

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility meeting on the current state of play in social mobility

Wednesday 26 October 2022

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Mobility was pleased to host a meeting on the current state of play in social mobility with the following speakers:

- Lee Elliot Major, Professor of Social Mobility at the University of Exeter and an associate at the Centre for Economic Performance
- Dr Tina Haux, Director of the Centre for Children and Families at NatCen

Chair of the APPG Kate Green MP introduced the session and was joined by co-chairs Baroness Tyler of Enfield and David Johnston MP.

INTRODUCTORY SPEECHES

Lee Elliot Major

Lee gave an overview of his recent work, including the Sutton Trust's 25th anniversary report, [Social Mobility – Past, Present and Future](#). He highlighted that the UK has entered an era of declining social mobility, where absolute mobility levels as measured by earnings are decreasing. Lee highlighted that early indicators for where today's children will be in their adult lives are not positive, with disadvantaged pupils facing greater learning losses than their more affluent peers, as well as a national crisis in school absences, with 40% of pupils receiving free school meals persistently absent. The direct impact and legacy of the pandemic is now exacerbated by the current cost-of-living crisis, challenging some of the more positive findings of the Social Mobility Commission's report on the state of the nation. Discussing potential solutions to the issues facing young people, especially the 'forgotten fifth' of those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, Lee emphasised the importance of parental engagement, which accounts for 50-80% of variation in educational outcomes, as well as the need to discuss university-led tutoring provision in scaling up the National Tutoring Programme.

Tina Haux

Tina highlighted projects that NatCen were running in collaboration with the Education Endowment Foundation, especially in the early years, highlighting that lots of educational inequalities establish themselves at this stage. Elaborating on the state of early years in the UK, Tina highlighted that the UK childcare system is one of the most expensive, with NatCen carrying out a qualitative study on recruitment and retention of staff, with many leaving settings due to lack of pay. COVID has led to a lot of childcare settings using up reserves, as well as a more fundamental change in the way that parents access childcare due to new working patterns. There needs to be a fundamental review of the system, and the EEF is funding projects where nurseries work with parents to support home-learning environments. Moving the discussion to schools, Tina highlighted issues such as evaluation of tutoring provision, with schools preferring to use funding themselves rather than through an external provider. There is a need to move fast on catch-up funding, with much dependent on the digital literacy of households and access to digital devices in order to be able to make the most of online catch-up learning.

Q&A

Following speeches from Lee and Tina, Baroness Tyler of Enfield opened the meeting up to questions.

The first question explored the importance of home-learning environments and parental engagement, and both speakers expressed the need for further research into factors outside of the school environment, such as the provision of school breakfasts, how schools communicate with parents, and understanding barriers facing children so to know how best to help them prepare to learn.

Other areas covered in the discussion included socioeconomic diversity in politics, reasons behind regional variation in social mobility outcomes, as well as debates on a gender divide in the education system, especially when it comes to the use of technology. Further questions highlighted the increase in the number of young people coming forward with mental health and wellbeing issues, with both panellists talking about the variety of approaches schools have taken and the need to ensure that these are in place across the sector, especially in places where support is needed the most, such as in schools serving the most disadvantaged communities.

A final set of questions covered issues of funding for schools, including how core school budgets and pupil premium funding interrelate, as well as arguments on the benefits of the former education maintenance allowance (EMA).

Kate Green MP thanked the panellists and emphasised the importance of the APPG's work in raising the profile of social mobility issues in Parliament. She then closed the session.