APPG for Schools Learning and Assessment – Meeting Note

Impact of current assessment system

Date – 25 January 2023

Time – 4pm

Parliamentarians in attendance –

- Flick Drummond MP
- Lord Watson of Invergowrie
- Baroness Blower
- Lord Knight of Weymouth
- Lord Baker of Dorking

Agenda –

Time	Details
4.00 – 4.05	Welcome to meeting – Flick Drummond MP
4.05 – 4.10	Opening remarks from Al McConville, Rethinking Assessment
4.10 – 4.15	Opening remarks from Sian Lewis, Parentkind
4.15 – 4.30	Opening remarks from UTC South Durham students – • Hannah Fenwick • Alisha-Paige Leather
4.30 – 4.55	Q&A
4.55 – 5.00	Close of meeting

Summary –

The meeting was opened by Flick Drummond who provided a summary of the purpose for why the APPG had been established and what was hoped to be achieved through the inquiry. Flick made clear that we hoped to influence all political parties to take the need to reform the current assessment system seriously.

The first contribution was made by Al McConville who provided an overview of the work of Rethinking Assessment. Al spoke of their proposal for a wider range of assessment types to be captured in a learner profile that would follow the pupil and provide a summation of all of their work. They have also recently established a working group to explore the practicality of a baccalaureate. Al said that since 2015 reforms of GCSEs and A-Levels has led to schools "being shackled to a narrow diet of exam-focused curriculum pathways". This has resulted in a decline in the breadth of subjects being studied. Al stated that research from Rethinking Assessment has shown that employers place more weight on soft skills that are not currently assessed. Their research had also shown that disadvantaged students were more likely to have their curriculum narrowed further due to pressure to get them to pass core subjects.

Sian Lewis spoke on behalf of Parentkind and claimed that too often parents have been ignored in this debate. Polling they had carried out last year proved that the status quo was not good enough as the high-stakes nature of exams set too many children up to fail. This polling demonstrated that 86% of parents believe that the system is not working and needs to change, and 55% identified exam stress as a problem for their children. Parentkind believe that parents are the experts on their own children. Parents much preferred the idea of teachers assessing their children over exams taking place – 93% of parents agree that a mixed method of assessment would be a fairer way to assess children. Sian said that parents want to see young people leave secondary school with skills and competencies such as self-confidence, preparedness for work, resilience and problem solving, but the current assessment system does not facilitate this.

Hannah Fenwick said that exams are a fundamental part of a young persons live, and it seems as those purpose of education is purely just to pass. Hannah referred to examples from her schooling where she was discouraged from using personal examples or creative thinking as it would not get her the required marks. She identified that a teacher's job is "no longer to teach but to transfer a mark-scheme in our heads word-for-word." She claimed that employers will not be able to distinguish between an A in one year and a 6 in the other. Hannah spoke of the benefits of studying at a UTC which focused on a student profile, as this had helped her specialise in being an employee, not just a student.

Alisha Leather built on these points made speaking about the stress that exams inflict of the whole of a students life. She explained her current learning experience at the UTC and how this made her feel prepared for joining industry in later life.

In the discussion that followed contributions were made on the current policy of major political parties; the validity of current grading; whether GCSEs should continue now education is mandatory to 18 years-old; assessment practices during the pandemic; and the unnecessity of teaching all subjects towards a qualification.