



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 14 March 2018

Session 5



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Wednesday 14 March 2018

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EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

9th Meeting 2018, Session 5

CONVENER

*James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)
*Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab)
Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)
*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:

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con) (Committee Substitute)
Kevin Browne (Independent Care Review)
Fiona Duncan (Independent Care Review)
Jamie Hepburn (Minister for Employability and Training)
Rosie Moore (Independent Care Review)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Roz Thomson

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 14 March 2018

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (James Dornan): Good morning. I welcome everyone to the ninth meeting of the Education and Skills Committee in 2018. I remind everyone present to turn their mobile phones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting. We have received apologies from Oliver Mundell, and Michelle Ballantyne is attending in his place. Tavish Scott and Ross Greer are attending the Finance and Constitution Committee's stage 2 consideration of the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Legal Continuity) (Scotland) Bill this morning and have also passed on their apologies.

The first item of business is a decision on whether to take agenda item 4 in private. It is a review of the evidence from the minister. Is everyone content that agenda item 4 be taken in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Ask the Minister

10:00

The Convener: The next item of business is the second in a series of three ask-the-minister evidence sessions. Today, I welcome Jamie Hepburn, the Minister for Employability and Training. He is accompanied by Victoria Beattie, the head of the workplace equalities team at the directorate for fair work, and Dr Paul Smart, the deputy director of advanced learning and science for the Scottish Government. I understand that you would like to make a short statement, minister.

The Minister for Employability and Training (Jamie Hepburn): No, convener. Beyond thanking you for the invitation to attend the committee today, I am happy to move straight into your question-and-answer session.

The Convener: That was an incredibly short statement. Thank you very much for that. As you are aware, minister, the committee invited suggestions from stakeholders and members of the public for today's session. I thank everyone who has contributed. We will ask questions in person today, and anything that is not asked now will be sent to the minister for a formal response to the committee. All responses will be shared with those who asked the questions.

Before I invite questions from members of the committee, I will ask a question that we have received from Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce.

"What have local authorities been asked to do to ensure that the developing the young workforce agenda is seen as a priority within their schools?"

Jamie Hepburn: That is a fair question, convener. Local government has not been asked to do anything beyond working with us as a partner. You could ask local government what it has asked of us. In that vein, we are taking forward the DYW agenda collectively and together. We did not ask local authorities to do much beyond ensuring that, within the school environment—they have responsibility as the education authorities in their respective areas—that ethos is being brought into the schools that they have responsibility for.

We can help to facilitate that. Through Education Scotland, we assist schools to take forward that agenda. Each school should have a DYW lead officer who is responsible for ensuring that DYW is being taken forward as part of the life of the school. Through Education Scotland, we will regularly engage with those leads to ensure that they are sharing practice and that there is effective co-ordination of efforts across Scotland and within their specific school.

The Convener: Thanks for that answer. What guidance would you give local authorities to ensure that schools are treating things such as apprenticeships with the same importance as further and higher education? I am sure there will be further questions about that later.

Jamie Hepburn: I do not think it is a case of providing guidance to local authorities. For example, DYW is structured in such a way that we have a national group on these matters that is jointly chaired by the Deputy First Minister and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Councillor Stephen McCabe from Inverclyde Council leads on these issues for COSLA. It is a joint effort, so we are not so much providing guidance to local government as ensuring, through that partnership approach, that local authorities are working with their schools to ensure that the vocational pathway is just as important as the academic pathway.

It is not really a case of having to issue guidance. It is about trying to achieve that through the work of the national group and—of critical importance—the 21 regional groups that we have established. They are much closer to the local environment by their nature, through being regional groups, so they are interacting with schools on a regular basis to ensure that that ethos is embedded in the school environment rather than receiving any form of guidance.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Last week was modern apprenticeship week. Like many colleagues, I took part in that week and visited the Irvine paper mill, where I met a very interesting and bright group of modern apprentices at different phases of their apprenticeship. They all had one thing in common: they had not been told about the possibility of apprenticeships in their school but had all come to it later on. Those young folk are in really high-quality apprenticeships and have good job prospects in our local community by following that path.

Our report suggested that further progress is needed in employers taking on young people straight from education. Could you say more on that? You said a bit about it in answer to the convener. What else is going to be done to ensure that modern apprenticeships have parity of esteem with university education, for example, and that people know about these really high-quality pathways that young people can take?

Jamie Hepburn: That is something that I, too, encounter when I am out and about. Given my role, it will come as no surprise to the committee that, similarly to Ms Maguire, I was out on a range of visits during modern apprenticeship week. I have to say that I found the picture to be quite mixed, but I agree that a significant number of people still come to apprenticeships without their

having been discussed as an option while they were in the school environment.

I think that that is, increasingly, less the case. It is unfortunate that it was the case for all the apprentices that Ms Maguire spoke to when she undertook the visit in her constituency. Increasingly, I find that those who engage in apprenticeships say that they are discussed in the school environment, but the picture is patchy.

DYW is contributing to changing that and to ensuring that more young people are aware of apprenticeships as a post-school option. We want to see that further rolled out. One way in which we can achieve that better is through broadening the careers and information guidance that is offered by Skills Development Scotland in the school environment, ensuring that it is offered earlier so that young people are thinking about apprenticeships as an option earlier in their experience of secondary education and are considering what subjects to choose with an apprenticeship as a possible outcome.

One of the big game changers will be the provision of foundation apprenticeships in the school environment. There has been a substantial increase in their number over the past few years. Two years ago, we were offering in the region of 340 starts for foundation apprenticeships in our schools over a limited number of frameworks. This year, we have had about 1,200 young people start a foundation apprenticeship over 10 frameworks, and, in the coming year, we will be offering in the region of 2,600 foundation apprenticeship opportunities across all 32 local authority areas and—I think—about 70 per cent of Scotland's schools.

There is still some work to be done to ensure that every young person in Scotland has that opportunity. Nonetheless, we are growing that provision and have a commitment to ensuring that there are 5,000 such opportunities in Scotland's schools by 2019. That is critical because, if someone can begin a pathway to an apprenticeship at school, it will open their mind to the possibility of doing an apprenticeship after they have left school, which itself will establish parity of esteem in the school environment.

Ruth Maguire: I am a big supporter of giving young people many routes to success. The young men to whom I spoke had higher passes in sciences, so they have gone into engineering apprenticeships. It was not the foundation skills that they needed; it was to be alerted to the apprenticeship rather than university as a route for getting a high-quality engineering job. It feels like a different thing from the foundation apprenticeship route, though I might be mistaken.

Jamie Hepburn: No, that is the point that I was making: it is a multitude of things. It is about ensuring that careers information and guidance is better and is available earlier. We may touch on the 15-to-24 learner journey review that we are progressing to make pathways into vocational education as critical an element as tertiary and higher education.

The point that I was making about the provision of foundation apprenticeships is that they increase awareness of the apprenticeship pathway. We have set the foundation apprenticeship at a level that is equivalent to a higher qualification, although it might be that the young men—and, I hope, increasingly, young women—who are undertaking modern apprenticeships have gone through sixth year at school and got all their highers. I am relaxed about that in the sense that DYW is about ensuring that young people understand the range of options that are available to them.

Increasingly, I am encountering young people who have got five highers but who, for whatever reason, despite getting the qualifications to go to university, decide that higher education is not for them and go on to a modern apprenticeship. It could be that those young people did not have the option of a foundation apprenticeship, which they might have found quite attractive had it been available to them earlier. That is why I am determined that we will provide those opportunities for more young people early on, so that they can begin their pathway to an apprenticeship at school.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I underline the importance of foundation apprenticeships. You said that the target is 5,000 by the end of 2019, but I understand that the Skills Development Scotland board was advised that the contracted number of 3,200 that it was delivering has been revised to 2,600, which is a cut of 600. Can you explain why that cut has happened? What can you do about it to ensure that you will reach the target of 5,000? I cannot see how you will reach a target of 5,000 by cutting the number of apprenticeships that are going to be delivered in 2018-19 by 600.

Jamie Hepburn: We are not cutting them. Incidentally, they are over two years. They will start in 2018-19 and be completed in 2020. I have made the point that, this year, there were 1,200 such opportunities to start and that, next year, there will be 2,600 opportunities. Two years ago, there were about 340 such opportunities. Over a two-year period, that is an increase of more than 600 per cent in the number of available places on foundation apprenticeships.

I am aware of the report to which you allude, deputy convener, and I think that there is a degree of misreporting in those figures. SDS will contract for a certain number of available starts to ensure

that it can reach the target that it has been set. It has been set a target of just over 2,600, but it might contract out more starts so that it can reach that target.

Johann Lamont: Can we clarify what the misreporting is? Is it your understanding that SDS's board was advised that its contracted number of 3,200 would be reduced to 2,600? Or is that not the case, does the target of 3,200 not exist and was it not reported to SDS that it would have to revise down the contracted number of places from 3,200 to 2,600?

Jamie Hepburn: The target that was agreed between the Scottish Government and SDS is 2,660.

Johann Lamont: That is the target now. Was there, before that, a contracted figure of 3,200? It may be that—

The Convener: Was there or not, minister?

Jamie Hepburn: The Scottish Government never agreed any other target.

Johann Lamont: That is not what I asked. I asked whether SDS had a contracted number of 3,200 places, which was reduced to 2,600. If you are not aware of that, I think it would be good to get a commitment from you that you will examine why it appears that that is what the board was told.

10:15

Jamie Hepburn: I obviously do not attend the SDS board, so I do not know what was said at that specific board meeting. The point that I am trying to make is that SDS may contract for a certain number of starts to reach the target that it has been set. The target that it has been set is the one that I have mentioned.

Johann Lamont: There is a target of 2,600.

Jamie Hepburn: That is correct.

Johann Lamont: What extra action do you think is needed to get to 5,000 starts by the end of 2019, given that we are in the first quarter of 2018?

Jamie Hepburn: We will take that action in the next financial year. We will move to ensure that SDS contracts for enough places to hit that target of 5,000. I understand that it might be felt that that target is difficult to achieve, but I return to the point that I made a few moments ago. Two years ago, SDS put out a contract to achieve 340-odd starts; this year, it will achieve about 1,200 and, next year, it will achieve 2,600. You can see the trajectory of growth that we have achieved, on which basis we can be confident that the target we have—

Johann Lamont: I am not disputing the trajectory. I would be concerned if the trajectory were downwards, given the importance of the opportunities and the emphasis that a lot of people place on pre-apprenticeship programmes in schools in drawing young people in and making them aware of apprenticeships and the progress they might make.

Jamie Hepburn: I have set out that there has been something like—unless I have my maths wrong—a 600 per cent increase over a two-year period. I do not think that we need have any concerns about our pace slowing down as we try to reach our objective.

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): Good morning, minister. I want to focus on disabled youngsters and their ability to progress into work.

Through a number of visits that I have been making—last week, I was at the Royal Blind school—one thing that has come out very clearly is the importance of habilitation in enabling young disabled people to obtain independence, get into a workplace and hold down a job effectively. One of the great concerns is the increasing lack of ability to refer young people to places in special schools that focus on habilitation. Elaine Brackenridge from the Royal Blind school has raised the question of those who get into university and gain first-class honours degrees and doctorates but find it difficult to get employment. Perhaps employers do not recognise just how hard those people have had to work and the barriers that they have had to overcome. COSLA has also pointed out that some of the key performance indicators are being missed for disabled people and for children who have been looked after and accommodated.

What are your thoughts about the extra support that is needed, the focus that we should be giving as those young people come up through school and youngsters' ability to get places in special schools that focus on the habilitation element that really does prepare them for the transition to work?

Jamie Hepburn: We cannot look at people with disabilities as just one group, because different groups will require different forms of support. That said, I think that the approach that we should take in the school environment is not entirely dissimilar to that which we are taking across the board. We must ensure that young people with disabilities are also getting the experience of a vocational education.

I have been lucky enough to see how that happens at first hand. Our colleague Linda Fabiani asked me to visit Sanderson high school in East Kilbride, which is undertaking some excellent work to support the young people who are educated

there to experience vocational education. In my constituency, Glencryan school, which supports young people who face a range of barriers and have a range of disabilities, undertakes a fair degree of vocational education. We need to embed that across our entire school environment, including in schools that support and educate young people with disabilities in specialist environments.

Of course, we cannot rely just on activity in schools. As you have alluded, there will be people who achieve great success academically at university who will, thereafter, struggle to get into employment. As a Government, we are taking forward several elements of "A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People" that are related to employment. It is the Minister for Social Security who has the overall lead, although I will be taking forward elements of that work through the disability action plan.

We have already given a range of commitments to ensure that employers better understand the contribution that those with disabilities can make to the work environment. We have run a fairly successful media campaign that was targeted at making small and medium-sized enterprises aware of the benefits of taking on those with a disability. We have also established a workplace equality fund of some £500,000 that is open for bids, the first round of which will close at the end of this month and the second round of which will open in June. The fund is designed to secure and foster better diversity in the workplace.

In addition, we have supported other initiatives for other groups—for example, Enable Scotland's stepping up programme, through which we have worked with 70 secondary schools across 11 local authorities. That programme is supported through the 14:19 fund, which we provide funding for. It is delivered through Inspiring Scotland, working with young people with learning disabilities, and has achieved 98 per cent positive destinations. We need to learn from that programme and better roll it out.

The fundamental point to make in response to your question is that we need attitudinal change among employers. We will take forward activity on that on the back of "A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People". Next month, we will hold a summit on employment for those with a disability, and a considerable focus of that summit will be on changing attitudes. Many employers out there are doing good work, but, judging by the gap that we see between the number of those with a disability who are in employment and the overall employment rate, there is still some way to go.

Michelle Ballantyne: Do you think that enough is being done in those young people's educational years in terms of habilitation, confidence building

and preparing them to go into the workplace? You seem to be saying that the problem is about employers and the workplace needing support to change. However, I am concerned about the young people getting the necessary habilitation so that they are ready and able as well as about the employers needing to open their doors, be more understanding and be able to work with them.

Jamie Hepburn: It is about both. The headteacher at the Royal Blind school makes a reasonable point about the difficulties faced by some of the young people that she has been involved in educating, who go on to good academic attainment post-school but still struggle to get into employment. I recognise that there is still a job of work to be done across the entire school environment in ensuring that vocational pathways are better understood. That is true of the entire school population but it is particularly important for those who face additional barriers to getting into the labour market—including, according to the evidence before us and the statistics about participation in the labour market, those with a disability.

Michelle Ballantyne: Yes. Those who have gone on to do extremely well have often benefited from the habilitation that I was just talking about and have been able to develop their skills. Nevertheless, I think that there is a gap there and that your consideration, as the Minister for Employability and Training, of what comes before the transition period is going to be really important.

Jamie Hepburn: I do not disagree. Work is under way, but there is more to be done.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I am going to ask some of the questions that people have sent in. As you would expect, I will also ask some questions relating specifically to the north-east.

First, I have a question from Megan Hare, who emailed the committee, and who has a background in employability programmes and working with young people to get them into work. She is interested in how to encourage people who are not quite ready for work to consider employability programmes as a valuable option. She says:

“There used to be pre-apprenticeship courses to help with transitions, sometimes run by local authorities (which were a good starting point with work tasters, an induction assessment process and employability skills). Now there are Activity Agreements, but young people don’t always buy into them, especially if they are not eligible for an EMA and the progression into work is not obvious.”

She asks whether there are

“any plans to invest more funds into employability programmes”.

I want to add an extra question of my own, which is similar to the question that I asked the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science last week about European Union social fund money, which has been funding a lot of these employability programmes in colleges. How will the gap that will exist when that is gone be filled by the Scottish Government?

Jamie Hepburn: Taking the last point, clearly that is an issue of concern to us as an Administration and to those who draw down ESF money. We are seeking greater clarity from the United Kingdom Government about how it might seek to bridge the gap that you highlight. We await further clarity on that. I am not going to presume that it will not bridge the gap, but we need to consider that it might not. In such circumstances, we will need to look at our budget settlements and how we will continue to take forward the range of programmes that we offer.

This coming year, we have maintained funding for the range of employability programmes that we provide, by and large. I am clear that they are making a considerable difference—principally, but not solely, in relation to young people, given their focus—in terms of making people more ready to engage with either the world of work or other programmes that can get them closer to the labour market.

That begets a wider question, though, because we are in a new period in that, next month, the employment programme that I have responsibility for—fair start Scotland—will be going live. That in itself involves a significant investment from the Scottish Government—it is a £96 million set of contracts over a three-year referral period. That, along with Naomi Eisenstadt’s point about the cluttered nature of employment services, causes us to consider how those services interact and work with one another. One of the things that was clear to me when I first came into this post was that it is quite hard to get your head around the variety of different programmes that are on offer. Each of the programmes does good things and achieves good outcomes in its own way, but I think that there is more that we can do to make sure that they are better aligned and integrated with one another. That is an area of work that I am actively considering, so that we can better ensure that that is the case going forward.

Gillian Martin: Slightly related to that answer, I have a question from Louise Moir, who is the headteacher at Mackie academy in Stonehaven. She says:

“The role of SDS within schools has changed to help support the DYW agenda, which is also starting to bear fruit, from my perspective ... However, there still appears to be barriers to effective partnership working with schools through the lack of effective data sharing, especially in relation to destinations data which hampers timely

intervention and learning by schools. How does the Government intend to enable more effective data sharing between SDS and its partner agencies to support the learner's journey?"

10:30

Jamie Hepburn: My view is that there is legislation in place to achieve that right now. Through the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013, there is a mechanism by which SDS can exchange data with schools and vice versa to inform the support that young people require in the school environment and also how they might be better supported as they leave the school environment. Information and data can also be shared on a similar basis between the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council and SDS.

The question comes from a headteacher, which tells me that there might be a particular issue in that school environment. I do not know what that might be, but my view is that we have the framework in place to allow for that data to be shared. One of the elements that the enterprise and skills review is considering is how that can be further embedded as part of the education system. Without clarity about what the particular problem might be there, it is hard to comment in great detail, beyond my view that the framework exists.

Gillian Martin: I will now ask some questions specifically about the north-east.

The Convener: Not too many.

Gillian Martin: Yes, convener; I will try to stop myself.

Minister, you will know that Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen are feeling the after-effects of the lower oil price, although it is starting to recover. A lot of work has been done with the Scottish Government to give funding to transition training, for example. However, Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce asks:

"How can the Government support the North East in generating demand for engineering training amongst young people which has fallen during the downturn in the oil and gas industry?"

There is a considerable amount of nervousness on the part of young people in going forward for engineering, because they do not see it as the safe bet that they once did. However, oil prices are starting to rise again and we are seeing a lot of contracts around renewables, so there are lots of opportunities for young people in engineering. How can we foster that confidence?

Jamie Hepburn: There is obviously an inherent difficulty in that, because some of those young people will be informed by the experience of their parents, who they might have seen having to

move on to other occupations or struggling to move into another occupation, despite the support we have put in place to facilitate that.

What we can do is provide the overarching framework to support young people to take advantage of the opportunities. To go back to the point about foundation apprenticeships, a significant focus of that effort is in the area of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Engineering is self-evidently part of that, and there are opportunities for young people to get practical experience in the industry. What we need is industry itself to step up and make clear that the opportunities exist. The best way for industry to do that in a way that has some influence in the school environment is to actively engage with the developing the young workforce agenda. That is led primarily on a local basis, by our regional groups.

The Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce will be well aware of the developing the young workforce agenda, because it is an integral part of the north-east developing the young workforce group. I would urge the chamber of commerce to ensure that it better involves those sectors that can provide engineering opportunities and ensure that they go into schools to send the message that the oil and gas sector is starting to bounce back from its difficulties and that, beyond oil and gas, there is also a huge range of opportunities in engineering. We need the industry to play its part by informing people about the opportunities that exist, and the Scottish Government, through Skills Development Scotland, will provide further opportunities through foundation apprenticeships, modern apprenticeships and—although we have not touched on them yet—graduate apprenticeships.

Gillian Martin: In apprenticeship week, I visited Sparrows Group and met some former pupils from my old school, who were very much taking advantage of the renewables opportunities and apprenticeships there.

The oil and gas downturn has affected not only people who work directly in the oil and gas sector but also people in other sectors that have flourished as a result of the high-wage economy. However, those people will not be able to take advantage of opportunities that are funded by the transition training fund. What would you say to the people who are feeling the bite there, who are not young, not school leavers and not in the 18-to-24 bracket, and who want to access modern apprenticeships but might think that apprenticeships are something for young people?

Jamie Hepburn: We have seen an increase in people aged 25 and above taking part in modern apprenticeships—in terms of the age cohort, they are the growth sector. We have sought to facilitate

that in a number of ways, while bearing in mind the recommendation in Sir Ian Wood's report, "Developing the Young Workforce", that the majority of modern apprenticeship activity should be focused on younger people. We are also alert to the fact that there are employers who would like to see more support for those who are in the older cohort—it seems odd to describe people who are in the 25-and-above bracket as the older cohort, but that is what they are. We have sought to facilitate that where we have thought that it was reasonable, so we have increased the number of frameworks where that is possible. Going back to the equalities agenda, people with a disability and people with care experience who take part in a modern apprenticeship can get additional support across all frameworks up to the age of 29.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): I wanted to pick up on the theme of disability that Michelle Ballantyne explored and which was touched on in that answer to Gillian Martin's question. My question concerns the on-going and changing support that young people with additional support needs and disabilities need. One of the things that I have heard frequently is that, when young people with those needs go into either apprenticeships or university, the support that they need is there when they start but, because of the changing nature of their disability, their packages are not adaptable enough to support them, which often leads to their dropping out. Is there anything that you are doing or are considering doing to ensure that young people have the support that they need?

Jamie Hepburn: On the modern apprenticeships, I have just made the point about the enhanced contribution rates, which enable additional support to be provided.

I should say the completion rates for modern apprenticeships are high. If I remember correctly, that is going in a positive trajectory as well, and it is the case across the board. I do not know whether I have seen the information disaggregated, so I could be wrong, but I suspect that it is probably the case that the completion rate will not be quite as good for those with a disability. However, my view is that it is still likely to be good overall and is still likely to be high. One of the ways in which we have responded is through the provision of enhanced support for providers to ensure that they have the additional resource that they need to support young people to complete their apprenticeships.

Mary Fee: Would it be possible to get the disaggregated figures so that we can see how many young people with disabilities complete their apprenticeships?

Jamie Hepburn: Yes, of course. I am quite happy to look for any information that the

committee would like. Yours is the first such request today, and we will look for that.

Mary Fee: It would be really useful to see that information.

My other question concerns the figures for modern apprenticeship level 3. The target is for there to be 20,000 modern apprenticeship at level 3 and above by 2021. Is that correct?

Jamie Hepburn: Yes.

Mary Fee: The figures for level 3 modern apprenticeships have gone up and have gone down over the past decade or so. Between 2003-04 and 2005-06, starts for level 3 modern apprenticeships were consistently above 20,000, and then there was a dip in the figures. In 2009, level 2 framework modern apprenticeships were introduced, and they replaced existing training courses or skillseekers courses. Is that correct?

Jamie Hepburn: Yes. Level 2 apprenticeships are offered on the basis that some employers might find them useful for the provision of certain elements of training.

Mary Fee: Are level 2 apprenticeships foundation courses?

Jamie Hepburn: I would not describe them as that, because I think that that could lead to confusion with foundation apprenticeships.

Mary Fee: Are the level 2 figures included in the figures for level 3 apprenticeships?

Jamie Hepburn: No. They are included as part of the overall modern apprenticeship target. However, I can say that we are presently meeting the target that we have set ourselves for two-thirds of modern apprenticeships to be at level 3 or above. We are performing at the level that we have sought to perform at.

Mary Fee: Are the level 2 ones that were introduced included in the figures for level 3?

Jamie Hepburn: No, because they are level 2 and not level 3.

Mary Fee: Would you be able to give us the figures for level 2 and separate them out?

Jamie Hepburn: They are already available separately. I am not going to sit here with a calculator to work out the precise numbers—

The Convener: You could send us the figures, minister.

Jamie Hepburn: Yes, I can send you the figures. I can say that, last year, we exceeded the target of 26,000—we achieved 26,262 modern apprenticeships. From memory—

Mary Fee: At level 3?

Jamie Hepburn: No, overall. From memory, we hit the target that we set ourselves of some two thirds of them being level 3 or above.

Mary Fee: Is the figure of 20,000 by 2021 only for level 3, or is it inclusive, with a percentage of them being at level 3?

Jamie Hepburn: Are you asking about the overall number of modern apprenticeship starts?

Mary Fee: Yes.

Jamie Hepburn: The figure is not 20,000; it is 30,000. We have an ambition of 30,000 modern apprenticeship starts by 2020. We have set interim targets, which we have, I am glad to say, managed to hit thus far. The target for the coming year is 28,000, and the target for this year is 27,000. That includes level 2 as well as level 3 and above.

Mary Fee: Forgive me if I am labouring the point, but I am keen to understand the difference between level 2 and level 3 and what is included in that figure for level 3. It was my understanding that level 2 is included in your overall target figure.

Jamie Hepburn: Yes, it is.

Mary Fee: That would mean that level 2 apprenticeships are bolstering the actual number of level 3 apprenticeships, because they are badged as level 3, but they are not level 3. The figures are inclusive of level 2—

Jamie Hepburn: They are not badged as level 3. I cannot make it any clearer. Let me say publicly here and now that level 2 apprenticeships, while part of the overall target, are not badged as level 3 or above. I do not think that I can be much clearer by describing—

The Convener: I wonder if there is some confusion here around the figures of 30,000 and 20,000. Minister, you are saying that your target is two thirds of the overall modern apprenticeships.

Jamie Hepburn: Correct.

The Convener: That would mean 30,000, and the 20,000 figure would tie in with those figures for 2021.

Jamie Hepburn: We have an overall target of 30,000 modern apprenticeship starts by 2020, of which 66 per cent will be level 3 or above.

The Convener: Which would be 20,000.

Jamie Hepburn: Indeed, yes.

Mary Fee: The rest will be level 2?

Jamie Hepburn: Indeed.

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): Welcome, minister. A few days ago, I had the pleasure of attending a developing the young workforce event

at Moray College, which was organised by the local programme. There was a panel of four or five apprentices, who, you will be glad to know, were all female—hopefully, Moray is playing its role in tackling the gender balance, which is one of the issues that are still outstanding.

One of the biggest challenges that we face in Moray is retaining young people to live and work in the area. At that event, I asked whether apprenticeships would play a role in retaining people locally, and there was a view that they would play a big role.

I know that the Social Mobility Commission south of the border has called on the UK Government to develop better skills and education policies for disadvantaged young people in rural areas. What steps are you taking to help to address the particular challenges that we have in rural areas, where there is a lack of large employers? That brings in the issue of the apprenticeship levy, which is generally only to be paid by large employers, although I know that the Scottish Government is not constrained with regard to where the money is spent in Scotland. It would be helpful if you could comment on that.

10:45

Jamie Hepburn: A useful first point to make is that we did not take the decision to introduce the apprenticeship levy, and we have put in place an offering for apprenticeships that is rather different from what is being offered by the UK Government in England. It is not necessary to be a levy payer to draw down on any voucher system; it is just necessary to be a willing employer who wants to take on an apprentice.

I suspect that some of the challenges that are faced in the rural environment reflect a lack of large-scale employers. There is sometimes a reticence on the part of smaller employers to take on modern apprentices. That is generally the case, irrespective of whether it is a rural or an urban environment, but because there might be a preponderance of such employers in a rural environment, it poses a particular challenge.

That said, the number of small and medium-sized enterprises that are taking on apprentices is growing, but that speaks of the need for us to constantly engage with such employers to get them to better understand the great value to them and their work environment of taking on an apprentice. I have certainly seen at first hand the difference that that can make to an individual employer.

As far as offering greater support for the rural environment is concerned, I have already referred to enhanced contributions for those apprentices who have a disability or who have care

experience, but we have also introduced a rural supplement for those apprentices whose employer is based in a rural environment. That has been introduced as an uplift payment to the training provider to ensure that the additional costs that are faced for the provision of training for someone in a rural environment can be met. We introduced that in the current financial year on the basis of identifying specific local authorities that might be felt to be more rural than others. This year, we are going further, so it will be available on a wider basis. Now, it will not be confined to specific local authorities; its availability will be based on whether the employer's postcode would meet the rural, remote rural or remote small town classification. The provision of the rural supplement for the provision of apprenticeship training will be more widely available in the coming year than it has been this year. That is one of the ways in which we are trying to better support the rural economy through the provision of apprenticeship training.

Of course, the developing the young workforce programme is organised on a regional basis, so it will reflect the distinct nature of the economy of each region. You will see great stuff happening through the DYW programme in Moray because the people who are best placed to determine what needs to happen there are those who are based on the ground: the employers, the college and the schools there. I have been up to see what is happening in Moray. I have been very impressed with what I have seen, and I would be very happy to return.

Richard Lochhead: Good. You are welcome to come back any time.

My final question is about the rural economy and the wider question of skills and training. I have previously raised with you the chronic lack of chefs and workers in the hospitality sector, which poses a significant threat to the rural economy, given that tourism is such a successful sector and is one of our great hopes for the future, especially post-Brexit. Ironically, Brexit may, of course, undermine the number of workers who are available to work in that important sector. A plethora of measures have been taken, which I very much welcome—I am encouraged by the interest that you are taking in the issue—but it would be really helpful to have an update as time goes on as to what is being achieved by those measures. I do not know whether you can give us an update now; if not, perhaps you can write to the committee with an update.

Jamie Hepburn: Of course I can do that. I remember the question that Mr Lochhead asked, and I remember giving a full answer, although I cannot remember every detail of the full answer that I gave to it.

Richard Lochhead: I think that it was the longest answer in the history of the Scottish Parliament.

Jamie Hepburn: The reason for the length of my answer was to demonstrate the great range of activity that we are undertaking. This is an issue that I am alert to. The hospitality sector is not the only sector that faces skill shortages. I am very delighted that, at the moment, the labour market is such that, by historical standards, we have high levels of employment and low levels of unemployment, but that exacerbates the situation for those sectors that face skill shortages, because it is easier for people to find employment. The sector to which you refer faces a double whammy, because people might leave it as a result of Brexit.

That said, some really good work is being done in the sector to extol the virtues of it as one in which people can have a career. Historically, it has been viewed as a sector in which people can be quite transient and can work for a short while, but which does not offer the basis for a good career. With seasonality, of course, that will be the case—some people will work in hospitality for only a short time—but, increasingly, it is no longer the case. I see young people getting the range of experience that they will need to work in the sector. One of the visits that I undertook during Scottish apprenticeships week was to Blythswood hotel in Glasgow, where I saw 40-plus young apprentices working in the hospitality sector. They showed great enthusiasm, and if we can get more of them, it is a sector with a great future ahead of it.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Good morning, minister. Earlier in the week, Sir Tom Hunter was extremely blunt about the problems faced by many youngsters in school who do not have the right skills. What discussions are you having with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science about the Government strategy that is required to deal with his concerns?

Jamie Hepburn: We are undertaking the 15-to-24 learner journey review, which is, along with initiatives such as DYW, predicated on making sure that young people come out of school with the skill set that they need to transition to the destinations to which they want to transition and to which our economy and society needs them to transition. DYW in particular has a role to play in that. Incidentally, the comments may have been blunt; I do not think that I saw them, so I will need to catch up with the blunt commentary that you are referring to, but—

Liz Smith: They were very blunt, minister.

Jamie Hepburn: It probably reflects a concern that we have heard historically from a number of

employers about young people not coming out of education equipped with the skill set that that they need to be ready for the world of work. That is what DYW is all about. It is about ensuring that, as a result of appropriate employer engagement with the schools through DYW regional groups, we can give young people practical and meaningful experience of the world of work. Also, through foundation apprenticeships, and experience of the world of work, young people can get an accredited qualification and those who educate them—the teachers—can better understand what employers require from young people as they come out of the school environment.

Liz Smith: Thank you for that, minister, but I ask you to be specific about what engagement you are having with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science. What Sir Tom Hunter is pointing at—along with several other employers and the chambers of commerce—is that many youngsters who are coming out of schools do not have the necessary skills for what is a fast-changing world, particularly in terms of digital activities and technological changes. They are being very specific about the need for a holistic policy that addresses that. What engagement are you are having with other senior levels of Government to address such concerns?

Jamie Hepburn: I am not quite clear what you mean by “engagement”. The Deputy First Minister is one of two cabinet secretaries to whom I have direct responsibility and with whom I work. This is a matter that we discuss regularly. I am trying to make the point about DYW, responsibility for which I share with the Deputy First Minister, and I have made the point that the Deputy First Minister is the person, along with Councillor Stephen McCabe, who chairs the national DYW group. We regularly discuss the progress of DYW and, along with Ms Somerville, we are actively engaged in the 15-to-24 learner journey review. It is an area about which we are in regular dialogue and in which we are actively engaged, under the programme for government commitment to the learner journey review.

Liz Smith: Those employers are pointing to some of the difficulties with the teaching of younger pupils, for whom they feel there is not a sufficient holistic strategy to address some of the skills needs in Scotland. I would have thought that, as a department—all our papers here are very cross-curricular in the sense that a lot of the things are interlinking—there would be a strategy to address some of those employers’ concerns, because they are the ones who are at the cutting edge of what is going on in business, industry and the jobs market. They are giving the Government quite a blunt message just now. My question is just about reaffirming to the committee that you

have a strategy in place to deal with those concerns and that you have engagement with bodies such as the Scottish Qualifications Authority or Education Scotland regarding them.

Our job here is to scrutinise what is going on across the whole gamut of education and skills—that is the title of the committee, after all—and I would like some assurance that there is a full-scale engagement about the strategic aims.

Jamie Hepburn: Let me provide you with reassurance, Ms Smith. DYW is not confined just to the secondary school environment; it is working in the primary school environment as well, albeit in a slightly different fashion, as you would expect. We are not expecting 11-year-olds to begin a foundation apprenticeship, but nonetheless we are trying to ensure, through DYW regional groups, that employers have engagement with primary schools, just as they will with secondary schools, so that, at an early stage, young people can understand what the world of work is like and can start to think about the options ahead of them in maybe a more focused way than has happened in the past.

On engagement with the SQA, SDS and the SFC, among others, of course those organisations will be cognisant of the concerns that are raised. SDS actively engages with a range of partners—in sector skills councils, for example—to hear what is required of our skills system from an industry point of view. We have a system—certainly for the provision of the full gamut of modern apprenticeships, including the subsets of foundation and graduate apprenticeships—that is responsive to industry demand.

I will not pretend that I do not, from time to time, hear certain employers say that they do not find that to be the case. Invariably, what I will do when I hear that is ensure that a discussion can be facilitated between them and SDS, which I find to be very responsive, and we will meet those employers very quickly to hear whatever concern they might have.

Liz Smith: I ask the question because this committee, which has heard recently from SQA and Education Scotland, has, on a cross-party basis, found it very difficult to see who is responsible for the overall strategy and the interlocking of how these bodies come together, particularly when it comes to the question of employability and skills. In the context of the committee’s discussions, I am asking where the overarching strategy is that involves your department—the skills department—to ensure that there is not only a regular dialogue with these bodies, but feedback to this committee and the wider public.

I think that you mentioned Ms Eisenstadt earlier. She made the point about there being a cluttered landscape, and this committee is trying to drill down to see exactly where the overall strategy is, where the transparency is and where the accountability is. That is the point.

11:00

Jamie Hepburn: To be fair, I am not the SQA but, as regards the SFC, SDS and our enterprise agencies, a critical element of better alignment of those areas is being progressed through the enterprise and skills review. That will provide an area of focus to ensure that each individual organisation's activity is far better aligned with each other's, so that skills requirements are matched with economic requirements. We think that that can be best facilitated by the outcome of the enterprise and skills review, but if there are specific concerns about transparency it is obviously incumbent on us to consider them.

SDS, for example, publishes its skills investment plans and regional skills assessments. They are available for people to see, and that has come around through the process of active engagement with us. For example, SDS's most recently published skills investment plan was for early years and childcare. Given the Government's ambitions, we have been involved in that dialogue and dialogue with the sector itself. I think that we have a transparent system, but if there are particular concerns, of course we will consider them.

The Convener: I think that part of what Liz Smith was getting at is the cluttered landscape that you talk about sometimes. We have found from the evidence that we have been given that it is still cluttered, and we are not quite sure where the layers of responsibility are for decisions being made about the things that Liz Smith and others have talked about. I am not sure what we are looking for. If there is any way that you can help to clarify that situation, by letter or whatever, we would be eternally grateful.

Jamie Hepburn: If you want to write to me with the specific points, I will respond, of course.

The Convener: That would be very helpful.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Good morning, minister. My question comes on the back of Liz Smith's. You will not be surprised that SDS managed to do a bit of research last week and had me meet apprentices from St Mirren Football Club. Renfrewshire Council had a programme that included apprenticeships in schools a while back. Recently, we had a report in which council employability programmes in Renfrewshire were ranked first in Scotland, and their results for assisting people into work were double the

national average. Does that kind of holistic working together not answer Liz Smith's question? The invest in Renfrewshire programme, which is the council's delivery mechanism for its employability programmes, is in the same building as SDS: the Russell institute in Paisley. Is the council being proactive in that area not an example of getting people to work together in decluttering the landscape? No doubt there will be other examples throughout Scotland.

Jamie Hepburn: Let me say that the only surprise from that question is that Mr Adam did not announce that he has sought an apprenticeship with St Mirren Football Club.

The Convener: I believe that he failed the test.

George Adam: I am too old.

Jamie Hepburn: On the specific example that has been posited, I am aware of what has been done in Renfrewshire, and it is a good example. It has been delivered locally by partners coming together. Where there is that type of good practice, we want to see others learning from it and saying, "If it can work in Renfrewshire, it can certainly work elsewhere." That is not to say that other similar types of activity are not happening in other parts of the country, but where something is working well in one place, it is important that other areas look at that.

The DYW approach, for example, is very much a result of the leadership of Rob Woodward, who was the chief executive of STV and has led on a lot of activity for DYW for us. He has helped to drive the creation of the regional groups and he brings together the various regional chairs and regional leads. Each regional group will have someone who is employed to help take forward DYW in its particular area. He brings those groups together so that they can share good practice, and that is something that we want to see across the board.

Of course, it is not me who is leading on this area, and doubtless you have pursued it with the Deputy First Minister already, but in some of the education forums, such as regional improvement collaboratives, there is the same philosophy. It is about ensuring that people can learn from one another what is working effectively and, of course, what is not working quite as effectively, and adjust accordingly.

Johann Lamont: My first question is from a woman called Isobel Taggart who has contacted us. You will be aware that next week is Down's syndrome awareness week. She asks:

"In supporting young adults with Down Syndrome into work, does the Scottish Government have any plans to emulate the excellent support provided by [the Down's Syndrome Association's WorkFit] in England and Wales?"

Jamie Hepburn: Having just made the point that we should always be willing to share and learn good practice, I would not close down the possibility entirely. Where something is working effectively in one place, of course at the very least we should be open and willing to learn from it.

However, I would go back to the point that I made in response to Michelle Ballantyne's question about how we can better support young people with a disability. I referred to the range of activity in relation to employment that we will be taking forward through the disability action plan, and I talked specifically about the stepping up programme that Enable Scotland is delivering, which we have supported through our 14:19 fund. That programme works with young people with a learning disability, which will include young people with Down's syndrome. It is having a very high success rate in achieving positive destinations, so of course we will be happy to look at WorkFit and see how it works in practice. Similarly, I hope that the UK Government will be willing to look at the stepping up programme.

The other relevant area of activity is the scoping exercise that we asked the Scottish Commission for Learning Disability to undertake to help us to understand the scale and effectiveness of employability support for people with learning disabilities. I have referred to what is good practice, but it would be wrong of me to suggest that we are getting this right, because I have already referred to the low employment rate of people with disabilities in comparison with the overall employment rate. In addition, although we do not know the exact scale of the issue, we know that the employment rate for those with a learning disability is even lower than the overall employment rate for people with disabilities. It is incumbent on us to consider what more we can do. A group is being pulled together to look at the recommendations from the report of the Scottish Commission for Learning Disability and it will provide recommendations to me in due course. If the committee is interested, I will be happy to provide more information.

Johann Lamont: It might be useful to look at the effectiveness of some of the work that you can do to support sheltered workplaces. You will know the European directive—I cannot remember the number—that allows you to protect contracts in order to ensure support for disabled people. I should know this, but is there a target for disabled people within the overall target on apprenticeships?

Jamie Hepburn: Yes, there is. Through the equality action plan, effectively we have said that we want participation in the modern apprenticeship programme to be representative of

the Scottish population as a whole, if that makes sense.

Johann Lamont: Logically, that will mean that you will be putting more resource and disproportionate effort into supporting disabled people into apprenticeships, because you are so far away from that target. The gap just now is so wide between—

Jamie Hepburn: Yes. There has been some growth in the number of disabled people taking part in modern apprenticeships. Last year showed quite significant growth, but the overall figures are still not great. What I would concede—I have to be quite candid with the committee about this—is that that was probably a reflection of our asking SDS to be a bit more assertive in counting the numbers. The figure that we had last year was probably just a more accurate reflection of what was there than the figure that had been reported before. There is still work to be done, which is why I referred to the enhanced contribution rates for those with a disability taking part in a modern apprenticeship up to the age of 29. We are taking steps to ensure that we better support those with a disability into modern apprenticeships.

The other thing that we need to reflect on is that someone undertaking a modern apprenticeship is someone in employment, so it goes back to the fundamental challenge of speaking to employers to make sure they better understand the great benefits that people with a disability can bring to their organisations.

Johann Lamont: You have come on to my last point. I am old enough to remember when the only people who offered apprenticeships were local authorities, which was in the 1980s. We desperately needed companies to step up to the plate then, but they did not and there was a massive challenge.

I am interested in the extent to which your commitments influence the broader picture of good-quality work and the business pledge—maybe you will say a bit about that in a moment. I heard what you said about apprentices in hospitality. We know that there is a massive issue in hospitality as regards precarious work: poor-quality training, a lack of rights, people not being paid the living wage and so on. Within the business pledge, what are you doing to create incentives for folk to do good things on training and apprenticeships in particular sectors to address that problem?

We have discussed this issue before. Unite the union and others who support the hospitality charter—which is something that I feel very strongly about—argue that when we talk about incentives for business and positive destinations, if a positive destination is precarious work with no

training and work that does not pay the living wage, it would be good for you not to count it as a positive destination. Would you accept that? Maybe the argument is that you cannot disaggregate things, but I feel very strongly that it would be a very powerful message if the Government were to say, "When we are looking at what happens to our young people, we will not define as a positive destination a job that we also define as precarious work."

I think that the First Minister is on record as saying that such work is unacceptable. We do not have the time to go into detail right now, but would you at least make a commitment to look at that? I feel very strongly that the positive things that you are doing in encouraging people to provide high-quality training are undercut when we define that kind of work as a positive destination.

Jamie Hepburn: Of course we can look at it. I think that there is a difficulty with disaggregating that information—that has been our early estimation of things—but we will look at it again. I would caution against the view that how we count destinations would act as an incentive or a disincentive to individual employers, because of course things are not broken down to the level of employer X, Y or Z. The work that we are undertaking on living wage accreditation, the business pledge—an element of which is investment in a business's workforce—investors in people and investors in young people is where we can make a bigger difference in relation to casting a light on who has good practice and who does not.

We have done good work with living wage accreditation. We see that Scotland is the best performer of the four UK nations on the proportion of the working-age population that is being paid at least the living wage, although there is a persistent group that is not being paid the living wage. We have a disproportionately high number of accredited employers, compared to the overall UK figure. The other critical difference is that we estimate that about 25,000 people have had a wage increase as a result of the living wage accreditation scheme. Those things are a result of our efforts, but now we need to go further.

Our next phase of work with the living wage is moving on to target specifically the sectors in which we know that there is not the same commitment to paying wages and investing in staff. Johann Lamont has touched on a sector in which we know that that is an issue. That lack of commitment does not exist across the board—I have just referred earlier to some good activity taking place in the hospitality sector—but there is still bad practice. Our effort now is to focus on the issue sector by sector.

11:15

Johann Lamont: I am very conscious of time, but I want to say that the issue is clearly about not just wages but uncertainty, insecurity, lack of training, lack of access to tips, shifts that are very short and all the rest of it. My fear is that we can have an economy that is theoretically strong, but with lots of people in precarious work. We see that at a UK level, and we would regard that as unacceptable. My fear is that simply to define these jobs as positive destinations distorts what is happening in the economy and disproportionately impacts on young people. Given your commitment to high-quality training and fair work, do you recognise that there is a mismatch and that it is something that we need to look at further?

Jamie Hepburn: There is an inherent tension between, on the one hand, what we define as zero-hours contracts that are flexible in that they work for the employee and might not be felt to be exploitative, and those that are exploitative because an employee is not able to—

Johann Lamont: Specifically—we are talking about positive destinations for young people—the contract may involve a young person who is studying and will be counted as a student but does a bit of work on the side.

Jamie Hepburn: That is correct.

Johann Lamont: We are talking specifically about young people coming out of school into precarious work that is defined as a positive destination, which is not what we should aspire to for them. I hear that you will look at this further, and it may be that I can communicate with you on where I think that some further work needs to be done.

Jamie Hepburn: Everything that we are doing through DYW and investment in training through apprenticeships is geared towards ensuring that people are in high-quality work, are not working in precarious circumstances and are properly and fairly remunerated. That is where the focus of our activity is. We know that recording information is more straightforward for the overall working population through the annual survey of hours and earnings, in which we see that the proportion of people in Scotland working on zero-hours contracts is slightly lower than it is in the UK as a whole, but we want to try to drive that down further where such contracts are exploitative. I think that the issue of looking at destinations for young people coming out of the school environment is slightly more difficult, but I have made the commitment that we will look at it, without being able to commit absolutely to what the outcome of that might be.

The Convener: Thank you. That would be great. It would be good if you would update the committee on your findings.

Jamie Hepburn: Of course.

The Convener: I thank you and your officials for your attendance today. I will now suspend the meeting for a few moments to allow witnesses to change over.

11:16

Meeting suspended.

11:19

On resuming—

Independent Care Review

The Convener: The next item of business is a briefing from the independent care review. The committee will take evidence from the Minister for Childcare and Early Years next week, and the minister's remit covers care-experienced young people. Today's session is, in part, to inform next week's session. We are also keen to hear about the progress of the review so far and its future work.

I welcome Fiona Duncan, the chair of the independent care review, Rosie Moore, a discovery group member, and Kevin Browne, a discovery group member. Ms Duncan, I understand that you would like to make an opening statement to brief the committee on the review's progress and planned work.

Fiona Duncan (Independent Care Review): I will be brief because I have sent the committee some information, which I will talk to. I thank the committee for the invitation. We are pleased to have the opportunity to update it on the care review.

I will talk a little bit about the highlights of the stage that we are in at the moment, as we are concluding the discovery stage. I will also talk about what we are doing now and share some of the things that we plan to do next. My briefing outlines the methodology and clarifies the timeframe. We aim to conclude the review in the spring or summer of 2020, which might be a slightly longer timeframe than was initially anticipated. That is because there is a huge volume of interest from people. It has taken us longer to get around all the individuals and organisations that wanted to speak to us. Because of some of the questions that we have been asking specifically of children and young people about their vision for care, it has taken longer to get to a consensus emerging around a vision. Lots of the early conversations were really about fixing challenges in day-to-day life rather than what the world could look like.

We have been very clear that it was important for us to hear from as many diverse voices as possible and in ways that worked for individuals. We have not been prescriptive about how we have encouraged people to engage with the review; we have been really open about that. In addition to all those conversations, including the ones with the workforce, we spent some time doing detailed analysis of everything that we have understood. At the moment, we have started to frame that analysis into a vision, a series of intentions for the review, a series of outputs from discovery, which

will be happening soon, and a series of inputs for the next stage of the journey, which will be on the more complicated areas.

All of those are being taken back to children and young people—our go-to groups—so that we can sense check what we have heard. We are saying, “This is what you have told us. This is how we have organised it. This is what we intend to do next and this is what we hope to achieve at the end. Does this sound right?” rather than just thinking that we have understood it correctly. That is happening throughout this week. Our first session was on Monday and sessions are happening all through this week, this weekend and next week. Once we have concluded that and, as we hope, the children and young people to whom we are speaking have told us that they like the way in which we have organised the next stage of the review, we will embark on that next stage.

We are very careful that our go-to groups are not made up exclusively of the 817 children and young people who spoke to us initially, because we recognised that there was a risk that we would have an echo chamber. Increasingly, we are building new groups of individuals who want to talk to us. That is where we are at. There is more information in the briefing paper and we are happy to take any questions on any of our work.

The Convener: Thank you very much for that. It was very useful and it was good to see so that many people participated in the questions. Before I invite questions from members, I will start by asking Rosie Moore and Kevin Browne for their views on how the care review has sought thus far to take into account the views of care-experienced people and what they feel could be done later in the review to achieve this.

Rosie Moore (Independent Care Review): Thank you, convener. Following on from what Fiona Duncan said, at the end of the discovery phase, 817 children and young people had been spoken to, but that does not include the new people who are part of the go-to groups. Half the discovery group is made up of care-experienced members, including me and Kevin Browne, and I honestly could sit and talk to the committee for hours about the lengths to which I believe Fiona Duncan and the team have gone to hear the voices of children and young people who are either in the system or who have left. The way in which the team is trying to gather such a vast variety of voices is really admirable. With the discovery group members, we have people with a range of different experiences, such as people in kinship care or foster care, so that we have diversity in the group, and then obviously there is the diversity of all the different young people that the team are speaking to outwith the discovery group meetings.

My skill set includes my personal experience of care, but I am also an academic and a professional, and I think that those things are equally valued. When people talk purely from experience and opinion and things that have happened to them personally, that is not given any less credit when people are inputting into the discussions that the group holds, nor should it be.

I have never known Fiona Duncan to pass up an opportunity to go and speak to care-experienced young people outside the review. I am part of a care-experienced young people advisory group for the Life Changes Trust. I made a passing comment to Fiona Duncan that we had a well-established advisory group of 18 to 30-year-olds and Fiona Duncan instantly said, “When can I come and see you?” and there was no underlying motive. We did not have an agenda for that meeting. She purely wanted to come and speak to us, update us a little bit about what the review was doing, get our thoughts on a few things and then open herself up completely for us to question her. It was nice for me, to be outside the discovery group and to resort back to being a care-experienced young person, asking her questions in a different role. I have never known Fiona Duncan to be too busy; she will make the time.

Fiona Duncan mentioned the recent creation of the go-to groups. There has been a multi-layered approach to engaging with young people, so that there can be one-to-one meetings, phone calls and focus groups from across the country. The approach is not centred around any particular areas or the bigger cities such as Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Moving forward, there needs to be a continuing discussion about how we reach some of the harder-to-reach care-experienced young people. As Fiona Duncan has said, one of the principles of the go-to groups is to get new people involved so that the forum is not an echo chamber. It is partly the responsibility of the review and partly of people across the sector to get together and think about how we can reach those people who are currently under the radar. If that is an issue to do with data, the collection of data not being up to scratch or people not feeling able to disclose their care experience because of stigma or shame or whatever, as we move forward, and speaking from a care-experienced young person’s point of view, that is a focus that I would like to see as a cross-sector responsibility.

I suggest doing that by using a lot of resources that are underutilised. For example, champs boards have recently been created across the local authorities. Up to 19 or 20 different local authorities have ready-made groups of young people who own the care experience and are there voluntarily to create change. They would

love people from different parties or different sectors to come and say what they think, because the voice of young people is so powerful. In recent years, through the work of organisations such as Who Cares? Scotland, the centre for excellence for looked-after children in Scotland, and the review, young people are slowly being empowered to talk and to open up. Some of the messages that have come from them are invaluable.

Moving forward, in summary, it is about keeping going the way we are and for people to get together so that, after the review has concluded, we do not just say "That is it". People from health, education, mental health and different political parties need to commit to continuing to engage with and listen to young people. A lot of the answers are there but we have not taken the time thus far to seek them out.

The Convener: That was really good.

Kevin Browne (Independent Care Review):

From my perspective the scale of the review is fantastic as far as the numbers are concerned, but I am most proud of the approach that the review taken. It has created the conditions for care-experienced children, young people and adults to feel safe. It has been as relationship based as possible by working in partnership with agencies and companies to make sure that children, young people and adults feel comfortable and confident in sharing their experience.

11:30

Beyond that, the public statement that was made that the review will be driven by people who are care experienced is a real strength. As a result of that, Scotland has engaged in a national conversation about how to engage with the care population locally. It has gone beyond numbers and it is starting to reach into communities; the discussion is being taken forward there.

The third element is care identity and the power of sharing and listening to stories. Approximately five or six years ago, there was a reluctance to listen to people who were care experienced because there was a fear that their declaration of their journey would cause or revisit trauma. The review has created the conditions for Scotland to have confidence that sharing stories is a positive thing if it is done in the right way with the right support.

More than that, the review has been tabled as an appreciative review, but it has not ignored the lived reality. I have spoken publicly and openly a number of times about my own experience 15 years ago and 10 years ago. Both of my brothers died at the age of 18—one through suicide and one through a drugs overdose—and both were care experienced. Last week, one of our members

at Who Cares? Scotland, who was aged 23, also died. Her name was Katie. The review has listened and is facing the reality as well as looking at the strengths and adopting the appreciative approach.

The fact that the review can learn from the past and listen to voices that will never be heard and, more important, build and look forward to the future, has real integrity.

Moving forward, the review needs to be care experience driven. The question was about how we have taken into account the views of care-experienced people. I would like to see care-experienced people at the centre of the process as its architects, builders and creators. For many years, care-experienced people have been oppressed through fear, stigma and discrimination, and the review is a marked change and a public message to care-experienced people that they will be listened to, that we will take their views seriously, and that there is real scope for delivering change.

I have every confidence that the review will achieve that. Under Fiona Duncan's leadership and given that, to date, care-experienced people have driven the process and will continue to do so, I am hopeful and confident that we will deliver transformational change that will restore childhoods, connect communities and create a care experience that is based on love.

The Convener: Thank you both for that. Rosie Moore talked about the importance of care-experienced voices and we have just heard that very powerfully for ourselves, so thank you very much.

I have one question for Fiona Duncan. How do you get the request out for people to participate in the review? I understand that your next step will be to involve those who are not easy to get to, but how do you make sure that enough people participate, which you clearly have succeeded in doing?

Fiona Duncan: We are trying as hard as possible to work in partnerships. You will see from the briefing that we have approached and been approached by lots of voluntary organisations, umbrella bodies, local authorities, and charities that have a specialism in disability or children. We are building trust within the care-experienced community. On Monday night, I was at a meeting with people whom I had not met before, but their friends or family members had engaged with the review and decided that they could trust it. We are meeting new people like that.

The nominations and representation process that we used to create the discovery group was effective. Kevin Browne and Rosie Moore represent other organisations and we mapped out

our key stakeholders and asked them to nominate or identify a representative. That was very good at extending our reach.

We also use all the usual channels. We are on social media and we go everywhere we are asked to. I have been all over Scotland and we turn up to every conference. As Rosie Moore said, I invite myself to things. I have not had many people say that they would not have me, but it has happened. We just make a point of being as accessible as possible. We are not working Monday to Friday, 9 to 5. It is evenings and weekends; it is whenever it needs to be. Because we want to hear from children and young people, it is really important that we are not compounding stigma by saying, "We will be with you on Tuesday at 3 o'clock and you have to come out of class." I guess that we are working around people's lives to make sure that we are present.

The last thing to say is that we are listening and we are asking questions. To answer Kevin Browne's point, we respect the voices of the care-experienced community and they will be involved in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of any care system. They have to be. We are moving into hope and belief, and that in itself is creating momentum.

Ruth Maguire: Good morning, panel. Thank you for attending and for all the work that you are doing.

Fiona Duncan, you said that some of this was taking a little bit longer than was expected. It is easy to say that you are consulting people, going out to listen to their views and getting them to shape stuff, but I guess that people are leading their own lives and that you need to get over the day-to-day issues. I would think that, in that respect, care-experienced folk will face additional challenges. I realise that it is not the same thing, but what I have in mind is the way that, when we have focus groups with teachers on future plans and strategies, we find that what is actually important to them is the stuff that is going on at the moment. Is there a time element to this? If so, how do you move past that and build trust so that people feel involved in building what is coming instead of simply sharing what is happening at the moment?

Fiona Duncan: There is a time element. We have structured the discovery stage of the review as a conversation, which means that people do not have to answer a question there and then.

Let me give you an example. Everyone who takes part in Who Cares? Scotland's work to deliver the 1,000 voices commitment gets a badge; I met one young lady who had five badges, and she was just getting to the point where she was ready to share the things that she thought we

had to hear. She knew that she had been counted once, so she is not five of the 817 young people to whom we spoke—she is just one person who appeared five times. I think that it is important to point that out.

A very powerful thing is to ensure, as far as possible, that the people involved in these conversations really understand the issues. You have seen for yourself the power of what Rosie Moore and Kevin Browne have had to say. The fact that Rosie Moore invited me willingly into her group and said, "You should be part of this conversation" in itself makes it easier for some of these conversations to happen. In any case, I certainly think that these have to be conversations; our response cannot be, "Right—we have heard your view, so that's it."

It is also worth noting that we have tried harder with hard-to-reach communities or individuals whom we have identified. We have not said, "Because you're hard to reach, we're just going to write you off"; we feel a responsibility to try harder in such circumstances. Our approach has been wide and open, but we have also been quite specific and targeted in hearing the voices that we need to hear. It is not just children and young people who might not feel that they want to engage with the review, but those who do not have a voice or whose first language is not English. We are very aware of all of that.

Finally, as Kevin Browne said, we create a really safe environment. We ensure that somebody is always on site if a person is talking about something that is traumatic or which triggers something and that all the support structures are in place to keep people safe during and after the conversation.

Mary Fee: I want to ask about harder-to-reach young people. In the previous session of Parliament, I was, for a short time, convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee. When the committee held an inquiry into young people and homelessness, we discovered that quite a high proportion of homeless young people had come through the care system and were homeless because the system had failed them. There was no support or clear pathway in place for them when they left care. I remember one young person telling us that they were taken away from their care setting in a car, deposited outside a house, given a set of keys and told that this was their new home, and they had no skills to cope or deal with that situation. I am keen to hear how those young people are being engaged with, because clearly we need to make some massive changes to how we deal with care-experienced young people and ensure that they have the correct support and the proper pathway of help when they leave the system.

We also found that young people were quite often in and out of the criminal justice system, simply because they had nowhere else to go. Again, that is a failure of the system; it is no reflection on the young people themselves. Basically, they do not have the coping mechanisms to deal with life, and I am keen to hear whether you are speaking to people in those situations.

Fiona Duncan: Absolutely. We recognise what you have just said, and we have targeted charities that work with the homeless community to ensure that we are having those conversations.

One of the things that we have identified is a lack of data, and part of our responsibility in the next phase will be gather that data and try to understand the scale of the situation. We have also done work at Polmont, and we have identified those areas—and, in fact, many others—that are of specific interest to us. It is an issue that we will focus on even more in the next stage of the review so that we can understand it.

Rosie Moore: I completely agree. For me, it is a massive issue where improvement is needed. I mentioned that Fiona Duncan had spoken to the Life Changes Trust advisory group, which I am a member of outside the review. One of the Life Changes Trust's big initiatives at the moment is focusing on the idea of home and the problems that you have just referred to, and Fiona Duncan has agreed to continue to work collaboratively with us as a group.

Two of my advisory group colleagues were here several weeks ago, providing evidence on homelessness issues. We have discussed these matters at quite some length with Fiona Duncan when she has come to speak to us; we also discuss them when she is not there and feed those discussions back either through me, given my involvement with the group and the review, or through emails, phone calls and updates. I can definitely say that Fiona and the team are considering homelessness and various other issues such as people being expected to run their own tenancies at the age of 16. Common sense says that that is not going to be easy; in fact, the approach has not been successful and needs to be looked at. I know that the review is definitely taking that into consideration, because I have been part of those conversations with Fiona Duncan.

Kevin Browne: I find this to be quite a dark subject and I hope that I can talk concisely about it so that you understand what I am saying. When Government increased the age at which people can remain in care to 21 and then to 26, it was a monumental move and definitely the right thing to do. That happened in 2014. A coalition of key partners in the sector, including CELCIS, Who

Cares? Scotland and Clan Childlaw, has now been formed; a whole range of people is coming together; and there will be a meeting in the Parliament in the next week or so to talk about the fact that, here and now, children from care are still ending up homeless and that the average age of leaving care is still 17. We are not seeing an increase, but the situation still exists.

11:45

This is a multilayered issue that has come up in the review, and it has also come up in my role at Who Cares? Scotland as manager of our national corporate parenting training programme. One of the things that I find fascinating is that all of the reasons for this situation are different. For example, registered foster carers have found themselves unable to look after a child after the halving of the foster care rate, and so the child has had to move on. For another agency, it was about their providing residential childcare at a certain rate. Some of the reasons have been to do with money and resource, but there is a whole range of other reasons.

When I spoke to professionals and agencies about this, I said, "This issue is bigger than finance. There is something very dark and cultural about it." The discussion that we had in that room was not about young people who were potentially going to be homeless, but about young people who were already homeless. Their foster carers let them go; the legal agency comes in and tries to support them at the latter end. Who Cares? Scotland is an advocacy service. The residential house had held them for seven or 10 years, and the people who say that they love their children are letting them go.

For me, there are some real challenges that we need to understand better, but this is a really dark issue to do with behaviour, society and culture. It is all about taking children from abuse and neglect, bringing them into the system and then returning them into a very disruptive and unsupportive environment. It goes beyond finance, and I think that in the next stage of the review we need to understand the culture and examine the fact that, despite our knowing that this is wrong, we collectively let it happen. It is not about blame—it is just a reflection of where we are at this moment.

Liz Smith: Thank you for your very insightful comments this morning. With regard to the 32 local authorities that you said were in the discovery programme, did you get a good level of engagement from all of them or was the response patchy?

Fiona Duncan: They were all willing to engage, but there was perhaps a different level of

engagement from each. Some engaged in a multi-level way through the champions boards and social work teams; some held workshops for us; and others encouraged us to meet children and young people. We were with some councils for days on end, and we had shorter interventions with others.

I am pleased that all 32 councils are on board; I believe that we are at the beginning of a conversation with all of them and that there is a willingness to engage, and we are trying to make sure that our engagement is wide. In that respect, we are also engaging with the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers, COSLA, the Care Inspectorate, Audit Scotland, the Scottish Social Services Council and all the other organisations that work closely with local authorities to ensure that we can continue to have conversations with them.

Johann Lamont: First of all, thank you very much for everything that you have said. You have raised some very profound issues that we need to think about. Those of us who are a bit hard bitten about stuff will say, “There have been a million reviews on a million issues in this Parliament,” but you have given us huge confidence that this review is being taken forward in a really serious way. No matter what parties members come from, they will all be hugely encouraged by what you have said.

Historically speaking, I taught for 20 years, and it was only latterly that people were even talking about youngsters who were in care. When I taught on Bute, youngsters in care were brought down on to the island; nobody discussed why they were there, even when they were trying to get back off the island. There has been some progress in that time, but I feel that this is a very important moment.

You are absolutely right that care-experienced people, whether they are young or older, have to be at the centre of all this. One particular campaign group that has been very strong in Parliament is kinship carers; they have spoken up for the young people whom they love and care for, and they have exposed a lot of issues. You talked about people stepping away from these matters, and I think that the extent to which our system has been prepared to step away is a shame on us all.

How do you manage not so much conflict between but the different perspectives that might be held by a care-experienced young person and somebody—a foster carer or whoever—who believed that they were doing their best but perhaps failed? Moreover, what balance should be struck between ensuring that young people have some very powerful advocates and ensuring that the care-experienced person is absolutely at the centre of things?

Fiona Duncan: I will try to respond, but I am interested in hearing the views of Rosie Moore and Kevin Browne, too.

We have a map of the care journey. It is on an A3 sheet, and it includes kinship and foster care, residential care, those who are looked after at home, the edges of care and babies and children of a certain age and gender and in certain settings. We have tried really hard to ensure that our conversations have been representative and that we have included children and young people, the paid and unpaid workforce, people who are involved in the children’s panel, kinship carers, foster carers and so on.

I will make a couple of observations on this. First, there is huge consensus and a real appetite with regard to what has to happen and the need for change. It feels that now is the right moment for this review and that there are certain things on which everybody agrees. I imagine that that is a symptom of the discovery stage that we are at; we are crafting a vision and are trying to understand the roots and branches.

Inevitably, as we move into the next stage, there will be divergence and conversations about resource allocation, precedents and voices. One of the things that people say to us a lot is that they do not feel as if they are being heard. Kinship carers do not feel heard, and foster carers do not feel heard at critical points of decision making. There is nobody I have met who does not want the best for children and young people; the issue is where the tensions lie. I imagine that those tensions will emerge when we talk about specific issues such as the voices that are heard at a children’s hearing, and, at that point, we are going to have to understand and go back to what is best and right for the child.

At the very beginning of the review, we had some interesting commentary from children and young people. They said that the system had been designed and delivered by adults and that children and young people now had an opportunity to make it better. One young man said to me, “If you had asked me these questions at the age of 14, I would have given you very different answers.” We have been speaking to people of different ages in all sorts of different settings. For example, I went to the Who Cares? Scotland summer camp and spent lots of time with children—and got pelted twice on the assault course. The conversations that children want to have are about what is not working now and what they would do if their best friend were to come into care tomorrow. With those kinds of day-to-day decisions and issues, we are not necessarily going to bump into disagreements; disagreement will arise on the bigger questions of where responsibility, power and the resources sit, what the risks look like and

how risk averse different organisations are going to be.

On Kevin Browne's earlier point, the fact is that there are many different pieces of legislation in the system, and that is often where the creaks happen. Something might have been changed in what people consider to be a good and positive way, but it might actually have had unintended consequences or it might simply not have been taken up. Those are the areas where the disagreements are going to emerge.

Kevin Browne: I hope that I am answering your question, but there are a lot of young people out there who are either in kinship care arrangements or are being looked after at home but who do not understand that they are care experienced. There is a real tension in the sector—and in families—about the ability or desire to embrace a label.

For me, the real challenge is that a lot of the opportunities and support that have been built up require a person to know that they are care experienced. The Government's fantastic work in replacing student loans with a non-repayable bursary for care-experienced students will transform lives, but if a person does not understand that they are care experienced, they will never—if I can put it this simply—tick a particular box and therefore never receive those benefits. For example, if you are from a care-experienced background and are made homeless, you will get priority; if you are looking for employment, a whole range of corporate parents will automatically guarantee interviews and ring fence jobs; and you will get free accommodation all year round in some of Scotland's universities.

Those are fantastic developments, but they require care-experienced people to celebrate their care identity. In that respect, I think that this movement is still very young. With the disability and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender movements, huge investment has been made in getting people to a place where they can celebrate who they are and where they are from. The care-experienced movement is embryonic, but we are building on that.

One real challenge is support for kinship carers, but a bigger challenge is to support children in having a very positive sense of self, in saying that being care experienced is not a bad thing and in realising that, by owning that care identity—not publicly but internally—they can access the benefits that we are creating out there. However, that requires them to know, accept and celebrate their identity.

As the review moves forward, we need to engage Scotland in a discussion about this area of care to ensure that people understand and do not try to hide from it. I went to university for four

years, and the only time I told somebody that I was care experienced was on my last day, because I knew that I would never see them again. That is a very real example of my feeling ashamed of who I am, and I have only felt happiness in my marriage, with my kids and in my job after embracing who I am. For me, it is a personal and professional issue, but there is a broader and wider discussion to be had, and I think that Fiona Duncan and the review can certainly aid that discussion in Scotland.

Rosie Moore: We have talked about discrepancies in data and our not knowing the number of care-experienced young people out there or, indeed, the number of kinship carers, because all of that is done as part of private family life. One issue that is important to me and which I have brought to the discussion in the discovery group is stigma. I am talking about not just the stigma of declaring that you are care experienced—which is, as Kevin Browne has just highlighted, a massive issue—but the stigma for families and carers of coming forward and asking for help. We have talked about that in relation to edges of care and the families who are providing kinship care to children and young people and whom we, as professionals, do not know about because they are simply not coming forward to tell us.

One of the big reasons for that is that there is the stigma associated with being a social work service user, and something that the review needs to continue to look at—and which cross-sector professionals need to continue to work on—is how to reduce the stigma of asking for help and how to get rid of the illusions that members of the public have about the social work, health and education sectors, a lot of which comes from the media and the misrepresentation of information.

Some responsibility for that lies with the review, and the issue will continue to be looked at through the journey stage. However, because the review is independent, there is general consensus that Fiona Duncan, the team and discovery group members' accountability lies with children and young people and with giving them a better environment, upbringing and childhood.

Stigma is one of the big issues that I would like to be worked on, not only to ensure that children and young people feel comfortable in owning their care experience but to reduce the stigma associated with accessing services and, I hope, to help families who are on the edge of care. For me, the goal that we should be working towards is prevention, not intervention.

The Convener: Thank you very much. I think that I speak on behalf of the committee when I say that your testimony was very useful and powerful. I have no doubt that we will hear from you again

during this process and, I hope, later in the parliamentary session.

That brings us to the end of the public part of the meeting. We will now move into private session.

12:00

Meeting continued in private until 12:07.

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Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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