OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 29 November 2017

Session 5

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Wednesday 29 November 2017

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EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE
30th Meeting 2017, Session 5

CONVENER

*James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)
*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)
*Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
*Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP)
*Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
*Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
*Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
*Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)
*Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Keir Bloomer (Royal Society of Edinburgh)
Dr Tracey Burns (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)
Professor Chris Chapman (University of Glasgow)
Professor Graham Donaldson

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Roz Thomson

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 29 November 2017

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (James Dornan): I welcome everyone to the 30th meeting in 2017 of the Education and Skills Committee and remind all present to switch their mobile phones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on taking business in private. Does the committee agree to take in private items 3 and 4 and all future reviews of evidence on education reforms?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Education Reforms

10:00

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is our first evidence-taking session as part of our early scrutiny of the Scottish Government's proposed education reforms and legislation. The committee is keen to explore the evidence base for the reforms.

Today, we will hear from a panel of educationalists. I welcome to the meeting Keir Bloomer, the convener of the Royal Society of Edinburgh's education committee; Dr Tracey Burns, a senior analyst at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; Professor Chris Chapman, the chair of education policy and practice at the University of Glasgow; and Professor Graham Donaldson. I should mention that Mr Bloomer is also the chair of the commission on school reform.

I thank the panel for coming along. Before I invite questions from other members, I will ask a general question about your views on the proposed reforms. To what extent do the proposed reforms reflect international best practice, and how applicable to the Scottish context is the experience of other countries and education systems?

Would anyone like to begin? If not, it is going to be a short meeting.

Professor Graham Donaldson: Perhaps I can make a few initial comments on the reforms. My perception of the overall package is that you can trace a relationship between each individual proposal, where Scotland has been, what it has learned from past experience and experience that has been drawn on from elsewhere. In other words, the antecedents of and evidence base for each reform in the reform package are quite clearly traceable.

However, as far as the total package is concerned, the challenge is not so much whether the structural changes are right or wrong; everything hinges on the extent to which the relationships between the various stakeholders in the process are strong, constructive and positive and whether we get the leadership right at the national level, at the level of the new regional collaborative and, particularly, at the headteacher level. After all, the headteachers charter places a huge responsibility on our heads across Scotland. One of the tests of the reforms will be the extent to which they rise to the challenge and the extent to which we have in place procedures and mechanisms that can identify well in advance any problems that might arise at a school through a headteacher rather than through something else,

instead of our reacting to a problem that has emerged.

Keir Bloomer (Royal Society of Edinburgh): The Royal Society of Edinburgh feels that the Government failed to make the argument in favour of the reforms as strongly as it might have done either in the original consultation or in the "Education Governance: Next Steps" document that was published at the end of the consultation. That is not to say that there are not very good arguments in favour of the reforms; they were just not made in those documents as convincingly as they might have been, and it would have been helpful had that happened.

There is considerable evidence of an international trend towards decentralising the governance of education systems, but the evidence of that being beneficial is not tremendously strong. Tracey Burns will be able to speak to this much better than I can, but, although there is some evidence of a connection between decentralisation, the devolution of control to schools and improvements in standards, the correlation is not particularly strong. Like Graham Donaldson, I feel that much will depend on the quality of the relationships that are established and the quality of the leadership that is offered.

Professor Chris Chapman (University of Glasgow): I want to amplify the point about relationships and highlight the fact that the direction of travel is sound and evidence based. However, there is no one switch that we can simply flick. If we look south of the border, we can trace these types of reform back to the Education Reform Act 1988 and the local management of schools. There has been an incremental devolution to—or, I should say, empowerment of—headteachers over decades. The point that I want to amplify is that this is all about relationships and ensuring that we have the right leadership in the right places at the right times.

Dr Tracey Burns (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development): One of the things that resonated with me is the fact that the issues on the table are actually the hardest to solve. They are the hardest governance challenges that we have seen in all the countries that we work with, and they are absolutely in line with the issues that all our partners and countries are struggling with.

As Chris Chapman said, there are no easy answers, but it is important to point out that the question is less about whether there should be decentralisation and more about what should be decentralised. This is not about just giving everything away to a local level; it is about the details and making the process work.

The Convener: I am sure that we will discuss those issues in more detail. Liz Smith will begin the questioning.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): This is one of the most challenging—and most interesting—questions that we face. The evidence that we have received from the OECD and internal Parliament briefings seems to suggest that—as, I think, Dr Burns says in her submission—the focus should be not on structures but on process and ensuring that we adopt what works. According to international evidence, a variety of systems work well. Given that, do you think that a lesson for Scotland might be that there is no single model that is appropriate?

We have talked about the need for headteacher leadership and other relationships to be in place, but to what extent should accountability be the key word in deciding what should or should not be reformed?

Dr Burns: As far as our work is concerned, getting accountability right lies at the heart of modern governance challenges. The three things that we have focused on—accountability, capacity building and strategic thinking—came out of discussions that we had with our 35 member countries as consistently the hardest issues to get right.

As for takeaway points and lessons, you are absolutely correct in saying that there is no one system that is right. That is because having the right structure is helpful but not sufficient; the goal is to create and plan a system that works and can adapt to meet its people's needs. Even if, at the end of today or at the end of these reforms, a perfect system were to be developed, it would never succeed permanently in keeping on doing what it needed to do. The aim is to create a system that can evolve and change as the problems evolve and change.

Indeed, that is a fundamental point, because the usual temptation is to focus on structures as a relatively quick and concrete fix. You feel successful when you do something, but that does not mean that you change any of the underlying relationships. That is the point that my colleagues made at the beginning of the meeting: those relationships are key.

Liz Smith: That was an interesting answer, Dr Burns. I wonder whether I can tease it out a little. If we have to be flexible on this very complex issue while learning different lessons from other countries, do we need to do much more to improve our data set on educational performance or can we move forward simply by looking at the lines of accountability?

Dr Burns: I am going to hedge this answer, because I am not an expert on Scotland and I do

not feel capable of answering precisely about your data set.

What I would like to iterate—this is a theme and trend in all OECD countries—is that having more data available does not mean that it is used. One of the things about compiling and marshalling evidence to make decisions is that it can also be a contested space. People can be rational in their use of evidence, but they can also choose the evidence that suits their purposes. Having a lot of evidence and data does not necessarily answer the questions; it really creates a system that is designed to provide the evidence that you need to answer your questions.

I know that that is a hedging answer, but it is an important point. One of the temptations with many systems has been to provide more and more data in the belief that it will make things clear. However, if the data is not used, or if it is not used appropriately, it is not necessarily helpful to do that.

Liz Smith: Could Keir Bloomer comment on that? I know that the Royal Society of Edinburgh has quite strong views about the paucity of data on which judgments can be made about Scotland's performance.

Keir Bloomer: We feel that the quality of evidence that is available in Scotland is insufficient.

I would also like to respond to the first question that you asked, which was about the place of structural change. Scotland has not gone in for much change in governance for a very long time. In Scotland, there is a tendency to underestimate the importance of governance change and structural change.

There are a lot of very strong things in the Scottish education system. We have a well-qualified and highly skilled teaching profession and a lot of policies in place that I believe to be right, such as curriculum for excellence and the report on the professional development of teachers that Graham Donaldson was responsible for. However, the results that Scotland has been obtaining during the past couple of decades have not been particularly impressive. There is something that means that we are not getting the maximum benefit from the strengths that our system possesses, and that must come down to the governance structures that are in place.

I am not aware that there has been any really serious attempt to address governance in Scottish education since the Education Act 1929. We could not, therefore, be accused of constantly fiddling with the structure. Although I do not think that governance change, in itself, brings improvement, it does put in place some of the prerequisites for improvement. To stand that on its head, if there are problems with the way in which the system is run and those problems are not addressed, we will not make much progress whatever the strengths of our policies happen to be.

I agree about the importance of evidence to support those policies, which is why the Royal Society regretted the fact that the argument in favour of what is now being called a school and teacher-led system was not more strongly advanced in the two papers.

There is also a problem at the local level with schools having the data available to enable them to make sound judgments. That situation is improving, but there is still a considerable distance to go.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): It is fair to say that everyone across the Scottish Parliament has used the 2015 OECD paper to suit their own purposes. It is an incredibly useful piece of work, and I want to explore two key themes.

The paper talks about the need to strengthen the middle and how there was a watershed moment for curriculum for excellence. I know that Tracey Burns is not the author of that report, but you are from the OECD, so I am slightly putting you on the spot. How would you characterise that requirement to strengthen the middle? Building on your earlier answers about relationships, what do we need to do to make sure that the middle is strong and focused on improving education in Scotland?

Dr Burns: I was not the author of that report. However, my colleague David Istance was one of the main authors. He had a lot of passion for the work that he put into the report and he felt very positive about the Scottish systems and the recommendations that the review made.

10:15

In the context of the general discussion about governance and the role of a middle tier more broadly, a lot of the work with the Nordic countries, where power is devolved to the municipal level—in some countries, that could be a municipality of 120 people who have the same governance responsibilities as Oslo or Stockholm, for example—has found that that does not work particularly well and that those countries struggle to reinforce the capacities of the smaller players to deliver on their mandate.

One issue to think about is whether there is a series of networks that work together, help each other and build capacity for some of the smaller players or whether there is a formal middle tier, in a structural sense, that is designed not only to build capacity and help the different players and learning between the partners but to think more

broadly about equity issues. One of the dangers with full devolution is that there are very small players who lack the capacity to deliver and who have fewer resources available to them, meaning that they would be less able to deliver even if they had the resources.

The role of the middle layer—whether it is a formal structural body or a series of networks of players—is to build capacity and support and to keep the conversation going among all the players to allow them to learn from one another. It is also to ensure equity across the system so that national objectives on excellence can be, and are being, met by all the devolved bodies and pieces of the system.

Daniel Johnson: That is interesting. Clearly, the issue at stake is about capacity in the middle layer. Is there sufficient clarity on that? To summarise, under the review, we will have the Scottish Government, an education council and regional improvement co-operatives and there will still be a role for local authorities. There will then be school clusters and schools. That is potentially six layers of competence and locus. Are we potentially creating more complexity rather than reducing it? Is there too much focus on structures rather than on capacity? I am interested in thoughts on that from any of the panel members.

Professor Donaldson: The use of the term "middle" in the OECD report was unfortunate, because it has led to a discussion of what we mean by the middle rather than a focus on what we actually need to do. I think that it meant that the approach should not be top down or bottom up and that it was a way of saying that we need collaboration. It was saying that we need to create a way of bringing about change in the system for which no one bit of the system is responsible but that is achieved through collaboration, and the middle is where all of that can come together.

Going back to the structural question, my view is that we should not necessarily think of the middle as a tier, which is what we might tend to think about straight away; instead, we should think about the mechanisms by which we can ensure that all those who have a direct role in ensuring high-quality education have the opportunity and the duty to collaborate to achieve that. That collaboration is an important part of the process. The regional collaboratives are therefore not really a tier in the system; they are a mechanism by which we encourage collaboration. They should not be seen as an additional tier in a structural sense.

I do not know whether you want me to talk about the watershed moment, but I can certainly do that if you want me to.

Daniel Johnson: My next question was going to be about that, so if you would like to talk about the "'watershed' moment", please feel free.

Professor Donaldson: I agree with the OECD report that we are at a watershed moment with curriculum for excellence. Scotland has suffered from being one of the first countries in the world, if not the first, to think about the curriculum differently from how it has been thought about.

Chris Chapman made reference to the 1988 act in England and Wales, which essentially set out a coverage curriculum. It said—sensibly—that there was a problem of entitlement: young people were not getting the broad and balanced education to which they were entitled. The act therefore defined the curriculum tightly at the centre and set it out for a range of subjects and programmes of study. That approach was, by and large, about entitlement. Over time, that has led to a very inflexible and highly crowded curriculum that things tend to get added into, as pressures build up. We have never had that kind of statutory national curriculum in Scotland, but the same kinds of pressures applied and, to a certain extent, the same evolution took place in Scotland as in England.

In Scotland, during the early period of the creation of the Parliament and the long hard look at what we were trying to do with school education, the national debate came up with quite a different way of thinking about the curriculum that said that although young people's experience at school is, of course, about learning the subjects, it is also about more than that: it is about the extent to which young people are shaped as individuals and people. The four capacities of the curriculum for excellence were an attempt to give expression to what kind of young people come out of the school system—young people who are ready to not just cope, but to thrive in the world that they will live in, into the next century. Scotland was one of the first countries to start thinking about the curriculum differently—not as a coverage curriculum.

I think that over time we lost the narrative: we no longer know what curriculum for excellence and its fundamentals are, so what we have is a series of bits of curriculum reform. We need to recreate and re-emphasise the narrative, because that original thinking is vital. Deciding what youngsters do at school is incredibly complex, given the uncertainties of the future world. Therefore, building them as people is as important, if not more important, than their acquisition of lots of learning.

Daniel Johnson: Do other members of the panel agree that we need, essentially, to regroup and think about the direction of curriculum for excellence, and to consolidate what we have

done? One of my thoughts is on whether the governance review is actually a distraction from that work or, at least, does not focus enough on the central theme that we need to focus on.

Keir Bloomer: I agree very much with the analysis that you have just been offered by Graham Donaldson.

Both the questions that you asked—the one about the middle and the one about the watershed moment—have in common the problems that we are having with Education Scotland. We need to do something radical to improve that organisation.

We will have in place shortly a new chief inspector: I wish her well in tackling the many problems that she is going to face. One of them, certainly, is that although the Government accepted the recommendations of the 2015 OECD report, doing that should have involved a radical simplification of curriculum for excellence and the mass of guidance for it that has been produced. That process has not gone far enough. I do not think that it has yielded real clarity on what the objectives of curriculum for excellence actually are and on the key features that must be emphasised to realise those objectives. I think that that is what Graham Donaldson is saying. We need to do much more to take forward the OECD report's thinking on curriculum for excellence.

I also interpreted the meaning of "the middle" much the same as Professor Donaldson did. It is not simply the intermediate tier between schools and central Government: it is much more about collaborations, networks and the whole infrastructure that lies in the middle that enables and supports teachers in doing their job.

The Government has clearly decided that the correct way forward is regional improvement collaboratives. At the time of the original governance consultation, the RSE did not agree with that. I think that not very many other people did, either—it was not a suggestion that found much resonance among the respondents. In the interim, there have been discussions between the Government, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the RSE and so on that have resulted in a new and, I think, superior model of regional improvement collaboratives.

I have one serious objection to the way in which that was done. It seems to me that the difference between the conversations that the Government is free to have at any time with any stakeholder and an open public consultation is that the open public consultation gives the people who are not generally spoken to the opportunity to have their voices heard. In this case, that will not happen, because the future shape of the collaboratives has been determined by the lead stakeholders. The notion that it is being consulted on at the moment is, frankly, farcical. Nevertheless, I welcome the way in which the concept has changed over the months.

Whether such collaborative structures will function effectively will depend very much on the future functioning of Education Scotland and, even more so—the point is made twice in the consultation on the bill—on the performance of the collaboratives being led by schools and teachers and responding to what schools actually want in the way of support.

If that is realised in practice, that will be a substantial step forward, because the major failing of Education Scotland, of Learning and Teaching Scotland and of the two predecessors before that, is that they have been seen as—and, indeed, have been—instruments of Government policy, not as instruments of the support that the profession actually wants.

The Convener: I will let Tavish Scott in next. He wants to continue to discuss Education Scotland, but we just have another hour, so I ask that answers be kept a bit shorter so that we can get through all the stuff that we have to get through.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I want to pursue Keir Bloomer's line of argument with the other panel members. Education Scotland has been responsible for the past 10 years, in broad terms, but the proposals—as far as I understand them—would augment the powers of Education Scotland. Do the other panel members believe that that is the right approach?

Professor Donaldson: I believe that the original decision to bring together Learning and Teaching Scotland and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education to form Education Scotland was an attempt to ensure that the learning that came out of the inspection process was more directly fed into how development took place nationally. That was a laudable aim.

As some members of the committee may be aware, prior to that merger, I was head of the inspectorate, so I am not exactly totally objective in relation to all this. It would not have been my preference to bring the two bodies together at that time—it is not what I would have done. I was trying to move the inspectorate towards having a much stronger focus on improvement so that we could use accountability as an agent of improvement. The inspectorate did a lot of work on leadership and so on that arose out of that.

That is now water under the bridge: the decision was taken and the two bodies were brought together. The challenge that now faces Education Scotland is to create convincingly the appropriate Chinese walls inside the organisation to preserve the independence of inspection, so that inspection is not seen simply as the enforcement arm of the

development side of the organisation, which is sometimes how it is characterised. Independence of inspection can provide genuine independent evidence to the system more generally, and to all of us who have the good of Scottish education at heart, which will allow us to make judgments about how well things are progressing. If inspection is sufficiently independent, there will be credibility in relation to those judgments. That is not impossible within Education Scotland, but it is not what has happened in the period immediately prior to this.

Tavish Scott: How can a person be both the chief inspector of schools and the chief executive of Education Scotland? How could there be a Chinese wall between the two roles that that individual holds?

10:30

Professor Donaldson: That is one of the governance issues. The director of inspection in Education Scotland must, within the structure, have integrity and independence that is then fed into the chief inspector. That must be transparent; it must not happen behind closed doors. If that were to be the case there would be an expectation that the results of inspection—not just of the school inspections, but of the more thematic work—would be transparent in terms of how the inspectorate goes about its business.

Given that there is a combined structure, it would not be impossible to create something that would satisfy the requirements of independence, but it would not be easy. Part of the challenge would be about perception. The issue is not so much whether it can be done, but whether people perceive that it is working well. That will be a real challenge for the new chief inspector.

Tavish Scott: That is very fair.

Dr Burns, on Professor Donaldson's point about the split between the inspector on the one hand and policy on the other hand, what is your international experience? I presume that both models are used in good education systems around the world.

Dr Burns: They are. The real takeaway is to have a conversation—perhaps the committee has already had it—about what the system's goals are, in terms of outcomes.

Much of the discussion is predicated on improving outcomes or improving the system. A basic question is to ask what that means. The inspectorate's job is to think about the functioning of schools. Part of that is to have a discussion about, and to give serious thought to, the elements of performance that it is interested in tracking and monitoring, because that is fundamental to what we want out of an education system.

Tavish Scott: Are those things in the Government's proposals?

Dr Burns: I do not know enough about the proposals. However, the model can be successful both ways, but it is important to get the mix right. I agree with how Graham Donaldson spelled it out: it is incredibly important to balance the structure correctly.

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): My question is not on the same theme, but is a general question based on what I have heard so far. There is a very academic flavour to your contributions, as would be expected on any debate about governance. I want to bring the discussion back to the real-life impact in the classroom. Given that a big theme in Scottish education is teacher workload, what will the impact be on teachers and the classroom environment? We debate legislation and we do our best to make sure that it is the best legislation possible but, ultimately, we must think about the impact on the classroom.

Professor Chapman: That takes us back to the OECD report. I reiterate the call for more evidence in the system. It is laudable that we are drawing on a vast international evidence base, but there was a clear call in the OECD report for a stronger Scottish empirical evidence base and a stronger involvement of our universities in developing that.

Since 2015, we have made some progress. We have a research strategy, and the newly formed Scottish Council of Deans of Education has been working collaboratively with the Government on drawing up proposals to progress a programme of research. That will be key if we are to understand the complexity and the nuances of the realities of teachers' lives in their classrooms. We should not, in creating and developing a robust Scottish evidence base, take away the realities of practice in a detached and isolated way.

Secondly, I want to pick up on the reference to strengthening the middle. I concur with colleagues. That plays into the Education Scotland debate, because it is about balancing accountability mechanisms and improvement. Historically, education systems around the world have had relatively bureaucratic organisations that are set within hierarchical cultures. We are trying to break down those vertical bureaucracies and strengthen the lateral ties and networks. That has implications for accountability. In the debate, I would like us to use the word "responsibility" more than we use the word "accountability". Professionals should be responsible to one another for their performance, rather than being accountable to somebody somewhere for it.

If we can use the regional improvement collaboratives as a mechanism of arrangements

and processes that support movement of our staff around the system so that they gain different experiences and insights into how the system works, we would have a much more realistic chance of the reforms being successful, because teachers will have insights and will have built capacity through a different set of experiences from those in traditional career progressions.

The reforms are about creating more flexibility in the system and the regional improvement collaboratives being much more fluid, rather than simply using another set of bureaucratic arrangements that sit in the middle of a hierarchy.

Another point that the OECD brought up in its 2015 report, which was really important and links into that approach, is about moving from a centrally managed system and placing innovation much closer to the classroom. The reforms are about empowering schools, headteachers and teachers to be able to make decisions at the learning level. In order to do that successfully, we need to create a culture in which we are not so scared of failure and people are encouraged to take risks. The system will improve as long as we combine that with monitoring the impact of changes to practice that teachers make in classrooms, so that we know what works to improve practice and what does not work, rather than acting on a whim or based on hearsay.

Richard Lochhead: If I was a teacher busy in my classroom and wanting a rest at the end the day and I was watching this debate, I would be wondering what the reforms would mean for my everyday job. Are there any examples of what the governance changes that you support will mean for the everyday experience of a teacher in a classroom?

Professor Chapman: Having been a teacher in one of those classrooms in a very challenging school, I can tell you absolutely what those changes mean for practice. They mean placing students at the front of everything that you do, rather than being caught up in some of the peripheral activity; they mean not only placing students at the forefront of what you do but working with and learning from your colleagues in other classrooms around the school and in other schools locally and beyond.

The reforms cannot be a bolt-on; they must be a fundamental rethinking of how we work and how we view our professional lives and contribution. If they end up being a bolt-on, the danger is that we are just adding to the complexity of teachers' lives without taking any of that complexity away. As I say, we need teachers to understand how they can have the most impact on the lives of their pupils by working with colleagues and taking responsibility for the outcomes of children not just in their classroom or school but in neighbouring schools and around the system. That sense of collective responsibility is key for moving forward.

Professor Donaldson: I have a lot of sympathy with the import of Richard Lochhead's question. In considering reform, it is important that we look from the classroom up, rather than look from the outside in. A classic response from a teacher on whether the reforms would make a difference to their capacity to do the job that they want to do with their young people would be, "It depends."

We have to move to a situation where, as Chris Chapman has described, more space is created for teachers to work together in arriving at approaches to learning and teaching that will really make a difference for the kids, and where teachers are supported more in their professional learning. Keir Bloomer mentioned the "Teaching Scotland's Future" report; that is still work in progress. We still have quite a long way to go to create a framework for a teaching profession that is properly supported to grow as a profession.

Most significantly, we need to get the accountability mechanism right. The risk—Tracey Burns will recognise this internationally—is that you create a structure in which the rhetoric is about freedom and greater ownership of the system but the reality is that you are free only to do what the accountability system tells you to do. That means that you are not free at all but are simply responding to the pressures that come from the accountability system. Being very clear about how we establish a constructive approach to accountability reinforces and affirms the good things that are happening in our schools and works with the profession in order to bring about improvement at the same time as identifying the relatively small number of occasions where things are not going well.

Workload becomes an issue when you do not believe in what you are doing or when you believe that what you are doing is simply feeding the machine. Many teachers' complaints about workload are because they feel a sense of alienation from what they are being asked to do and the way in which the accountability system impacts on that. We will get a much more vibrant classroom experience for young people if we are very clear about the relationship between backing the profession and getting an accountability mechanism that is constructive, rather than intrusive.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): I want to pick up on all the points that we have heard. I am interested in going back to the issue around relationships, because my sense from the teachers I have spoken to is that there has been a breakdown in trust in the system. Many people have not got into the curriculum for excellence reform or have very serious questions about it,

there is the issue of teacher workload and a concern about a lack of meaningful consultation on some of the proposed reforms. Given that a major partner in the reform process feels like that, how will it be possible to build a shared sense of ownership of this round of reforms?

Professor Donaldson: I am not sure that I agree with you about teachers' views about curriculum for excellence. Over the past two or three months, I have done quite a lot of work with groups of teachers and headteachers across Scotland, and one of the questions that I ask at the outset is whether they still believe in curriculum for excellence. I give them the opportunity to discuss that and then vote on it. Overwhelmingly, they still believe that curriculum for excellence is the right thing for Scottish schoolchildren and for Scottish education. However, the follow-up question is, "Do you know what curriculum for excellence actually is?" What comes across then is that there is some confusion about what we are talking about.

To go back to your earlier question, I do not think that curriculum for excellence, which has become a label, is the problem. The issue is recapturing the huge enthusiasm among Scottish teachers that was around about 10 years ago for what curriculum for excellence was trying to do. We need to re-energise the profession in support of curriculum for excellence. There remains huge good will towards curriculum for excellence if we get that right.

Keir Bloomer: There is no lack of consultation, but there is a lack of evidence that consultation makes any difference. The profession—and everyone else—becomes steadily disillusioned by circumstances in which a proposal is severely criticised and yet goes ahead in a virtually unaltered form. I do not exactly agree with your form of words, Mr Mundell, but I suspect that I agree with the intent behind them. In that sense, there is something of a breakdown of trust.

Teachers still believe in curriculum for excellence but they lack clarity about what curriculum for excellence entails. There has been a very significant shift in the way in which the Government portrays its priorities. We hear very little now about curriculum for excellence, but we hear a lot about the national improvement framework and the first two priorities in it in particular, which are raising standards for all and closing the attainment gap. There is nothing incompatible between those two priorities on the one hand and the implementation of curriculum for excellence as originally conceived on the other. However, at present, that link is not being made sufficiently strongly. If the Government still adheres to the original philosophy of curriculum for excellence, it must re-emphasise that that is the way forward and the way in which the two main priorities of the national improvement framework can be realised.

10:45

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): My first question follows on from Richard Lochhead's line of questioning. I am still not convinced that the Government has its priorities right. I welcome the fact that education seems to be the Government's flagship domestic policy issue, but I question why governance reforms are the priority in that. Looking at the evidence of where there are issues in Scottish education, I think that, although governance is far from perfect, it does not lead to the conclusion that, for example, regional bodies should be one of our top priorities.

Professor Chapman mentioned the desire for teachers to collaborate more and talked about how collaboration improves education outcomes. I agree absolutely. In their responses to the consultation, teachers were overwhelmingly clear in saying that the barrier to greater collaboration is not structural but is about resources—it is the result of budget cuts and a decade of austerity. Is governance the right priority given that we have not resolved what seems to be what the workforce are saying is a far greater issue, which is the financial and budgetary constraints resulting from the past 10 years?

Professor Donaldson: It is not a choice between either governance or finance. We have lived through a period in which, increasingly, the public pound has to be spent very parsimoniously. In the past, we have been more able to lubricate change through resources. That is much more difficult in the world in which we are currently living. Therefore, one of the ways to get more out of the resource that is available is by collaboration and the ability of teachers to work together—the whole of the sum is greater than its parts. That is one way of addressing some of the difficulties.

Decisions have to be taken about how to create the space in schools to allow teachers to engage in such collaboration. That is partly about decisions taken by headteachers—it may lead to some hard decisions about, for example, class sizes and the nature of choice in the curriculum, given that both of those impact on the extent of time that teachers are in front of classes. It is important that we do not define productivity in teaching as the amount of time that teachers spend in front of the class—productivity is to do with the quality of what happens when teachers are in front of a class. We have not invested nearly enough in helping teachers to be able to do as good a job as possible. We have seen simply having them fulfil their current contractual

requirements as being the measure of how we are using the resource well.

We need to be prepared to take some hard decisions about how we make that space. It would be great if there were more money, but if not, we have to think about different ways in which we can do that.

Dr Burns: One of the principles of governance is thinking about the whole system and taking a whole-system approach. One of the reasons why that is important is to avoid taking it bit by bit—as Graham Donaldson observed earlier in talking about the curriculum, if you do that you end up with a lot of pieces but the whole thing does not necessarily hold together. This part of the process and having a vision for the system are crucial in aligning all the pieces. If you focus on one piece and you do not align it to the rest of the system, the piece may improve for that particular moment in time, but it will not necessarily lead to long-standing change.

In order to build momentum and the critical mass for change, there needs to be a step back to think about how all the pieces connect. It has not come up yet, but one of the things that I found interesting was thinking about teacher pathways and different roles and specialties for teachers, as a way to retain the best and attract highly motivated teachers to the profession. That is absolutely in line with international evidence but is also connected to all the accountability frameworks and the potential for collaboration and sharing expertise. All those pieces need to fit together. I would argue that governance is not a distraction but a necessary precondition for a system that works.

Professor Chapman: Collaboration, which we have spoken a lot about, does not happen by accident. There has to be an architecture in place to support collaboration. The fundamental issue concerns how you build the leadership capacity that makes that collaboration effective and purposeful. The research evidence shows that, in terms of impact on student outcomes, the leadership practice that gives twice the effect size of any other practice is investment in professional learning. Therefore, we must invest in our teachers' and leaders' professional learning to a level that we have never done before. That leads back to the point about building different pathways and having a coherent pipeline of teacher development and leadership development in the system.

We are at a really important moment, because we can now put the pieces of the jigsaw in the right places through the governance review and the associated set of reforms. However, of course, the key will be in the implementation. How these things play out in practice remains to be seen, but the direction of travel is the right one and is based on evidence. However, it requires us to have the strongest possible leadership in the right places at the right time.

Keir Bloomer: I am sure that everyone in the room would like Scottish education to be better resourced than it is at the moment, but I do not see resources as the most significant problem that we face. In all circumstances, what you do with the money is more important than the amount of money that you have. Scottish school education suffers from excessive bureaucracy, unhelpful overaccountability, recurrent workload problems and inadequate policy implementation. At base, all those are governance problems. We have to get the governance infrastructure right.

If I had had the chance to answer Richard Lochhead's question, I would have said, very briefly, that getting decisions taken near to where they have the impact has got to be a good thing, and having less permission seeking and reporting back has the potential to reduce workload. I say that that has the potential to do that, not that it is inevitable that that will be the effect, because we might be lacking in courage in letting go of the system when we devolve decision making. However, I think that the direction of travel is right and that the emphasis on governance is right, too.

Ross Greer: Do I have time for a brief follow-up question before I move to the next issue, convener?

The Convener: Could you move to the next issue, Ross? I am a bit worried about time.

Ross Greer: I understand, convener.

Dr Burns, one of the areas that the Government has focused on and emphasised is greater involvement on the part of parents. However, I am interested in greater involvement on the part of children and young people. Do you know of any examples from elsewhere where greater pupil involvement in the co-design of the curriculum and in governance, whether that is at school level, municipal level or a greater level, has helped improve not only outcomes but buy-in on the part of those who are being educated?

Dr Burns: I can give you an example from Flanders, because that issue is being worked on there at the moment. Because of the structure of the system, Flanders has a highly iterative and participatory process for policy making. The Flemish struggle a little to get that right, but they have really tried to build in the voice of the students and the voice of the parents.

From the Flemish perspective, and from the perspective of research evidence, it is clear that, if you are able to be part of the process, you have an increased feeling of responsibility and

ownership. However, that is the case only if that participation involves having your voice heard; participation that involves simply ticking a box has the opposite effect. The approach is a positive one, but it has to be done well in order to navigate the balance between hearing the voices of the people around the table and maintaining the ability to take difficult decisions in cases in which not everyone is in agreement with the decision. It is important to be clear about who is involved, why they are involved and, at the end of the day, who is responsible for making tough choices. That group of people might change, depending on the circumstances, but there needs to be clarity on that, because the one thing that is clear from the Flemish experience is that, if students are involved but they perceive it to be an empty exercise, it backfires.

Ross Greer: I have a brief general follow-up question. Given the current direction of travel for reform in Scotland, what form would greater pupil participation take?

Professor Donaldson: It operates at different levels. We already have a number of examples in schools in Scotland of the engagement of pupils in how and what they are learning. I am currently doing some work in Wales, where I am seeing examples of young people's engagement. I am working with the Children's Commissioner for Wales to increase the level of young people's engagement in the process.

In Scotland, we have a number of mechanisms at local and national level through which young people can have a voice. I think that we need to use the existing structures more to engage young people directly in the process. They are the ones who will be affected and, in the past, we have been remiss in not engaging with young people more directly. We have the mechanisms to do it; we just need to use them better.

Professor Chapman: There are some examples of excellent practice in Scotland. Part of the challenge that we have is to capture those in a systematic way. That goes back to my point about research evidence. We should be investing in case studies of such practice so that we can inform other parts of the system and move that excellent practice around.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Some of the best schools in my area are the ones that involve older pupils in the learning of younger pupils. There are partnerships in which senior school pupils go into primary schools to assist with the learning there. Is there scope to widen out that practice more effectively? Some schools might be nervous about that, even though it is very good for the development of pupils at the younger and the senior stage.

Professor Chapman: That is an interesting example of an evidence-based practice. Cross-age tutoring improves outcomes in the tutor and the mentee. There is quite a long history and tradition of working in that way, and it is exactly the sort of practice that we should be celebrating, documenting and moving around the system.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I am interested in the argument around school autonomy. As someone who was a schoolteacher for 20 years, I can hold my hands up and say that I can see what challenges that would involve. There seems to be an interchangeability between the autonomy of schools and the autonomy of headteachers. Is there a difference between the two?

I worry about an education model that is based on the Mr Chips view of a teacher, which involves having as a head somebody who is very charismatic. There are excellent examples in Glasgow of headteachers who have changed schools through the sheer force of their personality, around whom structures have been put in place, but as someone who was not a Mr Chips, I understood that being a good teacher is about getting systems in place that work. How do we protect the system at school level if we hand over authority to the headteacher, which will mean that we are at the mercy of that person's view of the world?

I have a related question about pupil entitlement, which has been mentioned. There is already a question about gatekeeping by schools. Over many years, campaign groups have fought for the right of parents with a child with a disability to receive a mainstream education and to have the right supports in place, and for youngsters not simply to be moved out of the system when they cause problems. What protections would there be at local level in that regard if we go down the path of saying that it is all about the school and the headteacher?

11:00

Professor Donaldson: I absolutely agree with the thrust of your question. This comes back to the way in which we invest in ensuring that the approach to leadership among headteachers is governed not by trying to please external forces but by creating the conditions inside a school that make it successful. The Scottish College for Educational Leadership has been doing some very good work on a much broader view of leadership than the traditional view of the headteacher.

The whole focus of teacher leadership and distributive leadership is on seeing a school as a community that does not simply operate according to the will of the person at the top. In the same

way that we are moving away from a top-down approach to schools at a national level, we need to develop a collaborative and participative culture to shaping what happens inside schools. A lot of evidence is emerging about teacher leadership and the role of distributive leadership, and about how headteachers can create the architecture that allows for initiative at classroom level. It means that we do not simply create a new top inside rather than outside the school—the headteacher—and everything has to flow from what the head does.

That will be one of the important aspects of making the new system work. A headteachers charter is a charter for headteachers to be good at creating the right kind of schools that allow our teachers to do a good job. That is an important development in leadership. There is lots of evidence that that is happening in Scotland and there are examples of good practice—Johann Lamont referred to certain schools in Glasgow, and I have been to schools in Glasgow where I have seen that happening.

Johann Lamont: Let us say that a school says that it is going to restrict the curriculum and will not offer the same number of subjects as the high school down the road, and that it will have a disciplinary system that moves children out of the school. Let us say that that works—the school community agrees with it and thinks that it is the right thing to do, even though it is not necessarily right for individuals in the school. What about governance and accountability at school level? One of the papers mentions a board of governors. What troubles me is that there is a contradiction in policy, in which we are devolving to schools but centralising out to local authorities. Ultimately, there is a danger that either we let it go completely, as Keir Bloomer suggested—and therefore there has to be accountability at that level—or we weaken the capacity at a local level to influence or be a bulwark against what is being done at the national level. What protections need to be put in place?

Keir Bloomer: Part of your question was about what we should do if a headteacher restricts the curriculum. Another version of the question would be, what do we do if a local authority restricts the curriculum, as a whole number of local authorities did with the number of examinable subjects that young people could do in secondary 4? The answer is absolutely nothing. Nobody did anything about it and the curriculum was restricted as a result. That is certainly a problem that could exist at school level. The answer lies very much in the quality of leadership and in cultivating the leadership skills that are necessary to run schools in the way that we would want to see them run.

Schools are complex organisations; they are systems and they have to be dealt with as systems. Dealing with complexity and unintended consequences is all part of the apparatus that you need in order to lead that kind of organisation. There is quite a lot in Tracey Burns's paper that deals with that subject. We have made a lot of progress in recent years in relation to headteacher development. What we have to be careful about is that it is genuinely leadership development and not followership development, which has often been the case in the past, when it has been about how headteachers can more effectively implement policies that are devised outwith the school on their behalf. We have moved beyond that. What Graham Donaldson said about that was absolutely right.

I am sorry that the Scottish College for Educational Leadership, having done a very good job, is now simply to be absorbed into an Education Scotland that is as yet unreformed. It is a pity that it was not allowed to continue with the good work that it was doing, because it was certainly taking us in the direction of cultivating the kind of school leadership that would be required in order to operate schools effectively in a more autonomous setting.

Johann Lamont: The only observation that I have in response is that we seem to be failing to recruit headteachers now. A local school in my area has a headteacher who is responsible for two secondary schools, and maybe more than that at some point. There is a disparity between our acknowledgement of the role of headteacher and our attempt to define the role better, and people's response to it, which has been not to apply or, if they apply, not to be at the level that is expected.

I agreed with what was said about restricting the curriculum at local authority level as well. I am not sure where we go with that. It goes back to resources, and the choices that schools and local authorities make as a consequence of resources. Can the system work effectively only with a reasonable amount of resource? I know that we have had that question already. A system cannot really work in a school where there are too few people to deliver it or where there is not enough support around the school for it to be delivered.

Professor Donaldson: Clearly, resource is critical. A minimum level of resource is required in order for a school to work well. Tracey Burns might want to comment on this, but there is evidence in the OECD work that there is not a correlation between how much a country spends on education and the quality of that education. It is about how you use the resource—I think that Chris Chapman said that earlier. The risk is that we simply maintain our existing practices and try to work in the new ones somehow or other. We have

to think quite hard about the decisions that need to be taken to ensure that we create the kind of high-quality learning that young people need and deserve.

Tavish Scott: The panel has rightly made much of continuous professional development for teachers and the importance of learning in leadership. Many heads in my part of the world, and indeed across Scotland, teach. The witnesses have not mentioned the difference between primary and secondary schools, although it is in the RSE paper. Plenty of primary school headteachers in my rural part of Scotland spend four days a week in class. When will they find time to do all these other things? Maybe I should put that question in a rather better way. Will these proposals be adaptable to allow that to happen? I can see how you might be able to give the headteacher of Anderson high school, which has 1,000 kids, more time for the things that you are describing, but I am not so sure about the Cunningsburgh primary school, where the headteacher teaches four days a week.

Professor Chapman: What you highlight there is the importance of context. Any set of reforms has to be presented in terms of frameworks and principles that allow for local responsiveness and adaptability, so that they can be interpreted and implemented locally, whether that is in the context of a small rural primary school or a large urban secondary school. We are not arguing for a one-size-fits-all model of educational reform here; we are arguing for something that is very nuanced and adaptive to the local context. I agree with your statement.

Keir Bloomer: Tavish Scott raises a very important issue which, as you say, the Royal Society of Edinburgh is indeed concerned about, which is the very different management capacities of secondary schools and primary schools. I have observed over many years that policy making in Scottish education is very often dictated by what secondary schools desire, and primary schools find themselves as a kind of afterthought. Not enough consideration has yet been given as to how primary schools will be enabled to take on the kind of responsibilities that the Government rightly wishes them to take on. There is no reason in principle why primary schools should not enjoy the same kind of delegated powers as secondary schools, but there is a need to build capacity. Our view is that the best way of doing that is probably through clusters. There are no doubt other possibilities, but it is important that that issue gets the consideration that it deserves before the legislation is enacted.

Dr Burns: I am hearing a lot of the same things but there is clear evidence about the danger of taking the wrong path. Chile and Sweden give clear examples of what happens if you devolve too quickly and too suddenly without providing the support that is needed at the local level. This is partially on the individual context level, but it is also about equity in the system, which is a fundamental element that needs to be got right. It is incredibly important to get that right, because we have many examples of what happens when you do not get it right.

Work on funding has just been released in the recent OECD publication “Education at a Glance 2017”, which looks at the functioning of the system. Graham Donaldson is quite right to say that there is a correlation between the amount spent and performance but only up to a certain threshold, which all the OECD countries have passed. Once that threshold is passed, there is no real correlation between the amount spent and the outcome. It is about how you choose to spend in that space.

A new piece of work has just been released that could be interesting to look at. It looks at different systems and the trade-offs that they have made. Some systems, such as in Japan and Korea, choose to save money by having bigger classes, while others choose to focus more on spending money to support teachers but then they have less time to spend outside the classroom. Those are some of the traditional policy trade-offs that we have mapped along with performance as measured by the programme for international student assessment. That could be helpful to consider in the future.

Liz Smith: A previous witness to the committee was Frank Lennon, who is an experienced former headteacher. He made the point very strongly that increasing autonomy for headteachers should not be an end in itself. It is a means to take decisions and, to take up Keir Bloomer’s earlier point, it is about putting the decision closer to where it matters.

In that context, Professor Donaldson, what would you like to see in the headteachers charter to ensure that that leadership is top class and that it gives the headteachers who will have to take more autonomous decisions the confidence and accountability to move forward?

Professor Donaldson: There are two dimensions to that, and it goes back partly to the concern that Johann Lamont raised.

Earlier, we talked about whether we have the story right about what we are trying to achieve in Scottish education—do we have the strategic direction right? One of the corollaries to the headteachers charter is to be clear about the strategic expectations of a school. That might relate to the breadth of the curriculum and it could be a duty that is laid on the school from the

national level without prescribing in detail the specifics of how it should operate. Beyond that, the inspection process can be used to engage with schools on the way in which that duty is being carried out.

There is something here about strategic direction and the need to think more clearly about the context that headteacher autonomy will be in. It will not be about saying, "A thousand flowers blooming—do what you like." It will operate within some clear expectations. That then relates to the accountability structures that are put in place that allow us to engage with how well headteachers are discharging the duties that are laid on them through national legislation and working together.

We need to be careful that we do not put in place a rigid accountability structure that means that headteacher behaviour is driven by accountability instead of being driven by what happens inside the school. It is absolutely right that it is a frustration for a headteacher that it is difficult to do the kind of things that they would like to do and take the decisions that they would like to take to create a better context for learning.

I agree therefore with the principle of the headteachers charter and it must be buttressed at either end with clearer strategic direction about the duties and responsibility that go with that, and an accountability system that engages with the strategic direction in a constructive way that relates to those duties.

11:15

Liz Smith: That is exactly what Frank Lennon said to us. Do you fear that, if we accept greater autonomy and the slightly different lines of accountability in different schools and local authorities, the system will be too diverse?

Professor Donaldson: If we do not get this right, there is a risk that we will get an atomised education system that is too diverse, but that is not inevitable. It depends on the way in which we take it forward.

Giving headteachers—when I talk about headteachers, I am talking about school communities, which the heads orchestrate—more scope to shape the nature of the school in which they work has the best chance of creating the kind of context in which youngsters will get education of a higher quality than they currently get. However, that needs to be buttressed at either end.

Gillian Martin: I am interested in international comparisons, particularly when other countries have done something that is being proposed in our governance review, such as regional collaborations, partnerships and cluster work. Do you have examples of where and why such things have been successful? What was done to make them successful? At the start of the process, we need to look elsewhere to see good practice that we can adopt.

Dr Burns: I can give two examples. In my opinion, these are examples of success, but, when you talk to people in these countries, you find that they can be quite self-critical about whether they have achieved their goals.

Norway has done a very good job of thinking about and instituting processes. We discussed a middle tier, and in Norway it is not a structural thing but a series of partnerships and peer-learning networks that work together collaboratively to provide the kind of support and guidance that is needed by locally autonomous schools and heads of schools. For me, that is a positive example of a national Government empowering schools and giving the support that is needed as well as being responsive to requests from the field about the time, place and manner of that support. It is giving the tools to the constantly evolving networks and partnerships, and a lot of peer learning goes on. That is a promising example of processes being used to further this kind of debate and devolution of responsibilities.

Another example is the more structural approach that is currently under way in Chile, which is formally establishing regional bodies to administrate work. Chile had full devolution but is now re-centralising in some ways. It is creating regional bodies—I think that there were 11 at the last count—that have formal administrative power to guide and govern systems. There is a lot of devolved power, and the middle level now has some responsibility for equity issues and for ensuring that outcomes are met.

That is an example of a structural solution, and Norway provides an example of a more process-driven solution. Both of them work well, and the guiding goal and challenge for both is to ensure equity across the system. The real danger with the "let a thousand flowers bloom" approach is that those who do well will continue to do well and excel whereas those who have fallen behind will fall even further behind because schools do not have the support that they need to deliver what they are expected to deliver.

Gillian Martin: You have pre-empted my next line of questioning, which is on how we ensure equity across all schools that are involved in a regional partnership. Some schools face specific challenges because of the nature of the areas that they serve. How do we ensure that we have that equity across all schools?

Dr Burns: That is the crucial question with which the most evolved systems are struggling—in the Netherlands and Flanders, in particular. In

some cases, there is a discussion about re-centralising some aspects, but I would not say that the issue is structural. Flanders has what is called a "guiding coalition", so the issue is not about top-down governance but about getting the players and leaders from all the different places in the system to come together and pitch a vision for the system. Those objectives are the ones that are then played out, so they have legitimacy and the players in the system have ownership and respond to that. Being responsive to national objectives is crucial; we cannot lose sight of that and have one objective for one group of people and another objective for another.

I guess that it comes down to who establishes the objectives and who sets the vision and the strategy for the system. In the Netherlands and Flanders, that is done not just by the Government but by a group of powerful players whose voices are heard and who work on that together. Those countries have found that to be useful for buy-in across the system. Also, if there are very different ways in which to meet the objectives but everyone is agreed on what objectives they want to meet, there is a different conversation from one that involves saying to one of the players, "You're not meeting the objectives that we have set for you," if the player does not consider those objectives to be legitimate. It is about placing legitimacy and dialogue at the centre of the process.

Gillian Martin: One of the challenges that we face is that workplaces and skills requirements are changing, so we need flexibility in the provision of education. Is there room within the frameworks for adaptability, perhaps around peripatetic teachers and visiting specialists? If we need flexibility, how do we ensure that it is not cut off at the knees, perhaps by a local authority deciding to cut the provision of visiting specialists, given that everything is going down to that level? That question is for anyone who wants to chip in.

Professor Donaldson: It is extremely difficult to anticipate what might happen, although we can create worst-case scenarios. We need to put in place a mechanism that creates equity in the system. Things such as the pupil equity fund are part of a process of trying to even out the issues between schools. As Tracey Burns said, if we move to a system in which there is much greater local autonomy, we must put in place other mechanisms to ensure that we do not just widen the gap in that process. That will be one of the questions for the regional collaboratives, because that level allows that kind of varied support to be put in place not just in some of the smaller authorities but more generally. There is a focus on equity in Scottish education just now, and I hope that that will drive good behaviours in that direction rather than behaviours that might widen the gap.

Gillian Martin: Finally, might the regional collaboratives work in a way that allows them to address issues of teacher recruitment and ensure that local authorities and schools are not fighting against one another to recruit teachers?

Professor Chapman: The regional collaboratives give an opportunity to provide teachers with different types of experiences in different contexts and to build their professional expertise by orchestrating the movement of the workforce around an area that is greater than a local authority. A by-product of that might be that they can begin to think about how to co-ordinate the workforce over a bigger region. There is potential for that, but it is probably a by-product rather than a primary objective.

Professor Donaldson: One of the possible benefits from all of this, if it works well, is that we will create a much more attractive teaching profession and education system. Johann Lamont talked about the difficulty in recruiting headteachers. I hope that, as we move forward, instead of people seeing that job as one in which they get a bit of extra money but all the flak comes their way, it is seen as a much more creative role inside a school than some perceive it to be at the moment.

The same is true for teachers. If we create a context in which we are building the confidence and capacity of the teaching profession and in which schools are vibrant places—many of them are just now, but they could be more vibrant—that is partly how we will combat the perception, which gives us a problem with recruitment, that teaching is a difficult job that is not as well paid as it might be.

I hope that this work will help us to make it more attractive to be part of an exciting Scottish education system.

Tavish Scott: On the point that Liz Smith pursued with Professor Donaldson about the accountability of headteachers, is it possible to define who they will be accountable to once the exercise has concluded? Will they be accountable to me, as a parent, for example?

Professor Donaldson: There will be multiple accountabilities in the process, as that is an inevitability that arises from it. Part of it will have to be about transparency, as what happens inside a school is very transparent and the multiple accountabilities can operate in relation to that. As it moves forward, the inspection process will have an important part to play in helping to create or support the transparency, but big changes will be needed before that happens.

Keir Bloomer: If the question is whether it is possible to discover to whom headteachers are accountable by reading the consultation on the

Education (Scotland) Bill, the answer is no. There is a great deal in that document that is extraordinarily confused and confusing. I have said that its direction of travel is broadly correct, but a great deal of work requires to be done if we are to get a coherent piece of legislation out of it that results in a system in which responsibilities and accountabilities are clear. They are certainly not clear at present.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I want to ask about national priorities. We received a paper from the Scottish Parliament information centre that gave us international comparisons. Unfortunately for us, as politicians, there is no magic bullet and no one system to go forward with. That probably means that it is horses for courses and that each nation has its own ideal for what it wants to do.

We have the national improvement plan and the regional improvement collaboratives. Is the process that the Scottish Government has proposed a good way to get the national improvement framework to work on a regional basis to ensure that it does what it is meant to do? Does the framework exist at a local level? If not, how should we go about making sure that we get that?

Professor Donaldson: The framework is just a mechanism. It will not inspire people or result in anything dramatic happening in schools.

George Adam: I have been sitting here for about an hour and a half, so I know that.

Professor Donaldson: You make the point that there is no magic bullet and that there is no one policy that we can borrow. The structure must be true to Scottish culture and education, and it must work with the people that we have. I am optimistic that it can work, but there are huge risks in the process. We must go into it with our eyes open and be prepared to make hard decisions.

George Adam: Keir Bloomer brought up the fact that part of the framework is about closing the attainment gap. I am interested in what he said about its being not so much about the money as about how we use the money. The Royal Society of Edinburgh's paper mentions that the Scottish index of multiple deprivation is not necessarily the best way forward. I have been on the committee, in its various guises over the years, for long enough to be aware of the SIMD's faults. What other ways do we have of getting the right money to the right place at the right time?

Keir Bloomer: The pupil equity fund did not use the SIMD as a way of allocating the money; it used free school meal entitlement. Free school meal entitlement has drawbacks in that not everybody who is entitled to it takes up the free meal and, at the lower end of primary school nowadays, it is in many cases impossible to sort out who is entitled to free school meals. However, it is, in essence, a measure of individual circumstances whereas the SIMD is a measure of the circumstances of an area and does not necessarily say anything about the circumstances of the individual. We know that there are more poor people living in areas outwith SIMD 1 and 2 than within them, so by no means is there a precise correlation between the individual's disadvantage and the SIMD.

It is a complex issue. The Royal Society of Edinburgh responded to the consultation on measuring the attainment gap and came to the conclusion that, although the notion of keeping the measures few and simple has a lot to commend it, the complexity of the issues is probably such that that aspiration cannot be realised and we probably have to mix the SIMD with other measures—perhaps free school meal entitlement—that look at the circumstances of the individual. I agree that the SIMD has considerable merits; however, on its own, it does not provide a secure basis for this work.

The Convener: As there are no further questions, I thank the witnesses for their attendance. It has been a very useful meeting.

11:30

Meeting continued in private until 12:03.

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