



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Thursday 17 September 2015

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE
15th Meeting 2015, Session 4

CONVENER

*Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP)

*John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

*Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con)

*John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)

*Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Katie Hutton (Skills Development Scotland)

Helen Martin (Scottish Trades Union Congress)

Dr John McGurk (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development Scotland)

David Watt (Education Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Ruth McGill

LOCATION

The James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Thursday 17 September 2015

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:32]

Race, Ethnicity and Employment

The Convener (Margaret McCulloch): Good morning everybody and welcome to the 15th meeting in 2015 of the Equal Opportunities Committee. Please set any electronic devices to flight mode or switch them off.

I will start with introductions. We are supported at the table by the clerk and research staff, official reporters and broadcasting services and around the room by the security office. I welcome observers in the public gallery. I am the committee's convener. Members will introduce themselves in turn, starting on my right.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I am the MSP for Glasgow Kelvin and deputy convener of the committee.

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): I am an MSP for North East Scotland.

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

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): I am a member for Glasgow.

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): I am an MSP for West Scotland.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): Madainn mhath. Good morning. I am an MSP for the Highlands and Islands.

The Convener: Thank you. Today we have one agenda item, which is an evidence session in our inquiry into removing barriers: race, ethnicity and employment. When witnesses or members wish to speak, they should indicate to either me or the clerk.

I welcome the panel and ask our witnesses to introduce themselves. I also invite them to outline briefly the work of their organisation and any current projects.

Helen Martin (Scottish Trades Union Congress): I am from the Scottish Trades Union Congress and I am secretary to its black workers committee. The black workers committee brings together black workers from all across Scotland from a range of organisations and sectors. It is a self-organising committee that passes policy each year. It helps the STUC to understand the needs

of black workers and to make sure that our policy reflects their views of society and of the labour market.

We are undertaking a variety of work at the minute, but I think that the committee would be particularly interested in the fact that we are currently being funded by the fair work directorate to do a pilot project looking at the creation of equality representatives in the private and third sectors. It is a new piece of work, in which we are looking at how to support equality reps in those sectors, particularly given the fact that there is no statutory recognition of equality rep status. The idea is that the pilot project will select four workplaces and try to support the creation or development of equality reps. That project is on-going until April.

Katie Hutton (Skills Development Scotland): I am from Skills Development Scotland, where I have responsibility for national training programmes, modern apprenticeships and the employability fund. We have a range of activity on equality of opportunity. I will highlight three main areas. First, there is engagement with individuals and parents among ethnically diverse communities. We have a project with BEMIS—empowering Scotland's ethnic and cultural minority communities—called modern apprenticeships for all. Two full-time members of staff are embedded within BEMIS and work with a range of community groups to go out there and sell—to parents and individuals—the benefits of undertaking a modern apprenticeship as a career.

We have a range of challenge projects with community groups, too, to look at diverse ways of engaging individuals in modern apprenticeships. Our careers information, advice and guidance—CIAG—services have a range of measures in place to reach ethnically diverse communities. We have continuous professional development for our own staff and toolkits to support individuals in giving guidance to ethnically diverse communities in terms of understanding customs, cultural norms and so on.

Lastly, in terms of continuous improvement of our services, we have an equalities advisory group that we use a lot to advise and guide us on how we might tailor our services to different groups. That looks at things like our online guidance tool, My World of Work, and works with communities to look at how the information is presented and how we might present it better. That is a snapshot of what we are doing.

David Watt (Education Scotland): I am the senior education officer with responsibility for inclusion and equalities at Education Scotland. We have a range of workstreams on developing the young workforce. We are working together with Skills Development Scotland to publish career

education standards and work placement standards imminently, within the next couple of weeks.

I would like to mention the success in Scottish schools in attainment of children from ethnic minorities. Most of the ethnic minorities, if not all, are attaining above national averages, which is a strong success for our schools and education authorities. Even those young people who have additional support for learning are now achieving ahead of national averages. They are also gaining entry to higher education and further education above national averages. There is still a bit of work to do on employment, as employment among those from ethnic minorities is below the national average, but we are working from a strong base to continue to improve outcomes.

Dr John McGurk (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development Scotland): I am the head of CIPD Scotland, which is the body for professional people and development. We represent 10,000 members in Scotland and, including our Scottish members, UK wide—and, increasingly, internationally—we represent a total of 140,000 members. We are at the forefront of inclusion in the labour market. We work across all sorts of agendas from developing young people and people with disabilities to making work access opportunities available to all. Obviously, there is a lot of work to be done on the black and minority ethnic agenda and we acknowledge that. We acknowledge that there is a long way to go before we have a good evidence base for what good practice should look like, but we are happy to work with the parties in Scotland and nationally.

The Convener: Thank you very much. You do not have to press the button, as the microphone will come on automatically when you start to speak.

Katie Hutton mentioned BEMIS and the projects that SDS is doing. Can you expand a bit more on the role of the two allocated individuals within BEMIS and what sort of outcome you expect from that work?

Katie Hutton: Yes. A range of community groups have told us that it is about engagement. It is about going out there and reaching out to the community, who may not have a great deal of awareness of what modern apprenticeships are about. Crucially, they have told us that it is about selling a career rather than just an opportunity at that point post-school. As you will be aware, higher education in particular is a favoured route among some groups, so the individuals are going round various community groups. It is about shoe leather—they are going out and going round groups across Scotland. From the reports that we are getting back, I have seen that events are lined up with about 158 groups to talk about modern

apprenticeships and the employability fund. It is also about things like CV building and so on. We want 200 additional individuals from BME backgrounds to be participating in modern apprenticeships next year. We have therefore given them hard outcomes, but a lot of it is about going out there to different groups, taking advantage of events that are already on the ground and also setting up events themselves.

The Convener: What kind of feedback do the two individuals get when they speak to the groups about the reasons why they do not participate in the modern apprenticeship programme?

Katie Hutton: I think it comes back to what I said about the career route. People want to understand more about the career route that they will get. Someone said to me last week that a lot of BME community groups are prepared to make a sacrifice now by putting individuals through higher education and so on for the benefit of a long-term career. I think that it comes down to, “What does that get me in the future?” Those are the messages that the two individuals who are working with BEMIS are going out there to promulgate.

The Convener: My other question is on employers that are recruiting apprentices. What are you doing to encourage employers to open up their recruitment process to more ethnic groups?

Katie Hutton: As you know, one of the issues about modern apprenticeships is that it is the employer who, by and large, makes the recruitment decision, unless the training provider is asked specifically to undertake the recruitment process. We are doing the usual in terms of trying to promote the business benefits of diversity within the workforce. We have an equality toolkit online on our skillsforce, which is our online service for employers, and we are also looking at what we can do around unconscious bias advice.

The training providers—that includes colleges, local authorities, private training providers and third sector organisations—are really the sales force to employers. We have invested quite a lot in what we do with them. The Equality Challenge Unit, for instance, undertook on our behalf at the end of last year a training needs analysis to help us to understand issues around diversity. Before that, we had also funded some continuing professional development. We had about eight events and four webinars on equality of opportunity with training providers and we will be building on that on the basis of the training needs analysis that we have employers doing there. We have held get connected events.

We have funded challenge fund projects, and about seven of the 14 projects—I think—include a BME theme. We are also looking at procurement,

which is quite a delicate issue for employers. We have been working on a project with the Scottish Government, the police and the Equality and Human Rights Commission about what employers can put in their procurement requirements around equality of opportunity. We are adding some things to the guidelines for 2016-17 contracting, so that they are in line with the EHRC best practice guidelines. We also want to talk to employer groups—the CIPD might have an interest in an event—and business organisations about what more we can do to get the message across to employers and also what they can put in their procurement guidelines beyond 2016-17.

We have done things with our own staff. We have a small employer engagement team, so they have been through equalities training and it is about selling the messages there, too. We have done a range of things.

09:45

Annabel Goldie: How does Skills Development Scotland measure participation by ethnic minority young people in modern apprenticeships or other training schemes and, once people are in MAs and such schemes, does SDS appraise or review how they are getting on?

Katie Hutton: We measure the number and percentage of BME people who have started a modern apprenticeship. When an individual goes through registration after having been recruited to the company or chosen by the company from its existing workforce, we ask them what their ethnic group is, but that information is given on a self-reported basis. Some people refuse to say what their ethnic background is.

The training and assessment that is offered to BME people once they are on a modern apprenticeship is really the responsibility of the training provider in tandem with the employer, because those people are employees of the company. However, our staff go out and speak to the contracted training providers and talk to them about what they are providing. We also speak to trainees and employers to ask, “Are you happy with the training that you are doing?”

Annabel Goldie: Does that include discussing with the apprentice how they are getting on?

Katie Hutton: Yes. We speak to a sample of all the modern apprentices who are involved in the programme and ask them, “What do you think about the quality of your induction? What do you think about the training that you are getting? Are you happy with the support you are getting from your employer?” That is what our contract managers do. We also do in-training surveys online, from time to time.

The Convener: Do you send out surveys when every modern apprentice completes or leaves a programme?

Katie Hutton: Every few years we do a leavers survey to find out what happened to them six months onwards from being an apprentice.

The Convener: I will ask you to expand a wee bit, given the younger age profile from the ethnic minority population in Scotland. What other reasons prevent young people from participating in the modern apprenticeship programme? You said that one reason could be lack of knowledge about the modern apprenticeship programme in general. Are there other cultural barriers? Some people think that modern apprenticeships are not as good as college or university. I should declare an interest in that I was involved in the modern apprenticeship programme, so I know that there are opportunities for young people doing the modern apprenticeships to go on to do degrees and carry on their education in a working environment. What other barriers are you hearing about from young people?

Katie Hutton: Part of the issue is that, in the school leaver destination return, 80 per cent of school leavers from a BME background go on to FE and HE, compared with 65 per cent of school leavers from other backgrounds. A choice is being made—and it can be a family and cultural choice—about what people want and what route should be taken. You asked specifically about young people and you can see the choices being made there.

There are other barriers. Someone’s community might not necessarily have links to the workplace. Someone might not have those links to employers—perhaps they came here as a refugee or whatever—and their family might not have links to them either. A community could be isolated in that regard. It might be that nobody in the person’s family has ever gone into construction or perhaps they have heard that certain industries do not take people who come from their background. That may be part of the dialogue within the community.

There are a variety of reasons why someone could be put off taking particular paths. Obviously, if their parents are very keen for them to become a doctor or a lawyer, they will go down that route post school.

Helen Martin: I agree with a lot of what Katie Hutton is saying. There is a perception among ethnic minority communities that higher education is the way to go, but we cannot give up on the idea that apprenticeships are a really good route for ethnic minority young people. It goes back to the Wood commission and the parity-of-esteem agenda that we are trying to create.

One barrier that ethnic minority young people face later, even when they have degrees, is that they find it more difficult to get into employment roles that other people get into, because they do not have the same opportunities to do unpaid internships and other things that often are routes into good careers in our labour market. That is harder for an ethnic minority young person because they do not have the social capital that comes with being a member of other families, so they do not necessarily know people who work in certain industries. The apprenticeship route is a really good route for ethnic minority young people because it helps build that social capital. It takes them into the workplace earlier and gives them a very structured route into work, which could help with the longer-term labour market outcomes that ultimately we are trying to change.

The foundation apprenticeship scheme is the new scheme that is being developed at the minute. Foundation apprenticeships differ substantially from normal apprenticeships, as I am sure the committee is aware, because people on them are not employed. Foundation apprenticeships are unpaid and are a form of work experience. Obviously, the STUC would have some concerns about that approach, but, given that we have decided to take that route, it is incumbent on us to make sure that we are making the most of it. Given that foundation apprentices are not employees, we are able to do a lot more positive action—targeting of BME young people—than we are able to do when employed status is involved. We hope that the foundation apprenticeship will be used as a way to break down the occupational segregation that we have seen in apprenticeships in the past.

Katie Hutton: In case the committee is not aware of it, I should say that foundation apprenticeships take place in the school system. It is an option that people can take when they are in fourth year. They are developing at the moment. We have two pathfinder programmes at the moment and there will be more next year and the following year. The whole ethos behind foundation apprenticeships, including the work experience part of them, is that they will create parity of esteem, in terms of the work-based learning routes. People will come out with a nationally recognised qualification and will have already done part of their modern apprenticeship, which is a good thing.

At the equalities advisory group on Friday, Helen Martin and I talked about the issue of paid work experience. The work experience can take many forms. It could be an afternoon in the workplace, for example. There are some issues around that, but it is a developing option. As Helen said, we have high hopes around the equalities agenda. We hope that, right from the point of

school, the foundation apprenticeship will have parity of esteem with other academic qualifications and pick people up earlier to go down the work-based learning route.

John Mason: Ms Hutton, you mentioned a figure of 200. Will you explain that? Will that be an increase?

Katie Hutton: That will be 200 individuals from BME backgrounds taking up modern apprenticeships and work-based learning employed routes as a result of the activities that BEMIS is undertaking.

John Mason: Is that 200 on top of how many are presently doing it?

Katie Hutton: Yes.

John Mason: Where would that take us to?

Katie Hutton: At the end of 2014-15, 361 individuals self-declared that they were from a BME background. However, BEMIS is only one activity. We have challenge fund projects. Last year, for instance, Rathbone—

John Mason: I am interested in the numbers, being a numbers person. Am I right in saying that there are 25,000 modern apprenticeships?

Katie Hutton: Yes.

John Mason: So 1 per cent would be 250?

Katie Hutton: Yes.

John Mason: Given that BME people make up, on average, 4 per cent of the population, should we be at 1,000, if the scheme is to be proportional?

Katie Hutton: Yes.

John Mason: Might the proportion be even be higher among young people?

Katie Hutton: We are talking about the working-age population group of ages 16 to 24. The 25-plus age group is targeted at certain sectors and is not necessarily representative of the whole workplace. We are specifically looking at the key group of people aged 16 to 24.

John Mason: Is the figure for that group more than 4 per cent in Scotland?

Katie Hutton: It is 4.4 per cent, I believe. You are right. We are looking at getting an additional 700 individuals from BME backgrounds.

John Mason: Do you hope to get the number up to 1,000? Is that what you are aiming at?

Katie Hutton: We hope that the number will be reflective of the working-age population in BME groups.

The Convener: Can you do anything to try to capture information on the individuals who do not want to tick the box to say that they come from a BME background? A high percentage of people doing modern apprenticeships might not be identifying themselves.

Katie Hutton: The Equality Challenge Unit is working with us on two things: definitional issues and the best strategies to enable people to self-declare across a range of equalities issues. We know, for instance, that even graduates who have a disability are not keen on declaring some aspects about themselves. That work is about looking at the best strategies and practice on enabling individuals to declare. We will speak to our training providers about that and have good-practice sessions on helping individuals.

Christian Allard: I am struggling a little bit and I would like some clarification. John Mason talked about numbers, which are very important, but the issue is about people. BEMIS is doing fantastic work and SDS is doing great work, which seems to be working. Someone said earlier that one of the biggest difficulties is that families from some ethnic backgrounds are very successful in higher education and want their children to be doctors and solicitors and so on. Are we really targeting those people to get them into modern apprenticeships? Are we asking families to consider that their son or daughter should become a bricklayer, as opposed to a doctor or solicitor? Is that what we are doing?

David Watt: Together with Skills Development Scotland, at early stages within secondary school we are making an enhanced offer when pupils make subject choices. They will have a number of group sessions plus an individual session—with a parent—to discuss career options and to look at subject choices. Schools are also doing another bit of work in the senior phase about more personalised pathways and better working between school and business, to offer a senior phase that leads pupils to the world of work. That is still development work at the senior phase, but some exciting stuff is happening in schools across Scotland to broaden people's choices. One of the things underpinning the issue is that people need to have higher expectations for themselves.

Christian Allard: My concern is that we are targeting specific groups. Are we going to tell Dr McLeod that his children should not become doctors but should go into masonry? That is what I am asking.

Katie Hutton: We are laying out the options. We are making sure that people make informed choices on the work-based learning route, not uninformed choices. We are not forcing people to choose the apprenticeship route. The issue is about making informed choices.

Christian Allard: I agree, but we seem to be spending money and a lot of effort to encourage people from a specific ethnic minority to go into modern apprenticeships rather than higher education. That is not very equal if you are doing that only to one part of the population. I find it difficult.

Katie Hutton: It is not just one part of the population. We promote apprenticeships across Scotland. We recognise, in looking at the statistics around modern apprenticeships, that some communities are not going straight into the workplace or taking up apprenticeships. We have to demonstrate that we are helping individuals to make informed choices. It is up to an individual whether they become a doctor or not, but we have to make sure that the message gets out there.

Helen Martin: It is important that we do not think in caricatures when we think about what type of education is better for young people. It is right that ethnic minority young people should have the same ability to access modern apprenticeships as all other parts of the population. A lot of ethnic minority young people are going into higher education at the minute, but that does not mean that that is right for every ethnic minority young person. A person might do much better if they are given the option of doing an apprenticeship, because they might learn in a different way. It is not necessarily the case that because someone has done higher education they will have an excellent labour market outcome. We know that an awful lot of ethnic minority young people do higher education, get a good degree and then do not have the good labour market outcomes that we would expect from having that degree, because of other injustices within the labour market.

It is also important that we remember that there are some really good professions that can be accessed through modern apprenticeships that could allow someone to become a doctor, a pharmacist or an engineer via a different route from normal. Those options might be the best route for that young person because they might prefer a different style of learning. Right now, a lot of people in our education sector are being funnelled into specific routes according to their background, the level of earnings that their parents have or other factors, and I think that that is negative for all young people. Whether they end up in higher education or in apprenticeships, people should be given the ability to choose what is best for them as a learner, not what is best for them due to their ethnic background or the earnings of their parents.

10:00

Christian Allard: How we are targeting people based on their ethnicity? Are we trying to

pigeonhole them in different areas, such as modern apprenticeships or higher education, just to satisfy some arbitrary numbers? There should be equality about the education experience.

David Watt: I would rephrase that in terms of a more personalised approach for people.

Scottish education has probably had an unheralded success with regard to engaging with ethnic minorities and ensuring that they make that measure of attainment successfully. The next area is aligned to what you are talking about. We need to be a bit more focused around the underachievement of boys compared to girls across ethnic minorities. We need to be aware that, for example, Asian girls do very well but Gypsy Travellers do not reach the scores, never mind make improvement. We have to look at those issues in a personalised way to ensure that young people are making the choices in their senior phase that will lead to the best option for them. We have moved away from an academic-vocational divide and towards thinking about learning and achievement pathways for young people.

Sandra White: We have talked a lot about apprenticeships and modern apprenticeships and lots of work is being done by lots of people, but we do not seem to have a lot of data about exactly what BME factions go into what type of modern apprenticeship, how many make it through the course, whether there is a high drop-out rate and so on. Dr McGurk mentioned the need for the approach to be evidence based, but we do not seem to have a lot of data. What are you doing to follow that pathway through? I think that “pathway” is everyone’s favourite word lately. Basically, we do not seem to have the data that would let us know exactly what is happening—whether BME kids go into apprenticeships, what happens when they do or what type of apprenticeships they go into.

Katie Hutton: We have data. We publish statistics quarterly—I think; we certainly do it annually—on starts, and I think that we have now started doing that on achievement rates as well.

We are developing an equalities action plan in response to the commission for developing Scotland’s young workforce’s youth employment strategy. Without giving anything away, one of the actions in it involves working with representative groups to see what kind of data they want.

We collect data in relation to achievement, starts, gender and ethnicity and we publish quite a lot of data on a quarterly basis. However, if there is more data that groups would like to see, we are happy to talk about that and publish it. Sometimes you hear about what people want only through the medium of a committee, which is interesting.

Sandra White: The evidence that we have taken so far—the STUC gave evidence also—suggests that we do not have the necessary data on BME communities with regard to apprenticeships. How would having that data affect Dr McGurk’s profession? Do you receive that data?

Dr McGurk: Employers routinely collect data on recruitment, training, promotion and various work-cycle issues such as performance management, grievances, dismissals, organisational exit and so on. Generally, it is good practice to monitor the situation by specific groups, but it is wickedly difficult to collect that data systematically and use it.

We acknowledge that business needs to have much more of a mindset around using that data purposefully, because what happens when it is not used purposefully is that people just collect it and then forget about it. You need to use it to create a dialogue about the problem and try to solve it.

Obviously, there are organisations that are very good at collecting that kind of data, such as the big public sector bodies, which have an obligation to do it. However, it is more difficult to collect that information from the large number of small and medium-sized enterprises in Scotland. For example, yesterday, the Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training launched our people skills programme, which is designed to support SME capability and people in development. However, given the number of SMEs, where a lot of the opportunities exist, how do you collect the data?

We agree that we absolutely have to take an evidence-based approach, but there are a huge number of gaps before we get to that evidence. A real start would be to collect the data purposefully so that we could compare it and start to make decisions.

Sandra White: If you have the data, we would really like to see it. However, basically, the information that we have received suggests that, if there is any data, it does not talk about the ethnicity of the people who are taking part in modern apprenticeships. Therefore, it is not broken down far enough for us or anyone else to use in that regard.

Katie Hutton: We can do that, if people want to see that published.

Sandra White: Are you saying that you do not do that at the moment?

Katie Hutton: We publish a lot of data. There are a lot of modern apprenticeship statistics out there. We publish more statistics than a lot of other public sector agencies do, and we do so on a quarterly basis.

When you are publishing data, you have to be careful when you get down to extremely small numbers. Sometimes, you are not allowed to publish that because someone could use it to identify individuals. There are rules around that. However, we can certainly consider what we publish. As I say, it is on our action plan to talk to partners about what they would like us to publish.

Sandra White: Just to hammer home this point, we are doing this inquiry because we are interested in BME communities. Lots of work has been done—I congratulate everyone who is doing that work—but we do not have the data that would tell us exactly what BME communities are taking part in apprenticeships, what the drop-out rate is and what the flow-through into work is. We are looking for that data because, as you all said, the BME communities are doing well educationally but the data that you publish shows that an awful lot of people in those groups are not able to get into employment at the end. We would like to know a wee bit more about whether you are enabling BME communities to get into modern apprenticeships and whether you follow that through.

Katie Hutton: Are you talking about subdividing the BME groups by the census groups?

Sandra White: Yes, something like that would be a help.

Katie Hutton: Okay.

The Convener: To clarify, we are looking for data on modern apprenticeship starts, leavers, the ethnic group those people come from, whether they have achieved a modern apprenticeship and, probably, the drop-out rate.

Katie Hutton: At the moment we publish data in general on the start, leaver and achievement rates for the BME category. I understand what you are asking for, but I repeat the caveat that we cannot publish data that is broken down into extremely small numbers and groups.

The Convener: We also want to know whether the people are still in the job when they complete their modern apprenticeship qualification.

Katie Hutton: We do that through a survey because we cannot do a census of however many thousands are involved every year. If you do that by a survey, you get into issues around sample sizes. However, a big part of our research concerns the equalities agenda, so we can think about how we can address those issues as part of that.

The Convener: Thank you.

Christian Allard: I just want to clarify something. I am hearing two things. The committee is asking for data but are you saying

that if we subdivide the data by different ethnicities, the data will not tell us anything?

Katie Hutton: No, what I am saying is that official statistics guidelines say that, if you subdivide by group to the point that you get down to groups with one or two people in them, you are not supposed to publish that data, because those individuals could be identified.

Christian Allard: Is what we are asking for not possible?

Katie Hutton: It is possible to break the data down. However, for some groups, we need to be careful about what we publish, because it might be possible to use the data almost to say what an individual's name is or where they live.

Drew Smith: When we talked about young people specifically, we talked about what schools are doing to encourage people from ethnic minority backgrounds into training or apprenticeship programmes. I would be interested to hear a little bit more from Education Scotland and SDS about whether any specific work is targeted at those groups of people.

David Watt: It is not targeted at present. We are introducing some career education standards and work placement guidance that is going to be framed in terms of equalities and the need to take account of the public sector duties specifically within the area.

Schools and SDS have had a focus on ensuring that people's qualifications allow them to gain access to FE and HE. Schools have been successful in raising attainment but they now need to engage with parents and young people around choices that are made directly after the end of a person's school career. That is perhaps an area that we continually need to work on.

Dr McGurk: Access to apprenticeships and modern apprenticeships is absolutely vital, but we have to have a wider debate about the skills and labour market issue.

CIPD Scotland has put forward an approach called Scotland's skilled future, which involves everything from pre-school—which is important because we need to think about how people get socialised and formed in the community, as that defines a lot of their life chances, their behaviours and their later access to the labour market and so on—to pension age and beyond. The latter point is important because we have an ageing population and, whether we are happy about it or not, we are going to have to continue to work later in life.

Whenever we are considering any labour market problem or issue, we should be thinking about that wide spectrum of issues. There are issues around the settled and established BME community's access to the labour market. There is

a lot of evidence around, for example, what happens when anonymised applications are used instead of those that enable employers to see that some people have manifestly black or ethnic names and others have names that are manifestly white. Some research from the United States of America, which has also been replicated in the UK, shows that there is an almost 50 per cent chance of someone not getting through to the selection stage after the initial CV submission stage if their name is manifestly black or ethnic. That is an issue that we need to tackle, but it applies to people who are already in the system. We have to think about how we tackle those issues.

CIPD believes that the issue of collecting data is absolutely paramount, but also that issues about behaviours and mindsets are important, too. Those issues are much more difficult. How do we change behaviours and mindsets? We need to put in front of people the fact that they must consider those issues and think about their unconscious bias—my colleague from the STUC talked about that earlier. We have a report called “Our minds at work”, which examines how we think about issues and how our world view and our limited perceptions can affect how we make decisions. That shows how difficult the issues are.

On what is happening within the ethnic minority groups, I would say that economists love pay data, because it is easy to collect. They do not really like researching issues about characteristics and progression through the labour market.

Among the data, there is a really good report by Hilary Metcalf for the National Institute of Economic and Social Research—it is national research but there is no reason to assume that Scotland would be any different—that shows the different pay outcomes for ethnic minorities. It shows that, within ethnic minorities themselves—this is folk wisdom that a lot of people think they know—the rate is higher than the average, which, in that sample, is for the white male population. There is also research on full-time and part-time work that shows that, within the ethnic minority communities, there is a lot of difference in differential and outcome. We have to be clear about what problem we are trying to solve, but there is an absolute need for awareness raising and understanding of the fact that young people are not getting the right access to MAs and that a lot of the established community are not getting access to jobs. There are well-known cases that show why that is so and that it is related to ethnicity, and the evidence is statistically controlled and modelled.

We need to have a dialogue. It is easy to get into solution mode, but we need a dialogue before we start to get into solutions, because the

solutions that we come up with might not be fit for the problem that we are trying to solve.

10:15

Katie Hutton: You asked about careers information, advice and guidance in schools. We developed guidance on the development of partnership agreements with schools on school-based career coaching, which includes specific guidance on considering the needs of ethnic minority groups. The individuals have face-to-face meetings with their careers coaches, which involves a discussion between the schools and selected pupils. We have an equality toolkit for our CIAG staff that includes advice on how to sensitively handle day-to-day situations involving customs and so on and the use of interpreters. We also have continuing professional development online intranet modules for our staff, and we have strengthened our partnership arrangements to better identify young people from BME backgrounds in a school setting. In addition, we have a research project with BME school pupils in which we ask them what they think about the CIAG services that they are receiving with a view to their suggesting any improvements that we could make.

Drew Smith: Are you aware of, or is there any evidence around, whether pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds are more or less likely to engage with the careers service or whether they engage with it in a different way? Is there any report of a different experience of the careers service? You might expect that it would reflect some of the other things that we know are going on in terms of the propensity of some groups to go into higher education. There are also issues about their having worse labour market outcomes. Is any of that borne out through the engagement of the careers services with them?

Katie Hutton: I am not personally aware of those things, but I think that someone who goes into higher education is less likely to want intensive careers guidance and support. There is also evidence, from employability services more widely, about their generally being less inclined to put themselves forward to the Department for Work and Pensions or to our out-of-school services for employability support.

Helen Martin: There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that schools reflect some of the stereotypical views of career paths. Well-meaning teachers will also reflect back to students what a lot of their parents are saying. They will say to working-class girls, “You should be a childcare worker,” they will say to a working-class boy, “You should be a bricklayer,” and they will say to an ethnic minority girl, “You should be a pharmacist.” They will reflect those stereotypes back. We need

to help teachers to remember that they do not necessarily have to do that and that they can encourage young people to widen their horizons.

One of the nice things about the My World of Work website—it was one of the hopes for the website—is that it gives alternative pathways to similar places, helping people to understand that they can take a vocational route rather than an academic route. It helps people to think about what their options are without having that prejudice of, “You look like this,” or, “I know your mum so I am going to say this to you.” That is what we want to try to break down, because we do not want to pigeonhole people into certain routes; we want to give students the opportunity to choose their own paths.

Dr McGurk: A telling issue in schools is that, quite often, when we think that young people are destined for university—I think that Katie Hutton was talking about this, but I am not saying that this is evidenced; it is something that we all know in our social world because we hear about it all the time—there is no careers conversation with those young people, and that is part of the problem of parity of esteem. We need to have a really good dialogue with young people about what their options are and how people get baked into choices.

A piece of research that we have done recently with the Centre on Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance, which is the centre for operational and labour market research at the University of Oxford and Cardiff University, is about overqualification. There is a lot of overqualification in the labour market in the UK generally, and a lot of it is because people have just been chosen or have had options preselected for them. They end up, after university, without the skills that they need for the careers that are available and drift into jobs that do not use their full skills. Those issues are part of the problem for all communities.

David Watt: That is part of how schools are taking forward a wider view of work and the place of work within education. The career education standards that are being launched will broaden young people’s understanding of the world of work and what it means to them from an early age, so that they begin to engage in the discussion about what a career should be and what they should aspire to.

We were asked by the Wood commission to embed equality education across the curriculum for excellence. We are working to populate the curriculum with equality as content, to engage with gender stereotyping, to look at prejudice and to look at issues around migration and how that can be part of study within the curriculum from an early

age. We are looking to improve the curricular content in that way.

The Convener: What has been happening regarding careers advice and information?

Katie Hutton: There is a blended service and there is some targeted one-to-one support. Every pupil in Scotland can get one-to-one support if they want it—the opportunity is there. We offer some of that support online, as Helen Martin mentioned, and we offer group sessions in schools. We have just been given money by the Scottish Government to offer it further down the schools so that everybody will take part in a group session much earlier in the school system than they currently do.

It is a blended service for two main reasons. It is about personal choice and pupils receiving the messages in different ways, and it is about targeting intensive support where it is needed most.

Drew Smith: Obviously, you can take these things back as far as you want to, but does Education Scotland collect evidence or data on the ethnic minority backgrounds of pupils and their subject choices at school? How early does that monitoring start?

David Watt: That fed into the work of the Wood commission. The subject choices among ethnic minorities are broadly similar to those within the general population. The biggest diversion is between the subject choices of boys and girls, but I am not sure that the subject choices of ethnic minorities are differentiated from the national choices.

Annabel Goldie: Education Scotland’s inspection and review framework embraces 10 principles, one of which is equality and diversity. How does an inspector then discharge that responsibility in relation to the provision of careers advice in a school to a young person from an ethnic minority background? A lot of advice is now given to young people at school in respect of career choices, but how many careers advisers come from an ethnic minority background themselves?

David Watt: I will ask my colleague to deal with the second part of your question.

On the inspection process, the recently issued inspection advice notice—it is now the updated guidance for inspection for the coming school session—strongly threads through the developing the young workforce agenda. It talks about the career education standards, which are framed in terms of equalities. Initially, when the school’s self-evaluation is sought, we ask it how well it promotes diversity and equality and ensures inclusion. The answer that it gives us will enable

the inspector to talk to children and young people, parents and staff about the agenda that they have set. I think that, going into inspection in the coming session, we can expect a greater focus on DYW and a greater focus on equality education within that.

Can I name a report in which ethnic minority careers advice was commented on by an inspector? I am not sure that I can, but those discussions feature within inspection, which provides the opportunity for that. On occasion, we pull together a group of ethnic minority children and ask them about their school experience and about the support that they receive. They will, most likely, focus on the support that they receive from their guidance staff and their support staff rather than the careers advice, but that dialogue provides a trail that we can engage with in a school.

Annabel Goldie: That is helpful. My question was not a criticism of Education Scotland. We are all agreed that we are swimming through strands of weed in the sea at the moment, trying to see what the picture is. However, it seems to me that, with the best intentions, the discharge of the equality and diversity obligation in the inspection and review framework may naturally have concentrated on relations within the school or among pupils and on behaviour between pupils and between staff and pupils, and the specific issue of how youngsters from an ethnic minority background obtain careers advice may be off the radar screen. If you could give us any more information about that, Mr Watt, that would be helpful.

David Watt: It is worth having a look at the inspection advice note. Aligned to that, we are doing some try-outs of new inspection models. The theme for the coming few months in those try-outs is the senior phase, and part of the senior phase is ensuring that that pathway is personalised and that the young person is well informed about what they need to undertake to gain the experience that will equip them for the next stage. Within that, there are opportunities for us to engage with ethnic minorities in the schools in which we are focusing the try-outs.

The Convener: Katie, do you want to come in on that?

Katie Hutton: I am sorry, but I do not have with me the figure for the number of careers guidance coaches in SDS who come from an ethnic minority background.

As I said, careers information and guidance takes a blended approach, and it is also delivered not just by SDS but through partnerships in schools. There are guidance teachers in schools and a variety of school professionals who spend

far more time with the pupils than SDS staff can. It is about providing a blended approach, and there are a number of people who are involved in guiding young people in school. We can get you the figures on that.

Drew Smith: Before we move on from the issues around schools, can you tell us whether there are any examples of work with parents? It is all very well to say what careers information and assistance pupils are getting in school, but, given that some of the pressure comes from family or home, is anyone doing anything to fully inform parents about the options that might be available to their children and the things they might want to speak to them about?

10:30

David Watt: The good practice in that regard would usually involve an evening when parents, guidance staff and SDS staff can talk through a child's second and third-year options. We are seeking to encourage businesses and employers to be better engaged at those stages. In some local communities in particular, we are looking for school staff, not just SDS staff, to be aware of the profile of employers and to have a better understanding of how the teaching and learning that take place in the classroom relate to the employment market that the young people will face.

With regard to parents, there is an issue around availability. I suppose that a challenge is to speak about a broader perspective on what the next stage might be.

Katie Hutton: As well as what David Watt has said about SDS staff in schools, we provide necessary information to parents through our My World of Work online service, which has a specific section devoted to parents. Further, a lot of the work that BEMIS is doing is targeted not only at learners but also, crucially, at parents.

Christian Allard: Unfortunately, I am going to ask more questions about surveys and data, particularly data about people who are working, as that is quite important.

We have heard a lot about collecting data through doing surveys with people who are at school, those who are doing modern apprenticeships and those who are in higher education. We try to compare that data with data that we collect through doing surveys with people who are in work. Are there discrepancies relating to the number of people from a different ethnic background who have not been educated in Scotland? Would that explain a lot of the difference that we find?

The Convener: Who would like to answer? Everybody is looking at you, Katie.

Katie Hutton: Sorry, could you repeat the question? I am not quite sure—

Christian Allard: We try to compare data that we get from surveys that we do with people who are in education with data that we get from surveys that we do with people who are in work. The problem is that a lot of people who are working in Scotland, particularly in jobs with low wages, are people who have not been educated in Scotland but have come here in their 20s and their 30s. Would that explain a lot of the differences that we find between the two sets of data?

The Convener: What do you mean by the two sets of data?

Christian Allard: We are trying to explain why a lot of people from minority ethnic backgrounds who have had quite good and successful general educations experience a big difference in wages, compared to people who are not from minority ethnic backgrounds, when they are in their 20s, 30s and 40s. Part of the explanation will be that a lot of people from different ethnic backgrounds are in fact people who came into this country after being educated somewhere else.

Helen Martin: You are hitting on the fact that the picture is complex and that the data sources that we are using to tell us things are very limited. We are trying to get a picture that will show exactly what you are describing, but it is difficult to do that because the labour market data that we use in Scotland tends to get us no further than white or non-white, really, and is quite thin on the ground an awful lot of the time. Therefore, we have to use our understanding from sources that are wider than just pure statistics.

We know there is a difference between people who are raised in Scotland and go through the Scottish education system and those who are new migrants. Currently, the black workers committee is talking about people coming through the education system. The suggestion, based on information from leavers surveys and destination surveys, is that there are less good outcomes for minority ethnic people coming through the education system, as a group. However, that then touches on the wider picture of labour market disadvantage, when you look at what is happening to new entrants to the labour market as well.

There are two different issues going on that are perhaps related. We know that people who are new entrants to the country are generally working in certain sectors, because they are coming in on tier 2 shortage visas—they will be in the health service; they will be working as nuclear engineers on the nukes at Rosyth; they will be in particular areas in our education service, particularly in

further and higher education. We can identify problems with progression within those public sector employers. Yes, people are employed, but they are not necessarily rising through the ranks. That is a very identifiable trend, but it is identifiable primarily for people who are new entrants. However, other issues are caught up in it.

Obviously, it is harder to track what is happening with regard to the domestic population, because those people are much more spread out through the sectors, but that evidence suggests that there is a problem there as well. It is hard to know, though.

Christian Allard: In that case, maybe it would be better for us to concentrate on the challenges at work as opposed to trying to compare two things that are difficult to compare.

Helen Martin: We agree that there has to be an absolute focus on what is happening in public sector employment in Scotland. For example, it is unforgivable that, within the health service, an identifiable trend is that ethnic minority nurses are congregated in the very bottom grade and they feel that they cannot get out of that grade. For years, the STUC was hearing a lot of complaints from ethnic minority staff at NHS Lothian through our informal networks. Now, however, the health board is running a great programme to support ethnic minority nurses to rise through the ranks. Already, within year 1, people are being promoted off the back of it. It is a very well put together programme that would be quite easily replicated in other places. There is definitely stuff that we can do and perhaps if we focus on what is in our gift and what is fixable, that would be a good start.

Dr McGurk: With regard to labour market access, the key issues, which cannot be disentangled from any other outcome, are skills and qualifications. When we control for them, we see ethnic bias, which gives us a public policy and labour market problem that we have to address. However, we have to be clear about what those issues are. A lot of them will relate to skills, not just qualifications. There is an issue about recognition of different jurisdictions and so on and about how qualifications are rated. Scotland has an excellent qualifications recognition system through the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the Scottish credit and qualifications framework that can help to address that. However, there is also an issue about skills. I suppose that one of the biggest skills is around language, and another involves the kind of cognitive skills that are needed in key areas. Anybody who has tried to recruit recently knows that the recruitment environment is becoming more and more complex. The skills that are required for roles are increasingly multidimensional and sometimes, with the best will in the world, people who have qualifications that

are fairly difficult to predict will not stand a chance in that kind of job selection pool unless we take some other action. However, that action needs to be based on evidence.

I would be interested in seeing the data that shows that there is a different outcome for BME nurses in the NHS Lothian programme. That is a big public sector organisation that can collect that data and model it and can maybe give an example to the bigger organisations in the private sector, such as banks. We need to get into that sort of dialogue before we start to define solutions because, as I said earlier, a lot of the issues are around qualifications and skills.

Christian Allard: What you just said about languages is quite interesting, as was what Helen Martin said about concentrating on what we know. Language could be a big barrier. In the north-east, for example, if you do not speak the Doric you will have some trouble. Perhaps we should concentrate on trying to work on data that is easy to define. It is easy to talk about gender balance because you get a true picture, but it is more difficult to get a true picture when you talk about ethnicity. However, if you start to talk about barriers around languages and barriers regarding sustainable employment within a category of people that we know about, it is a lot easier. Therefore, restricting our focus might be the answer. I would like to hear some views about that.

Helen Martin: It is important to be prepared to look at what we know and to tackle the problems where we see them quite obviously existing. I would be a little bit reticent about saying that we can just disregard things that are difficult to measure because, in the area of ethnicity in Scotland, things are going to be difficult to measure. The numbers are quite low and the surveys—particularly big national surveys—are not very well designed for our purposes. We have to accept the fact that we will always be in the dark a little bit. However, that does not mean that we do not have information or that we do not know things; it simply means that what we know might not be in the form of statistical information. We can take evidence from community groups and we can ask people what their experience of the labour market is. We can take that evidence seriously, even though it is not necessarily backed up by a statistic.

There are other ways to collect evidence. It is important that we have a focus on community dialogue and take seriously the problems that people identify. That is what we try to do through our black workers network, and that is how we knew 10 years ago, before there was ever a statistic about how the nurses were congregated in the bottom grade, that there was a problem at

NHS Lothian. Now, since James Glover came in and collected the data, everybody knows there is a problem, but action could have been taken 10 years ago based on what the nurses were saying, if people had wanted that to happen.

Christian Allard: I read your evidence about that. Are you suggesting that we should use anecdotal data? We really need proper evidence to make proper changes or to invest resources. Is anecdotal evidence enough?

Helen Martin: If you have tried to collect the data over many years, which we have done in Scotland—there has been a lot of emphasis on that; I have worked around ethnicity for a decade and we have a conversation every year about how difficult it is to collect the data—at some point you have to decide whether that question is fixable or not. If it is fixable, fix it. However, if it is not fixable, we should just use the information that we have to do something. However, we cannot just sit here trying to create better statistics, because that is not helping anybody.

Christian Allard: With my last question, I am going to help the other members of the committee and you with regard to that issue.

The challenges about ethnicity are getting a lot more complicated in the world today. My mother happened to be Portuguese; my wife was Scottish. What are my children? A lot more families are like this now—they are made up of different kinds of people with different backgrounds. Perhaps Helen Martin is right. I would like to challenge the theories on this. Should we stop trying to collect data and trying to make it so precise when we have no chance in hell of winning the battle because the complexity of our population is getting such that it is impossible?

Katie Hutton: Like Helen Martin, I think that we should look at both sides. We should consider what data we can collect and what we think is trustworthy, but we should also speak to communities and get that dialogue going so that people can tell us what is working for them and how things could be improved. That is the sort of thing that we do around continuous improvement, but it is also useful with regard to identifying whether there are serious issues in relation to certain communities or localities. The approach needs to have a bit of both elements.

Dr McGurk: Even if you are dealing only with populations of people that you have identified, you still have to collect data. If you have identified a group of people, you can get the information on their qualifications and skills and you can use that as a basis for action. We have to drill down into specific contexts.

The Convener: If we have time, we can come back to that afterwards. We are quite tight for time, so we need to move on.

John Finnie: I have a couple of questions for Dr McGurk. I am afraid that I will have to use the D-word as well, because my questions concern data.

You expressed a view that data is paramount, and I think that we would all accept that. You are perhaps in a unique position in that your members are spread widely in the public and private sectors. Do those employers understand why data is important?

Dr McGurk: I think that there is variability among employers. Given the leadership that has been provided by various Scottish Government and UK Government Administrations, public sector employers are aware of the issues. A lot of private sector employers, especially large multinational corporations, are in a global talent market. Their customers are diverse and their market is diverse, so they need to be operating a policy of diversity. Increasingly, inclusiveness in the labour market is a business issue and it should be, because it is about people being able to make their contribution to the labour market without facing any barriers. It is also about employers being able to get access to the best talent that they can access and develop.

There is definitely variability in understanding. The real problem is in the smaller and medium-sized enterprises. That is just because of the visibility of the issue, which we can all do more about. I know that the Scottish Trades Union Congress, Skills Development Scotland and Scottish Enterprise have debates about these matters. The trouble is that we are having such a multiplicity of discussions about virtually everything—that is great; it shows the amount of energy that there is for change—that sometimes things get lost. We have to move the issue closer to the top of the agenda.

10:45

John Finnie: I want to ask about a specific issue, which you referred to as organisational exit interviews. I posed a question to Police Scotland about the particular challenge that that creates. The last thing that some people who decide to leave an organisation would want to do is sit in a room with the people who they perhaps felt had been coarse to them and explain that. There is obviously an opportunity to learn from exit interviews. Can you give us any examples of cases, particularly with regard to race, in which an exit interview has resulted in a change in work practices or a change in approach? There is clearly a glorious opportunity there.

Dr McGurk: Absolutely. I am not aware of any specific examples, but CIPD has a lot of research and if we can find any of that research, we will put it your way.

The issue with exit interviews is whether people want to engage with the organisation at that stage. What is their frame of mind? What will they disclose? If there was proper monitoring—that is a big if—and we found that a disproportionately large number of people from a particular group were exiting an organisation, we should investigate that and we should interview the people concerned in a more neutral environment. That would be another piece of data that we could use to address the issue.

John Finnie: I accept the challenges and the small numbers involved. Is an organisation such as yours in a position—perhaps even through informal discussions—to understand that there might be a pattern developing?

Dr McGurk: The HR professionals whom we represent who work in business and in the public sector will certainly be aware to different degrees of the extent to which that is an issue, but I would say that large public sector bodies such as Police Scotland and the NHS should be collecting that data. It might be very limited data, but if there was a disproportionate incidence of people from a particular group leaving an organisation, that would ring alarm bells. I am not saying that, in all cases, the individuals concerned would challenge that, but the issue should definitely be addressed and talked about across the networks. I do not know how we would capture that.

Helen Martin: I think that what John McGurk is saying is correct, but at the same time we should not be too keen to accept that employers will just pick this stuff up. Quite a lot of dedicated action on the part of the employer is required; the employer must go in with an eye to looking at how their ethnic minority staff are finding their workplace and how workplace outcomes are looking for ethnic minority staff. You would be amazed how long a trend can exist within an organisation without the employer seeing it. Only when it is pointed out to them will they look at it in a systematic way.

As trade unionists, we try to do such work in a range of ways. Equal pay is an obvious example. It takes quite a lot of dedicated effort on the part of an organisation to go through all its structures and work out what is happening.

For ethnic minority staff, we find that access to training can be a really big barrier. Often, that is simply to do with the fact that people are clustered in grades where training is not routinely offered, which might mean that ethnic minority staff might never get access to it. It is not that they are being

deliberately targeted and prevented from getting access; it just happens that way because that is the way in which the company is structured. Stuff like that can be broken down quite easily, but you have to realise that it is happening and you have to have a look at how the organisation has been structured.

John Finnie: I was going to pick up on precisely that point. It is possible to have formal structures for exit interviews and all the rest but, as Ms Martin says, one would hope that there would be some form of monitoring nonetheless, and in particular a focus on minority groups in the workforce. Is that likely to be the case, Dr McGurk?

Dr McGurk: It is likely to be the case in large public sector bodies, but the issue is how individuals disclose that information. That depends on the overall governance structures of those industries. Government obviously has a big say in how those industries operate but, generally, HR professionals should be on the lookout for that kind of thing. I am not saying that they would always take action in all circumstances, but it is another part of the dialogue that we have to be more systematic about. If that is an issue, we have to identify it and we have to have a way of getting it out in the open and getting it discussed. The evidence that you have presented will help us to do that.

John Mason: I want to move on to a slightly different area—employment barriers and so on.

Dr McGurk, you mentioned that looking at the names on an application form can have an impact. We have heard evidence that ethnic minority job applicants are less likely than others to get past shortlisting to interviews and so on. Is there anything that we can do to tackle that side of things?

Dr McGurk: One of the first issues is that we in the HR community generally have to have a dialogue about the employment barriers that exist. We need to get data to show where those barriers exist and where the issues are, and we need to develop professionals so that they are able to counteract those barriers.

For example, there is evidence on the recruitment phase in a study called something like, “Are Greg and Emily more likely to be shortlisted than Lakisha and Jamal?” Those were quite evidently white-American-type names. The same study was replicated in the UK by two of my former colleagues at the Cardiff business school, Mike Noonan and Kim Hawke. It basically came to the same conclusion. The issue that it raises is that, in the screening process, CVs should be discouraged as a method of submission. A CV is often sent in for high-level roles, to make it

possible to drill down into people’s skills and qualifications and their career history. It should be possible to do that using a standard application form, which should be standardised. It should have all the monitoring information on it. Does that happen all the time? No, it does not.

John Mason: So would you leave the name off the application form?

Dr McGurk: You could do. There are lots of areas that we can consider, but before we make recommendations and decisions about this, we have to have a dialogue about what works in different circumstances and what does not.

John Mason: Are you aware of employers that have tried something like that and it has worked?

Dr McGurk: Yes. BT, for example, has had anonymous submissions. The trouble is that, when companies have done this, they have not always had a control group to compare it against to check that it has improved practice. They have just brought in the practice. We are talking about a general issue to do with resourcing and talent planning, which is the professional area that is responsible for recruitment and development of staff. That is where we start to look at these issues and how they operate and collect much more evidence. The committee’s inquiry has made us aware that we need to do more of that.

John Mason: We have received a large number of written submissions. In one of them, West Dunbartonshire Council suggested that, when it gets to interview, we put too much emphasis on experience and not enough on competence. I do not know whether you agree with that. I am not sure how we can split those up, because if I want somebody in my office who is going to get on well with people, if an applicant has not had any experience of getting on well with people, I do not know how I can measure that.

Dr McGurk: I am sure that all the witnesses will have a different view. I was a former learning and talent development lead adviser in CIPD nationally and I dealt with the issue a lot. There are certain people who think that competence-based assessment is the be-all and end-all; there are other people who think that the world is changing and that it is now more fluid and dynamic, and that competence bakes in a certain type of behaviour and skill.

Obviously, it is necessary to have a mix of both. You do that by having properly structured interviews. It is sometimes necessary to consider things such as CVs, because they give more information about experience, or to conduct telephone screening interviews involving very targeted questions that ask people about their skills and their capabilities. You have to conduct structured interviews that involve asking the same

questions and giving the candidates rankings so that they are assessed on the same criteria.

John Mason: That is all very well for organisations such as BT and the City of Edinburgh Council, but most employers are quite small. How on earth can we make an impact there?

Dr McGurk: That is a really good point. Being small does not mean that a company should not be fair. It is all about visibility of the issue and viability of the practice. With the people skills project that we are developing, a lot of the support will be around recruitment. We will certainly put in good practice guidelines—which will be based on our fact sheets on fair recruitment and selection, for example—that will help SMEs to think about these issues.

There are very few people out there who will say, “I don’t want to employ a person from a BME community,” but sometimes unconscious bias or a lack of visibility of the community concerned—in contrast to the audibility of the bottles that we can hear being recycled—can have the same effect. We need to make people aware of the issue and have processes that it is viable for them to follow. If we put big processes in front of them that make things difficult or which make them comply in a tick-box way, they will get routine about it and they will not do it mindfully. We want them to do it mindfully and in a committed way, because it is the right thing to do.

Helen Martin: I agree with that final point. It is a question of people considering the issue for a minute. Research evidence that we have shows that, when people are asked to recruit in a fair way, that helps the outcome. It can be as simple as that. There is no right or wrong way to recruit when it comes to this issue, because the issue is not so much the process that people are engaging with; it is the person whom they are engaging with. It is the subjectivity that is involved in the process that is the issue. People will make a decision about who is the best person for their organisation. They will not necessarily realise that they are picking somebody because they look like them or they seem like them, but that is what they are doing.

If we can interrupt that thought process, we can make a real difference. That is part of the learning that we have seen already through projects such as the NHS Lothian project, part of which involved the provision of training on unconscious bias and ensuring that recruiters just considered fairness in their actions.

John Mason: I have a question that is less about the recruitment process and more about the process as somebody tries to move on in their organisation. That is when informal networks can

become very important. An example of that—given that we have heard lots of bottle noise—is that people go to the pub to socialise. That might exclude Muslim folk or anybody else who is not happy with the alcohol side of things. Is that a problem? Can we do much about that?

The Convener: Who would like to answer that? We will hear from David Watt first, as he has not spoken for a while.

David Watt: I am usually not this shy. I am not sure that that is an issue for me to comment on as a representative of an organisation that deals with education across Scotland, but thin-slice judgment has been mentioned. That is a piece of psychology whereby a person goes into a job interview and, in almost all cases, it is decided within the first five seconds. There is clear evidence that that is what takes place and just asking somebody about fairness would dissipate that.

From the education angle, it is who you are that makes a difference these days, not what school you go to. That is where networking comes in, because that is about your identity. People network with people whom they know and if someone does not have those networks, that will disadvantage them when it comes to engaging in employment. That is just an observation from that side of things.

11:00

Helen Martin: The specific example that you raise is a real problem. It is an issue within workforces that people feel that progression is about who you are friends with, and cultural practices can really hold people back within the workforce, although it does not have to be that way. A small amount of emphasis on the issue from employers can break down barriers quite a lot. Even just having training courses that allow people to come together and discuss the issue can be helpful because it clears the air and gets preconceptions out of the way.

Over the past couple of years, the STUC has been running a Scottish union learning course for BME workers on moving into management, which has been really successful. It has helped people to move into posts even though it has had no contact with employers at all. It has been focused on the employee and has taken people from a mixture of workplaces all across Scotland. The course is about coping and resilience. In essence, it is about coping with racism and providing people with networks among themselves so that they can give peer-to-peer support going forward. The feedback on the course has been phenomenal. People say that having that solidarity and the ability to discuss things has transformed the way in which they look

at their career. As a result of it, they become more positive about themselves and their skills, and their employer picks up on that. Even small behavioural changes by both the employee and the employer can have quite a dramatic impact on the outcomes for people.

John Mason: I like that, and I would like to go down that route. However, I wonder whether that will take forever to change people's attitudes. On the divisions between women and men in the workplace, the feeling was that we would gradually encourage change, but the progress that has been made has been so minimal—certainly in the political field—that people have started to say that they are going to have a 50:50 or 40:60 split on their company board or in the Cabinet. The suggestion has been made by Amina, the Muslim Women's Resource Centre, that we should be looking at quotas because that is the only way to make something happen. Do you think that would be useful?

Katie Hutton: Are you talking about modern apprenticeships?

John Mason: It certainly could be the case in modern apprenticeships.

Katie Hutton: We offer a funding contribution towards training and assessment costs but it is the employer who employs the individual, so the introduction of a quota system could be problematic.

John Mason: If, next year, every one of your modern apprentices was white and male, you would find that unacceptable. The question is, how can we change things?

Katie Hutton: A lot of what we are doing through the projects that I described earlier is about trying to change minds and influence individuals against the cultural pathways that exist post-16. That is the context that we are working in. With quotas, you get into all sorts of legal issues in terms of what you are offering, and I would not want to jump into anything without those things having been thought through.

The Convener: Do you think that the two main groups that should be targeted as a priority are young people in school prior to leaving to choose their career options and the employers? As you say, it is the employers who employ the individuals and then allow them to do the modern apprenticeships. It looks as though you need a two-strand attack. Do you agree with that?

David Watt: I think that there are three strands. In Scotland, 28 per cent of people think that it is okay to hold a prejudice while 66 per cent think that more should be done to challenge prejudice, so we have a gap to narrow there. Those figures came out of the social attitudes survey, which

asked people questions such as, "Who would you employ?" Those from a Gypsy Traveller background or who are transgender would have no chance given the percentage of people who admitted to having that attitude in the survey.

More broadly, we need not just to be inclusive of identity but to put that into practice, and that 66 per cent is a more than solid basis for that. How do we empower diverse communities? People have to make their way in the broad stream of society, but how do we pull them together in small groups to support each other? There is something in that going across the identity bits. We had a very successful deaf learners conference at which 66 young people came together for the first time. They gained out of that through looking at their agenda and the challenges they face. There are opportunities to pull those groups together.

Other people are better placed to comment on the role of employers, but we are looking to establish school-employer partnerships, which are very effective. In the best practice, they work really well with schools.

The Convener: Helen, do you want to say something? Please be brief, because another committee member still wants to ask questions.

Helen Martin: I will be very brief. We would be in favour of quotas but the problem is that they are not really legal. The only area in which we think you should potentially consider quotas is foundation apprenticeships, because there is no employed status to them. You could run quotas in that area, and you maybe should.

Katie Hutton: However, the individual would have to want to take part in that. Supply and demand would have to work there, too.

The Convener: We need to move on.

Annabel Goldie: I am left with a kind of hybrid situation, as about four fifths of the question that I was going ask has been answered.

We would all agree that you have given us some positive and encouraging information about what is happening, which is good. One thing that is legal at the moment is positive action. I was interested in what Helen Martin said about an unacceptable situation in a health board and the fact that, when the matter was brought to the health board's attention, it said, "This is unacceptable" and immediately a process and procedure was introduced that seems to have transformed the situation. Is positive action in the public sector limited because of ignorance of what is happening or what can be done? How can we improve the ability of the public sector to assist someone from an ethnic minority background either to get a job in the first place or to get proper career progression once they are in that job?

Helen Martin: You are absolutely right that there needs to be a focus on that. As with public policy in every area, things go in and out of fashion, and it has been a few years since we had a proper systematic focus on such issues across Scotland. It would be really helpful if public sector employers had a look at their workforce to see where people are clustered, what access to training they have and what the promotion issues are. They should listen to communities, have a proper discussion with them and hear what they have to say about their own lives. We could do a lot without having to change the law.

Dr McGurk: It is absolutely to be encouraged that we engage positively with different communities and build a diverse workforce; the issue is that characteristics are multifaceted. White working-class kids from North Ayrshire could rightly consider themselves excluded from the labour market in Edinburgh. You have to think about how that is coherently and positively managed so that it does not have the opposite effect, which is sometimes to cause another form of exclusion—or perceived exclusion—for another group. That is about the Government doing what it can and the levers that it can pull. It is about the big private sector organisations such as BT, RBS and so on doing what they can to engage with diverse communities. As long as the issue is at the forefront and such an approach is viable for smaller organisations, we can make a lot of progress.

Positive action has been practised in lots of industries. For instance, we had a positive action initiative in the airline industry. If you go to Southall, Hounslow and west London, you see lots of people from BME communities—primarily South Asian—loading baggage onto airliners. My PhD was in the labour market of the airline industry, and one of the issues that we looked at was how those people were getting into better jobs in the airline industry—pilots' jobs, for example. I worked for the British Airline Pilots Association for eight years, as its director of research, and when we looked at that issue we got a lot more applications from BME communities. However, we also found out—this is part of the issue with positive action—that people get into a mentality whereby, if they can recruit, they feel that they have fulfilled the aim. What we got was another layer of middle-class young people with qualifications in science, technology, maths and engineering going on and doing other things while a lot of the people who began by loading the baggage were still loading the baggage.

There is an issue about what the outcomes of positive action are and how other people perceive them, but I am not ruling it out. It is certainly something that should be considered if we do not make very strong progress in the coming years.

Annabel Goldie: I will summarise the position, as I do not want to go over ground that we have already covered. The four of you are saying that we should continue to collect meaningful data to understand what is not happening; continue to look at areas of good practice such as Helen Martin has described; continue to look at what is working in the private sector, which John McGurk has just described; and take note of David Watt's important point about an underlying cultural issue, which is a broad one for political and civic Scotland to address. If we can really move forward on those fronts, can you see a way towards improvement?

Dr McGurk: Yes, I can.

Katie Hutton: Yes.

Dr McGurk: Especially in Scotland, if we work together on this, I think that we can make a big difference.

The Convener: Thank you very much. Do any members have any other questions that they would like to ask briefly? Do any witnesses want to add anything that they have not had an opportunity to say?

Dr McGurk: I would just like to thank the committee for addressing these really important issues at a very timely moment.

The Convener: I thank you all for coming along and giving us your information and evidence today. It has been a really good session, and we appreciate it.

Our next meeting will take place on 24 September.

Meeting closed at 11:12.

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