# EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 15 November 2005

Session 2

£5.00

Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by Astron.

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## EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE
**16th Meeting 2005, Session 2**

**CONVENER**

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

*Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

*Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP)
*Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab)
*Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
*Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
*Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
*John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)

**COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES**

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con)
Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP)
Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)

*attended

**THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:**

Liz Galashan (Careers Scotland)
Morag Gillespie (Glasgow Caledonian University)
Julie-Anne Jamieson (Careers Scotland)
Anne MacDonald (Highlands and Islands Enterprise)
Anne Marshall (Jobcentre Plus)
Gareth Mulvey (Glasgow Caledonian University)
John Reid (Jobcentre Plus)
Sheila Riddell (University of Edinburgh)
Scott Skinner (Scottish Enterprise)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Steve Farrell

**SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK**

Zoé Tough

**ASSISTANT CLERK**

Roy McMahon

**LOCATION**

Committee Room 1

# Scottish Parliament

## Equal Opportunities Committee

*Tuesday 15 November 2005*

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:02*]

## Item in Private

**The Convener (Cathy Peattie):** Good morning. I welcome everyone to the 16th meeting of the Equal Opportunities Committee in 2005 and I remind everyone that mobile phones should be turned off. I have received an apology for absence from Sandra White.

Item 1 is to decide whether to take item 3 in private. Do members agree that we should take item 3 in private, as in that item we will be dealing with a draft report that the committee has not yet agreed?

**Members** *indicated agreement*.

## Disability Inquiry

10:02

**Cathy Peattie:** Item 2 is the committee's disability inquiry. This will be the first of our formal evidence-taking sessions on the theme of work. I am pleased to welcome Morag Gillespie and Gareth Mulvey, who are two of the authors of the report "Transitions to Employment: Advising Disadvantaged Groups". I am also pleased to welcome Sheila Riddell, who is the author of "Disability and Employment in Scotland: A Review of the Evidence Base". A very warm welcome to you. We have many questions to ask and I hope that we will have enough time.

I will start by asking about assistance to disabled people. The committee has heard that there are various schemes to provide advice and assistance to disabled people who are looking for work, or to help disabled people to sustain employment. There are United Kingdom schemes, Scottish Executive schemes, local authority schemes and schemes that are run by charities. Inconsistency in the services has been highlighted to us. To what extent are there variations in services, and what can be done to provide improved and consistent services to disabled people across Scotland?

**Morag Gillespie (Glasgow Caledonian University):** Our research has highlighted inconsistencies. The most significant finding is perhaps quite an obvious one: the issues that people needed advice on were closely linked to the barriers to work that they faced. That seems terribly obvious in retrospect, but it is very useful to take it into account, because many other issues follow on from it.

We found that mainstream advice services—citizens advice bureaux, local authority services, welfare rights services and independent advice services—were very good at offering advice on benefits, on better-off calculations and on how to meet costs such as housing and child care costs, but were much less likely to offer help on issues such as taxation, criminal records disclosures, travel costs and entitlement to child care, as opposed to help with child care costs. Other issues such as disability costs and travel access were also not routinely well covered. The mainstream services were very focused on benefits.

In other services, more attention was paid to the wider barriers and to issues to do with transition to work, but there was not the depth of support and expertise. Although people relied heavily on employment support projects and employability projects, the services did not have the expertise to help. We found a mismatch between where the expertise lay and where people were placing their faith and trust.

The different sectors in the whole advice and support area need to talk to one another better than they do at present. When they talk together, we have seen that it is very effective and leads to the provision of good services.

**Sheila Riddell (University of Edinburgh):** There is a need for better communication and for knowledge of programmes that are specific to Scotland—the ones that are run by Scottish Enterprise, by local authorities, by further education colleges and so on. There is also a need for knowledge of initiatives that come out of Jobcentre Plus—to do with access to work, the new deal for disabled people, work preparation and so on. Sometimes people are doing pretty much the same thing, but it is labelled differently, so there is duplication of effort. There is a huge number of programmes and there is an awful lot of overlap. There could probably be a radical stripping out.

I do not know how anybody understands which programme they should be following and why. There can be a lot of recycling of individuals: everybody wants to claim success so, when an individual gets a job, several agencies may say, "We're counting this person." As a result, the same person is counted many times.

**The Convener:** Both the reports that I mentioned suggest that the current system of monitoring and evaluating schemes that assist disabled people to get into work could be improved. Our inquiry has found that, too. How should monitoring be done? People say to us that they are doing this, that and the next thing, but how do we know?

**Sheila Riddell:** The most important thing to know is the proportion of disabled people in employment. In Scotland, the proportion is low; it is less than 40 per cent, which is lower than the figure in England and Wales. If someone lives in a workless household, they are probably living in poverty, so if we want disabled people not to be living in poverty, we have to improve their employment rate. That is the most important thing and it is fairly easy to monitor. There has been a small improvement, but we need much more improvement.

**Morag Gillespie:** I agree that it is critical to monitor that, but I suspect that a developmental issue arises, especially in the advice services. Those services may be less used to the regimes of European social funding. Those regimes have for a long time required that monitoring take place, so the services that have dealt with European social funding are more familiar with monitoring. The advice services are less familiar with it because they have a much narrower funding base. Monitoring could be improved.

I used to manage advice services and my plea would be this: for goodness' sake do not have 20 different requirements for guidance and monitoring coming from 20 different directions. Uniformity would be best. There would be economies of scale if you could say, "Here's a simple monitoring system and this is the information that we'd like everyone to gather." There might be duplication, but at least we would get a better picture of what is being done.

I would be interested not only in whether disabled people are moving into employment but in whether particular groups of disabled people are moving into employment. Are services targeted at one group rather than another and are they failing to reach one group rather than another? I do not see how organisations can develop and plan their services efficiently without knowing whom they are and are not reaching. For example, are they reaching disabled people, but not disabled people from ethnic minority backgrounds? If they are not, what are they doing to address that? Monitoring helps them to develop their service. It is necessary for monitoring to be carried out across the spectrum. When there is mainstreaming, no single issue represents the whole picture because some groups are perhaps doubly disadvantaged.

**The Convener:** So the monitoring should be kept fairly simple but consistent, so that appropriate information can be gathered.

**Morag Gillespie:** Yes. Monitoring is one of the processes that should be led from the top, as it is not helpful if 20 different routes of funding are looking for 20 different types of monitoring—there is a plethora of quality standards and you start to scream inside your head when you look at them all.

Simplicity and fairly clear guidance are desirable. There could even be guidance for a lot of people about asking questions, as people are uncomfortable about asking questions. Who determines whether someone is a disabled person? It has to be self-determined. People should be given more confidence to address such issues

**Sheila Riddell:** There is a tension between whether employment or employability is seen as being the outcome. There are arguments in both directions. It will be difficult for some disabled people to get employment as they face huge barriers. It is important to improve people's employability, but unless people move into paid work at some point, the fundamental problem of poverty has not been addressed. Even the best programmes get only about 20 per cent of people into some sort of work and that might be very part-time work in very supported employment. I do not want to rubbish that and say that it does not matter, but we need to boost the success of the schemes that are being delivered and raise expectations. Most disabled people want to work and do not want endlessly to increase their employability. Many people say, "I feel trained enough. Please just give me a job."

**The Convener:** Yes, but is that to do with outcomes? We heard from one organisation that sometimes it has nine weeks in which to get people job ready. For some people, that is not long enough. There may be a positive outcome in respect of the skills and confidence that the person gains, but it might not be realistic to say that they can become job ready in nine weeks. Is there an issue with the expectation that is placed on organisations, given the timescale within which they operate? Is there an overemphasis on outcomes?

**Sheila Riddell:** I am not sure that there is an overemphasis on outcomes. For economic reasons, Jobcentre Plus has tended to focus on the people who are closest to the labour market. The big target has been and will continue to be—particularly with the UK Government green paper that is due to come out—people on incapacity benefit, because they are seen as costing a lot of money. In fact, those people may not be the keenest to get a job because some of them have put quite a lot of energy into securing a benefits package. Often people who are the most disabled—the most severely impaired—are desperate to find work, but it will cost a lot of money to place them and maintain them in employment. There is a big tension between what the Treasury might want and what disabled people might want.

**The Convener:** Absolutely.

The type of assistance that is offered differs from scheme to scheme, depending on its purpose and, as has been mentioned, the focus of the organisation. The report by Morag Gillespie and Gareth Mulvey calls for a more holistic support system. What are the benefits of an holistic support system?

10:15

**Morag Gillespie:** One of the key points behind that was that the people to whom we talked do not distinguish well between the type of advice needs that might be met by traditional advice services and other support that they might need to prepare them for work, such as help to prepare a curriculum vitae and all the different kinds of support that might be linked more to employability than to welfare rights advice. We noted people's lack of clarity about that and, on some occasions, about whom they get what services from. People saw themselves as a whole person with a whole set of needs, which often included money issues—money was an issue for all the people to whom we spoke. They did not compartmentalise themselves in a way that was convenient for the service delivery model. That is where a difference could be made.

We identified gaps in advice provision, because it goes along traditional lines and focuses on money issues. Although money issues are not disability issues as such, they apply to disabled people as much as to other groups. The daft situation arises in which a service will provide advice about the financial support that someone can get to help with child care but is unable to tell them where they can get that child care and is not proactive in asking about it. We need a shift in attitude so that holistic advice is given, which requires the adviser to think about the person's whole situation. That does not necessarily mean that the adviser should answer everything in detail, but they should consider issues and refer them on where appropriate.

Across the board, services could be much better at that. Government services in particular are too ready to assume that they have the advice-giving role and it is satisfactory. Our research suggests that it is not and that there are big holes in the advice that is being given, because services face conflicting objectives and priorities. They are trying to deliver advice, but they lack time and so are unable to do so in a complete or holistic way. Their conflicting priorities are the needs and best interests of individuals, and service-driven targets.

**Sheila Riddell:** One of the aims of bringing together the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service in Jobcentre Plus, which was radical, was that people who gave employment advice could also give benefits advice. In the past, somebody in a Government office who gave advice on employment would not give advice on benefits and vice versa. The intention was to knit those two services together.

One of the difficulties is that the benefits system is immensely complex. For example, the 52-week linking rule means that if someone comes off incapacity benefit and takes a job that does not work out, they should be able to go back on to incapacity benefit within a year without that affecting their status. However, I am not sure that everyone who gives advice fully understands the rules. People who receive the advice are nervous about that. Can you imagine making a decision about your life based on bad advice? You would be completely stuck and in a bad situation.

**The Convener:** That takes me to my next question. Both reports highlighted the training of staff who assist disabled people into employment as crucial to ensuring the success and effectiveness of the service. Indeed, training for staff was part of the research for Sheila Riddell's report, "Transitions to Employment: Advising Disadvantaged Groups", in which she mentions that disability employment advisers are not always adequately trained. Why is that and how should staff training be improved?

**Sheila Riddell:** The professional status of disability employment advisers is an issue. There is no career route and they come from all sorts of backgrounds. There is no training, which is surprising, given the importance of the job and the amount of knowledge and skills that advisers need. In other countries, such as Canada, the US and other parts of Europe, there is much better, more professional training for people who give employment advice. The bodies that work in the area have been pleading for ages for proper training schemes to be put in place, for which there is a strong argument. Of course, that is difficult for Scotland, because I suppose that schemes would have to be UK-wide.

**Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab):** The witnesses have spoken clearly about the need for partnership working and for an holistic approach to all advice provision and service delivery. Are we making a success of partnership working? In my constituency we have opportunity centres, where many different agencies, such as Jobcentre Plus and colleges, work from the same building and give advice. Do such operations work? Are there examples of best practice that we could consider as a model?

**Morag Gillespie:** We need to look at the situation on two different levels—from a national and a local perspective. Local authorities have an important co-ordinating role to play.

I know from my experience and from research that local partnerships must be based on principles that recognise the importance of non-government agencies. Too much partnership working involves only Government and public sector agencies talking to one another and assuming that the voluntary sector will just deliver the goods. In fact, partnership working breaks down if all the partners do not talk to one another.

Big resource issues are involved and that is a thread that runs through our report. If the voluntary sector is to be recognised for its distinctive role and the contribution that it makes to partnerships, it will have to be resourced in a way that recognises its work. The culture has been more that voluntary organisations deliver and less that they take part in partnerships, but that needs to be addressed. For example, mainstream advice services need to be much more involved in welfare-to-work networks; in redundancy support services, with which they are rarely involved; and in employability networks and legal services partnerships, both of which are currently being developed by the Executive. Mainstream advice services need to be involved in those areas because they support people who link in with those services.

There is a lot of scope locally for partnerships to take on a co-ordinating role that improves accessibility, looks at services across the spectrum and is able to plug the gaps, although we do not expect one organisation to plug all the gaps while everyone else talks about it. That is a symptom of what is happening with advice services. The services are complicit in that because they prioritise their direct advice work above everything else, but they need to talk to those other services to address some of their problems.

**Sheila Riddell:** An interesting point here is that much of the support has been privatised for many years. In the 1980s, the Employment Service stopped doing a lot of training and service delivery and the money went to private and voluntary-sector organisations such as Enable and Capability Scotland, which do a huge amount of work in the area.

Voluntary organisations are slightly ambivalent because, on the one hand, they want to be independent of Government and to have a campaigning and pressurising role but, on the other, a huge amount of the money that enables them to deliver their programmes comes from Government. There is a tension there.

Organisations such as Enable and Capability Scotland are always stitching together funds to try to provide a more seamless service for people. Often funds allow them to offer work preparation assessments to people, which take a maximum of 13 weeks, but usually take six weeks. Unless someone is on the brink of going into the labour market, that is very little time. Organisations are not funded to provide aftercare. The personal advisers in Jobcentre Plus do not offer aftercare very often, although it is more in their remit. Such things tend to fall through the cracks when it is not clear which agency is meant to be picking them up.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** Morag Gillespie spoke about local and national perspectives. When you spoke about the national level, did you mean the relationship between the UK and Scottish Government departments? If so, what needs to be improved?

**Morag Gillespie:** That is part of it. Before I address that point, I will comment on a service that is a good model for the improvement of access to services for disadvantaged groups. The lone parent helpline is a well-badged service that targets a group of people who are disadvantaged in a number of areas, including access to services. It does not deliver a detailed, in-depth service but it seems to be effective in giving people initial advice and directing them to suitable local services. That is a useful model for targeting some—although not all—groups of people who do not access support to the extent that we would like. That is an issue for both Scotland and the UK.

On links with the UK, we must ensure that the welfare-to-work networks and forums meet the needs of both sets of organisations. I encourage more dialogue on the benefits of and barriers to work. Sheila Riddell mentioned the complexity of the benefits system, but that is not the only problem that people face in making the transition to work. There is a lack of capacity within the benefits system to support people as they go back into unemployment. Like the training that people get, jobs are often short term. People often face the prospect of returning to unemployment, sometimes because they have finished a temporary job and sometimes because of their health. It would be useful to use research such as that which we have done to engage with those people and consider what could be better and how Government service provision could be more seamless.

There are contradictions between the benefits system and what the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament might want. Higher education is a good example of that. Going into higher education is not feasible for some people—especially disabled people and lone parents—because they will lose their benefits. I am not talking about huge numbers of people or massive changes to the Treasury's costs. Small changes can make a significant difference for disadvantaged groups.

**Sheila Riddell:** I agree. If we are to crack the problem of large numbers of people being on incapacity benefit, we will need to consider the broad issue of the types of work that people can move into. After all, for most of us, there has to be an incentive to get out of bed and go to work. People like us have quite nice jobs and, generally, we like going to work in the morning, but many disabled people who are on incapacity benefit are offered jobs that are at the margins of employment. Those jobs are often hard and insecure—they are not good jobs, basically. That is a huge issue for society to address, but improving life for people in low-paid, insecure jobs is fundamental.

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** You mentioned jobs that are at the margins of employment. I presume that you are also talking about the quality of earnings. Is that a disincentive to disabled people?

**Sheila Riddell:** I think so. If there is not a great difference between being on incapacity benefit and earning a wage by working extremely hard, it is not surprising that many people choose to stay on incapacity benefit. We need to consider the situation of people who earn very little money. It is true that households are better off if people are in work. The statistics show that, by and large, workless households are households in which there is poverty and often children who are living in poverty. As a general rule of thumb, it is better for people to be in work. On the other hand, it is obvious that the reason why people are reluctant to take jobs is that the jobs on offer are not very good. We have to tackle that as well as the disincentives and incentives—the sticks and carrots—if we are to get people into employment, so I hope that the green paper on incapacity benefit will address that aspect as well as the simplification of the benefits system and so on.

10:30

**Gareth Mulvey (Glasgow Caledonian University):** One of the interesting things that we found in our research was the incredible difference between the range of jobs that people had done previously and the jobs that they were doing or were being offered now. On the possibility of progression, which you mentioned, the real problem with some of the programmes that we have come across is that there seems to be an inclination to conduct a bums-on-seats exercise. There is no notion that disabled people might want to progress within an organisation or to a job with better pay, prospects and conditions as much as anybody else would.

**Morag Gillespie:** A point that is worth bearing in mind for the future relates to the question of low wage rates. Sheila Riddell is right that employment is the route out of employment for many, but not all, people. The New Policy Institute says that people in paid work are the fastest growing group of people living in poverty. Although employment is a route out of poverty, people in paid employment are starting to account for a bigger and bigger chunk of people living in poverty. That is an issue to watch.

I suspect that one of the arguments is about the adequacy of the minimum wage. Work, particularly part-time work, is often still not viable for people, even with tax credits and so on in place. Advice is important in helping people to sort out whether work is viable for them. I have to admit that we were kind of partisan in that we wanted to see advice services that told people that they would be in even worse poverty doing a certain job than they would be if they stayed on benefits. The problem is not that people do not put themselves in that situation but that they are being offered work that does not make them any better off. That, rather than the choices that people have made, is the problem.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** Thank you for your answers. When we took evidence about people being job ready, we heard from young people and adults alike about their lack of confidence. Sheila Riddell talked quite a bit about people falling through gaps because there is no overarching support. One of the other interesting pieces of evidence is that people feel that when they get into further education they are on a treadmill and go from one course to another; they want to get into work, but find it hard to get to the job-ready stage. You have partly answered this, but what should we be doing to ensure that people get off the treadmill and on to the ladder?

**Sheila Riddell:** We need to think more creatively about the sort of long-term support that people need. It is one thing to get somebody into a job, but quite another to retain them. The access to work scheme is really good—it gives people the sort of support that they need in many different forms, such as transport to work, a personal assistant at work to help them do certain things and adaptations to the work environment—but the money is capped. There is only a certain amount of money in the pot and when that is spent, that is it.

People cannot get access to work support if they are in supported employment. They have to be in more regular employment to get such support, which could be much more varied; after all, we know that a third of people on incapacity benefit have mental health difficulties. Many such people have intermittent problems and might be okay at one time but not at another. They must have the sort of support that can kick in when it is needed, which means that there must be a lot of flexibility at work and there must be understanding employers.

Employers are another part of the equation that must be considered. We must not simply castigate employers for not doing their bit; rather we must understand what they need and what support will be required to make the whole thing work. We should not rely on people's good will alone. We should give more financial support to employers who take on disabled people. It may be the case that someone is at work only intermittently—of course, that is not the case for many disabled people, but it may be the case for someone who has a mental health difficulty.

**Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab):** We have touched a little on the idea of a Scotland-wide scheme. We heard evidence about inconsistencies in services, and one of the suggestions that the committee has heard is that there could be a centrally funded scheme to support disabled people into employment and to sustain them in that employment. As you said, that sort of scheme could also help people to maintain employment if they acquire a disability or if their impairment or condition worsens. The purpose of such a scheme would be to bring together through permanent funding all the services that are currently provided. What are your views on that?

**Sheila Riddell:** Do you mean a Scotland-wide scheme of employment support?

**Marlyn Glen:** Yes.

**Sheila Riddell:** There are pros and cons to that suggestion. Most voluntary sector organisations in the field would probably say that such a scheme would be a good thing, and the Government wants flexibility so that new ideas can be trialled. The Government looked to New Zealand, for example, for the job-brokerage idea, which was hailed as being something that was going to work really well. Although the scheme has had some modest success, it is probably not the panacea that was envisaged. There is a need for more continuity of funding, but also for flexible funding that can be used to try new ideas.

**Morag Gillespie:** I agree. In researching advice on transitions to work, and in the work that I am currently doing for the Scottish Executive on evaluating money advice services, it has struck me that there is a role for different levels of national provision. There is huge scope for economies of scale with, for example, preparation and development of training, information and so on and—as I said earlier—some basic levels of support in signposting.

It is difficult for people who live in rural areas or dispersed communities to access the range of services that are available to people in urban centres such as Edinburgh, Glasgow or Dundee, who would expect to find the services on their doorstep. That point is important and should not get lost in broader consideration of the issues. The situation is also more difficult for the people who offer services in rural areas, because they have to be much more multi-skilled. Again, I use the example of employability or advice services—people need more expertise if they are to be able to offer that range of support. They need to spend more time and resources on training than is the case for a specialist, but they do not have ease of access to it in terms of time, of location or of resources. Training is a big issue.

Our research found that very few people outside the citizens advice bureau network are able to access the training that Citizens Advice Scotland provides for the CABx. Those resources could be used more cleverly. That is not to suggest that other services should not contribute to funding that training, but some economies of scale are definitely possible.

**Sheila Riddell:** Interestingly enough and almost counter-intuitively, there is a higher employment rate among disabled people in rural areas than in the big urban centres. Although there are fewer support services in rural areas—fewer employment and advice services—a higher proportion of people are in employment and a lower proportion of people are on incapacity benefit. That is partly cultural; people in rural areas are quite good at wheeling and dealing to get little bits of work here and there. That definitely happens in the Highlands and Islands. There is less of that culture in the big urban centres, such as Glasgow.

**Marlyn Glen:** Some useful insights were contained in those replies. I am interested in your analysis of the difference between dispersed and urban communities.

I turn to the transition from school to employment. One of the findings of Sheila Riddell's report is that disabled people are likely to have fewer qualifications, which makes it more difficult for them to compete in the open labour market. How can that situation be addressed?

**Sheila Riddell:** A person who has a serious learning disability is likely to leave school with some qualifications, although obviously their qualifications will not be same as those of somebody who does not have a learning disability. We have always to bear that in mind.

Many people who subsequently move to incapacity benefit do not have severe impairments when they are at school. The largest such group are people with mental health and musculo-skeletal problems, such as bad backs and other signs of stress. They are much more likely to have experienced disability as a result of stresses in their environment: that is social disadvantage manifesting as disability.

People need different sorts of support. In very disadvantaged social environments people need support first in getting qualifications, which has to do with education policy. In Scotland, we have a big problem with people leaving school with few or no qualifications as a result of social disadvantage. They form the not in education, employment or training—NEET—group and the needs of that group must be tackled. There is a target for moving the bottom 20 per cent closer to the average. Unfortunately, in Scotland we have not done that yet; we have made little progress in that area.

If they are given support, there is absolutely no reason why people with significant impairments—physical disabilities or sensory impairments—should not get exactly the same high-level jobs as anybody else. If they have no intellectual disability, there is no reason why those people should not do very well. We have been making good progress in those groups. For example, there is much better support in further education colleges and universities now for disabled students. People get disabled students allowance in universities, and there is an increasing proportion of disabled students in higher education.

It is important that we consider what is going well as well as what is going badly, otherwise we will get very depressed. We need to examine more closely what happens to disabled graduates in the labour market, because very little work has been done on that. We might find positive things happening that demonstrate that there is no reason why a disabled person cannot do as well as a non-disabled person if the support is there.

The really big difference that we can make is to people who are disabled as a result of social disadvantage; there are many initiatives in the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive that are trying to tackle that problem. It is a difficult problem; if it were not, it would have been resolved already. That is where we can make a difference.

**Morag Gillespie:** We were aware when we were doing our research that Careers Scotland is trying to work towards holistic advice and support. It is one of the few organisations that we came across that provides staff training on access to service needs as well as training on particular impairments. It has considered access to service needs, and has not looked at disability just as a factor in claiming benefits, which is a big focus in advice services. Careers Scotland's service is not in-depth with regard to people's rights, so I would encourage it to engage more with advice services and networks. Careers Scotland should have the confidence to work in collaboration with advice services to support its move towards providing more holistic advice.

There is, however, a caveat: if Careers Scotland is going to refer more people to experts—which is what it wants to do—the experts must have the resources to field the expert advice that the services want. The difference in resources between Government services and non-Government services is enormous. One cannot constantly refer people to experts who do not have time to lift their heads even to talk to the services. Advice services are prioritised by not advertising and by keeping their heads down and hoping that nothing new lands on their laps. That needs to change. If those kinds of changes are to happen and referrals made to more experts through that chain, the experts need to be able to deal with people when they land at their door.

10.45

**Marlyn Glen:** That is a useful but worrying picture.

Evidence at our consultation events suggested that there should be a seamless transition between school and college and university and employment. How can that be achieved?

**Sheila Riddell:** There are huge gaps for certain groups. There is very little in the way of services for people with significant learning disabilities, such as autistic spectrum disorder. Although parents campaign for pilot schemes and schools put a lot of energy into educating young people, there is a gaping chasm and that simply does not make sense. In the olden days, people used sometimes to go straight from school to a day centre, and that was it for life. It was a depressing prospect that did not make sense, especially after so much had been invested in their education. Parents are saying that they want better services for their young people, which they are partly developing themselves with support from the agencies. As I said, there is not a seamless transition for the NEET group, which is often very socially disadvantaged.

**Morag Gillespie:** Support for people who are going through further and higher education should be looked at from a mainstreaming perspective. That will improve the core schemes rather than add on bits that will work for a particular group—additional support for lone parents being a good case in point. However, if we consider a mainstreaming approach, we must ask how much the core system supports different groups. If it does not support them, then perhaps we should change the core system rather than try to paper over the cracks with changes here and there. I know that that cannot be done easily or quickly, but more people will be supported better through the system in the long term if the core system is as embracing as possible.

**John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP):** From evidence, we have heard that more work needs to be done to engage with employers in employing disabled people. Employers have told us that they would like more information on how to support disabled employees. That information ranges from benefits advice to how to make reasonable adjustments. How should agencies and services engage with employers? Is the current support that is available to employers adequate? Further to that, is additional provision available for assistance to ethnic minority disabled people?

**Sheila Riddell:** Employers do not get a great deal of support. The best schemes work when employers work closely with Jobcentre Plus or a delivery agency. For example, we have found that when people go out on placement, through work preparation or whatever, the employer often does not know who they are or what scheme they are on. The transfer of information about the person is often not very good. Employers therefore need to be better informed about what is happening and what their role is. Sometimes employers receive an incentive to put a disabled person on placement schemes and sometimes they do not.

Pretty much everybody agrees that we need to work much more with employers. That can be done by appealing to their good nature and by offering incentives—not necessarily financial—such as advice and support on how to make reasonable adjustments and how to ensure that they are compliant with legislation and so on. I do not think that anyone has come up with the perfect solution or, indeed, has said where the money will come from.

**Morag Gillespie:** This may sound cheeky, but without clear and robust legislation that puts people in much less doubt about their obligations and rights, there is huge scope to address discrimination by raising awareness through training and other measures.

It was not the first time that we had come across the issue but, during our research, discrimination was identified as a barrier to employment by a significant number of people, and more often by people who were in work than by people who were still in the transition period that leads to work. The issue is not just that discrimination is perceived as a barrier; it is that so many people in employment identify it as a barrier for them. We came across that in two different research projects. Discrimination is real—it is not just in people's heads.

I would encourage a shift in the perspective of employers, who should consider not what their obligations are, but what help they can get to employ the best people, who might often be disabled people. That would be a good change in attitude.

Jobcentre Plus and Careers Scotland have loads of links with employers and seem to be perfectly placed to take a more proactive role in positively promoting the legislation and the employment of disabled people in a way that would meet their ends and help them to reach their targets. If that were successful, there would be winners all round. That role could be taken on more proactively by Jobcentre Plus, Careers Scotland and, more widely, by Scottish Enterprise.

**Sheila Riddell:** There are different situations and contexts to consider. It is easier for big employers to run with this, because they have more resources. However, a high proportion of people in Scotland work in small to medium-sized enterprises, and it is sometimes difficult for an employer to know what they should do and how to get help to do it. We must remember that one of the central planks of discrimination against disabled people is the failure to make reasonable adjustments. Often, a disabled person is not aware that they have the right to ask for a reasonable adjustment to be made or that help is available for that, such as the access to work scheme paying for an adjustment, although in such cases the employer would also be expected—under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995—to pay a proportion of the cost.

There needs to be greater awareness of the DDA among employers and employees. The new public sector duty, which will be introduced in 2007, should also have a big impact, as people in the public sector will have to demonstrate actively that they are making progress in the areas that we are discussing. Just as they must already demonstrate that they are making progress on race issues, under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, they will from 2007 have to demonstrate that they are making progress on disability issues.

**John Swinburne:** Has there been a better response from the public sector than from the private sector in employing disabled people?

**Sheila Riddell:** It is interesting that more cases are brought under the DDA against public sector employers. The reason for that is probably that everybody is more aware of the issue in the public sector than they are in the private sector. The main distinction is between large and small firms. The public sector is making reasonable progress, at least in certain areas.

Of course, some disabilities are seen as being more readily accommodated than others. For example, if it is necessary to make a physical adaptation to a building or to alter the height of a desk, people are happy to do that as long as the money is available for that. When the issue concerns somebody with mental health difficulties who turns up to work irregularly, however, that is seen as more of a problem.

**Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab):** Sheila Riddell talked about endless employability training. She said that people want to get into paid employment but not to join the ranks of the working poor. I want to explore that idea a wee bit further in the context of voluntary work.

The committee recognises the value of voluntary work and would not want to diminish it. People participate in voluntary work for many different reasons. We have heard from some disabled people that they are often offered only voluntary work, although they want to progress into the open labour market. On employability, we accept that voluntary work can play an important role in getting people job ready before they throw themselves into the open employment market. What could be done to enhance voluntary work for disabled people to assist them into paid employment?

**Sheila Riddell:** Voluntary work offers people many opportunities to develop all sorts of social and work-related skills. However, your point that people do not want to get stuck in voluntary work is absolutely right. For some people, supported employment is important because it involves being paid for a job while receiving support and possibly working hours that suit them, which might not be an enormous amount of time. Supported employment can be the bridge for people, but we must also consider more closely the skills that people obtain in voluntary work. We must help people to use those skills and to develop them so that they do not get stuck.

**Elaine Smith:** That leads to my next question, which is about specific impairments. All of us would like to do certain jobs but would not apply for others. The committee heard in evidence that there is a perception—and probably evidence—that people with certain impairments can find work more easily than people with other impairments can or—to turn that around—some people find it much harder to get a job. According to the National Autistic Society's submission, 6 per cent of people with autistic spectrum disorder are in full-time paid employment, compared to the national figure for disabled people of 49 per cent. The situation may be different in Scotland—you mentioned that the overall figure in Scotland was 40 per cent, so perhaps the figure for people with ASD is lower than 6 per cent. The figures are worrying. Does the perception that people with certain impairments can find work more easily have a foundation? Will you comment further on that?

**Sheila Riddell:** There are two aspects to that: the situation is partly to do with prejudice and with employers assuming that some people will not be able to work. That said, we should not ignore the barriers that some people face as a result of impairments. Measures can be taken to overcome the majority of impairments, although some are more expensive than others; for example, a deaf person might need a sign language interpreter at work, who would have to be paid and funds might be available for that through the access to work scheme. A person with autistic spectrum disorder might find many jobs too challenging, but people who are enthusiastic about supported employment say that there is barely a single person who cannot do some work given the appropriate support. We need to be more creative; we should not go for the easy option of saying that a person is too disabled to work. Such ideas are being challenged, particularly in supported employment.

**Elaine Smith:** Your report mentions the debate about whether assistance for disabled people should be mainstreamed or impairment specific. Will you comment further on the issues and how they should be resolved?

**Sheila Riddell:** The first issue with impairment-specific schemes is how they are broken down. The nature of a person's impairment does not necessarily dictate the support that they need. For example, a person might have more than one impairment; they might have a physical disability and a mental health impairment. If they receive support as a physically disabled person, where will the support for their mental health difficulties come from? It would be bad if we had only impairment-specific schemes, because that would mean that people could not access mainstream schemes, which would be a real pity. On the other hand, some advisers do not know a great deal about certain impairments and do not know what support people will receive. My feeling is that a range of provision is probably required, but that there is a danger in automatically channelling disabled people into a scheme for people who have the same impairment rather than into a mainstream programme, where they might do better.

11:00

**Elaine Smith:** Does that come back to training? In its submission, the National Autistic Society said that 75 per cent of Jobcentre Plus disability employment advisers whom it surveyed agreed that they would like training about ASD. That is concerning—does that mean that they do not receive training? Obviously, you cannot answer that.

**Sheila Riddell:** They would probably like training about quite a lot of things. It has been found that personal advisers and DEAs often feel that they do not have the specialist knowledge and skills that they need in relation to particular impairments. We should deliver that. As I have said, much better professional development in such matters is needed and is sadly lacking.

**Elaine Smith:** I put my question to Sheila Riddell, but Morag Gillespie or Gareth Mulvey can respond.

**Morag Gillespie:** I return to our research, most of which was from the perspective of service users—their experience of using advice and other support services, what they valued and what they had a problem with. It is interesting and consistent with research that has been done on the pathways to work programmes that service users valued services that understood their needs and focused on the soft skills. Service users might take it as read that they will receive high-quality, accurate advice—advice workers rated that highest—but they valued the soft skills and relationships of trust and confidence. That is why a mismatch arose: the people whom service users went to for detailed representation were not necessarily the best people to provide it, but they were the trusted intermediaries.

As with employability services, for example, there must be a bit of a continuum and a mix. I am not convinced that the one-stop-shop approach can meet everyone's needs in all circumstances, particularly when such facilities are located in local authorities, because they do not provide advice on the full range of issues. Some of the restrictions in local authorities are self-imposed. They do not provide advice on the range of issues that the voluntary sector, which is independent, can cover. Such facilities have a perfectly legitimate place, but they cannot deliver everything.

We are actively considering what in money advice services can be mainstreamed and whether anything cannot be mainstreamed. I advocate mainstreaming, but I wonder whether there is a place in the continuum of services for a level of support that moves beyond what might be seen as the standard advisory role. That might apply in the case of learning disabilities. However, one can meet that need only in localities with big populations. That need can be met in places such as Edinburgh and Glasgow, but how is it met in Achiltibuie or Lerwick, where the resources to do that are not available? Advice services, employability support services and whatever other services support people with learning disabilities, for example, still need to work together to produce a seamless service. In whole areas, there is no substitute.

**Elaine Smith:** I presume that services have a role after employment is found. If it is known that somebody is sometimes late, perhaps that can be coped with better and work can be fitted around it. Sheila Riddell mentioned that. However, if the employer does not know about such a problem and the issues are not understood, that person might face disciplinary procedures and be sacked. Is that a problem?

**Sheila Riddell:** That is an issue. Jobcentre Plus now has much more of a focus on job retention and working with employers to think about how to retain people in work, because we know that once somebody goes on long-term sick leave, the chances are that they will not return to the labour market or that to do so will become much more difficult.

**Elaine Smith:** I will talk briefly about benefits. They are reserved, but we need to have a bit of discussion about them, because we have heard much evidence about them. The committee has heard that they could be a major barrier to access to work for disabled people. If you could make any recommendations to the UK Government about the benefits trap, what would they be?

**The Convener:** The witnesses have two minutes to answer.

**Sheila Riddell:** I hope that that is going to be considered in the context of the new green paper that will be produced some weeks or months down the line. Efforts have been made to remove some of the barriers and to put into the benefits system some incentives, such as the 52-week linking rule. However, it would seem that that has not really worked so far. The benefits system is fantastically complicated and it is ironic that people who have the greatest difficulties in life have to cope with the most complicated bureaucratic system that would defeat anybody.

Of course, as soon as anyone proposes any changes to the benefits system, people start to get a bit wary because the assumption always is that things are going to get worse rather than better. That means that the existing system has a lot of defenders. However, people who use the system definitely want greater simplicity. Also, it is important to think about how the working tax credit and other aspects of the benefits system fit together because a lot of disabled people are missing out on such tax credits for technical reasons.

**Morag Gillespie:** In 2003, Westminster's Work and Pensions Committee said that, although the benefits system is complex, it becomes a bit simplistic in relation to the binary split between incapacity and ability to work. That is a core problem that must be addressed more flexibly. One person's flexibility is another person's complexity. However, until that issue is addressed, the benefits system will remain a huge barrier to work. The system of disability benefits, the disability living allowance and tax credits for disabled people must become easier to understand. People have to be able to understand why their benefits change or stop.

In the last advice service that I managed, three quarters of the tribunal work related specifically to disability living allowance claims, and we won more than half of the cases. As far as I know, the situation has not improved in the couple of years since I left that service. There is something wrong with a benefits system that results in our investing huge amounts of time—literally two or three staff units a year in quite a big organisation—in tribunals that make the benefits system work for the people it was intended to help.

A huge amount of resources is being expended in that way. Those resources come not from the Department for Work and Pensions but from other public services that fund advice services to sit for days on end in tribunals, representing one person after another in cases that involve attempts to keep benefits or get them back. There needs to be a bit of flexibility in order to create a culture that is about not just avoiding payment but making it possible for people to move in and out of work.

**Sheila Riddell:** One of the issues about incapacity benefit compared with jobseekers allowance is that there are more incentives for people to be on incapacity benefit than there are for people to be on jobseekers allowance. Not only do you get a little bit more money but you do not get pestered so much to get work—at least, that is people's impression. I am sure that the green paper will consider that issue.

The thinking has moved on. In the past, when someone went on to incapacity benefit, they were deemed to be permanently incapable of work. Of course, that is the case for some disabled people, but they would be a teeny proportion of the group. Now, the thinking is to look much more at what people can do—and the support that they need to do that—rather than what they absolutely cannot do. The systems have not caught up with that thinking yet.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** We have talked about helping people to get into work and a bit about progression. Once a disabled person has secured employment, what assistance could and should be given to them if they want to advance their career?

**Sheila Riddell:** Employers obviously need to be in dialogue with their employees, especially if they know that they are disabled. For example, they must ask about any adjustments that the employee might need, not just to do their job, but to be able to progress in it. There is sometimes a tendency to think that a disabled person should be grateful to have a job and therefore should not be demanding or asking, "What next?" That point was made earlier.

There is a need to take such matters much more seriously. Some disabled people who do fairly high-level jobs are excellent role models and set a good example to other people. Public perception and thinking have moved on, but we still have a way to go. Again, the extension of disability legislation should be helpful.

**John Swinburne:** Disabled people have identified a lack of information on employment, benefits, child care and disability discrimination legislation as a barrier to getting work. In general, people think that such information exists, but they are not sure how to get it. What should be done to co-ordinate information provision among service providers? You have mentioned one-stop shops. Do you have any examples of good information provision that the committee could consider?

**Morag Gillespie:** The models that I am aware of do not relate specifically to information on disability. It is necessary not just to produce information, but to use many different routes to put it out. The provision of well-written information that is easily accessible can allow good economies of scale to be made. There are examples of that. The one that I know best relates to lone parents, who can easily access a great deal of simple information.

There is also much good practice on the delivery of information in alternative formats. The specialist services are much better than the mainstream services at providing easy-to-read information for people who have learning disabilities; they deliver advice in a much more detailed way, which takes much longer. Someone who wants money advice might need two days of support, but someone in the same position who has a learning disability might need two weeks of support to get the same amount of advice and support. Such issues must be recognised.

There are many good examples of different approaches to getting information over to people, but we cannot rely entirely on new technology—we cannot assume that people will be able to access good material on the internet, because people do not know their rights and do not know where to start looking. We have found that people tend to fall back on organisations in the phone book that have "disability rights" or something similar in their title. Organisations need to be well named so that people can contact them. People often happen upon their rights; they do not set out to exercise them systematically. We must acknowledge that this country does not have a big culture of people knowing and exercising their rights. The situation can be improved.

**Sheila Riddell:** That is right; Anne Marshall will say more about that later. A great deal of work has been done with occupational health services at work. It is important that small and medium-sized enterprises have external occupational health services that they can draw on, whereby not just employers, but employees can be given advice.

General practitioners are a vital source of information and advice. In the past, GPs just looked at people's throats, for example, and told them whether they needed some time off work. The idea that GPs should give people advice about support or point them in the direction of where they could get it is relatively new. It is now recognised that doctors are important people who should not just be signing people off work, but should be helping them to think about how they can stay in work. I am sure that Anne Marshall will say more about that.

**The Convener:** One of the barriers that disabled people identified at our consultation event was people's attitude to them, and we have commissioned research into disability equality training. What do you think can be done to combat some of the negative or ill-informed attitudes that some people have to disabled people, particularly as workers?

11:15

**Sheila Riddell:** There are different attitudes to different impairments. There is probably a lot of sympathy for the so-called plucky wheelchair user who is getting on and doing their job, but there is less sympathy for those with certain types of impairment that people might find a little bit frightening. It is well known that there is still a lot of stigma around mental health, and I know that the Scottish Executive Health Department has been trying to raise awareness, through the see me Scotland campaign, of the need for much greater understanding of mental health difficulties, which affect lots of us—they do not affect just some other group of people. We need to be aware that there are different attitudes and that some positive stuff is happening, but there is still a need for big improvements.

**Morag Gillespie:** That is an area in which volunteering can help. Advice services in the voluntary sector use volunteers a lot; I had a lot of experience of that in the past when I worked in advice services. It was interesting to see how much a volunteer could bring to the organisation. As well as gaining skills and experience from the organisation, many people brought a lot to the organisations for which they volunteered. That enabled people to learn a lot more. A lot of people's concerns are driven by ignorance, and volunteering can be a good way of helping people to learn and of improving their understanding, but there is a long way to go to reduce people's misconceptions.

Once people are in work, they have much more set views, and that needs to be addressed at every level. Kids are bullied at school because of the way they look or because of a specific problem that they have. The message must be reinforced at every point in the process, because people's minds are set by the time they are 35 or 40 and their attitudes are much harder to shift.

**The Convener:** We have covered a lot of questions about access to work for disabled people, and members of the panel have great experience in that area. Can you each tell us just one thing that you think we should include in our report that would make life better for disabled folk?

**Sheila Riddell:** Linking up the economic regeneration and social inclusion agenda with the equalities for disabled people agenda is quite a challenge. That is happening, but it needs to happen more.

**Morag Gillespie:** Services should talk to one another and deal with the whole person and the whole person's needs, rather than just think about what they want to deliver to a person.

**Gareth Mulvey:** My comment is linked to what Sheila Riddell was saying, possibly with less of a focus on individual barriers and problems—going back to the social model versus the medical model of disability—and with more focus on how society disables people.

**The Convener:** Thank you for your answers, which will be helpful for our report.

11:19

*Meeting suspended.*

11:23

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** I welcome our new panel of witnesses: Liz Galashan from Careers Scotland in the Highlands and Islands Enterprise area; Julie-Anne Jamieson from Careers Scotland in the Scottish Enterprise area; Anne MacDonald from Highlands and Islands Enterprise; Anne Marshall and John Reid from Jobcentre Plus; and Scott Skinner from Scottish Enterprise.

Thank you all for coming. You have sat through the previous session, so you will be aware that we have lots of questions and are looking for lots of advice. As the panel is quite big, please indicate if you want to speak, so that you all get an opportunity to answer questions.

From the evidence that we have heard, there seems to be a variety of providers to advise and assist disabled people into employment. We heard from our previous witnesses that there are inconsistencies in the nature and success of those services. Do you think that that assessment is an accurate reflection of the current service provision?

**Liz Galashan (Careers Scotland):** Yes, I think that it probably is. However, we should be careful what we wish for. Do we want consistency? What is it that we want to be consistent? Perhaps we genuinely want to take a consistent and person-centred approach to assessment and to treat people as individuals, but we should acknowledge that there are different ways of achieving good outcomes.

**Julie-Anne Jamieson (Careers Scotland):** There is inconsistency. A lot depends on the part of the country in which a person lives. Reference was made earlier to areas of high population such as Edinburgh, Glasgow or Aberdeen, where there tend to be many advice agencies—a lot of the national voluntary organisations are based in those areas—and where a lot of good advice is available. However, the problems might be greater in rural areas where there might not be the same level of infrastructure or access to information.

Many agencies have been concerned for some time about effective communication of information and effective assessment, as Liz Galashan mentioned. As I am sure the committee will be aware, it was a constant theme in the work of the Beattie committee, among others.

Careers Scotland has been working with statutory agencies and voluntary organisations to try to improve information sharing. We have published a framework that sets out good practice and shows how we can work together more effectively. We have made improvements, but there is still a long way to go.

**Scott Skinner (Scottish Enterprise):** I agree with the rest of the panel about inconsistency. It is vital that we should have more joined-up working and partnership working. To go back to what Sheila Riddell was saying, I agree that the public sector duty on disability will have a phenomenal effect on the delivery of public services for disabled people in Scotland. The onus is on us all to make sure that partnership working is effective. If we do that properly, the level of inconsistency will start to decline.

**The Convener:** Do you see that partnership between organisations in the statutory sector only or between the statutory sector and the voluntary sector? What kind of preparation would you want to put in place to ensure that the voluntary sector is an equal partner?

**Scott Skinner:** It is absolutely vital to bring in the voluntary sector, which provides superb services throughout Scotland—it would be remiss of statutory bodies if they did not work closely with voluntary bodies. The public sector duty puts the focus on partners that are delivering public services for disabled people. The duty of statutory bodies also transfers to the voluntary sector, which is why the issue is important.

**Anne MacDonald (Highlands and Islands Enterprise):** I agree that there is inconsistency in services, particularly in the rural area covered by Highlands and Islands Enterprise. There are examples of good practice where organisations in the rural areas have been proactive on the whole agenda, such as the disability forum in Orkney, which came about through public sector forums. Also, in our area we have started the Highlands and Islands equality forum, a partnership between the voluntary sector and statutory bodies that addresses all areas of equality, but particularly focuses on giving advice on disability.

**The Convener:** You have some good examples.

**Anne MacDonald:** Yes.

**The Convener:** We want good examples from the rest of the panel as well. The committee is concerned about the differing natures of the services that are provided, the possibility of duplication of provision and the impact that that might have on resources. For example, there are schemes that might be competing for the same staff and resources, which, of course, means that there will be duplication of services to the folk who are meant to benefit from them. Is there duplication of services and competition between them?

11:30

**Anne Marshall (Jobcentre Plus):** In your first question, you mentioned inconsistencies between services, but there is also concern about the complexity of services in some areas, which is confusing both for the people who deliver them and for the people whom the services are supposed to help. In a recent study, the Glasgow welfare to work forum did a stocktake of the services that are available; the results were astounding. There is a lot of duplication and a lot of parallel provision. It is not that one service is better than another, but there is an awful lot out there.

Part of the way forward for the Scottish Executive, the enterprise organisations and Jobcentre Plus is to consider what kind of stocktake we need to do. Do we know what is out there? How can we best pool resources to offer a more streamlined and more effective service throughout the country? That process began even before the employability framework was in development. A planning group consisting of Communities Scotland, the enterprise organisations, the Scottish Executive, the national health service and others sat down and said, “What are our priorities for the next while?” The amount of common themes that came through was surprising. The group also considered the budgets that we bring to the table, the way in which we deploy them and whether that is the best way forward. That debate has begun and we are trying to ensure that what is out there is what is required.

Jobcentre Plus has had to reflect on and change a lot of what we do. Traditionally, our services were geared to people on jobseekers allowance, but now those people form only a small part of our customer group. For example, in September about 83,000 people in Scotland were claiming jobseekers allowance, whereas more than 326,000 were claiming incapacity benefit. We have had to change a benefits-oriented service that was geared in one direction and encompass, as Sheila Riddell said, a huge group of people who cannot be put into boxes. We need to be much more flexible in how we deliver services.

A lot of activity is taking place at the moment. We have delivered service-level agreements and statements of arrangements with the enterprise organisations and Careers Scotland and we are working in partnership much more, not just at a strategic level but locally, to change behaviours. That might include piloting things such as joint training with the careers service or joint marketing to enable employers to make more sense of what we are trying to do. A lot of work is being done on that front.

**The Convener:** You are wondering what is out there, but it must be even more confusing for a disabled person who is looking for work.

**Anne Marshall:** Absolutely. That came through in the work that has been done in Glasgow—and in Fife and other areas—to map provision. Services have different names and are provided by different providers even though they are basically the same thing. There is a lot of confusion around, particularly for the long-term unemployed. There is a concern that services are not as progressive as they could be, even though everyone is doing good work. How do we streamline services and identify what is needed and who pays for it?

**The Convener:** On that point, we heard that there is a fair amount of money around but that it is probably not appropriately directed to deliver what needs to be delivered. Are we getting value for money? Is the money that is available to get people into work being targeted properly or does the lack of co-ordination between agencies mean that the good work that is done in some areas is not done everywhere? Perhaps resources could be better targeted and better used.

**Anne Marshall:** The DWP evaluates all the programmes that Jobcentre Plus delivers, but given the changing nature of our customers, questions have been asked about the provision that is required. When my colleague John Reid speaks later about the pathways to work programme, he will talk about how we have changed and the way in which we use resources.

When the key organisations and agencies in Scotland, including Jobcentre Plus, sat down together, we shared information about budgets and the way in which they are used, but we still need to debate how we can make things work better for everybody, given that there are a lot of common issues on the key agendas.

**The Convener:** I would be interested to hear other agencies' views on resources and how they are used.

**Scott Skinner**: I guess that a hobby-horse of mine is that public sector organisations do not communicate as much as they should, not just on disability, but on equality issues generally. The Scottish Executive's equality unit is looking into that to try to ensure that public sector organisations share more information. However, you are absolutely right: service providers as well as disabled people will get very confused if we do not know what is going on outwith our own areas.

**Liz Galashan:** I want to take a step back to the previous question. We work across the Highlands and Islands and often there is no marketplace—quite the opposite. We are considering how we can ensure that there is a range of services across the geographies where we work. We sometimes carry out support work at what is almost an amateur level. We work very much at a community level and the question is how we can support the unofficial systems that are out there. That is why we work so strongly with the voluntary sector. We are often simply not visible to the public sector partners across the Highlands and Islands, so our networking at the voluntary sector level is very important.

The key partners with which we work, including local government services such as social work and housing, are not traditional employability services, which means that we do not always have a shared sense of purpose about what we are trying to achieve for people. That goes back to what I first said, which is that, if we could agree what we need to assess in terms of the person, that would be our shared responsibility. However, I emphasise that sometimes the services are just not available. The issue is not about people falling over themselves about best value; it is what we can do with the enterprise networks and other partners to build capacity where there is very little just now. That might not be done through traditional public sector means.

**Julie-Anne Jamieson:** I want to go back to the point about competition for resources and the question whether resources are perhaps not being used effectively. Recent preparatory work on the employability framework included a mapping exercise, which considered the complexities involved in the provision of support services for young people in a couple of areas in Scotland who are NEET. What came out strongly from the consultation that was done as part of that work, particularly from the voluntary sector, was that organisations were constantly chasing short-term resources but that lessons from that were not being adequately learned and inputted into mainstream services. There is a kind of revolving-door syndrome, which involves people chasing resources but not learning from the process.

However, there are good examples of agencies collectively trying to address that issue. For example, the equal access strategy in Glasgow, which the health and social work departments are leading, seeks to involve a range of organisations—Scottish Enterprise Glasgow, Jobcentre Plus and Careers Scotland, as well as, most notably, the voluntary sector—to consider how service provision can be improved. There are ways round the problem if we think a little bit more creatively. We can also learn from good practice in projects that are perhaps small scale and consider how to mainstream that good practice to ensure that we are not constantly reinventing things.

**Mr McGrigor:** We heard about the duplication of services, which by its nature must be expensive. Are you suggesting that that situation should be reviewed and that more funding should go to the voluntary sector and what you call the unofficial services?

**Julie-Anne Jamieson:** That depends on what is being duplicated. There are statutory organisations that have clear remits to work with individuals and provide different types of support. There are also a number of voluntary organisations that can support that process—some have a specific remit to work with individuals with a particular disability, while others have more wide-ranging remits.

We could do more to examine how we rationalise the process to ensure that there is not only a more consistent approach to information but a recognition that some specialist expertise is needed and that the voluntary organisations that provide such expertise are vital, particularly to the work of statutory organisations such as Scottish Enterprise. After all, we do not necessarily have specialist knowledge of or expertise in a range of areas—we have to work in partnership with other organisations in that respect. My plea is that we go back to better partnership working, particularly between the voluntary and statutory sectors, and examine how resources are used to facilitate that process.

**John Reid (Jobcentre Plus):** There is room for statutory, local and voluntary organisations. Indeed, I think that there is a tremendous opportunity for some of the work to be carried out as part of the community planning process, as happened when I worked in West Dunbartonshire. Given that the full range of statutory and voluntary bodies is not represented at the table, community planning offers an opportunity to discuss rationalisation and ensure that we are not duplicating services or wasting resources.

**The Convener:** I should point out that the suggestion that services are being duplicated or resources wasted is based on evidence that we received from someone involved in delivery, not from the voluntary sector.

**Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP):** I am interested in Liz Galashan's point about whether there is agreement over what we are trying to achieve. In the evidence that we have taken, disabled people have stressed that a person-centred approach should be taken and have told us that they want to be treated as individuals, not as statistics in an outcome-based approach. To what extent do the services that we provide help disabled people as individuals to prepare for work and to find and keep a job?

**Liz Galashan:** I can respond only in terms of the services that I am directly involved with, including the services that are contracted to service providers and over which we have some management control. I am confident that, over the past three and a half years, we in the Highlands and Islands have developed a person-centred approach that helps the individual to discover what they need to move towards employability. Of course, what they need might not necessarily be what they think they need or even what they say they want. We take the person through a process of discovery to allow them to have some self-determination over their choices.

As you might imagine, Careers Scotland is a small and scarce resource in the Highlands and Islands, so we are very particular about the contracting arrangements for our delivery agents. However, after we go through the contracting process with them, we trust them to respond quickly and responsibly and try not to tie them up too much with financial expenditure rules—if I can say that.

As a result of the need to try things out, we have taken quite a developmental approach—after all, not having the force of numbers focuses the mind. Even though labels can be used, we still have to carry out an holistic assessment. We must take account not just of an individual's medical issues, but of social issues such as the support networks that they might have—which brings us back to the informal aspects that I mentioned earlier—opportunities for learning as a step towards employment and so on.

I am confident that, where we have been involved, we have been very clear about what we mean by a person-centred approach. That is all that I can say. Perhaps we should consider whether we have a Scottish view of such an approach and think about introducing a set of rules, including financial expenditure rules, that would give some decision-making powers to the organisations that we think are professional enough to contract with and allow them to respond quickly to agreed needs.

11:45

**Scott Skinner:** With the best will in the world, public sector organisations cannot even begin to understand many of the employability issues that disabled people face. That is why consultation with disabled people is vital. One of the main tenets in the public sector duty is the requirement to go to consultation on any services that we provide to disabled people. That allows us to focus and target our services to individual needs and to get feedback. We cannot have a broadbrush approach.

An example of what I am talking about is the disabled entrepreneurs conference, which we held as part of the European year of disabled people in 2003. As that was a new area for Scottish Enterprise, we thought that we had better take specialist advice and set up a disabled advisory group. I will give a simple example of the kind of issues that we addressed. The group advised us to set time aside for exercising guide dogs, which is something that we would never have thought of. On the day, 10 guide dogs turned up and we had built in time for exercising them. If we had not had the advisory group in place, we would not have been meeting the needs of blind people. We regard consultation as vital.

**Julie-Anne Jamieson:** I want to follow up on some of Liz Galashan's points and talk about the work that Careers Scotland is doing in the Scottish Enterprise area. We developed an operating model, which shows how we operate as an organisation. At the heart of the model is the individual: we look at their assessed needs, what sort of service is appropriate and what sort of career planning or additional support they might require.

It is important that we look at not just what support the disabled person requires, but that person's strengths and achievements. It is important to see the person in the round and not just to focus on the negative—we must look at what people can do. That is at the heart of our process. We are trying to structure our services around the assessed needs of the individual, looking at the person rather than the disability. A person's disability may be just one facet or barrier that needs to be considered in their transition to further or higher education or into employment.

**Anne Marshall:** I mentioned earlier the changes that Jobcentre Plus has been going through. In some areas, we still have social security offices and job centres, but by the end of April next year we expect all Jobcentre Plus offices to be fully rolled out, as they say. The emphasis is on services through a personal adviser network. Much of the processing work and things that went on in the old job centre and social security network will be done elsewhere, so that the focus of those working in the job centres will be exactly as Frances Curran said: delivering a very personal service to their customers.

The committee is probably aware that we have significant job cuts on the way—indeed, we are experiencing them at the moment. Part of how we preserve our service to our customers is by doing things differently. For example, we will suggest to those who can find work for themselves or who are changing jobs that they use other media to get help and advice—they can use our helplines and phone numbers and they can help themselves through job points. However, the main focus will be on customers. Disabled customers and customers on incapacity benefit are a key group for us.

As part of the personal adviser service, we need to call on expert support. We have a range of contracts across Scotland, many of which are with the voluntary sector. The voluntary sector has niche specialisms. Autism was mentioned earlier; we have a contract with Prospects to advise our staff and help us to provide support for people with Asperger's syndrome who are going into employment.

We have disability employment advisers and incapacity benefit personal advisers, who are a new breed of person in Jobcentre Plus. We have enhanced the training of all our staff. In the past, perhaps our staff did not see helping disabled people into employment as a particular role; they may not have thought that they needed to know much about the impact of disability on employment or on the individual. A great deal more effort has gone into training at our end to provide a personal adviser service. That is our aim. We would like to spend more time with people rather than processing them in and out.

Essentially, we will be moving to an appointments system. When people come in, they will expect to have someone there to see them; they will expect that person to have the time and resources to do so. People will be able to call on expert help, which might come through the work psychologists, our contracts, the new deal for disabled people, brokers or access to work. We hope that that will improve the situation.

Where there are personal advisers in post, customers tell us that they like that system. They like seeing the same person and not having to tell yet another person their life history. They want to move on when they come in for a discussion and they want to talk to someone with some understanding. We recognised that we needed to do something in that regard and we believe that we are moving in the right direction.

**John Reid:** I want to build on Anne Marshall's point about experts and talk about the issues around pathways to work. It has been decided that the NHS will deliver the condition management element of the service so that personal advisers have access to condition management at all times. On the point about people having to tell their life history, condition management practitioners and personal advisers often work jointly with the individual, so that they do not need to go over the same information twice. We are attempting to ensure that the personal advisers are experts in their fields. When it comes to the health conditions, we make use of the resources that are available.

**Frances Curran:** My next question is about the concept of people being work ready. We understand from much of the evidence that we have taken that the aim is to assist disabled people into work at a stage prior to their being job ready. However, many participants at our consultation events said that they lacked the confidence to apply for work. The committee has noted that, in many work preparation schemes, the standard time available is not usually sufficient and that people are often not job ready when they complete their scheme. In your opinion, is the current system working? Do you think that anything more can be done? The issue is important because it is linked to statistics and outcomes, which are in turn linked to funding.

**John Reid:** I can answer that in relation to pathways to work, although perhaps not in relation to other aspects. The pathways to work programme is not aimed at job-ready individuals. One of the tools that the adviser uses screens out individuals who could find work for themselves. That leaves those individuals who are further from the labour market. The advisers and the NHS staff have time to deliver a tailored service over a period of months to help those individuals into work. If people move into work more quickly, so be it. As for pathways to work, the DWP has taken the decision, along with the NHS, to tailor that service to those who are slightly further away from the labour market and who need greater support. Those who are closer to the labour market will move on through mainstream or other provision or off their own backs.

**Frances Curran:** Is that time limited or time unlimited?

**John Reid:** The advisers conduct a series of work-focused interviews, as we call them, of which there are six of over a period of six months. We can, however, defer them and the NHS can give advice to the advisers on the length of time that it might take an individual to move on. The individual might move on to other provision before returning to a personal adviser at a later date. There are time limits for when an individual can see an adviser. However, that limit may be deferred or, as a result of advice from condition management, delayed for a given period.

**The Convener:** What is the position of other organisations on the timescale that Frances Curran highlighted and on people being job ready?

**Anne MacDonald:** We have been involved in the new futures initiative, helping many disadvantaged clients, people with disabilities and people with long-term mental health issues progress towards employment. One issue to come out of that work has been the amount of time that people need to become work ready. However, since that initiative came to an end and we have realigned our training towards clients who are much closer to the labour market, we have realised that a gap in provision has developed. We hope that the employability framework, which will come into effect next year, will help us to address that. We are aware of the potential gap in our adult programme, but we are not time bound in relation to the skillseekers programme and young people who need a longer period for training.

**Liz Galashan:** May I make a distinction between work ready and job ready? Semantics are always a problem. From a Careers Scotland perspective, I suggest that a number of programmes that we offer our clients would make them work ready. The programmes get them to a stage where they can begin to take control over their decision making and are motivated to work; they have attained a level of confidence without our necessarily being specific about what sort of job might be appropriate or how many steps there might be to go until they are stable within the labour market.

Jointly, across Scotland, we have programmes such as WorkNet, which we developed from American models. For some people, the programme might be a two-week intensive course, whereas in parts of the Highlands and Islands a person might get the programme two days a week, so it might take longer for them to complete it. Sometimes that option is taken for practical reasons, relating to accessing what is available.

We might get somebody to the level that we call work ready through standard career guidance and career planning services. We could then move someone on to the get ready for work programme or they might go through the supported employment projects that we have contracts with the Executive to deliver. We expect that those would take the person to the job-ready level, but it would be important that there was employer engagement early on. That is not to say that the person would stay with the same employer, but it might mean that there would be some tasters. We would be saying that the individual now needs the opportunity to learn in the workplace to become much more specific in their job readiness. The supported employment projects are funded on the basis of an average stay of 26 weeks, although the parameters around that are considerable.

**Anne Marshall:** The point about timescales is relevant to Jobcentre Plus, as many of our contracts have time limits. There are flexibilities on the margin, but people tend to speak about a six-week course or a 13-week course, because that is how the contract has been designed. Some of those contracts may have been designed for a customer group that they do not fit very well, so, obviously, that is all being reviewed.

When we get someone who is not quite job ready, opportunities that might be a useful step, such as volunteering, might come up; for some customers, there might be permitted work before they think about employment. There are other ways in which we can help, such as referral to a job broker. I take the point that perhaps there needs to be more flexibility in the timing of the programmes.

The committee has probably heard about building on new deal. BOND is based on a recognition that there are certain common strands that many people—whatever their disability and whatever their age, whether they are 25-plus, 50-plus, on the new deal or disabled—might need support with and for which a fixed menu might not be appropriate, as it would go against the personal and holistic approach that we are trying to adopt. BOND is somewhere down the line. People are still considering the scheme, because it is complex. It would involve giving someone a choice. The personal adviser would work with the individual to work out their pathway towards employment and support thereafter and to consider the elements that need to be put in place. We recognise that there is a way to go on that, but our programmes are probably a bit more flexible than is laid down—exceptions can be made.

**Marlyn Glen:** We have heard about inconsistency in services. One suggestion that the committee has heard in evidence is that there should be a centrally funded scheme to support disabled people into employment and sustain them in it and to assist people to maintain employment if they acquire a disability or their impairment or condition worsens. The purpose of such a scheme would be to bring together all the services provided with permanent funding. What are your views on that?

**Scott Skinner:** I would be rather concerned if another layer of service provision was put in place in the public sector. As we have heard this morning, some disabled people are already confused about the provision of employability services, so to add another layer of provision would be quite dangerous. We need to mainstream the public sector duty agenda within existing provision—for example, in Scottish Enterprise's national skillseekers programme and modern apprenticeships. If we do a proper disability impact assessment, which the new duty will require, we should be able to service the needs of disabled people much more efficiently. That does not happen among public sector bodies at the moment. If we did that work really well, there would be no need for any additional support.

12:00

**The Convener:** But that is not happening. You are telling me that this will happen and that will be fine, but we hear that such work is not happening. The public sector duty is being introduced and things should already happen because of the Scotland Act 1998 and equality requirements, but we hear that they are not. I know that sounds cheeky, but disabled people tell us that although they want to get into the workplace, the barriers are far too high.

**Scott Skinner:** Absolutely. That is why we at Scottish Enterprise fully support the introduction of the new public sector duty. Legislation has put in place certain measures for disabled people but, as we have seen for race equality, the real change will happen when the public sector duty is embedded. There are examples of good practice, but consistency is a problem and the public sector is not currently providing services proactively for disabled people. We will not have a choice about that come December 2006, so we have to start working towards that now.

**Liz Galashan:** I have mixed views. I can see pros and cons depending on what we are talking about—would it be a real or a virtual unit? Could we have it in Benbecula, where we are short of opportunities?

Disabled people have needs, but to hark back to what I said earlier, the people who support them also have needs. For example, I am conscious that people need information—whether about medical terminology or otherwise—and to understand the impact of a disability on performance in the workplace. The question is how that information is handled.

I can see a role for a central unit to support the supporters as well as disabled individuals. If the unit was to make a long-term commitment to the philosophy of supported employment, I would support it whole-heartedly, because it would get us away from short-termism and projectitis. Therefore, if there is further discussion about having a unit, I ask members to give some thought to the supporters as well as to the people who are to be supported, because there might be some mileage in that.

**Julie-Anne Jamieson:** It would be helpful first of all to know the best way of achieving the aims that the consultees told you about. They said that disabled people do not get the information that they require and that there is confusion and conflict. They want more joined-up services. The question is: how do we best achieve that? Like Liz Galashan, I can see the merits and demerits of having a centralised unit.

It is important to take a much more strategic approach. I welcome the work on a blueprint for supported employment that the Scottish Executive has recently asked the Scottish Union for Supported Employment to undertake. Rather than focus immediately on a central unit, there is an opportunity to consider whether there might be other approaches, such as better strategic working with a particular focus on supported employment, to bring together the various agencies. There might be merit in trying to piggy-back on that work to avoid initiatives going off at tangents when we are trying to achieve the same aim.

**Anne Marshall:** Everyone is saying that there is a lot of good stuff out there; it is spread a bit sparsely, but there are good models around.

When the employability framework was discussed, the interface between the various organisations—us, the Scottish Executive and the NHS—was described as a wrap-around service. That is a bit of a cliché, but the idea was that it would pick up all the people, from those who were furthest away right through to those who were in support and who still needed specialist help. We were somewhere in the middle. The key points were that people should be able to access a seamless service and that they should not be aware of who is funding what. Those points are critical. People need to have a sound understanding of what they are offering and what value they are adding. Supported employment sits within the bigger picture, and there is some really good stuff out there.

Jobcentre Plus is trying hard to get better at partnership working and has introduced new arrangements that involve people whose responsibility is partnership working with a devolved angle to it. We are mirroring that at a local level to ensure that we work with the right partners to help our customers. To overcome the barriers, we all need to work together.

**Elaine Smith:** I have a brief question on supported employment. You mentioned a supported employment agency called Prospects, which was set up specifically for people with ASD. Can you tell us a bit more about that? The evidence that the committee received from the

National Autistic Society was that there was a pilot scheme that was an overwhelming success, which it was trying to roll out and share with other organisations. Do you know any more about that?

**Anne Marshall:** No. I know that the agency is recognised as an expert in its field. We have a contract with it to deliver specialist service work preparation, which was mentioned earlier. That work preparation would not be six weeks, but would be flexible to meet the customer's need and would support the person in employment. We also call on Prospects for other in-work support. It is a key organisation.

I am not sure how far that pilot scheme was cascaded. We have a team of work psychologists who are specifically equipped to deal with disability issues, and they have worked with Prospects to help our advisers to have a greater understanding. Prospects helps us with training, but I am not sure about anything broader than that.

**Elaine Smith:** Perhaps we can pick that matter up and explore it further, convener.

**The Convener:** Yes, we can do that.

**Marlyn Glen:** That was an interesting discussion. I do not think that another layer is what we are asking for; however, I am interested in the idea of a national base in an office on Benbecula. I am sure that that would be helpful.

The evidence that we have received suggests that different organisations that are tasked with helping disabled people to find work, including local authorities, do not speak to each other; in fact, they seem to work in silos. Disabled people feel frustrated because they are being pushed from pillar to post to source advice and assistance. Is that an accurate reflection of current service provision? If so, how could service provision be improved? That is the perception that exists, which needs to be addressed.

**Julie-Anne Jamieson:** It is hard to argue with people's perceptions, especially if they are based on experience. That reflects an earlier discussion that we had about the disparity in provision throughout the country. It would be interesting to know whether that perception is universal or whether there are geographical differences in people's perceptions.

If the perception is universal, that emphasises the fact that, although a lot of partnership working is taking place, we are not there yet and still have a long way to go. The service providers—be they statutory or voluntary organisations—need to articulate that partnership working more clearly, so that the end result is that disabled service users see a more joined-up service.

The perceptions that you mention highlight and crystallise the issues. The discussions that we have had to date show that a lot of good work is going on, although it is patchy and we need to capitalise on it and consider how it can be applied more universally, not just in some areas, so that disabled people get a more seamless transition and those perceptions can be addressed.

**Liz Galashan:** A lot of good work has been done at a strategic level. Hearts and minds have been won at that level, but part of the difficulty is in translating that into activity at the operational end. We are perhaps not quite so good at monitoring to find out whether the strategic agreements that we have made are being lived and breathed in the community. We do not always check up on that.

**Scott Skinner:** Work is on-going on mapping to clarify the situation. We work with the Disability Rights Commission on its employability work, part of which is to consider how to get a clearer picture for disabled people. We also work with the Scottish Executive's equality unit on its employability work, a report on which is to be produced at the beginning of next year. The evidence from that and from the committee's inquiry will help us with the mapping process, which aims to provide a clearer picture for disabled people as they seek assistance.

**Marlyn Glen:** It is a little bit frustrating that there seems to be a lot of expertise, but we are not sure whether it is reaching the people at whom it should be targeted.

The report "Transitions to Employment: Advising Disadvantaged Groups" noted that Careers Scotland could have an important role in referring people to Jobcentre Plus and encouraged Careers Scotland to increase its collaboration role. Is Careers Scotland acting on that?

**Liz Galashan:** Yes. We have a strategic partnership agreement in development for both parts of Scotland—if I can put it like that. I was involved in a national group on guidance, career planning and referral systems. We have the "Working Together" handbook, which inevitably has Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise versions to reflect the different structures and ways of working in both parts of Scotland although, ultimately, we have the same aim. We have had joint staff development events, which have been important. The measures must be right at the operational end; we need the right level of understanding of how Careers Scotland and Jobcentre Plus operate so that the best referrals can be made in the interests of clients. The issue for us is the potential growth in demand, not so much through Careers Scotland referring clients to Jobcentre Plus, but through Jobcentre Plus referring clients to Careers Scotland. Issues arise about incapacity benefit and the kind of contracts that we currently and may hold, which may give rise to resource implications in the not-too-distant future.

**Julie-Anne Jamieson:** Liz Galashan spoke about working together nationally. However, while that strategic relationship is crucial, we cannot underestimate the importance of local working. Good examples exist throughout the country of joint working between staff of Careers Scotland and Jobcentre Plus, some of which is at the local, strategic level and some of which is at the operational level. The more we do of that, the more we will benefit our mutual clients.

**Marlyn Glen:** The evidence that we have received at our events suggests that more should be done to engage employers in service provision. Professor Riddell's report "Disability and Employment in Scotland: A Review of the Evidence Base" notes that disability employment advisers would like to spend more time on liaising with employers and delivering support to disabled people who are working, rather than on assessing, counselling and placing people. How do your organisations work with employers to facilitate the employment of disabled people?

12:15

**Anne Marshall:** The disability employment advisers are trained to work with employers to encourage them to consider their employment practices, take on more disabled people and adopt the disability symbol, which we promote. In general, the disability employment advisers think that that work is important. As well as getting people ready for work, we need to have employers who are receptive. The position might vary across the country and there will be various pressure points where there is a focus on seeing the individuals. However, that responsibility is certainly there.

I do not know whether you know about the disability symbol. It is an award that we make to employers who demonstrate positive practices around recruitment, development and retention of their disabled employees. It has been going since 1990—way before the DDA—and has been consulted on since then. There was a view that, now that we have relevant legislation, we might not need the scheme. However, feedback from employers and from disabled people, who see the symbol as a welcoming sign, told us that the scheme should continue.

The short answer is that the disability employment advisers still have a remit in the area that you are talking about.

In our districts, we have employer engagement people who use account management arrangements for employers who want to deal with only one source. Two years ago, we introduced a diversity manager for Scotland whose sole remit is to promote the diversity agenda in the context of disability. She has worked with many organisations to encourage them. Often, that work has been done on the back of legislative prompts. Organisations have asked her to come and talk to them about how they can get their applications right. We welcome that, as that gives us an in and enables us to talk to them about things that they think are important to them.

We have lots of examples of things that we have done with employers that have not only been nice experiences but which have transformed recruitment practices. For example, Strathclyde police, Argos and a number of other organisations signed up to the disability symbol and then asked us what else they could do. There might be opportunities to change the pre-recruitment process and their expectations of the traditional workforce, which no longer exists.

The disability employment advisers are one part of our work, but our efforts are much broader. With so many of our customers having disability or health issues, we need to engage with employers in that regard. John Reid might want to tell you about the Tupperware-party approach that is being used in relation to the pathways pilot. It takes an employer-to-employer approach, which has much more credibility than an approach that involves a civil servant talking to an employer.

**John Reid:** I stress that I do not do Tupperware parties myself.

Anne Marshall talked about the role of the disability employment advisers. Employer engagement is still important but, because the number of incapacity benefit customers who we deal with, particularly in the pathways area, has increased a great deal, the disability employment advisers provide support to incapacity personal advisers as well, as they have a longer experience of that particular client group.

On employer engagement, the disability employment advisers tend to have links directly into the employer engagement teams as well. That enables the employer engagement team to access their expertise when they are out speaking to employers.

The Tupperware-party approach that Anne Marshall mentioned is an idea that an employer working group in the pathways area in Renfrewshire had. It involves asking an employer to host an event for other employers, to give them information about what is available to them and to put to bed some of the myths about people on incapacity benefit and disabled people, and getting agreement from one or more of those employers to host a similar event that they can invite their peers to. We are trying to grow that sort of thing in particular areas in Scotland.

**Scott Skinner:** We have some way to go to encourage small and medium-sized enterprises, in particular, to take on disabled employees. There is a big information deficiency. They do not understand the legal implications of taking on disabled people or the good business case that there is for taking on disabled people.

That goes back to the point about what we are trying to achieve. At Scottish Enterprise, we are trying to encourage more disabled people to go into employment not just because it is a good thing to do or because there is a legal imperative but because there is an economic imperative. As you know, Scotland's population is aging and declining and if we do not engage underrepresented groups such as disabled people our economy will become pretty weak in the future. I am looking forward to my pension being paid for. If we do not have people generating wealth in the Scottish economy and negating some of the effects of a declining population, we will be in trouble.

We have to sell to SMEs the concept that encouraging disabled people into employment is not just good for economic reasons; there is a strong business case for it, too. Our evidence is that if an organisation takes on disabled people, it results in its gaining a much better reputation. Some of the evidence that we are uncovering shows that in many instances disabled people make far better employees than their able-bodied counterparts. Taking on disabled people also results in better staff retention and innovation in the organisation. It is really important to get that message across to SMEs because, ultimately, they look at the bottom line—at profit issues.

**The Convener:** What are you doing to get that information over to SMEs?

**Scott Skinner:** We started with the business gateway; we have some proactive material in the gateway about getting disabled people on board. In March, subject to final approvals, we will be launching, in partnership with the Executive, an SME information unit within the gateway. There will be a two-pronged attack. One prong is about trying to engage more SMEs and the other is about mainstreaming in our organisation and getting our business advisers up to speed with issues for disabled people and equality issues in general. We need to do an awful lot of work to get rid of the information deficiency in SMEs.

**Marlyn Glen:** It seems like we still have a long way to go, which is interesting, because we had hoped that we were a good way along the path.

The committee has heard that partnership working, not only between agencies but between the UK Government and the Scottish Executive, is crucial. What more could be done to increase the current level of dialogue and partnership between UK and Scottish Government departments about the employment of disabled people? How do you share best practice between departments?

**Anne Marshall:** I will give you an idea of what is going on. A lot of dialogue takes place at present. Margaret Hodge is meeting Scottish ministers next week and there has been dialogue on the common agenda, which really helps working relationships.

Allan Wilson, Ms Lamont and Lewis Macdonald have all visited our job centres and have had the opportunity to talk to advisers and see at first hand and understand what is going on. I extend an invitation to any members of the committee who would like to visit the centres or to see how the pathways project is working. They will be able to see at first hand what someone with a disability who comes into a job centre can expect and the interactions that we have with other partners. That invitation is open to anyone; our director would very much welcome your visit.

A number of things have happened in Scotland that have given Jobcentre Plus, the Department for Work and Pensions and other agencies an opportunity to work together. The employability framework is at the front of our minds just now. The partnership accord, which has been developed between the DWP, Jobcentre Plus, the Executive and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, is creating links between local authorities and our services, to help reach those who are hardest to reach not just in a strategic way but by setting up a key action plan. That is in the early stages. It is not about creating yet another layer; it will fit into and be part of the community planning partnership approach. That is bringing together our thinking and the thinking at Westminster.

From a Jobcentre Plus point of view, we feel that we are well consulted by our Scottish Executive colleagues. We have been involved throughout the development of the employability framework and have expressed our views. For example, we are involved with the Basic Skills Agency, which is an adult literacy and numeracy project. Adult literacy is a big issue in Scotland. Jobcentre Plus has arrangements with the Executive, learning connections and everyone involved to ensure that our services are well aligned and compatible. We have a statement of the arrangements that we work to.

We had a conference last year, which was a first in bringing together people who deliver services and increasing understanding of how we work together and do not duplicate work. We have some contracted provision, but there is a wealth of provision in local communities that might suit some of our customers much better. That work has gone from strength to strength and relations are good and constructive. We are seeing a lot of good referrals and are piloting new approaches.

I mentioned earlier that we link in with all the key organisations. The NHS is a big one for us. The nature of our work necessitates better relationships with the NHS and GPs, who are the honest brokers for many of our customers. We are working with the NHS to develop closer working. John Reid will pick up on what is happening with condition management but, for example, our director is on various steering groups, such as healthy working lives, to see how we can work together and have a better understanding.

We have a commitment to deliver our services in at least one GP practice in each of our districts by the end of the year, so that we can be seen not as bureaucratic, threatening, alien and strange, but as an organisation that can add to what GPs are trying to do. That is already running in a couple of GP surgeries. Like all such things, it takes a while, because people are busy and they need to understand that the aim is not to pressurise, but to increase information. We are doing quite a bit on that.

Health service delivery in pathways to work and condition management seem to be effective. People find it helpful in moving forward. We have managed work with our colleagues and non-Westminster funding. For example, with NHS Fife and Scottish Enterprise we have pooled money to see whether we can do something similar. It will not be exactly the same, but it will pick up the bits of the pathways that are effective. In Edinburgh, Lothian and the Borders, we are running a project to get information to people who are on incapacity benefit in the most deprived areas.

There is a lot of discussion and liaison with the Executive and Westminster. Child care is another big issue, as is the Scottish Prison Service's attempt to reduce recidivism. We are working jointly on many issues. There is a lot of liaison and a lot of interaction. Obviously, there is scope to do more, but there is a lot of collaborative working.

**Elaine Smith:** Clearly, there are crossovers and grey areas.

Benefits are a reserved matter, but we have heard that they are a major barrier to disabled people accessing work. Is that the case? If so, what steps might be taken to resolve the benefits trap—if you feel comfortable sharing that information with us?

**Anne Marshall:** That is not my area of expertise. I doubt that it is anyone's area of expertise, because of its complexity. We know, however, that it comes up a lot. We have found in some cases—not in every case—that when people sit down with us and we perform in-work benefit calculations and look at the in-work support that might be available, the picture is not as negative, or as black and white, as it first appeared. There is no doubt that there are issues. Permitted work will suit some people, but there are implications if they are on housing benefit. Benefits have been recognised as an issue—that is why the extra bonus that John Reid mentioned in the pathways to work is outside of all of that. We are looking at that to see whether it makes a difference.

We know that part of the five-year plan—part of which is the green paper—is a forward look at what can be done in terms of the benefit system. Suggestions have been made about two types of benefit, although they may not be agreed in the end. Recognition is being given to the fact that benefits are complex; many people perceive them as the main barrier to work. Very often, benefits are the one issue that stops people from even thinking about entering the debate and discussion about what might be around.

Our advisers are quite expert at pulling together all the resources that are around. If people were to come in and sit down with us, it might make them feel a little bit better. That said, benefits are presented to us as an issue.

12:30

**Elaine Smith:** I will turn to other barriers such as information and promotion. We received a submission from a support group that represents children with Asperger's syndrome and their families. The group described a survey that it had undertaken to ask about

> "the effectiveness of using various services, including Jobcentre and Careers Service, which can be regarded as potential routes to accessing work. None of the surveyed group had any experience of Jobcentres."

The submission went on to say that that

> "may well imply there are barriers for disabled people and their families in even starting the process of seeking work".

I appreciate that the point is addressed at the careers service too, but what are the ways in which you try to ensure that information is put out there for people to access?

**The Convener:** Before we move to the response, I inform members and witnesses that we need to finish the session by 1 o'clock. I ask for brief questions and answers, if possible. That would be wonderful; it would allow us to cover as much ground as possible.

**Elaine Smith:** In that case, convener, I will include the question whether information is given to employers. Part of what we were told was that employers also lack formation.

**John Reid:** As far as getting information to individuals is concerned, I think that it was a member of the first panel who spoke about the range of ways in which services could be promoted. Certainly, we have our website and our offices. A range of work is also done by our action teams, which are based in communities and which try to get information out to people in communities.

Anne Marshall mentioned GP surgeries. Our GP surgery pilot will start in January, in Paisley. We will have a full-time incapacity benefit personal adviser and a condition management practitioner in the surgery. There are a range of ways and means by which we advise individuals. Obviously, one way is to get leaflets to third parties. More important than that is for third parties to have information about our services so that people can access that information through them as well as through ourselves. We want to create links so that third parties can contact us. I return to the point that was raised earlier today. People should not be passed around the system.

**Elaine Smith:** GPs have been mentioned a lot today. Do you see them as key to all this?

**John Reid:** We do, although only time will tell if GP surgeries are the right place for IB personal advisers—Anne Marshall mentioned the slow pace of that work. There have been discussions on the subject, however. I was part of a group that made a presentation to Lewis Macdonald yesterday, as part of which our director addressed some of the issues about GPs. Those issues include how we can better include GPs to ensure that the information that goes out to people on incapacity benefit and people with disabilities is information that sets out the choices including whether work is an option for them.

Certainly, GPs are important. I am meeting a GP from Paisley next week to discuss the pilot that I mentioned earlier. We want to see whether we can get GP surgeries to be part of the menu of services.

**Elaine Smith:** I am sorry, convener, but I have a follow-up question. I am interested in the subject.

I understand that, over six years ago, there was an initiative involving GP practices that was called volunteering in practice. The aim of the initiative was to set up a volunteering service for GP practices, perhaps by bringing in Citizens Advice Scotland. Jobcentre was to have a central role in the initiative, which I think was funded by the Scottish Office. I am not sure that it was ever mainstreamed and rolled out across the country, however. I know that there were pilots in Inverness and Dundee.

**John Reid:** I have no information on that.

For the current system, we will try to bring in somebody from Jobcentre Plus and the NHS. We will link with GPs and as many other organisations as possible to ensure that they are all aware that we are there. The aim is that, in dealing with people in GP surgeries, we can access a range of services from that location. That takes me back to the point that I made earlier that the individual should not be passed from agency to agency. I do not know anything about the earlier initiative.

**Elaine Smith:** That is perhaps something we could look into.

**Mr McGrigor:** One of the committee's concerns, following evidence that we have heard, relates to the effectiveness of the DDA. We have heard, for example, that people are not always aware of their rights and that employers and service providers are not always aware of their responsibilities. There seems to be confusion over what reasonable adjustment means. How effective is the DDA? What can be done to make disabled people more aware of their rights and to provide employers with more information and support to meet their responsibilities?

**Scott Skinner:** We are working with the Disability Rights Commission, as are my colleagues in Highlands and Islands Enterprise, on awareness-raising sessions, particularly for small employers. That is important. Scottish Enterprise had a great many inquiries when the new disability legislation came into force. An awful lot of bad advice was going about. Some businesses were panicking because they thought that the new legislation would shut them down. You are right: it comes down to reasonable adjustments, about which many companies were not getting good advice.

There is a lack of good advice to employers in Scotland on the new legislation. Employers will not approach the commissions, for example, because they see them as policing the DDAs, rather than as organisations that can assist. That is why we are considering getting a unit based within the business gateway. It is not our job to give advice on legal issues, but we can at least point SMEs in the right direction for getting good, impartial advice, not only about making reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled customers can access their premises, but about making reasonable adjustments for disabled employees.

**Anne MacDonald:** On the subject of reasonable advice to SMEs on disability, that was one strand of equality that hooked the private sector into the equality forum, because the private sector saw the forum as a resource for explaining its duties and how it could fulfil them at a practical level. Previously, the private sector had a hard time engaging with the forum. There is a growing demand for advice, especially on disability and how businesses can support people.

**Liz Galashan:** All those issues at a higher level must be considered, but when we are working with individual clients we can advise employers that it is not necessarily about altering only the physical environment. A client with a learning disability may need more time for induction, or a more structured approach to settling in to the work place. That kind of thing can be considered to be a reasonable adjustment.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** As you are aware, the Scottish Executive has an equality strategy. To what extent do Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise adequately implement that strategy and how do they go about monitoring and evaluating it?

**Scott Skinner:** The equality strategy is probably not our organisation's guiding light; that is more "A Smart, Successful Scotland", which contains quite a strong equality remit. The clear equality agenda that it states must help more businesses take on equality for business benefit and so on. We work closely with our sponsoring unit, which is the Department of Enterprise and Lifelong Learning. We also work with the Scottish Executive's equality unit, particularly on disability with employability, to ensure that organisations meet the requirements of disabled people. However, as far as implementation is concerned the equality strategy is probably more strategic than we would want, which is why we take our guidance from "A Smart, Successful Scotland".

**The Convener:** I do not understand that answer: surely the equality strategy should be mainstreamed across Scotland?

**Scott Skinner**: Absolutely.

**The Convener:** Are you saying that the implementation of the strategy depends on where you live?

**Scott Skinner:** Not at all. The equality strategy's focus is on mainstreaming, which approach we whole-heartedly support. That means mainstreaming in the smart, successful Scotland strategy and through the services of Scottish Enterprise. A lot of our work is focused on mainstreaming and involves, for example, staff training. By the end of this financial year all our staff will have been through equal opportunities training. We have also just purchased 600 licences for our staff to train in online disability awareness. Staff capacity and training are vital to mainstream the strategy successfully. That is a main tenet of the Executive's equality strategy.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** Could I hear from the representative from Highlands and Islands Enterprise?

**Anne MacDonald:** Our view is similar to Scott Skinner's. Our guiding light is "A Smart, Successful Highlands and Islands", which includes cross-cutting themes such as equal opportunities and closing the opportunity gap. We should address equality through those themes. We monitor some aspects of that strategy through our national programmes and business start-ups. I must admit that we are not very proactive, and we must get a lot better.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** I want to be clear on this. Have you not implemented the equality strategy as a mainstream policy? Is it not monitored or evaluated?

**Anne MacDonald:** I will have to get back to you on that because I do not come from the strategy group in HIE; I come from the schools division. However, I do not think that we have. I shall check that.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** I would like more information on that.

**Anne MacDonald:** I could easily furbish that.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** It would be helpful if both organisations could give us that information.

We heard, particularly at our Kirkwall event, that some disabled people would like to start their own businesses, but were afraid to come off benefits. The success of the business able pilot is noted in the written submission from Scottish Enterprise. How would that and other projects assist people in setting up their own business? Is that your only best practice pilot?

**Scott Skinner:** We have been delighted with the success of the business able pilot, which came from the disabled entrepreneurs' conference that we ran in 2003. We were astounded by the wishes of disabled people to start their own businesses, so we set up the pilot in Scottish Enterprise Glasgow as a response to that. Our initial target for this financial year was to assist 100 people and as of last month we had helped 92 people. Thirty two people have started their own businesses and they have a real enthusiasm to get them growing.

The success of that pilot means that we will probably roll it out nationwide across the whole Scottish Enterprise network. We have learned some big lessons about how to help disabled people. Its project manager says that a lot of his time is spent almost as a counselling service because, as we mentioned earlier, many disabled people lack the confidence to face the business world. Lack of confidence is a big issue, and work on that is supported through the project.

Disabled people also lack the capital to start their own businesses; they tend to be poorer than their able-bodied counterparts. Scottish Enterprise will look at getting over that barrier.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** From what you have heard so far, how successful do you think that skillseekers and modern apprenticeship programmes have been and can be to get more disabled people into employment?

12:45

**Scott Skinner:** National programmes can be extremely effective in helping disabled people to get into employment, but perhaps we have not been as successful as we should have been.

We monitor the uptake of all our national programmes with reference to the census, so people of different race, disabled people and women and men are counted. Our skills directors consider those statistics annually. The levels of uptake are not as good as we would have hoped, and that goes back to the public sector duty, which is going to be important. Our skillseekers and MAs will be ranked as high priority for an equality assessment. We are doing something similar with race at the moment, but we need to do a bit more work with disability to ensure that the programmes are not only not discriminating against disabled people, but are being actively promoted to them.

**Anne MacDonald:** It is similar in the HIE area. The only difference is that we have a couple of pilots for our get ready for work programme, which Liz Galashan could speak about if the committee wants more details. It is a much more person-centred approach that will be better able to assist disabled people. Apart from that, our situation is the same as Scottish Enterprise's.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** I had better own up to the fact that I worked in further and higher education and was seconded to the fast track project, so I worked in a similar area for approximately 18 years. I am concerned about the lack of flexibility in skillseekers programmes and about the fact that they are very target-driven. I have a difficulty with equating that with best serving the needs of disabled people, unless you can tell me that there have been improvements in assessment procedures and so on. The funding mechanism is also rigid and that forces 16 to 18-year-olds down the skillseekers routes when other types of training might be more beneficial. Obviously I have been out of the job for the past five years. Have there been improvements in the skillseekers approach, and is there enough flexibility in the funding, choices and assessment processes?

**Liz Galashan:** That is exactly why we have set up the get ready for work pilots in the Highlands and Islands. To be fair to our colleagues, having Careers Scotland as part of the enterprise network has brought issues to the surface that we might not have had to deal with before. I am sure that it has been very difficult for some of our colleagues to have the likes of me coming along saying the kinds of things that Marilyn Livingstone has just said: the programmes are not flexible enough, they do not take care of the needs of individuals, and they are too prescriptive. I also talked earlier about the appropriate level of expenditure and I should mention the rule book that the networks have to work to for all the national programmes. That is why we are doing the pilots.

We have learned from the new futures project and our supported employment projects through using that person-centred approach, doing vocational profiling, doing job analysis in the workplace, drawing up an employability plan, and contracting with providers who sometimes take a facilitator role. They do not necessarily deliver all employability needs. They will deliver what they can, but they have the flexibility and funding to buy in specialist learning, for example.

However, there is also a discretionary fund available to them so that if a particular need is identified in an individual's employability plan, the providers do not have to come back to us to get our permission to purchase an adaptation, for example. They want to be able to respond quickly, but it is public money so it has to be identified as being spent within the employability plan to facilitate that individual's moving forward.

It is early days and we have just had our first quarter's evaluation, but I will be happy to keep the committee up to date. We could begin to roll out the programme as it is based on our experience with those other projects that have come from different places.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** Is that happening throughout the network? Is it happening in Scottish Enterprise as well?

**Liz Galashan:** No, the pilots are being run in two of the Highlands and Islands local enterprise companies at the moment.

**Scott Skinner:** There is a tension with getting people closest to the labour market into some of our programmes, but our skills people have just carried out a big survey of the uptake of national programmes by all streams of equality and we are working towards addressing any shortfalls.

**Mr McGrigor:** In the Highlands and Islands and remote and rural areas, it is more difficult for disabled people to get to and from work. Do local authorities do enough to provide extra local transport or subsidised local transport? Should something be done to help to provide transport for private carers who volunteer to take people to and from work?

**Liz Galashan:** That is a big issue. I know that you want a quick answer, but I am not sure that that is possible.

We attempt to do what you suggest through, for example, our approaches to discretionary funding. Where there are problems with public transport, we will purchase driving licenses and help people to pay for driving lessons because they need to be independent so that they can get to and from work.

I do not think that I can do justice to your question in the time that is available.

**The Convener:** We will consider transport in more detail later in the inquiry.

**Anne Marshall:** The access to work scheme, which was mentioned earlier, can pick up the costs and therefore help people to travel to work. Expenditure on transport was a big item in last year's budget.

**The Convener:** Transport has certainly been high on the agenda of every participation event that we have attended, so we will consider it.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** Scotland has no provision or funding for residential training to assist disabled people into employment. In England, disabled people can attend residential colleges to enhance their employment skills. That training is funded by the residential training unit, which is part of Jobcentre Plus. In written evidence, the Royal National Institute of the Blind stated:

> "Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and the Lothians … would rather send a blind or partially sighted person from Scotland to attend residential training in England, because the Residential Training Unit will fund this place."

What are your views on that practice? If Scotland had a similar facility, would that be of benefit?

**Scott Skinner:** I am surprised that that evidence was given. If that is the case, it is obviously something that we need to look into.

I apologise for returning to the public sector duty, but it is pivotal. If we do that properly, we will really start to mainstream the agenda in our services. If disabled people think that residential training is important, that will be brought out in our consultation and we will address it.

**The Convener:** The voluntary organisations that are involved certainly think that it is important.

We are really short of time. We have some further questions for Jobcentre Plus but we will write to you for some feedback on those.

**Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD):** One of the major barriers that disabled people have told us about is other people's attitudes towards them. The committee has commissioned research into disability equality training, which may help to inform people and to combat negative attitudes. What measures should be put in place to combat people's negative attitudes towards disabled people both at work and in general?

**Liz Galashan:** I would like to make a couple of practical comments, particularly about the young people we deal with. Employers run businesses and they need staff who can do the job or can learn to do it in a reasonable period of time. It is better to show an employer what an individual can do, rather than just telling them. The determined to succeed programme is on the local authority side, but Careers Scotland was asked to help with employer engagement and we have schools programmes and work experience programmes. It is not a big commitment for an employer to offer a week's work experience and lots of employers are willing to do that. A week is long enough for them to see that employing a disabled person is a feasible option for them.

We take a similar approach with our supported employment projects; 40 per cent of the job coach's time is spent with the employer, so the employer is given almost as much time as the client. It is best to show people what can be done rather than just talking to them about training.

**Anne Marshall:** It is bigger than just employers. It is about everybody raising their awareness, and we have taken that approach at Jobcentre Plus. We offer work placements to all our contractors; they can access any of our offices throughout Scotland and place people there.

Also, the DRC, which was mentioned earlier, can be quite influential and some of its materials are very good. The material about recruitment from the employers' forum on disability is good, as is the video "The Appointment", which the DRC put out recently. We have to approach the matter from a number of different angles. We need to get people to break down barriers and make contact with people. People meet disabled people every day of the week. They just need to see them in a different context.

**Julie-Anne Jamieson:** One of the most beneficial approaches is to show disabled people in employment. That has an impact not just on employers but on other staff, who are, obviously, citizens with their own views and attitudes. That is one of the most powerful ways to break down barriers. Our organisations are a good example of that. We employ disabled people and the focus is on what they can do. The fact that they are disabled is irrelevant. They have support to help them to do their jobs, but they are colleagues just like anyone else. It is in that way that we will break down the barriers and attitudes.

**The Convener:** Thank you for your evidence this morning. I realise that we had lots of questions for you. This was our first formal evidence-taking session on the theme of work and we are keen to gather as much information as possible.

12:56

*Meeting continued in private until 13:09.*

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