OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 13 November 2024

Session 6

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Wednesday 13 November 2024

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EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE
29th Meeting 2024, Session 6

CONVENER

*Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)
*Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con)
*Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab)
*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)
*Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
*John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
*Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)
*Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Andrew Bradshaw (City of Edinburgh Council)
Freda Fallon (Outward Bound Trust)
Tara Lillis (NASUWT)
Nick March (Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres Scotland)
Jamie Miller (Scottish Outdoor Education Centres)
Matthew Sweeney (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)
Phil Thompson (Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Pauline McIntyre

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 13 November 2024

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]

Deputy Convener

The Convener (Douglas Ross): Good morning and welcome to the 29th meeting in 2024 of the Education, Children and Young People Committee.

I welcome Jackie Dunbar, who joins the committee this morning. She replaces our colleague Stephanie Callaghan. On behalf of the committee, I thank Stephanie for her work while she was a member of the committee during session 6.

Our first item of business is to choose a new deputy convener. The Parliament has agreed that only members of the Scottish National Party are eligible for nomination as deputy convener. I understand that Jackie Dunbar is the Scottish National Party's nominee. Do we agree to the nomination of Jackie Dunbar?

Jackie Dunbar was chosen as deputy convener.

The Convener: Congratulations, Jackie, and welcome to your new role as deputy convener.

I take this opportunity to thank Evelyn Tweed for everything that she has done as deputy convener of the committee. It is great that you are continuing with us on the committee, Evelyn.

Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Convener: Item 2 is an evidence session on the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1. This is a member's bill, which was introduced by Liz Smith MSP.

We will hear from two panels of witnesses today. I welcome our first panel. Andrew Bradshaw is wider achievement manager, outdoor learning and adventure education, at the City of Edinburgh Council. Andrew is also representing the Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education and joins us virtually. Matthew Sweeney is policy manager, children and young people, at the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Tara Lillis is a policy official at the NASUWT. Welcome to you all.

We have an awful lot of questions to get through. Some members may direct their questions to individual witnesses. If you hear someone say something that you were going to say, there is no need to repeat it—we will have to rattle through things, given that we have two panels today.

I will start by asking you all—but maybe Matthew Sweeney can give COSLA's point of view first—to give us an overview of the current provision of outdoor residential education across Scotland and the variances that you see within the 32 local authorities across the country.

Matthew Sweeney (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence. There is quite a wide range of activity in outdoor learning in the round at the moment. In our evidence, we pointed to an Education Scotland document from a few years ago, which pointed out that there is a range of practice. Some is residential, but some involves what we have done to try to engage outdoor learning as part of day-to-day life within schools—and in early learning and childcare centres, for that matter. A number of schools have decided to undertake outdoor residential trips with children and young people, but a range of work is on-going.

COSLA is supporting the learning for sustainability action plan, which we agreed jointly with the Scottish Government and a range of other stakeholders. The plan includes a wide range of commitments to sustainability in the round, including through outdoor learning. More recently, we have joined a Scottish Government working group to look at outdoor learning and make recommendations over the coming months.

The other thing that we want to flag is that there are areas where there has been investment and where we have gone further, particularly in engaging outdoor learning in the day to day. In relation to early learning and childcare expansion, particularly where there was the ability to invest in new services, there is a lot more of what we call indoor/outdoor settings, with children able to come in and out. Similarly, we have been able to resource outdoor classrooms in some of the newer schools.

The structure of the curriculum for excellence means that local authorities, and schools in particular, are able to structure their curriculums to meet the needs of the children and young people they support. That obviously means that different approaches will be taken in their day-to-day outdoor learning but perhaps also in the approach that they take to residential trips.

The Convener: Your member councils may take different approaches to the bill. Different approaches may be taken within councils, too, given that we have geographically large authorities such as Highland Council, for example, where different approaches may be taken in the north of the region and the south of the region.

Matthew Sweeney: On the bill, our position has been very clear that we support the principle of outdoor learning, particularly in that broad sense. At the moment, we have a number of concerns about the new duties that are to be placed on local authorities and whether they will be able, practically, to meet them in the short term. In particular, there are questions around staffing, capacity and how we create the right offers for children and young people. This is probably not surprising as a COSLA view, but we are very concerned about funding being available. With a lot of this, there is a quite significant financial cost for staffing, transport and the centres themselves.

The Convener: We will come on to all those issues in committee members' questions.

Does Andrew Bradshaw want to say anything about overall provision at the moment and what the bill could achieve?

Andrew Bradshaw (City of Edinburgh Council): Good morning. From research that we have done across Scotland via SAPOE, I can confirm that range of uptake by schools. We looked at a sample of local authorities and, on average, in the primary sector, about 61 per cent of primary schools went on residentials. The figure was higher for secondary schools going to outdoor learning centres; indeed, it was much higher for any kind of residential. That very much confirms the picture.

Broadly speaking, the City of Edinburgh Council and SAPOE very much support the bill, based on the information that we have seen so far. We think that it is important that appropriate residentials are seen as part of Scotland's approach to outdoor learning and learning for sustainability. We are very clear about that and about the focus on residentials being integral to the curriculum. However, I want to stress the importance of flexibility and autonomy for local authorities and schools. The City of Edinburgh Council and SAPOE believe that that approach will allow different local authorities, and schools within local authorities, to consider context and needs.

We also acknowledge that there are important caveats, which we will undoubtedly get on to, that relate to cost, funding and the negative impact on other areas of outdoor learning. I think that contracts have already been mentioned, and capacity is very important, as is high quality. However, we feel that those issues can be overcome. This process will allow us to discuss them, which is good.

There is a lot of excitement about the bill in our sector. That is important. The bill is very useful. It has brought residentials to the forefront of debate and discussion: where are we, what are the trends, what will happen in the future, what is a good residential, and how do residentials fit into broader learning for sustainability? For us, that discussion and dialogue are exciting and interesting, and very helpful.

The Convener: You mentioned negative impacts on the current provision. What are they?

Andrew Bradshaw: The concern may be that if the funding model and resourcing around that are not right, there could be an undue impact on other forms of provision. We very much think about the progressive nature of this. Residentials are complementary. We have seen the research and the different benefits of residentials. That is an important point, and the benefit of a national bill and framework is that it safeguards and encourages them. I think that the issues are mitigated by the bill, as long as the guidance in it is right. That is our opening concern.

The Convener: Thank you. Is there anything that Tara Lillis wants to add?

Tara Lillis (NASUWT): In addition to what has been said, we welcome the opportunity to discuss the unequal impact on various communities, which has been raised through our structures. Initially, members of the equality advisory group raised concerns that people within their communities were entering into debt to secure their child's access to a residential opportunity, given the substantial cost associated with that for individual families. The discussion is welcome because it shines a very clear light on inequality within the

system, although it is not particular to residential outdoor experiences. It is important that we look at the bill through an equality and socioeconomic lens, so that education can indeed be free at source and there is equal provision for all children and young people.

The Convener: Thank you. We will move to Pam Duncan-Glancy. If Andrew Bradshaw wants to come in to respond to any points, he should just put his hand up and we will try to catch him that way.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Good morning. I thank the witnesses for joining us today.

I will pick up on the point that Tara Lillis made about inequity in the system. Do the witnesses think that there is inequity in the current system?

Tara Lillis: There absolutely is. It is difficult to pull outdoor residential education, as one facet within learning for sustainability and outdoor learning more broadly, apart from other experiences within the curriculum—for example, trips and outdoor learning experiences. Our engagement with our members has been around that broader package of learning experiences, rather than specifically around residential learning.

In response to our recent cost of living survey, 93 per cent of teacher respondents said that they saw a benefit to school trips for children and young people. At the same time, the information and evidence coming through from that survey of members showed that there were significant barriers to access to outdoor learning, school trips and residential outdoor education.

Those barriers come under more than one heading. For example, respondents from an additional support needs setting said that access to a residential outdoor centre was unattainable for them, because the cost was prohibitive. Others said that, even when they had put money in themselves to supplement school budgets, they still had to leave some children and young people behind. That was not just because of the budgetary costs for schools and local authorities but because of the impact on individual families.

In addition, we should look at impacts more broadly. When we talk about outdoor learning and outdoor sports, there are historical barriers in relation to race and systemic barriers to participation that align with the equality duties in respect of women, people with disabilities and black and minority ethnic communities. When we look closely, we see multiple barriers that face children and young people, schools and teachers in the provision of outdoor learning.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: How are those barriers affecting your members currently?

Tara Lillis: At the moment, I think that education is hanging on a shoogly peg. We are largely reliant on the unpaid work and labour, and the good will, of the education workforce to maintain existing provision. The impact of that is that our members are ground down; they are exhausted. They are absolutely pulled as thin as they possibly could be to provide day-to-day education in the classroom. When we look at going out and about on trips and at additionality in outdoor learning more broadly, we see that, of necessity, there will be additional costs for transport and for additional staffing. At the moment, I think that it is quite bleak on the ground.

While there is fundamental agreement with the principles of equity and of ensuring that all children are able to access the same entitlements, staff on the ground probably feel that they would rather they had additional support assistance in the classroom, enough teachers on the ground and external support agencies that were able to assist them with the young people before focusing on outdoor residential provision.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Matthew Sweeney, what are COSLA's members' views of the inequities and their impact?

Matthew Sweeney: I agree broadly with a lot of what Tara Lillis has set out. Local authorities and schools take a lot of approaches to using the funding they have available to them to try to lessen the impacts, particularly when it comes to poverty and inequality. The cost of the school day work shows that a number of schools have taken very innovative approaches, not just across school trips but across a range of activities—for example, in relation to non-uniform days and school uniform issues. A lot of very good work has gone on across the country in recent times, but we are obviously seeing a very challenging time for our communities at the moment.

One of the big issues that COSLA consistently highlights is the real challenge of trying to make do with the funding that we have when need is growing all the time. Need is growing not only in relation to the poverty and inequality aspects, as there has been an increase in additional support needs and equalities concerns more broadly. For us, it is very challenging to continue to try to meet all those needs at the same time.

We are quite interested to understand how the additional costs under the bill will be met. Some of that is set out in the financial memorandum, but who will meet the costs of the clothing, the sleeping bags and all those things? At the moment, as Tara Lillis set out, there is not a huge amount of capacity in school budgets to meet those costs, so how will they be met?

Similarly, particularly for children and young people with the most severe additional support needs, do we have the right type of provision available in terms of domestic accommodation and the activities that might take place, which need to be rethought and understood?

09:15

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I am not sure whether Andrew Bradshaw wanted to come in.

Andrew Bradshaw: From a SAPOE perspective, I think that, yes, there is a range of barriers, but there is also lots of good practice where local authorities and schools are addressing those barriers. It is challenging, but there is the capacity to do that.

The question of equity around not only financial barriers but non-financial barriers is very important. We have seen lots of good practice. I think that the bill and subsequent guidance, if right, can really support local authorities working together to share good practice and ideas. That is very important.

The City of Edinburgh Council absolutely recognises the potential for inequality and inequity, which is why we work very hard around them. We measure how many children attend residentials at our Benmore and Lagganlia centres—so, not all residentials. We try to understand how they are funded. We also try to understand the children and young people who do not attend and why they do not attend, and there can be a range of non-financial factors, in particular, for that.

It is fair to say that schools use a range of funding models. Again, the flexibility and autonomy to do that is good, but the key point is whether they have the capacity to do this work. It takes significant time from schools: they do a great job across Scotland and there are very good examples, but the capacity to do it takes them away from other things. The bill could really facilitate and support that work if it is funded appropriately and not to the detriment of other very impactful programmes.

To sum up, there is a range of barriers and of good examples. The bill provides an opportunity to overcome the barriers, but capacity and the need to look at the non-financial elements are very important, too.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Thank you. I have one other question, if there is time, convener. What is happening now to support pupils with additional support needs? Will the bill help that or make it more difficult? Is there anything about the bill that should change to support those pupils?

Tara Lillis: The unintended consequence of the bill is the shifting of finances away from basic provision. Although learning for sustainability and outdoor learning should be a thread that weaves its way throughout the curriculum, there are nevertheless some basics that need to be in place to have a successful education and learning environment. In some local authorities and schools, 50 per cent of learners have an additional support need. To an extent, the bill has been framed in a way that does not accommodate those additional support needs. There can be a variety of needs, such as increased anxiety—post-pandemic, we are seeing a lot of impacts on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in classrooms. There could be issues around physical access and there could be a whole host of behavioural issues.

I do not think that the bill—certainly through its financial memorandum—sets out a mechanism through which children with additional support needs would be able to access the proposed outdoor residential provision without a substantial injection of cash, which would need to be more than is proposed.

Further, there are potential knock-on consequences, with funding more broadly within education being diverted. At the moment, one of the key priorities is ensuring support for additional support needs, so there are risks.

Andrew Bradshaw: A lot of work is done on inclusion in mainstream schools in particular, but it will be important to unpick in the bill and the guidance how needs are to be met. Some can be addressed through training for schools and staff in order to achieve best practice, but the funding model also needs to be looked at.

I agree that access to the right facilities and the right equipment is very important. Are they pooled across Scotland so that we make good use of resources? The option of specialist hubs for special schools and how that works is another important issue. There are some very good examples across the United Kingdom of specialist providers that have been established. It would be helpful if there was more interest in inclusion and some more detail on that, particularly in the guidance.

Matthew Sweeney: I agree with everything that colleagues have said. I will add only that a range of work is going on at the moment, as can be seen from the update that the Scottish Government and COSLA published last week on the additional support for learning plan that came on the back of Angela Morgan's report. However, I do not think anyone will deny some of the broader trends that we are seeing with additional support needs. As Tara Lillis said, additional support needs are very diverse, but we are seeing that level of growing need. A lot of work is going on but we recognise that there is still a lot to do. That is the phrasing

that was used when the update was launched last week.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): What the panel has said about the value of residential outdoor education to pupils, schools, local authorities and councils is very interesting. At what level of governance should decisions about residential trips be taken? Who should make the decision that such a trip and such education should happen, and why do you think that that should be the case?

Matthew Sweeney: There has to be a collaboration between schools and local authorities on those decisions. There are probably elements where each side needs a bit of support. Some things around risk assessment or transport organisation can often be done at the local authority level, although that might change, depending on the size of the school and the size of the local authority. Collaboration on those issues can be helpful, but, with regard to the curriculum for excellence, it is quite clear that there is autonomy for schools, headteachers and individual teachers to make decisions about what they want to do. On where the decisions should be made, we think the balance at the moment that sees a role for individual schools, working with the local authority, is key.

Bill Kidd: Tara Lillis, do you think that teachers should have an input into those decisions?

Tara Lillis: Indeed. I rather think that the elephant in the room is the contractual position of teachers, who, at the moment, provide residential outdoor education on a goodwill basis—there is no foundational contractual obligation on them to do so. Indeed, I will go further than that and say that the trade union's advice to its members is to not participate in residential outdoor learning, because of the significant personal and professional risks that are associated with a situation where a trip is not contractual, may not have clear educational outcomes and does not require the expertise of teachers' professional learning and skills.

Sitting underneath the proposal, and in a number of the submissions that I have read, is a presumption that the provision would be undertaken by classroom teachers. I do not necessarily think that that has to be the case. If it were mandated that that should be undertaken by teachers, that would cause significant difficulties with the national bargaining structure at the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers, which is a tripartite committee between COSLA, the trade unions and the Scottish Government. For any Government to deviate from the national bargaining structure would be a very serious step indeed, and I would not anticipate that.

It is possible that the proposal could take place with centralised resources from local authorities without necessitating teachers undertaking the work. Much like our young people, teachers themselves have a diverse range of needs and sometimes—perhaps due to caring responsibilities, or their own health and wellbeing—are physically not able to dedicate that additional time gratis, nor should they, because there is no contractual requirement on them to do so. There are ways around that, through additional resourcing in local authorities to support such work, but I would expect teachers to have a core role because they are leaders of learning, as Matthew Sweeney rightly set out.

Teachers have a key role in relation to the curriculum, the pedagogy and embedding the outdoor learning experience so that it is not just dropped in as a trip but is instead woven throughout the curriculum, but I would not say that they necessarily have a key role in terms of physical attendance.

Bill Kidd: I can see what you are saying, but are you suggesting that there would be participation from some teachers who were keen to do so, or would there have to be a separate number of people who worked specifically on this manner of education rather than in the normal schools?

Tara Lillis: Fundamentally, any of those discussions would involve substantial contractual changes for teachers and that would need to go through the national bargaining structure. For the committee's knowledge and understanding, I should say that, thinking about our own position and the position of others, which have been publicly stated in the consultation responses, I think that having an additional contractual requirement for overnight stays is unlikely to garner support from the trade unions.

Bill Kidd: That is useful, thanks. Andrew Bradshaw, what is the position of SAPOE on that element?

Andrew Bradshaw: In terms of value, we very much agree with what has already been said with regard to autonomy and flexibility for local authorities and schools. Work has already started on a national residential quality framework. We do not want something that is prescriptive. It needs to allow schools to have ownership of the broad principles, but it also needs to embed the learner's ability to co-design quality and evaluate that quality. We have a big workforce—they are voluntary, but they are enthusiastic and have lots of expertise.

It is important that individual schools understand what represents a good residential for their needs and their context when they go about finding the

right provider. Of course, self-led options are possible, and some local authorities are thinking about that approach, where the workforce is keen to do that. Building in that flexibility is important. In terms of value, there is a need to recognise the local context.

A quality assurance framework is being developed in collaboration with schools, local authorities, providers and colleagues in Education Scotland. That is positive, but it must provide the flexibility and autonomy that I have mentioned.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Good morning. My questions are primarily related to the impact on teachers' terms and conditions. Tara Lillis, you have covered that quite comprehensively already, but could you clarify whether it is the position of the NASUWT that, were the bill to be passed and the obligation to provide outdoor residential education were to be delivered in the typical way, through teachers volunteering their time, that would end up going to the SNCT for a formal discussion about changes to terms and conditions?

Tara Lillis: Absolutely, and I think that, for it to happen in that order, with the Government bypassing agreed bargaining machinery to impose changes to terms and conditions, there would be significant discussions about the Government's commitment to fair work.

As I said, depending on the wording of the bill, it is possible that the proposal could be construed as not identifying teachers as the people who would undertake that work. However, looking broadly at the responses to date, it is clear that, across multiple parties, the assumption has been made that teachers will continue to provide that support for free, and I do not believe that that is a tenable position.

Ross Greer: You mentioned that the support does not have to be provided by teachers in the typical manner that I think that we are all familiar with. Andrew Bradshaw, I am interested in anything that you can add to the discussion in terms of what alternative models look like. Are there areas of best practice that exist already? Are there any local authorities that use a model that is not typically reliant on teachers volunteering to go away with their class for the week?

09:30

Andrew Bradshaw: I am very willing to ask our membership about that and come back to the committee with an answer. That is important, as our members want to provide that information.

There are examples of more small-scale targeted residentials, where we would use a range of workforce staff, but the delivery model tends to be the school workforce either working in partnership with a provider or working in a self-led manner. The approaches can be quite diverse. Schools can often tap into volunteers. We often see examples involving competent, well-trained volunteers who support the staffing structure, and also approaches involving partners. We see lots of examples where competent people from outwith our schools and also within the school communities support the supervision and the delivery. On a large scale, the delivery model involves the school workforce, but I will go back to the membership to check whether there are any significant examples of good practice across Scotland where what you are talking about is being explored.

It is important to recognise the needs of the young people. We know the benefits of residentials, and we need to understand the relevant relationships with the key parties, and how they are developed. Any solution needs to consider that carefully. In that regard, autonomy and flexibility for schools and local authorities are important.

Ross Greer: Thanks—that was useful. Tara Lillis covered the core questions around terms and conditions when she responded to Bill Kidd, so I do not need to repeat the question.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Good morning. If the bill were passed today in its current form, what would the practical challenges be for you in terms of implementing the bill? If you had a magic wand, what changes would you make?

Matthew Sweeney: There would be a few practical challenges. We have touched on one in quite some detail around staffing and how that would be worked out. As Tara Lillis pointed out, there is a process whereby we come to a tripartite agreement through the SNCT. As you heard, unions may have a position on the staffing issue, but, in any case, additional funding would likely be required to meet the staffing needs. I think that that will be a common theme.

The availability of and funding for transport will be a big issue and will have a differential impact across authorities. We are already seeing increasing prices and competition around coach hire and so on, and our island authorities will have a range of different considerations.

We still have questions around capacity and whether we have the number of centres that we need to ensure that all children and young people can access outdoor education in the way that the bill sets out. Further, if we have the capacity in general, do we have the capacity available at the right times of year? Obviously, going to an outdoor

centre in May, August or September will be quite different from going in January or February. If we do not address some of those capacity points, how will decisions be made about which people get to go when? That is an interesting question for us to think about.

There is a practical issue around the fact that the age range spans primary and secondary school. How would we track which children and young people have had their entitled trip during those years? How would it work if a child changes school? Also, a secondary school may have different approaches than the primary schools in that cluster and so some of them may have engaged in a trip in primary school but others might not have and will come to secondary school—

Jackie Dunbar: Or move schools.

Matthew Sweeney: Absolutely. There are those considerations.

Lastly, I would flag up some issues that are probably fairly minor but would have an effect in a small number of cases. For example, if you have a composite class—say, a primary 5/6 class—and half of the class is going away for a week, what do you do with the rest? Similarly, how would we manage in the small number of schools serving a remote rural community that might have only one teacher?

Jackie Dunbar: Tara Lillis, do you have anything to add to that?

Tara Lillis: I fully support the points that Matthew Sweeney made about the logistical challenges. We have not touched on the curricular framework today. As yet, we have not seen the entire vision for a senior phase, which may or may not include personal pathways and project learning, so we cannot say how the proposal would then fit into that curricular vision. Would it?

As it is, it is fair to say that, although policy around learning for sustainability and outdoor learning has embedded to an extent, it is not as embedded as we might like. A large part of that is around the time that is required. A number of people from whom the committee has heard have suggested that teachers require professional learning. Undoubtedly, teachers desire access to professional learning but, in and of itself, that is not sufficient. It needs to be accompanied by time and the opportunity to engage, discuss and collaborate with colleagues, and to be a leader of learning in your own context. Another challenge to get our heads around is how the proposal fits within a curricular framework and lands within learning for sustainability.

Jackie Dunbar: Thank you. Andrew Bradshaw, do you have anything to add?

Andrew Bradshaw: Yes, the issues of what, when and how are important with regard to the school and the local authority level, as has already been touched on. Another important issue is whether the capacity will still be there for retaining different types of residentials to illustrate fieldwork, for example, in the secondary sector. We need to protect existing good practice in relation to consultation with school communities and understanding how the residential experience fits into the curriculum. We want the residential to have maximum impact and to be embedded into the curriculum, and that does not happen overnight; it takes time—it needs thought and preparation, and we need to consider all of the relevant aspects in order to ensure that the investment benefits our young people.

High-quality capacity is certainly important in this context. Is there enough capacity of high-quality provision, whether that involves providers or is self-led? Staff confidence is important as well—it is key to the capacity and the provision of support.

It is also important to maximise attendance. We need to work with our families, our young people and our staff to make sure that our learners will attend with confidence, that they feel reassured and they understand the benefits. Again, that takes time. I want the preparation around that.

I have already touched on the importance of tracking participation so that we can ensure that some young people do not miss out.

Another important point is how we measure the impact. If we are to invest money, resources, time and so on, we want to be clear about how we measure that. There are lots of good ideas around that. The quality improvement framework will certainly assist in that.

Jackie Dunbar: On the issue of tracking participation, there is the additional problem of a child who was unable or unwilling to go on a residential the first time and then changed their mind. I wonder how that person would be fitted in. That is not a question; it is an observation.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind): Mr Bradshaw, I think that you said that around 61 per cent of young people are going on residentials. How is that paid for? How many of the residentials are entirely paid for by a pupil's family and how many by the school?

Andrew Bradshaw: The figure of 61 per cent is for primary schools and is an average, so there is a range of figures. That is an important point. Another important aspect is that it is not just how many schools attend but what percentage of the young people who attend from those schools are going. SAPOE wants to develop that information. We have not unpicked at a national scale why they

go, how they are funded and, if they are not funded, why not.

From a council perspective, Edinburgh collects information on how many people attend at Benmore and Lagganlia, because we are interested in that. We have various figures on that, which I can give you a taste of. We have attendance of between 85 and 90 per cent. About 40 per cent of the children who attend Benmore and Lagganlia are subsidised in various forms. Through our research and collection of data, we know that the pupil equity fund accounts for about 23 per cent—it ranges from 20 to 25 per cent—of that. Other school funding is about 14 per cent and school fundraising around 10 per cent. I note that some schools have fed back that they find fundraising to be an important opportunity for learners, as long as it is outside of their community, and they are building that into the education process. We have seen some good examples of that. Some 10 per cent comes from external grants. The funding is diverse and the scale is wide.

This all takes time. It requires a lot of capacity by staff. It also shows the commitment of staff. They understand the benefits of taking young people away and that is why they do it. The advantage of the bill is that it would provide consistency across Scotland and support capacity.

That is the model from Edinburgh. I hope that that is helpful.

John Mason: Yes, that is helpful. I will pursue that a little bit further. You mentioned consistency. Providing consistency costs money. If we have parents who are well able to afford to send their children on residentials, it seems rather a shame to subsidise them with public money when that money could perhaps be targeted at the families who need it more.

Willie Rennie will ask questions about money later on, so I do not want to tread too much on his toes. It was suggested that the cost of a week-long residential per pupil is between £300 and £400 or thereabouts. However, some of the submissions noted that the cost was £400 in 2022-23, so I assume that the average now would be up to about £460 with inflation. On top of that will be the cost of travel, clothing, equipment and so on. Even if the £460 was covered, do you feel that some families would not be able to send their children because of the need to spend money on clothing and that kind of thing?

Andrew Bradshaw: We are definitely getting information that shows increasing concerns about the costs, including hidden costs, and how to manage those from a wide spectrum of parents. We build in solutions in relation to clothing and so on, but transport adds to the cost of a residential.

We definitely have information that parents find that challenging; there is no doubt about that. How the bill seeks to maintain and operate provision is certainly advantageous in that respect.

John Mason: I come to Mr Sweeney on the same theme. If families and schools are fundraising—that is quite good for the schools and young people enjoy it—and that money is already available, we should not replace it with public money, surely.

Matthew Sweeney: I do not think that COSLA has taken a position on that to date, but I highlight that there is an understanding of that already, as there are areas where we provide specifically targeted funding to ensure that some children and young people can get access. There is also the clothing grant and the educational maintenance allowance. I think that there is an understanding that perhaps we can do more to provide some of that targeted support and that that has a place as part of the ecosystem of how we support children and young people to take advantage of their education.

More broadly, I think that I made the point earlier that the residentials agenda is a high priority in schools. Andrew Bradshaw went through some examples, such as PEF, which could be used in relation to those children whose parents do not have the ability to pay. Maybe that is where the PEF is being used to make up the gap. Some of that might be going on at the moment.

John Mason: Presumably, if there is a smaller number of poorer kids in a better-off area the school can cover that. However, I have schools in my constituency that cannot even come here to Parliament because they cannot afford the bus fare. What hope do they have of getting a residential? Should we be means testing for those who need support, or should provision be across the board, which is the intention behind the bill?

Matthew Sweeney: That is difficult to answer. That is not a specific question that we have taken to our members. I go back to the point that means testing is used for things like education maintenance allowance and the clothing grant. Elements of means testing already exist, so that would not be a totally foreign concept.

09:45

John Mason: Ms Lillis, we seem to have a lot of good will from teachers at the moment. You want to discourage that, as I understand it; they should do only what they are paid for. However, cost is a challenge. Everybody accepts that residentials are a good thing, but if we are going to argue that teachers must be paid overtime for every hour that they work on a residential, it just will not happen, will it?

Tara Lillis: The framing of the question ignores the fact that teachers work, on average, 10 hours a week more than their contracted duties. They have a 35-hour contract. Our evidence from members—it can be triangulated across other evidence from other trade unions and different sources in order to back it up as being reliable—is that substantial amounts of free labour are already given within the education system to maintain baseline provision. I wonder the extent to which any person being asked to exceed their contractual duties would be willing to do so on an on-going basis. That is the—

John Mason: Do you not think that most workers do more than they have to?

Tara Lillis: I am not convinced that we could necessitate that people stay overnight on a residential. There would be equality impacts. You would likely have a host of employment tribunal applications from those who have their own caring needs, their own disability, their own—

John Mason: At the moment, we have a lot of volunteers, do we not?

Tara Lillis: We asked teachers more broadly about school trips rather than specifically about residentials and whether they felt that trips were a benefit. Overwhelmingly, they did. More than 90 per cent of teachers said, yes, those are a good thing.

I suppose that the question for the committee, in relation to pulling that apart, is whether you are willing to push the teachers' contract to breaking point and undermine the national bargaining mechanisms or whether we can look at doing things differently.

The feedback from members is that getting children and young people out of the classroom is revolutionary. It broadens their horizons. If we think about it in terms of windows and mirrors, providing an opportunity to see other people's life experiences other than what is on your own doorstep is of fundamental value. Indeed, we have a lot of evidence from our members through our cost of living survey that says that school trips—taking children and young people out of their own context to experience something different—provided that that is done within a curricular context, is of benefit. Whether that then necessitates a residential experience is a separate and different question.

John Mason: I accept that. What about using parents or maybe other volunteers in the community? Would it take pressure off the teachers if some of the parents were willing to go on the trip?

Tara Lillis: It comes down to risk assessments. It is interesting that we are talking about risk assessments, because phase 1 under theme 5 of the national action plan on behaviour in schools, which covers violent behaviour, says that there should be national guidance on risk assessments. The staffing contingent for any trip, whether that is a residential trip or a trip to the local park, is required to undergo a risk assessment process.

It is worth pausing our discussion to think about the increase in violent behaviour in schools and the increase in challenges that teachers face. If we think about the measures that we need to put in place to manage the risks and then move that to a separate context outwith the school, that has cost implications as well.

John Mason: Okay. I will leave it at that, convener.

The Convener: Andrew Bradshaw wants to come in on that point.

Andrew Bradshaw: I just want to come in quickly. I appreciate that the means testing discussion is much wider than this, but, when I was a headteacher in England, I often looked at how my funding came in, including from the pupil premium grant. Yes, I got that funding for that group of learners, but I was significantly concerned about the groups above that. Those concerns continue, as I know that they continue in Scotland, about that growing band of learners. That is an important point.

I have given Edinburgh's example of how we approach that, but the funding landscape across Scotland varies. The evidence from our membership on that is anecdotal, but it is clear. The bill would support the funding landscape.

I will briefly comment on workforce, which I mentioned earlier. This, of course, is subject to safety, competence and suitable and sufficient supervision, but we are seeing schools thinking creatively about the use of not only volunteers and partners but people like trainee teachers who find going on a residential to be a beneficial experience for them. That is an important aspect. Going on a residential can provide high-quality, career-long professional learning not only for them but for other teachers in the school.

I absolutely acknowledge the challenge of volunteering and contracts, but mixed solutions are evident across Scotland, where schools are being creative while maintaining safety and quality all the time. Often, that is enhanced.

John Mason: That is great. Thanks very much.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): Good morning, and thank you for your answers so far, which have been helpful. I am interested in how schools ensure that residential outdoor education is part of a wider learning experience. Tara, you said that it

should be woven through the curriculum. Can you tell us more about that?

Tara Lillis: Matthew Sweeney referenced the learning for sustainability action plan. Trade unions are represented on the group that is discussing that plan, which provides a coherent overarching structure to embed learning for sustainability in Scottish education. It is worth pulling that apart. Learning for sustainability is about sustainable development and global citizenship as well as outdoor learning. The outdoor learning aspect is only one part of the wider learning for sustainability branch, and work is on-going on that. Further, the General Teaching Council for Scotland has a guide on learning for sustainability, and information is provided through Education Scotland, which teachers can access on its website, and through professional learning.

I would say, however, that we are in a policy-rich environment for teachers. By that I mean that, almost weekly, if not twice weekly, a new announcement comes out centrally—those are not necessarily always from Government, as they come from national strategic partners as well. That has resulted in overwhelm within the system, so some of the core messaging is not necessarily reaching teachers. In that context, we have to remember that teachers in Scotland have among the highest class contact times in Europe, and we are pending a reduction of 1.5 hours. That would free up teachers to do greater preparation and planning. At the moment, it is a busy policy environment for teachers, and the extent to which learning for sustainability can be embedded is hampered by the noise around the many different things that are coming out at once.

Evelyn Tweed: Is it the case that some of the guidance and discussions that are going on are not really landing, because teachers are busy and there is so much policy work?

Tara Lillis: There is a patchwork in Scotland. With any policy strand in education, some teachers will have a specific interest. In the national negotiations, we looked at the role of lead teacher, which has not been utilised due to a lack of centralised funding. That role is one example of a phenomenal way through which work on equalities, learning for sustainability or curricular development could be targeted at local level. You would have a leader within a cluster, a context and a school who would be able to provide co-delivery or shared learning experience.

At the moment, as is abundantly clear and has been referenced a number of times, there is not sufficient finance in the system and teachers are crying out for more teachers on the ground, never mind lead teachers.

Evelyn Tweed: How engaged are schools and pupils? Do they have a say on outcomes from residentials and what they will get out of them?

Tara Lillis: Framing the views of children and young people is something that Scottish education does well. I would lean on the evidence from the Child Poverty Action Group's "The Cost of the School Day Big Question" report, which involved speaking to groups of children and young people. That evidence largely aligns with the evidence from trade unions and others that there is value. The issues that children and young people raised in that report included access and finances. They raised issues to do with funding in the system and to do with wellbeing as a result of missing out. They were worried about the negative impact on the children and young people who cannot participate. They raised a whole host of reasons why trips are important to them as pupils and learners within the system, such as making memories, building relationships, feeling included and learning differently.

There is already a strong culture of embedding the views of children and young people, as we would expect, given the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Therefore, I do not think that that is a missed step in the current system.

Evelyn Tweed: Thank you.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Good morning, and thank you for joining us. Tara Lillis touched on the fact that 90 per cent of teachers have said that the bill will be a good thing. From the evidence that we have received and the consultation, it is clear that the teachers who submitted their views see an additional benefit.

Specifically, my question is: what impact will the bill have on other aspects of outdoor learning that is currently undertaken, such as through the Duke of Edinburgh awards or learning in school grounds or the local community? I will bring in Andrew Bradshaw on the local authority aspect.

Andrew Bradshaw: I am sorry, but I had a technical problem during the previous question and I want to make a quick comment on that, if that is still possible.

The Convener: Yes.

Andrew Bradshaw: It is about how to embed residentials into the curriculum. We have to think about that at different levels, starting at the national level with policy and the quality framework that we have talked about embedding the approach in, but also at school and local authority level. We have talked about consulting, but it is important that the workforce in schools as well as parents and young people understand the importance of residential visits and how they

actually benefit people. That needs to be rooted in evidence on how residential visits can benefit them and their learners. If we have ownership and an understanding of the benefits, we are more likely to see that embedding.

Curriculum planning and mapping are important. We need to think about the most appropriate place for residentials to fit in. A secondary school in Edinburgh has done a fabulous piece of work in consulting its school community and thinking about where residentials, including overseas ones, fit in. That is about the totality of the experience and where it fits in best around the curriculum. That is important. In East Lothian, there is a lovely example of work that focused on embedding leadership into the curriculum. The residential has a core part to play in developing leadership skills, which then provide benefits elsewhere in the curriculum, which I guess leads me on to Miles Briggs's question.

Lots of different levels are required to embed the approach in the curriculum. A fundamental understanding of how residentials benefit people is important and is a key driver.

Do you want me to move on to the other question, convener?

The Convener: Yes, please.

Andrew Bradshaw: Can you repeat the question? I lost a bit of connectivity there as well.

Miles Briggs: No problem. It was about the impact that the bill could have on other outdoor learning that takes place, such as that for the Duke of Edinburgh awards.

Andrew Bradshaw: Again, we need to think about where the residentials take place in that progression. From the evidence, we see that relationships between learners and with staff are a key benefit of residential visits. Staff become more aware of learners' needs, and the schools that embed that back into their learning make that clear.

Residentials can switch learners on to certain career or learning pathways. A residential gives them a taste of something and gives them the confidence to engage in other activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh awards. It can give them aspirations on, for example, geography and the sciences, and to go down a pathway where they design outdoor research through experiments and fieldwork. Residentials have clear evidence of benefiting generic skills and also signpost further things, and the benefits are then brought back into the school.

Recent research by Heather Prince in 2022 looked at the importance of schools recognising the benefits, harnessing those benefits and then bringing them back into the wider context of the school.

10:00

Miles Briggs: Last year, 20,144 young people started a Duke of Edinburgh award in Scotland. Of that, an amazing 1,847 achieved the gold award. Currently, people need to include a "residential event", as it is described, to achieve the gold award. From your experience of helping young people in the City of Edinburgh Council area get into outdoor education opportunities, are there barriers and inequalities in the state sector to our young people being able to go on to achieve the gold award?

Andrew Bradshaw: There could be barriers across Scotland. Schools and local authorities work hard at providing a range of opportunities around the gold award and a rich experience. Residential is built into the bronze, silver and gold awards for the Duke of Edinburgh scheme and is a key part of the achievement. In Edinburgh, we recently did some work on the bronze award, and our intelligence tells us that, actually, the residential component is not a barrier. We have looked at the achievement rate and found that those who have not reached that achievement are still achieving other sections. We try to unpick that. The data that we have is that the expedition is a higher barrier and there is still work to be done. That could be linked to the previous comments on staff confidence and capacity to do that.

Matthew Sweeney: I will reflect a lot of what Andrew Bradshaw said. I am conscious that our colleagues in the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland are slightly worried that the bill could displace other outdoor learning activity that goes on, because residentials would be the main focus for outdoor learning. As Tara Lillis pointed out a minute ago, we are quite policy rich—in fact, that is a polite way of putting it; others would say that we are very busy as a result of what we are asked to do. I suppose that that remains to be seen a little bit.

That is part of the concerns that we raised in our written response. The Scottish Government set out in its memorandum the challenges of legislating for one bit of the curriculum. At present, only religious and moral education is legislated for. What does legislating in another area of the curriculum mean for the broader framework that we are creating?

The Duke of Edinburgh awards are absolutely important, but children and young people can go on to do a lot of awards and some of them might not be in the outdoor setting at all—they could be vocational or practical. There are a lot of opportunities that we want children and young

people to have, and it is important to think about the delicate balance in how we approach that.

Lastly—this might link back to the previous question a little—should the bill be successful and taken forward, it is important that there are stronger links with Education Scotland's curriculum improvement cycle. We are now in that space where a range of practitioners come together, have a think about the broad shape of the curriculum and update the technical architecture of the curriculum for excellence. We need to ensure that we create links and, hopefully, address some of that busyness that we have at the moment.

Miles Briggs: Do you have anything to add, Tara?

Tara Lillis: Matthew Sweeney has largely covered the issue. The only point to pick up is about the percentage of our respondents who said that they saw the benefit of school trips. That was about school trips more broadly as opposed to residential trips specifically.

Another point to highlight is about the knock-on impact on the wider sector of potentially opening the door to profiteering, with third sector agencies and companies seeing an opportunity to siphon funds from education by supporting schools to meet that need. Currently, there would not be enough provision across Scotland to meet the needs of all learners, so the bill risks opening the door to profiteering and removal of funding from education.

Miles Briggs: Finally, do you collect any data on teachers who want to volunteer to take part in additional curricular activities because they see the benefit to their young people? You mentioned the additional 10 hours, on which you have some data, but do you have data on teachers doing extracurricular work voluntarily?

Tara Lillis: I do not think that we keep that level of granular detail. It is fair to say that teachers do an awful lot of unpaid things, whether that is staying late to coach a local football group, giving up their lunch hour to support curricular development or to support young people, or running to Tesco in the morning before they get to work to buy breakfast bars, because they know that the children and young people will not be arriving well fed and ready to learn. There are lots of examples in the system of the extent to which teachers go above and beyond.

To be honest, if you speak to teachers directly, they will say in large part that they feel like magicians. They are asked to create something from nothing on a daily basis. There are plenty of examples, but I do not have granular data to give you.

Miles Briggs: Thank you.

The Convener: On that point, a teacher who is interested in football will want to coach and help with the football club, and someone who does not have that interest will not. If we understand more about the volume of teachers who are interested in outdoor education and want to do it, that may allow us to see where the interest is across the country. It undoubtedly is going above and beyond, but is it not fair to say that they do it because they have an interest anyway and they want to share their experience?

Tara Lillis: There is a difference between giving up 50 minutes at the end of a school day to coach a local football team and a five-day residential, in terms of the impact on individual teachers.

The Convener: It is not just 50 minutes, though. It involves coaching through the week and speaking to pupils who have an interest in football and getting them involved. That takes several hours, and there will be weekend football matches as well. I do not know any teacher who coaches for just 50 minutes once a week. It is more substantial than that.

Tara Lillis: But it is voluntary—they are not mandated.

The Convener: It is because they have that interest and want to share it with others and their pupils.

Tara Lillis: If we were moving towards basing our educational foundation on voluntary work, that would be quite serious. I wonder whether we would ask our healthcare professionals to volunteer for additional shifts just out of the goodness of their hearts. There is a cultural difficulty in education to do with the expectation on teachers. They go into the job to support learners, and they go above and beyond to do that, but we must be careful that that good will is not abused.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The financial memorandum has come up a few times. What is your view of the financial memorandum, Matthew, as someone who has looked at the detail of it? Is it accurate?

Matthew Sweeney: The general view is that the financial memorandum does not fully capture what the actual costs would be, as we have covered in today's discussion. It does not include much on additional staffing costs, because of the expectation that the requirement for staff would be met by the current voluntary position. That seems difficult to quantify, as we have discussed. However, if that were to be resolved, it would be resolved through the SNCT. It is difficult to understand how much that might cost. That is a major issue.

The issue of the use of the centres has already come up. The view that we heard from our members when we discussed the financial memorandum was that the current estimates are quite low. Obviously, those costs will continue to increase due to inflation. The other issue that our members flagged up is the fact that the costs for use of the centres will differ, depending on which part of the country you are in. There are different providers and local authorities are charged a diversity of prices, depending on the provision that they are looking for.

Similarly, transport costs have been underestimated. That is partly to do with the increasing prices that we are facing because of the broader cost issues, but there is a specific issue, which I mentioned earlier, in relation to additional rural transport. We have also covered the issue of additional support needs. We are not sure whether that is totally captured in the financial memorandum.

There are also questions about the cost of things such as clothing and bedding, which children and young people might need in order to take part in such activities, and how those costs would be met. Finally, there is the issue of capacity, which we have already discussed. If new capacity needs to be created, that will have an additional cost, and there is a question about how that capacity will be created and the cost met.

Willie Rennie: Thank you for setting that out succinctly. That was helpful.

At the end of the day, this comes down to priorities. In some ways, of course, it is a question of money, but there is money there. The issue is how we spend it. People have said today that it is important that we provide residential outdoor education opportunities, but is it very important that we do that? Is it more important than the other things that we are doing?

Tara Lillis, do you want to kick off on that? Where does the provision of outdoor education opportunities fit in your priorities?

Tara Lillis: Our members would say that the provision of trips and learning outside the classroom environment is a priority, but it is not clear whether that would go as far as the provision of residential opportunities. We need to distinguish between the two. Pupils need to have an opportunity to go outside their own context, but that does not necessarily necessitate the provision of residential outdoor education.

At the moment, we are in an increasingly challenging fiscal environment. Local authorities are cutting hundreds of teachers from their budgets. Parents organisations are lobbying in relation to additional support needs. They have made it clear that there are children and young people who, through no fault of teachers, are not able to access the provision to which they are entitled. We are not able to get it right for every child because the support and additional staffing are not in place on the ground.

In a context in which we are having to make difficult fiscal decisions, prioritisation will need to be balanced. While we would say that any opportunity for residential education should be equitable—we would argue for universality on the basis of the basic principle that education should be free at source—there is a question as to whether that is a priority at the moment, in a context of cuts to teacher numbers and cuts to additional support provision.

Underneath that is an issue that we have not mentioned to date—that of family fundraising activities. I want to put it on record that, when we surveyed members, about a third of them said that their school was using local community fundraising for core educational business. I know from speaking to teachers that they feel exceptionally uncomfortable about that. Indeed, one teacher said to me that it feels like grifting, in that they are taking from communities who do not have the funds in order to subsidise education and that, intrinsically, that places them in a difficult position.

My final point about funding relates to ring fencing. Even if the provision of residential outdoor education is identified as a priority in future, will the funding for it be ring fenced? Plenty of Government priorities emerge, but because of the nature of the funding mechanisms within education, the accountability for the funding being spent on what was promised is not always there.

Willie Rennie: Andrew, do you have a view? Where does it fit in your priorities?

Andrew Bradshaw: From the City of Edinburgh Council's perspective, the provision of residential outdoor education is important. It fits in with our educational plans around health and wellbeing. That is rooted in our evidence on the benefits of residentials. We have already touched on how they impact others.

The importance of other outdoor learning lies not only in the output of the residential but in the direct impacts in relation to the preparation and the building up of confidence in the local area. We value that, and we put a lot of resources into making sure that we maintain a high attendance figure. That requires a lot of support and a lot of hard work by schools, because—

Willie Rennie: Sorry, can I interrupt you? The issue is not about the value of residential outdoor education; it is about the priority of it. Where does it fit in your priorities?

Andrew Bradshaw: The fact that it is valued means that it is a high priority for us. That is the point. Parents, staff and learners all value it and can see the impact that it has. Because of that, it has a higher priority for us.

Willie Rennie: Matthew, do you have anything to add?

Matthew Sweeney: Earlier this week, we launched our budget lobbying campaign, and we are keen to flag up the fact that local government budgets are under a range of pressures. Some of the pressures on education have already been expanded on, but there are also pressures on the broader supports that we provide children and young people with through social work, early intervention services, libraries and culture. All of those are fundamental to increasing attainment.

I am not sure that, if we had to support just one activity, the provision of residential outdoor education would be the one that would increase attainment and provide the best outcome for children and young people. We need to have a balance, which is why we need to give local authorities the space to make decisions about declining budgets. They know their communities best and are able to make decisions based on those local needs.

We might differ from Tara Lillis when it comes to ring fencing. We often see a ring-fenced pot being brought in, but that means that we get less in the local government settlement, which means that we are unable to continue to provide the same level of service.

Willie Rennie: That is a whole other debate.

Matthew Sweeney: Indeed.

10:15

The Convener: On that point from Matthew Sweeney, if legislating for the provision of residential outdoor education is not the solution, nothing else is coming forward. You are saying that such provision is not the top priority because it might not be the single measure that could improve attainment, but could that money go to anything else that would improve attainment?

Matthew Sweeney: Absolutely. That money should be provided to the existing systems to make sure that they are able to meet the growing demands.

The Convener: But the position would then be different right across the country.

Matthew Sweeney: Absolutely. The situation would be different with regard to the provision of residential outdoor education, but Scotland's schools and communities are very different in their needs, their demographics and their geographies. They will have different needs that we need to support.

The Convener: We heard from Andrew Bradshaw that, because of the current situation, 40 per cent of primary school pupils do not get any outdoor education. If we simply put more money into what we are doing at the moment, there will still be a chunk of pupils who do not get any residential outdoor education.

Matthew Sweeney: I am sorry—I thought that your question was about priorities. Are you asking about priorities in relation to residential education or priorities more generally in relation to what will improve attainment for children and young people?

The Convener: I am asking what would improve education and attainment more generally. Given that you all agree, and last week's witnesses agreed, that the provision of residential outdoor education is a good thing, if we do not pursue the bill and make it a priority to combine the opportunity to provide outdoor education and improve attainment, what else is there?

Matthew Sweeney: There is the on-going learning for sustainability work, which we have already discussed. The Scottish Government has set up the outdoor education working group to look at the issue in the round and perhaps address issues such as the question of how we fit residential provision within the curricular framework, some of which Tara Lillis described.

We also need to look at the issue in the context of broader improvement priorities. Some of that relates to the national improvement framework and the on-going process for that but, for example, the international council of education advisers has said that, in the short term, we should be looking at leadership and the quality of professional learning and development for teachers. In my view, we should perhaps focus on that in the short term, because we have been given evidence on how we can make some of those improvements.

The Convener: Andrew, in your written submission, you said that the estimated primary school allocation of £300 to £400

"is considered too low to deliver high-quality provision that maximises impact."

What should the figure be?

Andrew Bradshaw: First, there will be variation. From our perspective as a council, we are getting nearer the £500 mark when it comes to the amount that is allowed in terms of investment for providers. In SAPOE in particular, we recognise the importance of investing in our infrastructure. That is important. Some more work needs to be done on what that would look like

across the sector. I am hedging a little bit on a figure, but—

The Convener: You also said in your submission that you acknowledge the challenge of modelling and coming up with such figures. It will be difficult to do that, will it not?

Andrew Bradshaw: Indeed. As a local authority, we could do that with the operations that we have, but there is complexity across the country. In what we said in that response, we meant that there are lots of different providers and delivery models, including self-led provision. Therefore, it is extremely challenging to model an accurate figure. The City of Edinburgh Council has a viewpoint on a particular model, but that would be developed in consultation with our schools and our families and communities.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Good morning, everyone. I have listened to everything that you have said, and thinking back to what we heard last week, I remember being told that the outcomes for young people at these outdoor education centres is that they become good leaders—indeed, world leaders—and better people, and that they give them a focus on what they want to do in life.

However—and I am trying not to be a grumpy old man here—a lot of young people whom I know, including those in my own family and my own children, gained a lot of that from other things in school, whether from the football or netball team, or other sporting or academic endeavours. What, in your opinion, are the intended outcomes from the residential centres, and how do they feed into what we already currently do? I am struggling to marry all of that up. Matthew Sweeney has said that we are already doing quite a lot of work on this, and that doing something nationally might take away from that. I have to say that I share that concern.

Matthew Sweeney: Absolutely. As you have mentioned, we already do a range of activities that look at outdoor education in the wider sense. As I said at the start, where we have been able to invest, we have been able to adapt things and make them part of the day-to-day learning in schools and childcare across the country. That is important.

On your broader question, however, the needs of Scotland's communities, and indeed the needs of children and young people, are diverse. This might work as part of a package, but there are other things that will work for other children and young people.

George Adam: Just to be clear, in the area that I come from, the vast majority of children—though not all—would not know a Duke of Edinburgh's award if it bit them on the backside. How do we deal with those kids? From the experience in my own area and community, they are not likely to engage with these kinds of things.

Matthew Sweeney: That is part of our caution with legislating on one part of the curriculum when what we want is for schools and teachers to understand what their local communities need and to fit to them the curriculum that works for them. That brings me back to Tara Lillis's earlier point about the approach that we want to take in the senior phase to ensure that young people's achievements are reflected. However, we absolutely agree that schools need the flexibility to design curriculums and opportunities for achievement that meet the needs of children and young people, that they have to be able to provide the support that young people need to achieve and which sets them on a course for their future life, their career and their confidence and that, in this respect, the four capacities in curriculum for excellence need to be met in a way that works for everyone.

George Adam: Tara, you have talked about the challenges facing your members and the fact that teachers are having to engage almost in a plate-spinning exercise to ensure that they are getting everything done. How do they ensure that young people can achieve all of this? Surely they will say, "We know that certain young people engage in certain ways, and this might not necessarily be the way to do it." You have already mentioned that your members believe that day trips, for example, have a lot more value.

Tara Lillis: We need to pin this at the top-line level. The vision and purpose of education that came out of the national discussion have been set out in three strands—the impact on one's individual life skills; the impact on the learning journey into work; and the impact on the wider community—and everything else should stack neatly underneath those three top-level aims, outcomes or aspects of the vision for education.

Teachers are skilled at knowing the young people in front of them and at differentiating. They are a well-trained workforce who know their local contexts and are able to say, "This is not going to land with my group of young people. We need an alternative approach." Often, the barrier is not a lack of knowledge and skills on the part of the workforce in providing localised opportunities; often, the barrier is finance, and time. Teachers have no difficulty identifying what is appropriate for their context, but they might not have the funds to implement it or the time to develop the curriculum to the extent that they would wish.

George Adam: You mentioned that there might be some capacity issues, should this sort of thing become mandatory and part of the curriculum, and you also said you had a fear of money that had been going into education being taken out of it.

When you said that, I got a wee bit frightened, too. Can you elaborate on that a wee bit more? I can see where you are coming from, and I think that it is an important point.

Tara Lillis: It was more a reflection on how PEF money has landed. When the pupil equity funding money, which was to target socioeconomically disadvantaged learners in order to bridge the attainment gap, was identified for distribution, out of the woodwork came a number of consultants and agencies who purported, for a sum, to be able to assist schools, perhaps with behavioural approaches or in other avenues. It is only natural that where there is identified funding from Government and where there might be a gap in service, other providers might look for some advantage. That was the reason for our raising as a potential risk that, where the facility did not currently exist, either the Scottish Government or local authorities would need to find the funds to purchase additional outdoor centres, or we would have to be reliant on either third sector or corporate organisations.

The Convener: I am sorry, but I think that Andrew Bradshaw wanted to come in on an earlier question.

Andrew Bradshaw: Yes, if I may. It was on the difference between residentials and other types of outdoor learning and activities. We in Edinburgh—and, indeed, colleagues across Scotland—look at that triangulation. There has been research on the benefits of residentials with regard to relationships, the challenges involved, the issue of social development and the important issue of living together, which has distinct benefits. All of that is seen through the lens of a different environment of a different intensity and different forms of activity.

We also speak to people and hear their views. Every now and again, I will talk to a learner group at our centres—indeed, I did it last week—and a key question that I ask is: why come to Lagganlia or Benmore? Why go on a residential? Can we do some of these things in Edinburgh or in locations closer to home? One young person made some good points about that, saying that a residential allowed them to go to more remote locations. They said, "Yes, I can climb and experience Arthur's Seat, but it is so busy. When I come on a residential, I go to and access a more remote location." They said that they had quality time in the evenings to talk to others and unpick things, and that was important to them. In the evening, they could watch the stars—we had these new telescopes—and they could try new activities and have new experiences.

A former head teacher at Canal View primary school made the point clearly that this sort of activity gives the children in her community the opportunity to widen horizons and have new opportunities. That is fundamental and critical; indeed, we recently had feedback from a parent, who said:

> "As a parent, I believe it's essential that our children get the opportunity to experience new places ... some of our kids never get beyond the very local spaces."

She was clear about the value that she put on that for her own child as well as for them as a family as something that might not be possible otherwise.

George Adam: Andrew, what I am trying to say is that these things can be experienced by young people and learners in other areas. You might have, say, a sports team going on tour, having to fundraise for that and so on, and there will be an overnight element to that, too. I probably remember those kinds of sporting endeavours and overnight stays with teams more than my time in Ardentinny as a kid. I know that the world has changed quite a lot since I was that age, but surely there is an argument to be made that it is not just this type of outdoor experience or residential stay that makes that difference in young people's lives. Other people are motivated by other things.

Andrew Bradshaw: I completely respect that view. For part of our membership, particularly those in the Hebrides, Shetland and other remote places, a contrasting residential needs to focus on other things. That brings us back to the issue of flexibility and taking an autonomous approach. However, by bringing this sort of thing into the curriculum, we maximise outcomes and have equity of experience, too. I do not disagree with you—lots of these things have their place—but it is to do with how these things are structured and planned and thinking about the quality of experience and outcomes that go beyond that experience of, say, living together to career and learning pathways.

George Adam: I have a final question for Tara Lillis. In your written evidence, you say that you have advised members to participate only in visits with "clear educational outcomes" and proper approval. You have gone further than that today, saying that on the whole you advise them not to go, because of all kinds of other things. That is quite concerning in itself; I am also quite concerned by your comment that this could open up teachers' pay and conditions. Can you give me some further detail on why that is such a major issue? It probably affects the financial memorandum, as Matthew Sweeney mentioned earlier.

Tara Lillis: As a trade union, our fundamental purpose is to support members and negotiate terms and conditions and pay on their behalf. In doing so, we look to the best interest to protect our members in their workplaces. That is the context for our advice with regard to the personal and professional risks to individual teachers. This is a

non-contractual duty, and the best way of protecting yourself from any criticism levelled at you is not to participate. I suppose that that is the starting point of the trade union response.

Teachers do participate, because they are dedicated and committed to the children and young people, and they go above and beyond, not only under this but, as we have discussed, under a number of other headings. For us, this is about the appropriateness of relying on people's goodwill to further a national agenda. I do not think that that is something that, as a trade union interested in the terms and conditions of our members and in protecting them at work, we could be in favour of.

The Convener: I thank all of you for your evidence today. Andrew Bradshaw said that he would go back and ask his members some of these questions, and it would be very helpful if he could feed any responses back to the committee. Thank you for your previous submissions and the evidence that you have given us today.

I suspend the meeting until 10:45, when we will resume with our second panel.

10:30

Meeting suspended.

10:45

On resuming—

The Convener: Welcome back, members, and welcome to our second panel of witnesses. We have Phil Thompson, the development manager at Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre; Nick March from the Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres Scotland; Freda Fallon, the development manager for Scotland at the Outward Bound Trust; and Jamie Miller, the chief executive at Scottish Outdoor Education Centres. I welcome you all to the committee. As you know, this is part of our stage 1 deliberations on Liz Smith's bill.

I understand that you were all watching the earlier evidence session. Do you have any thoughts on what you heard from some of the representatives in relation to the teaching profession and local authorities? Also, can you tell us about your own individual organisations and the importance of the work that you are doing across Scotland?

Jamie Miller (Scottish Outdoor Education Centres): Yes, we watched the previous session with quite a lot of interest. My organisation has quite a long history. We have been going since 1939, providing outdoor adventurous learning for lots of young people in Scotland.

We see our job as allied with the teaching profession. The teaching profession is really important: it is the conduit for the learning that takes place at our centres to be expressed back in the classroom and the wider education environment. It is important for us that that education is not lost and will help to facilitate further education for the young people back in their school environment.

For us, it is a facilitative process. The activities that we do are merely vehicles for learning. It is not about the activities themselves; it is about how the young people can learn and develop from them. That can be social learning but it can also be environmental learning, for example, or even numeracy or literacy. We can be quite pragmatic—we can look at angles, forces, dynamics and that sort of stuff. For us, it is very much not about the activities themselves but rather what the young people can learn from those activities and how they can develop. Social learning is very important as well: resilience, personal development, team working skills, communication and so on are all immediately transferable back to the school environment.

Freda Fallon (Outward Bound Trust): It is great to be here. Thank you for having us all along. When I watched the previous session, the question for me was about how to address some of the issues that the panel members were talking about when we get the chance for this bill to happen. How do we, along with you as parliamentarians and along with the previous panel, for example, make this happen? I will broaden that out to ask, what does it mean in education to be a citizen of Scotland? Looking at Professor Louise Hayward's review of examination and assessment, what should education in Scotland in the 21st century look like? What knowledge, skills and capacities will learners need in order to thrive? Learners, schools, colleges, employers and universities gave examples of the skills that will be needed, which included the ability to work together to use knowledge to tackle problems, to think creatively and to persevere. My feeling is that we can contribute to that as a sector and I am excited to be here to discuss it today.

Nick March (Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres Scotland): I represent all the outdoor centres in Scotland—our membership is made up of all the heads of the centres, so I have a lot of understanding of what is happening in the centres. I also look after the Lagganlia centre on behalf of the City of Edinburgh.

I would like to move the storyline along in terms of how outdoor centres work these days. Jamie Miller mentioned the year when his organisation started—centres were being built in that pre-war period, with the question being, how do we look after people for the next conflict? However,

centres have moved on. That was a big piece of evidence that was missing from last week's narrative, in that we are no longer looking just at throwing people into kayaks and hoping that they will come back as better people. We have moved on, so if we can move that narrative along for everyone, that would be fantastic.

Our first job is building relationships. The high-quality outdoor learning that is being written into the new quality framework, as spoken about in the previous session, is a key part of that. The relationship between us and the school is everything. I do a large amount of work with every teacher coming to us to ensure that we discuss every learner need and that the course is written. Parts of it can cover whether it could be done, for example, within a football camp or an overnight stay.

The key part to a residential is about access to the environment enabling the learning sustainability policy. We keep hearing about the learning sustainability policy: we are involved in enabling it. We can take children to these wonderful wild spaces that they cannot find in places such as Shettleston. We enable a child to touch and smell these spaces and come home with a sense of what a wild space in Scotland is about. When they get back into the classroom, they will then be able to engage in looking after our planet for the future.

On the story of building relationships, I would like to quickly share something from a teacher from yesterday. I told her that I was coming here and she said:

"Nick, this is it for me. It's the foundation for the year ahead and the relationships that are forged on camp make the relationships in the classroom far stronger, more understanding and more effective. Relationships are at the heart of what we do. Positive relationships between staff and pupils and within staff teams make anything possible and learning limitless. There is nothing more effective to high-quality teaching and learning than strong and positive relationships and there is nothing more effective to achieving these quality relationships than a week-long residential."

We are looking at empowering teachers and trying to enable them to have the draw to school. We keep hearing about how attendance is a huge challenge now. We are looking at engaging pupils. Residential weeks are so powerful in doing that. It puts the child at the heart of this, which is what we hope to do today in sharing the stories of the children. A lot of the issues you heard about are in relation to teachers who are really challenged at the moment. I see that day in, day out—I will not deny that that is a reality—but we feel that residentials empower teachers in relation to teaching in the classroom and address so many of the issues that we heard about.

I am also keen to contribute in relation to the financial question later on.

Phil Thompson (Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre): Good morning, convener. You asked what we thought of this morning's session. Something that has been missing so far is the voice of the young person. We have got into the weeds a little bit too much. Obviously, that is why the committee is here: it is entirely within your remit to ask all the hard questions. However, what I see and hear every day is young people learning and achieving in Ardroy, the outdoor education centre that I specifically represent, and I hope that the four of us who are here today can bring you the voice of the young person. Yes, it is a lot of money; yes, it is a major bit of legislation. However, at the bottom of all of this are incredible opportunities for Scotland's young people. That is what we need to highlight in the next 90 minutes.

You asked about my background. I am from Ardroy in Lochgoilhead. There is an interesting back story to the centre. We were opened in 1969 by Fife Council. Fife Council decided that it could not afford us in 2011 and we were shut down. We reopened a couple of months later. In fact, it is 13 years to the day since we reopened. We now operate as a social enterprise and a charity, still largely delivering the same outcomes but doing it without any support from any local authority. We are a third sector success story, but it is a challenging world out there.

The Convener: We are keen to hear the views of the young people you work with. The union representative in the previous session portrayed this period as quite a difficult time for teachers in general, which I think that we all agree with, but we heard phrases such as, "This could be the straw that breaks the camel's back," and so on, in terms of pay negotiations, for example. What do you hear back from teachers? Mr March has just read out a helpful comment from one teacher. More generally, what do the teachers say when they are with you, when they are preparing to be with you and afterwards? What is the feedback that you get from teachers in particular?

Freda Fallon: We have just done an evaluation of 200 teachers to get their views on what they benefit from. There is a quote from Lanark grammar school which sums up how the relationships that are built on residential can then be transferred back to benefit the classroom:

"On a more everyday level, there are kids who are maybe on the edge of school, on the periphery of being involved in the classroom or involved in something outside school they shouldn't be. [After Outward Bound], they're much more engaged, much more likely to talk to you, much more likely to have a positive relationship with you in the corridors when you bump into them. If you say something to them, they take it from you because you've spoken to

them at Outward Bound and you've maybe picked them up on something."

Beyond that, 90 per cent of the teachers reported that young people are more confident in their interactions with adults at school after a course; 86 per cent of the teachers have improved relationships with their pupils following having been on a residential; 80 per cent saw qualities in their pupils they do not or cannot show in the school environment; and 75 per cent had an increased understanding of their pupils' abilities, which then supported the learning back in school.

From those little snapshots, you can see that it is not just the young people who benefit. Teachers benefit in terms of the relationships and the quality of enthusiasm. Some 64 per cent said that their own enthusiasm for teaching had increased and that they had learned new skills and seen new ways of working with young people. They built rapport with them in a new environment—being in a gorge, for example—and shared and connected.

Recently, a visitor to Loch Eil was speaking with a group in one of our areas who were returning from an expedition and what mattered most to them was that the teacher spoke about how the young people supported them on the expedition. That was the most striking thing.

Whenever I go to the centre at the end of a week, the teachers are talking about individual pupils and the joy that I feel from them in seeing that development is stellar. That comes from the quality of the experience of having one instructor with one group. The teacher who accompanies that group will stay with them for the duration of the time, taking part; it is essential that they are part of that development. However, we support every other aspect. We have 24-hour pastoral care; we think about the food. The teachers are there to support the development of the young people and transfer that development back to school for the benefit of the wider community.

The Convener: Thank you. With a panel of four witnesses, we will have to keep things moving. I think that covers that area very well, so we will move on now.

Evelyn Tweed: Good morning, panel. Thanks for all your evidence so far. Is the level of provision of residential outdoor education declining and, if so, what are the reasons for that?

Nick March: Outdoor centres have been on a journey post war, since the explosion of local authority-funded centres in the 1960s. We went through a number of generations of cuts and many of those centres have moved into the third sector. They have not moved there—to counter an argument that was put forward earlier—for profiteering. I cannot think of a less likely way of profiteering than opening an outdoor centre. The key point is that those in the third sector have done it through heart because they believe so much in the education service that such centres provide.

However, because of that heart and because of the question of affordability, all centres are driven to keep the price as affordable as possible because we are so aware of the young people and the areas of deprivation that we work with. Overall, each centre tries to hide its capital cost or does not even include its capital cost within the price of its residential. Over time, therefore, as soon as a centre is presented with a significant challenge—such as needing a fire escape or whatever—that centre unfortunately becomes unsustainable. At the heart of it is the building. The decline of the centre comes back to affordability and how the third sector can fund it.

In a recent meeting of the AHOECS members, we discussed how they are funding their capital costs. Those costs all have to come through a separate funding mechanism in order to supply and look after their buildings. We know that without the building, we do not have a centre. The decline over time is firmly rooted in the issue of whether they can look after and support the building while keeping the cost affordable to the young person.

Evelyn Tweed: Do you have ideas about how support could be given to tackle those issues?

Nick March: A sustained funding model would take away the financial challenge and make it equitable and enabling for every child in Scotland. A big part of the policy is about equity and allowing each young person from every area in Scotland to access opportunities. It will change the way in which centres work.

If your ambition for the outdoor residential is for outdoor learning and the benefit to the child coming back into the classroom, that takes away a lot of the seasonality of it. Outdoor learning in my centre takes place throughout the whole year—actually, the highest demand is not in the summer months; it is after summer up until Christmas for P7 groups that are trying to achieve the maximum impact over the course of the year. That has changed the narrative of when schools look for their residentials.

11:00

The bill will, I hope, look at high-quality outdoor learning and at these outcomes. I believe, therefore, that the structure of when schools go on residentials will change. As an example, the Blairvadach outdoor centre, the Glasgow City Council-owned outdoor centre, is at capacity through the year because young people want the opportunity of targeted outdoor learning over

simply jumping in a kayak for a splash in the summer.

It is important to differentiate between outdoor learning and outdoor recreation. We all do outdoor recreation for pleasure and fun. I do it myself; I go climbing and walking on weekends. However, our centres at high-quality level are not focused on outdoor recreation. We are not there to provide a big whooshy zipline; we are there to engage the pupil in the classroom.

When we take that into context, I believe that residentials will spread throughout the course of 12 months. We will try to engage everyone, including young people, throughout the calendar year, which will allow centres to have a full business pattern through the year and make them more financially sustainable over time.

Evelyn Tweed: Will a lot of it come down to flexibility and what is offered when, with it spread over 12 months?

Nick March: Yes—absolutely.

Evelyn Tweed: Thank you. Written submissions have highlighted tight margins, low wages and high turnover of staff. Are sufficient numbers of aspirant instructors coming into and staying in the industry?

Nick March: Across Scotland at the moment, I believe that staffing and human resources is our biggest challenge, in general—not just for outdoor centres, but we will be speaking about outdoor centres. High-quality outdoor learning centres need people with a firm understanding of teaching, teaching progression, the curriculum for excellence and learning for sustainability, and that must be married up with a raft of safety tickets that allow them to journey into these spaces to teach.

The journey to take someone to that level is the challenge. Lots of young people might come into the industry for outdoor recreation, spend a summer in it and want to be taken on. However, because of the challenging financial times for centres and young people not being able to afford this experience, the ability for third sector centres to engage young people, keep them on and take them on career paths is challenged.

The bill would definitely impact that, and it would impact universities and colleges. The recent quality framework document is under way with Education Scotland's curriculum team. We invited universities to engage with that process, and they are aware of how they would have to change their courses to suit and provide for young people in this new space.

Miles Briggs: Good morning to the witnesses. Thanks for joining us this morning. The number of pupils who undertake residential outdoor education is not collected centrally. Are you aware of how many pupils, especially those from the state sector, currently undertake residential outdoor education? Is that predominantly in council areas that still own their own facilities?

Phil Thompson: The simple answer is that nobody knows exactly. In Scotland, 13 local authorities use a system called EVOLVEvisits, which is excursion management software. Edinburgh and Glasgow do not use it. At the moment, no standard metric shows exactly how many children attend residentials in Scotland. Compare that with the situation in Wales, which recently had a parliamentary bill on residentials, and where they all use EVOLVEvisits: they could tell you to the decimal point how many children attend residentials. There is a definite need to do that here.

We see about 2,000 to 2,500 children a year coming through Ardroy but, at the moment, no central metric measures that directly. We do not have that figure. Any figures that we have are inferred or implied from other sources.

Jamie Miller: Likewise, we work with about 10,000 young people every year across our three sites and with a number of local authorities throughout Scotland. Again, the metrics are not clear, and some local authorities are supportive and some are less so. We do not have a representative body throughout Scotland, although we work with a number of local authorities.

Freda Fallon: Similarly, the Outward Bound Trust works with 25,000 young people across the UK, with 5,000 of those coming from Scotland. We work with about 28 of the 32 authorities in Scotland, but it is just pockets of schools. In my experience, whether you get the opportunity definitely feels like a bit of a postcode lottery depending on where you come from and whether or not your headteacher is supportive. It is not good enough; the benefits from the experience that we provide should be available to all.

Phil Thompson: You asked a question about local authorities. There are now only nine local education authority centres left in Scotland, whereas there were 70 in 1972, so there has been an overall decline in the provision that is backed directly by local education authorities. Provision has been moved out to the third sector, where margins are tight, where we do our best to employ staff who can afford a mortgage and where we bring value into the rural economy. To clarify the point, very few LEA centres are left in Scotland. Nearly all have closed.

Miles Briggs: Last week, there was some consensus in the evidence that we took that three or more days is a beneficial amount of outdoor education for young people to experience. Following on from that, is there a minimum

number of pupils or length of stay that makes a visit viable?

I want to go back to the evidence that we heard earlier about the union's concerns. In council-run facilities, what experience do you have of teachers enjoying being part of and coming along on these trips?

Nick March: It is evident that teachers support outdoor education so much, because, if they did not support it, we would not be sitting here. It is the teachers' choice to come. Even though we are in challenging times to make it equitable, teachers still make it happen. They choose to do it. I always feel that, when the teachers arrive, they turn up with a glowing light. They know what they are coming to and they are excited by it. They do not come to the centre feeling that they have been sent here. I have not encountered that. It is not a case of having been forced to go; that is not it. They look forward to their week away.

Different course designs are important. That is one of the narratives from last week to move away from. Course designs are important, and Freda Fallon from the Outward Bound Trust will be able to talk about the course design that they do so well.

There are specific parts where secondary teachers lead the experience, for example in fieldwork. I can talk about a young group that came away on residential from a secondary school in Edinburgh. The teachers enabled pupils with additional support needs within that group. They were preparing those young people for the world of work, which was about coming away and putting in a work ethic, perhaps where a work ethic does not exist where they come from. In such situations, the teacher leads the experience and takes charge of it, with us dropping in to do smaller parts of it. I hope that that answer shows that there is a lot of evidence about targeted course designs.

Freda Fallon: I am happy to speak about course design. At Outward Bound, we work with nine to 24-year-olds—a broad spectrum of young people. Course design always starts in a similar way, with the person sitting in front of us. If that person was Miles Briggs, we would ask, "What matters to you most? What is happening with the young people in your constituency? What things might they need? What experiences have they had?". How we build and deliver a course is from the context of ensuring that we understand the common language.

To give you a clear understanding of how that might be framed around educational language or the needs of young people, I will give you a few examples from last week.

The Loch Eil centre is on the west coast. It is a £2.7 million charity that the rural economy supports. It currently has a £1 million building project going on, with money going into the local economy because of that. The 120 young people that are at Loch Eil every week are a real mix. Last week, a resettlement group of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children were there from North Lanarkshire. There were Christmas school leavers from Arbroath who were working on our adventure and challenge award, which sits in the Scottish credit and qualifications framework. The SCQF is one way in which we can help with common language and parity of esteem so that we value all learners. There were young leaders from Braeview academy in Dundee, which is looking towards a merger with Craigie high school, and we were helping to build those young people into leaders to help with that transition. As well as that, a wee group of young carers were there to get to know one another better and to have a bit of respite and time away.

How we design a course is the same. We start with what matters to you. What is the context of learning? What things are you doing? If it is a school, what is in your school improvement plan? How can we move things on for you? We build it and design it from there. I rarely talk about activities, which I know might surprise everyone when we have talked about canoeing and kayaking. I talk about learning; I talk about young people; and I talk about what you want to get out of the experience. That is the impact that you get at the end of the day.

Miles Briggs: I have a brief question about making visits viable. I do not know whether Ardroy still has relationships with Fife Council in providing such visits. Do you usually see state sector teachers and pupils travelling on a Monday, for example, and returning to their local authority on a Friday so that the working week for the teacher is still the same?

Phil Thompson: Yes.

Nick March: Yes.

Freda Fallon: Yes.

Jamie Miller: Yes.

Miles Briggs: That was an easy answer. Thank you.

The Convener: Before we come to Bill Kidd, I want to ask about the EVOLVEvisits system. Why would authorities such as Glasgow and Edinburgh, which clearly have outdoor education, not join that system? Is there a cost implication?

Nick March: It is a piece of third-party software. Edinburgh does not have it yet. We have been trying to look at the costing for it for a long time; we think that we are going towards it now.

The Convener: Is its use universal across every local authority in Wales?

Nick March: Yes. That was done because it has a key element of safety management and because of the way that schools work in academy systems.

The Convener: Could you provide us with the list of local authorities that use it? Did you say that 13 use it?

Phil Thompson: Yes, I can work that out and provide it after the meeting.

The Convener: That would be useful.

Bill Kidd: I hate to have to continue to do this, but I have, I hope, only a couple of wee questions for you. What is the average cost of a school attending an outdoor centre? How much would the local authority have to pay on behalf of the school?

Nick March: In the latest round of AHOECS member centres, the price was £420. As I mentioned, some centres have had to make cuts to the point at which they have had to say, "If I don't include some of my capital costs, I won't be able to afford to be here next year," so they have needed to increase their prices, whereas other centres have managed to target specific funding in order to reduce their prices. That is why we get a range of prices.

Bill Kidd: Approximately how many pupils could attend for £420?

Nick March: That would be down to the capacity of the centre. In my centre, we have, on average, about 100 young people per week, but it varies—sometimes, it is down to 60 and, sometimes, it is up to 110.

Across Scotland, centres that are more tailored to outdoor recreation have much higher bed capacities and run their centres in different ways. Those centres, which are also AHOECS members, are on a journey in learning how to engage with learning for sustainability and in trying to provide more high-quality outdoor learning, but centres with a greater focus on recreation have much higher bed numbers.

Bill Kidd: On that basis, are residential outdoor centres financially reliant on school visits, as Phil Thompson suggested earlier, or is that not the case now?

Phil Thompson: We are completely reliant on school visits. As a third sector organisation, we can tap into some funding from other sources that we would not be able to if we were a local authority, but, if the school tap was switched off tomorrow, we would be out of business in a week.

Bill Kidd: I see. School visits are very important.

Phil Thompson: Absolutely.

Bill Kidd: They work for the benefit of both sides—schools and young people benefit greatly, but so do the outdoor centres, because such visits keep them going.

Freda Fallon: The whole purpose of our existence, as an educational charity, is to be part of education, so, if the tap was turned off, we would not exist any more. Some 80 per cent of the young people who attend Outward Bound Trust centres receive some financial support from us, as a charity. In Scotland, we raise £750,000 every year to support young people to come to us. Across the United Kingdom, the figure is £4 million. That is not sustainable for everyone, which is why we need more.

Jamie Miller: It is the same story for us. It goes back to what Nick March said earlier—nobody who is here, working in the third sector, is a millionaire. If you wanted to make £1 million, you would start with £2 million. That is the way that it would work for us.

We are wholly reliant on the school trade. It is worth mentioning that the Covid pandemic almost caused our organisation to close, because schools could no longer come. We were very fortunate to get a little bit of Government funding, which kept us going and kept the wheels turning before we could start trading again. If that had not been the case, I certainly would not be sitting here today representing my organisation.

11:15

Bill Kidd: People need to get their heads around that.

Nick March: I had the privilege of assessing and asking for money during Covid. Without the £4 million from the Scottish Government, none of us would be here. The outdoor education service is fully reliant on money from school visits, which is what you asked about, because, without the schools coming, there is nothing else.

Bill Kidd: Thank you for those very helpful answers.

John Mason: I will build on Bill Kidd's questions. For young people to come, somebody—parents or whoever—has to pay £420. What costs would a young person have on top of that? There would be transport costs. Do they have to bring with them waterproofs and decent shoes, for example, or can they turn up with just their ordinary clothes?

Nick March: I can talk about the big picture and then hand over to the others.

The Convener: I will bring in Ms Fallon first—everyone is keen to get in.

Freda Fallon: As an educational charity, we have to provide for the needs of all young people. When they arrive, they get £2,000-worth of kit in a kit cage, including boots, waterproofs, camping kit and everything else that they will need. If they are going to jump in the loch, we will give them a second old pair of trainers. They need to bring nothing apart from the clothes that they stand up in; we support them with the rest.

John Mason: Mr March, is that the case across the board?

Nick March: Absolutely. Poverty proofing is now our ethic in high-quality outdoor learning centres. We know from direct feedback that kit lists cause parents anxiety, so, at the top of the kit list that I provide, it says, "Do not go and buy anything from an outdoors shop. Send them in their football socks and stuff, and we will supply waterproofs and boots." I even have lockers with washed second-hand and leftover clothes, so I can hand out joggies and trainers to ensure that no child has to come with anything additional.

John Mason: That is helpful.

We have touched on capital funding. Mr Miller, I think that I stayed in two of your centres when I was younger.

Jamie Miller: Tell me that you enjoyed them.

John Mason: Absolutely, although it was quite a long time ago. That leads me to the point that, obviously, some of your buildings are quite old and have been there since 1939.

Jamie Miller: They were designed to be used for 25 years, but here we are still eking a living out of them 85 years later.

John Mason: That is quite impressive. What kind of state are they in? Are they in a good state, or do you need money for capital spending? Where are we?

Jamie Miller: It varies a bit. All the buildings look as though they could do with a little bit of a polish. We apply for pockets of funding here and there from different trust funds, and that allows us to do refurbishments on a piece-by-piece basis. Some of our buildings are in better condition than others. We try to keep all the living accommodation—the dormitories—at a standard acceptable level in relation to warmth and people having as much comfort as they need. They are not luxurious, but I would like to think that they are more than acceptable.

John Mason: Give us an idea of how big the dormitories are.

Jamie Miller: Our dorms are more traditional. We have various blocks, and there are four dorms in each block. Each dorm sleeps 12 people, and there is a little internal unit with an en suite for the visiting staff to stay in on their own.

John Mason: If capital costs are not covered by the fees, where do they come from?

Jamie Miller: They come from different trust funds here and there. Part of my job relates to fundraising so, from time to time, we apply for different pockets of funding here and there for specific projects. It might be upgrades to showers and toilets so that they are more acceptable for ASN young people, for example, or it might just be general refurbishment, which we did recently in providing a main hall with better heating and lighting.

John Mason: None of that funding comes from the public sector.

Jamie Miller: No. Our fees for young people, or for their parents or the sponsoring body, merely cover operational costs—nothing further.

John Mason: Ms Fallon, you mentioned £1 million. Can you tell us roughly where that came from?

Freda Fallon: We fundraise to support young people to come—we have seven different criteria for funding for young people—and we have separate fundraising projects for capital funding. As you can imagine, projects such as the £1 million learning village that is being built at Loch Eil can take years, and the fundraising for it has taken years. During all the time that we were waiting, we had yurts in the ground, which are now slightly mouldy. You are always waiting, as the money builds up, to be able to do such projects.

Please come and visit, if you get the chance. The work finishes in January, and I would love to host you, because it will be phenomenal.

John Mason: You called it a "learning village". What is it?

Freda Fallon: It is probably not true to call it a learning village, which is what I say to the centre, because our learning happens outdoors, so I do not like to call it that. I like to call it the "ceilidh place", because it is a meeting place. Every group that comes to Loch Eil gets a clan name, and the space that we have built—it will be finished in January—is beautiful, with a timber sweep of five, in effect, classrooms where young people can get ready for activities and review their experience. It is a space for them to be together. In the middle, there is a massive fire pit where the 120 young people who come to Loch Eil in any given week will be able to meet and share a community experience. At the end of the day, it is about living together, being together and sharing stories of the

things that have happened during the day, which people can take back home.

John Mason: Mr March, is that the case across the board, or are there variations? Are some centres in danger of closing because the capital situation is so dire?

Nick March: Yes. A number of centres are currently crowdfunding for doors and paint. They have not been able to recover any capital costs through their prices, simply because they have such a strong ethic in keeping their prices low, as the young people who come to those centres are from very deprived places.

The biggest risk to any centre relates to its building. If a centre cannot look after its building, it closes. From a local authority point of view, there is no capital investment for us, so we are all now encouraged to use trade service concepts to generate income. All our lodges are for sale at weekends on various platforms, so we generate income in that way because—this is the simple point—there is no capital funding.

John Mason: Mr Thompson, when schools choose which outdoor centre to go to, partly it is because they have a relationship with you—they know you and are comfortable with you—but how much is cost a factor?

Phil Thompson: It is not a massive factor. We are fortunate that, because we were part of Fife Council, we still largely work with Fife schools. We have a long relationship with them that we have established over many years. Cost is certainly a factor. We recently had to put our costs up a little bit for the next two academic years, just to break even.

John Mason: Do you want to give us a rough idea of the percentage by which you have had to put the cost up?

Phil Thompson: By about 7 per cent or so—not a lot. We had to set our prices two years ago just at the end of the pandemic. As you know, inflation went rampant, so we have had to make the hard decision to increase our prices. To illustrate this, I would like to read an email that I got from a teacher. It is very brief. It says:

"We are having to consider our options moving forwards. It is getting harder and harder to ask the families to pay out the cost for the week. We also provided so much last year for them, bedding, toiletries, holdalls and not sure if we have access to this again this year. I have to have a discussion with my HT and the parents and get their thoughts.

In honesty"—

and this is answering the point about accommodation—

"we are also finding the accommodation is becoming rundown and although everything else is fantastic value for money, instructors, equipment etc it is not the most pleasant dorms for the children to stay in any more".

We can offer high-quality products, but if our building is failing, we are failing as well.

John Mason: Finally, is there anything else on the financial side or the financial memorandum that any of you would like to comment on? If not, that is fine.

Jackie Dunbar: I have a couple of supplementary questions for Mr March. You were speaking about the kit that is provided to every child or young person. Do all outdoor centres provide that?

Nick March: No, they do not. At a recent meeting of the high-quality outdoor framework it was shown that everyone with a high-quality ambition provided the kit and poverty proofed, but it is not universal.

Jackie Dunbar: Does the child get to take it home?

Nick March: No, although, to be fair, I always say that anything that comes out of my seconds wardrobe does not need to come back, and often we do not want it back once it has been in the gorge.

Jackie Dunbar: I just wanted to know that for clarification. If the bill passes, does that mean that you will have to provide more kits because there will be more young people coming, or do you think that you will manage with what you currently have?

Nick March: The centres that are providing kit will not need any more than we already have. A very important ingredient of the bill will be a quality mark and a quality framework to establish that we are getting value for what we do. As part of that, it is essential that the young person is poverty proofed and that the equipment is supplied.

Jackie Dunbar: Thanks for the clarification.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Good morning and thank you for your evidence so far. I want to pick up a little bit on John Mason's points about the buildings but also to go back to the point that Ms Fallon made earlier about pastoral care and, specifically, the provision for people with additional support needs. The committee has received evidence on this. For example, PGL Travel said:

"the issue really arises around the ability to house young people with more severe disabilities overnight, facilities simply do not exist in enough numbers currently".

Glasgow City Council said:

"The bill also needs to take into account children with ASN, who have complex needs and would require significant support, adaptations to centres, specialist equipment and adapted beds, as well as the additional costs".

So you get the picture. I would be very keen—and I say this as someone who has been to outdoor residentials at school, which was obviously only last week. I really enjoyed it, and I am pleased to hear that we are not putting people in canoes now and seeing how they get on, because it is safe to say that I did not do well in a canoe. What is your response in general to the concerns about the reality of supporting the wide breadth of pupils you need to support?

Freda Fallon: That is a reality, and we all need to put structures in place so that we can have those conversations and can look at each individual and ensure that there is provision for them. That will be an on-going journey as we work through this. My worry is that currently not all young people come across my desk, so I do not get to have that conversation and I do not get to see what I can do. Obviously, an entitlement bill will change that.

I can share what we currently do to address this issue, which is probably relevant. At the very initial stages, we have a participant form, which is filled out electronically by the family. Everything is on there from someone eating only beige food to someone needing certain clothing, which we have—for example, we have waterproof hijabs in our stores. There are specialist things that we already have because we are on this journey already.

The participant forms come to us automatically and we have a specialist medical screening team and an adventure applications team who look through all the forms. They contact the family if they need more information and then they write a plan for each individual young person who comes to our centre.

That plan could be catering; it could be stores and what we kit the person up in; or it could be anything to do with activities and how we will change things. We address that for everybody who comes; it is very important to say that we are doing that for every one of the 120 young people who come each week to stay at Loch Eil. The inclusion piece for us is having that conversation as they come across my desk. I would like more of them to come across my desk, if I am honest. That is where I am coming from with this. I know that Nick March has a wonderful quote to share.

Nick March: I have got a story. I would like to introduce you to Nevis. Nevis has cerebral palsy. He is a full-time wheelchair user and he needs support with feeding and an adult with him all the time. He came to us last year and he wrote this for me to share today:

"Rock climbing was awesome! I got to defy gravity and abseil down a mountain at the speed of light! Kayaking was so cool literally. I sailed round an island with my school friends in a storm! I scored a gold at archery! And we all did drumming together at night, and it was really exciting and fun. I'd never done any of those things before, and Chris and Blanca and Nick helped me. I can't do so many things like that at home because they don't have spaces for kids with wheelchairs to join in at many places. Or there are stairs so I can't go in the building.

I think every kid should get the chance to go to camp, have adventures and hang out together. You get to do things that you only see in films and you never think that a kid can do. It made me feel brave."

I think that Nevis is the reason why I spend most of my time at work. I think that every centre has an outlook to include every child in Scotland. There is a ceiling that none of us can pass through at the moment. It comes through, when we look at welfare and accommodation and overnight stays, that there is a certain level that we cannot go beyond. That is throughout Scotland. We do not have the level of specific provision that is required to meet high-end need, and I think that that concept lives outwith the bill for me.

11:30

Lots of young people in Scotland need to travel down to England, where there are centres that can cater at that really high level, whereas I can look after Nevis as one child for one week but I could not look after six children like Nevis in one week. We do great things. We have a visionary in Equal Adventure, which is an organisation that is looking to expand SEN in every outdoor centre, so we are supported.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: That is a great story and it is reflective of my experience as well. It is incredibly important—absolutely. Local places do not always give that support to children and young people, so it is crucial. What is the ceiling and what would you need to break it?

Nick March: I recently visited a local education authority outdoor centre in Derbyshire. It had invested in a key building that was fully equipped to look after and work with high-end special educational needs schools with a wide range of needs, including welfare needs. It had everything that was needed to look after sleep—a hoist, a shower, wash, everything. It had had capital investment that enabled that site to become fully inclusive. For my part, it is the vision of Equal Adventure not just to have a special outdoor education centre but to have every centre able to include every child so that they can go on the journey with their school friends. To break the ceiling, we need to be able to invest in that.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I have one more question for you—I am sorry, but the story was so compelling. Who pays for the person to support Nevis, for example?

Nick March: It was done in partnership. The school had to get some money from the local education authority's SEN team. We had to ask the parent to pay some additional funds for sure. As a centre—I do not like the word "obligation"—we wanted to make sure that the young person came, so we funded all the additional equipment. We chose to do that.

Willie Rennie: A lot of this comes down to money, but it is money and priorities. You have heard that there is a lot going on in Scottish education, including real challenges—you will have seen that first hand yourself. You receive some money from foundations and charities and so on. I am intrigued in whether you think that the bill might open up further opportunities to release money from those charities. By the fact that it is law, would that trigger more investment from elsewhere, or will all of this have to come from the state?

Jamie Miller: It is probably a little bit of both, to be honest. From my perspective, our organisation is very seasonal. If the bill went through, it would effectively open up our calendar to the shoulder months as well, when traditionally people might not choose to come, although you can still get high-quality learning in the non-traditional months. Therefore, from that perspective, that would give us extra revenue to invest back and we would probably get economies of scale, which would be helpful to us.

Trust funds are also looking at the overall impact—the bang for their buck, for want of a better expression. If we were working with more young people, I would suggest that some of the trust funds would be more available to give money for these projects. The projects would have to meet the specific needs of the young people and match up with the wants and the needs of the particular trust fund. So I think that it is probably a little bit of both.

Nick March: I am hoping that this will change the narrative and understanding of what an outdoor centre does now and what it contributes to the school and to society. When looking at the budget for this, I am hoping that it can be looked at outwith the education budget. I believe that the benefit and the value of this experience to a young person has knock-on effects throughout their lifetime on the choices that they make and the directions that they go in. I hope that the engagement with funders and the private sector could help to unlock some of the other barriers of capital investment.

Phil Thompson: I make the observation that, in 1970, we had over 70 local education centres in Scotland and now we are down to nine—what happened? How did we get here? Now, more than 50 per cent of the beds in Scotland are being maintained by the third sector, which is doing it at rock bottom; it is doing the best it can, just about making do and not making capital investment. We are almost approaching a tipping point as an industry where, if there is not some serious investment soon, we collectively are in trouble, or the flipside is we put our costs up so much that it starts to become unattainable and unreachable for sectors of the community. Our model in Ardroy is to have relatively cheap prices in December, January and February, so that schools from deprived areas can just about manage to attend. The prices go up a little bit in the summer months and that way we can operate a year-round model.

The key question—and I do not have the answer to this—is, how did we get here? How did we go from the 1970s, when nearly every local education authority had an outdoor education centre, to now, when they are like dinosaurs? How do we turn that around?

Freda Fallon: When I think about this, I think about it like the five-a-day for health and wellbeing. It is an upstream intervention that can have huge ramifications for the young person, the educator and society. In some ways, there are so many Government agendas that we would hit if we started to see it as an entitlement. There is the Promise fund, the transition to net zero and investment in farming and the blue economy and health. There is active travel, funding for Scotland's rural economy, pupil equity funding and learning for sustainability—I could go on. There is behaviour in Scottish schools. I have a massive list of ways in which, in the same way that I would connect what I do with what is going on for the school, I can connect what I do with what is going on for you.

I could have been sitting in a different committee today. I could have been sitting in rural skills or a skills committee, but I am sitting with you in education, and I wonder whether it all has to come from education. I do not think so. We could look across the whole portfolio and the sector. In an amazing country like Scotland, why do we not take our young people out and experience all of Scotland and inspire them with the places that we all live in? I think that we should be doing that.

Willie Rennie: On the scope of provision, should it be for five to 17-year-olds? How much would you have to increase your capacity by in order to meet the numbers in that group? Have you done the sums on how much you would need?

Nick March: On bed spaces, when I speak to AHOECS members from the private sector, they simply say, "We will build more beds," so they have no worries about capacity. Obviously, it comes down to the third sector and local

authorities, and we would need to approach that in a different way. We would need an implementation plan—that is a strong piece of advice from our board. We would need a staged approach to implementation of the bill, to allow us to build capacity. The biggest capacity that we would need to build is in qualified staff, who would provide the quality mark that I mentioned would be needed.

Jackie Dunbar: The bill is proposing that the residential outdoor education course should be at least four overnight stays and five days but that that does not need to be consecutive. Should it be consecutive or not? I put that to all the witnesses, starting with Phil Thompson.

Phil Thompson: The ability to take children away for five days is a unique, immersive and impactful experience. I can think of children we work with who have never left their local area. When they get on the bus, travel across Scotland, come up over the Rest and Be Thankful and arrive down in Lochgoilhead, their jaws are on the floor. They have never seen anything like that before. I know a 16-year-old lad who was given the opportunity to go to Fort William on an Outward Bound residential and it changed his life. I am that lad.

The other thing is that you can condense an incredible amount of learning into those five days. If you do it in a more piecemeal manner, you do not achieve that. The same instructor—this is the same for all of our organisations—works all the way through Monday to Friday with a child and they build up a relationship. They go through a sequence of challenges and it is just the most incredible, immersive and memorable experience that they will have.

Nick March: There is a sort of day 3 phenomenon, when, all of a sudden on the Wednesday—we often call it "weepy Wednesday"—emotions pour out. They might be saying, "Oh, help," about everything. There is then a point following their removal from their usual space when they start to re-evaluate. We get so much feedback from children that it was on these days, especially on the Thursday, when they felt that they managed to re-evaluate things.

They took home a lot of their learning. I would love to be able to say that they took a new look at the world, but a lot of the feedback that we get from parents is, "They came home and they made their bed. This was amazing. What have you done?" That impact on a child happens in those five days.

I caveat that by saying that we have so many young people with additional support needs in Scotland—for example, someone might have anxiety or be neurodivergent—and five days is too much for a lot of them. We all recognise that. We build programmes that are targeted. A lot of the time, we build social stories, and a young person might come up for only one or two days. Teachers are taught how to support the process for that learner, and they know that they will get enough impact from that period.

Although I am strongly in favour of the length of the course being five days for some young people, we need to build tailored programmes to suit them.

Jackie Dunbar: My dad always said to me, "If you make your bed every day, then, if you do nothing else"—

Nick March: You have completed one task.

Jackie Dunbar: —"you have completed one task."

I still make my bed every morning, by the way.

Freda Fallon: You are speaking to the biased here. We think the more, the better—the longer that people are in the outdoors, the more they are exposed to the whole spectrum of progressive, meaningful experiences and quality outdoor learning. On residentials as part of that, a minimum of five days would be great.

I totally acknowledge what Nick March said: there needs to be flexibility within that to ensure that everyone gets the opportunity. As I said before, if there is a barrier to that for a young person, it is important that we address it to ensure that, even though it might be for a shorter time, they still get the experience.

The impact on parents and what they get back from their child being away after that five days was mentioned. I want to read a quote about a young lad from Fife. This always gets to me, so I will try my best. This is from his parent:

"I can't believe what this residential has done for"

him.

"His routine has totally flipped. He said you really listened and understood him, that when things were too much, you didn't push him too far and you gave him that extra bit of time. I feel like I actually have my son back - thanks so much for taking the chance with him. His sleep was so bad before he had no quality of life, I can't"

remember

"the last time he got up for school and ever since he has been back ... he has been up every morning. You've gave me a chance to make memories with my son and for him to build a future for himself and I couldn't be prouder of him!"

The residential acted as a catalyst—and that is only after five days. I say that it is only five days, but it is not. By the time that you have included the design, the five days is framed within a much broader context of learning. There is work before and there is work after. It ends up being so much more than five days.

I sat here in Holyrood with a young lad, who was deputy head boy at Liberton high school, and he described just that. He went on his first residential in S1. It was a catalyst for him taking on other opportunities that were offered to him in school. He said that he did not speak to anyone when he entered S1, and that he did not have very good English when he started. By the time that he was in S6, he was deputy head boy, because attending Outward Bound gave him the confidence to take on other challenges.

The benefits of residentials can be hidden in some ways. The young people develop and take on other opportunities. However, you might not have seen the one thing that happened, had an impact and acted as a catalyst. That is how to frame it—that residentials can be a catalyst, even for things like getting up for school. That boy will develop now more than ever because of that experience, which is great.

Jamie Miller: A transition happens between being coached and self-efficacy. As you transit from, let us say, the Monday through the Friday, the level of challenge changes. Our tutors—the other high-quality providers do the same—will guide the person. The first day tends to be very hands-on and then, as you transit towards the Friday, there is a lot of empowerment, and the design of the course gets handed over to the young people.

As a member of staff working with the groups, you can see that transition happening and their becoming much more independent between those two periods. Again, all that can be immediately transferred back into their work in the classroom and in their own lives at home.

As Freda Fallon said, we are not talking about just five days. It is also what happens beforehand, during the co-design of the course and the wash-up. Then there is the transfer of learning and what happens when they are back in their real lives. Five days is quite a good minimum period to get an impact from these courses.

Jackie Dunbar: I think that you guys are lobbying for five consecutive days, wherever possible.

11:45

Jamie Miller: Yes. A lot of the learning happens socially as well, so that is why the residential component of the courses is quite important. They are not five individual days that just kind of happen. They are five concentrated days, and a lot of social learning happens in the young people's free time and the chit-chat over mealtimes, in the dormitories and in the tents—all that kind of thing—and that adds to the experience.

The Convener: Last week, we heard that, potentially, the benefits plateau after about five days. Do you think that the benefits do not continue to increase if you go much beyond that?

Jamie Miller: I am not sure about that really, and I do not have any hard and fast evidence on that. On some programmes—this happened regularly when I worked for Outward Bound here and overseas—I worked with groups for 21 days and you could work on lots of different personal development projects during that time. I have found that the more contact time, the more development.

George Adam: I am glad that you are telling me that it is more than just kayaking, bows and arrows and running about the place, because that was what we heard from two individuals in particular at last week's evidence-gathering session, which made it sound like practices had not changed since the days that I was there. Unlike Pam Duncan-Glancy, that does not feel to me like that was yesterday.

I think that Nick March said there is a difference between outdoor education and outdoor recreation. I am interested to find out more about that. How do you make that distinction? You have already said that the highest capacity of beds are for recreational purposes. How many young people are getting access to outdoor education, and how do you package that for the individual and the group at the same time? That is quite a lot to respond to.

Nick March: I am glad to have made that distinction because, last week, I was sitting there listening to the evidence and thinking to myself that that is not who we are any more. The distinction is really important. I will invite some of last week's witnesses to come to a centre.

A good, high-quality learning package starts, as Freda Fallon said, with the design, the walk-in and the instructor being engaged with the class teacher beforehand and enabling the teacher. That relationship is really important. The instructor stays and designs the programme in the week that they are there. I suggest that that level of personalisation and individualisation restricts the programme, because lots of big, high-capacity centres do not have that level of individualisation. If you have 450 learners on site, you need to be very organised in moving round the different pieces of the jigsaw.

I visited the biggest high-capacity centre about a month ago, where I met the director. They see the direction of and have been inspired by the curriculum for excellence outdoor learning outcomes and by the learning for sustainability approach. They volunteered that they very much

want to go on that journey now and to consider how they transition into that model. It is not yet known how we will do that for a centre of that capacity.

George Adam: That kind of change gets us back into the financial realm, and there will be quite big outgoings for you. How will that be financed?

Nick March: I suggest that the third sector and the high-quality outdoor learning providers like my centre are already there. I think that the biggest transition to the high-quality model needs to come from some of the high-capacity private sector centres. They are not intimidated by the capital investment that will be needed for that. If the bill is passed and the high-quality framework comes in, they have volunteered that they would raise their game to meet that challenge.

George Adam: Freda Fallon, you have been talking at length about what you do when you know that someone is coming to you—you go to the school and work out a programme. Does that happen for every child? That could be quite challenging. It would be like piecing together a jigsaw. You might have children who have an additional support need—or more than one, nowadays—while ensuring that you cater for the whole class or group. How do you manage to do that? How practical is it to do that for just about every pupil who is getting involved?

Freda Fallon: It is great. That is what I love about my job.

George Adam: That kind of comes across, Freda. [*Laughter.*]

Freda Fallon: Yes, absolutely. I love it. Everyone is part of our society and should be valued as such. It is not a bother. If they are all at the centre at the same time, they are part of our community, too.

George Adam: If residential outdoor education becomes part of the statutory requirement, and we are doing that across the board so that every child gets an opportunity, how feasible is it to do that and to give that level of focus?

Freda Fallon: In Outward Bound, there is someone who works in partnership with educators to address some of those concerns and to speak with people. The role exists, so I suppose that we would all need to have a dedicated role to enable those conversations to take place, which we all do in the high-quality outdoor learning centres.

This is just about ensuring that, no matter who comes across our desk, the provision can match them. That is the journey that we will have to go on, which is one that we all want to work with you on, because that is our job and our responsibility. That should not become a barrier. That is our society, so the issue is how can we address that together. It will not be straightforward—my conversations are not straightforward; they can be challenging—but we are up for that. That is what we are here for.

Nick March: We are an industry that thrives on challenge. If the challenge is that we now need to have more high quality—

George Adam: I see that Phil Thompson's buildings have been there since 1939.

Phil Thompson: Those are Jamie Miller's, actually.

George Adam: Oh, those are Jamie's. Sorry about that, Phil.

Phil Thompson: Mine are from 1969.

George Adam: Your buildings are as old as me.

Phil Thompson: Likewise.

George Adam: Jamie Miller, everyone has said that the capital spend could be the thing that either makes or breaks a centre. Your buildings are older. How would you deal with the capacity that will end up on your doorstep should the bill be passed? That would be a challenge for you.

Jamie Miller: Yes, it would be. We have a few plans in our organisation about how we can develop. We are also at a transitional phase. If we get extra funding, rather than retrofitting buildings, we might rebuild them, because we are starting to get to that point. Some of the villages near our outdoor centres benefit from the little waft of warm air that comes down through the lack of insulation of our aged buildings. Looking after old buildings that were never designed with efficiency in mind is a perennial problem.

The third sector centres—this applies to most outdoor centres, really—inhabit buildings that nobody else wants and that is how we exist. Through our having extra capacity and extra funding, we can make the transition into a more sustainable, long-term, better-quality experience for everybody and the young people.

George Adam: Where do you see that funding coming from? Is that a mishmash or—

Jamie Miller: As I said in response to a previous question, we will benefit from economies of scale, and we will also be more attractive to other funding bodies if, ultimately, we rebuild some of our centres.

George Adam: Phil Thompson, do you have similar issues?

Phil Thompson: Yes. Capital is our nemesis. We can service the need and we can have children coming through. However, for example, the main building in the Ardroy centre was built in

1880. We had to get a loan to put a new roof on it. One of our blocks—heron block—is 55 years old now, which was referenced in the email that I read out. Capital is the biggest problem that we face.

You mentioned quality. A process is taking place. We are working on a quality framework across the piece so that we will be able to assess and establish that we are delivering a quality product.

Ross Greer: I want to ask about how your centres are inspected and assessed, but before that I will follow up on a point that was made about financial viability. Nick March gave the example of Blairvadach, which is in my area. As he pointed out, it is pretty much fully booked for 48 or 49 weeks of the year, but in most years Glasgow City Council still considers closing it because it is quite a significant net financial liability. There is a tension in that, if the council reduced its school trips that it brings in and increased the number of commercial bookings, the centre might move towards viability, but that would defeat its core purpose and the reason why the council has the centre in the first place.

If we are to pass the bill and significantly increase the demand from local authorities and schools for class trips, how can we address the tension whereby centres such as Blairvadach could move towards financial viability but only if they decrease the number of school trips that come in and move to being more of a commercial setting?

Nick March: To me, the key lies in how much we value the child's experience. Every time we look at having to close a local authority centre, the teachers say, "Please don't close this." The really important thing about the Glasgow centre is that it makes it more affordable. The reduced price for every child who comes on a trip is key. The local authority allows that equity, and I note that equity for young people is a big aspect of the bill.

I hope that local authorities will go back and look to support the process, valuing the momentum that the bill is building. I have had contact with three local authorities that do not have their own outdoor centres and are looking into what they will do if the bill is passed. In contrast, Aberdeenshire Council has just opened its new centre, and a cross-party delegation came recently and presented an inspired story about how they chose to create it, why they value it, and the accessibility for the children of Aberdeenshire that has resulted from it. It is about making a conscious choice based on priority and value, and I believe that it is worth it.

Ross Greer: That is great—thanks. I move on to my core question, which is about inspections and how you are assessed. I am interested in hearing about the basics of safeguarding, inspections and things like that, but also about how the educational outcomes of the services that you provide are assessed. The wider context of the bill is that it is being considered at the same time as quite a lot of reform in the system. The Government's education reform bill will re-establish the independent inspectorate, and a discussion is taking place about how wide its remit should be.

Will you tell us a little about how you are inspected and assessed on both safeguarding and educational outcomes? What changes might have to be made if we pass the bill and move it on to a statutory footing?

Nick March: We are in a very exciting time. You have probably heard many references to the new quality framework that is being designed. That is being done in association with curriculum colleagues, not the inspectorate of education in Scotland, and with teachers. We have brought 25 outdoor professionals into what is described as a megabubble to try to come up with the idea. At the moment, there is nothing of that standard, but it is going to come for Scotland. It is a very exciting time for it.

Licensing is still with us post the awful Lyme Bay tragedy, so the inspectorate still comes in to look at the health and safety licensing process for all—I must stress this—licensable activities. There are many activities that do not fall within licensing, so we may need to look at health and safety for non-licensable activities if we put the framework in place.

Phil Thompson: All those safeguarding elements are in place, but if we were not delivering a quality product, schools would not be coming back to us. The headteachers and the teachers are the customers, because they are the people who decide to book again for the following year. If we were not delivering a quality product, they would go elsewhere. We have had a number of schools come in from other providers because they were not getting what they wanted. They have come to us because they know that they will get a quality educational product. The ultimate gatekeepers are the parents and teachers who decide whether they want to come back to us the following year.

Ross Greer: I have no doubt that that is true. When I am not here in the Parliament, I am a youth worker, and plenty of the young people I have worked with have had excellent experiences of outdoor education.

A cynical or pessimistic approach to what will happen if we pass the bill might suggest that we could create a capacity issue by significantly

increasing demand. At the moment, schools can be somewhat selective and go to a centre that they know they will be happy with. If schools are obligated to go somewhere and there are capacity issues in the system, their options may be limited and they may, therefore, end up not being completely satisfied that the place they go to will have positive outcomes. What systems do we need to have in place to prevent that? If we increase demand, capacity will have to be created to meet that demand, and we will need to ensure that the capacity of the new, expanded system matches the standards that I have no doubt you are all meeting at the moment, if that makes sense.

Phil Thompson: Yes. That would be a decision for Government. If it puts money into the industry, it is entirely within its rights to ask what value it gets for that money. We would welcome any form of inspection. If nothing else, it would help to weed out the people who are not doing the job properly. We would love that. Bring it on. We invite people to come and see and talk to us.

12:00

Freda Fallon: When I was studying here in Edinburgh for my MSc in outdoor education, I learned that the outdoor education industry is as regulated as the nuclear industry. We are very used to scrutiny. As a charity, we also have to report to our funders, so we have to understand our contribution to society and be able to report back on how their money was spent. I would expect it to be no different under the provisions in the bill, with inspection from an education point of view. We have the “How good is our school?” approach. If we have “How good is our centre?”, that will be absolutely fine, or whatever framework it is decided needs to be put in place to make sure that the residential experience is of high quality.

I can share with you our social impact report and other reports on our work in Scotland. We are producing that information already. If I understand the question correctly, it is about how we can expand the requirement for that so that it incorporates everyone.

Jamie Miller: My answer is similar. We link all the learning that takes place at the centres directly back to the curriculum for excellence and learning for sustainability, and we take cognisance of getting it right for every child as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Everything that we do is embedded in what the Government and education authorities require of high-quality providers, and we are absolutely there to be measured and assessed on that output.

Nick March: I add that an implementation plan will be essential.

Ross Greer: Absolutely. Thank you.

The Convener: Miles Briggs has a further question.

Miles Briggs: Can you provide the committee with some examples of where the Scottish Government is currently funding residential projects? I think that all members of the committee will be aware of the Scottish young carers festival, which is funded by the Scottish Government and is a three-day residential event for young carers. Last year, 500 young carers from across Scotland took part in that. Where is the Scottish Government already funding residential projects, not through schools but through individual groups? If you do not have that information with you, maybe you could write to us with it.

Jamie Miller: The young carers festival took place at the Broomlee centre for a number of years before the funding dropped. Last year, it was at the Scouts Scotland centre at Fordell Firs, and we are talking about perhaps rehousing it for the coming season. I am not aware of other projects that have been funded by the Scottish Government that have come to us.

Freda Fallon: We have a specialist project across the central belt that is run by a Glasgow-based team. It has been running for 27 years and it is called the Mark Scott award. Some of you will definitely be aware of that and some of you will have been at project forums for it. It is fully funded for everyone who takes part, and 150 young people are involved each year. It starts with a residential for S6 pupils. The idea behind it is to bring people from different communities together to do a residential, learn leadership skills and then put those skills back into practice in their school communities.

The essential elements of that are the skills being put back into local communities and the young people from different religious, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds working together. The projects are amazing. The topics range from food poverty and mental health to first aid training, and from care homes to young people in primaries. If you get a chance to come to the project forums, you will be welcome. I can see there are lots in your constituencies. Community safety is the element of Scottish Government work that that relates to, and the project absolutely hits that aspect.

An add-on for this year is that that project has had a small amount of pilot funding from the learning for sustainability fund to have it credit rated in the SCQF as a learning for sustainability project. So many elements of the community projects hit on social justice, and they are all about the values of the young people who come together. The projects are not led by us; the young

people decide on the projects, lead on them and champion them. They involve everything from councillors in North Lanarkshire to improving an underpass. That very valuable project has been running for a long time and it has clear outcomes.

The Convener: Towards the end of our earlier evidence session, Tara Lillis talked about the increase in violence in schools and particularly difficult behaviour. Are there students who you refuse to take or currently cannot take because of issues that they have in the classroom? We have spoken about ASN and disabilities, but what about violent pupils?

Nick March: It is common to have discussions with teachers about their pupils. We have great relationships: we work with the teachers and they highlight any concerns very early on. From my point of view, given my time in Edinburgh, I note that teachers are always saying, "I think that residential is the solution here". They will put lots of measures in place to allow the child to come along because they see it as the thing that will, hopefully, transform them and open the door to stop the behaviour.

I have experienced situations where a child whose behaviour in the class has been violent and disruptive will not come along because the teacher feels that the risk threshold is such that we cannot put a place in for them. Although we always have a can-do approach and we have really good connections with the teachers, there are one or two instances where pupils do not come.

The Convener: We have certainly seen reports of violence in the classroom increasing. Are you seeing a similar increase in the numbers that you have to take that decision on or is it such a small number that it is remaining static?

Nick March: The level of work that I now do with every group that comes in, given the spectrum of additional need, has increased. Since the pandemic, it has gone through the roof. My lead instructors are working day in, day out on levels of anxiety and neurodiversity, and massively on disruptive children.

The Convener: I suppose the question that I am asking is: has the number increased?

Nick March: Yes.

The Convener: I am referring to the number of pupils that you cannot take for safety reasons.

Nick March: Oh—no, that has not increased. It is still a very small proportion. It is one or two.

Phil Thompson: A rule in teaching is, "Don't challenge the behaviour, challenge the cause." Why is the child not behaving well? Is it because the classroom is not the right place for them? There are a huge number of dyslexics in my industry. They were the people sitting at the back of the class going, "Uh?", but they found their vocation by going outside and experiencing the natural environment and so on. We never get tired of teachers telling us, "That's not the child that we see back in school."

Another thing in teaching is, "Catch them being good." If you can take pupils out of the classroom, create a positive experience and build up relationships with them, that can be a real catalyst when they go back to school. That also shows why teachers should attend. Last week, Chris Loynes said:

> "We call it the 'I saw Miss in pyjamas' effect."—[*Official Report, Education, Children and Young People Committee*, 6 November 2024; c 2.]

It is a levelling experience. If we can provide a positive experience and build a relationship between a teacher and a child and they can take that back into the classroom, it is a winner.

The Convener: Are there any other examples?

Freda Fallon: The quote that I read out was from the parent of a non-attending young person. It was just as you described.

We are a sector with vast differences in provision. At Loch Eil, we are limited by the fact that we take 120 young people. For some young people, that busyness might not be appropriate. It is about having an honest conversation and making sure that the provision is right for the young person.

Jamie Miller: It also depends on what else is happening at the centre—what other bookings there are and what the other groups of young people are like. It is subject to a risk assessment like anything else, so it is difficult to give you a hard-and-fast answer. It is about having the conversation about what is best for the young people, for the particular young person and for the wider environment.

The Convener: Good. On behalf of the committee, I thank you all for your evidence. Phil Thompson said at the start that we have not heard many voices of young people so far. I think that you have been able to articulate those voices in your testimonies, whether that is through the words of Nevis or with the accounts of what parents and teachers have said. It has been extremely useful to get that on the record, because we will be able to use it in our considerations. We have, however, had a number of submissions from young people to our call for evidence—in fact, a higher number than we have received for most of the other calls for evidence that we have put out. What you have said today matches what we have already heard from young people, who are very impressed with what they

receive when they go to outdoor education centres. Thank you very much for your time and evidence.

12:09

Meeting continued in private until 12:40.

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