The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Thursday 12 November 2015

Session 4

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE
18th 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:

Helen Barnard (Joseph Rowntree Foundation)
Maggie Kelly (Independent Consultant)
Jim McCormick (Joseph Rowntree Foundation)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Ruth McGill

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Thursday 12 November 2015

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Margaret McCulloch): I welcome everybody to the Equal Opportunities Committee's 18th meeting in 2015. Please set any electronic devices to flight mode or switch them off.

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

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

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

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): I am an MSP for Glasgow.

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.

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

The Convener: Agenda item 1 is a decision on whether to take in private item 3, which is consideration of an event on female genital mutilation. Do we agree to do that?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Race, Ethnicity and Employment

10:01

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is an evidence session in our inquiry into race, ethnicity and employment. I ask witnesses and members to indicate to me or to the clerk, who is on my left, when they want to speak. I welcome the panel and ask the witnesses to introduce themselves, please.

Jim McCormick (Joseph Rowntree Foundation): I am the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's associate director for Scotland.

Helen Barnard (Joseph Rowntree Foundation): I am the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's policy and research manager.

Maggie Kelly (Independent Consultant): I am an independent consultant at Corravare.

The Convener: I invite Helen Barnard to make an opening statement on the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's new research into poverty and ethnicity in Scotland.

Helen Barnard: Thank you for the opportunity to come and talk to the committee. We are delighted that you are conducting your inquiry. It is exactly the right issue to consider and this is a really good time to hold the inquiry, so we were pleased to see that you were taking it on.

You have our written submission and the draft report that Maggie Kelly has written for us; the report will be published early in the new year. I will not go over all of that; rather, I thought that it might be useful if I highlight some of the key actions that the evidence suggests could be taken to reduce the disproportionately high poverty among some ethnic minority groups in Scotland, as well as to think about how to make work a better route out of poverty than it is for many people across different ethnic groups.

Our evidence suggests that the drivers of the high poverty in ethnic minority groups are part of a broader set of drivers for high in-work poverty across Scotland and many other parts of the United Kingdom. That set of issues is not separate but is very much central to the overall goal of reducing in-work poverty. In particular, the key issue is the poor quality of work opportunities that many people have. Pay is important, but that is not just about low pay; it is about jobs that do not give people opportunities for training or progression and the high number of people who get stuck in entry-level, low-paid jobs.

We have seen from our research and the analysis in Scotland that some ethnic minority groups are disproportionately concentrated in the

sectors with those problems, and particularly in care, retail and hospitality. Therefore, having an approach to those sectors with a key focus on ensuring that ethnic minority people within them benefit would be one of the best ways to tackle this set of issues. There are also two additional issues for ethnic minority groups, on top of the broader drivers of in-work poverty—they are racism and discrimination and, for some groups, provision of English as a second language and English language speaking.

What are the big levers to address that set of problems? The first one that we want to focus on is the fair work convention. The issue should be at the forefront of what it is doing. We want it to set out a programme of action to promote equal opportunities and better work opportunities across ethnic groups.

The second lever is sector-specific action plans to raise the quality of work, to raise pay and to improve training, development and progression opportunities, particularly in the big low-paid sectors. We suggest that the focus be on the care, retail and hospitality sectors.

The third lever is employment services, which I know is a big focus of the committee's inquiry, and rightly so. Employment services need to do two big things differently. First, whether they are in the public, private or voluntary sector, their goal should be to get people into work that leads to decent pay and takes them out of poverty. Despite all the progress in the past few years, many employment services still focus on getting people into a job and, to some extent, that can be any job. Our research suggests that that approach leads to people getting stuck in in-work poverty and needing tax credits, and they never progress. There must be a reorientation of the incentives and the targets for employment services, which should aim to get people into jobs that have potential for earnings progression.

The second big issue for employment services is that there is little for people who are already in low-paid work. Once someone is in low-paid work, they can be stuck there. Assuming that they have basic skills, there is little on offer to help and advise them and support them to take the next steps. Employment services need to develop an offer for people who are in low-paid work.

The next lever, which Maggie Kelly can say a little more about later, is investment and procurement. Big steps are being taken by the Scottish Government, local authorities and through the new city deal in the west of Scotland and, despite austerity, a lot of public money is being spent in investment and through procurement. That could be leveraged much more than it is in order to create better quality jobs and to demand that people who receive any public money to do things create good-quality jobs and take active steps to open them up to groups that are shut out.

The next lever is apprenticeships. We have had the Wood commission and we support its recommendation that there be targets for the take-up of apprenticeships across ethnic groups and thinking about gender. However, those targets must be for successful completions and not just for people taking up apprenticeships, and the quality of apprenticeships needs to rise up the agenda. Throughout the UK, the big expansion in the quantity of apprenticeships has to some extent come at the cost of their quality. A fair number of apprenticeships out there do next to nothing for the career prospects of the apprentices or the economy to which they are supposed to be contributing.

Our research on the issue has led us to say that we need the quality of apprenticeships to be addressed, probably before we see any further big expansion. That is a particular issue for the committee's inquiry because some of the research has suggested that young people from ethnic minority groups are not only not taking up apprenticeships and not achieving them to the same degree, but being shut out of the higher quality apprenticeships that lead to higher pay. That is also more true for young women than it is for young men.

There are a further two actions that need to be taken. The first is to think about English as a second language. Our research suggests that speaking good English can reduce a person's risk of being in poverty by 5 percentage points. That is a big effect. The lives of people and groups whose English is not to a high standard could be transformed by getting their English up to a good standard. However, the key point is that many of those people are already in low-paid work. English for speakers of other languages provision for people who already have jobs is patchy, so it is difficult for those people to get English language provision to take them on to another step. There needs to be investment and more action there.

We also need to think about racism and discrimination. A lot of the research suggests qualitatively and quantitatively that people from some ethnic minority groups experience a significant level of racism and discrimination, and that that is directly tied to people not being able to access good-quality jobs, services and all the other things that they need to take them out of poverty.

A lot of the debate is, rightly, about the new powers that are coming to Scotland. There are some fantastic opportunities within them for the agenda that we are discussing, in particular the fact that powers over employability are to move to Scotland. There is a real chance to do something

that is different and better than what has gone before. However, a lot of what we are talking about is within the current powers. It is really important that we see action now, and not just a debate about what we can achieve with the new powers.

The Convener: Thank you, Helen. I think that a lot of questions will be fired at you after that presentation. Rather than jump in too quickly and cut everybody off, I will pass you over to John Finnie. I will probably come in with quite a few supplementary questions on the back of your presentation.

John Finnie: Thank you for early sight of the report, for your submission and for that comprehensive presentation, which may well have answered a number of questions as well as raising some. Can you say a little bit more about the different labour market experiences of different ethnic groups, particularly with regard to geography? I know that that is a challenge because of the dearth of data relating to Scotland, but can you comment on that?

Helen Barnard: Jim, do you want to say something about place?

Jim McCormick: What we found across the programme when we looked at different types of place was that place really matters. Glasgow is one of the places that we have looked at in some depth, but we have also looked at remote and rural areas through a more qualitative study. Place matters because of different patterns of migration, different compositions of ethnicity and, crucially, different compositions of the job market.

As Helen Barnard said, about half of Scotland's low-pay problem is found in three sectors—care, retail and hospitality—but the geography of that varies substantially. In some of our most remote communities, the public sector is a much bigger employer as a share of total employment. We need not just to understand the evidence on the most powerful approaches to reducing the gaps in employment rates and in-work poverty, but to make sure that local authorities, community planning partners and the new city deal in the west of Scotland have really good data and the right kind of tools to adapt to their labour market area.

We need to take a long view of that, probably looking at 10-year or even 20-year planning horizons. Scotland's population has changed remarkably in the past 10 to 20 years, and that is especially true of our cities. We need to catch up with the changes and to ensure that our labour market intelligence, the integration between local and national policy and our conversations with employers have all caught up with the reality that we see across Scotland.

John Finnie: In your report, you say:

> "despite the clear links between poverty and ethnicity there is a lack of integration between equalities and anti poverty policy and practice."

How does that impact on issues such as gender and disability when we consider the challenges that ethnic minority groups face in the labour market?

Maggie Kelly: That is quite a question. As the author of the report, I found that how we integrate equalities in general with anti-poverty strategies in particular was a recurring theme throughout the research.

One of the really important things about the research is that it clearly demonstrates the link between discrimination on the basis of race, religion et cetera and poverty. What comes across clearly is that there are many reasons for discrimination and racism, which demonstrate or manifest themselves in lots of different ways. One of the key ways is that people who are in one of the groups that are particularly disadvantaged have a much higher risk of being in poverty. The same thing happens to women, people with long-term health conditions and disabled people.

10:15

When we think about the different equalities strands that John Finnie mentioned, we must always bear in mind that there are different issues for those different groups, and the way that that plays out is quite different and specific to them. In the research, we found that it was different again within different ethnic groups, so we cannot generalise, but it is clear that—to use a hackneyed phrase—money is power. One of the ways in which discrimination happens, whether it is against women, disabled people or people from ethnic minorities, is through unequal access to money. In the research, we see that playing out through the job market in particular. I do not know whether that helps to answer the question.

Helen Barnard: To be even more specific, the gender pay gap is much bigger in some ethnic groups than in others and ethnic minority families that contain a disabled member have a higher poverty level than the majority of families that contain a disabled member, so some of the other big equalities issues affect people differently depending on ethnicity. That means that, in order to tackle those issues, we need to consider them within ethnic groups and not just across the board.

John Finnie: It seems from your report that disadvantage applies across qualification levels, too.

Helen Barnard: Yes.

John Finnie: I have a question about the thorny issue of shortlisting and the number of people from

ethnic minority communities who are unable, despite many applications, to get beyond that stage. Will you comment on that?

Helen Barnard: There is a big issue around data and monitoring. Our research suggests that, if we are to take action on these things, it is important to have data to tell us where we are achieving things and where we are not. There are two issues there. One is the collection of data and the other is what is done with it. Our research suggests that, in broad terms, public sector bodies are quite good at collecting data and very bad at doing anything meaningful with it, while private sector organisations are not great at collecting data and are extremely variable in whether they then do anything with it.

It is important to get consistent data collection, not just on recruitment but on progression and development, but it is then important to focus on what people do in data analysis. There has been a great focus on saying that everyone must collect data and monitor things but much less focus on the action that they take based on that analysis.

Maggie Kelly: Some local authorities have quite good policies on open recruitment and they are interviewing people from ethnic minority communities in reasonable numbers, but that is not translating into appointments. Quite a few things need to be thought about in relation to that. Some research suggests that having ethnic minority members on interview panels is really helpful, and there are other practical things that local authorities and other public bodies need to think about.

There needs to be a refresh of the on-going training for managers and front-line staff so that it looks at racism and unconscious bias. There needs to be a clear open recruitment policy, because sometimes people use third-party organisations to do recruitment and they might not have as good an ethos as the public body does. A lot of things that sound quite small could have profound effects on good practice around recruitment and ensuring that people going along to interviews translates into actual appointments to jobs.

The Convener: On the data collection point, we have heard evidence from various organisations that people can be unwilling to disclose their ethnicity, probably because they do not know why the data is being collected and what it might be used for. A higher percentage of people from ethnic minorities could be working in various industries but we do not have the statistics. What could the private and public sectors do to get people to identify what their ethnic background is? It is voluntary, is it not?

Helen Barnard: Yes, it is. I have not seen that evidence. It would be worth checking it against big national surveys to ensure that the issue is genuine. Assuming that it is, the big thing will be to look at informal cultures in organisations. Some of our research has suggested, in broader terms, that informal workplace cultures undermine equal opportunities policies quite a lot. Even in organisations that have very good policies, when we talk to low-paid staff and their managers, there are often, at the very least, pockets in those organisations that absolutely do not have a particularly supportive culture.

Two things could be done here. First, individual organisations could take a hard look at their own cultures and at what it is in their organisation that makes people feel that it is not safe to identify their ethnic background. The second thing is probably something broader, which is to have a big anti-racism drive at community and society level, involving the unions and some of the big civil society organisations.

A practical thing that we think would be worth doing is for the Scottish Government to repeat a 2009 study by the UK Department for Work and Pensions that quantified the amount of discrimination in recruitment. The study included Scotland but in quite a small way. It would be very useful if the Scottish Government were to repeat that exercise for Scotland so that you had up-to-date, specific results. That could trigger some very useful action and awareness around discrimination and racism.

Annabel Goldie: I am interested in occupational segregation and underemployment. If I may first do a little bit of housekeeping, however, I want to be clear about the basis of the evidence that we are looking at. Your written submission contains some interesting information about clusters and where people tend to be working. That information was, I think, based on the most recent Scottish census. Is that right? Was it the 2011 census?

Helen Barnard: Yes.

Annabel Goldie: Right. I notice that you go on to say:

> "It was not possible to include Scotland in this research (as originally planned) due to delays in the availability of Census data."

Is that a reference to when the next census will be? I do not know when it will be—2021 or something.

Helen Barnard: No. My apologies. The programme of research that the foundation has supported has a mixture of research to look at the situation throughout the UK and research that has ended up looking at specific countries. We referred to being unable to look at some of the

results for Scotland. That was one project that used the most recent census and came up with unemployment rates for detailed ethnic groups by local authority area and ward. There was also a measure of occupational segregation for each area and ward. The project used census data for England and Wales. It had originally been planned to include Scotland but the most recent census data was not released in time for the researchers to carry out the same analysis for Scotland. We recommend in our report that the Scottish Government should do that analysis for Scotland because we have been unable to.

Annabel Goldie: So we are talking about unexplored territory.

Helen Barnard: Yes.

Annabel Goldie: That is quite helpful. I was not quite clear what all this was based on.

Helen Barnard: For the submission, I looked at the information for Scotland that shows how, throughout the country, ethnic groups are concentrated in low-paid occupations. However, the additional analysis that I am suggesting would enable you to look at that for specific areas in Scotland and identify hot spots.

Annabel Goldie: That is very helpful. Thank you, Helen. That clears things in my mind.

You have kindly shared with us the draft report, which seems to be a very impressive piece of work. You talk about existing reports that you are drawing on and I notice that there was reference to one for Wales and two for Northern Ireland but nothing specifically for Scotland. Does that mean that there are just general extrapolations in here?

Helen Barnard: In the programme as a whole, some projects looked at more than one country, as I said. For instance, one of the biggest projects in the first phase of our programme included England and Scotland, but it did not include Wales and Northern Ireland. In an earlier stage of the programme, we funded a review of research in Scotland and some qualitative research in Scotland, but we did not do the same in Wales and Northern Ireland. Basically, we have caught up across the UK. We have funded those additional bits of work in Wales and Northern Ireland to bring our evidence base up to the same level.

Annabel Goldie: Thank you very much. I am sorry for having to clarify little bits of housekeeping, but you have highlighted that there is a bit of a gap in the available information, and we might be able to plug that gap with the help of the Scottish Government.

Helen Barnard: Absolutely.

Annabel Goldie: On what you discovered about occupational segregation and underemployment, I noted what you found as far as you were able to locate information on which you could base your findings, but did your research indicate the reasons behind the pattern? Did it indicate why there are clusters of certain groupings in the care sector, the retail sector or the hospitality sector?

Helen Barnard: Yes, to a degree. There is more investigation to be done, and there are a number of different issues. The recognition of overseas qualifications is a specific issue. We know that some people who come here have pretty high qualification levels, but it is very difficult for employers to get a sense of what that means, so those people end up working in low-paid jobs although they have high-level qualifications such as degrees.

The second issue is to do with English as a second language. Some people who are very highly qualified do not have the English language skills to match and therefore cannot make the best use of their qualifications.

Those are two specific issues for people who come into the country, but there are many others. I am thinking about how the apprenticeship route is not working in the way that it should be for ethnic minority groups across the country. That means that routes into better quality work are not being opened up.

There is also an issue to do with lower qualifications for some groups. Other groups leave school with higher levels of education, but the problem is partly a question of social networks. If people are reliant on social networks to get jobs and most of the people whom they know are unemployed or in poorly paid work, or their family and friends tend to be self-employed, they lack the networks that will get them into better paid work. The fact that we do not have a good careers advice service means that, if a person does not happen to have their own social networks, it can be incredibly difficult to identify what their route into better paid work is. Therefore, people cluster around places in which they have word-of-mouth networks, essentially.

Does Maggie Kelly want to add anything to that?

Maggie Kelly: Yes. I go back to what we talked about earlier. Helen Barnard mentioned the Wood research. I cannot remember the exact figures off the top of my head, but it found that, for every application from somebody with a white-majority-sounding name, the chances of their getting an interview are very much higher than those for somebody from an ethnic minority community.

All the issues that Helen Barnard has talked about are clearly very important, but one of the key things that the evidence shows is that quite

often people who are settled here already have very good qualifications and are well qualified for the jobs that they apply for, but they do not get them, or they get in at entry level and do not progress. Therefore, we need to tackle both elements. We need to tackle the supply side issues and the demand side issues together.

Annabel Goldie: My colleague John Mason will have more detailed questions, but I have one general point. The convener, Christian Allard and I visited the NHS Lothian programme, which you might be aware of. It has been on the go for around 18 months, and it specifically addresses the situation of black and ethnic minority employees in that health board. Do you know of that project?

10:30

Maggie Kelly: I am aware of it to some extent, but not in detail. You can correct me if I am wrong, but I think that it has had some success in improving the level of ethnic minority recruitment to the board.

Annabel Goldie: It has improved the levels of recruitment and promotion, I believe.

Maggie Kelly: I have certainly come across it as an example of good practice.

Annabel Goldie: We were very impressed, so I just wanted to alert you to that.

Maggie Kelly: Absolutely.

Annabel Goldie: Thank you very much for your help.

The Convener: Before John Mason moves us on to the next subject, I want to come back to Helen Barnard's comment that the modern apprenticeship programme is not working for ethnic minorities. What are the reasons for that? If the programme is not working, what can be done to improve the level of recruitment?

Helen Barnard: When I said that it is not working, I meant that, if we look at the stats on who is getting apprenticeships, it is clear that some groups are underrepresented. One aspect involves raising awareness and promoting the brand of apprenticeships among communities where that may not be perceived. However, there are a lot of people applying, and young people from ethnic minority groups are disproportionately unsuccessful in comparison with those from majority groups. A number of steps can be taken. One step is to raise awareness. Some specific work needs to be done to raise awareness and promote the brand. That comes back partly to careers advice. If there was a very good careers function for everybody in schools that gave people proper information, that would promote much more equal access.

We also need to examine what is going on in the recruitment process, which will involve taking a detailed look at the points at which people are falling out and not getting through. We also need to look at which apprenticeships the people who are getting through are actually getting. After a lot of fighting down in England, much more detailed data was released that showed that people from ethnic minority groups are not getting on to the best-quality apprenticeships. That is an issue for whether apprenticeships will deliver higher pay and better economic outcomes.

We need to look at all the stages. My impression is that, at all those stages, some groups are disproportionately not getting the outcomes that one would expect.

The Convener: Sorry—I pre-empted Christian Allard, who is going to ask questions about modern apprenticeships. We will come to Mr Allard shortly. Sandra White has another quick comment.

Sandra White: It is a quick supplementary and is not eating into anyone else's questions. I just wanted to pick up on what Maggie Kelly said about people applying for jobs. If someone has a name that people recognise as not being white, or whatever, they tend not even to get as far as an interview. We have heard a lot of evidence from people on that; we heard about one person in particular who even changed their name so that they could get an interview. Do you support the idea of names and ethnicities not appearing on CVs so that people can get to the point of having an interview, with data being taken on that to see how far people progress towards getting a job?

Maggie Kelly: There are a couple of different issues in that respect. Some public bodies remove names and personal identifying details from applications. If it could be encouraged, that would probably be the best approach in the private sector and in those public bodies that are not using it as rigorously as they should be. That is probably how I would like to see things go, and your suggestion might be one way of addressing the issue. The fair work convention and others could perhaps talk to employers about doing that in their recruitment, as it would be a useful, practical and helpful step to take.

As I said earlier, however, the issue is not just recruitment but the whole process: how someone gets through the interview and what systems are in place to support them, and, once they are in the job, whether that job will lift them out of poverty rather than leaving them trapped. There is a range of issues, but your suggestion is useful,

particularly for the private sector, where people often use CVs.

John Mason: We are going backwards and forwards and covering quite a lot of ground. We spoke earlier about people being overqualified. On page 5 of your report, there is a nice little graph that shows the number of graduates in the UK in each ethnic group who are overqualified for their jobs. Basically, according to the graph, everyone is overqualified. My fundamental starting point is to ask whether we are putting too much emphasis on degrees right across the board, or whether people are doing the wrong degrees—either coming into the country with the wrong degree or taking the wrong degree when they are here.

My colleagues will ask about giving young people advice. It seems that a lot of the jobs are in engineering. Are we getting enough people doing engineering degrees?

Helen Barnard: As a starting point, if you look at the projections for jobs in the UK over the next 10, 15 and 20 years, you will see that there is projected to be an increasing amount of high-quality high-skilled jobs, for which people will need level 4 qualifications. That is going to continue, so there is a demand in some parts of the economy for higher skills. However, that also means that people who do not have higher-level qualifications will be progressively more disadvantaged in the labour market. We have already seen that happening. You are right: given that not all level 4 qualifications are equal, there is the question of whether people are doing qualifications that will have value in the labour market. There is a fair amount of research that suggests that many people are doing degrees that do not have the value that they expect.

There are three points around that. First, there is the demand in the labour market. Certain parts of the country are stuck in a low-paid, low-skills equilibrium, where the economy is juddering along with a lot of low-paid, low-skilled jobs. There is no need for any particular business to do anything different but, as a whole, it means that the local economy is stuck there.

There is also a lack of career pathways. We have seen a disconnect between the bottom and the top of the labour market. Whereas in the past someone could get an entry-level job, get some work experience and work their way up, those pathways have disappeared in many sectors. There are some interesting things happening in the United States and various other places where people are reconstructing career pathways. Local and national Governments are working with employers in a particular sector to map out a career pathway and what people need to get up there.

The third point comes back to the question of higher-level apprenticeships. If the big policy drive works, it should help, and it should mean that people are doing qualifications that are worth while in the labour market and taking them into higher-level jobs that are valued. However, we have seen a big expansion in qualifications—particularly in business and service sector apprenticeships—that essentially involve people doing low-paid work with a very small amount of additional training. Those apprenticeships are not linked to any career path and do not add value to the business—they are just a way of getting somebody in. There is a tipping point here, and we need to stamp that practice out. We need to say that the apprenticeship programme should be high value and should rival a degree as a pathway into a good-quality job. At present, some apprenticeships do that, but not enough of them do.

John Mason: People who have good qualifications may not be in any job, or they may be in a job in which they are nowhere near using their skills. What kind of employment support and advice should be provided? What should be happening that is not happening?

I was interested to hear you mention the trade unions in that regard, because that aspect has not really appeared on our horizon so far. What part do trade unions have to play in all that?

Helen Barnard: I will ask Maggie Kelly to say something about trade unions because she has been looking at that aspect. One of the things that we are advocating as part of our broader anti-poverty strategy development is that there should be a national advancement service that should focus on people who are already in work and how they can progress. For some people, that will involve giving them advice on how they can switch sector or employer to make better use of their skills. For others, it might involve saying, “You’ve got a higher-level qualification, and if you do this extra bit of training, you can translate that into labour market success.”

The third point comes back to racism and discrimination. We know that there is a real issue in that people from ethnic minority groups who get higher-level qualifications are disproportionately unable to make use of them. That is partly to do with which universities people go to and the qualifications that they get, and partly to do with what is happening in the labour market and the discrimination that we see there.

John Mason: Do groups have different attitudes? There is a tendency among some white groups to look on medicine, law, accountancy and that kind of thing as better, and engineering as less good—my father was an engineer. Is the attitude that I described uniform across all ethnic

groups, or are there differences between ethnic groups?

Jim McCormick: We do not have evidence on attitudes, but we do have evidence on access to opportunities, which varies substantially. There is also what we might call an ethnic patterning with regard to the opportunities that people feel are available to them. As Helen Barnard said, that is partly to do with social networks, role models, what happens in a school catchment area and so on.

I think that what we see happening is a reflection of bigger economic trends that affect Scotland and the UK. You are quite right in that one of them is the long-term underutilisation of skills at all levels, although we have talked about the graduate level. That is maybe to do with oversupply, but it is certainly to do with blockages in our workplaces where, at the managerial level, we seem to lack the capacity to fully draw out in the business interest the skills sets that employers have at their disposal. There are problems there and even evidence that Scotland might be doing less well than the rest of the UK, because unpublished analysis by the Resolution Foundation shows that we have a particularly acute problem of graduates being stuck for longer in non-graduate occupations.

When people are in work beyond apprenticeships, there is then the question of who gets access to on-the-job training. If someone in work is poorly qualified, they have three times less chance of getting any on-the-job training than people who already have high qualifications. Whatever we do with our public investment, whatever employers do and whatever individuals invest in their own training, it is not helping to reduce that gap in access to good-quality opportunities for advancement. Those are big, macro issues that we need to grapple with. Certainly, there is an ethnic patterning to how that is experienced in Scotland.

John Mason: I interrupted Maggie Kelly, who I think has something to say.

Maggie Kelly: Yes. To go back to the initial question, I guess that there are two aspects. I will say a little bit more about the employment advice aspect of the initial question. In addition to the issues that Helen Barnard raised, I will say a little bit more about the future devolution of employability. It is fairly clear that the current work programme is on the whole not providing people with high-skilled, good work experience. When it comes to people who are overqualified for the type of work that they are doing, there could be an opportunity in putting together the devolved scheme to look at whether we could have high-quality, high-skilled jobs specifically for people who have good qualifications but are just not getting those jobs. We could seriously look at that in terms of ethnicity, gender and so on. We could see what kinds of job women—perhaps ethnic minority women in particular—and those in ethnic minority groups with particular skills and qualifications get and whether we can target them and offer them good work experience.

That is one point, which is in addition to what Helen Barnard talked about around apprenticeships It is another avenue to attack the same sort of problem from a different angle, and is definitely worth exploring.

John Mason also asked about the role of trade unions. The current anti-poverty strategy is being refreshed at the moment, but I think that there was a suggestion that it would be helpful to have a programme of awareness raising about employment rights across Scotland. However, that has not really been actioned or taken forward. I am thinking about a broad programme that would perhaps involve working in partnership with the unions. It would tackle the problem for the other groups of people that we have talked about, who are stuck in low-paid work in the sectors that we have discussed such as care and hospitality.

10:45

John Mason: Do you feel that the unions are up for this kind of thing? In one sense, they represent their members. Take as an example a sector such as construction, where the workforce is mainly white and male. What incentive is there for a union in that sector to discourage white males and encourage ethnic minorities and women to join the workforce?

Maggie Kelly: I think that you had better ask them. To be honest, I have discussed the issue quite recently with people from the unions, and I think that they are definitely keen to ensure that the issue was tackled. I was being slightly facetious in my initial response.

John Mason: You feel that the attitude is there.

Maggie Kelly: Yes. I think that people would be keen to engage with the programme. It is sorely needed, given some of the terms and conditions that people are working under. We have to think about the issue in the context of the fact that employment law is reserved, so there is only so much that the Scottish Government and/or people working locally in Scotland can do. Nevertheless, there are opportunities to encourage people to report bad practices. Third-party reporting has been used in other areas where there are sensitive issues, such as domestic violence. When people have really bad working conditions, reporting the issues can be a problem, so maybe they should be able to go to trusted third-party organisations.

We could think of a lot of different ways to address the issue, but a renewed emphasis on ensuring that people are aware of their rights at work, both around exploitation and poor conditions and around circumstances when they feel that they have been discriminated against, for example if they feel that they have not had opportunities for training and, as a result, have not been promoted. It can go right across the spectrum from very poor conditions to highly skilled posts where people are suffering from discrimination.

Helen Barnard: We should also link it up to investment and procurement. There are new regulations.

John Mason: If the convener allowed me, I was going to ask about that. On you go.

Helen Barnard: Part of what you are talking about is how we motivate people to care. These things are not happening naturally. There is therefore clearly not a strong enough business case to make them happen purely by persuasion, or they would have happened by now. There are some interesting levers in investment and procurement. I know that the committee has been looking at the regulations that have just come out.

John Mason: We have struggled with the living wage because we have not been able to say, "You must pay the living wage to get a Government contract," but we have encouraged payment of the living wage around the edges. Is it the same with this? Could we say to people, "Unless 8 per cent of your employees are from an ethnic minority, we do not really want to work with you"?

Maggie Kelly: I would not say yes outright to that. The guidance that has been published is guidance. The situation is that people ought to follow it unless they have good reason not to. There is a strong incentive for people to follow the guidance and they need to explain to themselves why they are not doing so, if that is the case. The difference between the living wage and a lot of the issues that we are talking about is that equality legislation says that people should already be doing the kind of things that we want them to do to improve recruitment and retention, diversity and so on within their workforce. In fact, in some senses, there is potential to be more forcefully persuasive. There are already duties on local authorities not just to ensure equality and diversity but to promote race equality and so forth, so that can be quite persuasive.

Jim McCormick: I will comment briefly on that point. We can do two things. We can make our inputs more intelligent. For example, we know that BEMIS has been working closely with Skills Development Scotland to try to get under the surface of that kind of issue in different sectors, to get closer to employers and those who represent the workforce and potential workers, and to be more proactive about showing guidance, good practice and solutions that employers can grab hold of. That is one thing.

If we do that kind of thing, we are entitled to expect better data in Scotland—not just tracking and monitoring data but better evaluative data about approaches that appear to succeed. They might be NHS Lothian; they might be other things as well. If we do that, hopefully, by the end of the next parliamentary session, we will be in a position to get better answers to such questions than we can at the moment. There is a big responsibility on the Scottish Government and its agencies such as SDS to be substantially further forward with good-quality data in the years to come.

The Convener: If John Mason has finished his questions, we will move on.

John Mason: I could go on for ever, but I will stop there.

The Convener: I know. Other people want to come in.

Drew Smith: I ask you to expand a bit more on the issues of discrimination. The submission refers to informal practices within the workplace. We have touched on some of that already, but can you give us a bit more detail on those issues and any solutions that you can suggest on how they could be tackled?

Maggie Kelly: The research that looked at employment and progression had a lot of interesting information on discrimination. One of the key issues was that human resources departments often have, on paper, good policies for equal opportunities—for example, typically, how they offer training, how they monitor ethnicity and so on. When people in the HR departments were interviewed, they said that they felt that their policies were pretty good.

Those policies did look good on paper, but when the workforce were interviewed, they often said that that was not what was happening in reality. They might, for example, say that they were being passed over for training or recruitment. Although there were good policies, there was no formalised practice for their implementation. There were examples of people finding out about training only after the rest of the office—or two thirds of them—had done it; because they were not in that little network of people, nobody had told them about the training.

Often, the person who had not told the person about training was their line manager. One of the striking findings in the research is that line managers are key. It is worth thinking, when looking at how to stop such practice, about really good training for line managers.

Also, HR departments need to look at how their policies are being developed in practice, rather than just on paper. They need to go out and talk to people in the workforce and do their own internal testing of what is happening. That could be another way forward.

The Convener: Can I ask that people make their answers briefer? We have a lot of questions to ask and we are running short of time.

Jim McCormick: A really specific example from some previous work that we have done concerns residential care. It is really easy to resolve, but we found evidence of some care homes in Scotland that had permanent night shifts rather than rotas for staff, which meant that people were locked out of all the training that was taking place during the daytime. Those care homes changed to a rota system that gave all staff equal access—at least on paper—to training opportunities. Things like that can be unlocked very easily as long as we are doing good awareness raising with employers. The care sector is a good example of one in which we can make much faster progress because of its workforce composition.

Drew Smith: We have discussed discrimination and racism with other witnesses, and the term "unconscious bias" has come up—most often from the employer or management side; workforce representatives have quite a different perspective. Do you think that it is a helpful term?

Helen Barnard: There is certainly a set of unconscious-bias training that seems to have a good effect. Whether the term itself is useful is a different matter. For me, it is useful in the sense that it opens up a discussion that is not just about overt racism, which is important because a lot of what we are talking about is not expressed as overt racism.

I suspect that some people do not like the term "unconscious bias" because it implies that there is no blame, or that the problem is no one's fault. That can be argued back and forth, but it is useful to acknowledge that people sometimes do things without conscious intention that work out badly for members of their workforce. There is training that helps people to become more aware of that and which challenges them to change their actions. To that degree, it is a useful contribution.

Drew Smith: What is your sense of the trends or levels at the more extreme end—the cases that might end up at tribunals and so on? How does our situation compare with that of other places?

Maggie Kelly: I have no specific figures on tribunal cases in Scotland. That is not something that the research considered in detail. However, I know that it is an issue for people because of the costs that are involved. Clearly, that is not a devolved matter, so it is not something that we can do anything about.

Drew Smith: I worry about potential underreporting. There are issues around employment tribunals at the extreme end, but there is perhaps also an issue with people describing situations as being less serious than they are because they are uncomfortable with the terminology around racism.

Maggie Kelly: You are right. A lot of cases go unreported, and the figures that we see are the tip of the iceberg. That must be the case. If you read the research in detail, certain cases will strike you as clearly being tribunal cases, but the person concerned is just sitting there and putting up with it because they feel that that is their only option. There are more cases than the number of tribunals would suggest.

Helen Barnard: It is about the imbalance in the power relationships in organisations; low-paid workers are not in a powerful position. To get them to challenge what is going on is a big ask, if their doing so means that they might lose their jobs.

Drew Smith: My final question is unrelated to the previous questions. You spoke about the idea of a national advancement service, which is an interesting idea. Could you tell us a little bit more about how you envisage that working? Are there examples elsewhere in the world that we should look to?

Helen Barnard: We will publish a report in the next few weeks that sets out that proposal in detail. It is one of our core recommendations as part of the anti-poverty strategy for Scotland and the UK.

At the moment, we envisage something that is commissioned on a local basis by local authorities to be part of their employment offer, with clear minimum standards from the Government setting out what it will offer. It should be integrated into employment services, because many of the people who will need to use it will be got into work and then left to do their own thing. The service should keep in touch with those people and help them to move on. However, there is also a client group that is not currently in touch with employment services, and the service needs to get to them, too.

There should be integrated local hubs that are set up and commissioned by local authorities, but there should also be a strong drive from the centre to set out what must be achieved and what minimum standards should be met.

Sandra White: I want to concentrate on young people. Christian Allard will ask about the apprenticeship side.

We have had evidence—the Wood commission was referred to earlier in this regard—about the fact that young people from ethnic minority groups get very high qualifications but cannot find decent employment. Obviously, that leads us on to the careers situation. Helen Barnard mentioned that that can sometimes be to do with very narrow networking opportunities. We have also heard evidence about the fact that in some ethnic minority groups, children are expected to follow the career that their parents had. I wonder whether the witnesses have evidence on that and any other cultural aspects in respect of why young people from ethnic minority backgrounds who have very good qualifications do not go into careers that their qualifications would allow them to follow.

11:00

Helen Barnard: I agree. Some of the research that we funded was about social networks. The research was primarily England based, but it looked at rural as well urban areas. We have other research that includes Glasgow, so we looked at the issue in that context.

There is a specific issue about communities in which there are very high levels of self-employment—when families are primarily involved in self-employment and most of the people whom a person knows are self-employed. Again, the work tends to be in catering, taxi driving and so on. Young people seem not to have networks outwith their particular sector and its way of working.

That situation affects young people from low-income groups across ethnicities, however, and not only ethnic minority young people—although there are particular issues with them. There is a strong role for public service careers advice to open up people's horizons, to break down stereotypes and to encourage people to look at better-paid work outside the experience of their family and their networks. We know that that is not happening to any great degree at the moment.

Jim McCormick: On top of that, there is a gender gap. Most minority ethnic girls from low-income backgrounds are substantially outperforming boys from the same backgrounds, and the majority of white Scots from low-income backgrounds. However, even with that educational premium, if you like, the levels of occupational channelling and segregation, and of underutilisation of skills are even more stark. We need to be quite specific about which groups are most affected by those kinds of disadvantage in terms of the labour market and where they are, so we need good data on geography and good sectoral insights.

We can start very early with that, but we can also use work experience in the fourth year of secondary school, for example, as a small way of modelling and demonstrating completely different experiences from the ones that young people would normally have access to. There is therefore a big responsibility on our schools and careers service in terms of what we can expect them to do, as well as what we can expect from further education, higher education and the workplace.

Maggie Kelly: Just to add to what my colleagues have said, obviously there is a specific issue for more recent migrants, who will naturally network with people who speak the same language. When we are thinking about the impact of networks, we need to consider the impact of people having low English language skills and the fact that people speaking English as a second language are possibly just not getting early information about career options or services that might assist them to find out about career options and so on. That is a very particular group that needs targeted action to ensure that people do not just move into low-paid work because that is what everybody else in their local network is doing, and because it is all that they hear about because they have issues around speaking English as a second language. We need to ensure that that does not happen and that cycle is not repeated.

Sandra White: I take your point. Perhaps the fair work convention can look at putting English for speakers of other languages resources into schools and other places.

You touched on careers advice. As has been pointed out in evidence, many young people are well qualified but are not getting proper careers advice, and are not, for whatever reason, being led on to a career path that could be fulfilling.

I also want to touch on devolution of employability. The work programme could, if it comes to the Scottish Parliament—as you mentioned—perhaps fit into the work of the fair work convention.

I picked up the point that the focus of employment services is simply on getting people into jobs—any job, really. I found that interesting.

What advice would you give to youngsters who are qualified but are obviously getting the wrong advice? Drew Smith mentioned the national advancement service taking over from, or complementing, the careers services in schools.

Jim McCormick: I will start with a point about purpose. The main goal for JobCentre Plus is to get people off benefits and into work. The work programme does a bit better than that: it aims to get people into work and to keep them there for six months.

We in Scotland have an opportunity, through devolution, to have a different commissioning purpose that is more ambitious. As Helen Barnard suggested, we could view the purpose as being to help people to get into work that will, in time, lead to their making sufficient earnings progress to take them out of poverty. That is good for the economy, the social security bill and people's prospects, and there is a business case for employers. Our purpose must be different and more ambitious.

It is fine to set a commissioning purpose, but we must then be very clear about some of the cultural and behavioural aspects that will flow from that. We must not only look at work programme providers, but take the opportunity, on the back of the Wood commission, to reframe our offer to young people around subject choice, work experience, careers advice and the choices that they make at 17 or 18. Given that we are trying to develop our cultural participation in Scotland, there is real space for young people to become fully involved peer to peer in designing a view of what works for different people in different places.

We should not make the mistake of thinking that there is a better bureaucratic fix that can come from Government. The more we can engage with young people who have grown up in Scotland, or who have come here recently, to design solutions that are likely to work, the closer we will be to having the kind of service that we need.

The Convener: You spoke about JobCentre Plus, and employment services moving people into better-quality jobs. What if people cannot get those better-quality jobs? Perhaps those jobs are not out there. Is there not an advantage in getting someone into a job in the first place, rather than having them stay unemployed? I have experience of that through training. The longer a person is unemployed, the harder it is for them to get a job. Their skills are out of date, and they may end up having health issues, too.

Jim McCormick: Absolutely. The consequence of what we are saying is not that we should park people until something better comes along. We are suggesting that we get people in, but that we do not say once they are over the threshold of getting into work—or after six months if they have been long-term unemployed—that they are on their own, which is what we usually say.

For the people with the biggest risk factors, such as those with health conditions or disabilities, those with poor English, those who are poorly qualified or those who are in a sector or a place where there are very few prospects for advancement, we want a service that sticks with them and which continues to offer them chances for advancement. If their employer is not offering that, we may look at procurement conditionality, or we may decide that we need to give people good support to get their second or third job. That is what we mean by sticking with people and keeping a focus on advancement.

The Convener: Does that not lead to the need for an understanding of the job market and the jobs that are actually out there? You are going to have to train job centre staff to understand what the jobs are and tie them in with an individual's qualifications. They need to take time to understand what the barriers are for each individual who cannot get a job and cannot progress.

Helen Barnard: Yes. You are absolutely right. We are advocating first, that if you change the high-level target and incentive for job centres, work programme providers and employment services, and tell them that their target is to get people to a certain level of earnings progression, for instance, that will lead an adviser to make judgments for particular people. They will be asking, "Is the best route to meet my target to ensure that this person takes the first job because they need work experience, or should I ensure that they hold off from those low-level jobs in order to get a better job or do more training?" At present, the adviser has no motivation to think like that. If you were to change the high-level target, you would create that motivation.

You made a very important point, convener: advisers need up-to-date local labour market information that tells them about the pathways and the earnings progression that would tend to result from a person going into a particular job, so that they can make a judgment. They must, however, have training to do that. We suggest something like a revitalised national college to upskill employment advisers so that they can make such skilled professional judgments with people about what is best for them, and then follow that up.

The Convener: So we would be talking about employment services staff becoming careers advisers.

Helen Barnard: Absolutely. It would be much more about doing that.

The Convener: We will move on to Christian Allard. I must apologise to Sandra White, as we are running short of time.

Sandra White: It is okay, convener. My question has already been asked.

Christian Allard: Do I need to move on, convener, or can I go back to an earlier point? I just want to make a quick observation.

The Convener: Okay.

Christian Allard: We have talked a great deal this morning about low-paid, low-quality jobs. Is that a problem, particularly with ethnic minorities?

Are we saying that there are bad jobs out there that nobody wants to do and that some people feel that doing such a job would be bad for their self-esteem? I cannot tell this from your report, but it seems to me that there is no such thing as a bad job, only bad pay. Some of these jobs have to be done by somebody, and people might find fulfilment in doing them. As my colleague John Wilson has said, the key is the living wage, not desperately trying to upskill people to get out of the poverty trap. I am a bit concerned that we are trying to devalue some jobs when the problem is in fact the pay, rather than the job itself.

Helen Barnard: I want to make two points. First, on the contribution that the living wage can make, an analysis that we had done a year or so ago suggested that about half of in-work poverty is related to people being paid below the living wage and that approximately half of people in in-work poverty do not have anyone in the household below the living wage. Even if everyone was on the living wage, therefore, we would still see about half the current level of in-work poverty. Other issues are the hours of work—we know that there are a lot of people who want to work more hours but cannot get them—and progression. Someone who is supporting a family might need to be paid quite a lot more than living wage, so they will need progression.

There is an issue with job design. The question is whether some jobs can be redesigned so that they will be worth more and employers will genuinely be able to pay people more instead of simply being told that they have to pay more. We also have to look at how we move people through jobs. Low-paid jobs would be fine if they were genuinely entry-level jobs and people could move on to something else, but too many of them are not.

The biggest area where I would agree with Christian Allard is the care sector. It is to some extent within the gift of national Governments to say, "We will value care work more than we do, we will pay better than we have done and we will get higher quality than we have had." The issue is really how good a level of care we are willing to pay for.

Christian Allard: To my mind, we should value any kind of job, and a job digging the street or a care job should be paid accordingly.

11:15

Maggie Kelly: Helen Barnard has just said exactly what I was thinking. I absolutely agree with Mr Allard that loads of jobs out there are really badly paid. That includes jobs in the care sector, which is an area that we could really focus on with regard to not only improving pay and conditions—for example, paying people a living wage—but looking at career structure and opportunities to develop. Although caring is an incredibly important job, it is hugely undervalued. It is therefore all about the culture, too. It is no surprise that it is quite often women—and perhaps ethnic minority women—who are doing that job. This is about pay, but, as I have said, it is also about the culture, and that includes a whole load of other issues around how we value that sector.

Christian Allard: You mentioned women and low pay. I was quite interested in the graph in your draft report showing by ethnic group the percentage of male and female employees below the living wage. I was struck by the huge gap between men and women in the white group in that respect, which is something that we do not find in other ethnic groups. We have talked about having more data, but we might well be surprised to find that some ethnic minorities are better placed than we are.

Helen Barnard: You are right; the gender gap in the white group is, I think, the biggest. It is worth saying that there is a selection effect at work in the statistics. Women in some ethnic minority groups are less likely to work, and those who do are those who can command higher wages. That does not take away from your point, but it gives more of a context.

The graph also helpfully highlights that men in some groups are incredibly badly paid, because they are concentrated in certain jobs. It is therefore helpful to look at the issue in a specific way, not just in a broad way.

Christian Allard: I am conscious of time but what I am trying to say is that some of the data contains positive things about ethnic minorities that could be used as examples for the white majority.

Helen Barnard: Indeed.

Christian Allard: Going back to the issue that I was supposed to ask about—modern apprenticeships—I got quite confused by some wording in the draft report. Interestingly, you use the word "targets" in respect of modern apprenticeships. There are two issues with regard to targeting: the idea of promotion and the concept of targeting groups to go into the system. After all, we should remember that the modern apprenticeships system in Scotland is different to that down in England.

However, you say very specifically that SDS should set targets for people, which is interesting. I have to say, though, that I found the point a bit difficult to follow. You said that the idea came from one of the Wood commission recommendations, which I read. It indeed talks about setting targets, but only for people with disabilities, not for people

from minority ethnic backgrounds. Has the report mixed up that recommendation?

Maggie Kelly: We are trying to say that the targets should be applied across the board; in other words, they should apply to ethnic minority groups and disabled people, too. That is what we want to happen.

Christian Allard: Do you think that the Equality Act 2010 should be changed?

Helen Barnard: The Wood commission made recommendations for disabled people, and we think that it should have made the same recommendations for people from ethnic minorities.

Christian Allard: But you do not say that in your report. You say that you agree with the Wood commission, and you have just extrapolated on that, saying that the target should apply as much to people from ethnic minorities as to people with disabilities. However, the Wood commission was very precise in trying to separate the two. There is a problem of legality; it is about the difference between positive action and positive discrimination.

Maggie Kelly: I can see where your question is leading and I appreciate that it might be more helpful to be a bit more specific about what we mean by targets. We are clearly not saying that the system should be changed to ensure that the percentage of a particular ethnic minority group in a local area is replicated in the number of people who are then offered opportunities. We cannot discriminate in terms of job or other opportunities; for example, we cannot specifically say, "This is how you're going to do it—you're going to have a quota." That is different from saying that action can be taken to increase the number of people from ethnic minority groups, where there is evidence that they are underrepresented.

Christian Allard: I am just a bit worried by this. Your report is only a draft, so it might be helpful to put in something about that.

Maggie Kelly: I could certainly—

Christian Allard: After all, you clearly recommend that SDS should set targets.

Maggie Kelly: I am not talking about targets in the sense of quotas. That is what I am trying to clarify.

You are absolutely right to say that we cannot discriminate against particular people on the ground of their ethnicity, whether they are white or from ethnic minority groups. That is not what I am suggesting; instead, I am suggesting that SDS put in place a programme that might involve, for example, liaising with local ethnic minority community groups and doing joint work with them to advertise the opportunities that are available. That might involve going into schools in areas with high numbers of ethnic minority groups that are really not getting on to certain things and having specific discussions with children and their parents about the available opportunities. I am not saying that we should have quotas. I have taken your point on board, and I will say something specific about that.

Helen Barnard: We are saying that there should be a performance target for SDS. It cannot meet that through imposing quotas, but it should still have a performance target that it needs to achieve.

Christian Allard: I take the point, but I was a bit shocked when I read the wording in the report. We have talked about the issue before in evidence. There is a fine line between positive action and positive discrimination, and we have to ensure that we stay on the side of the law—or we will need to change the law itself.

Maggie Kelly: You are absolutely right about the target issue. The legislation as it stands does not prevent us from having positive targets for people to move towards; the issue is how they move towards them. I think that that is your point.

Christian Allard: I am simply highlighting that the programme is not the same as that down south. It comes from employers—it is not direct recruitment.

Maggie Kelly: Absolutely.

Christian Allard: I have a final question, convener, if I may.

The Convener: You must be very brief, as we need to finish.

Christian Allard: I will be.

The witnesses have talked a lot about speaking good English and poor English. When Annabel Goldie, Margaret McCulloch and I went to NHS Lothian, we found people with huge qualifications—people with masters degrees—who had very strong accents. We have to be very careful about what we say in reports when we talk about good and proper English. Is there not a fine line here? A lot of people speak a lot better English than I do, but they have a much stronger accent.

The Convener: The witnesses will have to give us a very brief reply, as we have to finish in two minutes' time. You will be able to follow up your remarks in writing.

Helen Barnard: Just to clarify, I quoted a statistic from the survey that having good English reduces poverty by 5 percentage points. That is about English language ability.

Christian Allard: Is that written or oral English?

Helen Barnard: The survey reported on both. However, there is a wider question that brings us back to informal workplace practices. It is about people's accents and perceptions of whether people are insiders or outsiders—in other words, whether someone's accent marks them as a person who is seen as an outsider.

The Convener: Thank you very much for that. If there is anything else that you think we should know but which we have not covered, I would appreciate it if you would contact us.

That concludes the public part of the meeting. At next week's meeting on 19 November, we will continue our inquiry by hearing from the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights.

11:24

Meeting continued in private until 11:30.

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