

APPG for Schools Learning and Assessment – Meeting Note

What knowledge, skills and competencies will be most important for life and work in the 21st century, and how best can they be assessed?

Date – 28 February 2023

Time – 2pm

Parliamentarians in attendance –

- Emma Hardy MP
- Lord Watson of Invergowrie
- Lord Aberdare
- Lord Storey

Agenda –

Time	Details
2.00 – 2.05	Welcome to meeting
2.05 – 2.10	Opening remarks from Mike Nicholson
2.10 – 2.15	Opening remarks from Thomas Martin
2.15 – 2.20	Opening remarks from Alison Chang
2.20 – 2.25	Opening remarks from Rylie Sweeney
2.25 – 2.30	Video from Brandon Farley
2.30 – 2.55	Q&A
2.55 – 3.00	Close of meeting

Summary –

Emma Hardy opened the meeting by reflecting on the information that the group had heard during our previous meeting in January, which outlined many of the problems with the current assessment system. Emma made clear that the intention was for this meeting to be forward-looking and identify what we would like to see from a future assessment system.

The first contribution came from Mike Nicholson who outlined the different information that is taken into account when assessing student applications for higher education entrants. Mike was clear that the current focus on exams was not helpful as this does not show the full range of what students can do. He outlined some of the different methods that the University of Cambridge have put in place to try to assess the full range of a student's ability and ensure that they are accessible to all students. In terms of the change that needed to be implemented, Mike said that just changing the course content would not be enough – it is necessary to change the nature of assessment as this drives what is taught.

Riley spoke about her experience both of taking GCSEs and in her role as an apprentice and formerly a student of the UTC South Durham. She spoke highly of how this had prepared her for the world of work and compared her experience with those of her friends who had finished their GCSEs with straight 9s

but were not equipped with wider 'life skills' such as how to put together a CV. Riley said it was crucial to have these wider life skills and that this is how our assessment system should be constructed.

Alison stated that the current student measure of success is too focussed on high stakes terminal tests – which means that memorisation and regurgitation take precedence. Alison spoke of alternatives, some of which were already being used, such as online assessments, larger focus on continuous assessment and even the implementation of a baccalaureate model. All of these could help to reduce the pressure on students and allow for more skills to be shown.

Thomas talked about his experience of employing local people for Arco. He claimed that people get paid for what they do with what they know, rather than what they know and in this context they would rather employ people straight from secondary education rather than from tertiary as this means they do not have to work against the embedded behaviour the current system creates in students as much. He spoke of skills such as problem solving, teamwork and communication as basic skills that they really want to see in people, which the current system does not cultivate.

Brandon's contribution focused on the need to engage with students to guide the process and ensure that any reforms work for them. He spoke passionately about the impact that the high stakes nature of exams has on pupils' mental health and wellbeing. Brandon demonstrated that assessments could be improved by looking at incorporating more project based work or portfolios of different types of work such as presentations.

In the discussion that followed contributions were made on how the current system had come in to place and why there was such a focus on exams; the sufficiency of the Tomlinson review; the necessity of continued professional development (CPD) for teachers; the reliability of grades; how schools can be supported to prepare students more for the world of work; and the general purpose of education and how this influences the assessment system.