numbered. You then went on to say that of course it is a new qualification, so they will not necessarily be aligned. If it is entirely new and not related, Ofqual will not be maintaining standards over time; it will not be using comparable outcomes to ensure that roughly the same number of people get what was an A\*. It has now just become a 1 and a 2. Are you going to drive out the numbers? The 1s and 2s have a new name but still cover pretty much the same thing—are we going to see fewer of them? In other words, are we deliberately going to have grade deflation?

**Michael Gove:** First, you will have to see how 1, 2, 3 and 4 are referenced and what level of attainment should secure that recognition. Secondly, it is not my explicit aim to reduce the number of people who receive a particular mark; my aim is to ensure, working with Ofqual, that people can reliably feel that once you have new examinations, they will keep their standard over time. You are going to have new examinations and, I hope, a new approach, moving on

from comparable outcomes, so you are re-fixing exactly what the starting point may be.

**Q28 Mr Ward:** To use the analogy of a 100 metres race, are you saying that if we inclined the running track or increased the distance, people would run faster?

**Michael Gove:** Not necessarily, but potentially. I think that is a good analogy because one of the things that we—

**Mr Ward:** I thought it was a poor one. I am surprised you think it is a good one.

**Michael Gove:** I think it is a very good analogy. We talk about raising the bar for performance.

**Mr Ward:** Let us stick with the track. There seems to be a view that more are running the 100 metres in a faster time because they are cheating the system—they are getting booster powers, running shoes, or whatever it may be—and we want to deal with that. Dealing with those things I understand, but how does making the race harder over the same distance make people run faster? Isn't it about coaching?

**Michael Gove:** Yes, it is, but if you increase the level of challenge then people rise to that challenge. If you set the bar low, people do not feel the need to raise their game in the same way. I have always believed—or certainly for as long as I have been engaged in the debate on education—that one of our problems as a country is that we have set the bar too low, and that our expectations of all students have been insufficiently challenging.

**Mr Ward:** That is a massive, sweeping statement.

**Michael Gove:** It is, and we can debate it at length. I have written speeches and made the case that we have had too low a level of expectation for our students in almost every area.

**Mr Ward:** And also really quite insulting to thousands and thousands of teachers in many successful schools.

**Michael Gove:** No. It is also a recognition of what great teaching can achieve. That is one of the things I tried to argue last week. You have a primary school in inner London, where more than half of the children are eligible for free school meals, and more than half of the children have a language other than English as their first language. And yet in that school you have students who are studying two Shakespeare plays in year six at the age of 10 or 11. That is a high level of challenge, which has been successfully achieved. The question I ask, both as a parent and as a politician, is, why aren't there more schools capable of achieving at that level?

**Q29 Ian Mearns:** If I worked in the inner city, I could wait all day for Great Birnam wood to come to Dunsinane, but it's not going to happen, right?

**Michael Gove:** It actually did in the play.

**Ian Mearns:** Well, it kind of did.

**Michael Gove:** Although there was some gaming going on.

**Ian Mearns:** And I was not from my mother's womb untimely ripped.

You keep going on about making a positive impact and about raising standards, and we have asked you before about evidence. We have tried to follow you

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around the world to look at the evidence. You have been to Singapore and Finland, but things on the ground there are so very different. You have an adverse reaction towards tiering, but Singapore is quite clearly a tiered system, and Finland is so very different to what we have. But what they do have in both systems is a huge amount of stability. For instance, Finland does a curriculum review about once every 10 years, and they do it in a slow, incremental way. What are the international comparisons that you have particularly focused on that have led you to the train of thinking that you have gone down?

**Michael Gove:** There are several, and they don't just relate to the examination structure and the curriculum structure.

**Q30 Chair:** As far as possible, let's stick to the assessment area.

**Michael Gove:** Absolutely, Chairman. Very briefly, I will say one sentence and then I will get on to it. One of the things we have tried to do is to look at the common features in high-performing systems. Some high-performing systems have outlier aspects that you could not replicate elsewhere. It is the nature, for example, of the Finnish language that you will learn it as a Finn with a greater degree of ease than you will a more complicated language—I will put that to one side.

There are specific factors, but there are also common factors. The most prominent common factor is the quality of teaching. It is the single most important thing. However, if you look at high-performing jurisdictions such as Singapore, and you look for example at their A-levels, they are linear examinations. You are right; Singapore operates a tiered and tracking system, which I suspect both you and I might shy away from, because it has the shadow of selection hanging over it. But it is also the case that in most east Asian countries, including Singapore, there is a belief in what they call the mastery model, which is that you should get—certainly at age 11 and probably at age 16—most students up to a particular level where they have absorbed all the curriculum, and they do not take the view that some have in this country that there is a significant group of students who cannot get to a decent level in a general academic curriculum. Those are valuable points, and some other high-performing jurisdictions within the United States, such as Massachusetts, also recognise that in their curriculum. What I have tried to do is to learn from what other countries do in the curriculum and in assessment, but, of course, there is no perfect map.

**Q31 Charlotte Leslie:** Just looking at subject content, I wondered when the Government was planning to make more information available on subject content so that the exam boards can prepare for the introduction of new GCSEs.

**Michael Gove:** On GCSEs, at the end of June we should be able to have a consultation on subject content, and that should be agreed, I hope, by the autumn.

**Q32 Chair:** Is this the stuff that was originally going to be done by May, which became in May, then in

June and is now, according to you today, the end of June? Is that the same thing?

**Michael Gove:** I am saying the end of June; I hope it will be earlier in June, but June, yes.

**Chair:** Definitely June?

**Michael Gove:** Definitely June.

**Q33 Charlotte Leslie:** Going back to tiering, obviously children vary greatly in their abilities, and many of us accept the idea that all children should reach some kind of academic standard. How confident are you that it would be possible to encompass that large range within a single exam at GCSE? What sort of alternatives to extension papers have you considered?

**Michael Gove:** You are absolutely right that it is a challenge. There are some jurisdictions where it works. The advice that we have had from Ofqual is that it is more difficult in mathematics and science to move away from tiering, but there are some GCSEs at the moment that are not tiered; history is perhaps one of the most conspicuous. My own view is that it sends a positive signal, in many respects, to move away from tiering, but we have to acknowledge that if assessment experts say that it would be unreliable, and that you cannot have the entire ability range tested within a reasonable amount of time in one paper, we should think about it. I am attracted by the idea of core and extension papers, but there is a question as to whether or not an extension paper would require testing additional curriculum content or testing existing content in a more stretching way.

We have asked Ofqual for advice about each of those areas, and Ofqual, I am sure, would be happy to share this evidence with you. I think it is the case that they believe, on the basis of their consultation so far, that in mathematics and science the best thing to do is to have a system of tiering similar to the one that we have at the moment, where there is a crossover between the lower-tier paper and the higher-tier paper at around a decent pass mark, but there are arguments about other approaches as well. I cannot imagine that there would be any problem in Ofqual sharing the consultation responses and their working with you so that you can look at those and come to a conclusion about what might be best.

**Q34 Charlotte Leslie:** Obviously, uncertainty is difficult for the teaching profession. Have you got any kind of timetable as to when all these issues may be resolved?

**Michael Gove:** It should be the case that this autumn, after the consultation on GCSE subject content, we will publish the grade descriptors, the arrangements for tiering in individual subjects and, of course, the content specifications. People should know that in autumn of this year, so that they can be ready for first teaching subsequently.

**Q35 Charlotte Leslie:** Just looking at your proposal that exam boards should make more information available to students on their performance in different parts of the English and maths exams, what response have you had to that proposal? How has it gone down?



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**Michael Gove:** As ever, there has been a varying range of responses. As the Chairman pointed out, Cambridge Assessment have views about that. I am anxious, as much as possible, to ensure that there is maximum amount of feedback, but again I have to recognise, particularly with the challenging timetable, that we must not jeopardise the effect of delivery of fair assessment.

**Q36 Charlotte Leslie:** How much information—obviously it is a balance—do you think should be made available to teachers about the content of GCSE examinations, past papers and specifications? Obviously in the past we have had far too much made available, but there is evidence that if the test is unpredictable, it impacts on its validity.

**Michael Gove:** That is true. We want to try to reduce gaming behaviour as much as possible. At the moment too much time is spent on exam technique and not enough on mastering the content. But there is a balance to be struck in people knowing the type of assessment that there will be. We will publish, for example, what we believe the band of percentage marks should be in each area, so that—to take a case in point—in history, we would say that displaying chronological knowledge would be one assessment objective. Other assessment objectives might be being able to compare and analyse different arguments, and analysing sources in the paper. We would outline broadly what the percentage of marks might be that any GCSE could have in those areas. Then history teachers would know that they have to give people a spine of chronological narrative, develop analytical skills and have source comparison skills.

**Q37 Charlotte Leslie:** Are you watching what is going on in Scotland with the Scottish Qualifications Authority, in terms of their making much more information available to teachers?

**Michael Gove:** To my shame, I took a close interest in the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence and some of the problems there but I have not looked as closely as I should have at the SQA and the problems or benefits that they may have had from their changes. I will.

**Q38 Chair:** On specimen question papers, in particular, did you imagine that they would be produced or not?

**Michael Gove:** One thing we were thinking of doing was sharing with awarding bodies the types of questions that we thought might be appropriate. Ofqual said, “Haud yer wheesht. That is not necessarily appropriate for you to do.” But it may well be the case that awarding bodies might want to give people a clearer indication of the types of questions they might ask.

**Q39 Chair:** We have a lot to get through, but you are doing a good job, Secretary of State, so we will get through it all right.

Ofqual, because of its position as an independent regulator, has certain areas that belong to it. I suppose that there is a sort of tension. There may have been times where you drifted into what it considers to be

its area. Could you briefly describe, given all this reform and change to examinations, what bits are decided by Ofqual and what bits by you? Where is the border between where the regulator decides what happens and where you decide?

**Michael Gove:** We give a broad indication in terms of curriculum content and how we wish syllabuses to look. They take the final decisions on whether any of our suggestions are consistent with standards being maintained over time. By definition, there is dialogue, but the most illuminating thing, as we discussed in the past, is for people to look at the propositions that we have put forward, the correspondence that we have shared with Ofqual and how they have responded to that.

There was quite a striking discussion around the time of the GCSE controversy last year about what was properly our remit and what was properly Ofqual’s. Again, it might be helpful for the Committee if I shared with you DFE’s understanding of how Ofqual operates, given the fact that it also has a role in Northern Ireland regarding vocational qualifications. Wales has its own regulator, but there are qualifications called GCSE that Wales is responsible for regulating but which Ofqual has to be certain are judged fairly. We had conversations with the Welsh Education Minister, Leighton Andrews, on the—

**Chair:** I was going to congratulate you on that. It was not quite the ministerial conference that we recommended, but at least you had—

**Michael Gove:** We had the conversation. Leighton said that it was frank and cordial. I think it was, and it was helpful. The nature of Ofqual’s role relative to each individual Minister and jurisdiction is different. While I could describe it, I think it is best to share all that correspondence with you, and then you can conclude from that whether you feel that we have overstepped the mark, or that Ofqual has been too reticent.

**Q40 Chair:** We would be grateful for that. The fact you have had the meeting suggests that you are starting to take on board the need to at least think through the implications of having examination systems, albeit with the same name, in different jurisdictions heading off in different directions. We always felt that if that was done consciously that was one thing, but that we should not sleepwalk into creating more diverse systems than might be ideal for the benefit of young people.

**Michael Gove:** The view of all of us at that meeting was exactly that.

**Q41 Pat Glass:** Can I ask you about A-level reform? Your proposals have run into a good deal of opposition, not least from all of our universities. I attended a Westminster Hall debate where some very powerful arguments were made on this.

There are three main concerns. The first is predictability: universities use AS-levels to predict and to distinguish between students who do very well at GCSE. I know that your Department has done some research on that. Secondly, there is the issue of widening access: students who do well in AS-levels, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds,

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then feel encouraged to go on to apply for courses in universities that they would not previously have aspired to.

The third is about breadth and flexibility, and I have most concern about this because I have seen it. Students, particularly in subjects like maths and science, who were not particularly interested at GCSE but do really well in AS-level, realise that A-level in these subjects is vastly different and more interesting than at GCSE and are therefore tempted to go on or aspire to do A-levels in these subjects. How would you respond to those concerns? Given the degree of opposition, are you prepared to look at these areas again?

**Michael Gove:** First, there are three very serious concerns. Secondly, it is the case that there is a divergence of opinion in universities and among university academics. Some of the individuals who run admissions take the view that you have characterised, but many of the academics who are more directly concerned with teaching students take a different view. It was striking, for example, that at the weekend Mark Warner, professor of physics at Cambridge university struck a very different note from those who were responsible for admissions at his university in his analysis of the relative merits of linear assessment and the AS/A2 model. So there is a debate.

The second point that you raise is an important one: which is a better predictor of future success? You are right that the Department has done some research and we have shared that research with Kevin Brennan, because Kevin spoke very helpfully in the Westminster Hall debate. I will send you a copy of the letter to him as well. It states: “knowing GCSE results alone allows a university to correctly predict whether a student will receive a 2:1 in 69.5% of cases.” GCSE results are a slightly better predictor than AS results alone, which correctly predict the outcome in 68.4% of cases. It is very close but slightly better. “Knowing AS-levels as well as GCSEs does not add significantly to an admission officer’s ability to predict outcomes. Knowing both increases the prediction accuracy only slightly from 69.5% to 70.1%.” So it is a 0.6% increase in predictability, which is small.

That brings me on to the whole point about widening access. All other things being equal, that small level of predictability might mean that it would be a valuable tool for an admissions tutor. But the evidence, which I cited earlier in response to the question about GCSEs, suggests that performance improves over two years for many students. Like the students you talked about who were poorly taught in science at GCSE, those students who may not have been well taught beforehand improve significantly over the later two years of teaching. There is an analogy. On “Match of the Day” they pointed out recently that if you looked purely at the performance of teams on the basis of how they performed during the first half, Manchester United would not have won the Premiership and Swansea would have been in danger of relegation.

**Q42 Chair:** Would QPR have stayed up?

**Michael Gove:** No. Under no circumstances, I am afraid. It is sometimes the case with some students, like with some football teams, that it is later on that they put on that burst of speed and the fairest way of assessing them is after those two years of study.

**Q43 Pat Glass:** But you have not answered two of those areas, Secretary of State. Nothing succeeds like success, and there is no doubt that students who do well in AS-levels, in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are then encouraged to go on to apply for courses and to universities that they otherwise would not. If you have the time, you should have a look at what Nic Dakin, who is a former member of the Committee and a former sixth-form principal, had to say. He made some powerful arguments around that. Thirdly, there is the point about breadth and flexibility.

**Michael Gove:** I will answer both of those. First, it is still the case that if people believe that it is appropriate, they can take an AS qualification at the end of year 12. It is a moot point as to whether having that external validation or having a teacher’s encouragement at the end of year 12 to carry on with a course would be the more powerful incentive. It does, however, exist as an option for those who want it.

**Q44 Pat Glass:** But is that realistic? Anyone who has done a timetable will know that it is almost impossible, if you are doing simply A-levels, to timetable in AS-levels as well. There is also the cost. Colleges and teachers are telling me that the cost and the issues of timetabling are too great and that AS-levels will simply disappear. You cannot do both if they are not co-joined.

**Michael Gove:** At the moment, they have to do that. At the moment, people are doing AS-levels—

**Pat Glass:** It is an issue of co-joining them.

**Michael Gove:** We are providing people with a choice, and if they want to—I would not suggest and do not think that any school will make decisions about examinations purely on cost. It is certainly a pain if you are having to pay for more examinations, but if you think that it is an appropriate aid both to motivation and to learning to have that externally set and marked examination, you can. Many students—we talked about Cambridge earlier—benefit more from a two-year course and find that more motivating, and there is evidence that the pre-use popularity reinforces that.

On your point about science and other subjects, the one thing that I would say is that if the teaching at GCSE is properly delivered—I hope that our syllabus reforms will encourage that—then people can be motivated on to further study at A-level by a satisfying syllabus. But, of course, all the points that you raise are serious and we need to ensure that, as we make the changes, we do not either damage the widening of access or create barriers to people taking, in particular, mathematics and science subjects.

**Q45 Chair:** The Government say that they believe in trusting the front line, encouraging diversity and trusting the professionals to find the right route through for their young people within the right

accountability framework, and you have just talked about choice. Why then have you proposed getting rid of AS-levels as they stand when many people say they are useful for some pupils? Why not simply allow a diverse system in which those schools and those pupils for whom a two-year A-level is thought to be the best can do that, and others can follow the current structure, which many teachers believe, whether for disadvantaged pupils or others, is a better way of doing it? Why not allow both and let the market and everyone else decide which one becomes the predominant model going forward?

**Michael Gove:** If people want to do stand-alone AS-levels, they will have that opportunity, but it is important that the A-level is a test of knowledge and understanding over two years.

**Q46 Chair:** But we have just heard from Pat, and I do not think that you effectively contradicted it, that the truth is that in a system that is moving effectively to funding three A-levels, the likelihood of maintained schools—least of all those who are really struggling with a low-attaining intake—running these stand-alone AS-levels, which do not really count towards the accountability framework, is small.

**Michael Gove:** We shall see. If it is an effective motivational tool and helpful, then—

**Q47 Chair:** But why not allow the two? Why not allow the trusted front-line professionals to choose? Let Cambridge Assessment, AQA or anyone else produce one or the other and let people decide. Some schools will go for the two-year one and find that they have more time for teaching and all the arguments that you have made, which we are not contradicting. We are just struggling to understand why you want necessarily to rule out the benefits of what we have now instead of allowing choice.

**Michael Gove:** The danger would be then—we discussed it in the context of different approaches to GCSEs in Wales and England, and I do not want to cast aspersions on what Wales is doing as that might well be right for Wales and it might well be the right choice overall—if you have A-levels that are on the one hand modular and on the other hand linear, that creates precisely the uncertainty, confusion and variability between currencies that in different contexts you have expressed understandable concerns about.

**Q48 Chair:** Did you have any advice about that from anywhere? Apart from you saying now that it could cause some difficulty, I am not clear what precise difficulties you are thinking about. It might be foolishness on my part, but I cannot necessarily see why that would be problematic. I can see why having completely different currencies between Wales and Scotland and England could cause a problem, but I am not sure how two different structures of A-level, with a single regulator trying to ensure that they have a comparable currency as best they can, is fundamentally a big problem. Have you got anything that you can say on that?

**Michael Gove:** I would say that I know that, from what the regulator has said with respect to GCSEs,

there is a challenge—it may not be insuperable—in having qualifications that have the same name but which are modular running alongside those that are linear. So there is a challenge that has been raised in the context of GCSEs—as I say, I do not want to deprecate any other jurisdictions' decisions there—which would apply to A-levels as well. But, of course, if you want to ask the regulator whether she feels that that challenge is insuperable or whether it is negotiable, it would be interesting to see. My judgment is that it seems sensible to have one method of assessment for everything that is an A-level, and that method should be one that university academics assure me is a better preparation for university study.

**Q49 Chris Skidmore:** I would like to return to what you touched on earlier: the school accountability measures and the points-based system. In your statement to the House on 7 February, you talked about how the current measure of five A\* to C grades focuses teachers' time and energy too closely on those pupils on the C/D borderline. I therefore wonder why you have proposed to retain the threshold measure for English and maths specifically. AQA, in their consultation evidence, stated that “the proposed new threshold measure—a pass in English and Maths—will continue to exert the same pressure on schools...the prominence of the threshold measure means that many schools are likely to retain a greater focus on those pupils at the C/D borderline.” Essentially, while we have had this cliff edge threshold of five A\* to C, is this not still going to remain in English and maths under the proposed new measures?

**Michael Gove:** That is what we are consulting on at the moment. As we all recognise, there is no perfect method of accountability; each method will have strengths and weaknesses. The strength of having a threshold measure is that it reinforces the importance of these two subjects and generates a sense that there is an entitlement that every student should be able to secure at least a C pass in these subjects, because that is a route to further employability and progression. But you are right that Ofqual and others, including awarding bodies, have warned us that any form of threshold measure can generate some perversity.

We hope that by having the threshold alongside best eight, we minimise that. We also hope that by making some changes to GCSEs—getting rid of modularisation and controlled assessment—the gameability of that examination is reduced, but it is still a balance that has to be struck. The awarding bodies and Ofqual are absolutely right that by placing this emphasis on threshold measure, there is a risk that some schools in weaker circumstances may not necessarily behave at all times in a way that is best for all students, yes.

**Q50 Chris Skidmore:** You mentioned Ofqual. They wrote a letter to you on 8 May that requested that the floor standard should be based on progress in English and maths rather than absolute performance. What consideration are you giving to Ofqual's recommendation?

**Michael Gove:** Active consideration. We expressed a preference in the consultation, but, as you say, Ofqual

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are making the point that progress might be more appropriate. We received the letter relatively recently but have had a chance to talk to Ofqual and others in the course of the last week or so, and we are thinking that through.

The point about the consultation is to try to make sure that we recognise that secondary accountability in the past has driven some perverse behaviour. We want to get it right. We have put forward a proposition and we want to listen to those who broadly share our recognition that we want to improve that. It is a strong argument that we have to consider fairly.

**Q51 Chris Skidmore:** We have long known from the research of Robert Coe and Peter Tymms that some subjects are easier to pass than others. How is the new accountability system going to discourage pupils from choosing exams, gaming the system of the best eight, having subjects that may be considered soft? I know that is a controversial discussion to have, but how will the new system stop that taking place?

**Michael Gove:** There is a balance, isn't there? You get into difficult territory—I have certainly strayed into it—when you compare the hardness or softness of certain subjects. The current structure is designed to ensure that there is still a strong incentive, perhaps stronger than ever, to include English baccalaureate subjects. However, we also have to acknowledge that there were concerns that that might squeeze out both a recognition of vocational excellence and artistic and cultural excellence.

I actually don't think that the best vocational qualifications, particularly after the Wolf reforms, or recognition of artistic or cultural achievement are in themselves soft. However, I do think there are one or two subjects that may have thought of themselves as academic that are not in the English baccalaureate and that may have been seen in the soft in the past.

One of the things we have discussed with Ofqual is how to have not just the fixing of standards over time but comparability between subjects. It is a complex area. We are trying to reduce as much as possible the temptation to game the system, but we will have to be vigilant. It may well be the case that schools anxious to do well in the accountability system and awarding bodies that are ingenious for market share may find ways. We will have to review how things operate.

**Q52 Chris Skidmore:** On that point, in the 8 May letter that Ofqual wrote to you, it suggested that one possibility might be different weighting with a point-based system within the different subjects for the best eight. What is your initial reaction to having a different weighting?

**Michael Gove:** You could have a different weighting. One way you might deal with the English and maths issue, if you felt that threshold measures were wrong for whatever reason, you could have differential weighting for English and maths within best eight. If you had differential weighting for other subjects that would create more problems than it might solve. There is a case for English and maths, yes.

**Q53 Pat Glass:** May I ask about the transition arrangements? We have been advised that in the first

year there will be a fixed quota of failing schools. Will that not ignore the swift and significant rise in standards right across the country that you believe your proposals will achieve, and ignore a swift and rapid rise in standards in individual schools that are improving quickly? Will it not just punish improving schools?

**Michael Gove:** There are two things. First, when fixing a floor standard, we recognise—as did the previous Government—that it has to rise over time. Following on from the discussion we had with David, it is about embedding a culture of higher expectations within the system, that every year you expect people to do better. If a school falls below the floor standard, I do not believe that any intervention to support it should be seen as punishment. It is support both for the students and the staff there.

The judgment we have to make is where a floor standard will be fair. That means not arbitrarily hoicking it up too far, too fast, or allowing it to become becalmed at a level where a vanishingly small number of schools fall below it. In that sense, it is an art not a science. There is no arbitrary quota. We are not saying that X-hundred schools must fall below the floor. What we are trying to do is what we have done so far and what the previous Government did, and that is to say, "This is an acceptable level at which things should be set." We think that if schools happen to fall below that then we should support them.

There has been a lot of debate recently, not least from the authors of the fantastic new book called "The Tail", that we have set floor standards too low in the past. Even though individual schools may feel it is a pity that they fall below that, as a sign of national ambition it has been a good thing. We have not come to a definitive conclusion about where the floor should be set in secondary and primary, but those are some of the thoughts in mind as we try to work towards that.

**Q54 Pat Glass:** Have you given any thought to the potential stagnation that is going to happen? If I am a really good head teacher looking at moving to a school currently below floor targets, and in 2017, even if I rapidly improve, I am not going to reach the new floor target and am likely to lose my job as a result, I am not going to move, am I?

**Michael Gove:** That is a very good point, and it is one that has been raised with me in different ways by the NAHT and the ASCL, the head teacher unions. I have two things to say: first, simply being below floor standards on its own does not automatically trigger intervention. It may well be the case that we look at a school that is below floor standards and say, "Pat Glass has arrived as head teacher. She has already shaken things up and changed things significantly. Considering the low base and the challenging intake, she has achieved amazing things. Ofsted will confirm that on inspection and say that she should be given every encouragement to carry on with her trajectory of improvement."

We have talked to the NAHT and ASCL about trying to ensure that, if you are a new head teacher who takes on a difficult school, there should be a period when, after having taken over, you have the freedom to do what you need to do to improve the school without

the risk of a judgment suddenly cutting you off at the knees when you are halfway through that improvement work. It can sometimes be the case—as we both know—that, to improve a school rapidly, you may have to dismiss staff and make changes which, if someone turns up in the middle of and tries to pass judgment on, would not be fair to you or the staff, let alone the students.

**Pat Glass:** Are you attracted by that idea?

**Michael Gove:** Yes, I am.

**Q55 Mr Ward:** You mentioned the importance of the quality of teaching. In terms of pupil level variables, whether religion, ethnicity, gender or deprivation, how many of them do you believe can be eliminated as a direct correlation between attainment and those variables?

**Michael Gove:** They all can. There are barriers to students doing well, but they can all be overcome.

**Mr Ward:** Of course, many of them are proxy for a situation of deprivation. Just to reinforce matters, do you believe that it is possible to completely eliminate deprivation as a correlate of lower educational attainment?

**Michael Gove:** Yes.

**Mr Ward:** Completely eliminate it?

**Michael Gove:** Absolutely.

**Mr Ward:** So there would be no difference between any schools based on the intake of the pupils in the school. It is possible to eliminate the differences from different communities, with different education at pupil level.

**Michael Gove:** Yes.

**Q56 Chair:** Secretary of State, that has never happened anywhere in the world. If I recall the data from last year, Finland has the smallest gap. No one has ever managed to close the gap entirely.

**Michael Gove:** Some schools do.

**Chair:** What is the magic trick every country in the world has so far failed to find that will entirely eliminate deprivation from correlating with weaker academic position?

**Michael Gove:** Some schools in this country have closed that attainment gap.

**Chair:** Eliminated it?

**Michael Gove:** Yes.

**Chair:** Which ones have eliminated it, and based on whose assessment of the data?

**Michael Gove:** A number of primary schools have eliminated, almost totally—

**Chair:** Sorry, perhaps I am being overly strong. That we should set it as a policy and that all Governments regardless of who is in should do everything possible to minimise that injustice based on its importance is one thing, but saying that you can eliminate it—

**Michael Gove:** A number of primary schools have. There are also some secondary schools where it has almost gone. For example, Paddington Academy serves a relatively disadvantaged part of London. Its performance between children eligible for free school meals and children who are not eligible has not yet disappeared, but it has almost disappeared. As for performance at key stage 2 national curriculum tests, the gap between children eligible for free schools

meals and those who are not has at level 4 disappeared in a number of primary schools—not a huge number, but some.

**Q57 Mr Ward:** That is a completely different issue because, as we know from our visit to some east London schools, their performance is that eligibility for free school meals is higher than those who are not on free school meals. The reason for that is that the families of those not on free school meals are still on very low incomes. Certain families work long hours, split shifts and hardly ever see their children. So that in itself is not evidence that you can eliminate differences school by school on the basis on the intake.

**Michael Gove:** I take your point about individual schools and I also take your point about some families who are in a state of working poverty, as it were, who are above the eligibility criteria for free school meals, but who face very difficult circumstances. But to take it back, it is undoubtedly the case that there are barriers to achievement if children come from poorer homes. But there is nothing intrinsic in the cognitive ability of children from poorer homes that prevents them from attaining at least as well as children from wealthier homes. One of the aims of the coalition Government is to close that gap.

**Mr Ward:** That is an extremely worthy aim, but not eliminate it?

**Michael Gove:** Ultimately I think it can be eliminated, yes. I don't believe that there is anything inherent in any child's family background which means that they cannot succeed as well as children from wealthier backgrounds. There are undoubtedly barriers to be overcome and therefore we should concentrate on making sure, through the pupil premium, through incentives for the best teachers to work in those areas, and through some of the other changes that we are making, that it can be eliminated. But I think it is fatalistic to assume that it cannot be.

**Q58 Alex Cunningham:** Secretary of State, are you not dumping a lot of additional responsibility on to schools here? When you think about young carers, for example, some authorities are fantastic in dealing with young carers, others are not. There are other children whose parents may not have the level of education to be able to support them. So all the necessary additional work falls on schools. Are you really sure that our schools are equipped to fill that gap that exists at home, that exists in their family circumstances and everything else?

**Michael Gove:** If the question is do all schools have everything they need at the moment to overcome the disadvantage that certain children may face at home, the answer is no. But we can take, and I hope we will put in place over time as a country, the steps to ensure that we can eliminate that gap and that deprivation need not be destiny.

**Q59 Alex Cunningham:** Could you give us two or three examples of what you would have our schools do to close the gap for the kids who come from those most difficult of backgrounds where they don't have parental support?

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**Michael Gove:** The first and most important thing is great teaching. But there are some very respectable figures who argue that socio-economic circumstances and the scale of deprivation in some communities is so massive that children from those communities cannot succeed at the same level, and their chances of achievement are compromised from the beginning. I don't take that view. I do think it is important to look at every step along the way. So there are children who may be born with foetal alcohol syndrome. There are children who may grow up in homes where they witness domestic violence or other forms of abuse that will impair their cognitive ability. There are children whose parents, tragically, may be alcohol or substance abusers and that will impair their cognitive development before they ever—

**Q60 Alex Cunningham:** Are you expecting schools to sort it all out?

**Michael Gove:** No. But if you are serious about dealing with all of these problems, then you also have to allow for the fact that schools can have a transformative effect as well. There are two poles. The one is that the school can do everything. You ignore these circumstances and you don't provide any support for the school or the child outside it. Then there is the other pole which is that schools are essentially just sorting mechanisms whereby you say, "You're a fortunate child. You're an unfortunate child. There you are." I take the view that schools and teachers can have a dramatic effect. But it is important that we recognise that there are other things that happen outside school and before school that we need to consider as well.

**Q61 Pat Glass:** Secretary of State, there is a lot of evidence that the single most important factor in children's aspirations is parents' aspirations and their prior history of attainment. The Committee visited places like Denmark and the Netherlands—I have since looked at this in other European countries that do rather well—and their funding mechanism does not look at things like free school meals, which some parents who are on very low incomes and also working parents who are on very low incomes do not benefit from. It looks at the prior attainment or the attainment of the parent. When we asked "How do you do that?" they said, "We simply ask. When the child is enrolled at nursery or at primary we ask what the qualifications of the parents are," and they target funding through that. That stops the problem that we saw in east London, where the children of very poor working parents are not doing as well because they are not getting targeted funding. Is that something that the Department would consider looking at? We have seen quite a lot of evidence to show that that is probably a better proxy for targeting funding than free school meals.

**Michael Gove:** I take your point. I am not disputing the power of the case that you make, but the first thing that I would say is that we know that in terms of aspiration—this is slightly different from prior attainment—the level of aspiration that parents have for their children is much greater than many people allow for. The recent millennium cohort birth study

showed that more than 90% of mothers, including more than 90% of self-described working-class mothers, hoped that their child would graduate from university, so there is a significant level of hope at the moment of birth. You are right that if children grow up in a book-rich environment where there are automatic expectations about what they might achieve, that confers certain advantages. We have always been clear that we have used free school meals as a proxy, and one of the things that I thought was fair about using free school meals was that they were a way of avoiding some of the tougher questions that some people might put about asking people what their level of prior attainment was, or slicing the cake according to ethnicity or other factors. Of course, it is, by definition, not a perfect measure.

**Q62 Pat Glass:** It is just a proxy, but there do appear to be better proxies, and we should not let embarrassment or lack of courage get in the way of that.

**Michael Gove:** I would never do that. One of the things that the work of the Education Endowment Foundation is designed to do is to investigate what genuinely moves the dial for children from disadvantaged homes. If we or a future Government were to look at the pupil premium and decide, "This money, which is supposed to help disadvantaged children, should be targeted in a different way," we would do that. One change we have already made is that it is not just children who are currently eligible for free school meals; it is children who have been eligible for free school meals over a previous period, which we think is a slightly fairer proxy. I have no plans to change it, but yours is a fair challenge.

**Q63 Siobhain McDonagh:** But surely one of the best examples of schools doing their best for kids who come from more disadvantaged backgrounds is the D/C borderline—concentrating on those pupils. What changes the lives of kids in my constituency is getting their five GCSEs and getting into the sixth form. I feel a sense of frustration that there is concentration on the fact that teachers are acting in loco parentis because they can see these pupils who often do not have the same assistance at home and they can get them through their GCSEs, whereas more advantaged families do not need that help. Until I joined this Committee, I did not understand the disdain attracted by teachers who tried to get kids into the C band.

**Michael Gove:** I think it is a very fair point, and I think that one of the things that—

**Q64 Chair:** Is there something you desperately want to add?

**Michael Gove:** No, I think one of the things about the Chairman and the Committee is that they accept that teachers are doing a fantastic job, but they want to ask the question, "Could the accountability system do an even better job in supporting teachers doing the admirable work you describe?"

**Q65 Mr Ward:** Whether it is free school meals or whether it is some other measure, if it remains as free school meals, can we have your views on the impact

of universal credit on free school meals? Obviously, it then leads on to the pupil premium. Will there be any impact at all on the entitlement of schools getting pupil premium through the free school meals as a result of the introduction of universal credit?

**Michael Gove:** There will be an impact, yes. I can say a little bit about what I think the impact will be, if that is helpful. We are designing things at the moment to ensure that at least the same number of students who are eligible for free school meals now retain eligibility for free school meals after. There is a question mark, however, about whether it would be exactly the same individuals. Obviously we want to grandfather things, so that you do not suddenly find that your eligibility is withdrawn, but there is a question, which we are working through at the moment—child A is actually eligible for free school meals now, but would another child, who has exactly the same circumstances, be eligible in the future? So, it will be the same number overall, and everyone who currently gets will continue to get, but we just have to make sure and examine whether or not someone who is potentially eligible on the current criteria remains so.

**Q66 Mr Ward:** Can we have your current views on the destination measures?

**Michael Gove:** We need to extend them, and I think—

**Mr Ward:** It is not referred to in the consultation document.

**Michael Gove:** My apologies for that. It is a good thing to publish destination data. At the moment, I believe the destination data that we have published covers Oxbridge, Russell group and university education overall. We need to augment that with more data—and we hope to—that reflects employment destinations and length of time in employment. We will be saying more about that shortly. We have received some very helpful advice from Vince and his team at BIS on that.

**Q67 Neil Carmichael:** On this question of destination measures, there are two sides of the same coin. One of them is businesses' interest in encouraging education to produce the right kind of qualifications and skills for their requirements. Do you agree that there is a great opportunity here for a proper dialogue to be started between schools and businesses, so you can calibrate destination in terms of success for schools, and businesses can start thinking about what kind of influences they can bring to the table to meet their own requirements?

**Michael Gove:** I absolutely agree. Obviously, compiling destination data is easier in the first place with institutions such as universities, but I agree that we need to extend it so that it accurately reflects the success that schools have in placing people in satisfying, long-term employment. Part of that process will obviously involve talking to colleagues in BIS, but listening to business as well.

**Q68 Chair:** You have apologised for the absence of a mention of destination measures in your accountability consultation, and perhaps it is early days to be putting too much weight on destination

measures, but the Committee would want to say very strongly that we hope that the Department would not lose focus on this but keep working at it and improving it. Ideally, one day destinations measures would be one of the key elements of the accountability system; if we can get destination measures that are reliable, what better way is there of testing whether a school works than to see whether young people go on to have rich and fulfilling educational and employment lives after they leave?

**Michael Gove:** I completely agree. The next set of destination measures will be published on 20 June, and should be better than the ones we have now. Of course, I am interested in the Committee's views.

**Chair:** Thank you very much.

**Q69 Craig Whittaker:** Good morning, Secretary of State. I am going to ask you about the national curriculum. You said earlier that the final version will be out in the autumn. I received a reply from Liz Truss only two weeks ago that said exactly what you said, but also said that a further draft version would be published in the summer for schools to look at. Is that a good time to publish a further draft version?

**Michael Gove:** It is in July. It is not the best time, but by publishing the current draft we have attracted a fair number of comments, some of them supportive, some of them critical. What we want to do is, before the end of July, to be able to say that we have listened and we accept some of the changes that have been put forward but we also reject others.

**Q70 Craig Whittaker:** Who wrote the draft programmes of study—particularly those for history and design and technology?

**Michael Gove:** All the draft programmes of study were completed by officials and were approved by Ministers. A huge range of individuals contributed to those. Some of the individuals who contributed put forward ideas that were not accepted in the end by Ministers, but it was officials who were responsible for bringing together each of the draft programmes of study.

**Q71 Craig Whittaker:** So it was the officials not the experts who you commissioned to help or took notice of during the consultation?

**Michael Gove:** As I say, there were plenty of opportunities for individuals to contribute. Some individuals will find that the drafts that were produced are far closer to what they had hoped than others. That is certainly true.

**Q72 Charlotte Leslie:** This comes from a meeting I had with a very talented maths teacher in my constituency, who came to me with concerns about our strategy. Her point was that, overall, she very much agreed with the aims and the top line of what we were doing, but she took me through it and said that it was very apparent that people who were not educationists had drawn up the detail. The whole thing lost a lot of its potential value because people who do not know how to teach were drawing it up. Do you think there is merit or significant urgency in getting teachers and educationists to draw up the detail to

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ensure that the top line gets translated into what we want to do? One thing that I know you have been interested in is the concept of a royal college of teaching, which might provide the kind of expertise that would avoid having officials who do not work in schools drawing up stuff that is destined for schools.

**Michael Gove:** Ultimately, almost everything that comes from the Department for Education that will have a bearing on what happens in schools will be drawn up by officials. Some of those officials do have a teaching background. Of the people working at the QCDA, and the QCA before it, which was responsible for curriculum drafts in the past, some were educationists and some had a background in other areas of public service. Ultimately, you have to draw a halt to the initial process of drafting at some stage and put drafts out for public consultation and then look at the response to those drafts. I am conscious that some precise suggestions have been made by teachers in respect of English and mathematics, and I hope that we will acknowledge them. There are also other aspects of the curriculum, in particular, as Craig says, history and design and technology, that have attracted more controversy and where the change may be proportionately greater.

**Q73 Craig Whittaker:** Can I go back to ask you about the input from professionals and the end outcome, in particular for design and technology? Bill Currie and Howard Barrett, the chairman and MD of Boxford, which is a great exporter and manufacturer in the Calder valley, said: "Does the Secretary of State really want to put UK manufacturing back to the dark ages? Surely he has lost his marbles." I know that that is a generic comment, but there was a huge outcry, specifically for design and technology, saying that absolutely no advice was taken from the professionals. Considering that we have a shortage of 5,000 engineers in the UK, why did we put out what we did?

**Michael Gove:** First, the best way to ensure that we have more engineers is to improve the teaching of maths and science, but design and technology can play a part as well. As I mentioned briefly earlier, what we will see is a change to the design and technology curriculum, but it is also important to recognise that there have been many people who have welcomed some changes to that curriculum, in particular in the area of food.

**Q74 Craig Whittaker:** You didn't answer the question.

**Michael Gove:** Which part didn't I answer?

**Q75 Chair:** How did you put out such a dog's breakfast for this one particular curriculum?

**Michael Gove:** That is a "When did you stop feeding your dog a terrible breakfast?" question. By definition, the whole process of consultation is one of putting things out and seeing what the response is. On this occasion—

**Q76 Chair:** Would you like to apologise for the design and technology first draft and say that the second is going to be much better?

**Michael Gove:** I do not think that we should apologise. I hope that the new draft will be better, but we are so close to Christmas now that it would be wrong for me to unwrap the present prematurely.

**Q77 Craig Whittaker:** Let me ask you about Dr Joanna Pearson, a teacher living in the Calder valley who came to see me a few weeks ago. She was incredibly concerned about the lack of time to implement the new curriculum. Will you consider extending the implementation date?

**Michael Gove:** Some people have said that it may take a while to accustom themselves to some of the changes, but there are others who are eager to press ahead with change and are excited by what we are doing.

**Q78 Craig Whittaker:** Yes or no? Will you extend the timetable or not?

**Michael Gove:** No.

**Q79 Ian Mearns:** Secretary of State, the new curriculum that you are proposing has been receiving, shall we say, mixed reviews. It has been put to me by one wag that what you are putting forward is little better than a pub quiz. How do you respond to that?

**Michael Gove:** I think the person who made that remark was Professor Richard J. Evans, who is a great historian. His comments in no way diminish my respect and admiration for his work, but there are plenty of other historians who have said that there are good things in the history curriculum. One point to make: history is always the most controversial part of any national curriculum change. Another point to make: we have put forward a set of propositions. A lot of people agree with the broad thrust—I don't think the public do—but yes, there is some fine-tuning to do and some changes that need to be made.

**Q80 Ian Mearns:** One delegate to the teaching union conference said that they were concerned about truancy arising from a boring curriculum and boring delivery. There are also concerns that the imparting of facts does not necessarily impart a lust for learning. How do you respond to those sorts of criticism?

**Michael Gove:** I refer people to the work of Daniel T. Willingham, one of the best scientists working in the field of how students learn. One point that he makes is that it is through the development of factual knowledge and memorisation that you go on to develop creative and critical thinking skills. I do not think you should separate the need to develop a body of knowledge from the fact that you should then deploy that knowledge in a creative way.

**Q81 Ian Mearns:** One of the biggest challenges we have, particularly with youngsters who are struggling in school or who come from poorer backgrounds, is that learning to learn is a real problem. They have not had the same sort of development in their early years, and they have some catching up to do. Learning to learn is vital. How will you overcome that challenge in delivering this new curriculum?

**Michael Gove:** There are important things that we need to ensure for those children right from reception,



and indeed in pre-school education as well, in order to ensure that they arrive at school ready to learn. Some of the changes proposed for pre-school education are intended to address that. The other thing is the quality of the teacher. The curriculum that we have is knowledge-rich, but it is also perfectly capable of being aligned with ensuring that children learn at an early stage the disciplined habits of study they need, while also enjoying their learning. I do not think there is any inconsistency with the level of expectation that we have set that lessons should be stretching and enjoyable.

**Q82 Ian Mearns:** There are an awful lot of professionals out there concerned that the focus on learning facts may come at the expense of children's development of inquiring minds, problem-solving skills, critical thinking and creativity. There is real concern out there. How will you alleviate the fears of people within the profession?

**Michael Gove:** I think that there is absolutely no tension between students learning and mastering a body of knowledge and enjoyable teaching. In fact—

**Chair:** I did not want the Secretary of State to answer that question twice. I did not mean to be rude by cutting you off, but I feel as if you have answered it.

**Q83 Ian Mearns:** Many critics of the curriculum believe it demands too much too young. Do you think the curriculum risks widening the gap between achievers and non-achievers?

**Michael Gove:** I do not think so. I think it is appropriate to have a significant level of demand early on, but obviously we will look at each specific case. Charlotte mentioned mathematics earlier. There are some people who think that aspects of the mathematics curriculum may not be stretching enough. Indeed, the case has been made to me that in English, for example, particularly at secondary level, we should be clearer about the need for particular texts to be studied. There are lots of reactions; we have to try to weigh them to see which are strong.

**Q84 Bill Esterson:** Coming back to the point about style of teaching, you would accept, I am sure, that children learn in different ways. There is a huge amount of evidence about different stimuli and different intelligences, such as auditory and kinaesthetic learning. There are different types of learning, and we all have different balances in how we learn. You would accept that research, presumably?

**Michael Gove:** I am a wee bit sceptical of it, actually.

**Bill Esterson:** Really.

**Q85 Alex Cunningham:** So all children learn in the same way?

**Michael Gove:** No, but I think there are more similarities—

**Alex Cunningham:** You just contradicted yourself.

**Michael Gove:** No. That is the difference between being a wee bit sceptical and totally opposed. I think that too much emphasis is placed on the idea that, for example, boys are kinaesthetic learners and so on. Not enough emphasis is placed on the fact that more children learn more similarly to each other than

people such as Howard Gardner and advocates of that view have argued. I have been heavily influenced, as I said, by the work of Willingham and other neuroscientists and experts in brain development. I think that the multiple intelligence model is an interesting way of looking at humans, but its influence on education has been overstated.

**Q86 Bill Esterson:** Yes, because the follow-up to that is that you quite rightly put the emphasis on good teaching and the importance of a good teacher. Good teachers use different ways of teaching and learning, very often based on the sorts of theories that you have just described, whether they were developed by Howard Gardner or others who have looked at how the brain works.

**Michael Gove:** I am not a great fan of Howard Gardner's work. I think that subsequent research suggests—provocative thinker as he is—that there are better ways of understanding how the brain works.

**Q87 Ian Mearns:** Many in the profession, particularly at the primary head level, feel that the curriculum appears overly prescriptive and does not give them the room to innovate that they would like. The amount of detail and instructions betrays a distrust of teachers. Will you think about that again?

**Michael Gove:** It is a genuine challenge to get the balance right. Russell Hobby of the National Association of Head Teachers said right at the beginning of this process that he thought it was fair to have a higher level of prescription in English and mathematics, which we have, in return for greater freedom over other curriculum areas. Some people have inferred that greater freedom over other curriculum areas means that we care less about them—not at all. It is just that we think that in English and maths—we have touched on the reasons why in other areas—understandably, as foundational subjects, there might well be a greater degree of prescription. I think you are right. Some people have argued that, in history overall, there is too much detail in the curriculum. I think that it is there for a reason, but we are considering how we can change it to meet fair-minded criticisms—not every criticism is fair-minded, but there are many fair-minded ones.

**Q88 Ian Mearns:** In the secondary sector in particular, the majority of schools are no longer maintained schools. They have the option, as academies or free schools, not to teach the new curriculum. What is the point of a national curriculum in those circumstances?

**Michael Gove:** I think many academies will use the national curriculum. It is there as a benchmark against which they can measure themselves and which parents can use to ask whether students are achieving in line with what has been laid out as a national entitlement. One of the great things about academy innovation in both secondary and primary is that some schools are setting out a higher level of expectation in knowledge and in other areas than the national curriculum.

As I said in a speech that was written for a group of head teachers at the National College, the best curricula increasingly are being developed in schools.

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For example, the maths curriculum in ARK primary schools is based explicitly on Singapore. The national curriculum is there as a benchmark and model that can be applied, used and taken off the shelf, but I want to see a greater degree of innovation as teachers develop their own approaches to particular subjects.

**Q89 Ian Mearns:** So do you see the national curriculum developing as some sort of organic process? As schools innovate and change, should the DFE, basing its future policy on evidence, look at that and incorporate that into the national curriculum?

**Michael Gove:** Potentially, yes. One of the things that we would want to do is to shine the light on and to praise schools that are doing precisely that.

**Q90 Ian Mearns:** Do you agree with me that the national curriculum is an organic process?

**Michael Gove:** We need to have a draft out there and to see how people respond to it, but I agree. I would draw one slight distinction—curriculum development across the country is an organic process, yes.

**Q91 Chair:** Should the curriculum development have a fixed cycle, which some other countries have? I ought to know the recommendations of my own Committee, but I think in a previous Committee, we recommended that perhaps it could be a five-year cycle, so that we did not end up with a rush and with people feeling that decisions were being taken without consultation.

**Michael Gove:** It is definitely worth thinking about, but the scale of curriculum innovation that is happening in the best schools and the changes to teaching that new technology will bring mean that we have to be careful about setting in stone an expectation of curriculum revision that may not take account of some of the changes on the ground. That is not to dismiss the suggestion, it is just to say that I have a sense of significant innovation coming and I do not want to unnecessarily constrain it. We might be in a better position in two or three years to judge.

**Q92 Chair:** You have no plans at the moment to suggest a fixed cycle.

**Michael Gove:** I have no plans. It is not necessarily a bad idea, but I would want to see how people react to the national curriculum and how people use the academy freedoms. Some people have said not many are using them, but by definition it takes a wee while for people in some cases to realise what being an academy can mean in terms of additional freedom. We are only now beginning to see a flowering.

**Q93 Pat Glass:** Secretary of State, can I ask you about English and maths? I will start with English. Most high-achieving jurisdictions recognise that we need to do more than reading and writing and that speaking and listening is an important part of how we live our lives and how we work. I support a focus on spelling and grammar, but have we got the balance right between spelling and grammar and the rest? Are we simply pushing out other wider forms of literature?

**Michael Gove:** I don't think so. Anyone who visits classrooms as we do will recognise that there is a lot

of high-quality speaking and listening going on and that students will in all sorts of lessons discuss their work, work with each other and then present to the teacher and to other students verbally. I think, funnily enough—I would not say that anything can take care of itself—that in that area there is plenty of encouragement in current pedagogy. The quality of accurate writing and the use of effective and clear standard English in a written form is not quite up there in terms of the confidence that people have.

Secondly, you are absolutely right that formal literacy skills should exist alongside an appreciation of literature and an enjoyment of reading. One of the questions in my mind is how we can properly reinforce that in the curriculum. Some English teachers have said to me, "It is good that you have moved beyond some of the texts that we have done over and over again by suggesting that we introduce Romantic poetry, but maybe you should go further in giving an indication of the range of enjoyable reading that the curriculum should foster."

**Chair:** We have limited time left to cover a number of subjects, so punchy questions and punchy answers would be great.

**Q94 Pat Glass:** The maths curriculum has been criticised for rushing through key topics such as division, multiplication and decimals. The complaint in the past was always that when we taught children decimals, half the class did not get it, and we moved on, losing children. That is how we ended up with this situation where young children do not like maths and do not think that they can do it. Is this the right way to have a solid foundation for mathematics?

**Michael Gove:** I think we need a higher level of challenge, but you are absolutely right that we need to ensure that teaching—and teachers appreciate this—is built on a model whereby the whole class masters concepts before you then move on to others.

**Q95 Pat Glass:** So you would be in favour of giving those solid topics time before you move on to other things.

**Michael Gove:** In teaching you absolutely need to do that, but it is also important that we have a higher level of challenge to prepare people for secondary mathematics and science.

**Q96 Chris Skidmore:** There have been concerns that primary school teachers might not have the necessary specialisms to be able to teach the detailed prescription of the science curriculum. Are you confident that they will be able to cope?

**Michael Gove:** Several teachers have said to me that a greater degree of detail and prescription in the science curriculum actually makes it easier to teach science, if they are not specialists.

**Q97 Chris Skidmore:** When it comes to practical experiments, I know that the Under-Secretary, Elizabeth Truss, has confirmed that the Government are looking at the role of practicals in science to ensure that people have proper hands-on experience of chemistry and physics. When will we hear any announcements about practicals?

**Michael Gove:** We should be saying more about it. Bench skills matter in science. There is a question mark over how you can ensure that they are assessed fairly, but we need to ensure that people are confident in practical science.

**Q98 Chris Skidmore:** When it comes to the transition—key stage 2, key stage 3—Yvonne Baker of MyScience raised her concerns that, for the key stage 3 curriculum, the draft curriculum presented is less well developed than the primary curriculum and does not show a clear progression from the key stage 2 curriculum to the key stage 3 curriculum. How would you go about addressing that in any revised draft?

**Michael Gove:** It is a concern that a number have expressed. I think it is important to recognise that, for reasons we have outlined, there may well be a need for a greater degree of prescription in primary, because you may not have specialists teaching it, and therefore a greater degree of flexibility in secondary, because you will have specialists who will have a greater degree of confidence in deciding how to augment what is in the national curriculum, but it is a fair point.

**Q99 Craig Whittaker:** I shall very briefly take you back to D and T and the new draft. How much input has the D and T Association had into what will come out shortly?

**Michael Gove:** A ministerial colleague has been responsible for overseeing that part of the curriculum and they have been engaging energetically with a range of organisations. I do not know, and I cannot say all of them, but they include almost every organisation that has expressed a concern and is a substantial membership body. If it has not been involved, I would be amazed, but I cannot give an absolute guarantee; it might be the case that 19 out of 20 were in the room, but it was the one that was not.

**Q100 Craig Whittaker:** Why then has this group of experts had so much influence on changing your mind where others have failed?

**Michael Gove:** I think that you almost got at it earlier. We put out a variety of ideas. I do not expect that everything we put forward will be right, but we try to ensure that we have a clear view and then listen to criticisms. Sometimes we will get things wrong—I have acknowledged that in the past—and I think that of all the areas in the curriculum, the design and technology draft was the one where the most work is required.

**Q101 Craig Whittaker:** Let me ask you about history. Professor Chris Husbands said that if you teach history chronologically, there is a risk that young people end up with a seven-year-old's understanding of the Saxons, a 10-year-old's understanding of the middle ages and a 14-year-old's understanding of the industrial revolution. Is he right?

**Michael Gove:** There is always a risk, but one of the things that I would say is that with the history curriculum, it is more important to give people a chronological understanding of the history of these

islands, their impact on the world and the world's impact on them, and there is no perfect way of doing that. Whatever someone learns at the age of seven or nine will involve a different level of understanding than that which they have, obviously, at 14 and 16. You have to think about what you should introduce them to at each stage and ensure not only that it is as age-appropriate as possible, but that they build up a proper spine of chronology and then develop other skills later. There has been a lot of support—even from people who are critical of the draft, such as Simon Schama—for the principle of putting chronology at the heart and having students follow chronology through their time in school.

**Q102 Craig Whittaker:** An almost exclusively British history curriculum; does it have a place in the modern British classroom?

**Michael Gove:** I think, actually, that the extent to which it is exclusively British has been overstated. For example, in the current draft there are references to the new Commonwealth and the impact of Kenyatta, Nkrumah, Jinnah, Nehru and Gandhi, which would be relevant to all sorts of students today and also tells you something about how the world has changed. It is also the case that we need to ensure at GCSE that there is a proper emphasis on European and world history. Almost by definition, the history of this country matters more to its own children. People think that the current history curriculum is packed, but if we included the history of every civilisation from the dawn of time to now, there would not be room for anything else.

**Q103 Craig Whittaker:** You say that the current history curriculum is packed, but there has been a lot of criticism about the new curriculum being too packed.

**Michael Gove:** I meant the new curriculum.

**Craig Whittaker:** So do you not think that there is too much material in there for the time frame in which students have to learn?

**Michael Gove:** I do not think there is necessarily too much there, although there are not many critics saying that they want more—some have. I think it is the case that there are one or two questions, such as: is the division between primary and secondary pitched at the right point in the chronology of these islands; and is it the case that the list of suggested topics, by being placed in the heart of the national curriculum rather than in related guidance, might lead people to believe that they should apportion exactly the same amount of time to every topic, rather than zoom in on some and zoom out on others? These are legitimate criticisms that we need to address, which is about making sure that what we sought to achieve with the history curriculum is better understood and more easily delivered. We absolutely want to have a chronological approach and we absolutely want to have heroes and heroines of British history, but we also want to make sure that people do not encounter unnecessary impediments in teaching that curriculum.

**Q104 Craig Whittaker:** Let me ask you about primary, because you mentioned primary schools, and

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the chronological curriculum. How do you envisage that happening in schools that have two—or sometimes even three—year groups in a class? That must be incredibly difficult to teach.

**Michael Gove:** A very small number of students find themselves in that position, but if you are going to have any approach to teaching any subject and you are going to have mixed year groups, you have to be very careful about how you differentiate teaching for students of different ages. Something similar would apply when it comes to teaching mathematics when you have students at different ages with different levels of ability.

**Q105 Craig Whittaker:** But surely, particularly in classrooms with a three-year age range—in Calder Valley we have had that in the past, although I am not sure whether we have any at present—that will be incredibly difficult.

**Michael Gove:** It might actually be easier in history than in subjects such as mathematics, because mathematics is a subject in which, as Pat pointed out, mastery in one area leads to the ability to follow others. You could theoretically have three age groups understanding, and being taught together, what happened in England from the disappearance of the Romans to 1066, and you could have Anglo-Saxons, Vikings and so on being taught to that group in a way that might be easier than trying to teach those three-year groups the essence of what they want in mathematics in years 4, 5 and 6. But, as I say, it is always a challenge when you have those smaller—and they tend to be rural—schools.

**Q106 Craig Whittaker:** You have often said to the Committee that you are willing to go out to schools to participate. Perhaps on this occasion you would like to come out to the Calder Valley schools that have two-year age groups and see how it is done. Something for the future.

**Michael Gove:** I would be delighted to do so. I might even try to teach them.

**Q107 Craig Whittaker:** One final question on this subject. I am going back to Dr Joanne Pearson, who came to see me. She is coming to see me again next week for some answers, so it would be nice to know. It is going to be incredibly challenging for schools on things like resources, textbooks and teaching teachers to deliver the new curriculum. Are you going to be offering any new money or resources for schools to implement this in such a short time scale?

**Michael Gove:** I am arm-wrestling with the Chancellor now.

**Q108 Mr Ward:** Can I remind you that you have an 18-month commitment to come to Bradford before you go to Calder Valley?

**Michael Gove:** That is true.

**Q109 Mr Ward:** Do you think that it is more important to get a GCSE in French than one in Urdu?

**Michael Gove:** At GCSE level, not intrinsically, no.

**Q110 Mr Ward:** Do you think that the system as envisaged is equally supportive of someone who wants to get a GCSE—or indeed an A-level—in Urdu as it is for French or German?

**Michael Gove:** Yes, I do. One of the things about our proposals for languages in key stage 2 is that we want to make sure that students learn a language that is not their own first or community language. That is why we have drawn up a short list of languages that we believe should be taught at key stage 2. But then, when you go on to secondary school, all language GCSEs are equally valid—absolutely.

**Q111 Mr Ward:** The draft curriculum provides that children should learn a language—ancient or modern—from the age of seven. In many of our schools we have children who, at the age of seven, speak two or even three languages. Do you think that our educational system, and certainly the one as envisaged, recognises that wonderful ability that young children have and supports them in developing it?

**Michael Gove:** First, I think that the best schools do. We know that many children with English as an additional language do as well as, or better than, children who are monoglot English speakers. All the most recent evidence suggests that EAL students do at least as well overall.

The second thing is that, all other things being equal, if you speak more than one language, learning another language is easier. The third thing is that we want the learning of a foreign language from the age of seven to 11 to be just that—to be a language that is foreign to the experience of students. That is why we have the range that we have so that we can try to avoid community languages. Of course, if you have French émigré children or children from French west Africa in a class, and French is the language that you choose, they may have an advantage.

**Q112 Mr Ward:** I don't quite understand. An additional language is an additional language. An additional language to an English-speaking child may be French or German. Why is it wrong to support an additional language for an English-speaking child who also happens to have another community language? I don't understand the difference.

**Michael Gove:** Let us imagine that someone comes from a home where they speak English and Urdu or English and Turkish. We would want to introduce them to a wholly new language. That is one of the challenges that we faced in drawing up that list.

**Q113 Mr Ward:** So why should they have three and, where there isn't an additional community language, they have two?

**Michael Gove:** The student who can speak both English and Urdu will come to school, as it were, with those advantages. What school is doing for all children, wherever they start, is to add a language to those that they already have as a consequence of their heritage or circumstances.

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15 May 2013 Right Hon Michael Gove MP

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**Q114 Chair:** Secretary of State, thank you very much for appearing before us this morning. Can I ask whether you have yet shadowed a teacher?

**Michael Gove:** Yes.

**Q115 Chair:** Excellent. Can you tell us a little about that? Can we see a school report?

**Michael Gove:** I went to Paddington Academy and followed a teacher, whose name I hope I am pronouncing correctly, called Mark Inniss, who is a

brilliant history teacher. I also had a chance to spend some time with Oli Tomlinson, the head teacher. The quality of history teaching is outstanding. The irony is that one of the lessons I observed was a preparation of A-level students at Paddington Academy for part of the history paper that dealt with the impact and legacy of Margaret Thatcher. That was, of course, just a few weeks before Baroness Thatcher passed away.

**Chair:** Thank you very much for appearing today.

**Michael Gove:** Thank you.