



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Education and Skills Committee

**Wednesday 5 February 2020**

**Session 5**



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba



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**Wednesday 5 February 2020**

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**EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting 2020, Session 5**

**CONVENER**

\*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (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)

\*Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con)

\*Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)

\*Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)

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

\*Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Dee Barker Creggan (The Spark)

Nicola Dickie (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Deborah Gallacher (Scottish Guidance Association)

Stella Gibson (The Spark)

Joanna Holmes (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy)

Brian Magee (COSCA (Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland))

Laura Meikle (Scottish Government)

Stuart Valentine (Relationships Scotland)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Roz Thomson

**LOCATION**

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)



## Scottish Parliament

### Education and Skills Committee

*Wednesday 5 February 2020*

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]*

### Decisions on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Clare Adamson):** Good morning, and a warm welcome to the third meeting in 2020 of the Education and Skills Committee. I remind everyone to switch mobile phones off or to silent so that they do not disturb the meeting.

The first agenda item is a decision on taking agenda item 4, which is a discussion of today's evidence, in private. Are members content to do so?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** Are members also content for the committee to consider its work programme in private at its next meeting?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## Counsellors in School Education

10:00

**The Convener:** Agenda item 2 is our evidence session on counsellors in school education. I welcome to the meeting Laura Meikle, unit head at the support and wellbeing unit of the Scottish Government; Nicola Dickie, the chief officer for children and young people at the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities; Brian Magee, the chief executive of Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland—COSCA; Joanne Holmes, the children, young people and families lead at the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy; Stella Gibson, the chief executive of The Spark; Dee Barker Creggan, a children and young people's counsellor at The Spark; Deborah Gallacher, the head of guidance and personal social education, representing the Scottish Guidance Association; and Stuart Valentine, the chief executive of Relationships Scotland.

The meeting will be a round table, which is more of an open discussion than an evidence session. Please indicate to me or to the clerks if you wish to answer a question from the committee members. Could members also please indicate to me or the clerks if they wish to speak? Hopefully, we will have plenty of time to discuss the issues that are in front of us.

I will start by giving each panel member an opportunity to say a little bit about their organisation and highlight, where relevant, what they consider their role is in relation to policy delivery of counselling in Scotland.

**Stella Gibson (The Spark):** The Spark has been providing counselling services across Scotland for more than 50 years, and we have been providing children and young people's services for about the past 12 years as part of our early intervention strategy. For the past just over three years, we have been delivering school counselling services at scale, and we are currently working in more than 40 schools across the central belt. We also deliver some services in Aberdeen.

We are unique as a counselling organisation because we not only deliver counselling but train our counsellors and provide supervision. Therefore, we provide a whole package of support for schools. If we have a counsellor in a school, they do not work in isolation; they are supported by a clinical team, their supervisor and their manager. We think that it is really important that we do not have counsellors in schools working in isolation.

We deliver a diploma in relational counselling, which is part of our training for children and young

people's counsellors, with specialisms in intimate relationships, children and young people's counselling and family counselling. We can train people to work with couples, to work in schools and to train further as counsellors for families. Moving forward, that is something that we should be doing more of in schools, to support families.

The key concern for us in relation to the commitment from the Scottish Government is the number of counsellors who are available to deliver the policy. It is about not only the number but the quality of counsellors. As I said, we are working in 40 schools and we are getting two or three inquiries a week at the moment from individual schools and from clusters, which are looking for counselling in schools.

We have just recruited again for counsellors. We train counsellors but, because we do not have sufficient counsellors to deliver our children and young people's work, we recruit counsellors to do that. We got a total of 11 applications, and we took four of those counsellors. With regard to delivery, we could have easily taken 11 counsellors. Therefore, we would say that there is not a sufficient number of quality counsellors out there.

We also think that supervision is very important, because there needs to be consistency of supervision in service delivery. When we started to deliver a counselling service at scale, we recruited external counsellors into the organisation and they all had their own supervisors. There was no link between the counsellor, the supervisor and the service delivery, which we thought had a significant impact on quality. There was a change in quality when we moved to having our own internal supervisors. The fact that the clinical supervisors have responsibility for the service means that they do not supervise in isolation from the service delivery. That is a key point for us.

I have another point to make, which has slipped out of my head.

**The Convener:** Do not worry—when it comes back to you, I will let you back in.

**Stuart Valentine (Relationships Scotland):** Relationships Scotland has been operating in Scotland for the past 70 years. We support people with relationship problems and those who go through separation and divorce. Our services cover the whole of Scotland, so we cover the Western Isles, Shetland, Orkney, Dumfries and Galloway and everywhere in between. Each year, we see more than 19,000 people face to face and deliver more than 100,000 support sessions across the country.

We provide some counselling for children and young people. At the moment, we have 22 fully qualified children and young people's counsellors, but we are aware that there is significant capacity

in our network. We have around 160 counsellors across the country, many of whom would be interested in training as children and young people's counsellors. It is also important to mention that the geographical spread of our services means that we could deliver on-the-ground counselling for children right across the country if we could find the resources to have our counsellors trained up to deliver that work.

A key issue—which we will undoubtedly come on to—is the capacity of Scotland to have enough qualified children and young people's counsellors. We think that it is vital that we focus on the qualifications of counsellors and that we do not have people undertaking the work who are not properly qualified. All our counsellors are, of course, properly qualified.

There is an enormous opportunity for this work to take off, but it is very important that it is done in the correct way. We are delighted that COSCA and other professional bodies are involved in the work, which we think represents a great opportunity for Scotland and Scotland's young people. However, it is vital that we get it right.

**Nicola Dickie (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities):** Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to be here.

I do not have masses to add over and above the letter that COSLA sent on the back of the committee's letter to Councillor McCabe. As a membership organisation, COSLA—along with the Scottish Government—was responsible for agreeing the aims and principles that will support the provision of counselling across Scotland's schools. That was agreed politically, and we will deliver on it through our political structures. Councillor McCabe, who is COSLA's spokesperson on children and young people, and Councillor Stuart Currie, who is COSLA's spokesperson on health and social care, will have overall responsibility for that in COSLA, and local elected members will have arrangements to ensure delivery locally.

As with everything that COSLA enters into, we want to keep as much local flexibility as we can. We recognise that the situation in Orkney is not the same as the situation in Glasgow. In any aims and principles, or anything else that we get involved in, we always try to keep as much local flexibility as we can, because we think that that is important. It is particularly important given that the agenda in and around our schools at the moment is very much about listening to what our children and young people and their families want in the local area; it is not about imposing anything. That is our starting point and our end point when it comes to where the aims and principles come from.

We recognise that the provision of counsellors in every high school will not necessarily be straightforward—not many measures that relate to our children and young people are straightforward to deliver—but we are confident in our ability to deliver. We are really pleased that COSCA and others have been able to help us on that journey.

The timescales are a challenge, but that is not unique to school counselling. Local government in Scotland is used to delivering within such timescales, and we are confident that the right building blocks are in place to help us on that journey.

We recognise that the funding is always an issue: there was a slight delay between our announcement of the funding and its getting out to our leaders. That does not mean that no planning went on, as local authorities are already well-versed in an awful lot of that stuff and some of them already provide school counsellors.

I also stress that we do not see school counsellors, in and of themselves, as the solution but as part of it. The committee will be aware of the mental health programme board, which undertakes other work on community services, access to child and adolescent mental health services, and so on. School counselling is one of a number of things that we have going on for our children and young people.

We also work hard with our teaching workforce and other people in schools to ensure that they are in a position to help our young people at the lowest possible level. I am sure that we will hear more about that this morning.

**Laura Meikle (Scottish Government):** I am very grateful for the opportunity to share our work on counselling through schools, which is one strand of work in a cross-Government strategy to improve and strengthen children and young people's access to support for their mental health and wellbeing. That strategy includes strengthening the resources that are available to enable school staff to deliver effective learning as well as providing wider support across school communities.

The cross-Government approach, in partnership with COSLA, seeks to enhance the services that are available to support children and young people from their early years through to 24 years of age in order to respond effectively to highlighted concerns about young people's mental health and wellbeing, which led to the creation of the mental health task force and the children and young people's mental health and wellbeing programme board.

Counselling through schools, which is funded by the health department and delivered jointly with the education department, provides an opportunity

to enhance the service provision in young people's communities and to provide targeted and effective access to support. Young people can still access CAMHS support if that is required. There have been concerns about referral to CAMHS, but referral to those services should be more accurate as a result.

The framework for the provision of counselling is based on jointly agreed aims and principles, which include the requirement for counsellors to be registered by an appropriate professional body and the requirement that the service should be available to all pupils outwith school term time, provided in a framework of local services, building on those that are already available, and aligned to getting it right for every child. It should be provided to pupils who are aged 10 and over—primarily to those in secondary schools, but also to those in other school settings.

Our work on counselling through schools is a partnership approach with COSLA and has been informed by discussions with a wide range of stakeholders, some of whom are here today—the BACP, COSCA, The Spark—and evidence from evaluation of approaches to counselling in other parts of the United Kingdom.

Delivering on the commitment has not been straightforward, and there have been and will be challenges. However, we are confident that we will be able to deliver on it as part of a broad range of programme for government commitments to better support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

**Joanna Holmes (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy):** The BACP is a membership organisation with about 50,000 members across the four nations. My co-worker Steve Mulligan, who is our four nations policy and engagement lead, is here today—he is often present in Scotland. We are a professional standards organisation with an ethical framework that is embedded in working with children and young people within a competency framework.

There are different routes into working with children and young people in the counselling offer. Someone cannot just train as a counsellor and work with children and young people; there are different levels of step changes, continual professional development and training. One of our concerns is the level of training that is available across Scotland to get people competent to work with children and young people.

Our experience in Wales echoes what Stella Gibson described. The Welsh school-based counselling offer, which is a Government-funded programme, has been in place for nearly 10 years, from 2011. Services are commissioned and there is no single provider—different services are

commissioned across the different local authorities—and they have the protection of working for a service, with all the policies, procedures and safeguards that come with that.

Part of what that service provides is in-house supervision—supervision does not come from different professional providers, regardless of how competent those supervisors might be. Keeping things in-house means that people are going in the same direction of travel because they are working together, and it ensures that counselling is boundaried and safe for the children and young people we are in contact with.

10:15

Many years ago, the Welsh were worried that there would not be a sufficient number of people in the workforce and that they would not be ready. The situation was similar to what we are hearing about today. There has been a long process there, but they are now delivering in all secondary schools. They are beginning to look at delivering in primary schools, but they want to get it right first. The Welsh have a lot of experience to share, and we have worked closely with them to update a toolkit, which is a manual of good practice. It is good to dip into, and we can share some of that learning, too.

I reiterate what Nicola Dickie said: school counselling is part of a whole-school approach. It is one offer in a mixed bag of services. Triage is important, because the child or young person could go to see a school nurse or a guidance teacher—they would not have to go to a school counsellor; school counselling is just what is appropriate for some young people. It is an early help prevention. When it is accessible and easy for young people to refer into as a first point of contact, it means that young people do not have to repeatedly tell their story, so their mental health journey is less chaotic.

Some of the learning from Wales that it is important to share is that the approach is beginning to have an impact on some of the CAMHS waiting lists. In Cardigan, in west Wales, counsellors are working in collaboration with CAMHS to make referrals only when they not only involve mental health issues but meet the threshold for mental illness—psychological distress and so on—which we can work with in schools and community settings.

On top of that, I am happy to share my experiences of working as a school counsellor.

**Brian Magee (COSCA (Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland)):** COSCA is Scotland's professional body for counselling and psychotherapy. We have been advancing and promoting counselling in Scotland for the past 30

years or so. We are a membership organisation, like the BACP, and our members include individuals and organisations that deliver counselling. We validate courses in counselling and counselling skills, in supervision, in working with children and young people and in working with adults. We also accredit counsellors in order to quality assure their work, once they have reached the appropriate stage, and we have a recognition scheme that quality assures the work that counselling organisations that are members of COSCA do.

We welcome the commitment in the programme for government to create 350 new counselling posts in schools, and we have been working with Laura Meikle and her team since that was announced. Some of the issues that remain to be addressed concern the workforce and the training costs—we are happy to share how much it costs to do a training course in children and young people's counselling and how that could exclude many people in Scotland financially.

The question of research came up in one of the submissions, and we could perhaps explore a bit further the issue of how much research has been done, is being done and is soon to be done.

Those are the main things that I want to share at this point.

**Deborah Gallacher (Scottish Guidance Association):** As a member of the Scottish Guidance Association, I am representing guidance professionals who work in schools. We are a group of volunteers who provide continuing professional development opportunities and seek to inform the national picture when we can.

We welcome the plan to introduce counsellors across secondary schools, and we recognise the ambitious timescale of the project. Our concern has been the provision of mental health support for young people. We have noticed an uptick in the scale and complexity of the mental health issues that young people in schools face, so we welcome the Government's commitment as part of a package of support for young people. As ever, our concern is about its consistency. We recognise that local flexibility and the lack of prescription is a real strength in Scottish education, but we would like to ensure that our young people experience parity of support in the services that they access, and we would like the concerns regarding financial exclusivity in the provision of the service to be addressed.

As professionals, we would like to work in partnership with the people who provide services, with clarity about referral, triaging and confidentiality issues, so that we collaborate to provide the best support for our young people.



**Dee Barker Creggan (The Spark):** I feel very lucky to be here. I work in two local authority schools in Glasgow and North Lanarkshire as a children and young people's counsellor. It has been lovely to hear the things that have been said. I agree with what Nicola Dickie said about the need for a whole-school approach that is about working together, not just about one person working alone.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much. Committee members have questions, but we hope to make the discussion as free flowing as possible, so I ask people to indicate if they wish to contribute and I will try to get everyone in. We will open with questions from Gail Ross.

**Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** Good morning, and thank you all for your opening statements. I will start off by asking about the ability to recruit the number of counsellors who are needed. I come from a rural area, so I am nervous about how we will attract them. The briefing paper says that the Scottish Government intends

"to create around 350 counsellors in school education"

and that its end goal is to have one counsellor per school.

We have 357 secondary schools. We have just heard from The Spark that it works in more than 40 schools. Do we know how many counsellors we need to recruit or how many already work in schools? Do we have a final number on how many the Government aims to recruit?

**Laura Meikle:** The Government's commitment is based on having one counsellor per school, and the number 350 relates to the number of secondary schools in Scotland. There are 357 schools, so it is not exact.

A number of schools have quite small pupil populations. When we were considering how the policy would work, we looked to balance larger schools that would have more than one counsellor and smaller areas that would have fewer than one. Every school will have access to someone; the balancing arrangement is because we do not want underprovision and we cannot have overprovision.

As you will be aware from our submissions, we are currently in the process of drawing up our governance arrangements. Those draw on the plans from authorities in relation to where we are on the planning and the development of the commitment. We will know how many counsellors we have, but, at this moment, we are still in that process.

We must complete our governance arrangements internally, prior to making the information public, but we intend to share information with the committee in due course on

where we are with the plans, to give reassurance that we are on track or to say whether we need to take any mitigating action.

**Gail Ross:** Is it up to the local authority to determine whether a counsellor will work between two schools, or will the authority submit the evidence while you make the decision?

**Laura Meikle:** The local authority will make the proposal and we will consider whether it aligns with the aims and principles.

That is a governance arrangement. At the moment, the focus is on planning. At a later point, we will require to look at such things as outcomes. We are also very focused on ensuring that we will be ready for implementation. That is essential, given that we are nine months away from our end point. Things are quite intense.

The framework of aims and principles provides the framework within which authorities will make their decisions. The aims and principles make it extremely clear that we want school counselling to be knitted into the local services that are available as part of a holistic approach. There has to be local decision making to enable that to happen, but it has to be within the framework of the aims and principles.

**Stella Gibson:** We work in more than 40 schools, but the majority of them are primary schools. We have a counsellor population who are dedicated beyond the Government's commitment. In some primary schools, we work one day a week; in others, we work four days a week—there seems to be a very large need in Glasgow in particular.

Those counsellors will not be working as part of the commitment. We do some work in high schools, but the demand for us has always been in primary schools.

**Stuart Valentine:** A common theme in all the written evidence to the committee is that there are not enough qualified children and young people's counsellors to fulfil the commitment. COSCA has mentioned that there are 162 people on its register. Not all of them will come forward to do the work. It is clear that there needs to be training for people to become children and young people's counsellors. However, that is not a quick or straightforward process—they would need to do a generic diploma in counselling and then do the specialism in children and young people's counselling. There is a journey for people to go on. The question is, where will those people come from?

We have 160 counsellors in our network. In theory, in two years, with the right support, we could deliver another 40 qualified children and young people's counsellors for this work. We could

bring that offer to the table, but we would have to find the resources and capacity to do that.

**Brian Magee:** As Stuart Valentine just said, there are about 160 young people's counsellors on our student database. We validate two courses that train people specifically to work with children and young people: one at the University of Strathclyde and one through CrossReach's Tom Allan centre, which is delivered in Edinburgh. The course at Strathclyde is full and has been since its inception—it has a waiting list. The other course is struggling a little but will have a second cohort in May 2020.

I will touch on the costs. If a counsellor who has previously trained to work with adults wants to do the University of Strathclyde course, it will cost them £2,000. The course delivered at Simpson house in Edinburgh costs £1,600. There are other courses that we validate, which are generic, core diploma courses with a built-in component or module to train people to be counsellors of children and young people, such as The Spark's course. We could see some of that being used going forward.

There is progression and we have the workforce that is already trained. The BACP survey indicates some willingness on the part of its members to come forward. Perhaps Jo Holmes can talk about that. We are not starting from scratch, but there is a time element involved in growing the workforce.

**Joanna Holmes:** We carried out a workforce survey in 2018. We had a 25 per cent response, and 40 per cent of the respondents said that they were currently working with children and young people. That covers the four to 10 years and 11 to 18 years age groups, so some of them might work for some of the providers that work in primary schools. They indicated that there was capacity for people to retrain to gain those skills to work with children and young people and to increase client hours. We do not know whether those members are working in private practice, in public services and agencies, freelancing in schools or employed by schools. We have not got the breakdown, but there is an appetite for that work if the right training is in place.

**Gail Ross:** I am glad that you have touched on that aspect. In your written evidence, you said that 47 per cent of those who were not already working with children and young people would be interested in specialising in that area. Would that not leave gaps in those areas that they are already working in?

**Joanna Holmes:** Possibly. They could be delivering private practice hours and working with the adult population, which are very different to working with children and young people. They might have an interest in working with children and

young people, but they might not necessarily be the right people for those posts, because they must have the passion to develop those relationships with young people. There are lots of counsellors who want to do that and, with the right training, I hope that they can.

10:30

**Brian Magee:** There is a surplus of counsellors who are trained to work with adults, who are not in employment. Each year, we have about 200 graduates coming through our system, but there are not 200 new jobs every year for them. We are talking about the conversion of those trained to work with adults so that they can work with children.

**Gail Ross:** That is interesting.

**Stella Gibson:** There are a few points here. If we are going to train up new children and young people's counsellors from scratch, one challenge is that they will have to do a number of hours with children and young people in schools. Our diploma at level 11 requires 170 practice hours. However, they cannot go into schools because they do not have membership.

The cost is another challenge. The Spark charges for our diploma—it costs more than £7,000 to train with us. People must also have done the COSCA counselling skills certificate course, which costs another £1,000. People who come to us have to cover their own fees. If they go to a university, they may be eligible for funding from the Student Awards Agency for Scotland. There is a real issue about diversity in counselling, because only people who can afford to train will come to organisations such as ours.

At The Spark, we provide a whole package: the training, the supervision, the placement and then opportunities for employment. Someone who goes to a university does an academic qualification, goes out on placement with an organisation and gets their supervision somewhere else. There is a disparity—the connection is not sufficient to ensure that, if we are going to put people into schools, they will be of good quality and sufficiently qualified. I mean that not in relation to the bit of paper that they get but in relation to the quality of the service delivery and the support that is in place. Training costs are an issue for organisations such as ours.

We are talking about training existing counsellors to be children and young people's counsellors. There might be many existing counsellors who would be interested in working with children, but will they want to work in a school environment? It is very different to working in a local centre. A local centre is a very calm, therapeutic, place; a school is a very different

environment, and you have to build up relationships if you are to be successful there.

Employment is also an issue. For many years, we in Scotland expected our counsellors to be volunteers. They go away, train and then we expect them to deliver voluntary hours. We should take that issue seriously and consider career progression and professional service delivery. We still have some distance to go in that regard.

**Deborah Gallacher:** I support what Stella Gibson has said. Recruitment and retention of teaching professionals has been an issue in recent years. I am encouraged to hear about the numbers and about the capacity that may be available through converting counsellors to specialise in and work with children and young people, but I also have some concerns about them coming to work in the school environment. We need to know that the staff who would seek such a role would be dedicated to it and prepared to work in a school environment that Stella rightly identifies as being quite a different experience.

**Laura Meikle:** In summary, there are two points. We are to some degree reassured that capacity is available. However, that does not mean that we have set aside concerns about the workforce. The committee will have seen from our submission that we have also worked with the Scottish Qualifications Authority to ensure that there is an offer of training for those who are already established counsellors. There is a piece of work aimed at enabling qualification through a new professional development award in counselling children and young people, which is mapped to the professional standards defined by the BACP and will be jointly awarded by it and the SQA. The SQA has also developed a new professional award in counselling supervision. We have therefore put in place several arrangements to enable training to happen.

The benefit of working with the SQA is that it can deliver those awards through colleges that are spread across Scotland. Therefore, we can ensure that training is offered in locations beyond the central belt and consider supporting the provision of counselling in the Borders and in the Highlands and Islands, for example. That was a deliberate decision on our part. A number of private providers offer training and support to counsellors, but we needed to take a strategic approach and put our own offer in place. We have done so while also recognising the challenges that have been outlined.

**The Convener:** Will it be open to people seeking those qualifications to apply to SAAS?

**Laura Meikle:** It might be—I would have to confirm that.

**The Convener:** It would be helpful if you could come back to us on that. Thank you.

**Gail Ross:** I was going to ask which of the training courses will be available in rural areas. I thank Laura Meikle for pre-empting my question.

**The Convener:** We will move on to a question from Ms Mackay.

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** I want to probe a bit more about school counsellors' links with CAMHS. I have constituents who are on 18-month waiting lists for such services—I am sure that other members will have the same experience. How will the Government's approach impact that situation? Will it help to alleviate it?

**Laura Meikle:** The Scottish Government's approach seeks to provide a range of prevention and early intervention services for people from birth to the age of 24. Today, we are focusing on our commitment on school counsellors. However, we have made a range of other commitments, including those on school nursing, perinatal mental health, counselling services in further education and the development of a community-based support service to support families.

Taken together, such initiatives are designed to ensure that our offer will help people to get support earlier, which should mean that they will not have to rely on child and adolescent mental health services later. The programme across all the Government departments that are working on that approach is about making improvements in order to reduce the reliance on top-line services and to provide earlier, better and more effective support.

**Rona Mackay:** What about children who are on waiting lists for assessment? How do your initiatives fit in with them?

**Laura Meikle:** As the committee has heard, our timescale is challenging. That is deliberate. We need to implement school counselling as one of our responses, so we have to move quickly. That situation is continuing—

**Rona Mackay:** Do you have a timescale in mind?

**Laura Meikle:** The implementation date for the school counselling provision is September 2020.

**Rona Mackay:** Will you measure what impact that will have on CAMHS waiting lists? Do you have an objective in that regard?

**Laura Meikle:** Yes. We will look at a number of measures. We will undertake a review in which we will consider a number of factors, including CAMHS waiting times. We also expect to look at other outcomes for children and young people. For example, we should expect to see improvements

in attendance at school and in relationships and behaviour, so young people should benefit in a number of ways.

As I have said, at the moment, we are extremely focused on the implementation date in September. We will have a review period during which we will look at and monitor the outcomes. We have not yet had the conversations about what those outcome factors will be and we will want to be able to do that in the intervening period. Once the implementation has occurred and there has been a period of settling in, we will review the situation and check that the outcomes indicate that we are where we should be on the benefit to children and young people, which is ultimately what this is all about.

**Joanna Holmes:** In Wales, the experience in some areas where they work closely with CAMHS is that that reduces waiting lists. They talk about the missing middle there—that is, the children and young people who are stuck in the middle. That does not refer to those in need of really early help; it refers to those who are in quite a bit of psychological distress but who do not merit a CAMHS referral.

To some extent, there needs to be a cultural shift in understanding—CAMHS is not the only way; it is one service on a pathway. A lot can be done in the counselling setting—counsellors who work with children and young people are very skilled and have many different methods and approaches in their portfolios that work best for young people.

I evaluated a commissioned service in Gloucestershire, which is considering providing school counselling. About three weeks ago, I interviewed one young person who had been on a CAMHS waiting list for 10 months. Around 18 sessions—not just five or six—of on-going counselling were provided so, by the time that the CAMHS referral came through and she had her first appointment, she did not need to attend. That anecdotal account came when I interviewed her six months after her appointment, which she did not need because everything had been dealt with in the counselling setting. That is only one story, but it is one of many.

We need to work with those young people as early as possible, because of the distress that comes from waiting and waiting for something that may not provide the service that they expect. There is no cure, tablet or a way to stop feeling so low, distressed and anxious.

**Nicola Dickie:** I want to pick up on the wider point about outcomes. Although it is useful for us to look at CAMHS waiting times, from a local government perspective, we are clear that this work is about improving outcomes for children and young people. CAMHS waiting times are one of

the things that will tell us how we are doing, but there is also a need for wider evaluation. We need to evaluate how our young people are feeling, how our teachers who are supporting our young people are feeling and how the families who are dealing with those children and young people are feeling.

Although the provision will be attached to school, it will be firmly anchored in the community. We recognise that our children and young people are at school for a lot of the week. We also recognise that they are elsewhere for a lot of the week. We have to be careful. I am almost sure that we will see changes in the CAMHS waiting times, but there are other measures to consider, including inappropriate referrals and how many referrals are being refused. The situation is complicated.

Once we have all the plans and we can analyse where we are going, we will be in a situation in which we can start to think about what we do if there are gaps in rural areas that we need to plug and what we do if support is needed to make sure that other organisations that are not universities and colleges can be involved. However, we are not there yet.

Importantly, although it is not one of its suggestions, the children and young people's mental health and wellbeing programme board, which is jointly chaired by the Scottish Government and COSLA, is looking at the approach. Although the commitment is specific to school counsellors, we are looking at the matter in the round. Again, that is a whole-system approach to our children and young people across the school estate. It would appear odd to do it in any other way, and this seems like the only natural way to do this, bearing in mind the context in which we are operating across schools.

**Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP):** I want to pick up on some of the content that we covered with Deborah Gallacher on the role of guidance teachers in schools. I note that the "Review of Personal and Social Education" looked at a whole-school approach to supporting children across their educational experience. An eighth of the curriculum is already devoted to health and wellbeing, and I worry that there is a danger that we might be reinventing the wheel and that we could undermine the role of guidance staff in schools. What are your views on that? I am thinking specifically about the signposting of children with regard to who they should go to for help and support in school.

**Deborah Gallacher:** That is an interesting proposition to consider. In listening to you and Nicola Dickie, it strikes me that although the priority is the timeframe for delivering counselling—I repeat that we welcome that—there is a role for guidance staff. There needs to be

more consideration of resource, and training is required in how to work in that way. We are part of a team. Even where there is dedicated counselling provision in school—I work in an environment where there is such provision—the guidance staff are often the conduit of information between the family learning that we identified and the day-to-day support. The complexity of the mental health problems that pupils present with in schools means that there is daily contact with key individuals and support staff in guidance teams. There is a recognition of the role that we play.

10:45

The fact that there are inappropriate CAMHS referrals when there is no need for such a referral to come through and be seen through to fruition creates a burden of expectation on guidance staff that we are not always able to deliver on.

I have a degree in English and French literature and institutions, but although I can talk to you about the French political system, I have not had any recognised guidance certification. In my own time and at my own expense, I have undertaken the master's course that is provided by the University of Aberdeen through distance learning, but there is no training or resource provision to upskill the staff. They are dedicated professionals who want to improve learner outcomes, but they simply do not have the means to access the things that they require to do.

**Laura Meikle:** What Deborah Gallacher said is very relevant. Jenny Gilruth mentioned the "Review of Personal and Social Education". My team is responsible for the implementation of that review. Our work on personal and social education is about making sure that we provide high-quality learning for children and young people on a wide range of topics, including relationships and mental health and wellbeing; in effect, we support young people to develop life skills.

As part of our programme for government commitment, there are two other elements to that work, one of which is to enhance support for teachers by providing them with professional learning materials on good mental health. In addition, the mental health and wellbeing working group for schools has been established; it will meet this afternoon. It is drawing together work on training materials. There is a vast amount of information about a wide range of mental health and wellbeing topics, and we feel that it is not possible for teaching staff to sift through all that and find the materials that they need for their professional learning to enable them to support children and young people's learning about mental health and wellbeing. Teachers also need to understand all the related policy and legislative requirements and the services that might be

available nationally to support them in responding to what might be a very wide range of children and young people's mental health needs.

We will draw together training materials on those areas in one place and they will be put on Education Scotland's website. That resource will certainly be available before September 2020, although we expect it to become available next term. We also have an on-going commitment to offer mental health first aid training to every local authority in Scotland, and we have done that.

There are a number of aspects to our commitment. We are focused on school counselling at the moment, but my responsibility is much wider than that. It includes setting school counselling within the broader whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing. That is another piece of work that we are taking forward, which will be discussed this afternoon.

As well as setting school counselling in that wider context, we want to enable the services that we are talking about today to be linked with the school nursing service, the community services and the other things that are available in schools. We feel that it is our job to set that out for people so that they do not have to find their way through all the stuff that is available. We want to provide that within a framework.

In addition to that work, we work within an internal Scottish Government framework to draw together all that cross-Government work. That is aligned with all the work that we do with COSLA, too.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):**

I am very interested in what people are discussing, but I want to challenge some of the assumptions that seem to be being made. In doing that, I am happy to be told that I am wrong.

I wonder whether we are overdwelling on a particular understanding of mental health and using CAMHS waiting times as a signal of success. It could be the case that an increase in demand for CAMHS or other services might be a sign of success. At the moment, we are not diagnosing 20 per cent—one in five—of the children who have a neurodevelopmental disorder. We need to make sure that that happens.

My question to the witnesses is about how we make sure that the scope of what is covered goes beyond just anxiety and depression and includes a broader suite of issues and underlying conditions. It is critical that we make the right connections. That might lead to altered demand—in other words, reduced demand for some services and increased demand for others. I would like to see increased demand for diagnosis of neurodevelopmental disorders. At the moment, I am in contact with lots of people for whom even

getting a referral would be a success. I gently say that, for some people, getting a prescription for a pill is a good outcome.

**Joanna Holmes:** But it is a question of getting the right people through to the referral process.

**Daniel Johnson:** I point people back to my entry in the register of members' interests and my diagnosis. I would be interested to get people's reactions to those points.

**Nicola Dickie:** As I said to Ms Mackay, we do not necessarily see a correlation between counselling and CAMHS. It is a bit of a cop-out to say that it is complicated, but that is where we are. A lot of things are going on in this space. The mental health programme board is looking at CAMHS in more detail, and lots of things are going on there. It is clear from the principles that we sought to agree that there is no direct correlation between the two.

A question was asked about the referral process—someone asked whether counsellors will make direct referrals or whether referrals will still go through guidance teachers. The process will be determined locally, based on what is best for those children and young people. That can only work if, where there are those issues, we get the other parts of the system working in a way that works for local communities. That is why we have deliberately not stipulated at a national level that a referral must come through a particular route and must have three degrees of separation or anything else. We have not done that; at the end of the day, it will be up to children and young people and the families who supports them to determine the best way forward.

If we have given any impression that we see there being a direct correlation, whereby counselling will go up and CAMHS will come down, that is certainly not the way that COSLA is approaching the issue. If only it were that simple.

**Deborah Gallacher:** I want to follow up on what Ms Meikle said. I welcome the resource that has been put in place for guidance professionals, which links to the PSE review. In my short tenure in the working group, there was concern about the delivery of PSE across Scotland. As a teacher in a range of institutions, I have noticed that personal and social education is often a secondary consideration in creating curricula. Teaching staff are dedicated to subject specialisms and the people who teach PSE are not qualified professionals. Therefore, the quality of the learning and teaching that is delivered depends on the volition of the practitioner and how much they are invested in what they teach.

I think that Education Scotland is a valuable asset as a national platform for gathering resources, but I am concerned about how it is

accessed and how we can guarantee quality. Beyond PSE, I hope that there will be training resources for the professionals who support people with mental health issues on a daily basis. Not all of them diagnose neurodevelopmental issues, but they face a range of issues, such as school refusing and on-going anxiety, on a daily basis.

**The Convener:** I am conscious that I now have a list of about seven members who all want to come in with supplementaries.

**Laura Meikle:** The PSE review echoes everything that Deborah Gallacher said with regard to the standing of personal and social education in the curriculum. We have a programme of work under way to respond to the review's recommendations, which is due to be delivered before the end of the parliamentary session.

We have a number of strands of work. As well as the PSE work, there is the work that the mental health and wellbeing group is doing on whole-school approaches and training and resources. That will provide a package of support for those who work with children and young people.

I recognise what Deborah Gallacher said. I did not mean to imply that all those things were joined up in one big lump. There are several strands that will all come together to provide that support. They come at the issue from different routes. There are different ways in which we can provide support across services. School staff are not intended to be the answer to all those issues—other services need to be engaged and people need to know who to engage. I will stop there.

**The Convener:** I will endeavour to get through the long list of members who want to get in. I will come to Dr Allan after we have heard from Ms Gibson.

**Stella Gibson:** I want to pick up on what was said about referrals to CAMHS. We are seeing a spectrum of issues when it comes to referrals to counselling. The move by the Scottish Government to put counsellors in all schools is incredibly positive in promoting good mental health. That is a slightly different slant to looking at it as being very issue based. It also normalises counselling as a service, which is important not just for children and young people at that stage of their lives; it will also help them as they grow up and face issues in adult life.

We see counselling in schools as a form of early intervention. Children might have low-level issues and, if we intervene at that stage through school counselling, those issues will not develop into something much greater. That is really important.

Our work is solution-focused counselling. We are there to help the young person come up with solutions to move forward in life. We are not there to passively sit and listen. It is an active role to enable the young person to come up with their own solutions and move forward.

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** I do not want Laura Meikle to feel as though she is giving evidence in a traditional committee session. Although my question is based on something that she said, it is for everyone.

Laura, you mentioned that, understandably, the focus at the moment is on constructing the service and finding the people. I do not want to put words in your mouth, but I think that you said that you would look at what a successful outcome would be at a later date. Should we be looking at that question during the construction phase, so that we do not construct something that does not have a successful outcome?

**Laura Meikle:** The information that we have sought from local authorities as part of our evaluation of the plan asks specifically which outcomes they will use to measure their service. That will help us to build a consistent national picture of outcome measures that we can then report on. The research on the Welsh and English models, which have been in place for a number of years, looked at attendance and at whether children and young people were feeling better. That is probably the space that we want to get into.

There is one local authority in Scotland that has had services in place for quite a long time—I have seen its evaluation of its outcomes—so there is a model there to build on nationally.

Regarding timescale, we might review the scheme in the next couple of years; we do not want to wait until it is too far long. As Nicola Dickie said, if we need to adjust, we need to adjust, and we will do so.

**Nicola Dickie:** The guidance that the Scottish Government issued to local authorities makes it absolutely clear that they should be considering evaluation. Local authorities are already in that space. It is a tried and tested model: we do not do things in schools without checking that they are going well.

**Rona Mackay:** I understand everything that you said earlier about pathways and referral. It is important that families have a clear pathway to getting a diagnosis. One of my constituents tried to get a diagnosis for autism, and my office found five different phone numbers, so people are confused about how to get one. I assume that addressing that confusion is part of the strategy.

11:00

**Nicola Dickie:** That work is already in train and is being taken forward through the mental health programme board. School counselling will go alongside that. Ultimately, we cannot fix the referral routes from the school outwards; we need to do work from both sides. We are looking at that issue.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** What Ms Gibson said about the required training was very interesting. Is the expectation that people will do the 170 hours of training as one unit, or might people do the training on a part-time basis, which will mean that it might take quite a long time?

**Stella Gibson:** We hope that people will do their 170 hours of practice as part of their qualification. They would not be able to get their qualification—and, therefore, they could not become a member of COSCA or the BACP—until they had completed their placement hours.

**Liz Smith:** You rightly said that the key emphasis has to be on ensuring that we have the right training and good quality training. How long do you expect the training process to take before someone is well qualified and able to do the job?

**Stella Gibson:** We expect the qualification for our organisation to take two years. We heavily support our trainee counsellors as they go through their training. Our training team provides the supervision. There is a strong link between the delivery of counselling, supervision and training; that is all tied together. We expect our qualification to take two years, plus the six months that might be needed for someone to get their COSCA certificate before they start their diploma.

**Liz Smith:** Two years for training is quite a long time. How many people are in the training process now?

**Stella Gibson:** We have about 40 trainee counsellors going through the process at the moment. Given the demand, we hope to start another diploma course in April, which will take two years. The issue is that trainee children and young people's counsellors cannot get experience in a school environment until they get their membership. We might take the route of getting trainees to see adults in order for them to get their 170 hours of placement training with our organisation, and then we would give them their specialism in children and young people on top of that.

**Liz Smith:** How long would trainees be in a school to get on-the-job experience?

**Stella Gibson:** We would not send them to a school until we were absolutely happy that they could work in one. They would probably start with

one day a week, but they would be qualified by that time. They would have had 170 hours of counselling with somebody before they were sent to a school.

**Liz Smith:** That is very helpful. Do other panel members have views on the training process and how long it takes? Ms Gallacher raised concerns about the qualitative situation. What do we need to do to ensure that we have people who are fully trained?

**Deborah Gallacher:** Not being a counselling professional, my concern relates to the popular adage about not working with children or animals. Teachers are a funny bunch of people and they work in a specific environment.

**Liz Smith:** You are speaking to one.

**Deborah Gallacher:** So you will know that.

I take Stella Gibson's point, because I understand that, in order for trainees to get 170 hours of supervision, some of that time might need to be spent with adults. How does that translate into an environment in which people are working with children and young people? As I said earlier, my concern is the recruitment and retention of teachers, which is an existing issue. How do we ensure that that problem is not replicated in the counselling provision that we are attempting to deliver?

**Dee Barker Creggan:** I echo what Deborah Gallacher and Stella Gibson have said. As a counsellor, I know that it is not easy to work with children and young people. A lot of counsellors are probably more than capable of working with adults, but counselling for children is a different ball game. I have been working with children for 13 years, which is a long time, but I have not been providing counselling for as long as that. I have now been training for longer than four years, so I imagine that it takes a long time to become experienced and to be able to provide counselling.

**Liz Smith:** Do you feel that the training for working with children and young people is more extensive, or is it required to be more extensive, than it is for working with adults?

**Dee Barker Creggan:** Yes, I would say so.

**Liz Smith:** What would you be doing that is extra when it comes to children and young people?

**Dee Barker Creggan:** I started my journey at COSCA and then moved into cognitive behavioural therapy. It was not until I moved to The Spark that I specialised in working with children and young people. I had a foundation of being able to work specifically with adults, but the depth of training that I received at The Spark has given me the ability to provide quality and

integrative work. It is not specifically about one modality that suits; it depends on the child's needs, whether you are the best person for that child, and whether the child actually needs counselling—it is very complex.

If I am honest, I do not think it is as easy as just giving someone counselling. It takes a specific type of person to work with children and young people and to be effective. To work well in schools, the key is the relationship—that is absolutely imperative. If the relationship is not there, it will not work; it does not matter how skilled or how good you are.

**Joanna Holmes:** To follow on from Liz Smith's question, there are part-time and full-time routes to training. It took me four years, and that was when I already had 20 years of experience in working with children and young people. To begin with, I completed a counselling skills qualification and then I moved on to a diploma in humanistic counselling. I have built on CPD involving trauma-informed work and a lot of work on safeguarding.

To reiterate, it is about making a connection. It is almost about weaving together a combination of youth worker, counselling, and mental health skills so that you can immediately strike a bond with a young person.

The very formal counselling where you are waiting for someone to speak and there are lots of silences also comes in, but, to pick up on what Stella Gibson said, it is all solution focused and there is no specific method. Such counselling is so integrative and it needs so many skill sets that you are learning all the time.

We also learn from young people. They help to shape our services and that is very important.

**Stuart Valentine:** The length of time that it takes to train new children and young people's counsellors is key. How can we get those people into the workplace quickly?

Those who already have a diploma in counselling, such as many of our counsellors who have a diploma in relationship counselling, would need another year of a taught top-up course to get in. That is part of what Relationships Scotland can bring to the table: we have many counsellors across the country who would be able to complete a year's course to become qualified children and young people's counsellors in a shorter period of time than those who would be starting from scratch.

I will briefly raise a point about ensuring that fully qualified counsellors end up undertaking this work. The guidance for educational authorities is helpful, but more work needs to be done to specify the courses and qualifications that have to be completed to ensure that only qualified people



undertake this work. It is a complex and confusing area, but we strongly welcome the involvement of COSCA and the other professional bodies, so that greater clarity can be provided to local authorities to ensure that only qualified children and young people's counsellors undertake this work.

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** I will pull some of the answers to Liz Smith's questions together with some of the answers to the questions about the number of counsellors that are needed. I wrote those numbers down and they are in the written evidence. Laura Meikle said that she had reassurance that we would have enough counsellors to deliver the commitment to having a counsellor in every school by autumn 2020.

The numbers are not clear but, if we now have 160 registered counsellors and we need 360, that would be another 200. We have just heard that it can take one year to top up a qualified counsellor, two years to train a counsellor and four years if someone is pursuing a part-time course. Mr Valentine said that, with an effort, they might be able to convert 40 of their qualified counsellors, but that would take two years. I do not understand where your reassurance comes from. Can you explain why you are confident that we will be able to get enough by the autumn?

**Laura Meikle:** The number 160 refers to the COSCA membership. Scotland has a second membership organisation, which is the BACP. A workforce survey has been undertaken and the reassurance comes from both things taken together. Joanna Holmes might want to add to that.

**Joanna Holmes:** Our members might not be in full-time employment or they might work in private practice, but they are qualified counsellors and 40 per cent of them have specialisms in working with young people. There is a workforce and it might move from providing other services if there is more guaranteed work.

**Iain Gray:** How many members does your organisation have?

**Joanna Holmes:** We have 2,300 members in Scotland and COSCA also has a large membership. Some of our qualified counsellors do not always work, some work voluntary hours, or there could be a combination.

The workforce is there, but people might need additional CPD. There are different routes to working towards a children and young people competency framework, including in-house in services, such as a top-up. There are different ways to become able to work with young people, if someone is the right person for the job. There would still need to be a rigorous recruitment and selection procedure, which we spoke about earlier. I worked in a service in middle England in which a

counsellor being interviewed would have to include a 45-minute video-recorded session with a young person to pass. Selection needs to look at whether a person can work with young people.

**Iain Gray:** Is top-up the process that Stuart Valentine referred to? He said that that would take a year.

**Joanna Holmes:** The top-up process could be in house to the service. A qualified counsellor could go to work at an organisation and it could provide in-house top-up to get them up to speed.

**Iain Gray:** However, they would not be in a school. They could not be an in-school counsellor until they had completed that top-up.

**Joanna Holmes:** Yes.

**The Convener:** I will totally abuse my position and ask a supplementary question that is related to what Dee Barker Creggan said. The model that has been given is almost like one counsellor per school. Dee said that part of a professional counsellor's role is to decide whether they are the right person to give a response. How will this model accommodate that point and give flexibility when a counsellor in a school feels that they are not the best person to counsel a child?

**Laura Meikle:** The fundamental principle of school counselling is that the person has to wish to undertake counselling. We cannot compel the young person to undertake it if they do not wish to. The issue has two parts. First, the young person could say that they do not wish to engage, in which case we are asking for engagement with other services to support that young person so that we are not in a position where no support is provided. It could be a school nurse, a community-based service or other services that already provide mental health and wellbeing support in schools—a lot of work is already under way. Secondly, we have asked for each local authority to have a manager of services, so that if there is a significant incident—if there is an issue about a particular person in a relationship—and a need to prioritise counselling services in a school or area, that person could manage the need to engage the young person with someone else.

**Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con):** I come rather late to the table and I have to declare an interest, because I am the finance director of Relationships Scotland Couple Counselling Central Scotland, which also provides counselling for schools across central Scotland. It trains and provides supervision for those schools. I was going to mention that a lot earlier, but I never got the opportunity.

11:15

My questions are about appropriately qualified counsellors, because I feel that that is at the crux of the delivery of the service, as we have discussed as the morning has progressed. I believe that The Spark is involved with primary schools but I would like to expand on that. The service that the Government is looking to roll out is for 350 counsellors in secondary schools. My personal experience with Relationships Scotland is of counselling in secondary schools. Is there a difference between counselling in those and in primary schools? If so, does that affect how we will get 350 counsellors in place by September 2020?

**Joanna Holmes:** Different methodologies might be used in different settings, but the processes of working with schools, setting up service level agreements and knowing the nature of the school environment are very similar.

**Alison Harris:** I meant the difference between the counsellor skills rather than the service level agreements.

**Joanna Holmes:** We have a competency framework that goes from age four to 18, within which there is a skill set. When you are training to be a CYP counsellor you can develop skills across that age range. Some people might specialise in working with the younger age range, because they are able to use more play in their practice than counsellors who work with older young people. However, it is a similar skill set that would be transferable, were that to be the direction of travel of a particular agency. Stella Gibson might have something to add to that.

**Stella Gibson:** By way of example, Dee Barker Creggan works in secondary and primary schools. Our counsellors are trained to work with children and young people. We do not tend to work one to one with children under eight unless there is a specific need.

A headteacher recently told me that she specifically wanted one of her five-year-old pupils to access counselling. That child was a refugee and could not engage in a group scenario at all. We do therapeutic group work with small groups, but that child was not even able to engage in a group, so the headteacher felt that one-to-one counselling was more appropriate.

On training, our diploma in relational counselling is at level 11, or masters level. We also encourage our existing counsellors to undertake that. For example, Dee Barker Creggan came into our organisation as a qualified CBT counsellor and she is now undertaking the diploma in relational counselling. I will not speak for her, but she could explain the difference that that makes to her practice.

As an organisation that trains and delivers counselling services in schools and for adults, we have a vested interest in making sure that our counsellors are of a good quality. We are selling services to schools and providing counselling services to adults. The Spark's reputation is at stake, so we need to make sure that the people who go to schools and counsel adults are suitably qualified. We would not send anyone into a school or to deliver any counselling unless we were absolutely happy that they were the right person delivering the right service.

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** I want to ask about the funding model and how it relates to the level of demand and to services that are provided not by counsellors who are employed directly by the local authority but by contracted providers.

The funding model is based on a flat sum per school, with additional money per pupil and a rurality calculation involving how many schools are in an area. What are the panel's thoughts on whether that model sufficiently captures the challenges of providing those services in large rural areas and other factors that correlate to demand for mental health services, such as deprivation. Will the current funding model effectively meet the demands across the country?

**Laura Meikle:** Yes, it will. The funding model is that there is £45,000 for every local authority for a manager of the service, the reasons for which I have already stated, so I will not go over that again. Seven per cent of the total is allocated on the basis of rurality, because there were particular concerns about the potential infrastructure costs, such as costs of travel for counsellors moving around schools. The rest is based on pupil numbers. The intent is to provide a service across Scotland, and the framework is there to do that.

As Nicola Dickie said, on top of that is the level of need to which the local service responds. In developing our model, we worked on the basis that 10 per cent of all pupils would potentially use the service, but we have not determined where that 10 per cent would come from in the population. The figure was reached because our evaluation of current services indicated that between 2.5 per cent and 4.8 per cent of pupils were using relevant services. Given that we expect more use of the service in our national approach, we topped that up and went with 10 per cent.

I think that the model is right. We recognise deprivation as one factor that may contribute, but there are a number of other factors. When it comes to delivery, rurality was the concern for us. That is why we have gone with that model.

**Ross Greer:** You have discussed the local authority-level evaluation of the success of the service but, looking at it as a national project, at what points will you evaluate the roll-out of funding and how it relates to demand?

**Laura Meikle:** At present, we are in the first phase, in which we have drawn in plans. Prior to September, we will draw information from local authorities a second time. We will then carry out the review of outcomes that we spoke about, which I think will be 24 months after the September 2020 implementation, to allow the system to bed in. There are at least three check points. There is a financial year end in the middle of that, at which point we will also take a look. We have a number of check points along the way.

**Stuart Valentine:** Part of the costs of training will be met by the students, or by organisations. In the Relationships Scotland network, our services across the country are keen to train new counsellors, but that will have a cost. In our written evidence, we called for a centrally held fund for organisations such as ours to develop and provide training. We provide a lot of training courses for counsellors, and we could develop a new course for children and young people's counselling, perhaps in partnership with others. However, because of the way in which the fund is set up, there is nowhere to apply for the necessary level of resource. With all the money being transferred to the local authorities, and none of it being held centrally, there is no fund that our organisation can apply to for support to develop our work across Scotland.

**Laura Meikle:** We recognise that position. As I said, in recognition of the concern about whether sufficient training would be available, we have worked with the SQA, as a national body, to enable training through colleges across Scotland. From my perspective, we have taken mitigating action in order to relieve some of the concerns, but we have done that in a strategic way.

**Nicola Dickie:** There is nothing to prevent a collaborative of local authorities from putting forward money for training. At the moment, we do not know where there are gaps in provision. Some local authorities are looking to grow their own or to do other things, so they would not benefit from having money taken away and put into a national pot.

We have gone down a particular route for a number of reasons, one of which is speed—to be honest, it is not unusual for COSLA and the Scottish Government to spend a significant amount of time talking about how to distribute money. We are where we are, although I am not necessarily saying that what Stuart Valentine has suggested will not happen in future.

We need to think in a truly strategic fashion. We have employability services, fair funding directorates and lots of other things that do not necessarily sit in and around school counselling and that we would look to reach out to. That is what we do in the context of other portfolios. It is what we are doing with the early learning and childcare expansion and other areas in which there are particular workforce shortages in Scotland.

We are talking about school counselling, but I see heads of education and their inclusive growth guys locally taking that approach, if it gets to a point at which local authorities say, "We just don't have the availability." Rural areas would probably be a good shout for that sort of approach. Therefore, we have not knocked the suggestion away; we do not have such an arrangement at national level, but that does not prevent regional arrangements or arrangements by individual local authorities.

**Stuart Valentine:** That brings us back to the issue of speed and how quickly people can be trained. For example, Dumfries and Galloway Council is taking the grow-your-own approach, which is commendable, but when it advertised positions it said that successful applicants would begin the COSCA counselling skills course, which is the very first qualification in what is at least a four-year process before someone can call themselves a children and young people's counsellor. That will not deliver quickly enough to meet the requirements.

**Nicola Dickie:** We are not necessarily starting with a blank sheet of paper. Until we do the evaluation, we will not know whether Dumfries and Galloway or another local authority that has thought about bringing things in-house will have to change its model and commission from outside the council. There is enough flexibility in the system so that, if we need to tweak it as we go for the benefit of our children and young people, we will be able to do that.

**Iain Gray:** If councils are going to change their models, they will have to do it pretty soon if the change is to have an impact on what they can do in the autumn of this year.

**Nicola Dickie:** On the governance structure, we are actively collating that sort of stuff. As we collate models, we will do what we always do in local government, which is to ensure that the models that are working and that look like they have the greatest chance of success are shared across local authorities, so that authorities can learn from one another. However, nobody is saying that the timescales are not tight.

**Brian Magee:** I mentioned research. In the paper from the University of Glasgow that I think

committee members have in front of them, the word “scarce” is frequently used in the context of references to research.

The committee might be interested to know that a substantial piece of research will be published in spring. It is known as the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness trial of humanistic counselling in schools—ETHOS—study, and it is one of the biggest randomised controlled trials that has ever been done in the counselling field. It involves a number of universities and is led by Professor Mick Cooper, who was formerly professor of counselling at the University of Strathclyde and is now at the University of Roehampton. There were four pilots for the study, which all indicated positive benefits from counselling in schools, and we await the study’s outcome in spring. When the results come out, a dissemination conference will be held; the committee might be interested in finding out what is said as a result of the study.

**Ross Greer:** The committee will certainly be interested in that; it sounds like valuable research.

I have a question for Ms Dickie about procurement. Some of the written submissions flagged up a potential concern that organisations that provide counselling services might not be able to tender for contracts on a local authority-wide basis, particularly in the large local authorities and those that cover large geographical areas. I realise that each local authority does procurement in its own right, albeit that sometimes services are procured through regional collaboratives, and I appreciate that procurement is a massively complex area. Is COSLA or the Scottish Government issuing guidance to ensure that high-quality providers can contribute even if they cannot necessarily provide services throughout a local authority’s area?

**Nicola Dickie:** As is normal in local government, we will share that type of intelligence. The other place to which we always naturally go for help with commissioning is Scotland Excel, which will be able to help. It is not for COSLA to issue commissioning guidance—that would be way above my technical capabilities—but conversations are on-going. For local authorities who have issues with workforce, it is not in their interests to lock people out of or into commissioning for services, so I do not see that as a significant issue.

11:30

**Stella Gibson:** As a delivery agency, The Spark is always on top of procurement. We are starting to see contracts for counselling coming out. Interestingly, one large local authority first asked for views on whether it should put out one whole contract or split it up. Even as one of the leading

providers of children and young people’s counselling in schools, we could not carry a massive contract, as that would be too dangerous for us financially, so we hope that large local authorities will divide up their areas into smaller contracts.

My only worry about that is that, if there are not enough children and young people’s counsellors in or accessible to an authority, we will all be squabbling over the same counsellors. For example, in Glasgow, which is a large authority, if the contract was divided into four and there were four providers, they would all be chasing after the same counsellors. That is a real concern for us.

Other local authorities are approaching commissioning from a cluster perspective, which is interesting. We have been in touch with one local authority that is considering training counsellors, because it recognises that it will not have enough of them. That authority is considering a mixed model for delivery in which it trains some counsellors and recruits others.

Because we work on the ground, we watch what is happening all the time. I am not sure which counselling agencies across Scotland could pick up and support a large contract.

**The Convener:** Beatrice Wishart has a question.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** It is on a different subject.

**The Convener:** Does anyone have any further comments on the current issue?

**Ross Greer:** I have just one point.

**The Convener:** I will let Mr Greer finish and then come to you, Beatrice.

**Ross Greer:** I hope to be brief and that either Ms Dickie or Ms Meikle will be able to answer. The guidance that has come out says that, if counselling services are already provided through pupil equity funding, those services can be transferred over to the new scheme. It is a little challenging for us to scrutinise what is happening with PEF at a national level. Are many schools or local authorities using PEF to provide counselling and related services?

**Laura Meikle:** We know that a number of health and wellbeing interventions are being funded from PEF, and we expect that that transfer will be a feature of the implementation. It is helpful that we can allow that to happen, but we must ensure that the aims and principles are still delivered as part of the arrangements for that. We will have information on that as part of our governance arrangement, which will give us an understanding of it.

**Ross Greer:** We will probably follow that up in writing.

**Beatrice Wishart:** Mr Greer has just asked what I was going to ask, so thank you for that answer. *[Laughter.]*

I have another question, though. If local authorities do not spend their full allocation of funding in the current financial year, is the money rolled over to the next year?

**Laura Meikle:** As I said, we are working on our governance arrangements at the moment, so I cannot share our understanding of that with you. If necessary, we will have the conversations that are usual in those situations to enable that to happen.

**The Convener:** Do you know when you will be able to share that information?

**Laura Meikle:** I expect to report to the next programme board, which is in April.

**Gail Ross:** Why was the decision made not to ring fence the funding?

**Laura Meikle:** The arrangement that we have is a joint agreement with COSLA leaders, which allows us to have the aims and principles and a financial arrangement. That is the most effective way to do it. There may have been concerns from COSLA if we had ring fenced.

**Nicola Dickie:** COSLA has a position on the ring fencing of funds. Ring fencing for something specific would prevent the flexibility that we have just spoken about and would constrain us in how we could respond locally. We are absolutely satisfied with the aims and the principles in the political agreement.

On the point about whether we will carry forward money, local government in Scotland is looking to deliver on the commitment and on the agreement. We are not yet at a point where we are preparing not to spend the money in this financial year.

**Daniel Johnson:** In some ways, my question follows neatly on from Ross Greer's question about funding mechanisms and the model for those. At the beginning of the session, we heard from a number of contributors that successful school counselling involves a whole-school approach and we heard a number of comments about the need to have the right supervisory model.

What does good practice look like in terms of how the service integrates with the rest of the school? For example, do counsellors report to headteachers or do they report to someone completely outside the school? From the written submissions, we can see that some local authorities are implementing a hub approach, whereas others are looking at assigning particular counsellors to particular schools.

Although we do not want a uniform approach, those are quite fundamental differences and we do not want the service to be something that happens to schools; we want it to be part of schools. I am particularly interested in hearing from the practitioners—Joanna Holmes and Stella Gibson—on that. What does good practice look like to you, as local authorities are developing their models?

**Stella Gibson:** When we provide a school counselling service, we would provide the management for the service and would set up a service-level agreement. In a primary school, we would engage with the headteacher; in a secondary school, we would probably engage with the pastoral care team. For the referral processes, the counsellor would work with pastoral care in the high schools; in the primary schools, they would work with the deputy head or headteacher. That is how the service would be managed.

If there are any issues with service delivery, those would come to the manager of the organisation that is providing the service. If there are any clinical issues, they would come through to our clinical team. We have a team of senior clinicians in The Spark who provide support to counsellors in schools. In our service, the counsellors are not employed by the schools; they are employed by The Spark.

It will come down to how each local authority decides to procure that service. If a local authority procures a delivery agency such as ours, that agency will manage the counsellors and will have an agreement with the schools. For example, if we put a counsellor into a primary school and the relationship with the headteacher does not work well, we could put another counsellor into the school. That is the benefit of having an agency to provide the service. We would work with the school to ensure that there is a good relationship.

It all comes down to relationships. Any issues on the ground would come through to the clinical team or the management team. However, it will come down to what the local authorities decide to do.

**Daniel Johnson:** I was interested in Joanna Holmes's comments about the need for a whole-school approach. What are the elements of that?

**Joanna Holmes:** Good practice is having a counselling service that is integrated but separate. Professional provision of counselling requires boundaries. By that, I mean that the counsellor will not be everywhere in the school; they will have a room. Teachers and pastoral staff should not constantly bring to the counsellor young people who might be having panic attacks or meltdowns. Teachers might want to ask for advice as well, but there has to be a time for that. Some counsellors

will provide a drop-in service with more open access.

There should be no interruptions when the counsellor is with the young person. A room should be established and there should be a referral pathway so that the young person knows how to contact the counsellor. Arrangements should be made so that sessions are not cancelled at the last minute and so that counsellors do not arrive at a school with no communication having taken place. It is important to have a link person in the school—a pastoral worker or, in a primary school, a headteacher—so that there is constant communication.

**Daniel Johnson:** You describe a situation in which you need to get the integration right with the teachers and the rest of the school. Each school might have particular issues. Do you have any concerns about a relatively centralised approach being taken, certainly at a local authority level, to delivering these services, compared with a school-by-school approach?

**Joanna Holmes:** A good-practice approach is one in which a counsellor, when they are assigned to a school, will go into year assemblies to introduce themselves and talk about referral processes. They will say, “This is my face, this is who I am and this is how you can get in contact with me. It does not have to come from a teacher; it can come from you, and that’s confidential.” A lot of work is done around confidentiality and safeguarding. You are not working as an individual practitioner in a school; you have the strength of a service, with all of its policies, behind you. That adds value.

Poorer practice is when someone is situated in a school permanently but does not have in place professional boundaries to keep the practice as pure as possible. You should not be seen talking to teachers or the headteacher. When young people worry about confidentiality, they worry about the relationship that they have with you, which should be unique and happen only in that room. The only things that should be passed on are the things that you have agreed to pass on. That professional boundary has to be kept, which is sometimes hard to do when you are situated in a school, because of the dual relationships that can affect the delivery of the service.

**Daniel Johnson:** That is useful. Finally—

**The Convener:** Ms Gibson wants to come in on that point as well.

**Stella Gibson:** We are not talking about parachuting counsellors into schools; that would not work. Schools are incredibly complex places to work in. We have spent three years developing our service; it did not happen overnight.

My concern is that organisations could think, “We can deliver school counselling now. We don’t have any experience of delivering that service but we have adult counsellors that we could train to be children and young people’s counsellors. We could get a contract and put them into a school.”

I am not saying that we have got the service 100 per cent right, but getting it to this point has taken us three years of hard work, and we now have a quality service. As Joanna Holmes said, that quality is about having in place the structure, policies, boundaries and relationships. It is not a case of saying, “Okay, we’ll have to provide 30 counsellors in Glasgow, so we’ll just drop counsellors into schools,” which would not work at all. The local authorities have to be comfortable that they will get a quality service.

**Dee Barker Creggan:** I have done both. I have worked as a counsellor outwith an organisation and I have worked with The Spark. Joanna Holmes talked about being in school with a clinical team and a manager. It is very structured: you know who your contact person is and you are not alone. Working as a counsellor in isolation is very difficult. Being held and supported—in my case, by The Spark—is something that a counsellor needs. Working in isolation, either as a self-employed person or having been put in a school without a support network, would be detrimental to the wellbeing of that counsellor.

**Nicola Dickie:** We are straying into stuff relating to boundaries and supervision, which is in the guidance that the Scottish Government issued to local authorities. We are under no illusions about what we should be doing at local authority level. We would not do anything to a school, because all of the situations that we have set up in our secondary schools differ. Some schools approach pastoral staff and some have drop-ins for other bits and pieces, for example. We would not impose those things.

We were absolutely clear when we put out that guidance that there should be boundaries and that our young people should be able to understand the difference between having a conversation with a teacher and having a conversation with a counsellor.

At the local level, we know what model we are setting out to achieve, but that would be done in partnership with our schools.

11:45

**Deborah Gallacher:** Partnership is pretty much the spirit in which counselling works at the moment.

To go back to Daniel Johnson’s earlier question, good practice extends to very simple things. As we

said in our submission, good practice allows guidance professionals, in conversation with the team of child professionals, counsellors and extended support staff, to be responsive to issues that are raised. For instance, if a culture of self-harm arises in a group, personal and social education can be adapted to respond to it. Good practice goes way beyond triage, referral systems and so on. Every kind of partnership working with the support team in the school should lead directly to improved outcomes for our young people.

**Jenny Gilruth:** I am interested in the ethics of confidentiality and how information is shared in schools, which we touched on during Daniel Johnson's line of questioning.

My understanding is that information is shared quite readily between guidance staff and front-line teachers, because teachers are trusted with such information and it gives them an understanding and awareness of the pupils in front of them. If I were still a teacher and I were teaching a modern studies lesson about new legislation on domestic abuse, for example, and somebody in the class had experience of seeing domestic abuse, I would want to have an understanding of what that pupil was going through before I addressed the subject. Indeed, I might entirely change the focus of my lesson if I knew that somebody in the room had experience of the subject.

I am interested in the ethics of confidentiality and how information is shared with teaching staff. I am particularly interested to hear the perspective of the professionals here who are not teaching staff and how such information would be communicated to me as a classroom teacher—or would it not be, because of confidentiality?

**Stella Gibson:** Dee Barker Creggan can probably answer that more clearly, but that information would not be shared with you, because it is confidential.

**Dee Barker Creggan:** It is difficult, but confidentiality is part of building the therapeutic relationship and having the young person know that they can trust you. The only thing that I would ever share would be risk, and that would be for pastoral care. I have never come across counsellors sharing information with teachers in that way, and I have never done it.

**Joanna Holmes:** Information should not be shared unless the young person has specifically asked you to share it and you are working in their best interest. You might say, "Wouldn't it be handy if your teacher knew this?" Often a counsellor picks up on things that can really help in the classroom situation, and through a process of negotiation with the young person, the counsellor might decide to approach the classroom teacher. For example, you might say, "This person has

been really horrible to that young person for so long, and they sit close together. It would help if one of them sat over there." There are lots of little things that do not seem to be big issues to us but are really big for the young person.

Confidentiality has its limits, and there are issues about significant harm. The services that I worked with in England had a policy that we had to disclose to the designated safeguarding lead any disclosure of self-harm. There are limits to confidentiality, and we explain that to the young person right at the beginning, when we are contracting with them. A contract is put in place with the young person in every counselling relationship so that they explicitly understand what the limits and parameters of confidentiality are. We certainly do not hold on to every bit of information.

When we work for services, we take that information back and discuss it with our supervisor, who is, quite rightly, a part of the organisation. We will say, "This has come up. Where do you think I should go with it?" We are deciding to keep hold of information; we are processing it in the best interest of the child. If it is in the best interest of the child to share some information, we go back to the young person and say, "I know that we said this last week, but I really think we could look into sharing this information with your head of year." We work with that young person to do that, because it is about keeping them safe from harm.

**Laura Meikle:** In the development of the policy and in all our conversations, the sharing of information and the safeguarding of confidentiality were raised again and again. Aims and principles are jointly agreed by the Scottish Government, local authorities and COSLA as part of our framework agreement and, as a consequence of all those discussions, one of the principles is:

"Local policies and procedures in relation to child protection and information sharing should be followed. The requirements of the registering body, for example in terms of professional conduct and supervision, should also be followed".

That allows us to reflect the moral responsibilities and conduct that we talked about earlier and to take account of safeguarding and information sharing. It allows us to keep children and young people safe, while respecting the confidentiality of the one-to-one conversations between a young person and their counsellor, when that is required.

**Brian Magee:** Built into that guidance is reference to the need for a clear and accessible complaints procedure for children and young people to use when things go wrong. That is an important aspect, too.

**Dr Allan:** Confidentiality has been mentioned. I am thinking about smaller communities, given that

I represent smaller communities, but my point does not apply only to them. I am sure that we will reach a situation in which there is strong confidence among the school community about confidentiality, but the fact that someone has had a meeting with a counsellor or has gone through their door will be a matter of public record, and in many communities it will be a matter of public record not only in the school but well outwith it.

How do you deal with such sensitivities? How would you deal with a parent who heard about the counselling and tried to exercise some kind of veto over their child contacting a counsellor, when the child might have very good reason to do that?

**Brian Magee:** If a child understands what counselling is, they have the same right to confidentiality when accessing counselling as adults have. You mentioned parents, and we need to consider what involvement parents and other people in a child's life have in relation to access to counselling.

**Dr Allan:** I am not talking about confidentiality in the room; I am saying that it will become a matter of public record that a child has gone through the counsellor's door, because everyone will have seen them go through that door. How do you deal with that situation?

**Joanna Holmes:** It depends on the coding. In the school that I worked in, a young person's counselling appointment or session could be with either me or someone from an outside agency. We coded that on our SIMS register as an appointment, so it did not come up on the register as counselling. We kept it as tight as possible. In that school, we called a lot of things "mentoring". Appointments were recorded in that way so that not every teacher was aware of why someone was going out of a lesson.

In a lot of schools, it is quite traditional for people to come out of lessons. They might do so to see a nurse, or for another appointment, so the details are not public knowledge.

The room where the service is provided is really important. If it is known only as "the counselling room", some stigma can go with that. Schools, in partnership with the provider of the counselling, need to think about how counselling will look in a school, where it will take place and how young people will access it. The session time almost has to be at the same time as a lesson, but where do young people go after their session? What if they are distressed afterwards? What processes and procedures can be put in place to allow people to have a little time to rebalance themselves? Lots of things that are discussed in counselling can be really upsetting, and sometimes people are more upset at the end. There are lots of conditions that need to be looked at with great sensitivity, and

individual schools need to consider how best to manage that.

**Deborah Gallacher:** These are not trite considerations at all. The logistical issues that are associated with what Joanna Holmes has talked about are very real.

In our specific questions, we asked about accommodation for counsellors in secondary schools. That is not just about pressures on resource in terms of spaces and so on; it is about protecting confidentiality, which has been mentioned. There is a big difference between children leaving the classroom regularly to go to a music lesson or to get a plaster for a paper cut and children leaving to go for counselling. A pupil who goes to the counselling room is immediately exposed as someone who is getting that level of help. In my experience, even pupils who self-refer for counselling and are therefore committed to the process and are seeking help immediately ask questions about safeguarding confidentiality. They are hypersensitive to that. In this area, joint planning and liaison with school staff have a big impact.

Joanna Holmes raised the interesting issue of what happens after a counselling session. If we provide a weekly period of dedicated support for a pupil and they find themselves distressed afterwards, who is available to them? Professional pastoral staff in schools, like me, have dedicated and often quite extensive teaching commitments. Do pupils have an area to go to? In my school, we have resourced a wellbeing base this year, but it is not always staffed. The pressure to fulfil teaching commitments and to be available to different people at different times means that there is not always support. If it will fall on guidance staff to provide that, we could do with more input, training and commitment from school leaders to make ourselves available to provide the things that the young people will need.

On confidentiality, I note that Jenny Gilruth made an interesting point about the sharing of information. The safeguarding legislation covers a great deal of what we do, but if there is a relationship and collaboration between guidance professionals and counsellors, there are opportunities to think about the fact that someone is receiving support. We do not want to breach confidentiality, but if we know that the Holocaust is going to be covered in a history lesson and a young person is a survivor of some kind of genocide, we would perhaps have scope to sidestep the hurt that could be caused. It is not a safeguarding issue per se, or an issue of confidentiality, but by speaking to a young person about potential outcomes we can sidestep some difficulties and avoid distress.



I think that that is what Jenny Gilruth was alluding to. It has to be done with the consent of the young person, and we follow policies and procedures to ensure that we are not overstepping boundaries. However, that points to the interesting and complex points of liaison between school staff and counsellors.

**Laura Meikle:** The guidance that we have provided to authorities to inform their planning is clear about where counselling sessions should take place. It asks authorities to consider the location of the room, particularly so that young people are able to access it without their peers seeing them waiting, entering or leaving. The guidance reflects the concerns that have been fed back from small communities that there could be unintended identification.

**The Convener:** I am conscious of the time, but I promised that I would come back to you, Ms Gibson. Is there anything that you wanted to say but have been unable to say?

**Stella Gibson:** I have another point about the availability of counsellors. We are talking about children and young people's counselling, but many counsellors will go into further education and universities. When I read through the papers, it became clear that the funding that is available for universities is at a much higher level than the funding that is available for schools. We are already seeing universities advertising for counsellors at far higher salaries than we will ever be able to pay. Does that mean that the universities are going to recruit all the best counsellors and that children and young people in schools will be left as the poor relations?

**Nicola Dickie:** Laura Meikle and I are involved in the work in colleges and universities—somewhat selfishly, so that we can make sure that they are aware of our issues. We have also encouraged universities and colleges to have conversations with their local authorities so that we are not in a situation where counsellors are displaced from one place to another. How much success we will have with that will depend on how we go, but it is something that Laura and I and our respective teams are aware of.

**Stella Gibson:** We are also seeing further education colleges tendering for counselling services but not putting in the tender the full amount of money that was awarded to them for those services. They are also asking for more counsellors than they were awarded, and organisations are struggling to provide those services. Where does that leave quality? Colleges are looking for a lot more provision than was identified by the Scottish Government, but they are putting in less money. It is interesting to watch the environment at present.

12:00

**The Convener:** Does anyone have anything pressing to say that they have not had an opportunity to share?

**Deborah Gallacher:** I want to make a point about the mode of delivery of counselling in schools. We have talked about local flexibility and different models of delivery, including group work, and there was a suggestion in one of the briefing papers about digital platforms for counselling. Liz Smith talked earlier about skills for working with young people. It is a fundamental principle of counselling that, when we work with young people, we must seek to engage them and develop an alliance. I am concerned that, if digital platforms are considered to be a cost-effective solution or indeed a way of reaching remote and small rural communities, we may lose the ability to build an alliance with young people and have the improved outcomes that we look for from counselling.

**Joanna Holmes:** Quite a lot of evidence-based data has been picked up from digital platform providers, particularly from an organisation called XenZone, which has some contacts in Scotland. It works within a CYP framework. It has trained counsellors who specialise in working with children and young people and who have supervision and support. They deliver to rural areas in particular, such as in Wales and in Norfolk in England, and their work evaluates quite well. It is not a replacement for face-to-face work; it is an added offer.

Some young people prefer to go down the digital route because they find that they are able to express things more quickly, particularly if they are using synchronous communication. They can type things and get them off their chest, and some evidence has shown that that accelerates the process. It is an offer, but it is not the solution on its own.

**The Convener:** I thank everyone for their attendance. Your evidence has been informative and it has given us a lot of food for thought. If there is anything that you want to elaborate on or anything else that you want to say to the committee, please send it in to the clerks and we will take it on board.

I will suspend the meeting until 10 past 12, but I remind members that, when we resume, we will still be in public session.

12:02

*Meeting suspended.*

12:09

*On resuming—*

12:09

*Meeting continued in private until 12:30.*

## **Subordinate Legislation**

### **Royal Conservatoire of Scotland Amendment Order of Council 2020 (SSI 2020/3)**

**The Convener:** Item 3 is consideration of Scottish statutory instrument 2020/3. Details of the negative instrument are provided in the committee papers. Do members have any comments on the instrument?

**Members:** No.

**The Convener:** That concludes the public part of the meeting.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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