



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 20 March 2019

Session 5



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EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

10th Meeting 2019, 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)

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

*Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab)

*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

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Roz Thomson

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 20 March 2019

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning, and welcome to the 10th meeting in 2019 of the Education and Skills Committee. We have received apologies from Gordon MacDonald.

Under agenda item 1, the committee is invited to decide whether to take item 5, which is consideration of its draft report on Scottish national standardised assessments, in private. Are members content to take that item and any future consideration of the draft report in private?

Members indicated agreement.

Subordinate Legislation

Education (Fees and Student Support) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (EU Exit) (Scotland) Regulations 2019 [Draft]

10:00

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is subordinate legislation. We have two pieces of subordinate legislation this morning. The first is a negative instrument, the details of which are provided in paper ES/S5/19/10/1. As members do not have any comments on the instrument, are we content to let it go forward?

Members indicated agreement.

Teachers' Superannuation and Pension Scheme (Scotland)(Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2019 [Draft]

The Convener: The second piece of subordinate legislation is also a negative instrument. Members will be aware that the Scottish Government has laid another negative instrument that will amend the instrument that is before us today. The amending instrument will change the date of implementation of the increase in the employer contribution from 1 April to 1 September 2019, as is set out in paper ES/S5/19/10/3.

As members do not have any comments on the instrument, are we content to let it go forward?

Members indicated agreement.

Review of Responses

10:02

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is a review of responses in consideration of the committee's report "Young People's Pathways: a progress report on Developing the Young Workforce". Responses have been received from the Scottish Government, Skills Development Scotland and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, which are detailed in paper ES/S5/19/10/4.

Before I invite comments from members, I will make one suggestion for further work in the area. Recommendation 3 of the report is that the Government undertake a large-scale, quantitative survey on young people to establish whether the developing the young workforce programme has progressed the culture shift towards achieving parity of information for young people on post-school options.

The Government's response does not suggest that it intends to undertake such a survey. On that basis, I suggest that the committee re-run the survey of young people that it used to instigate the inquiry. When it was originally done, it was open for a few weeks and received more than 900 responses. We could run the same survey at the end of 2020 to assess what progress has been made towards parity of options by comparing the results with the 2018 results. That is a suggestion for the committee. Do members have other comments?

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): When I was looking back last night, I could not remember when the discussion took place—I think that it was during a session with Skills Development Scotland, but it was also referred to by Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland—but it was about how accurate we are in determining the data as to where a young person goes after leaving school. Did we make progress on that?

The Convener: I defer to the deputy convener and other members on that, because I was not present for the evidence sessions.

Liz Smith: Could we find that out? It was quite important.

The Convener: I do not know whether anyone else is able to follow that up.

Liz Smith: We made the suggestion that we need better-quality information about when somebody leaves school in order to track their progress. I remember that it was referred to by Petra Vend when the universities were talking about tracking young people as they go through institutions.

The Convener: Are you proposing that we seek clarification from the Government on that?

Liz Smith: Yes, that would be helpful.

The Convener: I am sure that we can write to the Government on that issue. Do members have any other comments?

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): We might be reluctant to go through the whole thing. I did go through it and I have a lot of points to raise, but I do not know whether it is useful to raise them here.

As a general observation, I am concerned that, on quite a number of the recommendations, the Government just repeats what it said to the committee before. The survey of young people is a good example of that: the Government just says, "We're doing what we're doing."

I think that we are awaiting an update on the retention and promotion of teachers. A report was produced for the Scottish teachers negotiating committee, and the update was due in February 2019. We can maybe ask what has happened to that.

We raised issues around the quality of careers education and about prioritising statutory leavers, which the Government again just bats back. It does not engage with the argument, which I find frustrating. It has also not really responded to the question whether there is an equivalent of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.

We made a point about work placement standards. We argued that young people who are taking such a module should be told what to expect when they go. The response is that the standard tells them that, but the point is that the young people should know.

I do not want to take away time from other folk, but another point is that the Government does not answer the question on positive destinations for care leavers and disabled students. We made the point that it should not be left to schools to do the developing the young workforce work, but the Government does not respond to that—it simply repeats what it said before. It was a concern for us that schools could end up in a position whereby they could not continue the good work that they were doing.

On the SQA, I pursued the question of commercial work, but the Government's response simply says that the SQA has to be self-financing. Why would we expect the SQA, more than any other public agency, to find a way of funding its core work—especially given that the argument was made to us that the commercial work is a distraction and is diluting its ability to focus on what it needs to do?

I have two final points. There was a question on panels. We argued that it was important that, if possible, panels should be consistent for a young person. The response says that 99 per cent of those who ask for the same panel have their request accepted, but that is not really the point. It is not about the ones who ask for it as a routine—

The Convener: I am sorry, Johann, but I have to stop you there. The next agenda item is about the general responses from the Scottish Government; this agenda item is specifically on its response to our report on developing the young workforce. We will deal with your points under the next item.

Are there any further comments from the committee on the response to the developing the young workforce report?

Liz Smith: I agree with several of the points that Johann Lamont has raised.

The Convener: Are we content to write to the Government, drawing its attention to the *Official Report* of this meeting and asking it to come back with further clarification on the issues that have been raised?

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Yes, I think we need further details.

The Convener: Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Thank you. That is helpful.

Previous Committee Reports

10:07

The Convener: The next item is the more general and detailed response from the Government to the recommendations that we made in previous reports. I think that you had made most of your points and you had started a point about the panels, Ms Lamont.

Johann Lamont: My point was about the consistency of the panels.

The Convener: Was that the children's panels issue?

Johann Lamont: Yes.

The Convener: Are there any other points on the more detailed Government responses?

Johann Lamont: We made a point about the importance of thematic inspection of personal and social education. The Government's response is that that can be inconsistent but that it found good practice, which simply misses the point. On access for young people across Scotland, we wanted to make sure that, even if things are not done in the same way, at least some basic things are the same.

The Convener: The Government has given guidance on the roll-out of the Time for Inclusive Education campaign recommendations. Should we ask the Government to report back on that?

Johann Lamont: I think that would be useful.

The other point was about the role of the inspection system in identifying how consistent the approach is across Scotland. I accept that there will be local flexibility and different priorities, but the response saying that there is good practice is not good enough.

The Convener: Do members agree that we should write for further detail on those points?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The only other point that I thought we might want to highlight is on our recent work on additional support needs. We have written to the Government about that, but we could highlight to it the importance of that work and get some further information in relation to the most recent evidence sessions that we had.

Johann Lamont: The response on additional support needs is a bit disappointing and thin. It would be good to highlight that.

The Convener: We should highlight that. Is everybody content with that way forward?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Thank you very much. That concludes the public part of today's proceedings.

10:10

Meeting continued in private until 11:44.

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