

Education Panel – 25 November 2015

Transcript of Item 5 – The Mayor's Education Programme

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Let us go on to item 5, which is on the Mayor's Education Programme, one of our main items for today's business. Can I please welcome our guest, Munira Mirza, Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture? Munira, welcome.

Can I just start with the lead-off question in terms of what you would consider are the main successes of the Mayor's Education Programme overall? Give us your top ten hits.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): We will be doing a full evaluation of the whole programme, which is due to come out early next year. That will cover the main projects that we run, including the London Schools Excellence Fund (LSEF), the London Gold Club and the London Curriculum. We have quite a large and extensive evaluation taking place with external evaluators.

One of the main things that we have achieved in the last three years since we started working more actively in this field is genuine engagement with schools and teachers across London. Just to talk through some of those projects that I mentioned, the LSEF is now working with 17,000 teachers in over 1,600 schools and it will benefit 680,000 students directly. That is the largest of our programmes and it reaches schools in every single London borough. We have had fantastic engagement from schools with a huge amount of interest and a great deal of learning between schools and between teachers. We are very pleased by the results from that. The initial evaluations that are coming out of the project, some of which are being externally evaluated as well, suggest that that is having a really good impact on teacher subject knowledge, teacher training and better classroom practice. In February when we hold our conference exploring how the LSEF has worked, it will demonstrate that it has had real impact.

Of the other projects that we run, we have now had 240 schools in London receive the Gold Club Award, and a very large number of those schools are engaging in sessions with other schools around London and sharing their good practice. Just to remind you, these are schools that have achieved exceptional results, particularly for their most disadvantaged students. The idea of the Gold Club is about schools learning from each other. It is very much a model of teacher-led and headteacher-led improvement, rather than top down. That has been very successful.

On the London Curriculum, half of secondary schools now have registered to use those resources and we have had really great interest from classroom teachers, whom we invite to come to sessions to meet with each other to talk about how they use their resources. Again, demonstrating the impact, we have had some external evaluation of that programme so far and it has been very positive.

I could go through every single one of our projects. We have a number of different areas. Those are the top three.

The other side of my work, and the work of the Greater London Authority (GLA), is identifying new sites for schools. We have done a huge amount of work on school places planning in London. Even though it is not the statutory responsibility of the Mayor, it is one of the biggest issues facing London and its infrastructure. This week, as you probably are aware, we are holding our annual Education Conference on Friday here at

City Hall. We are also publishing our latest numbers on the school places demand and need in London over the next ten years, which is quite a substantial piece of work. We are taking forward the campaign with the Government to try to increase the amount of funding that we get in London for that.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Let me just pick up some points that you have just said. If you like, I will come in where you have just finished. I wonder if Members can have sight of any publications – and it can be embargoed – that you will be releasing at the conference.

I do not know whether it was the same with other Members or whether other Members were thought of, but certainly an invite that I received last Friday evening just could not be accommodated in my diary.¹ I am sure that that is not the timeline for invitations. I am not even going to go there for that invite because it is an annual recurring thing, but any information you have that you will be releasing it would be useful for you to share, whether you want to embargo it, with Members of this Panel.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): OK.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I look forward to receiving that. I totally accept that you do not have sight of your full evaluation until next February. I am just making the links here. Is that because most or all of the programmes will have finished by that time?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): The LSEF will have concluded in this phase. The Gold Club will continue and the London Curriculum will continue and so other projects will carry on, but we felt that three years was a good point at which to evaluate the overall programme.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you. The LSEF was, of course, linked with a fund from the national Government.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): That is right. The LSEF of £24 million will come to an end this year, but then the GLA has also committed funding for legacy programmes. We are trying to maintain some of the subject networks that were developed out of that fund.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): How are you able to identify a legacy project prior to evaluation?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): We will have a call out for applications. We do have some evaluation of the projects. We just have not completed the full meta-evaluation of the whole programme that we work in. Applications will come in and will demonstrate the impacts of their work. We will be able to validate that and then we will make decisions about where the funding should go.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Being realistic, what is the timeline for those projects? We will be ending this mayoral administration in May. Can you just clarify, then? What is the timeline for this new programme and the legacy programmes going forward?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Our intention is to publish the full evaluation of the whole programme in February, possibly early, but we will have a conference in February that will talk about the impacts of the LSEF.

¹ Following the meeting Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture) confirmed with the Chair that an invitation to the Mayor's Education Conference was sent in early October 2015 and a follow-up email was sent on 11 November 2015.

We have a call for applications out and a process going on inviting organisations that were involved in the LSEF - and beyond, actually; I believe that we have opened it beyond those original applicants - to continue the legacy of that work. We are using the individual evaluations that we have of the projects and their own evaluations to then make the decisions over the next year.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Will they be funded along a one-year, two-year or three-year timeline?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): I will have to get back to you on that, actually. I am not sure.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Yes. It would be, I am sure, of concern if we were talking about just an annual programme because we know that they just do not work. By the time people have received the money and have done anything, they have hardly any chance to get into delivery.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): This is about supporting networks and hubs that will have longer-term sustainability. Our intention is not to continue funding year-on-year. It is about trying to consolidate and establish with a bit more resilience those organisations that we think have a longer shelf life and then do not need ongoing GLA funding. I take your point, but it is about trying to get those organisations into a position where they are getting funding from other sources.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Certainly what that puts in my head is that, at a future meeting of the Panel, which we will talk to you about, we will be able to look and to be quite clear about that area of work?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Yes.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): That is good. Then that covers what you are talking about: you are definitely looking for value for money, and you will not really know until you get your full evaluation reports done in February.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Yes.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Good.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): The early signs are that our programme has had good impacts, but I cannot give you the exact details of that until we publish the final report.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): One of the issues that we raised in the past when we started talking about all of this was what I termed the 'cliff-edge effect'. Certainly, having visited a number of these projects that have been so fabulous, the real fear that was fed back to us when we visited was, "What are we going to do?" We have raised the expectations, especially with these fabulous peer-mentoring activities going on and young people going out and about doing fabulous things. Their real fear was, "What is going to happen once this LSEF stops?" Have you thought about transitional arrangements or networks for these projects?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): That is what the legacy fund is that we are, hopefully, making a decision on in the early part of next year will do because it is about trying to manage that transition away from GLA funding. Obviously, we are only a strategic funder. We are not an ongoing funder of schools. We are trying to get those networks and those hubs into a position where they can start applying for other sources of funding and can start getting funding directly from schools themselves. Many of those schools have pupil premium budgets that they could spend in this area. It is absolutely because we recognise

that even though we had said from the start that this would be a three-year fund, some organisations just need a little bit of extra support to get them into that position. That is the transitional arrangement.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I have to ask you; you might say it is too early. In the same way that the Department for Education (DfE), if you like, listened to the case that you or the Mayor put, is there not a case for a further discussion with the DfE or are you saying, "Our administration ends in May and so we do not really care what happens in the future"?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): I am seeing the Secretary of State tomorrow and I will be making the case for continued funding. I cannot say more than that. I had hoped that they would see the value of supporting this work, and possibly seeing it extended to the rest of the country because what we are learning in London is so positive and has so much benefit and it would be a shame to only see it have an impact here.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I can only say: do look at our reports that we have made and our recommendations and please do use them in support if they are useful for the case that you are putting forward.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Thank you. Yes, very useful.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Personally, I have my fingers crossed but that is because of direct access to some of those projects. We have to wait for the overall evaluation. It is good news there that you are meeting up with the DfE.

Andrew Boff AM: Do you say you want to continue GLA funding at £4 million?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): For the LSEF legacy projects, yes.

Andrew Boff AM: That is what you are arguing for?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Is it £4 million?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Can I just check that exact figure and come back to you?

Andrew Boff AM: Yes.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Is that the figure that you have been given?

Andrew Boff AM: I am assuming. What is --

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): That is the original funds that the GLA put into the original programme, but the funding that we are giving for the legacy is not at the same level. I will have to come back to you on the exact figure.

Andrew Boff AM: Some of that £4 million was setup costs that we --

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): It was £24 million in total from the DfE --

Andrew Boff AM: It was £20 million from the Government. I am talking about the GLA's contribution.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): The setup costs were not £4 million, though. There was a proportion spent on administration of the fund, yes.

Andrew Boff AM: All right. I am trying to get an idea of what the amount is that you are asking for going forward, and why it would be different from what was originally there. You put £4 million in and you are asking for the scheme to continue, but for a lesser amount of money?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Yes. It is not the same type of scheme. The first scheme, which ran over three years, had a very large call for applications and we funded over 100 projects. The legacy of that fund is a smaller scheme that is about supporting the networks or the hubs that emerged through the fund and helping them to transition to a position where they are more self-sustaining. It is a very different kind of scheme but it builds on the legacy of the first scheme, which is why the amount of funding that we are putting in is slightly different.

Andrew Boff AM: OK. Thank you.

Darren Johnson AM: Can you tell us what the new skills unit for London has done to increase the number of places in the capital?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): The unit has provided land from the GLA Group portfolio for about 16 new schools. I am not sure if we have provided that list to you in previous Mayor's Question Times (MQTs), but a number of those sites already have schools allocated to them and we have worked with the Education Funding Agency (EFA) on those. They have provided approximately 10,000 school places in the pipeline for London.

The unit has also helped to support lots of other schools that are trying to set up in London, not necessarily on GLA land, but trying to find sites. We have put them in touch with developers and with boroughs. We assist and advise on planning applications.

Darren Johnson AM: Yes, this is what I wanted to come on to, actually. When we had evidence previously when we were looking at this, a number of witnesses expressed concern that the Mayor was focusing very much at the micro level, on a small number of sites for a small number of schools, at the expense of the more strategic level outside of GLA sites.

Do you feel you have that balance right and do you at least agree that there is a balancing act between the very site-specific around specific GLA land and the more strategic across London as a whole and supporting local authorities as a whole?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Yes. We have two functions, really. The first is at I suppose what you would call the micro level, trying to help schools with specific sites. For obvious reasons, the GLA is a major landowner and we have found 16 sites, which is very positive. Particularly compared to some other Government departments, it is quite a high number.

The other side of our work is the broader strategic planning, which is why we are producing this report, that will come out this week, about the number of school places that we believe London will need. We have produced that work after working with London Councils and working with their data people. We talk very actively to the EFA about the heat map of London and where the need will be. We are having a meeting later

this year with the Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs), the EFA and London Councils to talk about strategic planning for new schools even where there are not existing free school groups trying to set one up and to think more proactively about what London might need.

Darren Johnson AM: Certainly when we were discussing this a year or so ago, there were a number of concerns from boroughs, from teacher representatives and so on. Do you feel now that you are doing more of the strategic big-picture work than perhaps a year or so ago when we were last discussing this here?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Actually, we were doing it then but they were not necessarily aware of that work because we had not published material about our intelligence on the ground. That is partly because we had been working with London Councils and we had been lobbying the Government. People had heard more about our free school sites than perhaps the other side of our work, but we have been doing both from the beginning. The Mayor's Education Inquiry, which concluded in 2012, set out very clear recommendations that we should do both the macro and the micro.

Darren Johnson AM: What conversations have you had with the DfE on the issue of funding new school provision? You mentioned working with London Councils. Could you say a bit about the work that you have done to lobby jointly on that with London Councils?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Yes. The Mayor wrote to Rt Hon. Nicky Morgan MP [Secretary of State for Education] soon after the election and I have a meeting with her tomorrow. Obviously, the biggest item there will be school places and funding for London schools.

There is another issue about the school funding formula. The Government has announced that it wants to revise this and review it around the country. That will obviously have an impact on London. Those issues are ongoing discussions with the DfE.

Then we talk regularly to the EFA about the cost of schools and building schools in London and how it is just more expensive to do it in London, which it is aware of. All the time, we are making the point that the expectations for costs here are very different to those --

Darren Johnson AM: That is because of both land costs and construction costs?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Yes.

Darren Johnson AM: How will you ensure the London Land Commission takes account of the need for new school provision in new developments?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Certainly, there is a focus on housing and infrastructure in the London Land Commission. My colleagues Sir Edward Lister [Deputy Mayor, Policy and Planning] and Amanda Coyle [Assistant Director - Health & Communities, GLA] are at those meetings and they talk about the need for wider infrastructure.

There is a possibility that we may send a stronger message through our planning networks about the need to factor school planning into all new developments. That is already provided for in the legislation and the writing, but we are looking at ways that we can make that message even stronger.

Darren Johnson AM: We need to ensure that there are sufficient school places not just in those places where there is a demand and a grassroots campaign but certainly in terms of population growth and so on.

There might not be established community campaigns in the first instance there anyway if there is a lot of new development going on for the future. Again, do you feel you have the balance right between looking ahead in terms of population growth and listening to existing campaign groups on the ground?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Yes. The EFA has started more recently to start purchasing sites proactively, anticipating that there will be a need for school places even if there is not at the moment. We have always made the point that it needs to be more proactive than just reactive.

In fact, the example of the Southwark fire station site is a very good one. There was not an existing free school group campaigning to purchase that site; we recognised that there would be a need in that borough and therefore encouraged and facilitated the development to contain a school. The EFA came in and became a financial partner in that project even though it did not have an existing free school group at that point.

It is that kind of model that we need to encourage in London because it takes four or five years to build a secondary school, and we know that there will be a massive peak in numbers in the next few years.

Darren Johnson AM: A number of us have previously expressed concerns about the whole move to free schools anyway, but if we are having them and if that is the only game in town that the Government is prepared to fund, we at least need to ensure that the provision is looked at on a strategic level in terms of education need, population growth and so on, not simply where local campaign groups are shouting most vociferously.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Yes. There are boroughs that are expanding existing maintained school provision as well. It is partly being addressed by the creation of new free schools and also by existing borough schools. We can see that happening across the city.

Your point about the strategic forward planning is really the key and that is why we have called for the need for a single RSC in London rather than the current arrangement, but that is about having that strategic overview.

Darren Johnson AM: This was very much the Mayor's baby and the Mayor's objective to set up this unit and to take an interest in education even though it is not formally part of the GLA Act. How much do you feel this has now bedded down as a formal part of the GLA's day-to-day work that would naturally move into the next administration, whoever is running it?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): It is very integrated with all of the other strands of the GLA's work. We have a very good working relationship with the Planning Department and with the Regeneration Department. They understand that schools are going to be part of the infrastructure need going forward.

The fact that the Assembly has created this Panel shows that there is a recognition that this is politically important. The fact that the DfE has been working very closely with us and with the EFA to try to solve this problem shows that there is a genuine recognition that the Mayor has a role here.

We would argue that having a single RSC for London would strengthen the strategic overview. It is a no-brainer to us that we have that. Hopefully, that case will continue to be made.

Andrew Boff AM: Which local authorities are still resisting free school development?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): I do not know if any of them would say publicly that they are. I do not feel like I would have the right to announce them.

Andrew Boff AM: Which ones are we currently having difficulties with persuading that new developments --

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): It is very difficult for me to start accusing boroughs of being resistant to free schools.

Andrew Boff AM: There must be some that are saying they do not want them.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): It would be an accusation that I am sure some would resist.

Andrew Boff AM: Are there any boroughs currently saying that they do not want your help in finding sites for free schools?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Actually, we have pretty good working relationships with most of them. I am trying to think of ones that have been very explicitly or publicly hostile. I cannot think of any. A number of boroughs have been very active in coming to us and asking for our help, certainly, on planning and --

Andrew Boff AM: What about Kingsland fire station and Southwark fire station? How are those mapping out as destinations for free schools?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): The developer at Southwark fire station will submit planning probably early next year. It has a preferred school provider. It is talking very actively with the borough and so that will go through its process. It seems to be very positive.

At Kingsland fire station - let me just check my notes - I believe there is a school provider also for that and the EFA has committed support and has purchased that site. You will just have to bear with me while I check if we can announce the name. Yes, Kingsland fire station will be for Hackney New Primary. In fact, I visited the primary on its current temporary site. It is a very good school and it will be there shortly.

Andrew Boff AM: Has the Mayor used Mayoral Directions in particular areas with regard to free schools?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): The Mayor used a Mayoral Direction with the Fire Authority, which was part of a longer complicated process about the disposal.

Andrew Boff AM: Is that the only one that the Mayor has used so far, just one Mayoral Direction for the whole of the Authority, or have there been others?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): It was on the specific site. I believe that he also used one on ... sorry, you will have to forgive me because it was some time ago. Probably the best thing is if I can write back to you and confirm the exact number of sites where we have used a Mayoral Direction.

Andrew Boff AM: Yes, please. I would appreciate that.

Andrew Dismore AM: The Southwark one was necessary because of the desire of the Mayor for the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) not to get full market value for the site, was it not?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): It did achieve best value. That was one of the conditions on which the site was disposed of to the developer.

Andrew Dismore AM: No, it did not because of the school and the Mayor had to give a comfort letter with a Mayoral Direction to achieve that objective.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): I am sorry but I have to dispute that. It did achieve best market value. That was one of the legal conditions of the disposal of the site and the developer increased the amount it gave to purchase the site in order that it would meet that criteria.

Andrew Dismore AM: With a school on it?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Yes.

Andrew Dismore AM: The full market value would not have had a school on it. That is the point.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): The independent evaluation by --

Andrew Dismore AM: We and the Fire Authority (LFEPa) ended up with less money than we would have done had it not had a school on the site.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Everyone agreed that it was better to have a school on the site than luxury housing. It was agreed that it was a condition of the --

Andrew Dismore AM: The reason we needed a Mayoral Direction was to get the comfort letter as well.

Andrew Boff AM: I am done.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. What did come out of that is an idea. Mr Boff asked a question about who you had difficulty with. I would like, if you could provide us with it, a list of boroughs that you are actively in collaboration with about your plans, just confirming where we are. I know locally about the Kingsland school, but we do not have an overall view. Whatever you can share with us would be really good.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): I will ask the team to put together a note to share with you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Yes. That will bring us up to date and so we will know where the relationships are going. That is good.

Andrew Dismore AM: Yes. I am just wondering what you are doing to support the further education (FE) sector in relation to the cuts in the money it is getting from the Government for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).

We had a problem that arose with the Mayor at MQT a couple of sessions ago about the mandated ESOL courses. We had on the one hand the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) saying to people, "If you do not go on a course, we will cut your benefits". On the other hand we had the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) saying, "We have cut your funding for these courses". It left people somewhat in

limbo and left a lot of FE colleges, particularly Barnet and Southgate College, which services part of my constituency, in significant financial difficulties as a result.

I had a written answer from the Mayor which arrived yesterday and which seemed to suggest that he was quite supportive of the issue and I wondered what you had been doing about it.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): We are very supportive of ESOL in London. We recognise that it is extremely valuable for all sorts of reasons, economic and also in terms of social cohesion.

On the FE sector, as you are aware, the Government has announced an intention to devolve skills funding post-2019 to the Mayor. The process of area reviews is taking place over the next year, which is a review of all FE college and sixth form college provision, with a view to reforming that sector and looking at the institutional health of it. In that process of area review and skills devolution, we want to develop a vision for the wider FE provision, of which ESOL is a key part.

There are questions about what level of ESOL the Government should fund, what level employers might fund, the quality and variability of ESOL and its accessibility in different settings, not just in FE but also in schools. You probably are aware that through the LSEF we have funded a £2 million project, part-funded by the European Union (EU), to support ESOL teaching for mothers in schools. There are a number of questions about ESOL - how it is provided, who pays for it, whether it is more targeted, how we improve the quality of ESOL - that we will be looking at over the next year. We are working very actively with colleges on that.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Munira, our first meeting next year will be in February. Because of the concern and the current state of London's FE sector, we thought that that would be something that we would look at. Are you currently involved with the London Enterprise Panel (LEP) and with the London FE group?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Yes.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): It seems to me that we run a risk here of creating a two-tier system if we are not careful. It is just a sense. Is there anything that you can do so that they are all informed?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Sorry. When you say a 'two-tier system', between which --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Eventually, you will end up with the colleges that are, if you like, beneficiaries of the changes and those that are left behind.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Our intention is that the whole system works better. In many cases, a lot of those colleges are coming together of their own volition. They are choosing to develop strategic alliances and mergers in some cases.

Our intention is not to just pick winners and leave everyone else by the wayside. It is to look at the whole of the sector as one, which has not really been done in London. The FE sector has probably received less attention than most other parts of education, and it is aware that it has been somewhat unloved and unattended to. Our intention is that the both the current Mayor and the next Mayor will take ownership of this issue because the adult skills budget has been devolved to him - and also because he is being asked to lead on the area review process with the Government - and the whole of the sector is considered in the round. In some cases there are colleges that may well decide to increase provision in some areas or with some sectors

and reduce in others. There may be more specialisation. There may be colleges that decide to consolidate their estates and sell off buildings whilst building in other parts of the city.

That kind of review, which is a much more cohesive approach than what we currently have, will benefit everybody. The most important people, of course, are the learners rather than just the institutions themselves. We need to put together what the institutions currently need in order to survive and what the learners, businesses and employers also need. It is about bringing together that data and the supply with the demand and making sure it marries up much better than it currently does.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Clearly, Richard [Derecki] (Senior Scrutiny Manager, Education Panel) and others will be talking with your officers before we do that piece of work.

I just have to say, for instance, that - and I can quote it because it is so good at what it does - Barking & Dagenham College went along the road of consolidation and working with industry partners. It has fully utilised its site and the offer is excellent. I cannot see it not being at the forefront of any changes.

However, equally, I know of other colleges that are landlocked with programmes that have not changed for a while; let me say that. My concern is how some understanding is going to be given to that sort of difference in the sector. It would be wrong for us to deny that there is not that difference in the sector.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): There are some excellent colleges in London and I have been able to visit a number of them in the last few months and even previously when I was not looking after FE.

What I would say is that London's schools have done phenomenally well in the last 10 to 15 years but London's FE is more variable. We know that there is a relatively high dropout rate at 17, for instance. That is not simply about blaming FE. I do not think that that is the case. However, it is recognising that while London has achieved extremely well in some areas, it needs to raise the game in others. Partly it is about, as I said, having a more strategic overview of FE, recognising where there is excellence and trying to spread that good practice.

I was at a college yesterday, Havering College, and I met the head of the department for design. He has in his course a 100% student satisfaction rating, which is a phenomenal result for an FE college. I asked him if he had had the opportunity to share his lessons and his approach with other teachers in other departments around FE and he said, "That has just not been possible. That facility does not exist". In education in schools in London, it would be unheard of for a really brilliant maths teacher not to now have the opportunity to meet with other maths teachers, particularly through our LSEF.

Bringing that model of peer-to-peer support and learning led by professionals, bringing the brilliant teachers from City and Islington to other colleges and all of that is uncharted territory but it is what we should be doing over the next year and thinking about how to have that kind of improvement in FE.

Andrew Boff AM: Just to pick you up, when you were referring to FE but the idea that teachers never talked to each other until the LSEF came along is a bit of a fiction, is it not?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): I did not say that.

Andrew Boff AM: No, I just did not want to see the inference that it was only because of the LSEF that teachers are talking because they have been talking for years.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): I did not say that, either.

Andrew Boff AM: All right. Have you met with the three RSCs who cover London and what did you discuss?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): I have met with them a number of times. The officials here at the GLA in our Education team and Caroline Boswell, who is the head of Education, meet with them through the London education officers' group as well, which is a regular meeting.

We have discussed some of the broader strategic issues in London and we have also discussed their role. All three are excellent individuals. They have a huge amount of experience, but they are aware of our views and my views about the structure and the arrangements in London and how I think they are imperfect. We have communicated that to them.

Andrew Boff AM: What are your concerns about the current arrangements?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): There are a number of issues. The first is that it seems strange to have a city like London with so many other pan-London improvement networks - a pan-London Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) structure, the Mayor's Office, the GLA - and yet the RSCs do not cover the entirety of the city. There are three of them who all look after a section of London and then sections outside London. They have a very large territory that they have to look after. It does not quite make sense to have an RSC who looks after Hackney but does not also look after Islington.

Andrew Boff AM: Why?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Why is it strange?

Andrew Boff AM: Yes, why is it strange?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): This goes to my next concern about it, which is that the RSCs' remit is quite narrow in the area of school improvement. The RSCs essentially, as far as I understand their role now, is to focus on failing schools and to try to encourage those schools to become academies and be managed by existing successful schools. Obviously, that is one part of the school improvement drive, but there are other things that an RSC might do; for instance, supporting those schools that are just 'good' and could be 'outstanding'. It is about how to improve London's schools, many of which are at that level as well.

There are also some strategic issues in London. I mentioned school places planning, school funding and headteacher and leadership recruitment, which is another big issue in London. Those are strategic issues that in other countries and other cities a Schools Commissioner would have some responsibility for. At the moment, there is no London-led focus on those issues and they are really crucial.

Andrew Boff AM: What does that matter to an individual school in terms of the people who are actually carrying out the education, rather than the people who are looking at it from above? How does it matter to a school in Hackney that it is not in the same region as a school in Islington?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): For instance, something we are looking at is headteacher recruitment. There is a much higher re-advertising rate in London than there is in the rest of the country and we know it is harder to recruit headteachers here. As more and more headteachers retire, if I were

the chair of a school governor body, I would want to see that headteacher recruitment is something that is being looked at because I would want to be recruiting good headteachers.

Andrew Boff AM: That is a priority for each of those individual RSCs.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): They are finding it more difficult because the particular challenges of London make it more difficult for them. For instance, we are looking at whether there are ways in which we can encourage and develop people who may want to be headteachers but have not yet considered doing it. Whether we could develop a talent pipeline that gives more people encouragement to try to become a headteacher in London. That is something that we think would benefit schools directly and they are, frankly, struggling to recruit.

On the issue of school places planning, there are many schools that are struggling with the number of people that are applying to them. Boroughs need to plan ahead and have enough school places for the children in their borough. They find it very difficult to do that by themselves, and so there is a case for --

Andrew Boff AM: You already provide statistics about school places. I am just struggling to think what the improvement will be with a London-wide body, bearing in mind that the London-wide boundary is not particularly sensible. The GLA boundary is not particularly sensible.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): We could have an existential conversation about the Mayor's Office --

Andrew Boff AM: We could; we will not.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): It takes us in very interesting directions.

Andrew Boff AM: I am just wondering why the boundaries matter.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): They do. I know that Peter John, for instance, Leader of Southwark Council and the lead for education at London Councils, has said to this group previously that he believes it should be a single Regional Commissioner. A number of the boroughs that we have spoken to and Ofsted, I believe, have also made the same point. It would make sense that if you are going to have pan-London networks and pan-London agencies working to improve education in London that the RSC role should work on the same boundaries. It makes it much easier to align, to develop programmes together and to focus on the issues together. London is very different to the rest of the country. That cannot be denied.

Andrew Boff AM: What would you like to see a future Mayor prioritise in education?

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): The area of school improvement will continue to be important. One of the things about the way the current RSC structure is set up is that it slightly assumes that London is doing OK, and that the schools around London and in the other parts of the country need attention.

That is a mistake. We still need to address some of the key issues in London's schools to do with the gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged students and particular groups like looked-after children, in whom we have invested quite heavily through our LSEF. There is a very large reform taking place in FE and

that will be a priority area for any Mayor. The areas that we are looking at will continue to be important in the next year.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Any other questions? No. Thank you, Munira, again, for the exchange that we have had. I hope you will be willing to accept that if anything arises once we have gone through the minutes, I will write to you for any additional information and we will share the action sheet or the promises that have come out of our discussion. Thank you very much.

Munira Mirza (Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture): Thank you.