



OFFICIAL REPORT
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Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 26 September 2018

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EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

23rd Meeting 2018, Session 5

CONVENER

*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)

*Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab)

*Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)

*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

*Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)

*Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)

*Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

*Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)

*Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Alan Armstrong (Education Scotland)

Sharon Kelly (Skills Development Scotland)

Joan Mackay (Education Scotland)

James Russell (Skills Development Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Roz Thomson

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 26 September 2018

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Young People's Pathways

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning and welcome to the 23rd meeting in 2018 of the Education and Skills Committee. I remind everyone to turn their mobile phones and other devices to silent so that they do not disrupt the broadcasting system or the meeting. We have received no apologies, but Mary Fee must attend other committee business and will leave at some point during the morning.

The first item on our agenda is the fourth evidence session in our inquiry into young people's pathways. So far as part of the inquiry, the committee has undertaken a survey of and a workshop with young people, has taken evidence from a number of bodies and the chair of the commission for developing Scotland's young workforce, and has visited Shetland.

This morning, we welcome, from Skills Development Scotland, James Russell, director of career information, advice and guidance, and Sharon Kelly, head of operations; and, from Education Scotland, Alan Armstrong, strategic director, and Joan Mackay, assistant director. Members should indicate to me if they would like to come in with a question but, to open today's proceedings, I ask the witnesses to make some brief key points in the area of young people's pathways, starting with Mr Russell.

James Russell (Skills Development Scotland): Good morning. Skills Development Scotland is pleased to provide an update on the progress that we are making as part of the partnership work on young people's pathways and improving outcomes for young people. We make a significant contribution to the delivery of recommendation 1 of the commission for developing Scotland's young workforce, which is on senior phase vocational pathways, through the development and delivery of foundation apprenticeships, and to the delivery of the career information advice and guidance services under recommendation 2. We are involved in extensive partnership working with our colleagues from Education Scotland and through the network in delivering our expectations against each of the recommendations.

Alan Armstrong (Education Scotland): We welcome the opportunity to update the committee

on the progress that we are making in taking forward the developing the young workforce recommendations on the career education standard and our contribution to the senior phase pathways work. We lead on several aspects of the schools-based recommendations, and we work very closely with a broad range of partners to support the wider aspects of the complete programme.

Education Scotland was asked to work with SDS, local authorities and employer representatives to develop the career education standard that was published in 2015. We continue to work closely in partnership with a range of people, including the DYW employer groups, to support schools and their partners to implement the entitlements for young people that are within the standard.

Children and young people were directly involved in helping us to develop the process in 2015. Their input shaped the standard then, and it continues to shape the ways in which we ensure that it is available in schools. The standard recognises the journey that young people are on as they learn about the world of work from the early years right through to the senior phase. It sets out what children will learn; crucially, it also sets out what relevant adults in their lives can and will do to support them in that learning.

The aim is to make sure that young people are better informed about their abilities. We know that they live in a complex and changing environment and that the old linear pathways through school can no longer serve their needs. In the way in which the standard and DYW in general are being implemented, we can see that complexity play out at school level as changes are made in the curriculum—in other words, the offer that a school makes to its young people. We see the commitment of the staff in schools and the appetite of them and their partners to expand the offer, which is leading to the emergence of some innovative practice that we can touch on.

Earlier this year, we welcomed SCEL—the Scottish College for Educational Leadership—into Education Scotland, and we immediately started to work with it to embed the developing the young workforce agenda into the complete suite of its leadership programmes. The DYW agenda was covered in the excellence in headship programme, but we are working to make sure that it extends across the leadership programmes.

The evidence that we have gathered on inspection and review shows that we are making steady progress with the career education standard and DYW. Some schools are moving more quickly and others are picking up pace, but all of them are progressing. Most secondary schools are developing the learner pathways more

flexibly by increasing their partnership working. That often involves consortia arrangements between schools and bringing in and working with local businesses and community partners to provide a wide range of options.

We welcome the opportunity to explore the issue with the committee and to highlight some of the creative practices that we have seen.

The Convener: Thank you very much. We have some broad topical areas to cover. I do not guarantee that we will stick to those, but we will start with vocational pathways.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Good morning, panel. What progress has been made towards measuring and publishing information on vocational pathways alongside the other school performance indicators?

Joan Mackay (Education Scotland): It is quite a mixed picture at the moment. We work with data from a range of sources. We look at the data that the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council has to tell us about the trajectory and how the take-up of vocational pathways is going. We do not have all that information in one place yet, so it is a work in progress—we know that we need to bring that together. We are testing that out at school level at the moment and during this year, so we will be able to come back with more information on that.

Rona Mackay: Can you give us an idea of timescale? Do you have a target in mind?

Joan Mackay: We are timing it with the life of the programme. We had to get to a point at which we were seeing significant progress at school level. We are beginning to see that and, through inspection, we are picking up the story and the narrative of the change, but we have not yet collated the data in one place so that it is easy to make sense of. From the point of view of timescale, I guess that we will not get to that stage until the latter part of the programme. We have just started exploring that work with all our partners.

Rona Mackay: Mr Armstrong, you talked about the pace of change in rolling out vocational pathways. Can you quantify that for us? How is that progressing?

Alan Armstrong: I am very comfortable with the progress that we are making. We are talking about a significant change. The senior phase as it is conceptualised is radically different from what was previously in place. Schools have had to take a significant amount of time to look closely at what they were doing and how they were doing it, and to co-design what the offer should be, taking account of their young people. They often have to

find partners, link up with businesses and think of new and wider ranges of courses to offer.

The senior phase is becoming much less of a linear progression. Before curriculum for excellence, young people tended to move through standard grade—foundation, general and credit—to higher and advanced higher. Many young people would drop off—after secondary 4, 20 per cent of them stopped coming to school and went somewhere else.

There has been a change from that linear pattern to a web or a matrix of an offer across S4, S5 and S6. In the best cases, S4, S5 and S6 are coming together through the school organising young people in such a way as to open up the opportunities for pupils in those years to choose from a larger menu of courses and options. We are seeing that in a large number of schools, and other schools are picking up on that. We are active in that area. As well as collecting and sharing ideas and working with networks, we are sharing—through social media and our website—some of the examples that are coming through. Activity by more forward-thinking people who have a bit of traction is helping others. It is an uneven playing field at the moment, which is what we would expect with such a fundamental change.

Rona Mackay: Do you see that moving on quite rapidly?

Alan Armstrong: As I mentioned, the most recent set of inspection advice from over last session gives me great heart. We have many examples—some of which we included in our submission—of schools' commitment to the new approach. They are not just treating it as a function; there is genuine recognition, in hearts and minds, that this is about the young people in their school at the time. We are talking about a slightly different approach, because schools are realising that the S4, S5 and S6 cohort changes every year—a new S4 comes in and S6 goes out and different people leave. Therefore, they need to look again at what they are offering to ensure that their course choices are not static and will continue to grow.

James Russell: I reiterate that from a foundation apprenticeship point of view. It is important to note that the first two years of the foundation apprenticeship programme were about building capacity in the system. It was a pathfinder programme to address the challenges and differences around curriculum planning and partnership working. It was a case of bringing all the players together in a local area to ensure the success of that programme. This is the first year in which we are starting to see the positive outcomes from cohort 1—the 2016 cohort—as that is progressing.

I reiterate the point that Alan Armstrong made about the learning from that. We recently published a report on the progress of and learning from foundation apprenticeships. That will enable us to start building on what is working and sharing that with more partners as the programme expands towards 2019.

Rona Mackay: I want to ask about targets. Why have different targets been reported on for foundation apprenticeships in recent years? Do you think that too much attention has been paid to foundation apprenticeships at the expense of other vocational pathways, or do you think that the balance is correct? I am mainly interested in the disparity between the different targets.

James Russell: I think that the balance is correct. It must be right for the circumstances in which the school is operating, the network that it has around it and the delivery partnerships that it has for it to be successful. We are continuing to expand the opportunities for lead partners. Previously, colleges led the partnership. Local authorities are now doing that, and the commissioning for next year has been opened up to independent training providers.

I think that the focus is right. It is a significant change programme in the curriculum. It requires all those individuals and parties to come together and deliver what is required. That is a change for employers and for colleges and schools.

Regarding the foundation apprenticeship target, I believe that reference has been made to the existence of differing targets. I must make it clear that, through our relationship with the Scottish Government, SDS has always been and continues to be focused on the availability of 5,000 opportunities for foundation apprenticeships in Scotland by 2019. That has not changed for us.

Rona Mackay: How is that target reached?

James Russell: The development of the foundation apprenticeship programme has been industry led. As the DYW commission recommended, we are compared with the top-performing Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. A lot of great practice in the development of the foundation apprenticeship frameworks has been taken from countries such as Germany and Switzerland; we have worked with the Scottish Qualifications Authority and Education Scotland on that.

We needed to understand what capacity we had in the curriculum to deliver that. The challenge is how, in implementing a change programme, we provide those opportunities to as many people as possible without being unrealistic about what we are doing. S5 is the starting point for foundation apprenticeships, and the target of providing 5,000

by 2019 means giving 12 to 15 per cent of the S5 cohort the opportunity to do those apprenticeships alongside other formal senior phase vocational pathways and vocational learning programmes.

Rona Mackay: What steps have been taken to ensure that vocational pathways are of equivalent value to academic pathways? Are you managing to bridge that gap?

James Russell: Absolutely. We do that in the work that we do at every level in our engagement with our partners, our customers and our stakeholders. We believe in parity of esteem for academic and vocational programmes. The challenge for us is that, because we commission the apprenticeship programmes, it looks as though we have a specific focus on apprenticeships rather than on vocational programmes, but that is absolutely not the case.

We see work-based learning programmes as being an enriched learning route that adapts to different learning styles for young people. We promote equal opportunities. Careers advisers in schools undertake group work and support young people through our universal services. They are responsible for providing the information and advice about all the routes and pathways that exist for young people and for ensuring that all of them have parity of esteem.

This work is all about providing a choice for young people. From a CIAG point of view, the focus of our service is on enabling them to make an informed choice. It is necessary to know and understand what all those opportunities look like. We have a structured programme of interventions across each of the year groups, which involves exploring with young people on a face-to-face basis the various routes and pathways and the opportunities that exist in the local economy or in Scotland generally through the regional skills assessments and the skills demand statements.

10:15

Through our work with teachers and through Education Scotland, we have developed a lot of capacity-building activities and career-long professional learning resources for teachers that focus on labour market information. Through those, we introduce what that work looks and feels like and what it means for them when they are teaching in their classrooms. There are curriculum inserts. There is also the work that we do with parents and schools. We are involved with schools in planning what parental engagement should look like. We deliver interventions with parents across all the year groups, as well as offering the opportunity to get one-to-one support during those significant subject choice times.

It is a case of ensuring that everybody is involved in influencing and informing young people's choices and decisions. We play only one part in that process. We furnish people with the information and advice that they need in order to be able to have that career conversation.

Rona Mackay: Thank you. That was helpful.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I will pursue a couple of points that were raised there. First, Mr Armstrong, you said that young people have a larger menu to choose from, but the evidence that we received last week from Professor Jim Scott was there is a restriction in subject choice and the number of subjects that a young person can choose. How does the idea that there is a larger menu square with the evidence from last week that the choice is narrowing and constricting?

Alan Armstrong: There is always a limit to the number of courses that any young person can follow because of the hours in the school day, but my reference there was to the range of options a young person has. It is moving away from traditional subjects and towards more skills for work courses, more national certificates and more national progression awards—it is opening up that menu of options. We are seeing that menu being available to young people and we are seeing the distinct motivation that they find from studying foundation apprenticeships or working with employers over S4, S5 or S6.

Schools are very creative in the ways they arrange their option choices and, sometimes, if a school has six or seven options for young people, one option could mean two short courses in skills for work or something like that.

Johann Lamont: So the “larger menu” is that there is a series of wee topics within a year rather than one substantial subject—that is not quite the same thing. Have you looked at Professor Scott's research? Would it be worth while asking you to reflect on that further and come back to the committee? There are substantial issues with access that are in direct contradiction to what you are saying.

Alan Armstrong: I am happy to do that.

Johann Lamont: Can I ask about face-to-face support? Can you define what “face-to-face” means?

James Russell: We have two approaches—and I will bring Sharon Kelly in on this—through our universal service delivery, which is face to face in a group setting and also on a one-to-one basis.

Johann Lamont: What is the size of the group?

James Russell: In classroom sizes—about 30.

Johann Lamont: You define “face-to-face” as having maybe 30 young people in front of you.

James Russell: It is a face-to-face service, and it is combined with the one-to-one support. We have from primary 7 and S1 through to S6 defined engagements with young people on a face-to-face basis either in a group or one to one.

Johann Lamont: What proportion of people could expect to have advice in something smaller than a group face-to-face setting, which is really just a classroom setting? What proportion would have access to one-to-one advice?

James Russell: In the broad general education phase, we have 100 per cent entitlement for young people. All young people are entitled to the group sessions in S1, S2 and S3 but also to the one-to-one, face-to-face support that they receive at their subject choice.

Johann Lamont: Every young person gets to speak to somebody about subject choice.

James Russell: Yes.

Johann Lamont: That is it, but the rest is really just in what most people would call a classroom setting.

You and Mr Armstrong talked about the networks that are offered to schools. How do you stop that reinforcing inequality? Some schools will have access to loads of businesses; parents will have businesses of their own and pupils will have access to those opportunities. Other schools might find that more difficult because of the pressures that they are under. It seems very unfair if we have a system that reinforces that inequality by offering the ability to bring somebody in. Could it be argued that those resources should be made available to all schools rather than young people being at the mercy of local networks?

Joan Mackay: I am not quite sure what you mean by “local networks”.

Johann Lamont: It was said that schools were encouraged to develop their own networks by bringing businesses in to offer young people opportunities. That will be easier in an urban setting and in a more prosperous area, where parents perhaps have access to all sorts of contacts, than it will be in a rural area or in areas where there are few businesses functioning. Therefore, the school's opportunities to develop a network will be very different depending on where that school is. How do you stop that reinforcement of the disadvantages that are already in the school system?

Joan Mackay: We are acutely aware of the issues in rural and remote areas, and we have seen a huge amount of creativity in what people are able to do. When we began the work on developing the young workforce, we did not go to the urban schools or these obvious settings where networks might be more accessible. For instance,

we went to Dumfries and Galloway Council and Argyll and Bute Council and worked out on the ground with them what would work in those settings. That has continued to influence the work that we are still doing today in partnership with SDS on the offers that we are putting together.

It is important to know some of the thinking that has gone on in Dumfries and Galloway around the bridge project. We have followed that through, because it began to influence the thinking about how we helped and supported schools. The evidence on the ground is that the schools where there are real challenges are often the ones that are the most innovative and creative and have come up with the solutions. That is what we are tracking.

We have also seen the model in the Western Isles, where the island authority got going on a lot of this very early on, in 2008 and 2009. We have tracked that model and we see other authorities learning from the Western Isles and from Dumfries and Galloway. I have several other examples, but you may want to come back on what I have said.

Johann Lamont: I accept that that has been done. If you are saying that it is about the school and its networks, even within urban areas the capacity and the access to contacts among the people who are friends of the school will vary. How do you mitigate that?

Joan Mackay: We now have in play the DYW employer groups. It took a while to set up that part of the structure. They are all now fully operational and we are beginning to see the impact of those groups in making the links with schools and providing support for businesses. Sometimes there is more strength in rural and remote communities because of the local knowledge of small and medium-sized enterprises or one-off businesses, in which there is far more interest on an individual level. It is quite a mixed picture. We have moved away from an assumption that urban settings will have the best access to the opportunities.

Johann Lamont: I think that schools within urban settings and within rural and fragile remote areas will be quite different from one another as well. You are maybe seeing that, but the idea that the school has to make contacts and that those contacts can create a network is going to create problems in a school where there are perhaps fewer families with access to those contacts. It is like everything else in education. If you are looking for work experience and you are sitting in a school that has a lot of pupils whose parents run their own businesses, you have great opportunities that pupils in other schools do not have. I wonder how you mitigate the inequality rather than reinforce it.

Alan Armstrong: I can give some examples of how that is done. If we think about the science, technology, engineering and mathematics agenda, we are very focused on what we do if there are not the most relevant employers in the area, which is the point that you are making. We have a network of development officers for science whose role is to connect across primary schools through the raising aspirations in science education programme, which is funded by Sir Ian Wood. That is a pilot at the moment and those development officers are looking for ways to connect at a regional level, rather than school by school, to make sure that children in primary school have access to industry connections, either through visits to the school or through visits out to industry, and that teachers have professional learning.

We also have some work with the science centres. We are helping them with their outreach work to make sure that they can address some of the gaps in the understanding of parents about the STEM agenda and parents and family learning. That goes well beyond the local area of a city and takes much more of a regional approach.

Finally, through the glow schools intranet infrastructure in schools, we provide access to industry employers, for example to people who work in the digital sector and cybersecurity. They can have glow meets, which are live with a classroom and which are trying to help with the issue of geographical sparsity. That helps the school to take something from the national or regional offer or from their local employers.

The Convener: I have a number of members who want to come in with supplementaries. I will take Ms Fee first.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): I have a brief follow-up question on foundation apprenticeships. Mr Russell, can you give us the up-to-date figure for foundation apprenticeships, and could you say whether you are on target to meet your target of 5,000?

James Russell: For the this academic year, we set out to have 2,600 opportunities. We are currently recruiting for that and we do not have the figure for the start of the academic year. We will publish that as part of our report in November to ensure that the recruitment for that programme has taken place.

Mary Fee: You do not know how many there are currently. How many were there last year?

James Russell: There were 1,245.

Mary Fee: So you want to recruit another 1,300.

James Russell: We went from 346 to 1,245 the year after; and the plan is for 2,600 in this academic year and 5,000 next year.

Mary Fee: The plan is for 5,000 for next year—is that an additional 5,000, or does that take the total up to 5,000?

James Russell: The figure will be 5,000 starts next year; 5,000 opportunities will be available for 2019.

Mary Fee: Is that achievable?

James Russell: I think that this picks up on the point about schools not having to be responsible for finding networks themselves. A lot of investment at the start of the foundation apprenticeship pathfinder programmes and currently is to develop hub delivery models, which bring employers. We use our networks through SDS and our partners, such as industry leadership groups and the Scottish apprenticeship advisory board, to influence employers to become part of those delivery hubs. In that way, it is not schools that are constantly trying to find those opportunities and relationships.

Those delivery hubs bring all the partners that are involved together. This is about shared learning and we have a community of practice to embed that. The growth from 346 in cohort 1 to 1,200 was more than 200 per cent, and there has been a 100 per cent increase this year, so moving from recruitment this year to 5,000 opportunities next year reduces the percentage increase to about 90 per cent. I assume that everybody will be familiar with exponential curves in change programmes. You get the foundations in place; you build the networks and partnerships; and you understand what works and what does not. That gives you an opportunity to scale at a pace that is different from when you are trying to build the foundations.

Mary Fee: Thank you.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): I was astonished to hear Education Scotland hold the bridge project up as an example of how to tackle rural inequality. I have heard several teachers and lots of people within education in Dumfries and Galloway question what the project is about. They feel that it replicates the work that is already being done by the regional college, and it does not tackle the fundamental issue of how pupils in outlying secondary schools in Sanquhar and Langholm get over the fact that it is an 80-minute round trip to go to another building in what is a large urban centre within a rural region. What is being done to make sure the same educational opportunities are available to young people across Scotland regardless of where they live?

10:30

Joan Mackay: Can I come back on the bridge project? What was useful when we visited

Dumfries and Galloway was the thinking about all the challenges.

Oliver Mundell: Does creating another physical space in an urban centre get over those challenges?

Joan Mackay: I am not endorsing creating a physical space. That is not my point. My point was that the people there were exactly dealing with the issue that you are raising. That was helpful to us for the advice that we had to include on the career education standard, the work placement standard and the challenges that we are talking about here.

Oliver Mundell: You brought up the bridge to one of my colleagues as an example of how we deliver services in a rural area. However, in effect, the bridge is another campus in an urban setting that is inaccessible to many people in a largely rural region. I do not personally find that to be a credible solution to these challenges.

Joan Mackay: We went to explore the thinking around that, as we did in the Western Isles. Therefore I am not going to comment on how the bridge is viewed locally.

Oliver Mundell: That comes back to some of the evidence that has come in ahead of this session. For example, developing the young workforce is embraced by many as a concept, yet the reality is somewhat different from the vision. Do you not accept that a project that is, in effect, an urban-focused solution for a rural area is another example of that? We talk about having parity across the country but, when it comes to putting solutions in place, we go back to the same ideas that we already have in place, which do not address the fundamental challenges.

Joan Mackay: I think that we have seen more than that idea and that is what is emerging across the country. We do not in any way deny that there are challenges for rural communities. What we are seeing is an increased and innovative use of digital. We were involved in that when we were working with young folk in Argyll and Bute, who had come from vast distances to participate in the workshop sessions that we did. We talked in those sessions to their parents, the teachers involved and importantly, of course, the young folk on what worked for them. Part of our work with SDS is to support the creation of offers that make the world of work accessible and an understanding of it more available to young people online as well as locally. That work is on-going.

I reiterate that we are seeing at a local level that, although schools have challenges, they are coming up with solutions that are creative and responsive to where they are.

Oliver Mundell: I would not deny that schools are coming up with solutions; they are being

forced to do that. Again, I am concerned to hear that somehow digital is the answer for people who live remotely. We are seeing a huge focus on the bridge in an area that already has a disproportionate offering on that menu compared to outlying areas. I will leave it there for now. Thank you, convener.

The Convener: Your point has been well made, Mr Mundell. I am sure that you will have an opportunity to come back in later.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): My apologies for being late, convener. I have yet to find a way to say, "Stop speaking to me on the phone" to a Shetland constituent at 5 to 10 on a Wednesday morning.

I want to ask Joan Mackay about work experience. When the committee visited Anderson high school in Lerwick, the strong message that many of us got was that many early stage secondary school pupils are saying, "We would like more work experience options so as to make best judgment about the courses we take, given the narrowing of the choices that are available in the senior phase". How does Education Scotland view that? How do you help schools to widen out choice, given the challenges of finding employers and space in the school day to allow children to undertake more work experience options?

Joan Mackay: Young people raised that issue with us in preparation for the development of the career education standard. We developed the work placement standard at the same time because there was a heavy correlation between them.

The work placement standard is for youngsters in the senior phase, with options earlier than that, and I will come back to that. The important thing about the career education standard is that it should recognise that young people want to understand more about the world of work, which was one of the main themes in Sir Ian Wood's commission. It was interesting to tackle the issue of giving young people that awareness.

I will give you an example that comes back to the digital offer. A young person said, "We have just been studying such-and-such a thing in geography. We have done X amount of hours on it. We know we are doing that in order to pass an exam, and we want to know where that has any meaning out there." They were standing holding their smartphones. That view was echoed by children all across secondary, and we also saw some of that with primary children.

The whole point about the career education standard was that it built the connections into young people's everyday experiences, and helped teachers to make the subjects that they are teaching more relevant to the world of work so

children can see those connections. You heard James Russell talk about lesson inserts. For instance, a chemistry or geography teacher today should be able to find something being delivered by a colleague that would make a five or 10-minute insert to a lesson that gives their students access to somebody talking about the subject, whether it is geography or somebody working in weather. I am coming back to digital, but the important thing is to develop where youngsters find a lot of their information and how they access it. The My World of Work service continues to evolve in response to that.

It is important to note that the career education standard asks that real connections be made with actual employers in local industry, and we are seeing really interesting developments in early years and primary, where youngsters are getting directly involved with employers who come into the school, or youngsters are visiting workplaces. If you take the bits and pieces that have emerged, we are beginning to see a progression in children's experience of, exposure to and understanding of the world of work.

Tavish Scott: It would be fair to say it is a bit patchy, is it not?

Joan Mackay: Yes, at the moment it is.

Tavish Scott: The standard was specifically about work experience choices for kids, particularly in S1 to S3, so that they would have more things to relate to, and that would help them to make choices at the senior phase. The pattern we have seen across Scotland is, understandably, pretty patchy. Ian Wood is very strong on how we need more kids doing more work experience earlier on. I presume that you agree with that principle.

Joan Mackay: Absolutely, and that is what we are supporting schools to do. For instance, in S1 to S3 we have a real opportunity through the STEM strategy. The fundamental thing is that if the physics teachers, biology teachers and maths teachers are not working together and offering youngsters opportunities in S1 to S3, we need to do something to help them to understand that interplay. In the schools that have gone ahead with all of this we are seeing that happen. For example, somebody from the local distillery might come to teach part of a chemistry unit—my memory of chemistry is pretty weak just now—alongside the teacher, so youngsters are getting that kind of exposure. That is all going on in the mix.

Tavish Scott: Thank you.

The Convener: We move on to theme two, which is on careers information, guidance and advice.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Mr Armstrong, I refer you to the submission you made to the committee in which you point to the enhanced career information, advice, guidance and so on that you say has been in place in secondary schools since 2016-17, and which includes the earlier intervention for young people at primary 7, S1 and in the transition stages in S2 to S3. Could you provide the committee with some evidence to support your submission?

At last week's committee, Professor Jim Scott told us about his trawl of every single secondary school across the country and said that very few schools are providing comprehensive and good-quality guidance for subject choice. The two things do not quite fit together, so could you give us your take on it?

Alan Armstrong: As Joan Mackay said, where we are with implementation of the career education standard is the understanding of subject-specific secondary school teachers of the ways in which their subject relates to the world of work. That is work in progress with teachers so that they understand that, when they are teaching, they can change the context of teaching for young people so that young people, and teachers themselves, understand the relevance of the subject. Once that is more embedded—we can see this happening in the schools that are further ahead—it opens up the thinking of the teachers and the school about the range of possible courses. Rather than do what we might call traditional subjects such as geography, they might look at tourism, or they might look at land-based studies rather than biology or chemistry. Getting all that embedded takes time.

The review of the career education standard was launched in autumn 2015 and, in spring 2017, after 18 months, we had a pledge to review the career education standards to make sure that they were fit for purpose and were having some kind of traction. The review pointed to the fact that senior staff in schools were fully aware of the career education standard, what it was aiming to do and its potential, but that awareness had not yet fully reached the teachers and the classroom. Careers information and guidance inspections have shown that the next stage is for the standards to filter into the classroom.

Liz Smith: I am sorry, Mr Armstrong, but I want to interrupt you there. Professor Scott made two points. First, he believes that subject choice is diminished, particularly in S4, and he argues that that will impact on S5. His evidence is pretty strong on that and the committee has agreed to look at it further.

His second point is that youngsters and parents are not being adequately informed about what is on offer in schools. He has done a comprehensive

study of handbooks and the information that schools disseminate to young people. He makes the point that young people are not always aware because information is not sent to them.

Mr Armstrong, you seem to be arguing there is enhanced career information, while Professor Jim Scott is saying quite the reverse.

Alan Armstrong: There is enhanced career information, but we are not seeing it as widely spread in handbooks—

Liz Smith: Why is that?

Alan Armstrong: It is because of the stage we are at in the implementation. As I said, we know that, in spring 2017, the career education standard was well understood by senior staff but not in the classrooms. However, we did check and schools' intentions for the last academic session were to do much more work in the classroom, so it is beginning to penetrate. From there, they intend to do more detailed informative work in parent handbooks, discussions at parents' evening and with children. That is how it all flows. There is a sequence of activity to filter down from the senior management to teachers with their understanding, then to the young people, and it then has to find its way into advice for parents.

Liz Smith: If we were to look at the school inspections overall, are you telling us that the inspection process is reporting that better information is being disseminated to our young people, when Professor Jim Scott's evidence suggests that there is a long way to go? Is that what we would find if we look at school inspections?

Alan Armstrong: No; we would find out whether young people are on the right pathway into S3 and S4 and what quality of advice they received. We would see that the advice that they are receiving at the moment is variable.

Joan Mackay: If I remember rightly, Professor Jim Scott was speaking to a review he had done of school websites and school handbooks, and he is right in that. We also did a review midway through last year, and it was disappointing. It did not show up the range of options we described at the beginning, so we are reminding schools to do that as a piece of work. The handbook and the website are key tools in informing most of us in the community, but they are unfortunately often the last things to be attended to.

We found that websites do not yet reflect what we were hearing and knew was happening from our development work, for example. There is a point about the role of schools in promoting what they are doing. Sometimes they are still in a state of development so that is an issue. The other thing to say—James Russell will probably pick up on

this—is that the formal earlier offer from SDS and the changed focus as a result of the post-Wood recommendations and what is going on now requires a lot of culture change in schools to make all this work.

I will say this carefully but, for example, there might have been a degree of distance between senior management in a secondary school and what SDS was doing. It might have been seen as an add-on. The career person comes in and does this and goes away; we knew that was the attitude. Inspections have shown that, over time, the response of headteachers, for instance, to their school partnership agreement with SDS—which again sat on the side; it was something it did—is entering into the mainstream of secondary schools' body of improvement work. I think that I am right to say that the response that we are getting from headteachers is that they see the early SDS offer as much more meaningful. They are making better use of it in schools. They are using the data from SDS to inform what they are doing. Importantly, they are using what is often just one careers person in a better way to support the rest of the staff—not just guidance staff, as we might have seen, but all staff—and to develop their understanding of the links between what they are doing in the classroom and the wider economy.

It sounds like a catch, but it is a work in progress and I am not surprised that Professor Jim Scott found that on websites.

10:45

Liz Smith: Thank you for that. Does Education Scotland acknowledge that this is a serious concern? Mr Armstrong, you said in your opening remarks that, when youngsters come to make their choices, they face a more complex landscape than ever before. There are different pathways, which is a good thing. However, youngsters have to know in detail exactly what their options are, what the qualifications are, how they are examined and so on. It strikes me that the situation is a mess in terms of the information going out to youngsters. It is not clear cut and is certainly leaving them very short as young people who are obviously the future skills of this country.

Alan Armstrong: It is not a mess. It needs to be more informed by, for example, labour market intelligence. Our reviews of careers information, advice and guidance have turned out to be very positive. There have been very good, and some excellent, evaluations across the local authorities during the past years.

Within that, the areas that need to be worked on most are the implementation of the enhanced careers education offer from SDS, as well as the

use that teachers and schools make of labour market information. That is critical to helping schools understand exactly what needs to happen. As Joan Mackay said, it is work in progress and certainly an area we know needs to improve.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Continuing on the same theme, I am interested in Skills Development Scotland's senior phase survey. I am glad that you do it, but I have a couple of specific questions on it. Before I ask them, however, I note that your submission focuses on young people's experience of careers advisers. Will you briefly explain whether the survey is broader than that or whether it focuses on experience of careers advisers in schools?

James Russell: We set out to listen to our customers' voices as part of the CIAG service. We have been doing that for many years, including before the career education standard and DYW came in. As well as the senior phase survey, we undertake point-of-delivery customer feedback after group sessions and one-to-one sessions.

Until last year, it was a school leaver survey. We gathered feedback from leavers on the services that they had received from SDS. With the evolution of the sophistication of our systems and our tracking of young people, we are now able to ask those questions of young people based on the services that they actually received, and we remind them that those services have been received.

The point was made earlier that delivery of career information, advice and guidance services does not lie solely with SDS. Teachers are required to be engaged in that, using the same methodology. A lot of our focus is on building capacity to embed career management skills into the curriculum so that there is a common thread that runs through the support that a young person gets and the language that careers advisers use as well as the support and the language that the teacher is using.

At present, the survey is specifically focused on CIAG services. Part of our evolution as a partnership through the change theme programmes and the career education standard is the consideration of how we use that mechanism. We reach 3,500 young people every year, which is a significant cohort of individuals from the senior phase. How do we use that to start to focus on the broader career information, advice and guidance that they are getting through the school system, rather than purely what they get from SDS?

With the career education standard, we have been trying to develop a network of individuals who consistently provide the same or similar information, using the same language, in order to develop career management skills for informed

decision making. We are certainly considering that.

Ross Greer: Thank you—that is useful.

If we look at the results from last year, we see that nine out of 10 young people found their careers adviser to be friendly and approachable. That is fantastic. That was my experience not that long ago. However, that figure drops to 70 per cent being happy with both their ability to access support and the support that they accessed. Have you drilled down into that and found out why one in five young people has that gap in experience, whereby they found the careers adviser friendly and approachable but were clearly not happy with what they got?

James Russell: We have drilled down into that. One of the things to understand about the senior phase survey is that we submit the national result as part of our report, which we published last week.

We described earlier the difference between universal and targeted support. Universal services are for all young people; the entitlement is for every young person in school. That targeted support begins to come in around the needs matrix that we have referenced, and I know that that is picked up in the submissions. There are differences in what customers, or young people, actually receive as part of that service. We do not widely publicise that and say, “This is when you get targeted support and this is when you get universal support.” It is more about the individual and their circumstances and the practitioner working with them in order to understand whether they should get targeted support.

When we drill down into the survey, we see that the results for universal customers—those who are receiving only the face-to-face engagement or the subject choice one-to-one—is starkly different from the results for those who are receiving targeted support. We often find that the satisfaction of those young people who receive the universal support drops because they are not getting more, but we are obviously limited in the services that we deliver. We deliver against the expectations in the letter of guidance and through the CIAG strategy. With our resources, we deliver what I feel is the right mixture of services.

We have learned from that how we can take that out to practitioners in order to manage expectations around the services that young people have and the support that they can access, and to support them to know that they can get continuous, on-going targeted support if it is agreed and worked through with a careers adviser. If we identify a change in someone’s circumstances, we can offer that enhanced support.

The satisfaction level increases by 10 per cent when we look only at the targeted cohort. That is the difference. Part of our commitment to continuous improvement is about how we inform our practice, working with young people to manage expectations and be clear about the services and support that they can receive.

Ross Greer: The entitlement to one-on-one discussions with advisers has been mentioned. Do you know how many young people know that they have that entitlement? The subject has come up quite regularly in the informal sessions that we have had with young people, as well as in more formal evidence and submissions. It seems that they are often unaware of what support they are entitled to.

Sharon Kelly (Skills Development Scotland): We put a lot of effort into trying to make sure that young people are aware. We also use the opportunities that we have to work with our influencers, so we make sure that parents are aware of that. We spend a lot of time in schools, through the school partnership agreements, discussing what arrangements we will make to try to raise awareness of that.

Young people have the opportunity to come along for a face-to-face, which is arranged in the way that we have described, and in most of our schools they can also come to drop-in sessions for further help. Sometimes, it is from that that we identify that they need further help.

We now do a lot more to promote our services in a range of ways. We are a multichannel service. You will see that information in schools—I hope you have seen it in the schools that you have visited—and we also have marketing materials that young people and their parents can access. We also spend a lot of time talking to teachers about that, because they can refer young people for support if they feel that that is appropriate.

We use a lot of different channels and opportunities to try to raise awareness and make sure that young people are aware of their entitlements. We also closely monitor that, as a service, to make sure that we are reaching those young people who most need it.

Ross Greer: That is very helpful, but have you surveyed young people to find out what they know about their entitlements?

Joan Mackay: Entitlements are set out in the career education standard. I am not sure whether they are the ones that you are referring to, but there are 10 of them and they include, critically, the SDS offer.

I will give you some idea of the progress. We are absolutely pushing on all angles in relation to how children and young people are made aware

that the entitlements exist in the first place. You have heard us say that a lot of work is going on across schools and wider practitioners in community learning and development so that people are aware that the entitlements exist. As we speak, inspectors will be in secondary and primary schools, asking how aware the young people in the establishment are of those entitlements, and that work will bring feedback towards mid-year and the end of the year.

Alan Armstrong mentioned that career information and guidance reviews have taken place since 2014 on a local authority basis. We are now at the stage where some of the follow-ups are beginning to happen. For example, one local authority got a good review but there was a recommendation about teachers, parents and youngsters being made aware of the entitlements. There has just been a revisit, and that came out very positively in terms of the awareness in that local authority of young people's access to their entitlements. Again, it is work in progress.

Ross Greer: That is useful. Something that has come up quite regularly in feedback from young people is that there are choices that are not really choices for them. On paper, the school might have expanded the number of options that are available, but individual young people do not feel that it was ever really a choice. I do not want to use the word "railroaded", because it is a loaded term, but they felt that they were being directed towards one of a range of options and the others were not really options for them.

What is the role for a careers adviser in that situation? Are careers advisers empowered to address that with schools?

Sharon Kelly: We have a really important role to play around the curricular choices that people make. As you have heard, we have input around either the second or the third year. That is a face-to-face intervention, but it is also an opportunity to speak to parents and teachers if we feel that that is appropriate. Part of what we are trying to do while we are having those conversations is look at what the opportunities might be in the future and to help young people, their parents and their teachers to look at that in the context of the circumstances in which the young person is learning. As part of that, it may well be that they look at a career route or a career option.

Our job is to keep their options as open as possible at that stage and to help them to develop their career management skills in order to understand how they might go about accessing that. As part of that conversation, they may identify particular qualifications that they require in order to pursue the career. Whether those are available in the school is something that we will discuss with them, but our focus is not necessarily on which

subjects they are going to choose at that time. It is a much broader conversation than that.

On our influence in a particular school where young people might not be able to access something, I return to the points that were made earlier about looking at what opportunities might exist for them to access more widely, rather than within the particular school.

Ross Greer: What I was talking about is perhaps slightly different from that. It is not that the options are not available in the school; perhaps the options are available, but the school or individuals within it have, in essence, decided that they are not available to the individual young person. We get that anecdotal feedback quite regularly.

Alan Armstrong: That is fair to say. It shows the extent of the culture change that needs to happen, and it goes back to my analogy of linear progression. Parents, teachers and employers are used to one system, and employers know their needs. We need to harmonise the two so that exactly what employers need in the way of their future workforce influences schools and helps to influence the choices that young people make, with their parents' consent.

University may not be the best thing for a young person. They might be better to do a foundation apprenticeship or a modern apprenticeship up to degree level in the workplace, given all the benefits that that will have for the economy and their own personal finances by the time they are 21 or 22. Learning on the job can be incredibly valuable. We are working with SDS and parents on that cultural change. We have strong links with the National Parent Forum of Scotland, which is keen to help us with this. It is an important element of the DYW agenda.

James Russell: Going back to Ross Greer's original question, I note that there are dedicated staff from SDS working in the schools. We negotiate that service through the school partnership agreement. They may not be empowered to change what is happening in the curriculum, but they are certainly seen as part of the school team. The development of the career education standard and that collaboration has raised the visibility of what that offer does and the contribution that it makes to the wider information, advice and guidance. We are informing and influencing senior management teams and headteachers around what we are hearing from young people.

11:00

As Ross Greer described, there are experiences whereby people feel that they are being driven into different environments for different reasons. The

value that comes from having a professionally qualified careers adviser at subject choice is exactly what was intended. It is almost a pause for the young person. The advice is impartial, it challenges their decision making and it takes into account what influences have got them to that point. As Sharon Kelly said, it helps them to work through the reality of what the decisions are going to look like both now and in the long term.

The Convener: I have a quick question about the survey that Ross Greer asked about. Your submission says that 3,753 youngsters responded to it. How many were given the opportunity to respond?

James Russell: We hold valid email addresses for about 50,000 young people. We go through a very technical solution to make sure they are real email addresses. We match those with the young people who are also registered with My World of Work—we have seen quite a significant increase in such registrations. The response rate was about 8 or 9 per cent, which makes the results that we are putting out statistically robust.

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): James Russell, in response to Ross Greer you said that careers advisers in schools are not empowered to change course choices. On average, how many hours a week might a careers adviser spend in a school?

James Russell: It depends on the number of pupils in that school. For example, in Sharon Kelly's area there is a school with 4,000, pupils, so we have three careers advisers based in that school.

Jenny Gilruth: Did you say a school with 4,000 pupils in it?

James Russell: Sorry—it is 2,000, and we have about 2.5 FTE advisers working in that school.

We review the resources annually. We look at the population in the census data that comes through via the SEEMiS schools information management system and adjust our resources to ensure we can deliver the targeted and universal support that we set out to deliver.

The amount of time for which advisers are in schools will depend. In rural areas, for example, advisers will be there for three days, two days or one day a week. In some schools there will be a number of advisers. It is important to recognise that it is always dedicated individuals, so the same people will be working in that school annually and throughout the year.

Jenny Gilruth: If a school's careers advisers are not based in the school for the whole week, where are they? Are they out and about in other schools, or are they based in a central location in the local authority area?

Sharon Kelly: In the example that James Russell gave, the advisers are in school for four and a half days a week, so they are more or less full time. We make time—half a day per week—for advisers to come back into the centre so that they can link back in with other staff, attend staff meetings and undertake continuous professional development, which is crucial for our expert advisers. In other areas things might be done differently. Advisers may have a school case load and also work with unemployed young people. The situation is different in different geographies and in different circumstances.

Jenny Gilruth: I want to move on to look at subject choice with regard to gender segregation. The equality section of the developing Scotland's young workforce report made specific reference to reducing gender stereotyping and segregation in course choice. I would be interested to hear about some of the work that is being done on that by Education Scotland and SDS.

Joan Mackay: We have done a lot of work on gender, which features strongly in what we are asking in the career education standard, from the early years onwards. In an early learning and childcare setting today, we are asking the people who work with young people to think carefully about gender stereotyping when they are playing or dressing as somebody from work.

We have just completed, with SDS and the Institute of Physics in Scotland, a very successful programme in schools in Fife and other areas on improving gender balance. The findings of that were launched and disseminated in June, just before the summer, and the programme tackled a huge number of issues relating to gender across the piece. It has been regarded as very successful. Practitioners and teachers have found it very useful. We will now pick up on that work. Now that regional improvement collaboratives are emerging, we are looking for improving gender balance staff who will help take that work forward across the country. We have learned a lot from it and can see progress.

James Russell: We have been involved in the delivery of the improving gender balance project, which has led us to look at development of resources. Careers advisers, particularly those who are postgraduate qualified, have an element of that as part of their learning and training.

On challenging young people's choices in a positive way, it is about ensuring that the young person is making the right choice, which includes exploring gender and occupational segregation and the influences that inform those choices. Our staff undertake career-long learning, or CPD, which we have developed in conjunction with Education Scotland. There is also a teachers' resource that has been developed to help

teachers to be aware of occupational segregation and understand in which occupations and industries the specific challenges exist—that goes back to the labour market information. The issues can then be raised with young people so that they understand them. Again, it is a cultural change.

All the influencers need to know what that position looks like. We certainly have a role in supporting them through the information that we share with them.

Jenny Gilruth: Obviously, certain schools are better at tackling gender segregation than others. Is there a role for Education Scotland in tackling that and tracking course choices in terms of gender to see what the national picture is?

Does Education Scotland provide any advice with regard to the gender composition of a class? For example, a school might have an advanced higher physics class in which there are 16 pupils and only one girl. Do schools receive any guidance on how to challenge that or prevent that kind of thing from arising in the first instance?

Alan Armstrong: That is exactly the kind of work the improving gender balance officers will be doing. We have had a pilot running for two years, with the Institute of Physics part-funding the posts along with SDS, to look at that critical element in advance of the STEM strategy being developed. That has proved to be very successful. From some of the actions that have been taken in schools, we have learned how to help with the whole situation.

On Thursday of last week's Scottish learning festival, which the committee could not come to, we had a whole day focused on STEM. There were three intriguing short presentations by young people in the morning—it is worth looking at them on the web—which showed the stark differences. The last person who spoke was a young woman who left school possibly two years ago. She did not know what to do when she was in school in terms of her future career—it was before enhanced career information was in place. She fortuitously moved school in S5, and in S6 her technology teacher opened her mind to what they call a multitrade course. On that, she went out with the council workers two days a week, which really opened her mind. She is now a second-year apprentice plasterer. She knows she did not receive the right information when she was younger.

The corollary to that was the first person who spoke. She was a primary 7 pupil who had become a science lab technician in her primary school. She had to apply and go through an interview for that. She is now leading boys and girls in that school on science. That is an example of us seeing those early wins coming through. It

will take time but we are working on it from a range of angles.

Jenny Gilruth: How will Education Scotland capture that good practice and share it with other schools? Will it be done through a website?

Joan Mackay: It is done in a number of ways. All of that is captured in the findings and the projects.

With regard to your example of noticing that there is one girl in a class of X number of boys, that is exactly the type of thing that we are working on with the schools concerned. The influence of how a teacher speaks in a class, who are they taking answers from and whether they are responding to the boys first or girls first, and whether that varies across subject area—all of that has been made very clear. That was all unearthed as part of this work, and it is fascinating. It is all available and is certainly on the website. With the new improving gender balance officers, we will work with each of the regional improvement collaboratives to make sure everybody is aware of that material.

Alan Armstrong: The reason for placing the officers with the regional improvement collaboratives is that Education Scotland is looking to have a team of people working on literacy, numeracy, health, wellbeing, STEM and gender. Doing that will take things much more across the curriculum and help all teachers to understand the connections with everyday learning and teaching, without even thinking about which careers we want more women in. Covering gender bias issues will become a natural part of learning, teaching and young people's expectations.

The Convener: Thank you. We will move on to achieving the developing young workforce priorities.

Oliver Mundell: How well is DYW achieving its aims across the country?

James Russell: I would like to go back to a point that Terry Lanagan made in June as part of his evidence to this inquiry, which is that we are halfway through quite a significant change programme. The key difference with DYW is the length of time that has been given to elicit change in the system, which is already changing. The world of work is consistently changing, so the recommendations that we had back at the beginning of DYW are starting to be challenged by what the landscape currently looks like.

From our point of view, there is no denying there has been progress. As I said earlier, we would expect the pace of progress to be different at the front end of this change programme from how it will be at the back end. A lot of capacity has been built and a lot of infrastructure is now in place,

such as employer-school relationships and hub delivery models for foundation apprenticeships. That gives us a real opportunity to work towards achieving what DYW set out for the seven-year programme.

On the career education standard—the recommendations on career information, advice and guidance for young people and all the people who are involved in that—we are starting to see progress through the Education Scotland review of CIAG services. There are some great examples of local authorities changing their entire curriculum structure and running things so that the same opportunities exist for young people across local authorities. Those changes are being made in a way that does not take away time from other parts. A lot of learning has been taking place as part of the change programme. The incremental progress that is being made year on year is reflected in the performance against key performance indicators.

Joan Mackay: There are 39 recommendations in the original report, which break down into something like 124 sub-recommendations. Across the vastness of the programme there has been a lot of interdependency and complexity. I see it as being just beyond the midpoint, because pretty much everything is lined up. There was a point when we could not push on one bit until another bit was in place; for instance when we were waiting for the DYW employer groups to get themselves up and running, which they now are. We are in an interesting place now, because, from where I sit, everything is in place. The job now is one of pretty well relentless focus on delivering the ambitions of the programme in the next two to three years.

Oliver Mundell: Are you confident that the targets are going to be met by the end of the funded period?

Joan Mackay: I am confident that we are going to see a change. Remember that we are looking for system change that is sustainable, which is a big ask. This cannot be seen as another initiative—something that was done in the past. It cannot be something that stops when the programme stops. That is what we are gearing all our efforts towards. We have already mentioned the significant culture change that we are working on to ensure that system change actually happens and is sustained beyond the life of the programme.

Oliver Mundell: Are you confident that there is sufficient financial resource available to ensure that activity is sustainable right across the country?

Joan Mackay: I am probably not best placed to make a comment on the financial resource.

Alan Armstrong: There are three strong indicators of progress. One is that the

relationships are now growing with the right partners, which include employers, parents and everybody involved in this. It is not partnership—it is genuine collaboration. That is not just between national agencies but with schools and local authorities. There are also shared expectations, whether about gender bias or the need for better careers information in school at option choice. There are clear understandings and shared expectations. Relationships, collaboration and expectations are really strong.

11:15

Oliver Mundell: The final question I want to ask is slightly unrelated. Is there too much focus on employers' needs? I have heard that mentioned a couple of times this morning, and it is certainly a worry for me. The DYW group in Dumfries and Galloway is doing a great job, but ultimately a lot of the activity seems to be focused on supporting employers to match them with young people locally, rather than on young people's potential and what they want to do. I am concerned when I hear that although we are widening the option choice, for some bright young people, who may come from disadvantaged backgrounds and who want to pursue a traditional academic route, the support available to them on their choices is weaker or has lost its focus as a result of a focus on support for other activities.

Alan Armstrong: When talking to young people in schools and community learning settings, we need to keep a keen eye on whether they genuinely feel that the range of courses they are taking meets their expectations. Part of that is about a young person, right from the earlier stages, being able to understand and articulate what their career options might be, so that they can be aware of and talk about their skills. That allows them, their teachers and their parents to be well informed.

We certainly would not want a situation where a young person's aspirations were bound by the needs of a local employer, when that young person could become something different by doing something else. That is very important. It is about young people's needs as well as the economy's needs.

Oliver Mundell: I am asking whether the current programme has the balance right.

Alan Armstrong: Yes.

Oliver Mundell: As far as I can see, middle-class pupils who have connections and in-built advantages are not changing their mind from wanting to go to university to wanting to work in local businesses. They are continuing on that path. A lot of the initiatives end up targeting a group of bright people, who maybe do not have

the same advantages, with options that do not appear attractive to them. They are not given the full support that they deserve.

Alan Armstrong: I agree that that is an issue at the moment, but the drivers are in place to address that. I mentioned earlier the work of the science centres in reaching out and working with families on family learning and that kind of thing. That, again, needs to be embedded into the system and the driver is there for that.

Joan Mackay: We are acutely aware of that perception playing out. We absolutely have in mind that the children's needs come first. That is a driver in everything we are doing.

James Russell: Absolutely. Joan Mackay spoke about looking at what evidence exists at school level to support the planning of the school's curriculum and further education provision in the area. The 16-plus data hub, which is part of opportunities for all, is tracking young people's outcomes, and SDS is heavily involved through identifying where young people are if they are not in school. As part of that, a huge amount of work has been undertaken to support schools to input information about young people's status and destination, and there is information about preferred occupations and routes. The hub gives us a chance to use that information. A lot of the focus has been on getting that data as complete as it possibly can be.

We are already starting to see that information be used by local authorities and colleges for curriculum planning. We are also looking at supply and demand. If they are mismatched in some way, that has implications for all of us. How we use evidence and information to inform targeted and specific improvement needs to be part of the evolution of DYW, rather than be at the front end, which was broad infrastructure being built into the system. How we help schools to use that data more effectively is certainly on all of our horizons.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): I want to continue the conversation about employers. The vast majority of employers in Scotland, certainly in the private sector, are SMEs with fewer than five employees. What support is out there to encourage employers to get involved in the programme?

James Russell: It is important to recognise that SDS has a specific role in that space, working alongside Scottish Enterprise and the DYW groups in supporting employers. I can talk about the support that we have available for them.

We work with and account manage a group of employers to understand their business needs. There is a programme called skills for growth that enables employers to build the capacity to either export or undertake workforce development, and

we have a small team in SDS that works with those employers. Part of that programme, whereby we understand their needs and support them to improve or develop their organisations, includes identifying what skills programmes are available to help them, which will involve the apprenticeship family in its entirety. Could an employer become part of an FA delivery model, or would a modern apprenticeship better support the succession planning requirements of that organisation? That is one aspect.

We have sector teams, industry leadership groups and the Scottish apprenticeship advisory board, which is influential in supporting employers to understand the range of activity that they can get involved in. A lot of what we have discussed today has focused on the fact that awareness is the first requirement for anybody to make any change. How do we expect them to do that if they are not aware? It is about raising the profile of learning and skills and showing employers the benefits to them of the learning and skills pathways and programmes that are available to support their organisations.

The marketplace project, which we have developed with the DYW groups, is being implemented at the moment. There are seven or eight groups currently using that project, and there is a clear plan through the DYW lead strategy group to implement the project across all such groups. We developed the infrastructure around the project with DYW, and it is now a matter of promoting it to employers. We sometimes hear that employers do not know what to do to get involved with schools, and the marketplace project tries to give them an idea of the different activities that they may be able to put themselves forward for.

If an employer requires further support beyond that—if they do not know what to do but want to get involved—there are many routes whereby we can support them to do that.

Gordon MacDonald: KPIs 6, 10 and 11 are about increasing employability among young people, disabled people and people from care backgrounds. You mentioned the marketplace project. According to the information that we have, only 300 employers are registered with the project. Putting the public sector to one side, the private sector has 363,000 employers. It sounds to me as though only a minute number are involved. Do we know the make-up of the marketplace project? Is it predominately large employers or is it public sector employers? Who has registered with the marketplace project?

James Russell: It is a mixture. We work with our teams or through Scottish Enterprise, because many of the employers may be account managed in different ways across the entire landscape. We

help them to understand how they can broaden their reach. Some national employers are part of that, but we also support the SME sector and the public sector. We support a public sector network that develops employers' approach to learning and skills and to supporting young people. I do not have an exact breakdown of the numbers at this stage, but I could follow the matter up. It is important to note that we are not even halfway through the project—we are a third of the way to getting those groups engaged.

Joan Mackay referenced the timescales for having all the employer groups in place. It should then be a matter of using the networks of the DYW employer groups to interface in the marketplace. We have an evolution to go through if we are to meet their needs as part of that.

Gordon MacDonald: I appreciate that the project is a work in progress and that we will get further down the line as it goes on. How involved are SME groups in the DYW groups?

James Russell: I am not able to answer that question right now.

Joan Mackay: I do not think that we have that data to hand yet, but that is exactly what the groups are doing—looking in the localities of schools and the communities surrounding schools. A lot of them are busy engaging with and making approaches to SMEs, to see what is possible. I can give only anecdotal evidence at the moment, but I have heard of situations in which several SMEs—up to 10 employers—have grouped together to provide either a mentor for a young person, of which there are some good examples, or individual one-to-one support. One of the strengths that sometimes comes through is local knowledge of the community. There are a variety of things coming through.

The aim is, first, to support culture change. One issue has been the need for schools and employers to understand how to talk to each other, so that one is not demanding of the other—they have to enter into a mutually beneficial relationship—and our role is to advise the Government if there are particular blockages to that. In some cases, the developing the young workforce employer groups are getting up to speed and we are seeing good work there, with contacts being made. Therefore, I would not regard the success of the marketplace project as the only indication of what is going on on the ground.

The Convener: Let us move on to our next theme, which is inclusivity and support. A number of members want to ask questions, but I am mindful of the time. It would be helpful if people could keep their questions and answers succinct.

Mary Fee: I want to ask the panel about care-experienced young people. It is widely known that care-experienced young people have poorer outcomes. The figures show that, since 2012, there has been an increase of less than 2 per cent in the number of care-experienced young people who are reaching a positive destination. It is recognised that, quite often, care-experienced young people need intensive and personalised support. What specific supports are available for care-experienced young people?

Alan Armstrong: As you will be aware, meeting the needs of care-experienced young people is part of a much wider picture in the Scottish Government's education agenda through "Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education", the pupil equity fund and so on. We need to look at the matter through the lens of everything that is going on to help every young person to thrive.

There is a lot of multi-agency work going on with Education Scotland and others to look specifically at the needs of that group. Joan Mackay may have some examples.

Joan Mackay: The whole area is a challenge because of the level of individual support that is needed. I reiterate what Alan Armstrong said. From the DYW angle, we are trying to focus on what works for these young people when they are transitioning from one stage to another, into employment or to other positive destinations. That is very much what we are looking at. We are making slow and steady progress, although it is incremental. From working in the space that Alan Armstrong described, we are learning what works in the interventions through the Scottish attainment challenge and what is happening on the ground locally.

An example that comes to mind—some committee members may have visited it—is Scran Academy in the north of Edinburgh, which was set up with a Craigroyston high school teacher working with CLD in the local community to create a pathway for a whole cohort of young people. That is an example of youngsters in fairly challenging circumstances being motivated and supported through a route, and it is the kind of thing that we are learning from.

We are drawing out what works, which sometimes means passing on advice regarding any barriers to Scottish Government colleagues who are working in the policy area. We are working to capture what works for care-experienced young people, and our focus is very much on what helps them to develop confidence and skills in order to progress beyond where they are.

James Russell: The direct delivery service to young people—the targeted support that we mentioned, which is described in our submission—identifies socioeconomic factors among young people and uses those factors to enable the careers adviser and the practitioner who are supporting a young person—whether they are providing pastoral support or guidance—to make an informed decision about the level of support they will get.

11:30

One of the socioeconomic factors that would identify a young person for the maximum level of support is care experience, by which I mean care experience in any sense, not just the one-year definition that some statistics are reporting against. We are able to validate what the service level will look like for a young person on the basis of their circumstances. They may be a supported young person with clear career pathways in mind, and we will be able to identify that. We have brought the enhanced support on the back of the career education standard into S3 so that we can start the validation and intensive support with a young person from an earlier age.

The post-school services that we offer are, in effect, a continuation of the relationship that we have with young people from school into post-school if they have not moved into a positive destination. That is part of our corporate parenting plan, because, as an organisation, we are identified as a corporate parent. We have also extended the availability of intense and on-going support for young care-experienced individuals up to their 26th birthday, which creates a significant window of opportunity.

That is what our career intervention or career guidance support looks like, although it is not the entirety of it. We use a network to ensure that we bring into that environment whoever is working with or needs to work with a young person as part of the learning programme, and there is a commitment, from a service delivery point of view and also through partnership working, to extend that support.

Mary Fee: If the assessment of needs is done correctly and you produce a needs matrix, and if children are put at the heart of all of this and you assess the needs of care-experienced young people, why has the percentage of care-experienced young people who are achieving positive destinations increased by less than 2 per cent since 2012?

James Russell: We can only play a part in that process through the services that we deliver. It goes back to everything that we have talked about today: the broader support, information, advice,

guidance and influence that young people get—or lack, in many cases—from their peer groups, parents and carers. We can only put in place the support mechanisms that we deploy our resources towards and then build the capacity, as we have described today, to understand how we can support other people to provide those things.

One of the biggest challenges that we have outlined in our corporate parenting plan is having accurate and up-to-date data on all the young people who have experienced care in any way, shape or form. We are exploring how we might get data-sharing agreements or some way of identifying that data at a local authority level, as it does not currently exist.

There are many challenges to providing support, but we put as much effort as we can into the support that we give young people and work with our partners to connect that support as best we can.

Mary Fee: To go back to my original question, what specific support is put in place for care-experienced children? You have described a system of support that is available to all children who are identified as having a support need, but there is nothing that is specifically targeted at care-experienced children.

James Russell: I am sorry if I have not described that, but—

Mary Fee: You have described a system of support where you assess the need of a child and you put the support in place.

James Russell: Yes—absolutely.

Mary Fee: It is recognised that care-experienced children have more challenges and need more support. My question is: what specific support do you put in place when you have identified a care-experienced young person in addition to supports that may be put in place for other children who have additional support needs?

James Russell: The highest level of service or support would go to those young people.

Mary Fee: What does that look like?

James Russell: It is an on-going long-term relationship with the young person. We validate that need on an on-going basis. For example, we could work with the young person from S3 all the way through until they leave school and up to their 26th birthday. The extension of the service in the post-school setting is absolutely specific in our corporate parenting plan and our commitment to care-experienced young people. The targeted support and the needs matrix that we use take account of care-experienced young people in ensuring that they get the support that they need.

It is specific to those individuals; it is not just what everybody else gets.

Mary Fee: Do you have the resources available to deliver that? The figures suggest that you do not, as there has been less than a 2 per cent increase in the number of such young people going to positive destinations.

James Russell: It is not solely SDS's responsibility to deliver an improvement for those young people. It requires organisations throughout the system to change their mechanisms and undertake to provide support. I cannot comment on any of that. We deploy the resources that we have in the best way that we can to give the most support to those who need it.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Another group that has perhaps traditionally been underrepresented in the world of work is young people with disabilities. What can SDS do to try to improve the figures on that and to provide support specifically for young people with disabilities who are thinking about their career options?

James Russell: SDS's needs-based approach, which I have just described, would identify any disability or health condition that a young person has as a factor that may indicate that they require a greater level of support. We would apply the same principles of individualised support. The career information, advice and guidance service that we deliver is for the individual. The system that we have for that gives us a way of working with a young person and allocating a level of service that meets their needs. That is done on an individual basis, in the same way as I have described for care-experienced young people.

Dr Allan: I accept your point that it is not up to SDS to fix all problems in society, but do you as an organisation work with employers, where perhaps instinctively we might think that the primary barriers exist for young people with disabilities? What do you do to try to overcome some of those perceptions?

James Russell: We deliver the modern apprenticeship programme, in which there is enhanced funding for employers to put support in place to sustain young people who have disabilities and additional support needs through the programme for up to 52 weeks. There is additional support.

We do a lot of work with employers. One of the most recent pieces of work involved recruitment guides. That is about supporting employers to be fully inclusive and aware of the different aspects that may play into their recruitment practices and selection processes, in order to make them more fair and open. We do different pieces of work with employers to support them to bring young disabled

people into their organisations and to support them effectively while they are there, because that requires a level of support that employers may not have to provide all the time.

Dr Allan: Can any of the witnesses say anything about what might be done to overcome conscious or unconscious bias on the part of employers? Disabled people cite that as something that they perceive as one of the obstacles to work.

Joan Mackay: We are very aware of that in working with the DYW employer groups. One thing that we looked at early on was getting work placements for young people with disabilities. The definition of young people with disabilities covers a vast variation, and we have to unpack that almost continuously. I say cautiously that people rate some disabilities in different ways. There is a huge complexity sitting within that very wide grouping of young people. Education Scotland has sought to help the people who we can influence and work with to understand that they should not be setting a limit. It is a huge thing for a young person who has a disability if they are stopped at school level because the school says that they cannot undertake a work placement, for instance. The other side of that is about creating situations in which a young person can flourish because an employer is willing to offer them a work placement.

That is exactly where we are now. We are working on the cultural and attitudinal issues as well as considering the exact level of support that needs to be put in place. We have learned a lot from a number of organisations that work in the field. One of those is Enable Scotland, which was referred to in the original commission report and which has had a high degree of success across 11 or so authorities in working with young people with disabilities. Enable has a high success rate in getting those young people into positive destinations, so we have captured the learning from that and we are working with a number of other third sector and active organisations that support young people in that situation.

Dr Allan: Finally, I have a point about work placements, which Joan Mackay just mentioned. Tell me if I am wrong but, anecdotally, one problem in the past with encouraging more work placements and work experience for everyone has sometimes been the attitudes of employers on issues such as insurance. I presume that there are all sorts of misconceptions to be overcome when it comes to insurance for people with disabilities on work experience. What is being done specifically to try to overcome some of those anxieties on the part of employers to ensure that people with disabilities get the same opportunities as everyone else?

Joan Mackay: There are a number of issues like that, such as health and safety issues. For instance, we discovered that, on the west coast there was a completely different set of rules about allowing young children into maritime-type work placements compared with those on the east coast. All sorts of interesting anomalies have been thrown up as we have worked our way through that. What CalMac Ferries would allow on one side, P&O Ferries would not allow on the other side and so on. There are all sorts of interesting problems. We have to take them on almost a case-by-case basis to understand the blockages. That takes us into interesting territory. It is an on-going issue, and we are very aware of it.

The Convener: Two members still want to come in. If you could be succinct, that would be helpful.

Johann Lamont: I want to follow on from the issues that have just been raised. I am interested in the training that you have on dealing with different additional support needs. For example, last night, I was at the launch of a report called "Not included, not engaged, not involved: A report on the experiences of autistic children missing school" by Scottish Autism, the National Autistic Society and Children in Scotland. They have produced worrying evidence about the extent to which young people are excluded from school, either informally or formally or on part-time timetables, and who therefore are not securing an education. How do you factor in an understanding of that to the support that you would give to a young person with autism? There will be lessons from that relating to other reasons why people are excluded. It is a good example of young people who are not in school regularly and who, because of the circumstances, are not supported to stay in school. What do you do to ensure that they have the opportunity to access proper careers advice?

Sharon Kelly: We do that through a number of approaches. Partnership working, which has been touched on, is absolutely crucial. That is about using specialist agencies and people with expertise. We do not expect our front-line careers advisers to have that kind of knowledge and expertise, but they need to know how to access it in order to put together a package of support for a young person. We work really closely with our schools, who have an in-depth knowledge of young people. You are right that some young people are not in the school setting, so we have staff who go out and take that intermediary role and provide support if a young person cannot come to us to access it, which can be important for a young person.

It comes back to the points that were made earlier about changing employers' perceptions and how we ensure that we have a package of support

for the young person that is based on the reality of the opportunities while always being aspirational for the young person. In particular, we pay attention to their personal needs, aspirations and desires. Wherever we can, we try to ensure that the information, advice and guidance that we give them are in line with that and are about building their capacities so that they are successful in their transitions, sustain those and have a long-term future.

We invest a lot in CPD for our staff, using other agencies. We have not touched on mental health today, but that has been a really prevalent issue in our work. We ensure that our staff are fully aware of all the resources that are available to young people, so that they can bring them to bear. It is also important to mention the work that we do with parents. We take a family-based approach and ensure that the parents are involved at every stage where we make support available to young people.

Johann Lamont: Families regularly report that they have to battle with a system that finds it difficult to manage their young people and that there are really simple things that could be done to support them. How do you monitor access to careers advice for young people who may be in and out of the system? You have talked about face-to-face and one-to-one work. Whose responsibility is it to track the young person? The example of a child with autism is a good one, but there will be other examples where, simply because the young person is absent, nobody is tracking them to ensure that they get advice and support.

11:45

James Russell: In schools, there is a network made up of what used to be called the opportunities for all co-ordinators or groups and what might now be called DYW groups. Whatever name they give themselves, there is a very close-knit environment in schools that focuses on young people who are not engaging with services or in school generally. SDS careers advisers are part of that, with pastoral guidance staff and so on. Our careers advisers play a pivotal role in the delivery of the opportunities for all commitment for 16 to 19-year-olds. We retain those networks beyond school and use the local employability partnerships or local authority groups to work with the different partners, using the data from the shared data set. We know the young people who are either unconfirmed or unknown and, to be blunt, we agree a plan of action about how we find those young people.

There is ownership of that through the partnership for opportunities for all and in a school setting. Different partners identify who might be

working with a young person and whether we can do something differently. We have many examples of careers advisers engaging with non-attenders outside school, with the agreement of that group. They feel that the relationship that they have with a career information, advice and guidance professional, because it is impartial, is better in trying to facilitate the return to school. We have seen that on many occasions. There is group ownership of that.

In a post-school setting or if a young person is not in a school setting, as a lead partner in opportunities for all, we are responsible for understanding where young people are.

Johann Lamont: Non-attenders are a very generic group, because young people might not be attending for all sorts of reasons, including the fact that schools have informally excluded them. Do you have specific training on specific conditions for people who give careers advice? For example, do you have specific training on the developmental needs of young people with autism so that you understand that the child is not simply a non-attender and that, if you want to engage them, you will need to do so in a particular way?

James Russell: The professional capacity of career information, advice and guidance staff is to either provide that support or to know who provides it. SDS has a huge commitment to equalities. We have a network of equality champions and advisers, who develop and understand what works in different areas. It cuts right across the 1,600 people who are employed by SDS across Scotland. Those equality champions bring together information on the training that they have attended and what partnership work has worked for them and they identify how we can provide capacity building for our partners in the work that we do and how they can do that, too. There is a formal training programme that takes account of additional support needs broadly and, locally, we use our partners to support practitioners in the development of their skills on an on-going basis. We, too, have a commitment to 21 hours' CPD for our staff.

Rona Mackay: To follow on from that line of questioning, does your data tell you how many children who require the highest level of support, including care-experienced children, are falling through the net or how many you do not catch?

James Russell: Do you mean how many we do not catch specifically or how many do not access—

Rona Mackay: Is there data to say that a child should have received additional support but has not?

James Russell: Yes. We have quite a robust performance monitoring framework in place at SDS, and particularly for the delivery of CIAG services. For each of the interventions in each year group and for each cohort in a targeted group, we have an expectation of what support they will receive and we monitor that monthly. Advisers have access to that through our customer management system, so they know who they still have to see and who has not been there for the last four weeks, for instance. We have great examples of working with schools to share that information. We have begun to provide the information not just informally to teaching staff but formally to headteachers and directors of education so that there is strategic buy-in.

That goes back to Joan Mackay's point about awareness of all the services that exist in a school and a local authority. We feel that sharing that information will improve access to support for young people who are not getting it. It allows us to be really honest about why they are not getting it. For example, if they are in school and they are not being let out of class, we can negotiate a different time to see them. It becomes a planning tool for us in supporting young people.

Rona Mackay: Can you put a figure on that and tell us how many are not receiving support?

James Russell: Our statistics show that we have engaged with 92 per cent of the population in broad general education, so 8 per cent have not accessed any services from S1 to S3, which could be for a number of reasons. It could be that they were not in school at all—they are non-attenders. It could be that they were absent during the period in which we planned to deliver the engagements. We follow that up, with the best will in the world, which may be through one-to-one support rather than trying to have a group session. We have a mechanism to respond to that. That reflects the conditions that exist in schools, where there are 8 to 10 per cent absence rates. It becomes quite a significant planning piece for Sharon Kelly at a strategic level and advisers with school staff.

The Convener: I have a final question, and I am looking for as close to a yes or no answer that you can give. There has been a lot of discussion about the challenges and the scale of what is being asked for in terms of culture change and that kind of thing. We constantly hear about the change in the demands on workforces with things such as the fourth industrial revolution coming. Is the governance that is in place adequate to deliver what developing the young workforce is supposed to do? Is the governance flexible enough to react to changes and respond to the learner journey review, for instance?

Alan Armstrong: You mentioned DYW and the learner journey review. Those are absolutely in

harness. Together, they form the full articulation of the curriculum for excellence up to 18 from that point of view. However, it is essential to smooth the pathways, routes and support into college, university, employment or whatever and to look after our young people up to the age of 25. The governance for the learner journey is just beginning and Education Scotland will be more than actively involved in that, and I am sure that SDS will be, too. We are making sure that, internally, it matches with developing the young workforce, but the expectations coming from the programme for the learner journey are exactly the same. It is more than adequate.

James Russell: It is a pertinent point. The change-theme leads across each of the DYW themes are already considering the progress that has been made and the learning that we have taken from the first half of the programme. We understand that there are ways that we could probably increase the scale and pace of the activity with a different governance structure, and we are considering that with the Scottish Government and the other change-theme leads. We are considering how we build on what we know works and how we can be much more targeted in our activity, interventions and support. To reiterate the point that Alan Armstrong made on the emergence of the learner journey recommendations, the great word that Alan Armstrong uses is that it provides “impetus” to the work that we are doing in DYW. It also provides a specific focus in areas that require a different level of action. It is very clear that we need to respond to that.

The Convener: I thank our witnesses from Skills Development Scotland and Education Scotland for attending and for their contribution. I suspend the meeting for a few moments to let the panel leave the room.

11:53

Meeting suspended.

11:53

On resuming—

Attainment and Achievement of School-aged Children Experiencing Poverty

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is consideration of responses that the committee has received to our report on the inquiry into attainment and achievement of school-aged children experiencing poverty. We have received responses from the Scottish Government, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and Education Scotland. Some responses are specific to the committee’s recommendations. The Government has highlighted its work on a new measurement of deprivation based on social background. I invite members’ views on the responses and on how to take this forward.

Liz Smith: It was encouraging to hear that there will be a review of that measure. We are getting evidence from various quarters that it is not satisfactory now, so I was encouraged by that.

The Convener: Are we content to note the responses, with a view to coming back to the issue when there is further information?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We now move to agenda item 3, which we will consider in private.

11:54

Meeting continued in private until 12:27.

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