



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 31 May 2017

Session 5



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EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

17th Meeting 2017, Session 5

CONVENER

*James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)

*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

*Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP)

*Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)

*Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

*Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)

*Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)

*Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

John Swinney (Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Roz Thomson

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 31 May 2017

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Workforce Planning (Schools)

The Convener (James Dornan): Good morning and welcome to the Education and Skills Committee's 17th meeting in 2017. I remind everyone to turn their mobile phones and other devices to silent for the meeting.

The first item of business is our fourth and final evidence session for the committee's inquiry into teacher workforce planning for Scotland's schools. We will hear from the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. I welcome the cabinet secretary, John Swinney, and his officials, Stuart Robb, acting deputy director, and Mick Wilson, senior economic adviser, from the learning directorate of the Scottish Government. Thank you for coming along. I understand that the cabinet secretary will make a short opening statement.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): I welcome the opportunity to give evidence and to set out the foundations of the Government's approach to the delivery of workforce planning in education.

In Scotland, we have a flexible and child-centred school curriculum that is part of a wider policy framework to meet the diverse needs of all our young people at every stage of their journey through life. Young people are educated in modern, accessible buildings, and we have an evidence-based approach to improvement.

The most crucial component is ensuring that children get the right support to learn at the right time, and teachers are key to that. They are key to children's achievements at school and to supporting our ambitions to raise the bar for all and close the attainment gap. That is why the committee's inquiry into the teaching workforce is important and why ensuring that we have a sufficient supply of high-quality teachers is a key policy priority for the Government.

The evidence to the committee has fallen into two main areas—first, concern about the skills of newly qualified teachers, and secondly, discussions about the national approach to workforce planning.

In relation to teachers' skills, I was concerned by the evidence that trainee teachers presented about their experience of teacher education. I am also concerned by the findings of the research that I published two weeks ago, which analysed initial teacher education courses and found significant variations in the time that is spent on key components of the curriculum, with the widest variation in the crucial area of literacy. The committee also identified, in its report on additional support for learning, a lack of focus on ASL in initial teacher education and training.

I will meet the General Teaching Council for Scotland and the Scottish Council of Deans of Education to consider the available evidence and to establish how teacher education can be strengthened. Improvement is essential, but evidence highlights the fact that teacher education in Scotland is strong. Our universities are of high quality, and our evaluation of the teaching Scotland's future programme indicated that the experience of teacher education programmes, including student placements and the probation scheme, is positive.

The committee has heard that initial teacher education is just that—initial. Student teachers need the right foundation from initial education, but they are also entitled to on-going professional development, particularly in the core curricular competencies, to foster their confidence and competence. My sense is that that remains an area for further work by the Government, but also by the GTCS, Education Scotland, local authorities and the Scottish College for Educational Leadership.

The committee has discussed the way in which, in conjunction with partners, we plan for the recruitment of new teachers. We have made a number of improvements to the workforce planning model, which include taking into account local authority vacancies, starting the process earlier in the year and asking universities to work together to allocate places. We will continue to refine the approach through the recently reconvened teacher workforce planning working group.

To ensure that we have enough teachers in our schools, we have taken steps to maintain teacher numbers and have increased intakes into universities for the sixth year in a row. We are supporting the development of new routes to teaching, and we have over the past two years invested in a recruitment campaign, which we will invest in again this year. The campaign is a central plank in the Scottish Government's efforts to increase the number of teachers. It has a particular focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects this year, and I am delighted that the undergraduates whom

the campaign has targeted have shown significant interest in considering a career in teaching.

We need to ensure that our skilled educational professionals are empowered and supported to make the most of opportunities and responsibilities for the benefit of all children. I therefore intend to issue a next-steps paper next month that will set out how we will deliver our ambitions to empower teachers, parents, children and communities. I remain committed to ensuring that everything that we do empowers our schools to deliver excellence and equity for all in Scottish education.

The Convener: Thank you. You mentioned vacancies. There seems to be some discrepancy in the vacancy rates and how accurate and up to date they are. Is there some way for the Government to ensure that local authorities keep those figures as up to date as they can be? Should the Government request regular updates from local authorities on the vacancy situation?

John Swinney: The vacancy position varies at different stages during the year. The question comes down to the frequency with which we consider it necessary to gather that information to inform the workforce planning position. We gather the information via local authorities to inform the teacher workforce planning model and the judgments that are made about the intake to initial teacher education. The information informs the decision-making process that takes place over the latter part of each year and culminates in December.

If we were to gather that information more frequently, I would have to be clear about the purpose of doing that. At the moment, the purpose is clear—it is to inform the annual intake to initial teacher education. If the information was gathered more frequently, we would face local authority issues about the administrative burden of collecting information for which there was not a distinct and focused purpose, as there is for the teacher workforce model planning exercise.

The Convener: Are you confident that the information that you get from local authorities is as accurate as it can be? Is there scope for improving that data?

John Swinney: We rely on local authorities to input the quality information that is required for the teaching workforce planning exercise. It is in their interests to ensure that that data is accurate, so that the position is as clear as possible when we make the judgments. The availability of that data to us for the past six years has resulted in an increase in the intake to initial teacher education, and that will be the case for entry to the forthcoming academic year.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): In the parliamentary debate a couple of weeks ago,

and again this morning, you said that you were disappointed by many of the findings in the recent ITE report. Are you surprised by any of those findings, given the Donaldson review and the determination that the Scottish Government had to improve things when it published its evaluation report?

John Swinney: The work of the Donaldson review has been taken forward in partnership with the colleges of education to ensure that the recommendations have been put into practice and that initial teacher education is of sufficient quality. We have to consider a range of different factors. The Complete University Guide, which I cited in the debate, rated four of our universities in the top seven across the United Kingdom for teacher education. That is a pretty strong endorsement of the quality and strength of initial teacher education.

The analysis that I published demonstrated significant variation in the time and focus in individual courses. That merits examination and explanation. I will not jump to an immediate conclusion just because there are differences; the universities may well marshal a legitimate explanation for that. However, the variation is sufficient to suggest that we should explore it further to satisfy ourselves that basing our decisions on the evidence that suggests that there is strength and capability in our colleges of education is valid, although data that the Government has produced suggests variation and evidence that the committee has heard clearly raises other issues.

Among all those questions, we have to be open to exploring whether, in the design of initial teacher education, the colleges of education have taken all the steps that need to be taken to ensure that we can be confident that the foundations of initial teacher education are secure.

Liz Smith: The Donaldson review in 2011 was clear that literacy and numeracy were specific issues, and Donaldson made recommendations about that. Your evaluation of how the Donaldson review is being enacted raised concerns about

“relatively limited literacy and numeracy skills and a lack of in-depth subject knowledge”

among many teachers, and that report is fairly recent. Given the warnings that were issued in 2011 and given what the Scottish Government said, why are quite a number of witnesses telling us that the quality of delivery on literacy and numeracy is still weak in some areas?

John Swinney: It is important for us to remember the words “in some areas”, which Liz Smith used in the latter part of her question. I come back to the fact that we have external validation that suggests that our initial teacher

education proposition is strong. We have to look at all the evidence together to come to a considered judgment about what needs to be undertaken to ensure our confidence in initial teacher education.

Among that material, we have the testimony that the committee has heard from some candidates, the external validation of the strength of initial teacher education and the Government's report that suggests quite a substantial variation in the focus in initial teacher education—that applies more to literacy than to numeracy, but there is quite a range. The evidence merits further exploration and examination to give us confidence that the initial teacher education system meets the needs of our education system today.

Liz Smith: One of the great concerns is that Scottish standards of literacy and numeracy are not nearly as good as we would like them to be, and that has to be set in that context.

What role can the Scottish Government play in bringing together universities—autonomous institutions that decide their own courses—with the GTCS and local authorities, which have an important part to play not in the training of teachers but in how that is managed? As cabinet secretary, how do you envisage the way forward to cut through the problem that we have with literacy and numeracy and to raise standards across the board? That is the question that parents want to have answered.

John Swinney: The Government can do and has already done a number of things. The first was the guidance that the chief inspector of education issued to all practitioners in August last year, which recognised that, in the eight curricular areas, there should be primacy for literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing. I asked the chief inspector of education to make that explicit statement in order to give the profession clarity that, although the curriculum for excellence relies on breadth of delivery—I am a strong advocate of that—certain elements must be anchored, if I can put it that way. The chief inspector's guidance to practitioners in August was designed to do exactly that, and that was the first thing that the Government did.

The second thing was to put in place absolute clarity about what we expect in relation to literacy and numeracy. The benchmarks that were published in August, along with the chief inspector's guidance, were designed to give practitioners clarity about the levels that we expect young people to reach at different stages in their educational journey. From the feedback that I get, which I listen carefully to, I think that those benchmarks are providing the necessary clarity, which previously did not exist.

In all honesty, we cannot expect teachers to get young people to particular levels if we are not crystal clear about what those levels are. That issue has been addressed, so that is the second thing that the Government did.

The third thing—the way in which Liz Smith asked the question almost provides this answer—relates to the fact that universities are autonomous bodies, and Liz Smith would be the first person in the queue to remind me of that.

10:15

Liz Smith: Indeed.

John Swinney: The Government therefore has to lead a process that involves all interested parties to make sure that initial teacher education delivers all that we require it to deliver for aspiring teachers.

I said that I would convene a discussion with the GTCS and the colleges of education—I am happy to involve local government in that process, too—to ensure the necessary focus on addressing the issues. That is part of the work that I will take forward. I have already met the colleges of education and set out clearly to them my expectations for initial teacher education and the role that I expect them to play in the development of our education system, because they are significant research centres for educational development and I want the Scottish education system to benefit from that input.

Liz Smith: My final question is a big one. In hindsight, do you think that the curriculum for excellence has been part of the problem, in that the teaching profession has had to focus on too many other things, to the detriment of focusing on literacy and numeracy?

John Swinney: Curriculum for excellence is a broad curriculum to enable young people to have the capacities to face an ever-changing and dynamic world. In that respect—this is not just my opinion, as international commentators have validated the whole approach of curriculum for excellence—I am very confident in its strength and breadth. It has been necessary to provide clarity that, among the eight curricular areas, we attach greater significance to three elements—literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing. It is important to have that clarity in the system, because young people need to be equipped to be competent in those core skills. Whatever else young people are equipped for out of the breadth of curriculum for excellence, they have to have the strength of foundation in literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): There are about 700 vacancies in schools across

Scotland. I think that we would all agree that a key priority is to ensure that those positions are filled; therefore, the target for student teachers is critical, but so is ensuring that they end up in the classroom. I am afraid that I have been doing some number crunching, although I am sure that the cabinet secretary will be able to cope with that. The probationer cohort for 2015-16 was 2,500 or so, but, if we look back, the target for the number of student teachers in that cohort was about 3,000. If we take into account the number of teachers in the cohort who were not employed at all, there is a discrepancy of about 20 to 25 per cent between the targeted number of teachers and the number of teachers in the probationer cohort. Are you at all concerned about the apparent drop-out rate of student teachers between being recruited and working in the classroom?

John Swinney: Of course that is an issue of concern. The model that we use looks at a range of factors that Mr Johnson will be familiar with: pupil numbers, census information about pupils, the age profile of the profession, and the number of exits that we anticipate. Attention is also paid to particular specialisms to ensure that they are properly taken into account.

The workforce planning model looks at a range of factors to arrive at an assumption about how many teachers we need to train to ensure that we have an adequate supply of teachers in classrooms. Within that, an assumption will be made about the proportion of teachers who, in any given year, might decide that teaching is not for them or leave because of life changes and so on. If that proportion is exceeded, we will have an issue, so the point that Mr Johnson raises is a material one. We need to understand carefully the reasons for teachers leaving the profession and what we can do to address those reasons.

Daniel Johnson: According to *TES Scotland*, there is a 5.6 per cent drop-out rate from the professional graduate diploma in education programme. The figures on the probationer cohort show that 13 per cent of teachers who complete their probationary year are not then being employed, despite there being 700 vacancies. That would suggest that there are issues both with the course and, potentially, with the experiences of probationers. What might those issues be and how will you tackle them?

John Swinney: There will be a range of issues, some of which will be about individuals getting further experience of teaching and believing that it is not the right thing for them to do. There may be changes in an individual's life and priorities that will affect their decision. In our dialogue with those candidates, we need to be attentive to what the issues are so that we can address them in initial teacher education. Those issues must be properly

addressed in the system in order to minimise the drop-out rates that Mr Johnson has raised. We will never eliminate the drop-out rate—it would be foolhardy of me to suggest that we could—but we need to have it within an expected level to ensure that we can validate our assumptions in the teacher workforce planning system.

Daniel Johnson: As I said, there is a combination of factors: retaining those students, but also having the right target in the first place. The target number of student teachers fluctuated from 4,437 in 2005-06 down to 2,300 in 2011-12 and then back up to 3,706 in 2016-17. Does that high degree of fluctuation in a relatively short space of time raise questions in your mind about whether the model is satisfactory and accurate, and are you confident that the issues have been addressed?

John Swinney: Mr Johnson uses the correct numbers, but the other factor that should be taken into account is the high level of teacher unemployment—if I can use that terminology—in 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11. The model was recalibrated to take that into account. Our desire was to make sure that teachers who had been trained could get employment.

There has been quite a variation in intake levels, but those have been affected by a surplus in the number of teachers who have been able to secure employment. Although the planning model does not offer an exact science, we must have a sufficiently long-term line of sight to make the correct judgments, and to take into account the level of departure from the profession and the relevant intakes. Quite significant variables will happen in that exercise, but I can assure the committee that it is an absolute priority for the Government to maintain that clear line of sight and ensure that we are able to maintain the correct approach to teacher training intake, and therefore to the supply of individuals into the profession.

The Convener: This should be your last question, Daniel.

Daniel Johnson: I quite agree on the need for that line of sight. However, one concern that came up in evidence last week was that the line of sight is currently limited to vacancy data from local authorities, which does not take into account the total picture, including the number of schools and the workforce models and teaching formulas that individual local authorities employ.

On that basis, does the formula need to incorporate more data points? Does it need to look at the pattern of schools and models of teaching, and move from a year-by-year forecast to a three, four or five-year planning horizon? Do the numbers in your previous answer suggest that

there has been some overcompensation on teacher vacancies?

John Swinney: On your first point, our statistical model takes into account a number of factors, including population and pupil number projections; the pupil census and the teacher census; the age profile of the current teacher workforce; teachers leaving and returning to the profession; and pupil teacher ratios at individual school level. It also takes into account the requirement for flexibility in order to meet the need for short-term staff cover, the vacancy survey, and assumptions about student retention rates, which relates to what we just discussed.

With regard to projections of numbers, rather than looking at one individual year we take a longer-term perspective. Obviously, we formulate the target for teacher training intake numbers year by year because it is relevant only for each academic year. We look at projections based on all the factors that I have mentioned, which are discussed over a longer period, but that crystallises into the teacher training intake for a given year, and a judgment is made. All those factors are taken into account.

With the benefit of hindsight, there was probably an overcorrection following the intake numbers in 2011, but judgments were made at that time based on the level of teacher unemployment. If I were to hazard a guess as to the relevant factor since that period, I would suspect that a greater number of teachers were leaving the profession because of issues around workload, which I have now acted to address. I would imagine that that factor has exceeded what was expected in the statistical model that we used.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I have a couple of supplementaries to Daniel Johnson's questions about the model. When Laurence Findlay from Moray Council gave evidence three weeks ago, his argument—with which I concur—was that the model should be more localised in future and should perhaps reflect the regional approach of, for example, the northern alliance. Do you agree with that?

John Swinney: The model certainly has to address all circumstances and all localities, but I assure Mr Scott and the committee that the position at local level is directly taken into account in formulating the model as it stands. That is done for pupil teacher ratios at individual school level, but it also takes into account the vacancy survey for every local authority in the country.

What follows from Mr Scott's question is the question of what the specific challenges and issues are in particular parts of the country. We have to ensure not only that the statistical model reflects those challenges, which I am pretty

confident that it does, but that our approach to initial teacher education and our work to deploy probationers around the country also takes into account some of the challenges in different parts of the country.

Tavish Scott: Coincidentally—actually it was not coincidental at all—yesterday I met Helen Budge, the director of education in Shetland, and she said that Shetland is struggling to find probationers for the new academic year and that there are vacancies. That cannot be dissimilar to the situation in any part of Scotland, but there are particular challenges in certain subjects in Shetland. The consequence of those vacancies is that some subjects may not be taught next academic year. Is the system dealing with those immediate challenges? I appreciate that the new school year is three months away but, for parents, those are real concerns now.

10:30

John Swinney: We will work with our partners and strive to ensure that the breadth of curriculum that is expected can be delivered across the country. We will need to take a number of steps in order to address those issues before the start of the academic year. The position on probationers will have become clearer by then—Mr Scott is correct that there is still time for that to take its course.

We are introducing other reforms that will help with the delivery of education where there are shortages. The Government has funded the Western Isles Council to take forward e-school provision, which is designed to address some of those issues through distance learning. That is one of the tools that will be crucial in helping us to address any shortages, if they materialise.

We are working hard with the colleges of education to expand their intake to ensure that we have the right flow of probationers into the system, and local authorities are active in the recruitment process as we speak.

Tavish Scott: I appreciate that. Laurence Findlay also mentioned the preference waiver scheme. He said:

"We could make the preferential scheme a bit more preferential."—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee, 17 May 2017; c 5.*]

Would you accept that that could at least be explored?

John Swinney: We need to explore all of those questions to make sure that we have the right teaching cohort in every part of the country.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Before I move on to the question that I want to ask about making the profession inviting for graduates,

I will follow on from what Tavish Scott said about localisation of planning. Local authorities' political administrations have a clear impact on an issue that I discovered yesterday is current in my area—the administration of Aberdeenshire Council is talking about closing rural schools. Given what we have heard about the problems that schools face with taking on probationers and attracting people into rural areas to work and teach, how does that sort of decision impact on the job that the Government is trying to do?

John Swinney: There are two quite separate processes to consider. One is about possible school closures: Gillian Martin will be familiar with the fact that there is a very clear process that a local authority must follow if it wishes to act in that fashion. In large numbers of cases, I will be the ultimate decision maker as to whether due process has been followed. Local authorities obviously have to consider that before they come to conclusions.

The detail that I put on the record a moment ago about the workforce planning statistical model relies on data about things such as the number, structure and profile of schools, and pupil to teacher ratios within schools. A wide variety of factors will be relevant and will have an impact on the steps that the Government will take in leading the process. If there is reconfiguration of the school estate, that will have an effect on our work.

Gillian Martin: Thank you for clarifying that. I will move on to what I really want to ask about, which is how to make teaching attractive to graduates. I know that the Government is doing a lot of work on that. Many people from various bodies who have appeared in front of the committee in the past couple of weeks have said that it is a real issue. The way that teaching is talked about in the media, and in Parliament, as well, is really off-putting to many people who are deciding about their career. I am interested to hear your thoughts on that.

John Swinney: The way in which education is taught will have an effect on the attractiveness of the profession. In my communications about the profession, I have taken steps to acknowledge the fundamental role that the teaching profession performs in our society, recognising our reliance on a high-quality teaching profession and the exciting opportunities in it to transform lives. The Government has reflected those aspirations in the recent teaching makes people campaign, which captures in one line the attractiveness and the power of the teaching profession, and its ability to shape the lives of young people in our society. Our central message is designed to create an attractive image for the profession, but I acknowledge that a lot of the debate and mood music around education can sometimes be a

challenge to compete with when trying to put across that positive and attractive message.

Gillian Martin: I will go back to some of the things that could put graduates off. You mentioned progression to headteacher. Greg Dempster from the Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland talked about the issues around workload for headteachers. If graduates are looking towards career progression to a headship at some point, that will have an impact. He said:

“Our members have told us their top seven workload issues. The first is the reduction and removal of class cover”.—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee, 24 May 2017; c 27.*]

That is a local authority staffing issue. You will have seen all the evidence that has been put before us. We heard that some local authorities are not putting class cover in place and are expecting that their teachers will cover classes because supply teachers are not being put in place for a couple of weeks. That is not something that you can do anything about, cabinet secretary, but local authorities have to recognise that there are workload issues around headteachers having to cover classes because they cannot get supply.

John Swinney: One of my priorities has been to tackle the workload issue right across the profession. The committee will know that I have taken a number of steps to address that issue: through the clarity that has been provided by the chief education inspector's guidance; by the removal of unit assessments from the curriculum for excellence; and by providing clarity around the benchmarks that are in place. I have also led a process that has involved all aspects of the system—the Government, Education Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority, local authorities and schools—in tackling unnecessary bureaucracy. The guidance that was issued in August was designed to empower the teaching profession to be more selective about the elements of bureaucracy and workload that it pursues, and it put a requirement on local authorities to rein back the volume of bureaucracy and workload that has been applied to schools.

I asked Education Scotland to look at the matter and it gave us a clear report that demonstrated that, since the reducing workload reports had been undertaken a couple of years ago under the auspices of the assessment and national qualifications group, some authorities had made good progress in reducing workload, others had some way to go, and others were not even off the starting blocks. That message has been communicated to local authorities, and it is being monitored by Education Scotland. Fundamentally, it would help if local authorities would tackle some of that unnecessary bureaucracy to ensure that the teaching profession is able to do what I want it

to do, which is to be liberated to concentrate on teaching.

Gillian Martin: Going back to what Greg Dempster said, the number 1 problem is not necessarily bureaucracy, although people have mentioned that. It is teachers having to cover other classes because local authorities do not put a supply teacher in place immediately when a teacher is off sick. Schools are having to cover for the time until the local authority puts a supply teacher in place. That seems to be a major issue in some areas.

John Swinney: There are two issues, one of which is the availability of supply cover. If we have a general shortage of members of the teaching profession, there may well be challenges regarding the availability of supply cover in parts of the country. That is another factor that goes into the workforce planning model, to ensure that we have adequate levels of supply cover in the system, with flexibility in the size of the workforce to meet the need for short-term cover for staff. Genuine issues will have to be confronted on that.

The second issue is the choices that local authorities make about how quickly they put in place supply cover. I encourage local authorities to be supportive of schools by delivering that cover as quickly and promptly as they can, in order to ensure that young people can be supported in their education.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): A key element of workforce planning must be retention of teachers. A number of reasons have been given to us for why teachers leave the profession. On some subjects, there has not been unanimity among the people who have appeared in front of us. One reason that has been given to us is salary. Assertions have been made that the salary in the initial years of being a teacher is too low and does not attract people into the profession, but that after four or five years, it reaches a satisfactory level. I know that there may be issues at a more senior level, but that is what we heard about the critical initial years. There was no unanimity on that issue. What is your opinion?

John Swinney: Salaries are decided using the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers, in which the Government is one of the three participants. Pay rates and pay scales are designed to make the profession attractive and to provide the necessary incentives to encourage individuals into and through the profession. We have to be ever mindful to ensure that the profession remains attractive to people. I am conscious that over the past nine years significant pay constraint has been applied to public sector workers, including teachers. We must be mindful of that in taking forward our discussions in the SNCT.

Fundamentally, we have to provide a sufficiently attractive set of pay scales. We must also address some of the issues that Gillian Martin raised with me about the powerful message that is needed to attract individuals into the profession, given the opportunities that it offers.

Colin Beattie: Promotion opportunities have also been raised with the committee. The structure in most schools has been flattened, which has resulted in fewer opportunities for promotion through the ranks. That particularly affects middle-ranking teachers. Do you have an opinion on that?

John Swinney: I am concerned about that. I think that we have lost an element of leadership of learning. Not in every circumstance but generally, schools have moved towards broader faculty structures. In a subject such as history, for example, leadership of learning would previously have been undertaken by a principal teacher of history, but that is now likely to be undertaken by a principal teacher of a much broader set of disciplines. The fact that there is not that immediate leadership makes the ability to enhance the quality and depth of learning and teaching in schools more remote. That plays into the type of scenario that Mr Beattie has put to me about the opportunities for individuals to progress. There are significant issues about professional development in the governance review, which will address the points that Mr Beattie has raised with me.

10:45

Colin Beattie: Another point that has been raised is the difficulty that teachers have in addressing additional support needs, which is partly due to the complexity of the needs. The concern is that perhaps it is difficult to give teachers the breadth of training that is necessary to cover all the potential conditions that they might meet in the classroom, and there is also concern about disruption in the classroom. A number of teachers have raised the issue of additional support needs as being a significant concern for them in terms of carrying out their duties. Again, I wonder how we are tackling that.

John Swinney: There are two important elements with regard to that question. One is that all teachers going through initial teacher education need to be properly equipped with the necessary skills to support young people with additional support needs. However, we also have to recognise that there is a limit to just how broadly we can ensure, through initial teacher education, that the teaching profession has the capacity to do that.

That brings me on to the second point, which is that when a young person is judged to be able to operate in a mainstream school environment, the

support that that young person requires must be properly considered with regard to their educational and social needs so that those needs are met. That is surely the meaning of getting it right for every child.

A teacher's ability to support a young person to fulfil their potential in the classroom would therefore be a blend of the core skills that they have as a teacher to address the needs of young people with additional support needs, and the capacity that would be present within the classroom to ensure that they are able to do exactly that. That judgment would be arrived at by the process of assessing what the needs of the young person are and whether they can be met in a mainstream school environment.

I do not think that we can just take the view that teaching of pupils with additional support needs will in all circumstances be properly addressed by initial teacher education. I think that we have to make sure that the foundations are unreservedly there, but we also have to ensure that the proper resources are in place to support the delivery of education to meet the needs of young people, which is their entitlement, given the policy framework within which we operate.

Colin Beattie: From the feedback that we have had, it is clear that a number of teachers feel that they lack the confidence to deal with the complexity of some of the additional support needs that came in front of them. I wonder how that could be better addressed.

John Swinney: Specific needs of the teaching profession will be addressed as part of ensuring that they have the necessary confidence to support young people with additional support needs. Certainly, a judgment about whether the needs of a young person with additional support needs can be met within a mainstream environment will rely heavily on the resources that have been put in place and what training and support has been put in place for the teacher to enable them to meet those needs in every respect.

Liz Smith: You made an interesting comment about departmental leadership in answer to Mr Beattie—that because of the way that curriculum for excellence has been developed there has been a move towards faculty-based leadership within schools rather than departmental leadership. Do you believe that curriculum for excellence has perhaps unwittingly created a problem in that there has been a diminution of the core subjects that has had an impact on subject choice?

John Swinney: I think that Liz Smith has misinterpreted my remarks. I do not think that curriculum for excellence has been the driver of the process to move to broader faculty leadership. I think that that has happened due to decisions

that have been taken by local authorities to flatten structures. It is not anything to do with curriculum for excellence.

In my view, the fact cannot be contested that curriculum for excellence requires a depth of learning that enables young people to establish, in their broad general education, the foundations that will allow them to be competent and to achieve qualifications in the senior phase. I know that Liz Smith has had issues with curriculum for excellence, but I do not want her to misconstrue my remarks. I see curriculum for excellence delivering depth in learning for young people. That has to be done to a satisfactory level in the broad general education in order to create the foundations that will allow young people to perform in all the subjects that we are familiar with in the senior phase. The necessity of providing such deep learning, which is one of the purposes of curriculum for excellence, lies at the heart of that agenda. The move to faculty heads and a flatter structure is about local authority choices; it is not about CFE.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): Before I move on to my main focus, which is getting a proper understanding of what is happening in our schools, I have a brief question about initial teacher education.

In some of the evidence that we took, there was a recognition that the route into teaching has changed. When I started out, many graduates undertook a postgraduate course and went into full-time teaching. In other words, young people went into teaching via that route. Now, people want to come into teaching at a later stage. We have been encouraging that, because the experience that they can bring into the classroom is significant.

However, it does not feel as though initial teacher education has changed its view of what a student is. People told us how difficult it was for them to take a year out to commit to doing the course and then to travel to various different placements. What should be done to provide access to teacher training courses, perhaps on a part-time basis or through distance learning? How can we make those courses more sympathetic to the circumstances of the people who come into teaching now, who will have family and caring commitments and will be less free to travel to wherever they might be expected to go for a placement?

John Swinney: Those are all reasonable questions that it is legitimate to raise. I recognise that the people who go into teaching might not go straight into teacher training from university or might not undertake a distinct undergraduate course.

In several council areas, there are good examples of courses having been adapted to meet that need. In the area that I represent, Perth and Kinross Council has in place a partnership that enables existing employees, who might work in, say, the housing service, to enter the teaching profession. The council supports them to do that, which means that they do not face the issue of whether they can manage for a year without a salary and meet the costs associated with education. A number of measures are already in place, but I am keen to explore what further measures we can take to broaden the base of the intake.

The second valid question that Johann Lamont raises is about some of the practical manifestations of the work that has to be undertaken by a trainee teacher. The other week, I met a constituent who has gone into teaching at a later stage in life and who has family commitments. The time that it is taking her to travel to placements has upset the apple cart of childcare, which she would normally be able to manage. Being sympathetic to the needs of individuals who have other responsibilities in how we deal with elements of initial teacher education such as placements would perhaps address some of the issues that make it difficult for people to decide to enter the profession in the first place and to sustain their career in it, given the implications for their lives.

Johann Lamont: Let us move on to workforce planning. I would like to know whether we properly understand what is happening in our schools.

Is there a gap between the theory and the truth of what a school is and what it offers? We have had evidence, for example, that primary school headteachers routinely cover classes for other teachers and do not have management time and that non-specialists are teaching lower down in secondary schools because the specialist teachers have to focus on the pupils who have exams, so we are not getting the quality of teaching at the lower levels that we might expect. We have also heard that there has been a reduction in the number of specialist teachers in primary schools. There are other examples—I can think of one in computer science—of a post not having become a vacancy when a teacher has left because the school has taken the decision to no longer run that course.

None of that would be captured in a survey on vacancies, but it makes a significant difference to what happens in the schools. How do we address that question? Those factors impact on a school's capacity to deliver the core topics, such as literacy and numeracy, as well as on subject specialisms. They also have a huge impact on what it is like to be a teacher in that school, because the work

environment is not steady if there is a lack of supply teachers who are able to come in and free up teachers to do courses and so on. We are, in essence, managing problems in accessing teachers by reducing the curriculum or changing how it is delivered in individual schools. Have you examined that issue?

John Swinney: We have not undertaken a scientific exercise on that point, but I recognise the challenges that Johann Lamont raises—indeed, I hear about them when I am out and about in the education system. Some of those challenges will be driven by the difficulties in recruiting subject specialists. We know that we have particular challenges within STEM subjects, for example, which can result in acute difficulties in the provision of certain courses. Some of the challenges arise out of the availability of supply cover. When a school wishes to undertake professional development, the availability of supply cover will determine whether that can be done. That is not acceptable. We must ensure that we have adequate supply to enable professional learning and development to be undertaken.

We also face general challenges in recruiting teachers into the profession to ensure that we have the necessary stability in our teaching cohort. I think that I made the point in the initial teacher education debate—I certainly made it in response to recent oral questions that I answered—that, when I participated in the international summit on the teaching profession, which was held in Edinburgh in late March, it was clear from a number of jurisdictions around the table that challenges exist in making teaching an attractive profession and, therefore, in recruiting teachers in those jurisdictions.

As a country, we are not alone in wrestling with the availability of teachers, but we must take the steps that we can take—which we are taking—to have diverse routes into teaching that will encourage people into the profession. That will strengthen availability in the system and enable a more stable approach to be taken to the delivery of education.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I will pick up Johann Lamont's point. Given the time limitations of the one-year PGDE course, should there be much more focus on continuing professional development for early career teachers in order to retain them within the profession? What are your thoughts on that?

11:00

John Swinney: There has to be a constant focus on CPD to enhance learning and teaching in our schools. We discussed various issues at the international summit on the teaching profession,

which is attended by the Government and our trade unions, and we have to agree joint measures to pursue as a consequence. The provision of continuing professional learning and development is one of the important measures that we agreed with the Educational Institute of Scotland, the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association and the Association of Heads and Deputies in Scotland. Our trade unions will be participants in that process, enabling us to enhance continuing learning and development.

Tavish Scott: I have a couple of questions. The first is on online security for children and young people—a subject that we rehearsed in the chamber some weeks ago. I am grateful for the response that we received on the subject.

Is it possible for you to give the committee an update on how that work is going to fit in? I was taken with the evidence that the principal of Moray House school of education gave a couple of weeks back—she said that it had to be squeezed into everything else.

You have made much of literacy and numeracy, and more will clearly be happening in those areas. However, we cannot have probationers going into classrooms without a full understanding of the dangers of going online, given the fact that, as you rightly said, the world is changing around us. How can space be found for that kind of education?

John Swinney: We must ensure that, in initial teacher education, we cover the bases that are relevant to teachers exercising their responsibilities in the classroom. There is a lot of ground to cover. The challenge will be in ensuring that the key elements are covered in initial teacher education. If necessary, that education could be supplemented using the type of approach that Clare Haughey spoke about, which would involve continuing professional development for individuals once they were in the teaching profession.

Tavish Scott: That suggests that the matter would be addressed once they were in schools.

John Swinney: No—initial teacher education must cover all bases, but it might not have to cover absolutely everything that one might need to know, and continuing professional development has a role in enhancing teachers' capability and knowledge.

Tavish Scott: I accept that, but it is slightly worrying that the committee found out, from teachers and trainee teachers themselves in previous evidence sessions, that they are getting no training in online security at the moment.

John Swinney: That has to be reflected in initial teacher education.

Tavish Scott: Okay—thank you.

One of my colleagues talked about pressure and workload. Linda Robertson, a teacher, gave evidence to us the other week and spoke about computing in response to points that Johann Lamont raised. She said that the changes to N5 were correct and that it was good that they had taken place but that they happened late in the year, with three weeks to go before the start of the new year. She said:

“Basically, we were just told what the changes were ... The SQA is not interested in a dialogue.”—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee, 10 May 2017; c 35.*]

I was pretty concerned about that.

We have rehearsed in the committee, time and again, the need for the SQA and Education Scotland to be a heck of a lot more responsive to workload pressures. That comment from a teacher at the grass roots rather suggested that you or the system introduced a change that, although many of us support it, took place too late in the year and was just walloped into classrooms, as usual—there was no change there.

John Swinney: If people wanted N5 units to be removed and they were removed, they got what they wished for. There were then consequences of that.

Tavish Scott: With three weeks to go?

John Swinney: Three weeks to go until what?

Tavish Scott: The start of the new academic year for fifth-year pupils. My son is about to start sixth year, so I know about this as a parent.

John Swinney: The changes to the assessment arrangements will have implications for the coursework assessment and the final examination, but they do not change the course content.

Tavish Scott: Well—

John Swinney: No, they do not, Mr Scott. They do not change the course content—that point must be understood. I have sought reassurance from the SQA on that point. I understand that the course content has been changed in biology in that material has been removed from the course but, in general, course content has not changed. I appreciate that the stuff came out three weeks before the start of the new year—the bit before the summer holidays—but the course content was not changing; what was changing was the balance of assessment. That is a really important distinction. It is not a pedantic point; it is a fundamental point that has been missed in this discussion.

Tavish Scott: In that case, why did Linda Robertson say:

“Basically, we were just told what the changes were ... The SQA is not interested in a dialogue?”—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee, 10 May 2017; c 35.*]

I am not making this up; I am quoting what she said.

John Swinney: There was a requirement from the assessment and national qualifications group, which was supported by the trade unions in this country. They wanted the unit assessments to be removed for 2017-18, and the SQA cannot move any faster when it has an exam diet to preside over. When it is a question of doing stuff as quickly as that, ideally, the SQA would ask me for more time. Everyone wants more time. However, the professional associations wanted unit assessments to be removed in 2017-18—that was the demand. I have fulfilled that demand and people have to accept the consequences of it.

The Convener: I think that we have veered off course a wee bit. Ruth Maguire is next.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I would like to explore initial teacher education a bit more, and specifically the placements. The committee heard varying evidence of people's experience of placements. Some of that evidence was about the administration of placements and when people were told where they were going to go.

What concerned me was the quality of the experience that students were having in different schools, sometimes within the same local authority. There seemed to be evidence that some of that was down to the good will of individual mentors. I am interested in your reflections on how local authorities ensure that mentors for school placements have the required time and skill to support our student teachers and make sure that the placement is a valuable experience for them, because that is the responsibility of local authorities—the buck stops with them.

John Swinney: The placement element of initial teacher education is a fundamental part of how teachers acquire the skills that they require to participate in the profession. It is also a substantial part of the professional role of teachers to convey their experience and knowledge to aspiring teachers.

It is in everybody's interests for student placements to be worthwhile and valuable experiences that enhance the opportunity for the aspiring teachers and provide experienced teachers with the opportunity not only to convey their expertise and knowledge to individuals but to learn from some of the work that is undertaken with new teachers. That interaction is a fundamental part of the effectiveness of the student placement system. It is also an opportunity for us to provide some of the CPD that Clare Haughey talked about, which enhances the profession.

The process must operate seamlessly. The GTCS, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland and the universities need to jointly review the system and take action to improve the process to ensure that individuals get as much clarity, notice and awareness as possible regarding where they are going for their placements, because it is important that people get that information timeously.

Placements are a core element of our professional approach—they are an essential component of our approach to initial teacher education—but they must be delivered in a fashion that meets the needs of everybody involved. Student placements also provide additional expertise in schools to help us to deliver the curriculum, which is obviously beneficial.

Ruth Maguire: It was suggested that it might be appropriate to have some sort of service level agreement between the local authorities and the universities. Do you have any thoughts on that?

John Swinney: Whether we call it a service level agreement or a bit of joint working, it is in everybody's interests that student teachers are able to fulfil their placements in the education system, that they do so timeously and effectively and that, as a consequence, they make their contribution to the system. The onus is on everybody to make sure that the system works; it is not something that just needs the local authorities or the universities to do something different. We must focus on the students' interests and ensure that all the arrangements are in place to meet their needs and provide opportunities.

Ruth Maguire: Thank you.

The Convener: Johann Lamont has a short supplementary question.

Johann Lamont: It is about mentors. You have said that it is in everybody's interests for the system to work. We have heard in evidence that people who are already under pressure are being asked to be mentors and that they are finding it very difficult to fulfil that role, not out of any sense of hostility to the students, but simply because of their own pressures. Is any consideration being given to finding a way of recognising the role, either through remuneration or time, to ensure that schools can deliver for students in a real way, instead of students having somebody who is theoretically mentoring them but is actually already under the pressures that I described earlier and is unable to do that job? It is fundamentally important for students and new teachers to have effective mentoring.

John Swinney: Our schools are—and always have been—busy places, with a lot going on. What we have to try to tackle is stuff that is unnecessary and which is not actually central to the learning

and teaching experience. That was the guidance that I gave to the profession last August. Actually, I asked not just the profession but the bureaucracy of education—local authorities, Education Scotland and the SQA—to look carefully and hard at that to try to ensure that we minimise the burdens that are placed on people so that we can ensure that all the core elements of education can be fulfilled.

I would judge the student placement system on its successful operation as one of the core elements of our education system, because it is how new, aspiring teachers acquire a lot of their classroom experience and expertise. We have to tackle the issue by trying to address the wider issues of congestion in the classroom and the education environment. As I have said to the committee on a number of occasions, that is at the heart of the agenda that I am taking forward.

Johann Lamont: On the point about burdens, I get the importance of reducing bureaucracy and stripping out some of the unnecessary elements, assessments and so on, but we hear anecdotally—again, I would compare the position with my time in teaching—that some of the burdens on the teaching profession are administrative tasks that were previously done by a school auxiliary or a member of support or admin staff. Many of those posts have now gone, and teachers report that they spend a lot of time doing that work, which in my view is not core to their job.

How can we ensure that there is proper investment in local authorities to allow them to provide that support, which reduces the burdens on teachers and allows them to concentrate on their core work? It is not unnecessary stuff—it is photocopying or whatever. I wonder whether you have looked at that.

John Swinney: As part of my focus on workload, I certainly want to ensure that teachers are—these are the words that I have used—liberated to concentrate on learning and teaching. That needs to be at the top of their priorities, and I want the system to reflect that as well. The onus is on local authorities to support schools and equip them with the resources that enable teachers to concentrate on that process of learning and teaching, with tasks that do not need to be undertaken by teachers being undertaken—if they are necessary—by others in the school environment.

Johann Lamont: Why are we in a position where teachers are reporting that they are doing jobs that 10, 15 or 20 years ago were being done by support staff? How do we address that? You have said that local authorities should make sure that schools have the resources, but I assume that local authorities, like everybody in this room, are

committed to delivering education. How do we ensure that they have the means to do that? This is about not just teacher workforce planning, but workforce planning in education more generally.

John Swinney: As Johann Lamont knows, local authorities are responsible for the delivery of education in our communities. I do not make those decisions.

Johann Lamont: You make big decisions about the financing of local authorities.

John Swinney: Local authorities have been well supported financially by the Government, given the resources available to the Scottish Government in the periods of austerity.

11:15

The Convener: I accept that there is an election next week, but let us get back to talking solely about workforce planning.

Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con): In oral and written evidence to the committee on this issue, we have heard about the challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers in the north-east and north of Scotland and the measures that local authorities such as Moray, Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire are taking to address that situation. We have also heard from trainee teachers about the natural bias and gravitation towards the central belt when taking a position. Laurence Findlay from Moray said that it was important that local authorities did not try to outbid one another in local schemes to attract trainee teachers to the area; indeed, I have seen an element of that when Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire have been desperate to get people.

Laurence Findlay suggested that a national scheme tied in with local delivery could help. Is the Scottish Government looking at how we might incentivise those who have gone through teacher training, particularly in the central belt, to come to those areas where we have a lot of vacancies?

John Swinney: If I read Mr Findlay's evidence correctly, I thought that he was arguing for local authorities to have even more scope to take local decisions. I do not follow how a national scheme would help support local priority.

Ross Thomson: In answer to my question, Mr Findlay said that local knowledge was important in the local scheme, but he also said that it was important that local authorities did not outbid one another with golden hellos, for example, or by giving the most money or the better package. He said that he would welcome a national scheme, not to overrule or militate against what was happening locally but to support it and prevent competition.

John Swinney: I venture to suggest that there is a contradiction between those two points of view. How can a national scheme do anything other than overrule a local scheme, if the problem is local competition between two authorities outbidding each other? I do not understand the logic behind that.

Ross Thomson: I am referring to evidence that Mr Findlay gave to the committee—

John Swinney: I am simply saying that I do not understand it.

Ross Thomson: He suggested a national scheme.

John Swinney: I am simply making the point that, if the purpose of a national scheme is to avoid local authorities outbidding one another, and its effect is to stop that local variation, we will have overruled what happens locally. I do not understand how that could be done.

Ross Thomson: Have you done any work on what local authorities are doing and whether such competition is taking place?

John Swinney: We obviously work with local authorities to try to ensure that they have an adequate range of skilled professionals to meet their teaching needs. I am acutely aware of and welcome the work of the northern alliance in facilitating co-operation in that respect, and it is something that I support.

I come back to Johann Lamont's point about the profile of people who might wish to enter the teaching profession from rural localities. We have to be adaptable and ensure that our teacher training system addresses the desires and aspirations of those individuals wishing to enter the profession who are entrenched in a part of rural Scotland and do not want to live elsewhere. To put it bluntly, not everyone has to come to Glasgow or Edinburgh; they can do teacher training in other parts of the country. The University of the Highlands and Islands is taking forward a number of those measures through distance learning. There are certainly ways in which we can provide the necessary assistance to local authorities to advance some of that agenda.

Ross Thomson: Thank you for that answer, cabinet secretary.

When you talked in your opening statement about those new routes into education, you called the recruitment campaigns a central plank of the Scottish Government's efforts. In February 2016, the transition training fund was announced in Aberdeen, and *The Press and Journal*, the BBC and others were told that the fund

“will lead to more high-quality, passionate teachers in the area.”

However, according to the most recent figures from Aberdeen, three of the five trainees who went through the programme dropped out—two of them returned to the oil and gas sector—and two will shortly be starting teaching at Hazlehead academy. Given that the scheme was meant to help plug the hundreds of vacancies across the city and shire, do you think that the transition training fund has been a failure in relation to teaching?

John Swinney: It has certainly been an attempt by the Government to provide those who lost their employment in the oil and gas sector with a route to finding a different career, if they so wished. As a result, I do not agree with your suggestion. It is important that the Government tries to be helpful to local authorities; indeed, that is just what you asked me to do earlier, Mr Thomson. The Government has been helpful to the north-east of Scotland, has put the resources in place and has tried to be helpful to oil and gas workers who have faced hard times.

Ross Thomson: Last week, we heard a view from one of our witnesses that the scheme had not been successful. Moreover, constituents have got in touch with us to say that some of the issues with accessing the scheme have been about funding, and there have been press reports to that effect. Cabinet secretary, will you think about reviewing how the scheme has worked, particularly since local authorities are still waiting to hear whether it will be continued? While you are waiting to make that decision, will you consider the issues that have arisen and what changes can be made to make the scheme more accessible, to remove the barriers and to ensure that we get people into teaching and fill these vacancies?

John Swinney: I am happy to consider how we can encourage more people to use this device. People asked for the scheme, the Government put it in place and I want to ensure that people can use those opportunities.

Gillian Martin: Might the rhetoric around teaching, which I mentioned earlier, be a way of encouraging more people to access the transition training scheme? I also understand that the scheme is designed to get oil and gas workers not just into teaching alone, but into any other sectors that need to recruit.

John Swinney: On the rhetoric around teaching, if the narrative could change in that respect, that would be helpful.

The Convener: Members will correct me if I am wrong, but I think that one of the witnesses said that they thought that the teaching aspect of the scheme was unsuccessful because the workers who came from the oil and gas industry had not realised what teaching involved and that, once

they got involved in it, they thought that it was too much for them.

John Swinney: That might be the case. To go back to some of the points that Daniel Johnson made to me earlier, I think that one of the reasons why some people do not continue with a career in teaching is that they do not find it what they expected it to be, so they make a different choice. People are entitled to make those choices if they so wish.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): In your opening remarks, you touched on the issue of additional support needs. We have consistently heard not just in the evidence that we have gathered for this particular area of work but from speaking for the past year to newly qualified teachers and students as well as teachers who have been in the profession for some time about teachers' lack of confidence in that regard, and the fact that they do not feel able to fully support young people with additional support needs. That is partly due to initial teacher education, which I will ask about in a moment, but do you recognise that it is also, in part, due to the loss of specialist support staff, which means that new teachers are entering the classroom without the specialist staff who, previously, would have been with them to support young people with additional support needs?

John Swinney: It is important to consider the context around this point. The most important issue and key point is that, if the system is making a judgment that a young person with additional support needs can be educated in a mainstream setting, we have to make sure that the right support and resources are in place to enable that to be the case.

I have seen the evidence that the committee has taken on additional support needs. As the committee knows—I have written to the convener to this effect—I planned to issue a consultation on new guidance on mainstreaming, and I committed to doing that on 19 May. However, I have paused that work until I see what the committee reports on the subject, and I will reflect on it before I issue the consultation. Every young person who has additional support needs must have the support that they require available to them in whatever educational setting. That is the key test. If we decide that a young person's needs can be met in a mainstream setting, we have to make sure that the support is in place, but if we decide that that young person's needs have to be met through specialist provision, that has to be put in place, too.

Fundamentally, I come back to the point that a judgment has to be arrived at whether the young person's needs can be met in a mainstream setting and, if so, what intervention is required to

make that the case and therefore to make it possible for a teacher to support that young person and the other young people whom they are responsible for educating in the classroom setting.

Ross Greer: I accept that. I hope that the presumption on mainstreaming, which is an important inclusive principle, is not damaged simply because of resource pressures on schools. I hope that decisions not to educate young people inclusively are not being made because of the reality of staff cuts.

To go back to the point about newly qualified teachers—

John Swinney: Can I just interrupt there? What I said in my answer, which I think is the same point as Mr Greer is making, is that, fundamentally, I am a believer in the principle of mainstreaming, but if we are going to make a judgment that a young person can be educated in a mainstream setting, the resources must be in place to do that. When a young person is educated in special educational provision, the cost is likely to be greater than if they were in a mainstream setting. However, I am concerned about whether the young person can be fulfilled, and that cannot happen unless they are properly supported. That is the point that I am trying to get across.

Ross Greer: I absolutely agree. Education is, rightly, young person centred. However, going back to the point about the teacher, do you recognise that there is a confidence issue among newly qualified teachers, who are expected to do more to directly support young people in a more specialised way than their predecessors were, simply because the additional specialist staff are not there? Do you accept that that confidence issue among teachers is having a range of effects, including on retention, which was discussed earlier?

John Swinney: There are two separate issues. I do not doubt that a new teacher who comes into the classroom and who has not worked with a young person with additional support needs before will lack confidence in their ability to handle that situation. That is natural, because the situation is unfamiliar and the teacher will not know their way around it. I do not doubt that factor.

However, I come back to the point that I was labouring in my earlier answers: however lacking in confidence the teacher might feel, they must be able to rely on the right support being in place for the young person to ensure that their needs are met. This is not just about the confidence issue for teachers. Some of that confidence issue will be mitigated if the right support is in place to assist them in what they are trying to do.

Ross Greer: I absolutely agree with that.

On initial teacher education, you mentioned in your opening statement your proposal to meet with the GTCS and deans of education. Will you outline in a bit more detail your objective in relation to consistency between courses? That inconsistency, specifically in relation to additional support needs, came out strongly in the evidence.

John Swinney: I want to be assured that due account is being taken of the essential ingredients in initial teacher education and that they are being properly provided. From looking at the data, I find the range on some of those attributes to be so broad that it raises questions in my mind whether all of the provision is as consistent as it needs to be. There might be a good explanation for that, but I just feel that the range requires explanation and examination.

11:30

Ross Greer: Is it an area that the GTCS should be taking the lead on if it is strengthening its guidance?

John Swinney: In essence, the GTCS signs off the initial teacher education propositions from each school of education. Yesterday, for example, it signed off two new courses at the University of the West of Scotland that take forward new opportunities in initial teacher education. The GTCS certificated those and made that announcement yesterday. It is a combination of the universities formulating courses that meet the needs of student teachers and the GTCS validating and accrediting those courses.

Ross Greer: Thank you.

The Convener: Daniel Johnson has a very short supplementary question.

Daniel Johnson: On the cabinet secretary's last point about accreditation and evaluation, it has been flagged up to us that although the GTCS is responsible for accreditation Education Scotland does the inspection. Will that be considered as part of your governance review? Do you think that there is a question about the relation between the accreditation and inspection regimes?

John Swinney: In short, yes. However, a complicated set of arrangements is involved, because the universities are, as Liz Smith will tell me, autonomous bodies and therefore free to decide their course content. However, I think that we have a legitimate right to feel confident that what is being provided is appropriate for our requirements.

The Convener: You talked earlier about the teaching makes people campaign. Its website has been receiving quite a number of visits and has had positive reviews. How do you encourage

those people who have shown an interest to go into teaching?

John Swinney: Essentially, we are using the campaign to tackle the issues that Gillian Martin raised earlier around people's views of the teaching profession, how to interest them in it and how to motivate more people to decide to enter the profession. In 2015-16, the campaign that we launched contributed to a 19 per cent increase in the number of university graduates entering postgraduate teacher education courses in Scotland. I am not trying to say that the campaign was the only factor in that increase, but it contributed to it.

Obviously, we look to encourage and motivate people to participate in the profession. The campaign has made initial contacts at recruitment fairs; I attended a fair at the University of Glasgow, where at its very energetic stall the campaign was trying to encourage people to participate in the profession. Obviously, we follow up any contacts that are made and try to encourage young people to take their interest to one of the participating education institutions.

The Convener: The follow-up aspect was the one that I was interested in.

Thank you very much, cabinet secretary, for your time and your answers. I close the public session of the meeting.

11:33

Meeting continued in private until 11:59.

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