

Education Panel – 26 November 2014**Transcript of Item 5: Pupil Referral Units and Alternative Provision in London**

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): This is a question and answer session, or a real discussion, with our guests about Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and Alternative Provision (AP) for our young people in London.

I would like to welcome our guests. That is John d'Abbro, Head of New Rush Hall Group that is based in Redbridge. We have got Anna Cain, Chief Executive and Head of Boxing Academy, Academy. Welcome, Anna. Gabrielle Grodentz, Head of Alternative Provision, Islington; and Seamus Oates, Executive Teacher of Tri-borough Alternative Provision. Thank you all for joining us today.

Let us start with the first question. If I can start off and put the first question to Gabby and Seamus, if we can be on first name terms? Yes. Can you just, Gabby and Seamus, tell us what does AP provide that mainstream school cannot?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): I will start. First name terms is good, because in AP it often is first name terms.

We work with young people that have been excluded from school or are not attending school for one reason or another. Usually they have come to us having exhibited fairly significant behaviour issues in their mainstream setting. Often we find that behaviour is masking other learning needs, so they may have literacy needs, numeracy needs and, for one reason or another, have become disaffected with learning.

The first task that we have in AP when they arrive through our doors is that they often arrive angry, disaffected, disillusioned, with families who are equally angry, disaffected and disillusioned. Our first task is to really try to drill into that and to find out what the reasons are, so we have very comprehensive assessment processes and from that develop personalised learning packages for our young people. That will often involve finding the thing that is going to hook them into learning. It could be anything. It could come from a range of areas.

We then also work really hard to build positive relationships with them. I think you will also find when you ask young people in AP what they value, they value the caring family atmosphere that they get in their schools, of whatever sort they are. That is through building up a positive relationship. That is often missing in mainstream. We work in very small class sizes, so classes of up to six, sometimes eight, sometimes more but not often more than that. Small class sizes. Highly trained professional teaching staff. Highly trained and skilled support staff. Together we develop an offer which absolutely starts to turn the young people around. When it works it works really well and we get some very strong outcomes.

In a nutshell, those are some of the things that we try to deliver in AP.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Can you give us the average age?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Within my setting the Tri-borough Alternative Provision (TBAP) Trust works across three London boroughs, the tri-boroughs, but we

also sponsor what was the PRU in Haringey so we work across four London boroughs now. We work with learners. We have up to about 350 learners from primary to secondary. The majority of our learners are in key stage 4 so most of them are 14 to 16 years old, but not all of them. Often the more challenging learners are younger. Most of them are 14 to 16. Most of them are boys. In our setting it is usually 70% boys to girls.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Gabby, what have you got to add?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Yes, I wanted to add to that that AP provides courses that cannot be on offer in mainstream school or are not on offer, so that are discrete to industries. Students will take to those because to them they can then see an end game. They can see that it will lead to a job in a profession which is something they do not necessarily see when they attend a mainstream school. That is not to say, obviously, mainstream school does not lead to professions. However, for them they see construction, mechanics and some of those offers as what they want to do. They see it as having more of a purpose. That is for them the bit that then engages them. I think it is important we recognise some of those specialisms.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): From your experience, are you saying that the young person, or a good proportion of them, at 14 they have that insight and they feel strongly that is where they are going to? Or is it that they have no choice because by 14 they already know that they are outside of the mainstream? You talk about numeracy, literacy. What is the choice based on if the 14-year old is arriving in your system illiterate and innumerate?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Not all of them are. We give them a choice. We sit down with them and have an in-depth interview, where we give them an offer. Some of our offers are very similar to mainstream so they still get the GCSE package, or they have a mixture of the literacy and numeracy with the other areas. They are given a choice, and they are also given a chance to go around and visit the different offers, and even have bit of a trial as well. They might do a week in one, a week in another, and then make a decision. This is also coupled with careers advice from our team. That is important to help them pick the right pathway for them.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I am trying to understand. In your experience, say at 14, these children arrive within the structures that you offer because mainstream schools do not offer that?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Some of them do want that choice. They will come to us saying, "I would actually prefer to go AP because I want to specialise in this area". That might be because that is what is in the family and they want to be like their dad, or eventually work in the family business.

I agree that the majority of our students do come to us because of behaviour issues. However, there are a percentage of students that do want to specialise in these areas, and we have to recognise those as well.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Again, just a little bit of clarity between PRU use. My understanding of PRU use is that it is not so much a matter of choice for the individual child. I am still a governor in a university, I used to be a governor of both a senior and a primary school. When I have met them at meetings it is not a choice for either them or their family, it is like they have to go. This is what I am just a bit confused that they are leaving a place from which they have been excluded, or they have to leave, and then the next day, from what I am hearing, they arrive with you and this is where they have always wanted to be?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): No, that is not what I am saying. I am saying there are a percentage of students, the majority, who are at risk of permanent exclusion and will go on AP. However, I think we often think about a small cohort who choose it as an option and will go to their head of year, or whichever senior leader is in charge of the AP, and say to them, "That is what I want to do". In amongst all of this I think we are forgetting about that percentage of students who do want to specialise in this way.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): So long as we have some proportion that they are small, rather than they being the majority.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): I appreciate that. I still think it is necessary that we at least acknowledge them because they do exist.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): My next question is how is the cohort of young people attending AP in London changing? Are they from the same school? From your data do you see a pattern of the young people coming to from the same schools over a period of years, or is this changing?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Within our setting across four London boroughs - certainly across the three - we have got data which goes back over the last ten years.

I think just to clarify the previous point, learners who are permanently excluded from school absolutely come into the PRU. We now call them AP Academies, Alternative Provision Academies, into our setting. We also offer the option for schools to refer learners on what we call managed moves. That is where interventions have got to an end point in the school and the family, the young person and us, all agree that this will be the best setting for them to perform and achieve, so we do a managed move into the AP.

In terms of the cohort of young people, there has been a surprisingly static number in terms of the numbers we operate with. In Hammersmith and Fulham, in particular, we had up to 175 places. Over ten years we have never gone 20% over or above that number, in terms of the total number of young people that have come into our setting. As our provision has improved and moved towards outstanding, schools have become increasingly confident, as have young people, at coming into the settings because they know they are going to achieve better than they would have done if they had stayed where they were.

The only difference we see in terms of the groups of young people coming is if a particular school has gone into special measures, or is having difficulties at any one time, we will probably see bit of a peak in young people being excluded or coming out because of poor behaviour.

Over that ten year period I have seen many different outcomes in our schools across the boroughs, and can track some particular groups of young people coming out of those schools at those times. Overall I would not say there has been a massive shift.

The only thing we have picked up very recently, and we have not got real evidence for it, is that there may be a slightly higher number of year 6 students having difficulties in primary. That is the only thing that has come up recently.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): The latest trend is the year 6 in primary?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Yes.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Can I just ask you, in terms of profile of the young people are you noticing any differences in gender or particular ethnic groups? Last week I was reading about the commonalities between black boys, in whatever you could put together in that part, and white boys, whatever. Are you able to drill down and give any sort of feel?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): We are able to drill down and we absolutely have that data. Within the London context that I work within, across the three boroughs not the four, the data that I have across the three boroughs I have not picked up a significant difference over the years in terms of either black boys or white boys being excluded more or less than others. The only times occasionally we pick up things will be around gender, and that is because we have quite a lot of single sex schools. If one particular school is having difficulty we may get bit of a spike in the data. Within our context I have not seen any significant difference over the last ten years in the cohort.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Would you use Office for National Statistics classification of individual children?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): In terms of ethnic --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Yes.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): We use the standard school classification that comes in our school information management system. That is reported on four times a year in terms of roll analysis.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you. John, what can you add in terms of this cohort of young people in London?

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): It says London, but I am thinking about 25 years' experience of working with children presenting challenging behaviour and I do think a general stereotype we demonise our young people. I actually think the majority of young people get it right.

However, something that I think is changing in the context of children presenting challenging behaviour is they are far more complicated. Their deprivation is more complex than it used to be. I do think they are more violent. I do not find that more challenging; challenging behaviour is challenging behaviour. If you read the hieroglyphics in the Egyptian temples they were talking about children presenting challenging behaviour. I think young people will always present challenging behaviour. I do think many youngsters are more violent than they used to be. It is against that context that we need to understand why is it children are more violent. It could be that we have a more violent society because a society gets the children it creates. I think we need to pay regard to that.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Before I bring in my colleague, Andrew Boff, Anna, did you have anything to say about --

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): The Boxing Academy is a small independent alternative provider. Generally all our referrals come from mainstream schools pre-exclusion. We have worked quite hard over the last six or seven years to encourage schools to use us before it is too late. We only have 40 children but 90% of them are from mainstream schools and are still on roll at the school.

Certainly the breakdown does not change very much. I would agree with Seamus [Oates], it might go up and down very slightly. It is predominately boys. It is predominately black boys, in Hackney anyway.

Obviously the Boxing Academy specialises in violence and anger management. We have had a waiting list for at least two years now. There does not seem to be any shortage of skills wanting to refer young people who have anger management problems.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Just a question that comes to me, it has got no agenda; if it is known to work then why cannot you just go in and give that as an offer to that school child and keep that school child within the school?

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): I think you can sometimes. The children that we accept as referrals have come to the end of the line. Some of them will have been presenting this sort of behaviour from the beginning of primary school. You are not going to fix it with one session a week with a mentor or a boxing mentor. We do provide an outreach service to schools. One of my mentors is at a school in Hackney at the moment delivering an after school boxing class. That is exactly the point, for a lot of young people that will be enough. For the ones that we are taking, we are taking the young people who absolutely cannot go anywhere else.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): My last question is in terms of all of you: when we looked at demographics have you noticed a difference between class? I am talking about children from families classified "professional", whatever that is, to families where they are third generation homeless or what have you. Have you got any of that data?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): We have data. We know that our learners tend to come from very highly disadvantaged backgrounds with really, really complex issues affecting family life.

Anecdotally often I am told that when middle-class learners have these issues they get sent to boarding school. That is what I have heard.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): I would say to that as well, I think that is probably true. We do have a few every year who come from what people would class as a fairly respectable background, and parents who are pulling their hair out and do not understand how this can have happened. There seems to be a general acceptance of this sort of behaviour among young people. It is causing a lot of peer pressure.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Very much. I think just to emphasise, in terms of how the group has changed over the last 10 or 20 years, there has been, I think, an increasing number of young people coming with mental health needs that perhaps have not been addressed elsewhere, or addressed early enough, in the journey that they are on.

One of the strengths of the work that we all do is outreach, and is working in schools and doing early intervention. Often by the time young people come into our AP Academies or our services, we will have come across them many times and will have worked with other professionals. Often it works and they do not come any further. When it does not work, we have got a good story behind them and we have got a good set of data and strategies to support them.

The mental health needs is an area that we cannot get enough of. We deliver it ourselves. We buy into Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) commissioning. We often find that is needed. Families need support as well so a lot of work needs to be done around families.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): That was in my question in terms in terms of setting the scene, what other factors have you seen. Mental health, thank you for bringing that in.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): One thing it would be remiss of us not to mention is that within all schools, but I think it is over-represented within our sector, is foetal alcohol syndrome. This is one big change that we are now seeing that you would not have seen 20 years ago. We now have the metrics and the research that is backing this up.

If you go with [Professor] Barry Carpenter's [OBE] work, he would say that one in a hundred children is now arriving in schools with foetal alcohol syndrome. Given that many of the children who end up in AP are, as Seamus and Anna say, sometimes coming from - I do not like to use the term but I will use it - middle-class, which may go some way to explaining why you have got this cohort of children coming in who are classless. We have unfortunately developed a disability that is not normative. It is given to children through their parents. If you talk about the change in context of behaviour, that is something that is different in the last 20 years because we did not have the mind mapping imaging stuff to be able to do this 20 years ago, whereas we can now. Therefore in vitro we can say, "This child is damaged and his or her propensity to learn will be different".

In a mainstream context I think that is more challenging, but I think it is something that we need to pay regard to.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you. I will hand over to my colleague, Andrew Boff, and then I have got a couple of other questions on this section.

Andrew Boff AM: I am trying to get a picture of the scale because actually we are talking about very, very small numbers. Just to backup what Mr d'Abbro said, a lot of young people that go to PRUs have got challenging behaviour. Actually bearing in mind there is 1.4 million school kids, and we are talking about over the whole of London 3,000 are in AP, is that accurate figure, about 3,000?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): It feels very accurate.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): In Islington it is about 10% of our population.

Andrew Boff AM: Ten per cent?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Yes. Ten per cent of the school population overall.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): I think there is 3,000 in the PRU/AP.

Andrew Boff AM: Ten per cent?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): In London?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): In London, yes.

Andrew Boff AM: Are in AP?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Yes. Not in PRUs, in AP.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): There is a slight differential between --

Andrew Boff AM: So AP, in the broad sense, we are talking about probably around 140,000 young people?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): That is not a figure that I would be familiar with. I think 3,000 is learners who are in PRUs, AP Academies and independent AP schools. There are also a number of learners who are attending mainstream schools who will go to some kind of AP on a full or part-time basis, and for which the schools maintain responsibility for those learners. That number, I do not know the figure of at all.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): That is what we are, essentially. They are still on roll at the school so your numbers only reflect people who have been removed from a school roll and moved onto approved or a local authority AP.

Andrew Boff AM: I am having difficulty here understanding the figures then.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): This is one of the problems.

Andrew Boff AM: I want to know what this 10% on Alternative Provision is, then?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): I might be slightly off with the percentage, I think, so apologies for that. You do have those that are permanently excluded that go into a PRU; those who are at risk who go into AP; those who remain on the roll of the school but still go to AP; and those who will go out of school for a part-time basis, so one or two days a week so they are classed as AP and school. There is a wide mixture of how it is used.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): I feel we need to have caution around that number of 10%.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): My apologies for that, I think.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): That might be something that can be helped with gathering the data, because it is difficult to get the data from ever school.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Yes.

Andrew Boff AM: There is a difference between talking about 3,000 and 140,000.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Yes, my apologies.

Andrew Boff AM: It is difficult to understand quite --

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): It is difficult to get exact numbers on this though. For example, every child at Boxing Academy is also on roll at their school so who counts them?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): When Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) visit schools they would look that.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): I count them.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Ofsted look at that.

Andrew Boff AM: We will move onto as to whether or not they should be on the roll of the schools if they are at the Academies, because of course you then do not get the money if they are on the rolls of the school.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): That is another complication, yes.

Andrew Boff AM: The profile you gave to us, the age profile, predominately 14 to 16; Are there figures that perhaps you can provide us later about those?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Absolutely. I can absolutely provide you with data for my setting, for the four boroughs that we work in. In terms of London wide data, we might be able to find that because we had some released last year.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): I can do north London. I can provide you with the data for those in north London, not just Islington but the five boroughs.

Andrew Boff AM: What you said earlier confirms what I have seen of AP, which seems to be that predominately, not uniquely but predominately, it seems to be a facility for 14 plus. Is that correct?

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): I think that's generally.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): In general, yes.

Andrew Boff AM: That's generally. I know there are exceptions that, and you yourself have said, Mr Oates, that you get people of primary school age.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Absolutely. I run a dedicated primary AP in Fulham which has got 18 places in it. I have in Haringey I think ten, I will have to check up the number, primary places within that provision. You are correct, the predominance is 14, and actually probably going post 16 longer term. At the moment it is post 14 to 16. We cannot underestimate the challenge that the small number of pre 14-year olds bring into the sector. They are actually the group where early intervention is really important. Our focus at those early ages is around reintegrating them back into mainstream schools and getting them switched back onto learning and working around some of the issues that they are facing.

Whilst 3,000 is a small number, 3,000 is a highly significant number when we look at the costs they have both financially, emotionally, and in many other areas to society as we go through their lives. It is really important that we work with them effectively at this stage, and we have got some good examples of that going on.

Andrew Boff AM: You have also talked about the stability of the numbers, year-on-year you are saying that actually it is about the same numbers.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Yes.

Andrew Boff AM: Sorry, is that wrong?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): No. I am just saying in Islington we are working quite hard to reduce those numbers. Over the last two years our numbers have gone down by 70 children, which is an awful lot over two year groups. You know, we are working hard to try to support schools to keep the children in schools as well. I think it is important to acknowledge that the boroughs, and PRUs, and local authorities rather, are working really hard to keep the students in school, and only moving them on when it is completely necessary.

Andrew Boff AM: These debates are familiar to anybody who has, for example, got involved with special education provision about to what extent you have special schools, and to what extent you cope with the issues within the established sector.

Where I am trying to get to is whether or not that stability of numbers over the years has got down to the amount of places that are provided? Are you just filling all the places provided, and therefore you are always going to have the same number? Is there actually a hidden need that is not being represented?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): It is a complex situation and a complex scenario. I think five years ago we had an absolute mantra and belief that inclusion meant every young person should be in a mainstream school. I subscribed to that personally. I recognised really quickly that actually our mainstream schools cannot meet the needs of a lot of our learners. Therefore if we are going to have an alternative in place it needs to be of a very high quality, and it needs to achieve really good outcome.

The worst thing, as was happening five years ago, is young people were losing an entitlement to education, were being put into very poor PRUs in very poor, underfunded areas. Since Charlie Taylor's [Government's Expert Adviser on Behaviour] review has taken place, and various other things have happened we have had some really good AP set up, and, particularly in London, some strong providers delivering good outcomes to learners. We recognise that for some learners AP is absolutely going to get them the right outcomes. It may mean that reintegration takes place at 16 when they go onto college or into further education. It is not necessarily about getting them back into a mainstream school. In the old days it used to be six weeks and you were back into a school, and what was very much a revolving door coming out of the school, bouncing out and failing again and again and again. We recognise that, whilst at the same time we work to get people back into mainstream, particularly pre 14. It is complex in that there are a number of drivers behind it. At every point it is around meeting the needs of the young person to get the best outcomes and that is what we do.

Andrew Boff AM: I get that. Perhaps we have gone a bit forward because I am still pivoting on the numbers. Just a last question I have got on the numbers is because of what you said Ms Grodentz I would not mind

getting some figures about the number of young people who are using the facilities of AP but not actually attending full-time. For example, I believe at the Boxing Academy I thought your young people were full-time there.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): They are full-time, yes.

Andrew Boff AM: They are still on the roll of their --

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): They are still on roll at their school. It does cause huge complications, especially money as dual registration has all sorts of issues; but part of the process is that they have not been permanently excluded. We do not want them to have to go through that very damaging and emotionally draining process that causes a huge amount of disruption, and leaves them with even lower self-esteem than they had already. By being referred to us like that, the school is still involved. The school do quality assurance (QA). They come in and see them regularly and everybody can be sure that they are getting a good outcome.

Young people sometimes are not very happy about it at first. Sometimes they come bouncing through the door saying, "This is what I wanted". It varies according to individuals' personal circumstances. They will all say that they needed the smaller environment, with much more attention and support and two years to get over all the big problems that they had in education. Then they all go to college at 16, re-integration at 16, and they make a go of it. If you just do a nice quick placement, turn around, back you go, you are not going to get to the root cause of the problem. Some of these problems are very deep rooted.

Andrew Boff AM: I am sure. Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Before we leave this, Andrew, from the work that our officers have done, and in conversation with the Greater London Authority Education and Youth Team who work on this full-time, there is no reliable data that exists at the moment. What we have to go with is the Department for Education (DfE) estimates in terms of full and part-time places in the form of AP. That number excludes PRUs. It would not --

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): There is overlap.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): -- include, if you like, offers by boxing clubs etc.

Andrew Boff AM: Chair, we want to get an idea of the data. You see even that data, the DfE reckons it is 23,000. That is the national figure. Actually looking at 3,000 is probably around sort of rightish. That still appears to me to be a very small number, even in part-time.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): The statistical press release is confusing because it does not count anybody still on roll at a mainstream school, and that is most of the kids in AP.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Except to say we are talking about an annual number here. When you guys are talking about dealing with 3,000 children or 300 or whatever number --

Andrew Boff AM: It is still a tiny, tiny number compared to the --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): It may well be a tiny number. I certainly would not like to be one of those tiny numbers. It is not a matter of the size of the number. It is really the issue about --

Andrew Boff AM: It does really matter because if it was a big, really huge number, we would talk about changing the schools themselves. With a small number you are dealing with a specific set of problems here that needs a particular solution, rather than, "Oh my goodness, look what has happened to 10% of the kids in London". Then we would have to start looking at the schools and how the schools are dealing with this. That is why the numbers are important. Not because they are any less important.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): We, within AP, are often looking at how our practice can be transferred back into mainstream so we do get the number even smaller.

I think also one point to note is the 10% that we were just talking about, as it is mainly key stage 4, mainly year 11s, mainly 15 to 16-year olds, that 3,000 will have a higher proportion of 15 to 16-year olds in that group of 3,000 which makes it more significant than if they were not that big a proportion, if you see what I mean, whilst it is small.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: I want to just briefly pick up, we have touched on it a tiny bit, this issue of special educational needs. I was reading that 79% of the pupils attending PRUs, and I guess AP as well, have special education needs (SENs). That is a really, really high level. I agree a lot of trend has been towards mainstreaming SENs into schools, and I do not have a problem with that up to a point. Is a lot of it attention deficit disorders and different spectrums of autism, and actually whether there is a need for a very specialist provision because there are some children with that sort of disorder? I think people often think of special needs as being maybe more physical disabilities. Is there something there that needs to be picked up, either through special schools or an increase in that sort of specialism of special schools across the capital?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): John has probably got that. May I just answer quickly before you though? In our sector --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: John is eager to get in, but go on Seamus.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Because John runs that set-up, but within our organisation we have got designated SEN units within our AP Academies. Again, we were receiving many learners with what were stated as SENs and feeling their needs were not being met within those boroughs. There were no special schools for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) or any of those types of provision so we set it up and did it ourselves. We are now in a scenario where we are confident that we can meet the needs of a set number of learners for statements for social, emotional and mental health (SEMH). We cannot have 'behaviour' anymore; it does not exist. Those learners come into us and we meet their needs. That is an example of where what was a PRU has adapted itself to meet the needs of the learners that are coming in.

John comes from a different direction but there are similar outcomes so John will answer.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): I do not want to make this political, but we need to recognise that by segregating certain people and using a disability group, and SEMH, is not a normative category; you cannot define it as someone who is a wheelchair user, or somebody who is partially sighted. It is a social construction that says we put a certain amount -- it is some of your point, Andrew, the

fact that percentage of children end up in PRUs is as much about social construction as it is about understanding disability and how we marginalise certain groups of people in our society.

The interesting thing from my point of view, as someone who manages a school as well as some PRUs, is that some of the children in the school could be in the PRU and some of the children in the PRU could should be in the school. Going back to why is it that some children end up in some ways, that is really about other processes. Dare I say, it is about luck? It may be that someone has done something on a Friday afternoon that got them permanently excluded, but they have had a residual unmet special need for years, particularly in relation to mental health. I think it is something we all scream about saying, "Can we have more mental health support?" to support the work that we do. Actually behaviour is just a manifestation of how children are feeling. Often what we see is baggage that has not been addressed much earlier on in children.

To answer the question, I want it both ways and I am hoping the new legislation is going to make it easier for us to give children the support they need, be it an education, health and care (EHC) plan or it someone signposting that the right place for someone is a PRU or AP. Just to echo this point, we should not see that mainstream school is the gold standard for all children, because it is not. This is not bashing mainstream schools. The majority of mainstream schools are starting to do a great job, but sometimes some children need more and they need a personalised approach that cannot be given in a mainstream school setting.

Equally, and I am sure some of the students will not like me for saying this, but the children in mainstream school have rights to learn as well. The one thing that our children often say is, "I want to feel safe. I cannot learn until I feel safe." That is what we provide for them. Equally mainstream school children have a right to learn safely. There is this tension between that on one level we would all want to embrace total inclusion, but in reality we are not sophisticated enough as a culture yet to say we can have purely comprehensive education.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Smaller class sizes as well, that must help particularly some of these --

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): It is a personalised approach, which Seamus alluded to earlier on.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Much more than a class of 30 down to 6 or something.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): If you speak to the children that is what they like the best about AP, is the fact that they are getting more one-to-one support. In those small classes of 8, maximum 12 students, you have got two or three adults supporting those. It is that intensity of support that actually helps, not only to move them and progress them more quickly through their education, but also support those difficult and challenging behaviours.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): I would just like to add as well, we have got 40 young people or more at the Boxing Academy; one has got a statement of special needs. Probably another 15 could have one if they had come from a different family, or a different background, or a different time; and all of them actually have a SEN in some way.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Yes, I think almost every learner that comes into our setting will have a special need of sorts. They may have it recognised through a statement, or what was school action plus, but we do certainly see that.

I think that kind of goes - you are probably going to move onto it - to why it is really important that we have some of the best, highest quality, highest qualified and most skilled staff to work with these young people because that is what they need to have. That class of six or eight, with two adults, teacher, learner support professional, whatever they are, they need to be at the top of their game in delivering those outcomes.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): We are going to get onto that because reports do not tend to tell that story. Last question in this series, and we have just touched on the question in terms of the voice of the young people, how is that captured? Is it captured by Commissioners and/or providers? I certainly would be interested in getting hold of it because one of the things that I am concerned about in this piece of work particularly is hearing from you guys you would say what you are saying, would you not, because it is part of your business model. It would be great to get some feedback from young people. Do you capture that information? Would it be possible for us to get access to any of that?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): That is straightforward. We regularly send out questionnaires to our students and our parents, because they are obviously part and parcel of this. In north London we run quite a rigorous QA process. Part of that is to sit down with the young people and get their opinions, and find out from them what they really think and feel. Also to sit down with them and say, "What will make this better for you? How can we improve what we are currently doing?" Most of the time in that context it is verbal feedback, but we do send out written questionnaires and get the feedback that way as well. This is constant. We do a lot of one-to-one meetings with students as well, where we get them in, a bit like you would have a parents' meeting in the school. We do it that way as well so we get lots of feedback that way. It is important --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I am glad that you are all nodding, but let us get back to that. We want to look at a way of capturing some of that to put in this report, or just to circulate to Members for our better understanding.

I do now want to go onto, Andrew, question 5, and that is about challenges.

Andrew Boff AM: We have heard there is a problem with information flow between schools and AP. What are those challenges, and how does it hamper the chances of those young people?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): It does vary. I think you have got to really push to make sure schools, or the Commission, the Local Authorities (?) are putting together a really rigorous information passport, and then giving them back to schools and saying they will not take referral unless it is filled in and complete and it passes the information onto the provider. Four or five years ago nothing was being passed to the provider.

Andrew Boff AM: Can you give me a kind of idea of the kind of information you are looking for?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): What you need on there?

Andrew Boff AM: Yes.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Things like key stage 2 and 3 information, that is essential. Obviously the basics, you would expect the contact information but forget that. In terms of academic, you want that key stage 2 and 3 information. You want a report from the English, maths, science and information and communication technology (ICT) teachers actually listing what the child is

capable of in class, as well as their current level. I think sometimes a teacher can look at a level but it does not necessarily explain to the new teacher exactly what that child is capable of. You need something that is broken down. You also need targets set, both academic and pastoral. They need to be really clear so that the provider then has a base. They then make their own assessments of the child when they come in, and they put the two together.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): I would just say that for many years lack of information from schools was used as the biggest excuse for not having a strong baseline and not being able to demonstrate good progress. About five years ago that was absolutely the case. It still is an issue. Schools can, and do, use school-to-school data transfer from their information system into Commissioners and APs.

What many people have done, ourselves included, is said, "OK, we are no longer going to rely on that. We are going to have a very comprehensive induction system for young people when they come in", induction and assessment. Every young person that comes into our organisation has a two-week period of time when they are assessed on their cognitive ability skills, so that we get a good indication as to what GCSEs they are capable of getting. They are assessed using an online system around their attitude to self and school. Their special needs are assessed, their reading age is taken, their numeracy skills are looked at, and their mental health needs are assessed. We meet the family. If we are lucky we get the school to come to and we get that information that comes in. By doing that we are then able, very quickly and very efficiently to get a really good picture of that young person's needs at a particular time. That is a model that works, and it is a model that we are sharing elsewhere. It is certainly not used everywhere at the moment there. Schools are busy places and often these learners, before they come near to AP, have not been to school for quite a long period of time; or the school does not actually have any data about them because they have so many behaviour issues, they have missed lessons, they have not done assessments, they have not got the key stage 2 data. We really quickly realised that you have to have a system in place to do that assessment on induction of those young people.

Andrew Boff AM: I almost want somebody from a secondary school here, or primary school, to say, "Why are you not giving the information?"

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Because they have not got it is what they will say.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): I am initially from a secondary school background. Seamus is right. We do get children who come in from, for example, travelling families or you get children that have not been to school for a long period of time. The school will then say, "We have not got that data because they have not been with us long enough to assess them".

Andrew Boff AM: It is not really an excuse, is it? That is an excuse for handing over a file with nothing in it.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): It is not an excuse. It is not acceptable but this is what we are given.

Andrew Boff AM: At the moment they are not even handing over the file, are they?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Yes.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): You have some situations where you say, “We will not take the learner unless we get the data”. What actually then happened was learners were out of school and not getting anything. I think we are pragmatic in our solutions and really all we want is some information. Usually we want to know about their learning potential so you can see what they are going to do.

Andrew Boff AM: How could you work better with schools perhaps in order to increase the collaboration that you have? Surely there is a willingness on both sides.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Yes, there is a willingness there, its inclusive and it is about finding models that work well locally. There are very strong partnerships locally in London boroughs between schools and AP providers. That is the way into finding success and where it is not working trying to transfer it.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Also modelling that good practice across because it does vary. You can go to one borough and get minimal information on a child, and go to another and get a whole file, as you said earlier. I think it is about us modelling across what works and then keeping that going on.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): Certainly from our point of view we have worked really hard to develop good relationships with the schools who make referrals to us. Not just about data and the transfer of information, but also picking the right children for a placement with us but it has not been easy, it has taken quite a long time. Do not forget that these children are not necessarily very popular by the time they get referred. There is a little bit sometimes of just get them out the door.

Of course, we, as a small provider, cannot access DfE records so we are completely reliant on what is written on a piece of paper which is why we retest.

Andrew Boff AM: I have been to the Boxing Academy. I got the impression it was probably easier to get into Eton than it was the Boxing Academy.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): I like to think so.

Andrew Boff AM: Just to finish this off, I am assuming therefore you are willing, once you aim perhaps to reintegrate those young people back into the secondary school that you are in a position to share data back with the secondary schools.

John d’Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): That is the really interesting thing, is it not? When we do it the other way, we feel we can give the information and guess what, the school just expects it. When you start talking about predicted exam grades, and talking about attendance figures and whatever, the school just expect it back. When you remind them and say, “Hang on, 2 years, 18 months or 6 months ago where was that stuff then?”

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): I report back every week. They get weekly reports, data, tracking levels, everything. You do as well, don’t you?

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): John, before another Andrew asks us a set of questions in this area, you talked about the EHC plan. Is that not something that every child has to have, or is that a proposal that will not kick off?

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): It is a moot point. It is now legislation so from September we are moving towards having, in the special school where I manage the line manager, they are moving to a position where children will have that. I would suggest that any child who needs something different from mainstream should have --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Should have one of those.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): -- but it is not going to follow that way. What we might find is that as the threshold moves up, which I think it will do, for what we used to call statements, I think that is going to change, and it is going to get harder, for want of a better word, to get a statement. The whole raison d'être of the legislation is that proactively we should be statementing, or giving EHC plans, less the children who do not need them and putting the support in place for them within their mainstream school if that can be the case.

I think over time we will find that there will be less of these plans. That is not the same as saying that a child does not need an individualised learning programme, a personal plan. I think we are in an interesting period at the moment because we are in transition. It will be interesting to see in a few years' time, has it resulted in more children in PRUs starting the process of EHC plans but it being financially, dare I say, expedient to refer them to the PRU rather than go down the road of a full-blown EHC plan.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I was just trying to make the links in terms of what was said earlier about children's mental health needs, and also physical issues, like foetal alcohol syndrome. That will be known on the children's health record, but that information will not be transferred over to your area, will it?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): I think the introduction of EHC plans, if I am the most optimistic and hopeful about them because they are designed to replace what we have now as statements, and for learners who have got EHC plans the input of health into that plan I think could give us a lever to actually get some additional funding and support around some of those issues that the learners present with.

I think the other encouraging thing, when I am most optimistic about them, is that the EHC plan gives parents and others the option to commission support. AP is a part of the local offer. They will be looking in their region, a whole menu of AP providers, including PRUs and AP, and they can make a choice as to which one those learners go to. That could be quite an encouraging and useful thing for parents, learners, and for us in AP too because we will get the best fit into our provision.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): It only applies to children who have a statement.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Who have a statement, yes.

Andrew Dismore AM: I will carry on from the previous discussion you had with Andrew Boff about the files, and you give them a good file back. How do you decide whether a student is suitable for reintegration into the mainstream? What criteria do you use?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): For us, as I said earlier, it is mainly key stage 3, so it is mainly 11 to 14 years old; occasionally 14 or 15 you are able to integrate but mainly key stage 3. Again, we have been through many models of reintegration, and there used to be a thing called Readiness for Reintegration and if you ticked all the boxes you were ready, and back you went, and then back you came to your AP six weeks later. Now we have a very personalised approach. Learners can refer themselves for reintegration, the family can, teachers can within AP. When we feel that a learner is ready for reintegration we work with their named school and they will go on visits, and they have a very personalised package of reintegration. That may involve them going back full-time from the beginning with no support, or it may involve them having a part-time placement in the school and part-time back at the AP. It is targeted very carefully around the needs that they have.

We cannot underestimate sometimes how challenging it is for a young person to go out of AP back into the mainstream, because there are many things around them. Within our setting we work really hard to get them ready for it. They have a particular group they attend, particular classes on reintegration. You have addressed a lot of the behaviours, or you have tried to address a lot of the behaviour that they presented with in mainstream. You have made them ready and usually when they go back it works now. It does not always, but usually it does. That is what we do.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): The majority of my students are the 14 to 16 cohort, and they tend to stay in AP. Most of them would say once they are there they would not want to go back to mainstream anyway.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): We take 14 to 16 and we do not send back during that period. They will complete their GCSEs with us, and reintegration will happen when they go to college the following year. Sometimes they do still struggle without the constant support. We try to do outreach and mentoring, but it is not an official part of our offer.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): We have two key stage 4 PRUs. One is actually on a further education college site. We look towards 16 for reintegration. It was designed with that in mind. Because it is on the same campus you can have 14 and 15-year olds going into college courses, and then we see the transition at key stage 4 to 5 as natural. In that particular PRU most often children do not go back to mainstream school. We have made a decision that if you are not back in the year 9 when you have picked your options, you are probably better off in a PRU anyway.

In our key stage 3 and 4 PRU we have a process where we say, "As and when you feel ready we will then look at our metrics and see whether what you say and what we say agrees" and look to see if it is appropriate for that child to go back. I think it has to be driven by the child, not by the schools. This is sometimes where there is a tension. Because of the stigma that is still around mental health, or the stigma that is around behaviour management etc people do not necessarily see that their child's best life chances are being in a PRU. It goes back to point. That is why it is so important the quality of what we offer is as good as they are going to get in mainstream.

Andrew Dismore AM: I want to come back to post-16 in a minute. Seamus, you seem to be more optimistic about getting kids back into mainstream. What are the benefits of getting kids back into mainstream?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): That is a question we are often asked when people come to visit the Bridge. They say, "You are obviously meeting their needs so well.

They have got these classes of six. Things are great. Why do they want to go back?" Actually, we make their AP Academy experience as close to mainstream as we can in many ways, so the uniform is there, the curriculum is broad, 13 GCSEs can be taken, but we have all that support around them too. We recognise that young people do not like to feel different to their peers. The uniform is an absolute classic. Every other young person wears a uniform in our three boroughs so they want to too.

There are always some young people that do want to go back into mainstream. There are benefits for them. In most of our mainstream schools they can achieve more, in terms of the breadth of the curriculum even though we still have, for an AP, a very broad curriculum, they can get more in there. You will sometimes that they have been excluded for a one-off event. It is not the right place for them. They need to get back into mainstream. We can recognise them very quickly, those learners, and we do move them on very quickly. I am struggling to find benefits with mainstream for some of the group we work with. By the time they get to us it is usually the right place for them to be. We all agree.

I know we are going to come onto it, but I think we have an issue that is going to become much more of an issue over the next few years post 16. We reintegrate by getting them into college. Post 16 we have them coming back informally, looking for the support that they have left behind when college fails or it falls down. We are looking now at how we can do some form of post 16 AP and have that set up officially, not unofficially as it is at the moment through informal links that we have. I know the others are the same.

Andrew Dismore AM: Just sticking with reintegration, we have now got this rather wide diversity of schools, academies and free schools and all the rest of it. Do you find academies and free schools more reluctant to take kids back, compared to the old state schools?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Going back to the original point I made, it is really about the local partnerships that you have. We have a very strong local partnership of schools. We are the borough that probably has the biggest diverse range of schools. We have the first free school, academies, state school, communities, we have every kind of school known to man amongst our nine secondary schools.

Reintegration wise it is about the relationship that we have with those schools. One of the best schools for us is one of the first academies that converted. They are absolutely fantastic at Burlington Danes, absolutely fantastic at bringing young people back into the school. Equally, Phoenix and Fulham College, one of them is now an academy but they are late converters, are equally strong as well. I have no evidence within the boroughs we work with that academies, free schools or any other kind of school are not getting young people back in if we come to them and tell them we think they are ready and that is the right school for them to go into. I think it is important to recognise the strength that our relationship with those skills has. Equally, when they say, "We cannot manage this kid's behaviour anymore" we have that trust and we are there to support them and bring the young person into our provision. We complement one another very well.

Andrew Dismore AM: Can we ask the same question of Gabrielle, because you are not getting kids back into --

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): I think that is the difference between the PRU and the AP. Our PRU works with our children to reintegrate them back into school. If they come to AP it is normally understood they will not be reintegrated back to school. It is a slightly different approach. The main reason for that is most AP are offering a year or a two-year course. Once the child starts that it is a different curriculum from what they were doing in mainstream school, in some cases. If they are still doing

GCSEs they are doing less than they were doing at school so they can manage it and get better qualifications. That is the difference I think with AP.

As I said, our PRU in Islington will reintegrate back into mainstream because you are more aligned with the school in terms of the curriculum. You would be doing the child a disservice, in some cases, to have them for six months at AP and then suddenly pick them up and put them back into mainstream. They would not cope. They would not manage at all.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): You also have to consider the courses. The curriculums do not match. Years 10 and 11 are your GCSE curriculum. If a child gets halfway through and at the end of year 10 possibly their behaviour has improved that much, if they went back into mainstream school at that point, assuming there was a school that would take them which frankly they would not, they are not going to be able to cover the course in the time that is left. At that point you have to make a decision about what is the best outcome for this child.

Andrew Dismore AM: That is the next question really. Looking at the outcomes, because what we have got here it tells us that only 1% of AP students get five or more good GCSEs.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): Those are the figures that count excluded children, but not children still on roll.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): The first metric that is always used is 1.4% five or more A to Cs in PRUs and AP which compares against whatever the national figure is right now. When you start to look at other data sets around progress that learners have made, you will find that within AP learners make significantly better progress from their starting point than their peers nationally. When you look at London PRUs you will find that London PRUs and AP achieve higher figures in terms of five or more A to Gs GCSE, and one qualification compared to other AP providers across the country. Those kind of academic measures of attainment, and this is validated by Ofsted inspections of outstanding providers within London, we have very clear data that shows that the levels of progress is significantly higher than that that is achieved nationally.

Five or more A to Cs, whilst being a measure that we continue to measure ourselves against -- and again in London PRUs you will find a higher figure than the 1.4% national figure, it is going to be 10, 20, 30, some of the London PRUs have got 40% five or more A to Cs, I think Lambeth did that. We are doing better in London in that context, but we need to have a big caveat around the five or more A to Cs as a measure for PRUs. There are all sorts of reasons for it but the levels of progress they make from their starting point is significant. We cannot underestimate the importance of even just one qualification, in terms of the life chances that that young person has longer term. Look at the data for achievement and accreditation of young people in young offender institutions and in prisons, you have got 87% of young people have been excluded from school at some point or another who are in the youth justice system. Most prisoners have literacy levels way below that we would expect in the population and high SEN needs as well. All of that stuff goes towards looking at why we need to get it right in AP.

We will argue quite strongly that our achievement is high and our outcomes are really strong. They are borne out by the data. It may not be by the 1.4% A to Cs, but we do not regard that as a fair measure around attainment. That is without even mentioning all the other metrics we use to chart success; around emotional, social and behaviour.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): A couple of the points that Seamus has said there, and the one I often say to my local authority I want to be judged by is NEETs, not in education, employment or training. One of the successes of the people --

Andrew Dismore AM: That is what we are coming on to next.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): That is about inclusion for life.

Andrew Dismore AM: Whose job is it to support the needs? Whose job is it?

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): Informally or formally, because like Seamus on an informal basis kids come back every week and say --

Andrew Dismore AM: I think formally is the real question, is it not? If you are doing it, fine. If you are doing it on a voluntary unofficial basis that is --

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): It is not voluntary. We have got a duty of care to these students. The provider will be offering some careers advice. We also have careers advisers working within each local authority that offer support and advice to work with these students. It is everybody's responsibility. From the person where that child is going to receive their education, as well as the local authority and the school all working together to make sure that is met for the child.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): One of the beauties of our PRU being in the further education campus is that youngsters can have a bad morning and informally go back into the PRU in the afternoon and actually get some TLC, which is often what they need.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): That is what they come back to us for, yes.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): You might have to go down a statute route and say, "Who is going to pick up all these post-16 children?" potentially. I think the plan Seamus is talking about, I think long-term we need some bespoke provision that is almost AP at key stage 5.

Andrew Dismore AM: Based on leaving at 18, that creates some challenges, doesn't it?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): The NEET figures, that is on an upward trajectory. If you look at the NEET figures because we, again, are just getting national data through on destinations from PRUs and AP. We have only had one year of data so far, but looking at locally what I am hearing is that the NEETs are decreasing significantly. We are getting a higher proportion of young people post-16 staying in employment, education or training from AP. The AP sector is doing a very good job in terms of getting young people onto progression post-16.

As we have said, they fall out in January or they fall out in March. We get them in September, fall out in January, come back to their AP setting, "Help, what do I do now" and that is where our informal support kicks in. We are all thinking how can we formalise that? The challenge we have is that when we come to look at funding post-16 within AP, if we wanted to set up an AP free school or an AP provision post-16, the funding is the same as a mainstream student. I cannot remember the number, it is in the region of £4,000 per learner, as

opposed to pre-16 where we get now £10,000 per learner base funding. There is a real pressure for us as we think about post-16.

Andrew Dismore AM: At the moment there is no formalised structure for this.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): For us there are not possibly, but there are formalised structures where we have independent 14 to 19 AP free schools or AP independent schools. There are some. We are all now thinking how do we get to do that to formalise our current provision.

Andrew Dismore AM: Whose job should it be formally?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Where should it be falling?

Andrew Dismore AM: Whose job should it be?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): I think it is for us because we know these learners so we are quite happy to do it, but we need to be able to afford to do it.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): Also we need a mandate.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Rather than sending them to post 16 colleges where they fall out of education, and the issues that we know what happens to them at 18, 19, or 20 where they go into the youth justice system and become a greater burden on society. If we can stop that at any point in time then we are doing a good piece of work.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): That takes us nicely into commissioning and QA. Caroline, you have got some questions in this area?

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you, Chair. Perhaps I could start with Gabby and Seamus. What really do you look for when you are commissioning AP? Is this shared between alternative providers of education?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): There is a real variety of quality out there. Currently in north London we have got a team of the five boroughs that go around and quality assure together. Actually we have worked out that we were stronger as a group than we were as individuals. We can keep the pressure up that way. Obviously we are looking for good to outstanding lessons, good structures, good support for the students, good progression routes. All of those things that you would still expect to see in a mainstream school. Our QA is very much in line with the Ofsted framework, and requires all the similar things that Ofsted do when they go in. There are a couple of little things that we look at slightly different, obviously, because these are not mainstream students. Our actual pro forma, our actual QA, is modelled on the Ofsted framework. That is what we look for. That is the main thing.

The problem is not all providers are capable of meeting that. As local authorities we have had to take some quite tough decisions and say, "I am sorry, but we are no longer using you" and we have had to withdraw students. We are starting to get to a point now where we are doing that. Whereas five or six years ago it was just accepted and the students were placed there. Now we are saying, "It is not good enough. We are done."

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Are you helping those providers up their game?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): We are as well. One thing where I think it is lacking, we run an awful lot of support for our providers in the north London boroughs. We run programmes of in-service training (inset). We all take turns in doing that.

Where I have seen real strength in AP is when mainstream schools have come in and supported them as well. One of the weaknesses that we know across the board is in maths and English. Our providers will be very strong in teaching the vocational areas, but the maths and English always seem to be their weakest. However, like with the Boxing Academy, where they have got strong support from school the quality and standards in those core subjects go up. I think that is what we need to start doing, is encouraging our schools to pair with AP providers to give them the support. Maybe then we can place a child there possibly, with the chance of reintegrating back into mainstream. There should be more partnership work between mainstream education and APs, rather than it always being the local authority, in most cases, leading on it.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): From my experience obviously we have a partnership with a local school, the Urswick School. One of the problems we have got is that it is small scale, it is small classes. Forty students is what the young people need to succeed. What you end up with in that case is a single teacher teaching the subject, with no department and no one to confer with, and no one to come in and peer observe or mediate. For us, the advantage with our partnership with the mainstream school is that our teachers can go back there and can draw down on all the support and experience of the department. They can also get, for example, the mock papers will be second marked by someone back in the department this year, and they can get a second opinion so you can standardise and all that sort of thing. Without that it is very difficult to keep standards high because a teacher is working on their own. This is something that has worked really well for us.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): I think first of all it is really important that young people are not disenfranchised, or their choices and options are not limited because of something that has happened when they are 14, 15 or 16. In AP there is a risk that we put them into a space where it might be all right this week but in three weeks' time they have overcome the issues, they can get back on track and get their accreditation etc, and they need to move on.

My starting point is always that young people must have the opportunity to achieve five or more GCSEs as a starting point. As a system, even if we got them somewhere where they are doing a very specialised piece of work, we need to be agile enough to get them back on track to get the five GCSEs, if that is appropriate for them. Often it will not be, and they carry on in the direction that they are going. The introduction of the Ofsted criteria for AP Academies and PRUs etc, they are all inspected under the same framework as any other mainstream school. It is really important that is maintained. Then we can make really strong and clear judgements, using a nationally recognised framework for all its faults and issues that we have at the moment, that gives us a clear indication.

We then move on to the whole plethora of other alternative providers. Within our organisation we work with probably up to about 35 other providers, who are located around London. In London we have got a great range of alternative providers out there, of varying quality. We have done a similar thing to Islington, in that we have come together with our local schools and we have got teams that are made up of staff from our AP Academy and local schools, and they will go in and do a QA visit. These are organisations that are often not subject to Ofsted, even if they are we still go and have a look. They get the TBAP QA visit. That visit looks at the similar things to Ofsted. Are they achieving? Are they safe? Is behaviour and safety OK? Do they have

policies and procedures? We then can be assured that if we have commissioned that place they have met a standard. Our schools, across the four boroughs or three initially, because they cannot get out and visit 30-odd places at any one time, have got that assurance there as well. It is really important to have that. Collaboration cannot be underestimated.

The other good thing that has happened is that we have got now two teaching school alliances with AP at their heart. TBAP has one and John has one too. Those teaching school alliances have got the potential to begin to deliver really high quality support to the small AP that has not got the curriculum expertise etc. We have already got examples of staff from our partnership going into support head teachers and other leaders in AP using senior leaders of education. That is another good step that has been taken. I think it is again having a real mixed menu around AP led teaching school alliances, mainstream schools around the corner. All of these things together can really start to work. That is where we have come to.

You cannot underestimate the importance of QA because otherwise these kids are stuck in bad provisions.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: I think that is really reassuring.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): I think this is something that is Londoncentric, and I do not mean that in a pejorative way to the rest of the country. One thing we know, because of London Challenge, London schools went from being one of the most underperforming to really good. I think there is a quick win here for, and I say you guys, because this is a political thing. Five years ago the pan-London PRU network had a working party. One of the outcomes of the working party was a QA framework. If you go on the pan London website the framework is still there. I really hassled one of your previous colleagues and said to her, "Look can you talk amongst the great and the good, or whatever you are called, and actually --"

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): We will take "great and good"!

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): That will do, right. "Can you get them to sign up for a pan-London Kitemark for QA so that you can say a school, or anyone who commissions a placement in AP, can say there is a pan-London AP QA mark." What she said to me, God rest her soul, she has passed on unfortunately, was, "I cannot get the members, John, to sign up for it pan London. When you move to QA and you define minimum standards of what it should be half our APs are not going to meet the criteria." I think this is so important. You are talking about the most disadvantaged, and in some cases disenfranchised, young people in our community. If we do not put the investment in when they are young then we are going to have our prisons full. We are going to have our psychiatric hospitals full. I know it is on the wish list for the Mayor, but one thing I will say is let us just have a pan-London QA framework. The tools are out there.

Andrew Boff AM: How about a national one?

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): Have a national one, but let us start with London.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): We cannot do everything.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): If I had [David] Cameron [Prime Minister] in front of me I would say to him, "David, let us have a national QA framework".

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): What is currently happening is we are writing our own.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): We all nicked it from each other.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): True.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Basically. We have developed it in our own way

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): Yes.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: There is a model that all of us are working from and we have developed it in our own way. It does lead on to us putting an improvement plan into place for the providers and then obviously checking they are meeting that. It would be far better for us, and for the providers, if it was standardised across. We are all working then from the same point.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): A kite mark. It is a quick win. From a political point of view. It is all politics, but it is a quick win.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-Borough Alternative Provision): We could do that for the Teaching School Alliances.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: There is a huge variation in the quality of provision and in Charlie Taylor's [Government's Expert Adviser on Behaviour] piece of work *Improving Alternative Provision* states:

"The existence of good quality AP in any one area is usually more a matter of luck than any systematic planning."

I wondered, John, what do you think makes an outstanding PRU and how can effective practice be applied more consistently across the sector?

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): It is about outstanding leadership and outstanding vision and it has to be joined up. You need a framework. I would say this, but I think we need to remember we have an outstanding model and that is because it is thought through and it is longstanding. There is a thing about longevity. You need to sometimes have five-year plans and say, "That is the direction we are going in" and not have to keep changing because of whims of, dare I say, local councillors. It is about saying, "This is what I think our mission is". Outstanding leadership is part of it, but if you said to me, "What defines the most outstanding PRUs" I would still go back to our first comment - personalised learning and outstanding relationships. Children who have behaviour difficulties do not suddenly start getting General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and start attending school is for anything other I think are outstanding relationships. The outstanding leaders put in place the prerequisites to make outstanding relationships happen.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Do you get the quality of leaders and teachers wanting to go into this field?

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): We do and we do not. I want my cake and I want to eat it. We try to breed our own. There is a big thing for the Teaching School Alliance. One of the

things, when I come on to a wish list later on, we have a Chartered London Teacher scheme and I think we should have something around AP as well, so we give this the status for the work that we do, because it is still very misunderstood and, in some cases, maligned by people who do not understand the nature of the work.

We have to do two things. We have to do our own succession planning, and that is where the Teaching Schools will come into that, but I also think we have to be more outward looking. A model of the world as well. I often say to mainstream colleagues is, "Come and spend a day in the PRU. Come and see that the child who you said is unteachable, with the right approach, is teachable". It is a mindset.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Should that be part of the whole teacher training? You know far better than I do that a lot of it is school based, but they should also do some time in a PRU as well.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): I agree. When I did my teacher training we spent two weeks in a primary school as a secondary teacher. There is nothing wrong with that, but if you are doing it in a primary and you are going to be dealing in inner London schools with the most challenging behaviours then you should spend some time in a PRU actually learning how to cope, because it is such a shock to the system as an Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) going into a school where you have that level of challenge. You have learn very quickly how to manage it.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): I would just say that Charlie Taylor's [Government's Expert Adviser on Behaviour] report was spot on in terms of the hit and miss nature of what would happen in terms of provision. Where we have high quality outcomes and high quality provision there has been a real investment locally in it. An investment in terms of financial investment, but also an investment in terms of systems behind it, so the local schools would be signed up to it, the local authority would be signed up to it and everybody has a belief that this is the right thing to have in place for these learners.

As a result of Charlie Taylor's review, we suddenly were able to train teachers in the work we were doing. As a teaching school now our AP Academy teaching school alliance trains teachers. We had our first cohort through two years ago, I think they arrived, and I thought they had all applied to the wrong schools. I thought they had gone to the Bridge Academy in Hackney. I said, "Are you sure you know where're coming? Because it's going to be a challenging space?" They were young teachers and they had made a decision and a choice to come into the sector. They had often had some experience as a teaching assistant perhaps in a PRU or an AP and they had chosen to come in. We trained them in partnership with Goldsmiths, they got qualified teacher status. They did their six-week placement in mainstream, so that is the difference. We are the main trainers and providers. The skills that they have learnt with us are, as I said at the beginning, are some of the highest and most skilled practitioners. They manage behaviour, they understand learning with a forensic detail and they have become highly successful NQTs. We are willing to appoint 25 next year, so we are beginning to build a group of staff from within, who are choosing to come in to AP and are choosing to progress.

Ten years ago you ended up teaching in PRUs because you were much like the children, it was the end of the line, or you had a vocation and you really believed. Now when we advertise for heads of school or for leaders we are getting some of the highest calibre staff from mainstream choosing to come in, because it where they want to go and they can see that the things we have been talking about are the things that can make a difference. What has brought a lot of us into this is that we can see that we can make a big difference with this small group of children. It is getting better. It is still not there and it is not there universally. Anything we can do to raise the status of, not just teachers but other support professionals working within this sector, to give them clear career paths and to recognise the work that they do, any of that will help us continue to do it.

Growing out two Teaching School Alliances is really important and that gives us lots of opportunities. It is a challenge but we are making progress.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: That sounds really promising. Is there anything else you wanted to say on the issue of quality assurance and anything else that I have not picked up around that subject? I thought we had covered it.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): I think it needs to be done by practitioners. I was just talking to Seamus before, we have just had a quality assurance framework in the school and it was really rigorous but the guy who led it was not a practicing teacher. It is something that we have to get our act together. I do not mean this in a pejorative way but I think that we know best what is right and we have to take the responsibility and say, "As part of our professional duties we all have to sign up to do some quality assurance work". I am not saying you can pull the wool over on an Ofsted inspector, but unless he or she is a practitioner they are not the same as people who do it every day. Any quality assurance framework we should be doing it to each other.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): Senior school leaders, that is who we take with us. Most of our team are or have been teachers but because we are out of the system doing something different at the moment we take senior leaders with us a well to pass that judgement with us. I agree with John, it is really important.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): About the commissioning, you were talking about if you developed commissioning, would that be at a borough-based level or would that be at a sector level, or is there a role for a pan-London commissioning?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): At the moment commissioning is local authority and school level. The aspiration is for schools to act as commissioners or AP, so that is how it happens at the moment, is it not?

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): That is what happens at the moment, yes.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): The concept of a pan-London model is something that could and probably be explored. I have found increasingly that when we started our project learners will not travel more than three miles because of postcodes. I have found that not to be true and, as learners who attend other mainstream schools travel across London all the time, ours do too. With a bit of support often they will travel there. We have learners from Haringey going down to North Kensington and all the rest of it. I am not underestimating the issues around postcode because I do not think we can do that, but we need to be aware that there is that option. To have as broad a range of AP available to all of our London learners, irrespective of local authority boundaries and barriers, will serve them well. If we cannot move learners into other types of provision because of where they live that is not a fair situation, so pan-London could do it.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I was just thinking about also getting parents and carers involved in the commissioning. It just seems to me if you look at the borough level it tends to be limited, because there is this inherent reluctance for people to offer anything outside their boroughs, and what-have-you. That is where the conversation is taking place but I did not know if at a wider level whether the carers and parents could be involved.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): It would be very good for them to be involved, and they are not at the moment - to the degree that they could be. We are still very much, however many London boroughs there are, the commissioning of AP will be often very limited to perhaps one or two London boroughs, but usually it is the home borough where they are sitting, so that is the issue.

Darren Johnson AM: What are the main funding challenges facing AP in London?

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): Where to start? There is the complication, apart from anything else. Obviously almost all of our kids are dual registered and so they are still on roll at their other schools. The way we get around that is we charge a fee. In fact we fundraise to top up the difference because it does not cover everything, because we are a charity. Not so much the school we work with, but I have found that there are a lot of schools who are only shopping for AP on price, which is slightly alarming when you think that this is actually supposed to be a fit for the child. Therefore, there is a huge amount of pressure on small independent APs to keep their prices down, because they are worried that that will be the final consideration.

As I say, we have had a waiting list for two years. It is not something that we are finding is problem for us now but there were a few years at the beginning where it was a huge issue.

Darren Johnson AM: This is where this Kitemark standard could come in?

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): It could do. There is also the stuff about people say, "Oh well, you get pupil premium and all this extra support for disadvantaged young people". None of that comes to an independent alternative provide. We have tried ways of doing it but there is just no way of doing it. It is extremely complicated but the money does not follow the child.

Darren Johnson AM: Seamus, your model is --

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Ours will be slightly different because we are an AP academy, which was a PRU, so it slightly different to the independent providers. The funding model for us is that as an AP academy that we have baseline funding, which comes from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and then we have a top-up amount which comes from the Commissioners, which in our cases are the local authorities.

The challenge that we have across London and across the country, and this has been discussed and recognised, is that in many cases the top-up funding is done on what is called 'place plus funding'. It is based upon bums on seats, ie at the end of month one how many learners you have in your classroom. It makes it very difficult for a provider to set up their school to work as an AP. As an AP you often expect to have, say, 20 in September, 60 in July, so to fund the provision on the basis of number of learners actually attending is a real challenge for lots of providers, because they do not have enough funding to staff it properly. They cannot guarantee they are going to get those people in.

The way that has been overcome in some places, and we have overcome it within our model, is that we have an agreed block funding upfront, an agreed amount of places. We are funded for 175 places, and that is firm, at the Bridge AP Academy. That is funded upfront through the high needs block by the Commissioners for a three-year period, so we know that is going to be there. We have a guaranteed amount of funding. That way

we do not have to fill up our school in September, which will work against doing the work we do, which is to take learners as they come in, and we can have it staffed and ready with specialist staff available. That model of funding we would like to see made available and taken up by everybody else, because at the moment it is not. It works against AP and in favour of local authorities attempting to save money at times.

Darren Johnson AM: Gabrielle, from a borough prospective then, what can be done to ensure quality and it is not just a matter of going for the lowest price?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Islington do not operate in that way. Our community of schools come together in our school forum. They top slice a percentage of money --

Darren Johnson AM: That is all your schools in the borough, academies, community schools, private and so on?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Yes, all of them come together and have agree to top slice a pot of money for the AP children. Then when the schools refer they pay a percentage and we then top up whatever the cost of the provision is. We do not choose providers based on cost at all.

Darren Johnson AM: It is done on a strategic level where there are economies of scale across the borough then?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Yes, exactly. For us it is about quality, it is not about price. If a provider, for example such as the Boxing Academy, is charging more than one of our colleges but offers the right fit for that child then that is where that child goes. We are quite passionate about that.

Darren Johnson AM: Is Islington fairly unique in this or is this a reasonably common thing?

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): From my point of view it is completely unique. They are the only borough that is doing this.

Darren Johnson AM: As a provider, what is your view on the Islington model?

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): It is very interesting that only Islington are doing this, where there is a separate department for AP from the PRU or any other route. I think it is particularly effective. It makes it easier for providers.

One of the biggest problems for small providers - because some are smaller than us, some have 12 children and it needs to be that small - is it is very difficult for them to survive year-on-year and plan a budget. Getting good teachers is really difficult if you are not completely sure how you are going to pay for them at the end of next year.

With a borough like Islington looking past the usual way of doing it and it is about quality and you know that you are OK as long your quality is good and you are delivering what you should, it is very encouraging for providers.

Darren Johnson AM: John, do you have any comments on the funding situation?

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): Real time funding is a nightmare. It is what we call 'real time funding' and it is the problem. If you have one child in a class or eight in a class it costs you the same amount of money. Anything that moves to a position where we can actually give the children what they need and not have to worry about the money, because we do have to worry about it. We have an income target and we if we get overdrawn, guess what? That comes out of our budget next year, so we have to move to positions where you have a set amount - I think on a three-year plan is right - because you cannot keep good staff if they do not know if they are going to be paid each month.

Going back to what I was saying about the most effective of APs and PRUs, are the ones who have longitudinal plans. You cannot plan on a six-week, three-month basis, you have to do so for two or three years.

Darren Johnson AM: If you were going to recommend a funding regime and the commissioning model for London boroughs, or recommend a particular way forward for the Mayor to jump in, what would you be saying, John?

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): I would be saying I think the National Strategies did us a disservice when they said that the average AP place was £15,000, because it was nowhere near that. The trouble we have is schools are coming to us and saying, "Oh well, the National Strategy says it is £15,000" when we know it is nearer £20,000. I would like to move to a position where we say, "Actually it costs about £20,000" to support a youngster through an AP" and raise that bar. That is not about money, that is about long-term security, because I do not think we are going to make major inroads into looking at this long term, unless we fund it appropriately.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Can I just interrupt you, Darren? Is that London specific? You are saying --

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): No. The politics of this are they looked at all the children who went into AP in a year. Maths is not my speciality, but they said, "Right, there is X amount of money with X amount of children, if we just divide the children into the number of places then we will find out what it costs". It does not work like that. We can take 105 children. Over the course of a year we have 200 children come through our PRUs because they do not all stay on the roll all the time. If you divide 200 into X you get a lower average than if you divide 105 into X. What the National Strategies did is they said, "Let's divide the total number of children who have gone to AP in this particular year with the funding" and it came out at £15,000.

Darren Johnson AM: This panel here needs to be making recommendations to the Government then?

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): Personally, I think it is nearer £20,000. I am not saying the Commissioner should pay for it but I think the block amount should be more.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK, let us not go to the wish list yet, until you have finished.

Andrew Boff AM: Just on what Ms Grodentz said, if money is no object, how do you know you if you are getting value for money?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Because we go an assess that. I am not saying money is no object, what I am saying is --

Andrew Boff AM: You did. You just said you do not mind about money, which is --

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): No, what I am saying to you is I am not going to stop a child going to a placement because they charge a grand or two more than another provider, if that suits the child. In terms of going in and doing value for money, that is on the outcomes, the results, the destination the child goes to. If after a year or two we are not seeing that then we will pull back from using that provider.

Andrew Boff AM: What you are saying is you are choosing the most appropriate form of provision for the child?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Of course, for the individual. That is why --

Andrew Boff AM: You are not looking at the money.

Darren Johnson AM: Presumably the economies come --

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): You obviously take the money into account because you have to balance your own budget then.

Darren Johnson AM: Presumably the economies come from the economies of scale of being able to do it borough-wide. Rather than just looking at it individually you are able to use the budget more efficiently.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Yes.

Darren Johnson AM: That is where you are making your savings, rather than simply going for the lowest cost solution for each pupil. OK, that is really helpful.

Andrew Boff AM: I sat on a council for years and I never allocated the lowest sum to the lowest contractor, you do not. It is absolutely stupid to go to the lowest contractor, because there is always charlatan in there.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): Often when schools do this on their own that is what they do, because they see their budget and a child that, let us be honest, nobody really likes and they just go with paying as little as possible for that. It was like that for a long time.

Andrew Boff AM: You do look at the money?

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Of course, you have to take it into account, but what I am saying is you have to place the child at the appropriate placement and in a way not really think too much about the money. Unless of course someone is coming along and saying, "Well, we're going to charge you £30,000" that is a ridiculous price.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I think we understand that you are looking at what we have heard about the personalised plan and programme for that child.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Indeed.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): You are then wanting people to bid to give you that programme and then you are doing your quality assurance about that.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): Yes.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Can we just go now to the section we call 'Leadership and the role of the Mayor'. You have referred to it as 'Wish list'. Before I hear your wish list, can I just rattle through some programmes that we know that the Mayor is involved in? Many of them come out of the Mayor's Education Inquiry. The Inquiry then had a plan, which was refreshed recently:

"The Mayor's Education Inquiry committed to establish with the London Pupil Referral Unit Network a programme to support PRU leadership development and strengthen subject knowledge in English and maths."

Are any of you aware of that and did you get funding to do any of that work? No? Nodding?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): No, we are aware of it.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): We are aware of it and we did some work on it with maths.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Right, so you have been able to benefit from that Mayoral initiative?

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): I would not go that far. It was --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Did you get money or not?

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): We got money, yes, and we used it in conjunction with other money. If you are asking was the Mayor directly responsible for it you could say yes, OK. What I think it helped us do was leverage, because we were able to put some other money --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Additionality?

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): Yes.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Yes, additionality. That is a benefit, yes. You have had some uptake from that. Do you think it is something that should be carried on or do you think that it is not really worth the bother because it is just additionality?

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): From a critical point of view I think it was just additionality and I would have like to have seen - and I said this at the time - more resources that were specifically targeted at the sector. Let me think of an example. There is a lot of value-added in some of the safe, social, emotional aspects of learning work that we do and some of the personal, social, health and economic (PHSE) work that we do. Of course English and maths is our bread and butter stuff and in the effective PRUs we major on English and maths anyway. I think some of the other --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): The remit was not wide enough to cover your scope?

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): That is my own view.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): I may have misunderstood that, but that is referring also to the London network, is it?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No, that was specifically --

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): No? Specifically to the English and maths?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): There are a number of issues and it was just whether or not you knew about it and had had engagement with it.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): OK, sorry.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Then you talked about some sort of Kitemark or some sort of standard. There was a proposal to scope two strands of the London Schools Gold Club, tailored to AP in special schools. Were you aware of that proposal and did you get engaged with it?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Going back from that, the PRU leadership development network, it was really important to do that. I think we are going to talk about it in a moment. In terms of the Gold Club, we have had initial conversations including PRUs and APs in the Gold Club and I think that would be a really good thing for us to do. The thing that has slowed it down is being able to get the data that you are going to use to define whether or not a PRU or an AP is of a sufficient standard to join the Gold Club.

I attended the Mayor's Conference, not this last one.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Last week, yes.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): No, the one prior to that. Listening to the Gold Club members sharing their practice and their experience I felt that there was a real gap and that we did not have PRUs and APs represented and so I have been speaking with officers from the Greater London Authority (GLA) around getting us into that Gold Club and that is progressing but perhaps it could progress a bit faster.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): That would certainly go some way to lead into this pan-London Kitemark.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Absolutely. The issue you always have in AP, PRUs, is a sense of isolation. We thought we were doing a very important piece of work in London with some of the most disaffected and challenging learners and there is a Gold Club which is recognising high outcomes in mainstream schools, so can we recognise high outcomes in PRUs and join the Gold Club?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): And APs, yes. That would help with the stigma that we have not dealt with in any depth.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Absolutely. No.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): That is one of the big, big things, is it not?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Yes.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): You are outside, been driven to the outskirts.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Yes, so it is important to tackle that.

Andrew Boff AM: Why are you not already able to join the Gold Club? On the basis that the Gold Club is only awarded to people who get a specific criteria. There is no special criteria.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Specific criteria goes back to the question that was asked earlier on around five more A to Cs. It is absolutely about that. This is probably not the place to do it, but the same way that Ofsted will make a judgement that AP improves our standing, is the same kind of criteria that can be used to get the metrics that you will need to see whether or not they can join the Gold Club. There are a number of PRUs and AP academies in London that are outstanding, have been judged as outstanding a number of times so, therefore, the criteria could be used to join the Gold Club. At the moment they will not meet it because it is a mainstream measure.

Andrew Boff AM: Sorry, I am not clear on that.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): In the mainstream I know what the number is.

Andrew Boff AM: There are criteria for joining the Gold Club.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Yes.

Andrew Boff AM: Those are criteria that --

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): AP cannot get.

Andrew Boff AM: APs cannot get those criteria because they are?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Because of the nature of the learners that we are working with.

Andrew Boff AM: Right, so you are asking for the Gold Club criteria to change to allow you to be included.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Not necessarily. I do not mind if you do or not, but I think it would be inclusive to have a category in the Gold Club which includes the special schools who achieve that. The same way that Ofsted are using the same criteria across every school in the country to make a judgement. You will find that more PRUs are judged outstanding than are mainstream schools as a percentage, which is an interesting piece of data. The Gold Club to me reads 'outstanding'. If we

are saying that we have a group of schools in the country that are outstanding, you are telling us that you have a group of schools in London that are meeting the Gold Club criteria. At the moment PRUs and AP, and I do not know if special are included within that group, cannot get into the Gold Club. That to me is not very inclusive and it is excluding a group of schools from the group.

Andrew Boff AM: It is only excluding them on the basis that the Gold Club measures certain things which you do not attain.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): If you take a special school example. A special school which takes learners who will never get a GCSE A to C. Is it right to exclude them from measurements that are being used within the Club?

Andrew Boff AM: It does not exclude them. The Gold Club is for certain criteria and you are not meeting those criteria. It is not saying, "We are not having you".

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): That is fine. As I say, when we were negotiating we were trying to find the metrics that could be used to measure success in AP.

Andrew Boff AM: What I am trying to get to is you are not specifically excluded from the Gold Club. They are not saying, "Oh you're an AP, therefore you --"

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): No, but the membership of the Club precludes us from joining it.

Andrew Boff AM: I think the Club is a waste of time myself anyway. I just wanted to see.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Let us stay in scrutiny mode. As Members we all have our personal opinions.

It is a question to you, Seamus. It is my understanding that the Bridge AP Academy, which is part of, what is TBAP?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): That is Tri-borough Alternative Provision.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK, sorry:

"Successfully received funding to increase the number of pupils learning Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, French, Spanish, Italian and Polish through a teacher and training programme for teachers in partnership with a mainstream specialist language school."

If that is successful that is an amazing achievement, isn't it?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Can I say that the London Schools Excellence funding for that project, the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) project - we are now into our second year of that - has been one of the most phenomenal and amazing things I have seen in AP in a long time. When I travel around what were PRUs in Wood Green, North Kensington, Fulham, Westminster, wherever we have got them, St John's Wood, I see learners speaking many different languages

that they have learnt as result of the project. They are not learning them to GCSE standard at this stage, but they are having exposure. Japanese is spoken, Mandarin is being delivered. There is a Chinese teaching assistant that has come from China and is working across three of our APs and is working with the young people. There is an absolute cross-over of skills going both ways in that context.

The funding was extended this year and we were grateful for that funding being extended. It has meant that we have managed to get another modern foreign languages teacher to work across our provisions. We would never have been able to do that without this funding. Equally, you will find very few PRUs where modern foreign languages are available as a curriculum offer. Being able to do this has been a really positive things, so that funding has been fantastic for us.

My teacher Anu Jain, who is the MFL leader, has really worked hard to deliver this project. We have had staff go to Japan on the back of it to link up. We have the Japanese 2020 Olympics team coming to the Octagon PRU in Haringey on Thursday, on the back of this project. The achievements go on and on and on. They come about by somebody whose enthusiasms and skills have been enabled and facilitated by this piece of funding. Yes, I would say it has been very successful.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): That is good. Again, it is my understanding, through a bit of research internally that a lot of this of course came from a block of money that came to City Hall from the DfE, so it is time limited.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): OK, yes.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): If that ends you would have to stop that offer, would you not?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): First of all another thing we have to mention is that we have also used the funding to train our staff to deliver language teaching. Learner support professionals and teachers have been trained, again at a low level, but have been trained to deliver a whole range of different languages using language specialists from one of our local teaching schools. If that funding stops it will be difficult for us to replicate and continue with that programme at this level. I know it is going to stop and I can't see how we do it.

Andrew Boff AM: I do not quite understand. What are the outcomes with regard to this training? I know you have been successful in attracting funding for teaching, but what are the actual outcomes?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Unlike our other areas, we are not looking for A to C GCSEs in this area. We are looking at exposure to languages. We have some accreditation that learners are achieving through that delivery, so they are achieving accreditation at Key Stage 3. We use ABC awards for that in terms of the languages that they are learning. There are some GCSEs being sat. I cannot give you numbers but we had a number of languages sat last year and we continue to do that.

Another offshoot from this project has been that this department is now identifying home languages that the learners are coming with and using those and getting them ready for GCSEs, where they often achieve well and get A to Cs in those home languages. That is another --

Andrew Boff AM: In the language they speak at home?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Yes.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Because that child within the mainstream school has all the other factors that are at play, that skill or gift is not going to be identified until they get to an AP facility.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Of course it is not.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): That is what you are saying, isn't it?

Andrew Boff AM: You are saying that you cannot measure this in A to C?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): As an outcome no. I am saying quite clearly that for this particular project I am not going to measure in A to Cs and A to Gs. What I am going to measure it in is a massive increase in the number of young people in AP who are picking up new experiences and new languages and actually are getting engaged in learning as a result of it.

Andrew Boff AM: That is from the London Schools Excellence Fund?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Yes.

Andrew Boff AM: How are they asking for that investment to be measured?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): They are asking for that to be measured through very lengthy evaluation reports that teachers have to fill in.

Andrew Boff AM: That is the number of young people who have exposure to those languages?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): The outcomes are being measured on London teachers that have been taught, the number of young people who are getting exposure, the ABC awards that we achieve and the GCSEs that are in there. I do not want to sit here and say that this has suddenly resulted in children improves, getting A to Cs and Japanese and Mandarin, it has not. It has absolutely led to some really dramatic changes in attitudes and in knowledge.

Andrew Boff AM: OK, thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Andrew, we can certainly be picking up further questions but I want to finish at 4.00pm. John, do you have anything to say in addition to what we have heard from Seamus?

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): I was asked recently a question at a conference about taking children on residential experience. This person said, "How can you measure that in A to Cs?" I said, "Well, actually, I cannot in A to Cs but you prove to me that it doesn't have an impact on that child's life". We do Spanish at school, so taking a child to Spain, exposing that child to an aeroplane ride, exposing that child to another culture, I defy anyone to tell me that does not have an impact on their life and celebrating diversity and being able to understand that there are different people. I cannot measure it in five A to Cs but I know that child will benefit from that for their life. These are some of the things that we are saying. We are not saying five A to Cs are unimportant, they are absolutely important, but they are not the only metrics that we should be using to measure the success of the work in the AP sector. That is a bid really.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): You go back to something that Seamus was saying: mainstream schools cannot provide the educational package that all children need. Much like the university technical colleges, at 14 there is encouragement there for so-called 'gifted' or children with a special interest to go off to there. It seems to me that is really by default what a small section of the children that you deal with decide, but in a very negative way, from what you have said.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): At the beginning sometimes it is negative but it usually turns around.

I was really glad to hear John say that about residential. We do one every year. We go to the countryside. It is the first time the children have seen the sea most of the time. They also do not have a phone for a whole week, which is liberating and a shock.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Yes, but it goes back to the point that if evaluation is only going to be based on attainment then your work, no matter how marvellous it is, is out with that evaluation. Without value it remains stigmatised and it lies where it is.

Andrew Boff AM: There is an argument for actually establishing that there are outcomes from your input, is there not?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): That is what it is saying.

Andrew Boff AM: You should not talk to me about measuring A to C. Anybody who looks at league tables to choose a school probably did not go to school. What I am asking you is about your measurement of your attainment and how you express that.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): We are going to put that to you in writing.

I just wanted to say, did you know that there was going to be a conference hosted by the GLA at City Hall on 10 December? It is through AP/PRU London Network. It seems to me, Seamus and John, that you are going to play key parts in this event.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): I knew we were talking, I did not know we were playing the key part.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): You did know the date was set.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): Yes, I put it in the diary. Yes.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): We have young people coming as well. We offered to bring some young people to this group as well, because I think it is really important to hear their voice.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Yes.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): There are young people coming to the conference that will be at City Hall, so if Members are here they can have a chat to them and see what they are doing.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): It goes back to what I was saying, and I am hopeful I can get Member's support, that we do really need to hear the voices of the young people, or some contribution from them for our report. Then I wanted to know whether or not you thought it would be a good idea to ensure that young people would be at the December conference. You are confirming that young people will be there making a contribution?

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): Absolutely. Yes.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): We will think through and discuss with you, if we may, how we can get that voice into our work.

A quick wish list. You can only have one thing, Seamus, because you would have us here all night. One item from your wish list. If you have to think about it I will take Gabrielle and then you will be lost.

Seamus Oates (Executive Head Teacher, Tri-borough Alternative Provision): I will lose the opportunity. First of all, the funding is the real thing for me. I think it would be really helpful for everybody if we had a model where we were not going for this - what did you call it, John - real-time funding. We do not want real-time funding. We want to be able to establish our provision. I am speaking for everybody else because we already have this, but everyone else needs to be in a position where they can absolutely know how much money they have got at the beginning of the year and can set it up and deliver amazing outcomes. The second bit is really let us just be clear about the outcomes we deliver. We can tell really clearly what works and how we know it works. I think we want that to be recognised, celebrated and known.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you, Seamus.

Gabrielle Grodentz (Head of Alternative Provision, Islington): I think it is the same. We are constantly asked to meet this five A to C and not all of our students will fit that. It is about measuring their other journeys of travel, so it would be good if we could be assessed in that way. Also it is still important for our children to have good literacy and numeracy, so more support for our AP providers in this area to help us raise standards.

Anna Cain (Chief Executive & Head of Boxing Academy, Hackney): I would like better information. Obviously as an independent provider it is a big, big issue for me. It would help us. Really and truly I know that what we do with these young people is a completely life-changing experience. Some of them do get five A to Cs by the way, but some of them are not going to get that when they are with us but maybe in two or three years after us they are in university. I have children who are now in university, who would not have got a single qualification in mainstream school. I guess we are all saying the same thing: we want to be recognising what each child's journey is, not just a general league table.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): Right, watch the knives in my back with this one. Four term year, it is absolutely ridiculous that in the 21st century we still have three terms a year. We have a six-week gap in the middle of a learning programme that makes absolutely no sense. We run schools for teachers rather than pupils. I know the teaching profession will not like me for saying it, but I am quite certain that for some of the youngsters we work with, four ten week terms with a four-week break in the summer, but able to offer the support that we give lots of children around counselling, around therapeutic input, around a learning programme where we do precision teaching and then we say, "Now there is a six-week gap". If we genuinely serious about addressing 21st century learning I think we really have to look at why.

Well, we know why. We have had a three-term year because of the old agricultural system but in the 21st century --

Andrew Boff AM: It is more to do with the parliamentary recess, actually.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): Well possibly.

Andrew Boff AM: Good luck with that.

John d'Abbro (Head, New Rush Hall Group, Redbridge): It will not happen. You did say a wish list.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Can I just say to you thank you. Just a couple of key points, it seems to me, that have come out of our discussion so far. A challenging group of children who need the support and care provided in small schools staffed by dedicated, highly qualified teachers. That came over really strongly. You also made a powerful case for quality assurance in terms of how vital it is for effective commissioning. We also heard arguments for a pan-London quality Kitemark of some sort but for further discussions around that, so that needed to be explored rather than dismissed.

Of course we heard your comments about the funding, which is always, is it not? Also just an insight into the methodology that was used which, I certainly agree with you, is questionable. That really needs to be reviewed to ensure effective provision for children. Given that if we are talking about this personalised pathway and complexities are so many for some children's lives, it is really not good enough to say that you will cap that at 150 and not deal with their emotional or social needs. Certainly now we have issues that, through no fault of their own, mental health or foetal alcohol syndrome that is impacting on their lives. We thank you for that.

We heard your news on the Mayor's intervention. Yes, some have been modest but it just seems to me that from what we heard, certainly from you Seamus [Oates], that may be modest input but it seemed to me a huge and potentially remarkable outcome and something that London as a city needs. The more people who can speak world languages has to be good for us as a world city. Also what came up is that there is a lack of understanding about information sharing that we have to get to the bottom of.

That was just a few of the points that you came up with, but you are totally committed to ensuring that this area should not continue in its stigmatised location. We thank you for all the work you are doing to ensure that work benefits the most vulnerable children. In terms of numbers, I will say no more except more work has to be done in terms of the numbers.

What we will do is if any Members, over the next couple of days, think that there are questions that they would like some answer to, and we can identify the individual, we will get back to you and also once we have collated our work so far. We also need some contact from you about the voices of the young people. Also if you want to invite us to anything that you are doing then do let us know through Richard, because I know that we have benefited in terms of visits that we've undertaken through other pieces of work.

Thank you very much.