

## All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility

### State of the Nation 2019 Hearing

Monday May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility was very pleased to host **Dame Martina Milburn**, the Chairwoman of the Social Mobility Commission to discuss the findings from its State of the Nation 2019 report. The following report is a summary of the hearing.

#### OPENING STATEMENTS

**Justin Madders MP (Ellesmere Port and Neston)**, the Chair of the APPG on Social Mobility opened the hearing. He highlighted two important headlines from the 2019 State of the Nation report. Firstly, social mobility has been virtually stagnant over the last four years and secondly there are half a million more children in poverty today than there were in 2012. While these statistics and others from organisations such as the Sutton Trust are important Mr Madders noted that the APPG tries not to *just* reel off statistics but also to bring forward practical policies for consideration by the government. This work is reflected in the last two reports from the APPG on Social Mobility – [Closing the Regional Attainment Gap](#) and [Access into the Leading Professions](#). Tackling social mobility however requires cross government effort looking at areas such as education, business and housing. The APPG feels the Social Mobility Commission can really add value to this process and it wants to work with the commission and government departments to ensure where you end up in life is not determined by where or to whom you are born.

**Dame Martina Milburn** echoed those sentiments in her opening address and stressed that the country needs everyone to help as things are not going to change unless we start doing things differently. The core issue in social mobility is that everyone thinks it's a great idea until it comes to actually doing it – really doing stuff differently acknowledged Dame Martina is something we're bad at. Additionally, the debate around social mobility has become one of party politics. Dame Martina said that some of the reaction to the State of the Nation report has been polarised depending on a person's political perspective – one group of people wished it had got worse proving that austerity has had negative consequences on society while another group of people hoped it would have got better so there would be no attributable link between austerity and social mobility. "We need to stop playing party politics with this" she said, "it's people's lives we're talking about."

There is often a sense of despondency around this issue. Some feedback she has received said none of this will make any difference and the work won't go anywhere as the government is not championing it. She said she very much hoped that today will be the start of a new journey and asked the attendees at the APPG "what can you all do to help us?"

Recently on a visit to Sunderland she sat with some young people one of whom couldn't see the point in anything – he didn't play football, he occasionally listened to music and his mum was an alcoholic. He wasn't even angry. That despondency is something Dame Martina says she sees and hears every day in the work she does at the Prince's Trust.

## PRESENTATION ON STATE OF THE NATION 2019 REPORT

**Ali Jaffer** and **Lindsay Turner Trammell**, Heads of Policy and Innovation at the Social Mobility Commission then did a short presentation recapping on the 6 key headlines from the State of the Nation report:

1. **Social Mobility:** Those from better-off backgrounds are almost 80 per cent more likely to be in a professional job than their working-class peers
2. **4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution and living standards:** As automation rapidly changes the world of work, and life in general, existing divides could get worse
3. **30-hours childcare:** Policy is not reaching the families which need it most and we recommend reform
4. **Post-16 Education:** The sector is underfunded, and we call for significant increases to spending in this area
5. **Unconditional Offers:** Universities are often making these out of financial necessity, with the potential to harm students' interests
6. **Low Pay:** Those starting in low pay tend to get stuck, and those who experience low pay are more likely to be from working class backgrounds. We call on the government to become an Accredited Voluntary Living Wage employer

They then highlighted 4 key areas below that had received less media coverage at the time of the report's release. They welcomed the fact that this APPG provided them with the opportunity to focus on them:

1. The Early Years Workforce
2. The Student Experience at University
3. Apprenticeships and Social Mobility
4. Employer Recruitment Practices

There then followed nearly an hour of questions and discussion on the 4 key areas highlighted and the report more widely with some common threads emerging throughout the discussion.

## CROSS PARTY AND CROSS DEPARTMENTAL CO-OPERATION

The Co-Chair of the APPG **Claire Tyler, Baroness Tyler of Enfield** opened the discussion and picked up on the critical need for cross party and cross departmental work to tackle social mobility. Baroness Tyler noted that on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> May there was a good debate in the House of Lords on equality of opportunity for young people with issues highlighted both within and between generations. During that debate the State of the Nation was frequently referenced with idea after idea coming through on what the government should do. There was a clear wish for a cross government strategy to pull the threads together and a recognition that it shouldn't be left to just one department. Baroness Tyler said that the government should be really held to account and should see the State of the Nation as a hugely important piece of work to trigger others. Dame Martina was interested in how that could happen and Baroness Tyler said to engage with parliamentarians from both houses. Do we wait for the government, or do we use parliamentarians

to say, 'we think the cross-government strategy might look like this'? Baroness Tyler said that she had previously been involved in initiatives based physically in number 10, that's how you really get influence.

**Dame Martina** then talked about the 'Opportunity Areas' in England and proposed that the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department for Work and Pensions should be involved alongside the Department of Education in those areas. Otherwise it is a bit 'bonkers' as all the work in those areas stops at aged 19. She also noted that she wants the work of the Social Mobility Commission to be open to the public as most people don't know what social mobility is. Dame Martina wants to see people saying to their elected candidates: what are you doing on giving me a choice about going to university or exploring job opportunities? People may not understand the term social mobility but **Justin Madders** said they do understand economic uncertainty for their children.

**Sasha Morgan, the Head of the Secretariat of the Social Mobility Commission** echoed the need for a more holistic approach to social mobility. She noted that the Social Mobility Commission sits within the Department of Education, but it shouldn't matter where they are physically situated, what matters is how they are thought of in the minds of politicians and the public. It can't "just be Damian Hinds trying to do heavy lifting" she said. They would, for example be very excited if the Treasury Select Committee took questions on social mobility. She asked the MPs and peers present what other places in the Houses of Parliament could be asking questions and how can we all make that happen.

## LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

A key factor impacting social mobility is where you are born. **Dame Martina** pointed out that if you're born in a rural area outside London you are 70% more likely to move to get a job if you're from the middle classes compared to the working classes. If you want to get on, you've got to move out - that shouldn't be the case she said. **Sasha Morgan** picked up on the need to make sure that regional and local challenges and opportunities are part of the work being done. The Social Mobility Commission has 12 commissioners. Not only do these commissioners all have their own personal social mobility story but as they are located across England, they also bring critical regional based thinking which aids the commission's understanding about how devolution is impacting labour markets for example.

**Judith Cummins MP (Bradford South)** was very interested to know how the Social Mobility Commission saw Opportunities Areas going forward as her own constituency is in one. Dame Martina felt that it was too early to say, but worried about the 3-year cut off and a lack of cross departmental involvement. She felt some things are working very well, especially where they have a specific theme and there is some evidence they're making progress. Therefore, she wants to push for evaluations to start as soon as possible, to bring in the other departments and to extend their life span.

**Tracy Brabin MP (Batley & Spen)** agreed about regional variations. She said that towns and cities are not the same; working class kids in cities have more opportunities. It can't be right she said that you must leave home to fulfil your ambitions. She is chairing an inquiry on class and social mobility in the arts. There are very few working-class voices telling working class stories and she put it quite simply – "if you can't see it, you can't be it".

## EARLY YEARS AND PARENTING

Ali Jaffer in his presentation talked about how the early years workforce is plagued by poor reputation and the policy tension between the quantity of childcare provision versus the need to ensure the quality of early years educators. **Tracy Brabin MP, the Shadow Minister for Early Years** thanked the commission for putting a big focus on the early years. “We can close the gap if we get it right there” she said. There was a discussion about the eligibility of working versus non-working parents for access to the 30 hours free childcare. Ali Jaffer said they settled for expanding eligibility before universality of provision which allows time for more rigorous research. Dame Martina said she was shocked that 45 percent of childcare workers are claiming state benefits or tax credits because of low pay and it was noted that the Social Mobility Commission would be doing further work on the barriers to stability of the workforce and also look at the issue by region.

**Shanice Swales, the Civil Service Fast Stream Social Mobility lead** talked about how these issues are evident first hand in Leeds. It can feel like you are just plugging gaps. As children fall into poverty month by month and suffer extreme stress and trauma from that poverty, will it make much difference if a few more 2-year olds are in nursery? It feels like we are not getting to the core issues. But **Dame Martina agreed that it is very stressful but was clear that** you need to try to do what you can. If a single mum under huge stress could put her child in free childcare where he or she would get support it would make a big difference. But that support is needed at all stages. The Social Mobility Commission can't do this alone as its the smallest commission in the whole of government.

**Ruth Lowe from the charity Parentkind** which works to bring home and school together pointed out to the commission that there hasn't been much narrative to date about the part parents and those in parental roles can play. She noted that they have been approached by one of the opportunity areas who didn't have anything in their plan but have now realised if they want real change it's going to be needed. **Ali Jaffer** said the commission has been looking at the home learning environment and that the Department of Education has invested in innovation in this area. But he cautioned it is important that these get to some of the hardest to reach places and it isn't enough to simply expect someone to download an app and follow instructions online - proper engagement with families is needed to support these innovations.

## DIGITAL REVOLUTION AND SKILLS EDUCATION

The digital revolution and automation will rapidly change the world of work and life in general. The need to equip young people with the right education and skills to access the workplace was highlighted as a critical area. Failure to do so could exacerbate existing divides. **Baroness Tyler** noted that one of the areas that this APPG needs to look at is the spending review and the huge inequalities for 16-19-year olds between Higher Education (HE) and Further Education (FE).

**Dame Martina** said they are calling for a pupil premium for 16-19-year olds. She noted this is an area where we are letting a lot of young people down. Ninety percent of further education colleges are struggling with staff retention which sees them closing the type of courses that could get young people into work. Part of reason is that they cannot attract the right staff as you earn more as a secondary school teacher than you do as a teacher in an FE college.

**Steve Besley, Head of Policy at Pearson** picked up on this critical issue. He said the aged 16-19 window is a transition period which is so vital for so many young people. He had three quick answers:

- Investment - Pearson had a report out in May that found a 60% drop in the funding for 16-19-year olds over the last few years. How can you reskill young people on that?
- Qualifications - the system is constantly changing so it feels very unstable. We need to make it less confusing for young people.
- Employee status – some countries give a young person a trainee status, so they get support e.g. bus passes. And that status in turn gives them a sense of value.

He acknowledged that society is going through a difficult time but we must not talk ourselves down and we must provide hope and support for our young people.

**Dame Martina** agreed and again noted not to forget just how stressful things can be and recounted the story of one of the Social Mobility Commission's younger commissioners, Jessica Oghenegweke who gave up going to her further education college as she had to get 3 buses.

**Lindsay Turner Trammell** talked about the importance of apprenticeships for the Commission but she said they held off making any recommendations in the report as they are commissioning further research in this area and the Department of Education is undertaking a full review of the apprenticeship levy.

**Emma Neill** from **Open University** talked about the decline in part-time education and **Virginia Crosbie** talked about how important funding is for those who need a second chance in life.

## THE ROLE OF EMPLOYERS

In addition to being Chair of the Social Mobility Commission **Dame Martina Milburn** is also Chief Executive of The Prince's Trust. She talked about some work The Prince's Trust did five or six years ago with Marks and Spencer. M&S took on 400 young people as part of their move into work programme. They then tracked them and all went on to get jobs in the business and the bulk of them are still there and many have been promoted. She said not a single one of them would have gotten through the Human Resources recruitment processes. The big battle is with the HR departments.

Disadvantaged young people are the ones more likely to leave school without the requisite GCSE qualifications. Often that means the young person goes to a further education college and has to retake their English or Maths GCSE. 75 percent of employers require key GCSEs for entry level positions and apprenticeships so that disadvantaged young person cannot get a job. **Dame Martina** asked how many of those entry level roles really need a GCSE? A young person may have the necessary skills even if their academic qualification in English or Maths doesn't reflect that. Many employers do their own literacy and numeracy tests anyway. So, can there be more flexibility? Is there another way to let these young people in with some level of support?

**Lindsay Turner Trammell** talked about the importance of adult skills in helping people move out of low pay. As with government and parliament she said they cannot do this alone. The Social Mobility Commission wants to engage with a large number of stakeholders, it wants to work together and align wherever it can. Opening up recruitment by itself is not sufficient without inclusion. Employers

who only look at the diversity side and not at inclusion get negative consequences as employees enter but then feel excluded and leave.

**Sasha Morgan** talked about the inclusion experience of another of their commissioners, Sandra Wallace. She went to an FE college and then on to a lesser known university because she didn't think she was good enough or that she would fit in. She is now Managing Partner UK and Joint Managing Director Europe at DLA Piper.

**Dame Martina** noted one controversial recommendation in the State of the Nation report. She said they are calling on the government to become an accredited voluntary living wage employer. This would send a huge signal across the board if the government took this move.

## RESOURCES AND DATA

For the Social Mobility Commission this State of the Nation 2019 report is not the final word. **Dame Martina** said they have a budget of £2 million to spend this year on research and they have 11 pieces of really significant research underway already. This will help to keep the subject out there.

However, one challenge the Commission faces is access to the data it needs to do rigorous research.

She also noted that the Social Mobility Commission is a very small team in comparison to other public bodies. The role of the chair is part-time. To put this into perspective the Children's Commissioner is full time with an 18-person team. A similar government organisation looking at race inequality has a full-time chair. We are not serious enough about this said **Dame Martina**.

## IN SUMMARY

The APPG was really pleased to have held this hearing on the State of the Nation with the Social Mobility Commission. Also, it was very pleased to have had such engagement with the social mobility issue from across parliament and from the representatives of the many public and private bodies who were able to attend. There was definitely a sense of enthusiasm about how public, private and non-governmental organisations could engage with the commission and how their work and expertise could align with the Social Mobility Commission's work. **Iain McNicol, Lord McNicol of West Kilbride** asked for 2 or 3 practical recommendations that he can use his position in the House of Lords to put pressure on government ministers to achieve. Dame Martina Milburn said her personal three would be: widening the eligibility of the 30 hours free childcare so a parent working 8 hours can access it; student premium for 16-19-year olds, and for the government to become an accredited voluntary living wage employer. If pushed for a fourth, then scrap the use of unconditional offers at university.

Social mobility is a marathon not a sprint. It is a project that needs a 30-year plan and needs to move beyond a parliamentary timetable. The APPG on Social Mobility is committed to supporting that long-term plan.