



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 17 April 2012

Session 4

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**EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE**

**11<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2012, Session 4**

**CONVENER**

\*Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

\*Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)

\*Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)

\*Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)

\*Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD)

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

\*Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Angela Constance (Minister for Youth Employment)

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab) (Committee Substitute)

Hugh McAloon (Scottish Government)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Terry Shevlin

**LOCATION**

Committee Room 6



## Scottish Parliament

### Education and Culture Committee

*Tuesday 17 April 2012*

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

#### Youth Employment

**The Convener (Stewart Maxwell):** Good morning and welcome to the 11th meeting in 2012 of the Education and Culture Committee. I remind members and those in the public gallery to ensure that all electronic devices, particularly mobile phones, are switched off at all times. Do not put them to silent, because they will still interfere with the sound system.

We have an apology from Neil Findlay. I am glad to see that Hanzala Malik is here as his substitute—welcome, Hanzala.

Our first item of business is evidence from the Minister for Youth Employment, Angela Constance, on the Scottish Government's youth employment strategy. I welcome to the committee Angela Constance and Hugh McAloon, head of youth employability and skills at the Scottish Government.

I do not think that I have had the opportunity to welcome you formally to your new post, minister, so I do that now, although it is not so new now that you have been in it for a couple of months. I invite you to make an opening statement.

**The Minister for Youth Employment (Angela Constance):** Thank you. I am grateful for the opportunity to attend the committee to outline my priorities as the first-ever dedicated minister for youth employment anywhere in these isles. This is an ideal opportunity for me to engage with the committee and to hear its members' views, particularly before we finalise the youth employment strategy, which is still in draft form.

I have always been clear that the youth employment portfolio provides an opportunity to bridge the gap between the world of education and the world of work, particularly for those who are experiencing a period of unemployment. Like many employers across Scotland, the Scottish Government is working to provide opportunities for young people through the apprenticeship programme and other training programmes. We encourage other employers to do likewise.

At a strategic level, through our investment in post-16 education and training, we are focused on ensuring that our young people have the right skills to help them succeed in the world of work.

We can also encourage employers of all sizes in all sectors in all parts of Scotland to consider young people when they are recruiting. We can ensure that every part of Government regards addressing youth unemployment as a fundamental part of its core business. Youth unemployment sits out there on the periphery, but it must be at the heart of the Government and of everything that we do. The Government also wants to ensure that we are working with everybody in the public, private and third sectors who can make a difference for our young people.

That is very much what was laid out in the draft youth employment strategy that was published at the end of January. In essence, the strategy highlights what we are doing in post-16 education and training; outlines how we will achieve a whole-Government approach; and demonstrates our commitment to work with employers, local authorities, the United Kingdom Government and the third sector.

Let me give examples of how I work with other ministers. I work with Alex Neil on maximising opportunities from public infrastructure investment and procurement; I work with Richard Lochhead on rural skills issues; and I work with Shona Robison on securing strong employability benefits for young people from major sporting events. Those are just some examples of partnership working across Government that I will continue to pursue in the weeks and months ahead.

The strategy lays out in broad terms the changing nature of the cohort of unemployed youth since the start of the recession. We have a significant number of young people who face complex barriers to employment, but we also have a group who, in better times, would undoubtedly have found work and have had much better prospects.

We have to ensure that we continue to support those who are furthest away from the labour market to re-engage in learning and training. At the same time, we have to work to ensure that those young people closer to the labour market do not move into long-term unemployment.

Through the opportunities for all programme, the Scottish Government has committed to ensuring that every 16 to 19-year-old who is not in work, a modern apprenticeship or education will be offered a place in education or training. That means that there will be support for those who are at risk of disengaging and for those who have already become disengaged. It also means that there will be a much greater focus within the post-16 education system on meeting the needs of those young people. Opportunities for all is now live, and will become operational over the next financial year.

I will give a quick run-down of the funding announcements that I have made to date. The sum of £1.5 million has been allocated to employer recruitment incentives and the provision of additional flexible support for those who face the greatest barriers, which should assist up to 1,000 young people over three years; £6 million has been allocated to support a continuation of the community jobs Scotland initiative; there is a £2.5 million challenge fund to support our social enterprises and specialist third sector; and £9 million has been awarded to six local authorities in 2012-13 to help them to tackle youth unemployment. Those council areas—Glasgow, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, North Ayrshire, East Ayrshire and Renfrewshire—have been identified by the Scottish Government as having high youth unemployment rates and large numbers of young people.

As members will already be aware, we have a number of policies that support young people to progress towards the labour market. We have established a target of 25,000 modern apprenticeship opportunities in every year of this parliamentary session. I am sure that the committee was pleased to hear, prior to recess, that we have achieved that target for 2011-12. We continue to prioritise young people within colleges. We are reducing debt through our policy of having no fees for students who come from Scotland. We are working with local authorities on activity agreements for those who are most at risk of disengagement. We are maintaining educational maintenance allowances. Finally, we are working towards a minimum income for higher education students of £7,000, starting with students from the lowest income families.

Ultimately, the issue of youth employment must be a core priority for all parts of Government and all parts of our society, and the draft strategy outlines the breadth of the approach that we need to take.

I am happy to answer any questions on the draft strategy and on the Government's approach to improving youth employment.

**The Convener:** Thank you for that comprehensive statement.

I will start by asking a general question. I am not being cheeky but given that, as you said, the issue of youth employment is at the core of all ministers' responsibilities and at the heart of Government, what additional value does a minister with responsibility for youth employment bring to the work that was already being carried out by those ministers?

**Angela Constance:** I bring a renewed focus on the work that already exists and on what further work can be done. I like to think of myself as the

glue in Cabinet—a go-between for various portfolios. I sometimes think of myself as a customer and am always looking at other ministers' portfolios, policies, legislation and budget decisions with an eye to things that could be included that would benefit young unemployed Scots.

The other significant thing about my post is that I report directly to both John Swinney and Michael Russell, which means that there are opportunities to further improve the connectivity between the world of education and the world of work.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Can you give us an idea of the criteria that the Scottish Government used to determine where best to put limited resources? You said that £9 million will be diverted to six local authorities. Why did you opt for such an approach, in the context of requests from colleges for greater budgets? What criteria have you used to measure the effectiveness of your policies?

**Angela Constance:** It has always been clear to me that, although an additional £30 million to support my portfolio is welcome, the bigger challenge is what we do with our core resource—the bigger resource across local government, national Government and the third sector. It is right and understandable that people focus on the criteria for allocating additional funding when it becomes available, but at the heart of post-16 education reform is what we do with the £500 million that goes on the college sector every year and how we can maximise opportunities and outcomes for our young people.

Of the £30 million, £18 million is available for the forthcoming financial year. I was keen to take a balanced approach. As you mentioned, £9 million is targeted at six local authorities. The methodology in that regard is robust and quite simple. The six local authorities are in the top 10 on claimant count and in the top 10 on numbers of young unemployed Scots—the areas are local and national hotspots.

Other funding is not targeted in the same way. The community jobs Scotland initiative obviously applies throughout Scotland. We are working on the criteria in relation to the social enterprise challenge fund. It is important that we strike a balance between the urban, the nationwide and the rural aspects of youth unemployment.

**Liz Smith:** You said that you considered claimant count, which is standard practice in employment policy. Did you base your assessment of where the greatest need is on quantitative measures in economic surveys and feedback, or did you decide your priorities on the basis of more anecdotal evidence from councils and employers?

**Angela Constance:** Decisions about targeting resources invariably mean that some people will get the resource and some will not. We did not base our decision on anecdotal evidence and feedback. The methodology for the strand of funding that you asked about enabled us unashamedly to target the resource at areas where the rate of youth unemployment is high and where the numbers of unemployed young people are large.

**Liz Smith:** You largely used a quantitative measure.

**Angela Constance:** Yes, with regard to that funding stream.

**Liz Smith:** What about other funding streams?

**Angela Constance:** Community jobs Scotland is a nationwide initiative, and we are finalising the criteria for the social enterprise challenge fund.

Some funding is targeted at sectors. The example that I am thinking of is the announcement on the work that Shona Robison and I will do around the Commonwealth games and other major sporting events, on sports-related modern apprenticeships and legacy-related sectors, such as hospitality. We will not do the same thing with every funding stream.

**Liz Smith:** I was not asking about that. I am interested in the criteria by which you decide whether something is going to be effective. Obviously, you are in a difficult position with limited resources, but those limited resources have to be spent well. I am interested in the criteria that you use to decide where the focus should be. Perhaps more important, how are you going to measure the effectiveness of the youth employment strategy in one or two years' time? I am trying to get at those criteria.

10:15

**Angela Constance:** In broad terms, we are looking to add value and to work with organisations that have a proven track record. In terms of the information that we gather, we want to bore down into the effectiveness of our policies, whether modern apprenticeships, activity agreements or opportunities for all.

**Liz Smith:** You mentioned that you are responsible to John Swinney and Michael Russell. In a previous evidence session, the Federation of Small Businesses said that there is a "yawning" gap between employment and education. Party politics aside, that must be taken seriously. How do you see things working better so that we no longer have a yawning gap, but bring the worlds of work and education closer together?

**Angela Constance:** I am not sure that I accept that there is a yawning gap, although I accept that there is more to be done throughout the education system. Obviously, the older children get, the more focus there is on employment and their future careers. We have to focus on improving young people's employability and the skills around that. There is a huge spectrum of activity. As I am a former children's minister, you will not be surprised when I mention that what we do in the early years with very young children is the foundation of much of what is done through the determined to succeed strategy on enterprise in primary and secondary schools. We can build on that in the senior phase with more personalisation of education.

Locally, I would like to see more coherent and consistent collaboration across education, involving secondary schools, colleges and so on. Some higher education institutions include a work placement as part of an accredited course. Such things are a move in the right direction, but undoubtedly there is more to be done.

I am all for education for education's sake. Learning never goes amiss, but ultimately we encourage our young people to stick in at school and get a good education because we believe that that improves their employment prospects.

We need a far sharper focus. I have been to events such as the shaping my future event in Renfrewshire, where many large and small local employers spoke to secondary 2 pupils, prior to the pupils making choices about their future course of studies. There is a huge spectrum of activity, but, undoubtedly, we need to be smarter and more focused.

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** You previously referred to youth unemployment as "endemic". Do you believe that there is a youth unemployment crisis in Scotland?

**Angela Constance:** I believe that we need to be in this for the long haul.

I often give the example that when all-age unemployment was at 4 per cent, youth unemployment was at 14 per cent. Although 44,000 young unemployed Scots today are young people with reasonable qualifications who are out of work largely because of the economic downturn, around 20,000 young Scots from disadvantaged backgrounds face considerable barriers to getting into work. Some youth unemployment will be resolved when the economy picks up, but—this will come as no surprise to Mr Bibby—we need to get the economy moving to get economic growth, and there were lost opportunities in the recent UK budget. However, youth unemployment is always two and a half to three times higher than all-age unemployment, so,

although the numbers may be smaller, it is always an issue that we need to tackle through long-term action. Some unemployment is structural, if you like, and some is more variable depending on what is happening in the economy at any given time.

**Neil Bibby:** I agree that the economic downturn will have had a massive impact on youth unemployment levels not only throughout Scotland, but throughout Britain—it has affected the whole of the UK and many countries around the world. If the economic downturn has affected the whole of the UK, why do you think that youth unemployment has risen more in Scotland?

**Angela Constance:** The Scottish figures are higher than the UK figures just now, but that has not always been the case. Comparisons with the UK are interesting and informative in terms of context. For example, more of our young unemployed people are also full-time students. However, I am a pragmatist, and I think that we should all accept that youth unemployment is way too high. We just need to roll up our sleeves and get on with trying to address it.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** Good morning, minister. You talked earlier about being the glue in the Cabinet. Have you identified areas in which there is a degree of duplication in what different departments or agencies have been doing? If so, what steps have you taken to reduce that duplication and ensure that, as Liz Smith mentioned, we are getting the maximum value for both the core and the additional resources that we are putting in?

**Angela Constance:** Some people might suggest that, as well as being the glue between portfolios, I am a bit of a pest—in a positive sense.

**The Convener:** Never, minister.

**Angela Constance:** I have been called worse, convener.

In terms of a whole-Government approach, it is about cranking up activity in every portfolio, ensuring that there is an absolute focus on young people and seeing it as core business for everybody. Back in my days as the Minister for Children and Young People, we used to say, “It’s everybody’s job to make sure I’m alright”, and it is everybody’s job to make sure that our young people get the best start to their working lives. There is a huge appetite for that across the Scottish Government, as there is in the business community and—as you would expect—in local authorities and social enterprises.

We are always vigilant about duplication. Resources are precious and we cannot afford duplication, so we must ensure that all our efforts

are complementary. I do not know whether Mr McArthur had anything particular in mind.

**Liam McArthur:** Because of the priority that everybody attaches to the issue in the public sector, across the parties, within the business community and at the local authority level, there is a risk that, with the best of motives—everybody is trying to do what they can—people are doing similar things and we are not getting best value from the resources that everyone is spending.

**Angela Constance:** That is an area to be hypervigilant about. For example, although I have views about what the Scottish Government’s responsibility should be, whether I like it or not the Department for Work and Pensions has responsibilities and resources that the Scottish Government does not control. Until that changes, I must ensure that the Scottish Government does not duplicate any DWP provision. That is a cogent example.

**Liam McArthur:** In the past, I have probably made a bit of a pest of myself in highlighting the youth contract initiative. I was pleased that you talked in your introduction about collaborative work with a range of partners, including the UK Government. You talked about some of your work with Shona Robison, Richard Lochhead and Alex Neil. Will you give examples of the work that you are doing with the UK Government to highlight the youth contract initiative to employers in Scotland?

**Angela Constance:** Day to day, the best grass-roots example is the collaboration between Jobcentre Plus and Skills Development Scotland, which in many places are co-located. I have spoken twice to Richard Cornish, who was comparatively recently appointed as the head of Jobcentre Plus, and I will have an in-depth meeting with him soon. I think that I have a phone call with a UK Government minister this week.

There will always be political differences on the constitution but, leaving politics aside, having skills devolved and employability reserved does not make much sense pragmatically. In the interests of young people, there is a willingness to get on with the day-to-day job.

**Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Good morning, minister. On the Scottish Government’s approach to employers, you say in the strategy that you may work with large employers with a view to them taking on people for work experience or apprenticeships. The UK Government recently had a bit of a disaster in working with large employers; it did not get it right. Does that have lessons for us? How will we do it differently?

**Angela Constance:** The strategy reflects the need to work with large and small employers. The attraction of working with large employers is that



they are easy to identify and have a larger workforce, so they can provide more opportunities. However, working with small employers is equally important, given that the vast majority of employers are small and medium-sized enterprises.

It is more challenging to work with very small businesses, because those involved often have to be a Jack-of-all-trades. I know, as someone who is married to someone who runs his own business, that it is not really a Monday to Friday, 9-to-5 job—it is an all-consuming affair. There are additional barriers to engaging effectively with small businesses.

John Swinney commenced the work on BASES—better alignment of Scotland's employability services—before I was appointed. Some of that is about hiding the hard-wiring of public sector offers and organisations, to try to make it easier to think of employers as customers we should serve, as well as our young people. Certainly, Skills Development Scotland, which has always had to engage with employers, has an increased focus on how to communicate better with them. We want to move towards having one contact and one phone number for employers, whether they are from Edinburgh or West Lothian, so that they can be put in touch through DWP provision or through Skills Development Scotland with a young person to whom they can offer a modern apprenticeship, work experience or whatever. We want to make it as easy as possible for employers in that regard, particularly small employers. There are undoubtedly challenges for someone running their own business, but such employers are a huge part of our economy and we must get our approach right.

10:30

**Jean Urquhart:** I agree with everything that you say about small employers. The small and medium-sized enterprises in Scotland are the largest group of employers. However, what about business organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses in Scotland? They have access to many small employers. Are you working to improve communication with them to make it easier for small employers to employ young people?

**Angela Constance:** Absolutely. We engage regularly with the FSB, the Confederation of British Industry and the chambers of commerce, which offer access to their membership. Following on from the national economic forum in February this year, we will undertake a series of regional events after the local council elections. Getting local employers to participate in those, along with local authorities, Skills Development Scotland and local Jobcentre Plus offices, will be key.

**Jean Urquhart:** You referred to working with the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment. I remember a debate in the chamber in which I think everybody agreed that, as a condition of getting development funding, new infrastructure projects could provide apprenticeships.

**Angela Constance:** Yes.

**Jean Urquhart:** I do not know how easy it is to do that, but are Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and other development organisations aware of that?

**Angela Constance:** The Government is committed to introducing a sustainable procurement bill later this year. I must ensure that young people are very much at the centre of that and that we are up front about that. Lots of good work goes on in procurement through community-benefit clauses. The evidence is that since John Swinney introduced guidelines on such clauses, there have been 1,500 targeted employment opportunities. Local authorities have very much woken up to the use of community-benefit clauses. The position may vary across the 32 local authorities, but there are obviously opportunities in that regard. There will also be opportunities from the review of community planning and new single outcome agreements after the council elections.

There is more that we can do on procurement, though. We have to regard it as a tool to squeeze out every last opportunity. Organisations such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise are important in that regard. The Scottish Enterprise board will consider approving this month its own youth employment plan. We would like to see other parts of the public sector having similar plans. We want people to put their heads above the parapet and say what they can and will do for young people.

**Jean Urquhart:** From the Highlands and Islands point of view, one of the industries that is predicted to do well this year is tourism. As recently as 10 years ago, somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000 jobs—albeit some of which were short term—used to be created. They were taken up by students or young folk from the central belt, because the Highlands and Islands simply does not have the workforce to service that need.

It seems that some stimulation—or at least encouragement—is needed for that to happen again. Many job applications currently come from outwith Scotland—in fact, from outwith Europe—and the number of people seeking to take up those jobs is decreasing at a time when it could be growing. Is there anything that we can do about that?

**Angela Constance:** Tourism is one of the bedrocks of the Scottish economy and, in that

context, the hospitality industry is vital. The issue that Jean Urquhart mentions is an example of where better connectivity between the world of work and the world of education would help. In key sectors, such connectivity would offer positive outcomes and opportunities to engage with young people at an earlier stage.

I am generalising, but young people are less attracted to going into some industries, such as the fishing industry, and that sometimes applies to the hospitality industry too. Employers have to cast quite a wide net to recruit. We have to get the balance right: young people will want to move to where the work opportunities are, which is a good thing—it is part of their working life experience—but we must support sustainable communities too.

**Liam McArthur:** On the target of 125,000 modern apprenticeships, that supply is very welcome, but demand is required to pull it through the system. Particularly given the current economic situation, how confident are you that there is such a demand from large employers down to SMEs to take on new employees and to upskill existing employees to the level that you are talking about?

**Angela Constance:** Undoubtedly, the employed status of the modern apprenticeship programme makes the target of 25,000 apprenticeships for every year in the current session of Parliament a challenging one. It is not an easy target to reach given the economic difficulties, but that employed status is crucial to the programme's success. We must listen to employers in particular sectors to ensure that we meet their needs. Some sectors have skills shortages, which can be addressed through skills investment plans—such as the one that was published last year for the energy sector—that focus on the skills needs of employers in a particular industry or sector and cast an eye to the future.

**Liam McArthur:** I appreciate that you are likely to hear a much louder voice from employers where there is felt to be an insufficient number of opportunities than you would if there were more opportunities than might be necessary. Are there any concerns at this stage from business groups or individual businesses that the figure of 25,000 per year significantly exceeds their needs, or is there confidence that that is pretty much where things need to be to encourage employers—whatever their size—to take apprentices on?

**Angela Constance:** From my experience of talking to employers, I think that it is recognised that the target of 25,000 modern apprenticeships each year is ambitious. However, employers' opinions differ widely between sectors, and we will try to resolve issues on a sector-by-sector basis. Joan McAlpine has a great interest in the

renewables industry and knows that it is important that we ensure that we have the right qualifications and modern apprenticeship opportunities to support where that sector will be going in the future.

In wider terms, at grass-roots level, the post-16 reforms are about ensuring that the provision of modern apprenticeships and college places is inherently connected to the world of work and to where the jobs are today and will be tomorrow.

**Liam McArthur:** In my constituency, there is a real appetite for taking on the role of training people whose existing skills need to be developed in a particular way in order to keep pace with developments in the renewables sector.

Earlier, you talked about the Scottish Government's efforts to play its part in creating apprenticeships. What proportion of the overall figure do you see being taken up by Government, its agencies and the public sector as opposed to being taken up by the private sector?

**Angela Constance:** I do not have precise figures for that to hand. The issue of private sector job opportunities goes back to macroeconomic policy, economic growth, the ability of small to medium-sized enterprises to get access to affordable finance and so on. In the public sector, we want to ensure that there is a policy focus on young people and that we are able to step up to the plate and provide more opportunities. The Scottish Government will play a role in that as an employer.

I cannot tell you the proportion of the Scottish Government workforce that is under 25, but I know that, last year, there was a commitment to provide 85 work-based opportunities for young people. That commitment has risen to 155. Some of that involves taking young people on work experience from the get ready for work programme, which has a training allowance attached to it. Some of it involves modern apprenticeships—the Scottish Government had a commitment to 15 modern apprenticeship posts last year, and that figure has now risen to 60. I am clear that the Scottish Government must lead the public sector by example.

A lot of local authorities have a long-standing historical commitment to the modern apprenticeship programme as well.

**Liam McArthur:** I appreciate that it is difficult for you to anticipate what private sector organisations or particular sectors will require in terms of their apprenticeship programmes, and I certainly welcome your restating of the Government's commitment to the part that it will play. However, there must have been some sense of the scale of the role that the Scottish Government and public agencies would play in delivering the target of

25,000 modern apprenticeships in each year of the Parliament. If you do not have the figures to hand, perhaps you could write to the committee with some of the detail of those assumptions.

10:45

**Angela Constance:** We set the 25,000 target with regard to what we had previously delivered. In 2011-12, we achieved 25,000 and in 2010-11, we achieved more than 21,000.

I am a big advocate and fan of our modern apprenticeship programme. However, young people are not all the same—they are not a homogenous group—and we need to have a range of provision to provide for young people depending on where they are in their journey towards employment.

Let me pick up on issues to do with the private sector. Scottish Enterprise's work with growth sectors is important, so the agency's youth employment plan is particularly important.

As a devolved Administration, we rightly focus on education and training, because those are within our power and our gift and we know that the longer that we keep young people in education and training, the better their long-term prospects. However, our approach to youth employment needs to be rooted not just in education and training and opportunities for all but in the economic narrative. Where we support and pursue economic growth, young people need to be part of the agenda, because there are talented young Scots who are unemployed but who could benefit and make a positive contribution to many businesses that are serious about growing. There is an economic proposition as well as a social policy proposition.

**The Convener:** Liam McArthur's question about the split between the public and private sectors was interesting. The UK Government said that, in a time of cutbacks in public sector employment, the private sector would take up the slack—I remember the phrase being used quite a lot. It would be useful to know the Government's view on what will happen in future years. It might be difficult to predict that, but I am sure that you can break down the figures for the public and private sectors in 2011-12. I am sure that that is feasible.

**Angela Constance:** I am sure that we can have a look at that. We know that we have met the 25,000 target, and we will have more detail at the end of the month on a range of issues, such as the age of modern apprentices and the sectors. We can dig away at that.

**The Convener:** The committee would be interested to see stats that show the breakdown by age, sector and so on.

**Angela Constance:** Does Hugh McAloon have a feel for the split between the public and private sectors in the past?

**Hugh McAloon (Scottish Government):** We can find the information for previous years. I think that the bulk were in the private sector. There are parts of the public sector in which volumes are a bit higher—if we think about the sort of things that the national health service and councils do, we can see that the numbers will be a bit higher in such frameworks than they might be for smaller-scale stuff. I expect the bulk to be in the private sector.

Mr McArthur asked whether we have enough employers. I have been working in the area for three years, during which we have set increasingly challenging targets, and more employers have come on board as the reputation of Scotland's apprenticeship programme has taken a grip around the place. SDS has worked hard to get more employers on board.

Every year at around this time, I guess that we ask the question that Mr McArthur asked. We ask ourselves, "Will we be able to do it this year?" Up to now, achieving our objectives has been reasonably comfortable. I think that there are two reasons for that. First, young people are keen to go for the apprenticeship programme, because they get training while they work. Secondly, and more important in the context of members' questions, employers are keen to engage in the programme, because it enables them to develop their workforce according to their industry standards and how they operate.

We have seen no sign of a shortage of employers as yet, despite experiencing some of the most challenging economic conditions that we have seen for years. We hope that employers in the numbers that we are looking at will continue to value the programme. We certainly do not take the issue lightly. SDS and others work hard to engage with employers. However, we have not got to December and thought, "We're running out of employers." That has not been an issue.

**Angela Constance:** The biggest frameworks—construction, hospitality, retail and tourism—are private sector industries. Social care is also a big framework, although some of that will be in the public sector.

**The Convener:** Mr McAloon, I am curious about what you said about reaching targets. You are pleased with the number of private sector employers who are coming forward. Is there any evidence—I hope that there is not—of displacement, whereby businesses are choosing to have a modern apprenticeship not as an extra job but as a job that they were going to create anyway, which they will now call a modern

apprenticeship? Is there evidence of that going on as opposed to additionality?

**Hugh McAloon:** If an employer were thinking of employing somebody anyway, they would have to go out and find the person and pay their wages. Whether or not the person was on an apprenticeship, that would still be the case. The additionality is the training that comes with the apprenticeship. If an employer is thinking of employing somebody anyway and decides to take them on as an apprentice, additionality will be built in from the start for both the employer and the young person. The young person will not be offered just an entry-level job with no training; they will be offered training that will benefit not just the business but the young person as they move on to their next employer and the next employer after that, because the training will be recognised across the sector.

The additionality follows the decision to take on an apprentice. An employer would not say, "I'm not going to take on an employee; I'll take on an apprentice instead," because they would still be taking on an employee. If we had a system in Scotland in which apprentices did not have to be employed, your question would be highly valid, but the additionality is built into the programme.

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** I apologise to the minister and the committee for my late arrival. I had not anticipated how bad the traffic was going to be in Glasgow.

Let us return to the question of meeting the target. The minister talked about the target being challenging, but it is encouraging that we are on track to meet the target this year. Given the recent economic indicators that suggest that the situation regarding vacancies is improving slightly, do you think that we are over the most challenging year? Have we met the greatest challenge, and might future years be somewhat easier?

**Angela Constance:** I would never be so foolish as to look into my crystal ball and make such predictions. The Government will deal with what comes our way. Nevertheless, we have met the target for 2011-12, which is great news and encouraging. I am aware of the surveys that show an increase in the number of vacancies in some areas, but I am not one for predictions, whether for the economy, elections or future prospects. We will just deal with what comes our way.

**Joan McAlpine:** That is probably wise. You referred earlier to our discussions on renewables and apprenticeships in renewables. I am grateful for the help that you have offered on that issue. We discussed the challenges that arise because occupational standards are set at a UK level. Can you say a little about the challenge of working with a Scottish level and a UK level? In a sense, you

were waiting for the UK authorities to write the occupational standards on which you based the courses.

**Angela Constance:** National occupational standards are written at a UK level, and I understand that that is what the industry wants. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills commissions and pays for that, with the skills sector bodies bidding into that process. For me, the issue is that, whatever the system is, it must be responsive to employers. I have had an initial conversation with Charlie Mayfield, the chair of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, and I will meet him again in the near future. Unlike me, he is from a business background but, like me, he is keen that the skills system should be responsive first and foremost to the needs of employers and that, when it is not responding fast enough, we should address the issue as pragmatically as we can.

**Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP):** When I compare modern apprenticeships with the other training schemes, in particular training for work and get ready for work, I am struck by two big contrasts that are indicated by the statistics that are collected to inform Government policy. First, there is a lack of follow-up information about positive destinations for modern apprenticeships, although we have the completion figures, which are very high. Secondly, the modern apprenticeship completion figures are much higher than the completion figures for the other two schemes.

Has any thought been given to the collection of information about people after they have finished their modern apprenticeships and to how we could raise to a similar level the completion rate for the other qualifications and training opportunities? Although there has been a huge expansion in the number of apprenticeships, there has not been the decline in the completion rate that a sceptic might have predicted but the reverse, as the completion figure has risen to 71 per cent. Is it possible to duplicate that figure in the other training schemes?

**Angela Constance:** It is good that the completion rate for the modern apprenticeship programme is at an all-time high of 71 per cent. However, we must seek continuous improvement. When we look at the situation framework by framework, we see that not all industries have a completion rate of 71 per cent. We could bore down into the detail to see whether we can improve the completion rate further.

We are in the early stages of looking at what opportunities there are for following up modern apprentices. It is difficult, because people are employed, to collate such information. I will ask Hugh McAloon to say a bit more about that.

You are right that there is scope to drive up the positive outcomes from the get ready for work and training for work schemes. A number of actions will follow from the making training work better review.

In general, opportunities for all will provide an opportunity to have a far better system for tracking and monitoring 16 to 19-year-olds. Intensive work goes into tracking the destinations of school leavers and we want to build on that for 16 to 19-year-olds through opportunities for all.

**Hugh McAloon:** The minister mentioned the making training work better review that we conducted at the end of last year. One recommendation was that we ask SDS to consider a cost-effective way of carrying out follow-up work to establish where the apprentices go and what they do. SDS is considering how it might go about that. Cost effectiveness is an important issue.

The making training work better review looked at the completion rates of all the various national training programmes. In some ways, the modern apprenticeship programme is set up to have quite a high completion rate, because it is tied to the person's job. We would therefore expect most employers to be on top of people progressing. That has worked in such a way as to enable the achievement of the current level but, as the minister said, we are looking to push it up a bit higher.

I will address the other two programmes. Training for work tends to be for older unemployed people, who may have quite a strong record of work experience in the past and are looking to retrain because they have lost their job or moved out of the labour market. About 50 per cent of participants move on to a job. Given their previous experience and the pressures on them to move back into employment pretty quickly—life pressures, if you like—we would expect a reasonable number of participants to move on to a job.

Get ready for work is a wide-ranging programme. It covers young people from those who are fairly close to the labour market and, perhaps, doing work experience, right back to those who are doing what we call life skills—that is, the basic employability and life skills that people need. We must always think about how we can improve completion rates. We are particularly focused on the get ready for work programme, but we must understand the range of people with whom we are dealing in that programme and the levels of engagement that we are trying to achieve. I do not want to understate the situation. I do not think that 30 per cent—or whatever it is—is good enough but, at the same time, we must understand the different client groups with which

we are working in the get ready for work programme.

11:00

**Marco Biagi:** Is there, realistically, any way to increase the completion rates with the resources that are available?

**Hugh McAloon:** We are thinking about how to improve our understanding of the different components of the programme. We are considering the work experience element for those young people who are nearer to the labour market that we outline in the strategy. We are looking at how to ensure the quality of that experience and ensure that it is recognised so that the young person has something that they can take to their next engagement with a prospective employer to show that they have turned up, made a contribution and been the sort of young person that an employer would want to take on.

At the same time, we are thinking about how well the life skills element sits within the rest of the programme and moves people along towards employment. It would be easy to say that these kids have real barriers and that we must focus on overcoming them. That is absolutely right, but we must do it in a way that progresses the young people so that, at the end of the programme, they are much better equipped to move into work. That might be achieved through a route into other training or further education, but it might also be about accelerating them. We are focused on that.

**Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I will ask about the commitment that has been made under the opportunities for all initiative to give young people who are not in education, a modern apprenticeship or employment an opportunity for training and learning. From the evidence that we have taken, there seems to be a worry about what that training or learning opportunity might be. Will you give us a bit more detail about the quality assurance for the initiative? Is there an expected minimum time for a training opportunity? How does that fit with college places and the modern apprenticeship programme?

**Angela Constance:** We have to work with 35,000 16 to 19-year-olds who are not currently in education, employment or training. Within that cohort, some themes will arise that will not surprise you—young people who have left school early, disengaged from school or truanted and have some sort of complex disadvantage to their life. Therefore, we need to offer a range of opportunities.

The opportunities can vary from an activity agreement through a college place to a national programme, such as a modern apprenticeship, a targeted pathway into a modern apprenticeship—

which is useful for people with additional barriers—get ready for work, life skills or training for work. It might involve provision through a social enterprise or community jobs Scotland. It might be that the young person wants to be self-employed or do voluntary work.

With college provision, modern apprenticeships and the get ready for work programme, there are ways of assuring quality. We fund community jobs Scotland, so we have an agreement as to how it should operate.

There will be a range of opportunities, based on the young person's needs. Some of them, such as college places and modern apprenticeships, are accredited. Obviously, youth work and voluntary work are not necessarily accredited, although we have schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh's award. A huge variety of opportunities is available. I am concerned not so much about quality as about engaging young people, finding them and getting them to our various services. We need to be absolutely focused on that.

**Clare Adamson:** I hope that you will indulge me if, in my last two weeks as a North Lanarkshire councillor, I ask a question about North Lanarkshire. I have spoken to people at one of the hubs in North Lanarkshire that delivers activity agreements and works with programmes such as the youth music initiative. Specifically, I talked informally to Reeltime Music in Newarthill, which offers training and work programmes for young people. It does not seem to be able to access the new money that is available. Do you expect the local authorities that have received the additional funding to produce new initiatives?

**Angela Constance:** North Lanarkshire Council does great work through activity agreements, which are a good example for other local authorities to learn from. The council is one of the beneficiaries of the £9 million. Officials are still discussing with councils the detail of programmes. Local authorities need flexibility and discretion to respond to local needs, so I will not dictate what North Lanarkshire Council, South Lanarkshire Council or Glasgow City Council should do with the opportunities for all funding.

From a quality point of view, we want to ensure that initiatives work and that we are not flinging good money after bad. Notwithstanding that, if there is space for innovation, we will look at that when that can be evidenced. A lot of local authorities are looking at their practice and considering wage subsidies and the gaps in the skills pipeline in their areas.

I do not know the Reeltime Music project—forgive me—but organisations can also bid for funding from the social enterprise challenge fund. We are still working up the criteria for that.

**Neil Bibby:** I understand that activity agreements are classified as a positive destination. Are you aware of any young people in prison who are on activity agreements?

**Angela Constance:** I am not. Are you about to surprise me?

**Neil Bibby:** Would you classify prison as a positive destination?

**Angela Constance:** Most certainly not. I am a former prison social worker and I do not consider prison to be a positive destination. Imprisonment is necessary for some people—that depends on the risks that they present to society.

**The Convener:** Is Neil Bibby thinking of something in particular?

**Angela Constance:** He has got my interest now.

**Neil Bibby:** I have heard concern about the possibility of young people in prison being on activity agreements. That would raise concern if activity agreements are determined to be a positive destination.

**Angela Constance:** An activity agreement is a contract. It is an agreement that is reached between an adviser and a young person on the basis of the young person's needs and individualised assessment. We are talking about young people who are invariably furthest from the labour market. Many of the young people who are on activity agreements have complex barriers to work.

An activity agreement supports young people in the community. Notwithstanding that, it is important that when young people are removed from or leave the community because they have gone to prison or hospital, through care and aftercare provision kicks in. It is not unreasonable to expect local services to keep in touch with young people if they have a period of incarceration, whatever it is for and particularly if the period is short. It is common sense that services should always plan in advance of someone's release from hospital, the care sector or prison.

An activity agreement is personalised to the particular young person; it is not one-size-fits-all provision. As in the example in North Lanarkshire Council, it is an opportunity to engage with young people who are the hardest to reach.

**Neil Bibby:** I agree that it is common sense to keep in touch with young people in prison. However, I am concerned if statistics classify young people in prison as having a positive destination because they have an activity agreement.

**Hugh McAloon:** In most cases it is positive for young people in a prison setting to be involved in education or a training activity, because it can reduce reoffending and help them to move on after the sentence. I am sure that you would agree with that.

On how we might count that, I cannot say hand on heart that such young people would not be included in the 35,000 figure, but there would certainly not be any attempt to present being in prison as a positive destination. I think that most people would regard as positive any activity in prison that helps to improve a young person's employability and to reduce their chances of reoffending. However, we can write to the committee about how we count the young people who are in a prison setting.

**The Convener:** We are talking slightly in the abstract here, so I think that it would be helpful for Neil Bibby and the rest of the committee if we had some detail from the minister on this question.

**Angela Constance:** I would be happy to oblige.

**Neil Bibby:** What financial recruitment incentives will be available for employers from April 2012 onwards and how long are the schemes likely to be in place?

**Angela Constance:** Prior to the recess, I announced that we will continue with the adopt an apprentice scheme, which is a hugely successful programme that has been in place since the economic downturn began. The programme has a recruitment incentive for employers to take on a redundant apprentice. When I last looked at the figures a month or two ago, we had assisted in excess of 1,200 young apprentices. We will keep that programme going for this financial year.

I announced just before Christmas an employer recruitment incentive for some of our more disadvantaged young people, such as young carers or care-leavers. That is tied in with bespoke, one-to-one support work as well. We want to get young people into work, but we have to realise that it is important for employers, particularly small employers, that there is professional support from the likes of Skills Development Scotland or aftercare for a young person in work.

The employer recruitment incentive that Shona Robison and I announced is worth £5 million. That is for the personal best programme and for recruitment incentives, for example for modern apprenticeships in key industries such as sports-related activity and Commonwealth games legacy-related industries such as facilities management, events management and hospitality.

I will continue to have discussions with employers. Some of the local authorities that have

benefited from the £9 million in funding are interested in using that money for wage subsidies. The community jobs Scotland initiative has a wage subsidy of 100 per cent. There is also provision that is not ours through the DWP's employer recruitment incentive for young people on the work programme.

11:15

**Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab) (Committee Substitute):** Good morning, minister, and welcome to the committee. I, too, am just filling in for a colleague. I have a number of points to raise.

**The Convener:** I do not think that the minister is just filling in for somebody—let us be clear on that.

**Hanzala Malik:** No—I am.

There have been a number of cuts to universities and colleges, as a result of which they have abandoned some courses. Is there provision for students who would have gone to a local university or college but who now have to travel further afield because a course is not available locally? Would we support them by funding their travel and accommodation costs?

According to the SPICe briefing, students or people between the ages of 20 and 24 would be eligible for funding only if they had been employed for three months; otherwise, they would be funded only if they were training in key sectors. I wonder whether we could remove that condition. Glasgow City Council is providing apprenticeships for 16 to 24-year-olds, and I think that other places could mirror that, because it provides a good opportunity. If we were to remove that condition, many people who currently do not qualify would qualify for apprenticeships.

My third question is about the key sectors. I am not sure that there are some "key" sectors—I think that every sector is a key sector. We are short of a lot of skills, and restricting funding to certain sectors discourages people. There will be people who are talented in specialist areas, but if their area is not a key sector they will not qualify for funding. That would be a shame, because we would then not have the same broad range of skilled people in our communities.

How many apprenticeships are being taken up by people from minority communities and how successful are those people in completing the apprenticeships? Historically, there have been apprenticeships, but no guarantee of a job at the end of them, which has meant that people have had to take up more than one apprenticeship, in spite of which many of them have still not gained employment. That can be soul destroying. Should there be a provision whereby we can ensure that we find employment for people who have

completed more than one apprenticeship? We do not want a lot of people undertaking apprenticeships and then being disappointed time and again by not getting a job at the end.

**Angela Constance:** The Government has never guaranteed individuals access to every conceivable course under the sun; it is for local colleges and higher education institutions to decide on provision. For me, the key issue is that, although education for education's sake is never wasted, a vast amount of public money—£1.5 billion every year—goes into our post-16 education and training system and we must have more than an eye on the economy for today and tomorrow. We need to train and educate our young people for where the jobs are now and for where they will be.

I appreciate what Hanzala Malik said about the importance of sectors: every job is an opportunity. However, I am not sure about the situation with regard to the modern apprenticeship provision as it relates to the 20 to 24 age group. I will let Hugh McAloon talk about that once I have trotted through the various issues around the 16 to 19-year-olds, the 20 to 24-year-olds and the adult group, but I think that it is the funding for over-25s that is specific to key sectors.

We need to focus on key growth sectors. That represents sensible use of public money. I am interested in the commitment that has been made by the two major political parties in Glasgow regarding the 16 to 24-year-old group. I will be interested to hear more from whoever forms the administration in Glasgow about the detail of how that policy is progressed. It is good that local authorities are ambitious. It will be good to see how that policy works on the ground, and I am sure that we will all be able to learn from it.

The point about minority communities and their participation in the modern apprenticeships programme is well made. We need to be vigilant. We know that there are gender issues as well. For example, there are difficulties around getting young men into working in childcare—I would like to see more young men working with children. Similarly, there are issues around encouraging more young women to get into science, technology, engineering and mathematics—the STEM subjects. With regard to the draft youth employment strategy, there is a need for us to better articulate the equalities issues. I have met representatives of Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland to discuss the matter in detail, and we are undertaking an equality impact assessment of the draft strategy.

**Hugh McAloon:** The key thing that we are trying to do is protect new opportunities for people moving into work. Someone can do a modern apprenticeship either as a new entrant or as an

existing employee. Both ways are valid, but we are trying to strike an appropriate balance between what we do to support youth employment and what we do around workforce development in the key sectors.

Our approach to the 20 to 24-year-old group involves bringing in new employees, and that is not constrained by sector. With regard to upskilling existing employees who have been in work for some time, we would treat people in the 20 to 24-year-old group the same as we treat people in the 25-plus group: we would support them if they are in a key sector or a supporting sector—not only the six or seven sectors that are in the Government's economic strategy, but sectors to whose development the apprenticeships are key, such as engineering, construction and parts of manufacturing.

We are trying to strike a balance between using the apprenticeship programme as a vehicle for upskilling across the workforce and using it to bring as many young people into work as possible, given the number of places and the employer demand.

That is roughly the approach that we are taking. However, for those in the 20 to 24-year-old group, there is no sector constraint with regard to what we will support.

**Hanzala Malik:** That is not clear from the document that is before us.

**The Convener:** For the minister's sake, I should clarify that we are referring to a document called "Youth Unemployment: Policy" that was produced by the Scottish Parliament information centre. The part that Hanzala Malik is talking about is on pages 18 and 19.

**Hanzala Malik:** The document suggests that there is a condition attached to funding for those between the ages of 20 and 24. I am suggesting that that condition be removed in order to level the playing field for that group. As the minister has pointed out, that is what Glasgow City Council has implemented. From where I am sitting, that is a young age group, and I think that we want to continue to build on that.

If the condition were removed, more people would have the opportunity to get modern apprenticeship places, which is not a bad thing. We are trying to encourage more people to participate, and its removal would make that happen more easily.

I think that we need a more full response on the issue. I am assuming that there would be no difficulty in providing one.

**The Convener:** The paragraph that Hanzala Malik is referring to says:



“Policy for the delivery of MAs to 2011/12 was that SDS would fund an MA in any industry if the apprentice is aged 16 to 19, or aged 20 to 24 years and has only been employed for three months. Otherwise they would only be funded if they were in a ‘key sector’ or a ‘traditional apprenticeship’ such as construction.”

It goes on to say something that I would like to be clarified:

“From 2012/13, SDS have extended the ‘any industry’ funding from 16 to 19 year olds to those aged up to 25 years, regardless of how long they have been employed (i.e. they have removed the ‘3 month’ rule for the 20 to 24 year old age group).”

Could you clarify exactly what the position is in terms of Mr Malik’s question and what the SPICE briefing says?

**Hugh McAloon:** The best thing that we can do is get Skills Development Scotland to write to the committee. That would give you absolute clarity.

**The Convener:** Yes. What I just read out does not seem to match what you said a moment ago, which is why I would like clarification. If you could write to us with some detail, that would be helpful.

**Angela Constance:** We want to be crystal clear about the position.

**The Convener:** We have run a little bit over time, and I thank the minister for attending. The issue that we have been discussing is an important one for the committee and, I am sure, for the Government.

11:27

*Meeting suspended.*

11:30

*On resuming—*

## Petition

### Education Staff (Training in Learning Disabilities and Autistic Spectrum Disorder) (PE1409)

**The Convener:** PE1409, by Linda Whitmore, on behalf of ENABLE Scotland, has been referred to this committee by the Public Petitions Committee. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ensure that all teachers and support staff in Scottish schools are fully trained to provide the right additional support for children and young people with learning disabilities and/or autistic spectrum disorders. Members have received a paper from the clerk. I seek comments on how we should progress with the petition.

**Liz Smith:** It is an extremely important issue—in fact, it could hardly be more important. Before we progress, I would like to know from the General Teaching Council for Scotland and other groups what stage they have reached in implementing the Donaldson review recommendations. There has been progress, but it would be helpful to know just what it is before we start pursuing other suggested options.

**Liam McArthur:** I agree with Liz Smith. The options at paragraphs 9 and 10 in the clerk’s paper are sensible areas for us to explore—in particular the suggestion that we seek the views of the Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland and look at local authority practice. Gathering such information as Liz Smith has identified would be a first step. We have already put on record that, as the Donaldson review proposals are being progressed, we would want to get into that area.

I was slightly concerned that it was deemed to be inappropriate for representatives from ENABLE Scotland to be involved in the national partnership group. Given the Donaldson review’s recommendations, I would be interested to know how the NPG expects to co-opt that expertise in coming up with recommendations. If that does not involve adding additional members to the group, I cannot see from reading the clerks’ paper how the NPG would be able to draw on such expertise.

**The Convener:** I share your concerns about ensuring that the NPG has the right information from the right people. However, the committee paper notes at bullet point 1 in paragraph 9 that although ENABLE Scotland’s concerns about the membership of the NPG and the strategic reference group were made clear to Scottish

Government officials, the officials' view was that there are representatives from Dyslexia Scotland and the National Deaf Children's Society through whom information could be fed to the group. However, I accept what Liam McArthur says.

**Neil Bibby:** I agree with a lot of the comments that have been made. We will hear evidence on additional support for learning on 15 May. ENABLE Scotland has raised a number of serious issues, so it would be sensible to give it the opportunity to take part in that meeting, so that we can hear its concerns directly and take things from there.

**The Convener:** Okay. We have not yet decided who will come along to give evidence, so we can certainly feed that suggestion in and discuss it.

**Clare Adamson:** I absolutely agree with the comments about the importance of getting it right for children on this issue. However, I am a little worried about the petition's expectations, and I think that we must be careful in responding to it. The petition states the need

"to provide the right additional support",

but it already contains an understanding that support varies quite a bit throughout Scotland. It would be almost impossible to agree on a tight definition of "right additional support".

**The Convener:** I agree with much of what has been said. However, I remind members that there have been calls on the committee—not necessarily through petitions—to ask for teachers to be provided with mandatory training in other areas. We took the view in those cases that we could consider such issues in the context of the Donaldson review; the petition falls into the same area.

I take on board Clare Adamson's comments about jumping in and looking at the issues too early or with too tight a definition. I certainly support keeping the petition open and considering it in the context of our examination of the Donaldson review. I would be happy to examine some of the general areas early on at our evidence session on 15 May; that was a reasonable suggestion.

Beyond that, Liz Smith suggested—not unreasonably—that we write to GTC Scotland to get an update on progress. Does Liam McArthur want us to consult anyone else at this stage or wait until we have had an update?

**Liam McArthur:** I do not mind whether we do that sequentially or at the same time. It was noted that the Association of Headteachers and Deputies had not responded to the Public Petitions Committee's request. It seems to be logical to follow that up, whether or not we invite the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to give an

overview at this stage of where the local authorities are, which can probably wait.

**The Convener:** I agree—we can leave COSLA for later and consider the issues in the light of the Donaldson review. We will write to the two organisations as suggested, and keep the petition open. We can certainly look generally at the subject on 15 May, as per Neil Bibby's suggestion, and we can consider the petition's specific comments when we take evidence on the Donaldson review later in the year.

The clerk has rightly pointed out that we should draw the petition to the attention of the national partnership group. Are members agreed?

**Members indicated agreement.**

*Meeting closed at 11:37.*

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