



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Thursday 27 March 2014

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

7th Meeting 2014, Session 4

CONVENER

*Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP)

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

*Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)

*John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)

*Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Aileen Campbell (Minister for Children and Young People)

Dr Gary Clapton (University of Edinburgh)

Erica Clarkson (Scottish Government)

Karen Love (West Lothian Council)

Inez Murray (National Day Nurseries Association)

Fiona Robertson (South Lanarkshire Council)

Donny Scott (City of Edinburgh Council)

Simon Stockwell (Scottish Government)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Douglas Thornton

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Thursday 27 March 2014

[The Convener *opened the meeting in private at 08:51*]

09:02

Meeting continued in public.

Decisions on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Margaret McCulloch): I welcome everyone to the seventh meeting in 2014 of the Equal Opportunities Committee. I ask everyone to set their electronic devices to flight mode or to switch them off.

We will begin with introductions. At the table, we have our clerking and research team, together with official reporters. Around the room, we are supported by broadcasting services and security officers.

I am the convener of the committee. I invite committee members to introduce themselves in turn.

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): Good morning. I am the member of the Scottish Parliament for Edinburgh Central and deputy convener of the committee.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I am the MSP for Glasgow Shettleston.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): I am a member for North East Scotland.

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): Good morning. I am a member for North East Scotland.

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am an MSP for Central Scotland.

The Convener: We took item 1 on our agenda in private. The second item is a decision on taking business in private. Members are asked to agree to take in private consideration of a draft report on the fathers and parenting inquiry at this and future meetings. Do members agree?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Members are also asked to agree to take in private consideration of the approach to draft budget 2015-16 scrutiny at future meetings. Do members agree?

Members indicated agreement.

Fathers and Parenting

09:03

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is oral evidence on our fathers and parenting inquiry. We have two panels of witnesses today, and we will conclude with evidence from the Minister for Children and Young People.

I welcome our first panel of witnesses. I ask you all to introduce yourselves in turn.

Dr Gary Clapton (University of Edinburgh): Good morning. I am a senior lecturer at the University of Edinburgh.

Karen Love (West Lothian Council): Good morning. I am team manager for the sure start and early years outreach service in West Lothian Council.

Inez Murray (National Day Nurseries Association): Good morning. I am here representing the National Day Nurseries Association. I own and manage two nurseries in Glasgow.

Fiona Robertson (South Lanarkshire Council): Good morning. I am senior community learning and home-school partnership worker in South Lanarkshire Council.

Donny Scott (City of Edinburgh Council): Hello. I am a service manager in the City of Edinburgh Council's children and families department and I am responsible for family and community support.

The Convener: I ask the witnesses to indicate to me or the clerk on my left when they wish to speak.

We have heard evidence from fathers, support groups, employers and trade unions; this is our fourth evidence session. We have a number of questions to ask. If you would like to give further information, that would be welcome, too.

John Mason: As the convener said, we have heard from a number of witnesses, including fathers and people who represent organisations. The suggestion has been made that there is a lot of gender stereotyping in the public and private sectors. Do your organisations feel that that is a problem? I would be happy to hear general comments about gender stereotyping, too, and particularly about gender stereotyping of men.

The Convener: Who would like to speak first? Will I pick someone?

Dr Clapton: Not me.

The Convener: You have volunteered, so on you go.

Dr Clapton: I was volunteering my colleague Karen Love. [Laughter.]

The committee has seen my submission. I have looked particularly at publicity and found evidence of stereotyping. In my research, I have found that publicity materials on children and families are particularly one-sided; there is a lack of references to, and images of, fathers in national health service materials. I did not look at them, but I am certain that there are similar examples to those that I found in national services such as the curriculum for excellence and local services that are run by councils. In social work services, I found not images but case scenarios and case studies that depict fathers only in an incredibly negative light.

Donny Scott: The power of Gary Clapton's presentation is in the fact that he has done a systematic study. In our experience it is commonly—but not universally—true that social work practice tends to exclude fathers. In child protection work or work that involves concerns about domestic abuse, the tendency is to address and work with the mother and not to engage with the father. We are concerned about that.

Significant stereotyping occurs in the early years workforce and in the care workforce generally. The early years workforce is massively female.

Inez Murray: I can come in on employment. The most recent NDNA newsletter contained an article about some parents' perception that it is not right for men to be in childcare and about comments such as, "I don't want that male practitioner to change my baby's nappy." My experience is the opposite of that attitude. When I get men to work with children, they are very good role models. One of the most important points in the research is about the lack of positive comment about men. Young men in particular need to have good role models—not specifically Simon Cowell—who show them that it is okay to care and show their feelings.

We must get schools far more involved in addressing the perception of gender stereotyping. It is still the case that, if a young girl does not know what to do, she goes into childcare or hairdressing. It is important that schools become actively involved in letting young men know that it is okay to go to college to study childcare or social care, and that if people do not want to go to college it is okay to get an apprenticeship. Apprenticeships are the best route; I employ most of my staff through apprenticeships, which give people the opportunity to develop a successful career.

Karen Love: West Lothian Council has some male workers in our early years service, which has allowed us to diversify that service. That is the tip

of the iceberg, though. We would echo the opinion that males are not greatly represented in social work practice. Some of our research found that, anecdotally, the fathers whom we work with want to be actively involved in their children's lives, but are alienated by the language of terms such as "mother and baby groups" and "mother and toddler groups". They feel further alienated when they walk through the doors of those groups. That is a real issue for us.

Fiona Robertson: I agree. Early years and nursery settings are not seen as places for men generally, so dads do not feel comfortable in them, and some staff are not particularly comfortable with men. It is hard to engage dads if those places are not welcoming to them.

There is another issue with stereotyping that is not just about gender. The men who are portrayed in images are perceived as being a certain type of man who gets involved—it is a very middle-class, well-to-do image. Such images, despite their being of dads participating, can put off some of the dads whom we work with as much as female stereotyping can put them off.

John Mason: Dr Clapton is from Edinburgh university and obviously cannot speak for all universities, but I will use the university as an example. Does the university have to be passive? People come to train as primary teachers and for some of the other care professions. Do you just have to accept that it is 99 per cent women and 1 per cent men and that is the way it is, or does the university have a role in addressing that in recruiting to and advertising for its courses?

Dr Clapton: I cannot speak for the recruitment policy even of Edinburgh university. However, I have run the four-year undergraduate social work course and although we often do our utmost to pitch it to male students, my classes continue to be 90 per cent women and 10 per cent men.

There are things that we do and have done, regarding how we organise our publicity, but there is a bigger problem in how the profession is represented. To be honest, much of the stuff that I have looked at—but which I have not talked about today—includes training examples from social work courses that continue to stereotype men and to pigeonhole fathers as being dodgy or absent. We have a fair bit to do on the training and education side to get our house in order.

To come back to John Mason's point, obviously things have been done, but if the profession was more father facing or man friendly it would be more likely to attract and recruit men.

John Mason: Do you think that we need a whole change in culture, more than just one or two specific actions?

Dr Clapton: I think that there is a much wider issue, including our stereotypes of Scottish men. It goes beyond my ability to attract prospective students to the courses. The next one up, to use a Russian dolls analogy, would be the profession. The caring professions are not seen as manly endeavours. We know that working in childcare, primary schools and social work are options that do not immediately appeal to a young lad at 17 or 18. They ought to, but they do not.

The Convener: My question is for Inez Murray and is on attracting men into childcare. When you advertise for staff, what is the ratio of male applicants to female applicants?

09:15

Inez Murray: That is a difficult question for me to answer, because I do not advertise for staff. People tend to come to me and I have good staff retention, so it is not a big issue for me. Nevertheless, I understand where you are coming from.

We need to effect a sea change in our culture. The question is how we are going to do that. I go back to the point that it must start with schools and careers advice. There are jobs fairs in Glasgow that we are invited to attend, but I would use a training campaign instead. It takes a lot for a young man to go to a childcare stand at a jobs fair, because of perceptions about that. Why would he want to work in childcare? That is why we need a sea change in culture, although I do not know how we could effect it.

Siobhan McMahon: Fiona Robertson said that fathers might sometimes feel unwelcome when they drop their children off. We have received written evidence from fathers who thought that they were being looked at, or were not made as welcome by the staff. How do you challenge that? Inez Murray is talking about how staff work together, but men going into that environment as staff might not be welcomed by female colleagues, which could affect retention. You say that you have good retention. What is the best practice in that situation? Also, how can we challenge the behaviour of staff when fathers drop their children off, so that they feel welcome? How can we ensure that staff understand that there is no difference between mothers dropping their children off and fathers doing the same?

Fiona Robertson: There are two aspects to that. First, there is what happens when fathers drop their children off and the behaviour that they are met with. Secondly, there is their perceptions of what will happen. Sometimes, people perceive things to be happening when it is not necessarily the case that they are.

In South Lanarkshire, we provide multi-agency training for staff, through the getting it right for every child initiative, to raise awareness of why engaging dads is so important. We labour the benefits of that for children, and it is about what children get out of dads being involved. Staff from nurseries, social work and the NHS participate in that training. The staff need to know why it is important to engage dads, but for some of them the primary focus is the child. If they do not understand that everyone around a child has an impact on that child, or see how that impacts on their job and the child's wellbeing, they might see it as something that is additional. That can happen in any parenting engagement process. They must understand why it is important to engage dads, be aware of the environment that they are working in and see it from the perspectives of both mums and dads. How easy is it for them to come into the building? What reception do they get when they come into the building? Equally, the staff should not cheer when a dad comes in; sometimes, they can go too far the other way and scare them off.

Dr Clapton: "I found a father!" [*Laughter.*]

Fiona Robertson: Yes. It must be a whole-organisation approach, from the person who answers the phone, to ensuring that they are not passed on as soon as they come through the door. The nursery staff should be interested in not just the child, but the dad, as someone who is important in the child's life. We must get the staff on board right through the organisation, from management down to practitioners on the ground. Most important is that there is a whole-organisation approach—that is the key message for any staff. All staff want what is in the best interests of the children they work with, and that is how we sell it to them. It is how we sell it to mums, as well.

Siobhan McMahon: How do you monitor whether that is happening? We heard evidence from a father who, unfortunately, thinks that that is not happening.

Fiona Robertson: As I said, the whole organisation has to be involved. Management must take responsibility in the process, as well. Sometimes, it is difficult to get managers to participate in the awareness-raising sessions that we run. We get a lot of practitioners who have been sent along, but they need the support of their management in checking up and disseminating that awareness throughout the nursery or organisation. There can be one person flying the flag who is seen as the person who engages with dads. There must be a management procedure.

We have found that it helps to have it written into service plans and policies that an organisation is strategically looking to engage fathers. We are trying to encourage that. When that happens, the

organisation becomes accountable to the education department and there is an onus on it to report back, so it must do those things and be seen to be doing them. There is also the inspection process.

Donny Scott: That point about writing such aims into policies is really important. I have been chewing over the idea that there is still a challenge—certainly in my local authority area—in engaging parents, whether they are mothers or fathers. Services for children have tended to be structured around the idea of “You hand the children over to us and we’ll educate them and look after them and then hand them back to you.”

We are all starting to think much more about connecting with the strengths of families and the strengths of communities, for all kinds of reasons. Gary Clapton’s paper is subtitled “Father-Proofing Your Work”. We have been parent proofing our work, but we have not adequately built into policies the idea that the issues do not just concern parents in a gender-neutral way, but are about mothers and fathers.

Part of the driver for that involves understanding that it is not just a question of being fair to fathers, but that it is also very important for children. Another academic, Brigid Daniel, who is a professor at the University of Stirling, wrote quite a long time ago a book for social care professionals about engaging with fathers. She discussed the fact that, if we do not engage the father—a separated father, say—that does not only miss out on the benefits that he can bring, but misses out on his parents, aunts and uncles and that whole side of the family, such that those resources are not there for the child. That is just one reason, but there are many reasons why, in practice terms, the question is very important. I underline the importance of policy not just at the nursery level but, institutionally, for the whole organisation.

Dr Clapton: I echo the emphasis on policy, but I also return to the micro level and the front-door question, which is important. I have done a wee bit of work on that, too, in respect of the feel of a place—foyers, general practice surgeries and social work reception areas. Those are places where—for want of a better way of putting it—men are not really expected to be. Who do the leaflets and posters on the walls face? There are zero tolerance posters—not that I am against them, of course—and a number of other leaflets and posters about the moonwalk and so on, which are addressed to women. There is very little by way of publicity. As for reading material, we might find *Bella* and *Take a Break* on the tables, but very little else. It goes right down to colour schemes and so on. That might seem like a bit of a micro point, but those things are important with regard to the messages that are given. If the message is

that fathers are optional, the other side of the coin is that women have sole responsibility for children, and that is a lose-lose situation.

Christian Allard: I read in your excellent paper that the

“marginalisation of fathers ... is detrimental to mothers as it over-burdens them with sole rather than shared responsibility.”

Could you expand on that? The committee did some work on women at work. Are we on the same ground here? Do the two issues join up? Does the exclusion of fathers from the role of looking after their children exclude women from certain careers that they could have?

We have just heard Donny Scott perhaps making a little attack on gender neutrality. Perhaps we could be a lot more focused on, and could try to redefine, the traditional roles of fathers and mothers.

Dr Clapton: The message might be intended for parents but the envelope is addressed to mothers only. I concentrated on the envelope, which is the publicity for services. We have moved from the notion of mother and toddler groups to things that do not work, such as parent and toddler groups or support groups for parents. It has been proven that such groups have not drawn in fathers.

It is not about bending the stick. We have to talk about mothers and fathers when that is appropriate. Obviously, we need to use the term “parents” often, but we need to address fathers. In our society, when people talk about parents, they think about the mother. That applies across the board. My profession of social work research and researchers in general are as guilty as anyone else in that regard. Research that purports to say that parents have told us something is often based on the mothers’ view, as they were in when the interviewer called. It is often false to say that such research is about parents, because it is often mothers’ views on X, Y and Z that are reported. You will find that in one of our big studies, “Growing Up in Scotland”, which acknowledges that the researchers often did not get to the fathers. We often find that a report on the family is really a report on the mother.

Inez Murray: In the private sector, where I work, it is often easier for us to work with both parents—if they are both there. At the moment, I care for more than 200 children with a wide variety of family set-ups and cultures.

At the back of that is the inspection process that we have to go through—we had an inspection at one of my nurseries yesterday. The Care Inspectorate is very keen on parental participation. The inspectors check the evidence trail of all that we have done and although it is more difficult to engage with fathers, they looked at the number of

dads who were bringing in or collecting their children and the percentage was very good. Of course, that is because mums are working later. I tend to look after children in working families or children whose parents are at college accessing training.

Dr Clapton is right. How we welcome the dads who bring in their children is crucial. We work hard to make sure that both parents, if they are there, are treated in exactly the same way.

Alex Johnstone: I have a quick question about what you just said. Is there really a noticeable difference between the experience in the public sector and the experience in the private sector?

Inez Murray: What I am hearing here about policy decisions being made so that staff know what to do and management taking that on board is not how things work in my nurseries. That is all part of the process that we go through. I do not have enough knowledge of the public sector to answer that question properly.

Alex Johnstone: Maybe I could ask someone who has public sector experience to compare their experience with what they have just heard.

Donny Scott: We were swapping a few notes before we came into the committee room, and there is a sense that everything depends on the individual manager of an individual service. We get managers who really understand the issue and who have put policies in place. I do not know whether they have written down those policies, but they make it quite clear that they want their institutions to move forward on involving dads. Some of them are good at that, but people in other settings have not really thought about it.

John Mason: I have a supplementary for Ms Murray. You said that the Care Inspectorate was in yesterday and that the inspectors were interested in parental involvement. Did they distinguish between fathers' involvement and mothers' involvement?

Inez Murray: I have not had feedback yet.

John Mason: Did they ask you about that?

Inez Murray: They have just been looking at evidence. They have not come back to talk to us about it yet, so I cannot answer the question. I will happily listen carefully to what they say and come back to you on that.

John Mason: I do not know much about the inspectors. When they come in, do you just give them a pile of stuff for them to take away and look at?

Inez Murray: No—although that would be lovely. It is an intense—

John Mason: So the inspectors ask you questions?

Inez Murray: They ask the staff questions, so I do not know—

John Mason: So they do not question you personally.

Inez Murray: The staff answer the inspectors' questions, and then the inspectors talk to management. We have already had discussions with them, not about the specifics in your question but about parental participation being crucial.

John Mason: Could you feed that back to us? I am interested to learn whether the inspectorate asked you or your staff about the involvement of fathers specifically or just about wider parental involvement.

Inez Murray: I will do that.

09:30

Karen Love: This is perhaps a slight digression. We are talking about engaging fathers, but at the postnatal stage, when the children are already here. Fathers are not engaged with maternity services. There is no midwife appointment so that dad can go along and discuss his hopes and fears about his child coming into the world—about what he is looking forward to and what he fears most. Antenatal appointments are very much focused on the mother, so even at the antenatal stage, we are disengaging fathers.

All the evidence shows us that it is good for the father to remain on the postnatal ward with the mother, but he is shown out at the end of visiting hours. The mother is then left without that support—that relates to Dr Clapton's point about mothers being supported if fathers are involved. Although that is a bit of a digression, I think that it is an important point to note.

The Convener: Could you give us an overview of sure start and what the organisation does?

Karen Love: We are an early intervention service for children from birth to the age of three, and we have been in place at West Lothian Council for about 15 years. I am new in post, so bear with me while I try to unscramble the information in my head.

We have a very robust service that we feel supports parents as much as it possibly can. We provide six-week antenatal programmes for fathers in the evening. We look at baby care tasks, what they will involve for fathers and how they will manage those tasks, and how they will support their female partner. We also give fathers a more robust view of baby brain development and early childhood development.

We also provide antenatal support for young fathers who are under 21 years of age. Unfortunately, we are not currently in a position to provide universal dad support at weekends—I hope that as an agency we might be able to take that forward.

We focus much more on mothers than we do on fathers, but I feel that we are getting better at engaging with fathers. As a service and as an authority, not just in early years services but in schools services, we have support groups for fathers that fathers engage with.

We have a dads group on a Monday afternoon that is working with 17 dads. That is quite a small number—it is not the same as the number of mothers whom we work with—but it is a starting point on which we can build. I hope that we are breaking down some of the cultural barriers.

Christian Allard: I have a supplementary on that. I visited a centre in rural Aberdeenshire—

Karen Love: It was not my centre.

Christian Allard: No, it was not your centre, but it was the same kind of thing. The people there said that they tried very hard to involve fathers but that they got very few responses. They said that fathers seemed to be invisible—that was the word that they used—and not happy to engage. Do you also find that, or is it more of an issue in rural areas?

Karen Love: I do not think that we find that as much in our area. We are in the very fortunate position of having access to our own people carrier and our own minibus. Our dads workers are able to go out and pick up the guys who say that they are interested and want to come along.

Men can be referred to us by a professional such as a health professional or a social work professional, or they can refer themselves to us—perhaps they have heard of the group in their community and want to come along. If they phone up, they get a visit so that we can tell them what the group is about. If they are somewhere that is not accessible—if the group is run in Whitburn, for example, and they live 20 minutes away and cannot get there by public transport because the links are not great—we will ensure that transport is not a barrier to access by picking them up in our minibus, our people carrier or our own cars. If the service is there, we will endeavour to get a father—or mother—to that service.

The Convener: I ask Fiona Robertson to give an overview of what her organisation does with families.

Fiona Robertson: The community learning and home school partnership service works across South Lanarkshire. Our remit covers adult and family learning opportunities within the council. We

sit within integrated children's services in the education department. There has been a long process of restructuring and the home school partnership side focuses on family engagement.

We have staff based in primary and secondary schools across South Lanarkshire. They work in the schools and with the surrounding communities, and their remit is to engage mums, dads and carers in their and their children's learning. Our staff provide learning opportunities that support children's learning at home; opportunities for parents to come into school and take part in classroom activities during the school day; and opportunities for family learning in the evenings in the community. We provide curriculum support, which means helping parents understand what the curriculum is and how they can support their children's literacy and numeracy. There are also take-home packs that families can work on at home, which is particularly good for families who find it difficult to come to the school because of work commitments, disabilities or family circumstances. We try to make it as easy as possible for families to work with their children.

We also do things that build the parents' capacity. For example, we offer parent support and have parenting programmes on handling children's behaviour, building the child's self-esteem and helping with homework tasks; in general, we work to give parents more confidence in supporting their children's learning. We also have programmes that involve parents going into both primary and secondary schools to offer paired reading and buddying support. For example, parents go in and spend half an hour with a child on a one-to-one basis to increase their language skills. For all those processes, there is a full induction and training programme and continuous support. A lot of our parents have gone from that to work in classroom support and other areas of education, and some have gone on to college.

It is a kind of holistic family learning approach, because it is about increasing the child's capacity, building confidence within families so that that can happen and engaging all members of the family. For example, sometimes grandparents come along to the daytime class sessions, but then mum and dad do the work at home with the children. It is just about communicating that that is fine, that it does not need to be just one person who takes responsibility and that a mix of people across the family can be involved.

The Convener: What percentage of fathers participate?

Fiona Robertson: We started to focus on fathers in our family learning programme about seven years ago when 11 per cent of fathers engaged with our activities. This year, the figure is

up to 27 per cent, but we are still counting—we hope that the figure goes up further. However, engaging fathers is an on-going battle. It requires a culture change for not just families but staff and organisations. It is a slow process, but we are heading in the right direction. It remains a key service priority for us in our service planning. Staff are aware that they will be asked about fathers' engagement and that they will be measured against that and held to account for it.

The Convener: What did you do over the year to increase the percentage?

Fiona Robertson: It was over seven years.

The Convener: Sorry.

Fiona Robertson: I would be very impressed and happy if the increase happened over one year.

We started with the staff team—we did an induction and sold to the staff team the idea that fathers were going to be a focus for us. We said that, from a managerial perspective, we wanted to focus on engaging fathers. We explained that the work is for the benefit of the children and is about safeguarding our children and providing them with the best opportunities, that we would use everything around the children to do that, and that dads are as much of a resource as mums are.

Although that is where we started, we were very fortunate because the gender equality duty came into play at that time, so we managed to get that as a target within our statement of commitment so that it was more robust and we were answerable for it. The duty was also useful as it allowed us to sell dads as a resource up the way to other managers. We told them that we needed to do that work and that it had to be taken on board because we had a duty to do it.

Staff were encouraged to come up with initiatives to engage fathers. Our process was not about starting dads groups; it was about getting dads into our generic programmes across the board. Although it was not about dads-only programmes, it turned out that that was one of the ways in which we got dads in, having surveyed them. We had a lot of anecdotal evidence from mums that dads were doing a lot of the family learning work at home and were spending a lot of time with their kids on it. They were doing lots of things outwith formal services. It was not that they were not interested or passionate; it was just that the services were not accessible to them, for whatever reason.

When we surveyed dads, we asked them what they were engaged with at home and what were the barriers to their engagement with formal services. The key barriers that came up were, as we expected, time and work commitments, but

they were honest and said that, sometimes, the things that were on offer were just not of interest to them. The time that they have outside work or other commitments is very precious, so they judge whether an activity is something that they want to spend their time doing. Therefore, a service has to be sold to them on what is in it for them—we must be specific about that.

We changed our publicity. We took out “parents” and moved to “mums and dads”. The dads came back and said that they were interested in dads-only groups and in outdoor activities in particular, so we started programmes based on the things in which they were interested. We ended up with dads-only groups but also had family days.

Dads also said that they thought that the groups were not necessarily for them or were for a specific type of dad. We have done a range of initiatives with different age groups and target groups to sell the message that dads are important and welcome. The dads sell the groups to other dads and show the benefits.

We were school based and one of the key points that came out of the survey was that the dads did not get information from the school. They were reliant on mum to pass on information from the school because, generally, it came through schoolbag mail and, generally, it was mum who went through the bag and got the information. If she did not think that it was relevant to dad, she did not necessarily pass it on. If it said “parent”, she took it on as her responsibility. For dads who were in share-care positions, it was even worse: if their relationship with mum was not particularly positive, she did not pass on information at all. A cultural shift was needed to ensure that the information was passed on, so we established our service website so that dads could directly access information about what was happening in the area.

John Mason: I was interested in what you said about work. I do not know whether any of the other witnesses wants to contribute to answering this question as well.

We have been considering whether, for some fathers who want to get more involved in the formal stuff that you talked about as well as at home, there is a problem at their work. The next question is whether it is their own attitude that they must be at work or their employer's attitude. It has been suggested to us that some employers are willing to be more flexible with the mother but are not so willing to be flexible with the father if he is looking for time to get to a meeting or something else. I would be interested to know whether that is your experience with employers and more widely. We have had a suggestion that the Department for Work and Pensions will be more flexible with a mother than it will be with a father.

Fiona Robertson: It depends on the employer. Sometimes, there is a perception that the father has to be at work. It depends on what spectrum of employment they are in and how flexible it is for any staff.

We have had dads who have taken time off work to come to a programme when they have felt that it was of significant benefit. Our service is fortunate because our staff work a flexible working week, so we do evening programmes and have done weekend initiatives to try to make it easier for dads and working mums to access the programmes that we run.

We have had issues in the past when parents who were building up their capacity through volunteering in school and getting good training to do it—it is robust training—were pulled out of a session because they had to go and do something with the DWP, which did not value the training as a legitimate work-enhancing activity.

John Mason: Would that be equally the case for men and women?

Fiona Robertson: Yes.

Dr Clapton: That was an excellent description of the work. It is important to restate the fact that it is a long haul. Getting to more than double the number of participating fathers in seven years is a real achievement. It backs up the point about there being no quick fix. You cannot simply send out a leaflet or put up a poster saying “Fathers Group” and expect the dads to come. It will be a long haul and it will involve minibuses and so on.

The point that was made about mothers was excellent because, in the literature, mothers are regarded as the gatekeepers. I think that, in practice, they are. If they give permission to the father—some of it is tacit and some is explicit—the possibility of the father engaging and going to fathers groups is a lot higher.

The question about employment was another excellent one. When I look at services, I find that they are invariably configured on a 9-to-5, Monday-to-Friday basis. It is clear that stuff that happens during the day will pass by working parents, both men and women.

09:45

Inez Murray: On the point about employment and time, we find it more difficult to engage fathers. We have to have initiatives to do that. We do lots of things as together times, but we have also gone down the single fathers route. Perhaps wrongly, we start with things such as their being goalies and saving the children’s shots for charity. They are then taken inside. They do not know what will happen next, but they will be building with their children. We get them involved

subliminally in different things. However, there is a time element of what we do that we have to try to work out.

We have done surveys to find out what the best time is, and we find that fathers will come in the late afternoon, at around 4 o’clock. Last year, we sent out something that said, “Come to FRED,” which stood for fathers reading every day. We did not know what would happen. We did not say what would happen, but fathers came because it was called FRED and that was male. We had a very good storytelling session using props, and they went away inspired.

The sharing of that knowledge in the group is very important. When they go back to work, they will say, “I went to this session. I learned this and didn’t know about that,” or, “I knew about that. Isn’t it good that I knew about it?” We could use workplaces more. The chance to allow fathers to share information about their children and other things is crucial, but time is very important. People are time poor.

John Mason: Do you get the impression, although you could not study this, that some fathers have employers who are more flexible than others?

Inez Murray: Absolutely.

The Convener: Fiona Robertson gave the example of mothers checking schoolbags for newsletters. I saw myself going through the schoolbag and thinking that the letter was for me, and not thinking about the father. We have work to do on the mothers as well as on attracting the fathers, which is very important.

Fiona Robertson: In response to that point and Gary Clapton’s point that mothers are the gatekeepers and can prevent dads from participating but, equally, can be key in getting dads along to things, I note that we have asked dads, “Why are you here?” and they have said, “Because I was told I had to come.” That is as good a way as any.

The Convener: Absolutely.

Donny Scott: The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 has been in place for eight years. It has had some impact, but it was only last year in Edinburgh that we established a policy on communications between schools and parents. That is about including all parents and recognising that, sometimes when parents have separated, communication cannot even be done through schoolbags with mums helping out; we have to find out explicitly who the relevant people in the child’s life are, ensure that they receive messages and communications, and invite them to parents evenings and so on.

I echo the point about not just setting up specific things but getting father involvement through how services are delivered generally or getting the way that we respond right generally. We are lucky in Edinburgh with the number of initiatives that are around and the number of voluntary organisations that run specific pieces of work around dads. There is a lot of partnership between local authority workers and organisations such as Families Need Fathers, Dads Rock, dads club, which is partly run by One Parent Families Scotland, Circle, Stepping Stones and CHAI, the Community Help and Advice Initiative, out in Wester Hailes. That creates opportunities and is really effective. I presume that those organisations have thought through the issues about minibuses, how to present an image and attractive activities to offer. There are things to be learned and practice to be shared.

Alex Johnstone: I want to ask about something that we have been discussing throughout the session. Two terms appear in my notes almost interchangeably, and they have been used in that way during our discussion, although Christian Allard started to bring out the difference in one of his earlier questions. Those terms are “gender equality” and “gender neutrality”. Although they are used interchangeably in my notes, it is obvious that they are not interchangeable and that they mean different things. For gender equality, I read, “Making sure that we include fathers,” whereas, for gender neutrality, I read, “For ‘parent’, read ‘mother’.” Is there a problem with the concept of gender neutrality and do we have to replace it with gender equality?

The Convener: Who would like to answer that? I will pick on Donny Scott and then Gary Clapton.

Donny Scott: Yes, there is a problem. It depends on how we approach the issue, but I certainly think that gender neutrality in a range of contexts does not work. I suppose that we just need to think “fathers and mothers”.

There was a reference to 10 per cent—rising to 27 per cent—of fathers getting involved. We get 10 or 11 per cent of dads attending parenting programmes of various kinds or responding to questionnaires. We cannot just keep going with that when we know that fact. We need to do something specifically about dads.

Dr Clapton: I agree. Gender equality is an aspiration that we would all sign up to, but gender neutrality is a failed policy. I do not think that it has worked and it has not included fathers. We recognised that we did not want to talk about mother and toddler groups and that we should get fathers and mothers involved, but the failed policy part of that was calling those groups parent and toddler groups. We know from experience, particularly the experience of front-line staff, that

that has not worked because, as I said, the default position is that, when we read “parents”, we hear “mothers”.

Marco Biagi: Is it fair to say that, even if we make the language gender neutral, if we have the imagery that Dr Clapton set out in his paper, that will reinforce the initial presumption?

Dr Clapton: Yes. If an envelope is intended for parents but the image is of a woman with children, there is a disconnect and people will default to the position that it must be for mums.

Fiona Robertson: Another issue is that the term “parent”, certainly for those of us who work in education, is written into and defined in law. Therefore, when we try to change policy on that, education departments can be a bit wary of how things are termed because there are specific definitions under education legislation of what a parent is, and they do not take into consideration the gender of the parent. There are difficulties in that regard, too.

John Mason: I have a couple of points about schools, which have just been mentioned. It has been suggested that, despite what the law says, in practice schools default to the mother and, especially if the parents are apart, the father will sometimes get information only if the mother has approved that.

It has also been suggested that a male teacher would get less flexibility for time off or parental leave than a female teacher would. I am not sure whether the case that we heard about is an isolated example or whether you think that that might usually be the case. The second point is probably for Mr Scott.

Donny Scott: I do not know whether a male teacher would get less flexibility.

I think that the first point that you make has been true. The policy in Edinburgh, which has been in place since June last year, is trying to address that, but I am not sure what its impact has been and how it has been experienced.

I cannot comment on the point about personnel policy and whether a woman would find it easier to get time off, because I do not know about that.

John Mason: In practice, would it be dependent on the headteacher?

Donny Scott: I do not know how these things work, as I am more on the social work side of things. I can imagine how the process might operate, but probably no better than you can.

Fiona Robertson: To be fair to schools, sometimes the systems do not help. For example, when a child is registered for school it is up to mum whether she gives out dad’s information. The default position for schools from the very start is

that they do not necessarily know who dad is, where he is or how to contact him.

Dads have told us that they are not aware of the information that they are entitled to, because no one has ever told them that, although they live separately from the mum, they can get information from the school. They do not know where to start, as no information is available about how they can access things and what they are entitled to. If they have parental rights, they have entitlements, which include schools sending out information to them and making arrangements for parents evenings. However, if they do not know that they have those entitlements, they cannot access them.

John Mason: I know that we cannot expect schools to do everything, but is there an onus on the school to say at the point of registration, “We need information on both parents”?

Fiona Robertson: There is, but equally the departments involved have to take that on in their systems. We have done awareness-raising work with some of our health staff. Their paperwork asks only about mum and does not necessarily have a place for dads. They say that they are accountable for and measured on the information that they give back, so if they spend time working with a dad but there is no way to record or evidence that, it is very difficult for them to justify the time that is being spent. We definitely need to look at systems.

The Convener: As members have no more questions, would any of the witnesses like to add anything?

Dr Clapton: There is an important typo in the last three lines of my submission, which relates to the last thing that I want to say.

This is not a question of commission. I believe—and it needs to be said—that there is no conspiracy out there. It is more to do with unthinkingness. I will talk to the clerk about changing my submission to say that it is unthinking and is “not” a matter of commission. It is often about things that we need to stop rather than start doing. There are not a lot of resources involved in stopping doing some of the things that we have talked about.

Inez Murray: I will follow up on what Karen Love said about pre-birth. I sat on the national under-threes advisory group as the NDNA representative. One of the positive messages that came across in the research is that it is crucial that fathers are involved from the conception right the way through, because research shows that the start of the child’s life is vital and involvement must go right the way through. If we can get fathers involved and engaged in the stage from pre-birth to three and that involvement follows on through

the curriculum for excellence, that will make life much better for the child.

It is also important that we all work together. As an association, we want to be as involved as possible.

The Convener: Having listened to what everybody has said, I come back to Fiona Robertson’s comment about sending a message out to all staff that they should include fathers. I am thinking about the message that is sent out at the antenatal stage and in the early years. As it is mainly the mother who is involved, she picks up the same message. She obviously therefore thinks that it is her responsibility and—not knowingly, but through her actions—excludes the father. It is therefore very important that we also get that message out to the mother.

I thank you all for coming. The evidence session has been very interesting and informative and I thank you all for your contributions.

I suspend the meeting to allow our second panel of witnesses to come in and take their seats.

10:00

Meeting suspended.

10:05

On resuming—

The Convener: I welcome our second panel of witnesses. I ask the minister and her officials to introduce themselves, and I invite the minister to make an opening statement.

The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell): I am joined today by Erica Clarkson and Simon Stockwell. We all welcome the opportunity to talk about the subject that the committee has been investigating.

The Scottish Government intends Scotland to be the best country in the world in which to grow up—a country where all our children and families have the opportunity to fulfil their potential. I know that, in evidence gathering for your inquiry, a number of clear themes have arisen for your consideration. Those issues echo the issues that arose during our wide-ranging consultations with parents and professionals across Scotland, which helped to inform our national parenting strategy.

The parenting strategy, which was launched in October 2012, supports everyone who is in a parenting role and recognises that fathers should absolutely be involved in their children’s lives. It also acknowledges fathers’ needs for professional support with issues that affect their ability to be confident, proactive and successful parents.

Through the strategy, we are working with partners to examine how to make services relevant and able to involve fathers positively in their children's lives. We want to make the strategy fit for fathers, and what we need to do is listen effectively and respond to what dads really want.

As we move forward with implementation of the parenting strategy, we will continue to ensure that services such as health and education and those in the third sector make dads feel welcome and included. For example, we are currently working with Children in Scotland to examine ways in which our public bodies can ensure more equal treatment of dads when it comes to parenting responsibilities.

We are also working with employers to support them in creating workplaces that encourage a better work-life balance for everyone. So that we can help dads to thrive at home and at work, we have formed a new partnership with Fathers Network Scotland, the parenting across Scotland group and Working Families to try to change the way that Scotland's parents live and work.

Through funding for organisations and initiatives such as the men in childcare project, we are acting to redress the gender imbalance and to raise awareness of the need for more men to opt for a career in our early years sector. Elsewhere, we are investing in projects and organisations such as Families Need Fathers and Fathers Network Scotland to ensure that the voices of dads are heard. Along with Fathers Network Scotland, we co-chair the fathers advisory panel, which met earlier this week to consider how fathers can contribute to policy and practice development across Government. Most recently, the panel has helped us to restyle our "play talk read" and family information service websites to ensure that they work in a way that speaks to dads.

In addition, we are working with the advisory panel and Fathers Network Scotland to develop clear, simple messages about GIRFEC and the named person. We have also sought the views of dads in developing the sexual health and relationships education resource for secondary schools. As well as that, we are working with young men and fathers as we take forward the development of the new teenage pregnancy and young parent strategy.

We will also be working with the advisory panel and Fathers Network Scotland over the next few months to map the delivery of support groups for dads across Scotland, so that we can better understand the provision and consider what needs to be done to encourage participation and widen access.

Furthermore, in partnership with Families Need Fathers, we have been gathering data from local authorities on policy and practice in schools in relation to fathers and non-resident parents. That is being used to develop a good practice guide for schools, and NHS Health Scotland has been working with a group of dads to father proof a range of resources and to inform the development of new content to be made available on the "Ready Steady Baby!" website. The overhaul will include a fathers section, usability testing with fathers and the development of a communication strategy for the launch.

I believe that we have made solid progress over recent years, but I recognise that there is still a long way to go if we are to ensure that all parents—dads included—get the support that they need, when they need it, in order to be the best that they can be for their children.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this statement. I hope that I have given you a flavour of the work that we have been doing across Government in relation to the theme that you have been examining for the past few weeks.

The Convener: Simon, do you have anything to say about the issues?

Simon Stockwell (Scottish Government): Not at this stage, convener.

The Convener: I pass over to Marco Biagi to start the questions.

Marco Biagi: One area that keeps coming up is the perception of what a typical parent is. Obviously, we are coming at the issue in this inquiry from the perspective of fathers, but there are gender implications in both directions if the typical parent is seen to be the mother, as that reinforces traditional gender stereotypes for both genders.

In taking evidence, we have discussed the presentation of that perception by public agencies, through the documents that are published and in the posters that promote parenting services in GP surgeries, which usually depict a woman and child. Do you share that analysis? If you agree that that is something that we should address, how much scope is there to deal with that at a governmental level? When would we start to see new guidance filtering down?

Aileen Campbell: You touch on a key point, which is one that we came across when we were developing the national parenting strategy. We did a lot of work with different groups, using the networks of our third sector partners to gather as many different views from across the country as possible, from not only mums and dads but kinship carers and other groups of people who fulfil the parenting role.

The fathers groups made points about the images that are presented by various public services. We understand that there is a need to make those images much more balanced. In the development of our documents, such as the parenting strategy and the magazine that accompanied it, we tried hard to ensure that the pictures were much more balanced and showed the role of fathers.

As I said earlier, we are working with partners such as the NHS Health Scotland fathers forum to ensure that it can father proof NHS documents. The "Ready Steady Baby!" document will be tested to ensure that it speaks to fathers as well. We have already taken a bit of work through the fathers advisory panel to ensure that we can map services for fathers and determine what more needs to be done.

There have been a few tangible areas of progress, but we recognise that more needs to be done, and we accept that the things that the Government presents need to have the right images that speak to the situations that all families are living in.

Marco Biagi: It is helpful that the issue came up in the development of the national parenting strategy and has been dealt with in that regard. However, we have been presented with examples from across Government, agencies and local government of areas where the default has slipped into the gender stereotype. Do you envisage the approach that you have taken with the strategy becoming an initiative across Scotland, to ensure that the child protection guidance, the documents that are produced by Education Scotland and so on get the look that they need to have?

The parallel that I would use is that of the inclusion of diverse ethnicities in images in documents. All communications departments know to ensure that there are not only white faces in their documents. Are we going to have the same level of awareness in relation to the issue of gender and parenting?

Aileen Campbell: The parenting strategy was developed in my portfolio, which is children and young people, but the approach needs to be reflected across Government, because lots of strands of it touch on other areas of Government.

We absolutely need to ensure that we do not take the foot off the gas on the issue of ensuring that the Government practises what it preaches. We must not only say to others that they need to ensure that the images that they use reflect the needs and requirements of fathers, but ensure that our documents also reflect the diverse situations of families.

As I say, we have made progress, but we are not complacent. We understand that we need to

do more. That is why your investigation comes at a good time: it enables us to reflect further on what more needs to be done, and the evidence that you have taken is helpful.

10:15

Siobhan McMahon: The parenting strategy is to be welcomed, and I welcomed it in the debate that we had on it. However, we have heard evidence that the imagery for the strategy was a problem, because it did not recognise fathers in the way that people thought it would. It has also come up in evidence that either fathers are missing from the recent children's panel advert and the early years framework, or, where they are in them, it is in negative rather than positive terms.

I understand that we are trying to get somewhere, but how is progress monitored by Government when things come up? For example, how will the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 be advertised? What things are happening proactively to allow councils to replicate information as they go through the strategies that they will implement?

Aileen Campbell: The early years framework preceded the development of the parenting strategy. We now need to use the parenting strategy and the views and opinions expressed in it to inform Government policy and ensure that the documentation properly reflects the situations that families live in.

We tried very hard to ensure that the parenting strategy and its accompanying magazine reflected fathers. If others feel that we need to do that more, we can take that back and reflect on it when we publish any more documents.

The early years framework preceded the parenting strategy, GIRFEC and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. We are working with the national parent forum of Scotland to ensure that we get messages about the 2014 act absolutely right. That needs to reflect all parents, not just mums and dads but grandparents, adoptive parents and foster parents—it needs to reflect all parenting circumstances. Guidance is being and will be developed in consultation and collaboration with a number of different groups to ensure that it will do what is required of it.

Siobhan McMahon: I understand that the early years framework came out before the parenting strategy, but we are still working on that framework. People are still talking to the framework and are using it in their strategies for implementing things. The document still has the same pictures. Is there a way of changing them, given that the national parenting strategy says that is what we are trying to work towards?

Aileen Campbell: The early years framework is there and is informing the way that Government works on earlier intervention—effectively intervening in a child’s life at the earliest opportunity. We also have the groundbreaking early years collaborative work, which is taking forward tests of change and delivering good, tangible results for young people around the country. It is the first time anywhere in the world that this improvement methodology has been used in a multi-agency way.

At one of the learning sessions we had a presentation from Dads Rock. We are utilising the views and expertise of many different groups from around the country to ensure that early years practice reflects the needs of fathers. That is one example of how early years work is ensuring that dads are prominent in the picture.

Siobhan McMahon: So the answer is that we will continue with the same pictures in the early years framework. If there was a picture of someone from an ethnic minority and retrospectively we thought that it was not the right strategy to take, we would change it. There have been many examples of that, over different Governments.

We are now saying that we wish to implement a strategy to see a more reflective view of society, but we are still working on documents and implementing things—you have given us many examples—and we will continue to hand out things with the same pictures. You are saying yes.

Aileen Campbell: We are talking about GIRFEC and the guidance that will accompany that, and the fact that we have the fathers forum for the NHS, which is refreshing the “Ready Steady Baby!” documents.

Siobhan McMahon: Those are new things.

Aileen Campbell: “Ready Steady Baby!” is not new. There will be a refresh of what is already there, in light of the fathers forum that has been established. Significant and tangible improvements are going on in different services.

I say again that we understand that more needs to be done, but we are making progress.

Erica Clarkson (Scottish Government): I am not aware of the images that Siobhan McMahon is referring to, but we are working hard with our partners in the national fathers advisory panel and beyond to ensure that we get messages out that are bit clearer and that speak a little better to dads, as well.

Siobhan McMahon: I am sure that we can give you the academic report that the committee has received, if that would help. How does that work feed back to the other partners such as local authorities and the NHS, and how is it monitored?

Erica Clarkson: They are represented on the national fathers advisory panel as well. We are taking this strand of work forward with enthusiasm and energy. We are covering all bases by involving as many people as we can in the discussions about what we need to put out there in terms of messaging for dads—and for mums, but in this instance we are talking about getting it right for dads.

Aileen Campbell: The guidance that will accompany getting it right for every child will clearly require input from local authorities, and under the 2014 act there will be joint service planning between health and local authorities. We will need to make sure that that reflects the requirements that are set out in the parenting strategy.

Erica Clarkson: A commitment in the national parenting strategy set out that we would carry out a mapping exercise to see what national information is out there—both ours and other agencies’—and what advice is available to parents right across Scotland. We commissioned Children 1st to carry out that research on our behalf and it published its report in November. It highlights some of the issues that the committee has raised today. We are now looking at the recommendations in the report and considering how we can best meet them.

Alex Johnstone: There are two ways in which we can go about promoting positive and engaged parenting. We can either take the gender-neutral approach, or we can take the approach of promoting parenting in the sense of clearly identifiable fathers or mothers. We heard from the first panel that the problem with gender neutrality in this area is that, in many cases, for “parent” we can read “mother”. It is as simple as that—that seems to be the way it works. Do you see a difference there, and do you have a specific view on what the Government’s approach is?

Aileen Campbell: The parenting strategy that we developed is for all parents—not just mums and dads, but adoptive parents, foster carers and kinship carers. It tries to be as reflective as it can be of all the situations that families currently live in, and that influences the way in which we take forward Government policy.

We need to be absolutely mindful that, when we say “parent”, we do not just accept as a default position that that is the mother. We need to be mindful that different families live in different ways. Fathers will be the primary carer for some families, and some parents are adoptive parents. It may be that a grandfather looks after the children as a kinship carer. The parenting strategy speaks to all parents.

We have a challenge because, as you rightly say, oftentimes the default position is to accept that the parent is just the mother, but that is not the case for many families across the country, which is why, having engaged with many families, we made sure that our parenting strategy reflects all parents.

Alex Johnstone: It reflects all parents, but is it adequately targeted on specific types of parents? For the purposes of this inquiry, we are talking about fathers. Are we talking about parents and trying to include fathers, or are we targeting fathers directly?

Aileen Campbell: A number of the 80 commitments in the parenting strategy are specific to fathers and ensuring that we help with redressing the gender balance in early years settings. We fund the men in childcare project, and we have done other things in relation to the Children in Scotland report that Erica Clarkson mentioned. We are now taking that further through the mapping process that the national fathers advisory panel is making progress with, to see what more we need to do around the services that are being taken forward around the country. A number of commitments in the parenting strategy are specific to fathers even though there is an umbrella approach to make sure that it reflects all parents and those in caring roles.

Erica, do you want to comment?

Erica Clarkson: To add to what the minister said, I note that we consulted broadly in the development stage of the parenting strategy. We got the views of a number of agencies and 1,500 parents, 500 of whom were fathers.

As the minister said, we heard strongly that we needed to ensure that the strategy spoke to them, and that is why there is a strong father focus right through the strategy. We try to encourage agencies and organisations to think about fathers as they implement their practice and policies.

Alex Johnstone: I raised with the previous witnesses the comparison of the gender-equal and gender-neutral approaches, which was developed to an extent. One witness suggested that an element in legislation prescribes the gender-neutral approach, rather than the gender-equal approach. Is that the case? Does anything in legislation make promoting fathers' role difficult?

Aileen Campbell: In the recently passed Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, we embedded elements of getting it right for every child. That does not favour one parent over another; that is not in the bill.

Alex Johnstone: I am suggesting not that legislation favours one parent over another but that, in most institutional situations, the gender-

neutral approach means that for "parent" we read "mother"—the mother is the default parent.

Aileen Campbell: The bill reflects the principle of getting it right for every child. Siobhan McMahon lodged a number of amendments on specific groups of children; the approach that we took in the bill was about getting it right for every child and working to achieve positive outcomes for all children. We made a commitment to take forward issues in some of the amendments that Siobhan McMahon lodged in relevant guidance and through engaging with stakeholders.

The guidance that accompanies the bill will allow us to ensure that fathers are more properly reflected in policies, if that is a requirement. The networks that we have built up following the parenting strategy, such as the NHS fathers forum and our advisory panel, which is undertaking work now, will be in a good place to input into the guidance. That will allow us to ensure that the default position is not further ingrained through the bill.

Alex Johnstone: So we are moving in the right direction.

Aileen Campbell: As I said, I believe that we have made tangible progress in many places. However, the committee has heard from a number of witnesses who have shown that we need to make further progress. We have always been mindful that, although we are implementing good policies, we need to go further in some areas. The committee has heard in its evidence sessions that we need to continue that approach.

Marco Biagi: I am curious to know what tools are at your disposal. Our issue is not with the national parenting strategy or what is happening at Government level, but with what happens when that percolates down to every group around the country that meets in a community centre. What used to be mother and toddler groups are now parent and toddler groups, which is progress, but we are hearing that those attending are still mothers and toddlers, whereas we need groups of mums, dads and kids.

You mentioned guidance and the strategy. What is available in your policy suite to make the approach filter down?

Aileen Campbell: We go back to the parenting strategy, which articulates the importance of parents and the change of culture. That is a powerful tool that the Government has. We have the power to influence change in the national, top-level sense. Legislation is another powerful tool that the Government has to make further cultural change.

You are right that persistent issues might relate to mother and toddler groups, for example, and

the default position of going back to the mother. Whether we have influence over that might be questionable. However, the parenting strategy articulates the importance of all parents and is intended to bring about cultural change.

The early years collaborative is ensuring that we do things innovatively and in collaboration, with small tests of change. We are developing good results and making tangible progress. That is another way of getting messages across. We are bringing together people from all 32 local authorities and the community planning partnerships. At the most recent learning session, just shy of 800 folk were in the room. We can articulate the messages that we want to get across. As I said, Dads Rock was one of the groups that made a presentation at a previous learning session.

We have the opportunity to influence people and the ability to bring about culture change through our national messaging. We have partners that are keen to go further. The NHS fathers forum ensures that literature is father proofed, and we must ensure that the advisory panel's work develops changes and has tangible results and benefits. By mapping out the panel's work, we can ensure that tangible progress takes place. There are limits, but around the culture change, the message is that we can make good on that.

10:30

John Mason: I want to move on to role models. I will start with schools, but other aspects such as childcare and the caring professions in general are affected, too. Quite a small number of men seem to go into primary school teaching. We have heard evidence that that is not just a Scottish problem; it appears to be a problem throughout Europe. If anything, the trend is downwards and the number of men in teaching is reducing here and in other countries, too. We have asked various witnesses about that. What can we do? Does the Government need to do something, or the local authorities? Has there been a general change in cultural attitudes?

Aileen Campbell: We have done some things directly. We fund the men in childcare initiative, which is a project to encourage more men to go into childcare in the earliest years of a child's life. We have had to work hard to redress some of the gender imbalance that we see in the early years sector and to raise awareness of the need for more men to get into those roles.

The employment of teachers is a local authority issue, but we want to ensure that the very best teachers are employed and that teaching is an attractive profession for people to get into. Some of that might mean ensuring that teaching is a

viable profession for them. It might come down to some of the images that we see. In the childcare and early years setting, we are directly funding a group to try to redress the gender imbalance.

John Mason: I am sure that we all agree that the legislation is absolutely equal, but when it comes to practice, it is just not happening. I suppose that schools are quite devolved organisations. We have had some evidence from men that they do not feel welcome when most of their colleagues are women, but I know that that can apply to both sides; lots of women could say a similar thing. Is it just one of those things that we hope will change over time?

Aileen Campbell: In the past couple of years, we have seen a modest increase in the number of men going into the teaching workforce. That is welcome.

You are right. In many work settings, women feel as though they are in the minority, but I do not think that a complete gender workforce imbalance is healthy. We need to work hard at that culture change, but we want to ensure that we are getting the best possible teachers for our children. A lot of those decisions are made at local authority level.

For children in their earliest years, we have tried to redress the imbalance that we see in that workforce through funding the men in childcare initiative. I hope that we will see some progress being made there and that that will start to bring about a culture change.

I have no doubt that there are fathers who have felt that when they go to a school where all the teachers are women, that is a barrier. We need to ensure that we are being as welcoming as we can be to men who are in the profession, and that schools are also welcoming to fathers.

John Mason: We heard one suggestion that a man in any employment, but particularly teaching, would be treated less favourably if he wanted a bit of flexibility around parental leave or needed to take a child to the doctor, for example. I do not know whether that was an isolated case, but the suggestion was that women are treated more favourably than men. Can the Government do anything about that, or does it just come down to the individual school?

Aileen Campbell: On flexible working more generally, just the other week, along with our partners Fathers Network Scotland, parenting across Scotland, and Working Families, we were exploring ways in which workplaces can be made much more family friendly. At the Institute of Directors awards tonight, we are sponsoring an award for companies that have shown excellence in providing family-friendly flexible working practices. This is the second year that we have sponsored the award, in order to work with a

group of people who would not normally engage with this subject and to showcase the way in which businesses are doing their bit to allow families to have a better work-life balance.

The piece of work that, along with the partners that I mentioned, we announced just two weeks ago, will involve bits of work to allow us to change the culture in many work settings and to allow fathers to have access to flexible working patterns, too, so that they can play a much stronger role in their children's lives. Those are areas that we are trying to influence directly.

We know that flexible working is a good thing for businesses. It can be beneficial to staff morale, and it can up productivity. Those are some of the messages that we want to get out there, letting businesses understand that it is not all about them giving the flexible working; they can benefit from it, too.

John Mason: It has been suggested that, if a father is seeking information from a school, the school will often default to the mother, especially if the parents are apart. The school might even check with the mother whether the father is to be allowed access to information. Can we change that centrally, or is it more about the culture locally?

Aileen Campbell: The legislation says that people should take account of different families' circumstances, and that the best practice would be to ensure that both parents are fully aware of situations in the school. The school should be aware of the family situation. The legislation does not suggest that there should be a default position to one parent; it involves encompassing the whole gamut of situations in which families might find themselves.

John Mason: Do you accept that, in practice, there is sometimes a bit of a default towards the mother?

Aileen Campbell: It is about the cultural change that we need to bring about, the default position being that the mother is the parent and the mother has the caring role. In my situation, my husband is the primary carer for our wee boy. We know from personal experience how important it is to allow fathers to have that positive role in their children's lives. It is something that we need to work at. However, the legislation does not prohibit teachers from allowing fathers to have a full role in their children's lives. I would also mention curriculum for excellence and all the other things that are gradually changing the situation.

Christian Allard: Getting it right for every child is a ground-breaking policy, which is exactly what we need for children. However, should there be a subtitle within that policy, "Getting it right for every parent"? As my colleague said, it seems that the

policy is not trickling down as it should be—when it comes to implementation, we are not talking about parents; we are talking only about mothers. Is there a part of the policy where we can get it right for every parent? I understand that there are many kinds of parenting, but we have discovered in the course of this inquiry that we do not seem to be progressing. There has been a great emphasis on that. We might even be going backwards in some respects. That is my second question—perhaps you could answer both at the same time. I think that Mr Stockwell said, in relation to the figures, that more and more men are coming into the teaching profession.

Aileen Campbell: I said that there had been modest progress. There has been an increase—a modest increase, but an increase nonetheless.

Christian Allard: We tried to find out about that. It seems that that modest increase has been in secondary schools. In primary schools, however, we seem to be going back the way. We are not talking about gender inequalities in primary schools, but about an absence of role models for fathers. Do you have any figures on that?

Aileen Campbell: There has been a percentage increase in the number of male primary teachers. It is at the highest level since 1997. I caveat that by saying that the increase has been modest, up to 9 per cent of the workforce in the primary teaching sector being male. The increase is modest, but the figure has been going in the right direction. I would hesitate to agree with your assertion that we are going backwards. Getting it right for every child is about getting it right for every child. That means the whole wellbeing of a child, so we embedded wellbeing in the legislation.

We know that interaction with both parents, where it is appropriate, is important for a child's wellbeing. Getting it right for every child means reflecting on the positive roles that both parents can play in a child's life. The national parenting forum Scotland is on the programme implementation board, and we will ensure that our messages on the legislation are correct for parents.

There were differences of opinion on the named person provision, but that provision, which is based on universal services, gives support to parents should they require it. That is another layer of support that both parents, male and female, can access as a result of the bill.

Christian Allard: It is strange that, when you speak about getting it right for every child and every parent where that is possible, or however you put it—

Aileen Campbell: Where it is appropriate.

Christian Allard: When you say that, I hear it as a statement that fathers can get involved only where it is appropriate. I know that that is not what you are saying—

Aileen Campbell: No, it is not what I am saying.

Christian Allard: But it is what people are hearing. Perhaps we need to consider how to formulate the message, and to ensure that it trickles down not as I am—and everybody else is—hearing it. I do not know how we can formulate a message about getting it right for every parent to emphasise fathers' involvement and to change social attitudes.

Aileen Campbell: The GIRFEC approach does not assume anything negative about a parent. It assumes that, for a child to flourish, they need love, nurture and support from parents, and from both parents if the child is in those circumstances.

It has to be said that that should be the case where it is appropriate—the birth parents might no longer have a role in their child's life, and the child may be being looked after in a foster care or adoption setting. Families face a lot of different situations, but we want to embrace the opportunity that the guidance on the 2014 act offers us. Having the national parenting forum on the programme board will allow us to ensure that our messages in the guidance that we develop to enable the successful implementation of the act are mindful of the issues that have arisen through the committee's investigation on fatherhood. We want to ensure that fathers feel properly part of their children's lives. The committee has raised a lot of good issues, and has challenged Government and local authorities, and our perceptions as a country.

Christian Allard suggested that we have been going backwards, but I think that we have been making an awful lot of progress. We have identified some things on which we need to do more, but they are being taken forward through the mapping exercise, and through the NHS father-proofing all its documents and policy guidance. We are making good progress, but we need to ensure that we work together and do not take our foot off the gas, because the progress could slip, and we cannot allow that to happen.

Christian Allard: Thank you, minister. It would be helpful if you could get the figures, because I do not think that we have been given them.

Aileen Campbell: Yes, okay.

Marco Biagi: I think that we have moved on a bit. I am interested to know what the uptake and interest have been in the IOD award that the minister mentioned. Are the companies fighting for it? I am not asking you to give away the winners and spoil the envelope moment tonight.

Aileen Campbell: A spoiler alert.

Erica Clarkson: I will not say who the winner is. Last year we had a very small number of entrants for that category of the awards. I think that there were two or three entrants, but that predates my involvement so I would need to check that. This year we had six nominations, so it is clearly picking up momentum. They were of very good quality and it was a tough decision and a close call.

Aileen Campbell: On the back of that, we are happy to keep the committee informed as work progresses on our family-friendly work, which is fairly significant and will, we hope, bear fruit in the form of a cultural change that we all seek.

The Convener: We would welcome that too, minister.

Siobhan McMahon: When the committee discussed family-friendly work with the Scottish Trades Union Congress, the modern apprenticeship scheme came up. Are young parents who are in the apprenticeship scheme able to train part time or for a longer period? Will that be included in the new family-friendly working?

Aileen Campbell: I understand that the modern apprenticeships work at the pace of the people who are undertaking them, so I imagine that they would be mindful of the parenting role that an apprentice may have. I am happy to take that on board in the work that the working group is progressing.

Siobhan McMahon: On a point of clarification, because we did not know the answer, can someone who is on a modern apprenticeship scheme claim paternity or maternity leave during their placement?

Erica Clarkson: Yes, they can. All apprentices must be employed in the usual manner. Modern apprenticeships are real jobs—there is vocational training attached, but apprentices have the rights that go with real jobs and they are therefore entitled to the same maternity and parental leave as anybody else would be.

10:45

The Convener: I will come in on that issue, because I know a bit about it. With regard to part-time working, apprentices on all the modern apprenticeships work a minimum of 16 hours a week, so they could reduce their working hours. The timescale for completion of the apprenticeship can be extended, and apprentices are able to take a break and restart the programme. Again, that is down to the employers and the terms and conditions of the modern apprenticeship programme.

Christian Allard: I have a brief supplementary on apprenticeships. We heard very good stories this morning about apprenticeships for carers working very well in the private care sector. There are good examples in the private sector of inclusiveness and flexible hours for fathers, but we did not hear so much about that happening in the public sector. I know about the award scheme, but I hope that you are involving not only the big companies and the public sector but smaller and medium-sized companies, which have, it seems from our inquiry, been very good and flexible to fathers.

Aileen Campbell: The work that is being progressed will apply equally to working with the public sector. In the Government, civil servants have the opportunity to work flexibly—I am sure that Erica Clarkson will be able to elaborate on that.

Erica Clarkson: Today is my flexible working day. [*Laughter.*] We will reach out across all sectors, and we will speak with employees in the public sector, the private sector and the third sector. There were nominations from all sectors in this year's awards.

Simon Stockwell: One of the draftsmen who worked on a bill that has just been considered took paternity leave when he was drafting amendments for stage 2, so there was an interesting question of how quickly we could get them done in time and whether the other draftsmen would have to do them instead.

The Convener: Minister, you mentioned the "Ready Steady Baby!" website and the play talk read initiative. There are a great deal of initiatives out there for fathers, but the big problem is that a lot of the information is not getting to fathers—it is out there on the internet or in a big black hole somewhere—so they do not know what programmes and initiatives they could join. It is great that those initiatives exist, but how will you ensure that fathers know about them and that the information does not just sit on the internet unused?

Aileen Campbell: We are looking at ways in which the play talk read campaign can be improved to allow more fathers to access the hints and tips and the key messages that we are promoting with regard to playing, talking and reading with their wee one from day 1. We are working to ensure that it can be better used by parents.

We are also looking at the "Ready Steady Baby!" website with regard to enabling it to be more father friendly, and we are progressing the mapping exercise so that we are better placed to ensure that fathers can access those key

messages and play a full part in their child's life, especially in those early years.

A nice thing happened—I am diverting a wee bit from the question—at a Sense Scotland meeting a week or two ago. One of the music therapists spoke about men feeling very much left out in the antenatal setting, and she said that the bass tones of a father's voice penetrate the womb much more ably than female voices, so men have a critical role in that very important period of child development. If they are singing and talking happily to the child when it is in its mother's womb, that allows the child to develop and to be already connected when it is born. Those are nice things that allow fathers to feel very important during a time when mothers are often at the centre of the services that are provided.

The Convener: As members have no other questions, I ask the minister to offer any closing remarks.

Aileen Campbell: We are happy to keep the committee engaged in the work that we are taking forward that we have discussed today. I thank the committee for the work that it has done and for the opportunity to present some of the activity that we are progressing as a Government to achieve the same aim that the committee has to allow fathers to play a full and active role in their children's lives.

The Convener: Thank you for coming along, minister. That concludes the oral evidence in our fathers and parenting inquiry and the public part of today's meeting. Our next meeting will take place on 24 April, when we will consider a draft report on the fathers and parenting inquiry and our approach to the scrutiny of the Scottish Government's draft budget for 2015-16.

10:50

Meeting continued in private until 10:55.

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