



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Education, Children and Young People Committee

**Wednesday 18 December 2024**

**Session 6**



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**Wednesday 18 December 2024**

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**EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE**  
**34<sup>th</sup> 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:**

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP) (Committee Substitute)

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Neil Stewart (Scottish Parliament)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Pauline McIntyre

**LOCATION**

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)



**Scottish Parliament**  
**Education, Children and Young**  
**People Committee**

*Wednesday 18 December 2024*

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]*

**Interests**

**The Convener (Douglas Ross):** Good morning and welcome to the 34th meeting in 2024 of the Education, Children and Young People Committee. We have received apologies from George Adam, so I welcome Clare Haughey, who is joining us in his place. As this is the first time that Clare is attending the committee in that capacity, our first item of business is to invite her to declare any relevant interests.

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP) (Committee Substitute):** I do not have any relevant interests.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much.

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

09:30

**The Convener:** Our second item is the final evidence session on the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1. I welcome our witnesses, Liz Smith MSP, who is the member in charge of the bill; Neil Stewart, who is a senior clerk in the non-Government bills unit; and Claudia Bennett, who is a senior solicitor at the Scottish Parliament. I invite Liz Smith to make an opening statement.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I thank the committee for its rigorous and important investigation into the bill. I very much appreciate the commitment that the committee has shown to taking a lot of evidence, which has been very important. I also thank the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and the Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise, who have been very constructive in their engagement. Not least, I thank the outstanding non-Government bills unit and my staff, whose commitment has been second to none, for helping me through the process.

Members know that I received 535 initial responses to my proposed bill, 95 per cent of which were very positive about its principles. Members also know that 38 members of Parliament supported the final proposal and that I gave evidence to the Finance and Public Administration Committee on 19 November on the cost of the bill.

In my three minutes, I want to explain to the committee why I believe that the bill is a priority. I start with building resilience in our young people or—to use the term that I think that the General Teaching Council for Scotland would use—learning for sustainability, which is part of every teacher's professional development, these days. Particularly since Covid, it has become apparent that a lot of our children are needing extra support. They are needing to build their self-esteem, confidence and ability to relate not only to their peers but to adults in the school setting. The residential experience has been commended throughout the evidence to the committee, and in lots of other ways, and we have had tremendous feedback about it.

I want the bill, if it should pass, to be able to complement and not undermine any other aspect of outdoor learning. The reason why I am fixed on the residential aspect is the compelling evidence from teachers and pupils that residential really are life-changing experiences, which is what it is

all about. As I have said, since Covid, we must accept that an awful lot of young people in our schools are feeling pretty anxious. Given the statistics that came out last week about additional support for learning and on what is happening in our schools, we must accept that a lot of people need extra support. That really is the most important reason.

On top of that, teachers are telling us that their relationship with young people who have been on residential changes for the better. We get the same evidence from parents and children. The evidence that I have heard throughout not only my professional career as a teacher but my parliamentary role has absolutely convinced me of the value of residential outdoor education.

The second reason relates to what has been happening in relatively recent times, which the committee has taken evidence on. Lots of really good things are happening in the current system, but it is not working sufficiently well to incorporate all young people, and we need to build on the Scottish Government's vision from 2010.

The bill is underpinned by inclusion. One thing that I want to do, which is very much in line with Government policy, is to include all young people. As we worked on the bill, we found that there is a tremendous lack of data, which the Government has acknowledged. There is a bit of a postcode lottery as regards who is able to go on residential experiences, and we have to try to change that, particularly as the John Muir award, which was so successful, has been paused. The last thing that we want to get into is the situation that we had in the 1970s and 1980s, when local authorities lost their dedicated teachers of outdoor education. I would not like to think that we will end up with that circumstance.

The committee is well aware of the evidence that has been provided by the Outward Bound Trust. It said:

"The global study across eight countries, including the UK, revealed that for every £1 invested in Outward Bound programmes, there is a return of between £5 and £15 in societal value."

That is a compelling statistic. Money that is spent in that way represents a healthy long-term investment in our young people and in society in general. That is also in line with Government policy and with what I would like to see young people achieve through the bill.

**The Convener:** Thank you for your opening statement, which covered a lot of areas. Members will want to delve into those in more depth.

I think that you attended and observed all the committee's public evidence sessions on the bill. What did you make of the evidence that we received? Is there anything that you would like to

highlight or pick up on from the evidence that you heard?

**Liz Smith:** The evidence has been comprehensive and it has largely been very positive. I give the committee credit for the number of evidence sessions that you held and for taking the trouble to meet many of the people who are involved in delivering outdoor education. I think that you also went on a visit at the beginning of this week.

Issues have—rightly—been raised, and it is imperative that, should the general principles of the bill be agreed to at stage 1, I address them, whether they are about costs, catering for youngsters who have additional support needs or teachers' time and the commitment that they might be required to make. Those are all valid issues and I discussed many of them when I appeared before the Finance and Public Administration Committee.

Overall, what has struck me the most—I return to what young people and those in the sector have said—is that residential outdoor education provides life-changing experiences. In many cases, I have seen a young person who would not otherwise have had such opportunities come back from an outdoor residential centre a changed person. That is hugely valuable in today's society.

I have been very impressed by the evidence. I very much welcome the Government's engagement on the bill—it has done so for quite some time—and I hope to be able to work with it should the bill pass stage 1.

**The Convener:** You mentioned the committee visit. Mr Mason, Mr Briggs and I were at the Broomlee outdoor education centre on Monday. We watched a presentation to begin with, and we watched a video of a teacher who has taken pupils to outdoor education centres for many years. He said that the thing that really makes them is the staff. Will you comment on the staff that you have met at outdoor education centres? In everything that I have seen, and in some of the evidence that we have taken from witnesses, the staff's professionalism, dedication and enthusiasm for outdoor education has really shone through.

**Liz Smith:** Very much so. Over the years, I have visited most outdoor education centres across Scotland and many of the other facilities that offer outdoor education, and the professionalism is second to none. People must realise that outdoor education is evolving. It is not just about people climbing Munros, canoeing or rock climbing, which has perhaps been its image. Given their professional development, many of the people who deliver outdoor education are trying to embrace the spirit of the getting it right for every child policy—that is, we have to get it right for

every child, whatever their needs are, in outdoor settings.

They have done a huge amount not only to modernise the delivery of what they are offering but to try to articulate it with the modern curriculum, which I think is very important. The Government quite rightly asked how the proposals in the bill would articulate with the curriculum for excellence, and I think that they complement it 100 per cent. The principles behind the curriculum for excellence are exactly the principles that are behind the outdoor education sector.

I come back to Professor Greg Mannion's point when he gave evidence to the committee. He said:

"We should make it an entitlement in the curriculum that everybody gets education in outdoor settings, and within that we should make it a further entitlement that people get a residential experience."—[*Official Report, Education, Children and Young People Committee*, 6 November 2024; c 25.]

I could not agree more.

I am impressed by what I see, but I also do not want us to get into a situation where we force all young people into outdoor residential education. That is not the intention behind the bill. All I want to see is that the opportunities are there for every child, should their school wish to take them up.

**The Convener:** The curriculum in Scotland is largely non-statutory. Why do you believe that the Parliament should put your proposals into legislation?

**Liz Smith:** That is an important question, and the Government has asked it, too. The reason why it has to be statutory is that, although the current system has good principles behind it, dating from 2010, when the Government set out that vision about outdoor learning and linked it with the sustainability aspect, we have to accept that the system of non-statutory provision is not delivering for enough young people. I do not think that we are there yet with regard to allowing all young people to take advantages of the experiences. That is why I believe that the proposal should be put on to a statutory foundation.

**The Convener:** Thank you. Willie Rennie will ask the next question.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** You have already said that the data is patchy. How do we know the scale of the problem and the gap?

**Liz Smith:** The bill team and my staff have been working very hard on that point, as has the Government in recent months, to be fair. What has become evident during the early stages of the bill is that we do not have enough data to capture exactly what is happening. Some local authorities—such as the City of Edinburgh Council, which you heard from—are first class and

can tell you exactly how many pupils are going on residential. We know that several local authorities have been using the EVOLVEvisits system, which captures quite a few residential, and that all the local authorities in Wales know exactly how many people are going on residential. However, there is not a universal outlook. You are quite right to say that the data is patchy. We have to be sure that, if the bill is to progress, we are capturing more and more of that data as we go forward.

One thing that the bill has done is raise awareness of the fact that we do not have enough data on the issue. We have spent an awful long time questioning each of the outdoor education centres and asking all the local authorities how many of their young people have been to those centres. We have looked at lots of studies that have been done by universities and so on.

I would not pretend for a minute that we have 100 per cent accuracy in the data, but I think that we are getting there, and I am convinced that we have enough background evidence to ensure that the bill is positive.

**Willie Rennie:** You have answered the question about how the bill fits in with the rest of the curriculum, so I will not cover that. A lot of the debate comes down to what return we are getting for an investment in this area versus other investments. Give me your most compelling case as to why the residential element, which is expensive and will have ramifications, is better than other types of outdoor learning or education.

**Liz Smith:** For me, the case for residential involves what the Outward Bound Trust said, which is that, if you put £1 into residential, you get benefits worth somewhere between £5 and £15. That was based on evidence from the United Kingdom and other countries. A very extensive survey was done, and I think that those findings are pretty compelling.

How do you measure all the outcomes of outdoor learning? Some of them—whether they concern nursery provision or what happens in schools—are valuable, but how do you measure all that? It is pretty difficult, but we have to try, and I think that what we have seen when looking into all the evidence suggests that the return from residential is very high.

09:45

**Willie Rennie:** Some councils are clearly not convinced.

**Liz Smith:** Some councils are not convinced, and, in councils that are convinced, there are some people who are not convinced. There is a mix of opinion, which has come about, quite rightly, because there are questions about cost

and about transportation. If you look at a lot of the evidence from some of the local authorities, you will see that their problem is not to do with the fact that they cannot get the benefit out of a residential centre but to do with the fact that they cannot get the children there. That is a big issue, and I think that that is particularly true in relation to youngsters who have special needs. I have tried to address that in the financial memorandum.

There are other questions, such as those around teachers' time. For example, people have asked whether the proposals would undermine teachers' ability to do other things. I do not think that they would, and I do not think that the schools and local authorities that are already engaged in residential have seen any undermining of the rest of the curriculum, nor do they see any displacement.

How do you measure the benefits of education? It is not easy, but it is a key question.

**Willie Rennie:** Thank you.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind):** Good morning. On the topic of people being convinced about residential being a good thing, I am totally convinced that they are, so you do not need to persuade me about that. Further, our recent visit to meet teachers—arranged through the Educational Institute of Scotland—and the visit that we went on this Monday were both absolutely excellent.

Ms Smith, as we are both on the Finance and Constitution Committee and have previously discussed the financial aspects of the bill, you will not be surprised to hear that my questions are on finance.

You pointed out that the current system is not working, but is the problem really finance?

**Liz Smith:** I said that the current system is not working well enough—those were the words that I used—because it is excluding too many young people. The current non-statutory provision is working for the young people who are benefiting from residential education, but the provision is not universal by any means. We think that around a third of pupils in secondary school are getting some sort of residential support. In primary school, it could be around a quarter to 30 per cent—we do not really know.

To answer your question, yes, it is about cost—of course it is about cost, because cost matters, both in terms of the delivery of residential outdoor education and in terms of the costs of ensuring that young people can get transport to their residential location. For some children, that might mean quite a journey, while, for others, it might mean a very small step to somewhere just a few miles from the school.

There are costs—of course there are. I have been keen to engage with the Government on what the level of those costs might be. We came out with roughly the same estimate—the ballpark figure in my financial memorandum was not too different from what the Government had estimated.

I am more than happy to say that the costs are probably around £36 million to £40 million. I am quite happy with the engagement that I have had with the Government about that. We have to deliver the money to finance that, and I have told the Government that I have various suggestions about what we can do to involve the private sector.

**John Mason:** Other members will ask about other funding methods that might be used, so I will stick to the costs themselves.

The cost that you have estimated—around £30 million or so—is still a lot of money, and some have said that that will not be enough.

I was very impressed by the Broomlee centre that we visited at West Linton on Monday, but it could do with a bit of money being spent to modernise it, and that might be true of some of the other centres as well. Are you convinced that £30 million or thereabouts is enough? As I understand it, there are no capital costs in that; the centres are purely charging for running costs.

**Liz Smith:** Those problems would exist whether or not the bill passes—let us be honest. Some updating has to be done, but we should remember that there is a wonderful brand-new facility in Aberdeenshire because demand is so strong. Nick March was clear in his evidence that some centres, especially those that were built in the 1930s, are definitely in need of an upgrade, and money has to be found for that.

If the bill passes, there would be an increase in demand, which would allow centres to take in more revenue, which could help with their investment. However, some centres have already found other ways of investing in provision.

**John Mason:** At the moment, parents—better-off parents, obviously—contribute some of the money, and schools fundraise for some of the other kids. Some of the £30 million that the Government would be paying would go not to the centres or the kids but, in effect, to parents—it would save better-off parents money. I have a slight problem with that. If parents are willing to contribute several million pounds a year at the moment—we probably do not have the figures, but I assume that it is about that much—is it fair to suddenly save those parents a lot of money?

**Liz Smith:** I point to the independent sector, which, as you will have noticed, I did not include in the bill, for the very good reason that independent



sector schools already provide such education through their fee structures. If we are working towards inclusion, that provision should be available to all youngsters in the state and grant-aided sectors, because why should they lose out when it is a given right in most independent schools now? I do not think that the bill will benefit better-off parents while excluding other parents; I think that it will provide for levelling up.

Mr Mason was absolutely right to mention fundraising. Not only are school fundraising activities generally very successful, but there is an esprit de corps in the way in which youngsters and families contribute to that fundraising, which is all part of the learning experience.

I point out that pupil equity funding, which was a fantastic innovation by the Scottish Government, is, as far as we know, largely being used for a lot of aspects of outdoor residential education. That tells me that that funding, which is about levelling up, has been very successful in providing more money.

**John Mason:** I will press you on that. If some kids are already at the standard that we want in relation to getting residential education, and if we are talking about levelling up the others by using PEF or a similar fund, would it not be better to target the limited money that we have at those kids? There could be, say, a top-up fund to which schools in poorer areas—there are certainly some in my constituency—could apply. That would mean that there would still be the parent contribution but that other schools would get some of the money and the scheme might not cost so much.

**Liz Smith:** You made an interesting suggestion along those lines when I was giving evidence to the Finance and Public Administration Committee. There is merit in having a look at that opportunity. That is part of providing diversity through the additional funding that would be required. I would be happy to engage with the Scottish Government if that was where it felt that we should go.

**John Mason:** You mentioned transport. I made the effort by using my bus pass to get to West Linton on Monday, and that was successful. The buses are not all that frequent, but the journey worked fine. A 45 or 50-minute bus journey from Edinburgh followed by a 20-minute walk in December was okay. Are there ways in which schools and everybody else could save on transport costs by using bus passes more?

**Liz Smith:** You sound as though you are making a good case for being a leader on using public transport to get to outdoor education.

You make a good point. There is huge variation in transport costs because of geography. By definition, some schools have to pay a lot of

money for a coach to get a set of youngsters to Loch Eil, Torridon or wherever it might be, whereas other schools have a fairly short trip, and a school or local authority minibus might be provided. I think that we can be imaginative about the issue.

I have spoken to a lot of employers about the bill, and they value the skills that outdoor education residential provide so much. There is scope for employers to help with transport costs in some areas.

**John Mason:** Are you satisfied that the costs that you have put in would cover kids from Shetland and Orkney and further away, who will have much higher costs?

**Liz Smith:** I am satisfied that there is a mean average, because we worked out what the cost would be for those taking much longer journeys against those on much shorter journeys. We were quite content with the average, and I think that the Finance and Public Administration Committee was, too.

**The Convener:** I bring in Miles Briggs to continue on finance and funding.

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** In the interests of full transparency, I think that we should put it on the record that Mr Mason got a lift back to Edinburgh with the convener.

As it is the season of good will, I start by paying tribute to the work that Liz Smith has done on the bill, which has been really important for the debate. The people we met on Monday who have been involved were pleased that we are having the debate and about what it means for the future.

When we met people at the Broomlee centre, they outlined some other funds that they see groups receiving—the Robertson Trust was mentioned to us specifically. Are there other examples of funding from the third sector or of philanthropic funding opportunities? What elements of delivery of the bill could that fund—be it the teaching experience or the capacity and capital spend that we might need?

**Liz Smith:** There are various trusts around Scotland that have done quite a lot, whether it be the Robertson Trust or the Gannochy Trust in my part of the world. A variety of funding streams are out there. PEF is one of them and philanthropic and charitable provision is another, but there are also the models that I gave evidence on to the Finance and Public Administration Committee, and I sent a letter to this committee about what has happened in Ireland with Rethink Ireland.

I am convinced that, if we are creative and imaginative enough and if there is a will, which I believe there is on the side of the Scottish Government as well as on the side of the

committee and myself, we can make this work. You are quite right, Mr Briggs, that there is definitely scope to look at different funding models, and Mr Mason made a good point about some of the possibilities. Should the bill pass stage 1, the issue will be instrumental at stage 2 in ensuring that the bill works.

Some local authorities and some centres have been successful in attracting a lot of money. For example, the Outward Bound Trust is a charitable trust that has a lot of money behind it. It is exceptionally well run and has delivered wonderful outdoor education for a long time. I am impressed by its can-do approach to everything.

**The Convener:** Are we seeing the same can-do approach from the Government? I thought that the solicitor from the Government pushed back on it quite a bit when they gave evidence. They said that there were no examples of such funding being used to support Government legislation in the past. I think that their concern would be about money being available in years X, Y and Z and then stopping. How do you respond to those comments?

**Liz Smith:** The approach has to be sustainable, as I said when I gave evidence to the Finance and Public Administration Committee.

There are examples across Scotland of other private sector involvement in Government policy. I think that I am right in saying that HMP Addiewell, which is a private sector facility, provides a service to the Scottish Prison Service. In days gone by, we have had lots of private finance initiative commitments in which private sector money was marshalled in by the Government in partnership.

This is an interesting aspect of public finances at the moment, and it is certainly very much on the Finance and Public Administration Committee's agenda. Scotland needs there to be a good relationship between the public and private sectors, as there is in many other countries. There is scope for ensuring that we address the question that you just asked about the importance of ensuring that the private and public sectors can work together.

10:00

**Clare Haughey:** I am keen to probe that a bit. Obviously, I have not sat and listened to all the evidence sessions that the committee has heard. Nonetheless, if you went down the avenue of the public trust model of finance, who would be responsible for applying for that? I assume that the local authorities would be responsible, but how would they be compensated for the additional burden—including the administrative burden—and what would happen if they were unsuccessful in applying for those funds?

**Liz Smith:** Under the model that I am proposing, the public trust is controlled by the Scottish Government, as the trustees are Government appointees. The Government is in control, and the bill provides that the Government would be responsible for disbursing the funds.

An application process is a possibility but, through the public trust model, I would like the Scottish Government to work with all 32 local authorities—as it has done with PEF—to ensure not only that the money was available for outdoor education centre provision but that we built on sustainability, which Mr Ross asked about. I am interested in a trust model because it tends to have such sustainability within it—Ireland has proved that, where the approach is about not only the next few years but the future, and that is embedded in the whole system.

I think that the question whether there should be an application process would be up for discussion. However, as I said, I think that the Scottish Government would be able to work with the 32 local authorities to ensure that the money was available for the outdoor education needs in each local authority.

**Clare Haughey:** There would be an additional burden on Scottish Government officials to facilitate the disbursement of funding.

**Liz Smith:** The trust model is overseen by the Scottish Government and, under that model, the trustees all have expertise—in this case, that would be in outdoor education and in the business models that are required for sustainability.

As I said, public trusts elsewhere work pretty well. I come back to the fact that we need to ensure that Government, private sector and third sector involvement—as Mr Briggs mentioned—can all come together, because I think that the ambitions of all three of those groups are the same.

**Clare Haughey:** The public trust model would involve an additional cost, because the trustees would need to be paid. You would need to pay for some financial—

**Liz Smith:** Well, it is not for profit making; it is different from a charitable model of trust. It is a not-for-profit-making model, which is quite different from the charitable model, where profits can be made on that basis.

**Clare Haughey:** I absolutely get that. I am trying to get at the fact that there seems to be no provision for that in the financial memorandum, so that would be in addition to what is in year 1, year 2 and year 3. I am not trying to trick you; I am just looking for a bit of clarification.

**Liz Smith:** It is a fair question. Whatever model we use, the Government would be responsible for

implementing the bill, should it pass. The costs of that provision are in the financial memorandum, and how we would choose to administer it is up for discussion.

**Clare Haughey:** Thank you for that clarification.

**The Convener:** Finally, before we go to Jackie Dunbar, I have a question on finance. When the cost of a bill reaches a certain threshold, a financial resolution is required. If the Government introduces the legislation, it lodges that resolution. As a member with a non-Government bill, you cannot lodge that—it has to be lodged on your behalf by the Government.

You heard the questions that were put to the minister on that issue. What was your reaction to the minister's response that, on the one hand, the Government was neutral on the bill, but that, on the other, it was not looking at lodging a financial resolution?

**Liz Smith:** The convener is absolutely right that the responsibility to lodge the financial resolution lies with the Scottish Government. I hope that it will be positive in relation to my request. I wrote to the Government last month to request that it lodge a financial resolution. The minister has said on, I think, three different occasions that the response is neutral. If the response is neutral, I would expect it to lodge a financial memorandum, but that is a matter for the Scottish Government.

**The Convener:** You might not have anything to add, Mr Stewart, but given your experience with other non-Government bills, is the approach that is being taken by the Government consistent, or is it different with this one?

**Neil Stewart (Scottish Parliament):** I do not think that I have anything to add to what Liz Smith has said on the issue. Standing orders provide that the Government has to lodge the financial resolution motion, and it is then for the Parliament to decide. Obviously, the bill cannot proceed to stage 2 if that is not lodged.

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** Good morning. I have a couple of quick questions. There has been a suggestion that your bill could create a narrow focus on only one type of outdoor learning. Do you agree with that suggestion?

**Liz Smith:** I do not think that it would undermine any aspect of outdoor learning at all. As I said in my opening remarks, it is complementary to—

**Jackie Dunbar:** I was asking about just focusing on one type of outdoor learning, not about undermining others.

**Liz Smith:** It is a more narrow focus, but that could be said about lots of aspects of education anyway. To answer the question of whether it is too narrow, I do not believe that it is. The

residential aspect of outdoor learning is a piece of the jigsaw. I come back to what Greg Mannion said in his evidence, which was that we should provide that opportunity for outdoor learning for all pupils. The residential part of that is a further entitlement. He said that that

“is not a big ask.”—[*Official Report, Education, Children and Young People Committee*, 6 November 2024; c 25.]

I chose the residential aspect because of the compelling evidence that we were getting about its benefits. I would like to see that piece of the jigsaw in place to ensure that there is an all-round experience for young people in the outdoors that complements and articulates with the curriculum for excellence.

**Jackie Dunbar:** How do we ensure that every child gets the same experience? We have heard from some witnesses that schools from poorer areas could go in winter because it is cheaper, which I disagree with. If that was the case, that would mean that schools from different areas would have different experiences. How do we ensure that schools in every area get to choose whether they go in winter—if that is what they want to do, and not because of the price—or in summer?

**Liz Smith:** That is an excellent question. We must ensure that it is about inclusion and providing equity across the system. That is one of the reasons why we must have additional funding, to ensure that resource is there to allow young people from every background to participate. Should the bill pass, it is important that we have engagement between the local authorities and the outdoor sectors to ensure that we are coping well with young people who do not have the privilege that some of their peers might have.

If we look at the overall evidence, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have provided some of the most compelling and positive evidence. That swings it for me. People will know that my professional background was in an independent school, and I always felt that it was wrong that other young people across Scotland were not able to benefit from what I could see happening on a regular basis in independent schools. We will never make everyone's outdoor education experience identical, but the bill is about inclusion and ensuring that all young people have that opportunity. Mr Rennie asked about the return on the investment—for many of those young people, the value of that experience is perhaps even greater.

**Jackie Dunbar:** Is that included in your financial costs?

**Liz Smith:** Yes.

**Jackie Dunbar:** So there will be a level playing field for every school.

**Liz Smith:** The bill is built on equity and inclusion.

**Jackie Dunbar:** Have you spoken to the Government about what happens if the bill does not pass? Is there any non-legislative approach that you would like to see in those circumstances?

**Liz Smith:** I hope that that does not happen. I say again that the Government has been very engaged. I have been very pleased with the constructive discussions that I have had with the cabinet secretary and the minister. There is a genuine agreement that the principles of the bill are the right ones.

I do not see how anybody could argue that the principles would not articulate with what we are trying to do in Scottish education. They articulate with the curriculum for excellence and with the Scottish Government's approach to learning for sustainability. There is a firm commitment. Does the approach have to be statutory? I come back to my earlier answer, which is that we have tried the non-statutory route, some of which has worked and some of which is not working. To ensure inclusion and equity, we perhaps need to take the statutory route.

**Jackie Dunbar:** Would you not consider it a success, then, unless the bill went through? Sorry—I am not trying to put words in your mouth.

**Liz Smith:** I hope that I have been constructive in my engagement with the Scottish Government, and I will continue to be as constructive as I can. At the end of the day, I want all young people in Scotland to have the opportunity to participate in residential outdoor education, even if they do not all take it up.

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** You have spoken about the practicalities of implementation, Ms Smith, and many stakeholders have raised concerns about the practicalities of delivery, such as the capacity of the outdoor education residential sector in Scotland during the school term and the tracking of the participation of young people from those schools. What are your key concerns when it comes to ensuring the delivery of implementation, and how would you propose that those concerns are overcome?

**Liz Smith:** Those are good questions, which have been raised by several witnesses. On provision, although a number of local authority centres, particularly outdoor education centres, have closed, the beds capacity is quite impressive. You heard from the outdoor education sector about some of the expansion that has happened—for example, we have a new centre in

Aberdeenshire. From that angle, there is an expanded provision of beds.

SEEMiS is a system that has been used to ensure good-quality tracking of young people. There is no doubt that some outdoor education centres need an update—some of the people from the sector squarely admitted that. Those centres are looking for a regular commitment to young people's participation, so that they know that there is a regular income.

One of the interesting things—this goes back to the question that Jackie Dunbar asked me—is that the number of pupils who are going away outwith the normal period, which tends to be spring or summer, is increasing. That is a positive reflection on what the sector has done to make itself more attractive to a wider range of pupils and by offering more diverse activities.

**Bill Kidd:** Should the duties in the bill be qualified to allow for exceptions to be made where delivery of residential outdoor education might prove to be impractical, such as when a pupil moves school and misses the trip at the school that they were in, but it has already happened at the school that they are going to? Is that just unfortunate?

**Liz Smith:** There will always be circumstances, such as illness or particular family circumstances, when a young person misses out for a variety of reasons—that is just as it is now. When it comes to changing school, the method of tracking in schools is much better now than it has ever been. If a youngster goes to a new school, that new school will be able to track what activities and curriculum the youngster has undertaken at the previous school. As I said, SEEMiS seems to be working pretty well at giving much better tracking information.

**Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP):** Good morning, Ms Smith and witnesses. Thank you for all your work on the bill; it has been a pleasure to work on it with the committee.

Do you feel that the bill allows enough flexibility to allow schools and local authorities to tailor outdoor experiences to the needs of their pupils?

10:15

**Liz Smith:** That is a very important question. Yes, there has to be flexibility. Let us be honest—the curriculum in Scotland is flexible. I think that, in principle, the Scottish system benefits a lot from that flexibility, when compared with other systems, such as the one in a country not too far away from here, which has a much more rigorous curriculum and has run into difficulty as a result. Flexibility is important.

Local authorities and local schools will take different perspectives on what kind of education they want to facilitate. The purpose of residential outdoor education need not be to provide outdoor activities; it might be to provide outdoor learning as part of a language trip or a history trip. Such educational experiences are just as valuable as any others. That flexibility is absolutely vital.

I come back to the fact that the evidence proves that residential outdoor education benefits youngsters from the point of view of attainment, behaviour, confidence and the ability to have good relationships with not only their peers but their staff. That evidence is compelling. However, that does not take away from the flexibility angle—in fact, it enhances the flexibility angle. We talk about doing our best for every child; the ability for each child to have a different residential experience is very important.

Pam Duncan-Glancy has given some good evidence to the Parliament on additional support for learning. Last week, we saw what we still have to do to enhance the provision of additional support for learning. The evidence that has been provided by residential outdoor centres such as the one at Ardroy—some centres are now concentrating on such provision—is very compelling.

You were right to ask that question, because flexibility is an important principle.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** Good morning. Thank you for the evidence that you have submitted and for your engagement with committee members throughout the process.

Like other members of the committee, I am really positive about certain aspects of the bill and, in particular, what it could do to improve the life chances of young people. I think that Liz Smith has put forward a compelling case.

However, as Liz Smith will be aware, there are a couple of issues that we need to explore a bit further, including the one that has just been touched on—that of the needs of pupils with additional support needs. What is your assessment of what happens at the moment in that regard and how that relates to your bill?

**Liz Smith:** Generally speaking—I know this from the facilities that I have visited and the evidence that has been given to the cross-party group on outdoor education and to this committee—a huge leap forward has been made in enabling young people with additional support needs to take advantage of such opportunities. I think that the committee has seen video evidence of that. The provision of residential outdoor education to such youngsters is life changing—they come back with a completely new outlook.

At the moment, we are not catering for every child with additional support needs—that can be said of education generally across Scotland—and we must do more, but what has been so important in the development and evolution of the provision is the fact that providers are very conscious of the fact that, if they are to win a gold award or to get a good inspection report, they must up their game to ensure that young people with additional needs have exactly the same opportunities as everyone else. I think that awareness has definitely improved markedly, as has provision across most—although not yet all—of the centres. It is pretty impressive that that is the case, given that it is teachers and volunteers—and, in some cases, parents of children with such needs—who have been involved in that provision.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Do you think that, if the provision of residential outdoor education were a statutory responsibility, the progress in that area would continue, or do you think that additional work would have to be done on that?

**Liz Smith:** It must continue. I would be very dissatisfied if the bill were passed and we still excluded some youngsters from such opportunities. That would be no good to me. We must ensure that we are making provision for residential outdoor education for all young people.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** In your discussions with the Government, what has been its response to the issues around pupils with additional support needs accessing residential outdoor activity?

**Liz Smith:** The Government flagged up the costs—quite rightly so. There are costs related to transportation, specialist equipment and specialist provision for staffing. That is part of the financial memorandum.

I found the statistics that came out last week on additional support for learning, which I know that you were leading on for the Labour Party in Parliament, pretty grim. We have a long way to go to ensure that we are looking after young people with additional support needs as well as we should be. I think that the Government has acknowledged that. I hope that the bill will help that in some respects, particularly on the life-changing experiences that they can get from the outdoors.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Some of the teachers who have given evidence to the committee on the bill have said that, in order to do this properly for pupils with additional support needs, more staffing resource would be required. Do you agree? How do you think that that could be resolved?

**Liz Smith:** Obviously, in some cases, additional support needs require a bigger ratio of staff to individuals. If you watch the video of the youngster who has significant disabilities, you will see that he was on a climbing wall. Instead of just one person

being needed to support him there, it took three people, which was absolutely right and proper. There are costs to that, but the smile on that person's face because he had managed to achieve what he did says it all for me.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** I hark back to my time in the disability movement. Many disabled people have said over the years that sometimes it does mean more resource, but achieving that parity is quite important.

Can you set out for the committee how you considered those additional resources in your financial memorandum?

**Liz Smith:** Yes. I actually started off with that, because I am very passionate about support for additional needs. As a teacher, rather than a politician, I have always had a passion to try to ensure that we are providing for all young people, whatever their needs, so I started with that. I spent quite a lot of time on the additional support needs aspect, because I see it as so important.

Over time, I went to visit a lot of centres. You are probably aware of Sam Rowlands, who is a member of the Welsh Senedd who was putting through a bill there, and of Tim Farron in the Westminster Parliament. We took a lot of time to talk about additional support needs in different centres across those three jurisdictions, and that flagged up for me what we have to do to ensure that there is that extra provision.

There is a question about equipment. I was very interested in what the centres were saying. At one stage, people were saying that we would have to have a huge amount of extra money just to kit out people with clothing and boots. Most of the centres have all that, but not enough for some people who have additional support needs if extra equipment is vital for them to engage in whatever activity it might be. I started with that issue, because I was determined that the bill, if it would do anything, would ensure the inclusion of a lot of young people who do not at present get the experience that I would like them to have.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Do you think that any progress can be made, particularly for pupils with additional support needs, without the bill?

**Liz Smith:** Some progress has been made, and I am sure that there could be some more. Is it enough? I do not think so, but that is true for other young people as well. That was the reason for bringing the bill forward in the first place.

**Miles Briggs:** Something that stuck with me following our visit to the Broomlee centre is that it has been 80 years since a significant piece of legislation has been passed in the UK to expand outdoor education—the Education Act 1944, which

is often called the Butler act. That was the foundation for the building of that centre.

I have a question about the capacity that is currently in the sector for the increased demand. Some useful data was shown to us on peaks and troughs; obviously, those are very much related to school holidays. What work has been undertaken on the bill to envisage what that would look like—not necessarily just at centres, but, as you mentioned, at camping and hostel sites as well? To what extent could different models be used?

**Liz Smith:** To take a historical line on that, you give an accurate summary of what was happening. In the 1960s and 70s, Scottish local authorities all had dedicated outdoor education teachers. Those people were important in ensuring that local authorities had good provision right across the board, which worked really well until the 1970s and 80s when, for a variety of reasons, those teachers were slowly lost. You can track a lot of evidence to show that, after that period, we saw quite a downturn in the number of authorities that were able to facilitate outdoor education. Provision was very patchy throughout the later part of the 20th century, although local authorities were still determined to do it.

That determination is still there, but we should not forget what Covid did. It meant that outdoor education centres could not function, so I was enormously grateful to the Scottish Government for providing an initial £2 million and then a further £1 million to support the sector throughout that period. Had the Scottish Government not done so, even more centres would have floundered, so we owe the Scottish Government our thanks for doing that, and I know that the outdoor education sector would say that, too.

I think that we can build up that capacity again, but there must be a strong level of regular demand for those centres, which the bill would provide. There are positive signs: I mentioned the completely new facility in Aberdeenshire, and there are signs that other outdoor facilities are working pretty hard to expand and to have a more diverse offer.

That is another important historical point. Outdoor education centres in the past offered what I would call “traditional” outdoor education. You might spend a lot of time camping and would be climbing hills, kayaking, canoeing and all sorts of things like that. Those things are still included, but outdoor education is changing, and that diversity plays to the different needs of today's young people. It is important that centres have recognised that and have done a lot to improve.

That was an important question.

**Miles Briggs:** I have a question about current capacity. As an Edinburgh member, I see my

schools benefiting from the centres that we have, and schools in Aberdeenshire and the Ayrshires also have that opportunity. Do you see the bill as a way of correcting the postcode lottery that has been created, with some councils continuing to value outdoor education while others have allowed it to disappear?

**Liz Smith:** Yes, I do. Edinburgh is a classic example of a council doing everything that we would like to see. Not only does it have good data and background evidence on what is actually happening, but it puts a high priority on outdoor education.

That is not to say that other local authorities do not want to do that, but they have felt financial pressures. There are 13 local authorities that have been using the EVOLVEvisits system to track what is going on, and there are moves within quite a lot of other authorities to try to improve things. However, it is difficult. Some local authorities do not have the facilities in such numbers, which might also mean that they do not have youth hostels.

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** I apologise for being late to the meeting. I had an urgent task that I thought would be simple but turned out not to be so. I have been watching the live feed and think that I caught most of the meeting before I got here. I certainly caught Mr Briggs grassing up Mr Mason's transport options.

I will follow on from Miles Briggs's line of questioning about centre capacity. You will be aware of the Blairvadach centre in my region. The centre, which is run by Glasgow City Council, is an interesting example because it is fully booked all year round at the moment, with a mix of council bookings for its own schools and commercial bookings that subsidise that school work. How would you respond to the suggestion that increasing the obligation to provide space for schools could displace the commercial work and might actually push some centres into a more precarious financial situation? To put it bluntly, they can charge more for commercial bookings than they typically can for school bookings.

10:30

**Liz Smith:** Absolutely. That is an important question, because the worst thing that could happen would be if, because of the financial system, somewhere such as Blairvadach, which is excellent, wanted to take far more people who pay a commercial rate, rather than providing for schools and young people who are involved in the scouts or whatever it might be. It would be a worry if that happened.

The reason for the bill is to try to ensure that the centres are well used, as well as to offer an

educational experience to the young people who participate. We heard from those who have given evidence that the demand level and bookings are sufficient just now and, as I mentioned, are increasing year round. That was not the case when I led outdoor education. In my day, you were stuck with April to October. That is changing, which is a good sign, because it opens up more facilities and, often, the people who come from the commercial angle do not want the same times. There is greater scope for provision, but I would worry greatly if the commercial side took over from the school side.

**Ross Greer:** I will move on to a totally different area of questioning, but you will be familiar with it because we covered some of the ground at the Finance and Public Administration Committee when it looked at the financial memorandum. The response from trade unions has been interesting, in that there is a significant well of support from teachers for giving more pupils access to residential outdoor education, but there is also an understandable concern from them that that would essentially formalise what at the moment is an informal system that is reliant on voluntary contributions and significant goodwill from teachers. How do you respond in particular to the suggestion that, if outdoor education was put on a statutory footing, the issue would have to go to the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers to be considered as a renegotiation of teachers' terms and conditions?

**Liz Smith:** All aspects of teacher contracts have to go through that tripartite negotiation. That matter is not for me but, rightly, for the Government, local authorities and unions. That is the basis for those negotiations.

The evidence that was provided by the unions was, as you said, interesting, and it was important, because if we cannot take teachers with us on this, we will not go very far, as teachers are a very important part of it.

I was struck by the evidence that the unions provided about the benefits that outdoor education provides. All of them were supportive of the principle but, rightly, they raised concerns, which you have echoed, about how it would work when it came to teacher contracts. Some teachers will not be in favour of the bill, but a lot are in favour. We have heard an awful lot from them, including in the initial responses, about the voluntary aspect not being undermined.

I am not sure that there would have to be a renegotiation, but I am not an expert on such matters. A lot that goes on in the current provision works very well. Schools manage it very well, and a lot of teachers are keen to participate in outdoor education or outdoor visits. I do not think that the issue is a major problem. Nonetheless, I am

conscious that I need to be able to take all teachers with me.

**Ross Greer:** As someone who is keen to support the bill, that is probably my chief area of concern, particularly as it relates to the financial memorandum and the wider costs. The system at the moment relies significantly on teachers' good will and volunteering their time, and it is reasonable to expect teachers to still be broadly willing to do that. However, there is a question of fairness. I struggle to think of many other areas of employment in which we would move something on to a statutory footing—essentially, we are obliging schools to provide it and, de facto, obliging teachers to provide it as part of their employment—but not pay for it.

**Liz Smith:** The counter to that is that, if we really believe that this is worth doing, we will ensure that we do it on the basis of the expertise and professionalism of staff and their willingness to engage with it. There is a large number of teachers from different schools across Scotland who know that this is the right thing to do because of the educational benefit. That is important.

**Ross Greer:** I absolutely agree with that.

This is my final question on this area. I am interested to hear your thoughts on the suggestion that, if centres had their own centrally employed teachers and appropriately qualified youth workers, perhaps not as many classroom teachers would be required to accompany pupils on trips as has historically been the case. The typical experience is that two primary 7 classes go and both of the primary 7 teachers go too, but there is a suggestion that perhaps only one of them would be required if the centres had an appropriate number of their own appropriately qualified staff.

**Liz Smith:** That comes back to the flexibility issue that Evelyn Tweed asked about. There are now centres that hire in professional expertise for various activities, and there are schools that choose to send quite a number of school staff, sometimes alongside parents, carers and former pupils of the school who have had a good experience and who want to go back to help. There is great flexibility in that, which is how it should be. The more flexibility you have, the more people are inspired to take part; the more you set conditions and expectations of what teachers must do, the less you will find that they are willing. The reason why teachers are so keen is that they know the value not just to the youngsters but to themselves as professionals in the classroom. That is the key thing about the bill.

**Ross Greer:** That is an excellent line to end on.

**The Convener:** Just to press that a little bit further, I note that we have heard about the impact that outdoor education has not just on the pupil but

on the teacher who teaches the pupils for the remainder of the year. Staff at the Broomlee centre told us on Monday that September is a big month for primary 7 and secondary 1 classes—they have noticed a real difference in those transition years. I take Ross Greer's point in the spirit in which he asked his question, but there is clearly also a benefit from pupils seeing their own teacher in such environments. Is that what you have picked up, Liz?

**Liz Smith:** Absolutely, and I can speak from many years of personal experience. Youngsters can see a teacher—such as me—not always getting things right, and they learn from that experience. They can also see us getting things right most of the time, which they learn from, too. We learn about our own professional expertise and how to handle different youngsters.

I could quote many youngsters whom I taught at George Watson's college. Some of them were pupils who were not flourishing in the classroom, and some were perhaps not too keen on school, but they absolutely flourished in the outdoors. There were other youngsters who you thought would be an absolute star in the outdoors, but they were not quite as good as they thought they would be.

The educational and social experience is vital. It enhances the relationships that you have with your peers and it definitely enhances the teacher-pupil relationship in both directions. You learn so much as a teacher from that. I was a teacher for 16 years and I still contribute to a lot of outdoor education, and I learn so much from just watching youngsters who might have thought that they would never be able to do something and yet they did it. They come away a different person.

You are right that it is about the long term. Pupils perhaps do better in their exams and in their attainment. They take part in extracurricular activity. That swings it for me. If we are going to be concerned—as we have to be—about our young people and the outcomes that we can deliver, we should recognise that outdoor education contributes to that. It is not the only thing, but it does contribute.

**The Convener:** This is not a question; it is just a comment. At Broomlee on Monday, we saw that groups had one member of staff from the outdoor centre and one teacher. I thought that that mix worked very well. The teacher was learning things to take back to the classroom, but the pupils were also getting the experience of someone from the centre.

**Jackie Dunbar:** I agree that it would be good if what you said were to happen, but I have a concern that came out of the meeting that we held with teachers. We could be asking teachers to



clock in at 9 o'clock on a Monday morning and not clock out until 5 o'clock on the Friday, and we would be asking them to volunteer that time. Not all teachers are able to do that. They want to be part of those experiences, but their family life or caring responsibilities might prevent them from doing that.

We heard from one teacher that there would be hidden costs. If a class was going to an outdoor centre, at least one additional teacher might be required to go with the class in case, for example, a child with additional support needs had to go home because they were not coping. There would be teachers who would be required to go, and there would be teachers who would be on call, so to speak. All those salaries would need to be paid for, but I do not see those costs in the financial memorandum.

How can we square that circle so that we can go forward with the concept that you are suggesting? I would love to go forward with it, but I am worried about how we will pay for it all.

**Liz Smith:** I think that most of the costs are captured in the financial memorandum, but let me go back to your first point, which is very important, about teachers clocking in at 9 o'clock and clocking out at 5 o'clock. Many teachers would tell you that those are not the hours that they are working now. They are probably in the classroom—

**Jackie Dunbar:** I was meaning while they were at a centre.

**Liz Smith:** Being at a centre is a full-time experience. Nowadays, they are in charge 24/7, as it should be.

**Jackie Dunbar:** How do we compensate teachers for doing that?

**Liz Smith:** Some schools provide additional facilities for childcare, and some provide some outdoor equipment that people might need but do not have. That already goes on. Some teachers are able to enjoy benefits such as extra payments or extra days off in lieu, so there is some flexibility in that regard.

Will we be able to pay all teachers an extra salary for doing all that kind of stuff? No, I do not think so. It could be argued that taking on anything new as part of the curriculum should result in an incremental increase in salary, but that does not happen. It all comes back to teacher contracts. We cannot give a salary addition for every additional thing that teachers do. Teachers argue strongly—rightly so, in many cases—that they have had an awful lot of extra work to do, but they do not get paid for that extra work. In fact, that is sometimes a bone of contention.

I do not think that that is a major issue. The number of teachers who already engage in such education disproves the point that there is a major problem.

I come back to the point that you cannot force teachers to go to outdoor centres if they do not want to go, but I do not think that schools are doing that. Schools use the staff who buy into it. By no means are all school staff in Scotland going on residential outdoor education trips. It does not work like that. I would not want people to be forced to go, because if you start forcing people, you are in trouble.

**Jackie Dunbar:** However, if we are going to make such education a statutory requirement, how will we ensure that every child gets it if we do not ensure that there is teacher feed-in?

**Liz Smith:** I think that there is teacher feed-in. The evidence that the committee has heard and received from all the submissions shows that there is really big teacher buy-in.

**Jackie Dunbar:** At the meeting that we held, great concerns were raised.

**Liz Smith:** As I said earlier, some members of the teaching profession are not keen on the bill. However, an awful lot are, and I want to capture their enthusiasm, commitment, expertise and professionalism. They are doing a wonderful job. I think that the bill would enhance the opportunities to expand on that professional development and, at the same time, give a lot of benefits to young people.

**Jackie Dunbar:** I will leave it there, because I do not think that we will agree.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** The member in charge of the bill, and members of the committee, have addressed this in large part, but I want to put on the record a specific concern that has been raised. The member will know about this. We are already in a situation in which teachers are delivering—as I think that research has suggested—about 11 hours a week for free, on average. In addition, the environment in which they are expected to do that is becoming far more challenging; the member has already alluded to some of the data from last week.

10:45

We have heard that, against that background, the good will among teachers to do the types of things that we are talking about has waned slightly. That would be my concern with regard to making outdoor residential education a core responsibility. As I said earlier, I understand why that is the case, because there are inequities. How would the member respond to that?

**Liz Smith:** There are concerns, because—let us be honest—being a teacher these days is all-consuming in terms of the commitment that teachers have to make on a whole lot of different things, not least the things that they are compelled to do by much of the legislation. Being a teacher is not an easy job, but it is a very important one, and I think that the numbers of teachers who have shown a willingness to participate in residential outdoor education demonstrate that teachers believe that it is a priority. In other words, some teachers might argue that they would prefer to be out in the outdoors rather than doing some of the other stuff that they are asked to do, because of the benefits that they can see from outdoor education. I do not think that there is a problem in convincing teachers that it is the right thing to do.

You are quite right to flag up that the curriculum is packed with a lot of other things. The commitment that is required from teachers to non-teaching activity outwith the classroom has grown enormously since I left teaching 20 years ago. There has been a huge change in that respect, and we have to be mindful of that. Nonetheless, I do not see any signs that a lot of teachers are withdrawing from that type of activity.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** The concern is that, although we might not see the impact quite yet, if the trajectory continues with regard to what teachers are experiencing in the teaching environment just now, to which you alluded, they could begin to worry about the additional commitment that is required.

**Liz Smith:** We saw a downturn in the 1980s when the playing fields scenario meant that a lot of schools cut their extracurricular activity. We saw a big downturn in the number of teachers who were responsible for looking after football, rugby, hockey or whatever it might have been. That activity is beginning to come back. I have been interested to see the number of extracurricular activities that are happening in some schools where there had previously been quite a big decline. I think that that represents an understanding in a lot of schools—to be fair to the Scottish Government, I think that it recognises this—that the benefits from physical activity and sport are pretty compelling. We are starting to see an upturn in the number of schools that are going back to running more teams and taking part in more activities.

We see that a lot of youngsters are now involved in local tournaments these days, at schools that had previously pretty much shut down their extracurricular activity in the last part of the 20th century. It is good to see that.

**The Convener:** I have one final point. Mr Mason raised the issue of the bill potentially benefiting better-off parents who currently pay for

such activities if the provision is funded by the Government. The policy memorandum says:

“The Member considers that any system created ought to be based on substantial funding from the Scottish Government, but accepts that flexibility could potentially be retained to use different funding streams such as school fundraising activities and also to enable parents or carers, who can afford to, to make a part contribution towards the costs.”

Can you explain that a bit more with regard to the flexibility that you are speaking about and how that would work in practice?

**Liz Smith:** Yes. There are some circumstances in which parents who have more means than others contribute more in the way of fundraising activities of the type that happen in a school, through taking responsibility and putting in a bit more money behind those activities. There are some parents who are making provision for transport costs, whereas other kids are not getting that provision, and some schools are having to subsidise on that basis.

Mr Mason is right to question that, because some parents obviously have greater means than others. Would they be able to go ahead and pay a bit while parents of other children do not? I think that it is worth exploring that, but I would not want the level playing field to be removed because of that. Could we part fund it? Could we use PEF money for some of the youngsters? I think that that is a possibility, and I have discussed it with the Scottish Government. We know that there are some schools, certainly in my region, that use PEF to subsidise youngsters who are not able to go, yet other parents in that school are paying for the activity. I think that there is some scope to discuss that.

**The Convener:** Do you believe that there is flexibility just now, or would you look to bring back amendments on that at stage 2 if the bill gets past stage 1?

**Liz Smith:** I might consider lodging amendments on that if I felt that the committee might like us to pursue it.

Again, it comes back to the point that what is happening just now is a patchwork, and there is a bit of a mix with regard to how such activity is funded in some schools. I certainly think that there is scope for flexibility in how it is funded overall, should the bill pass.

**The Convener:** That is helpful.

We have gone through all the members' questions. Would you like to make any final comments to members on behalf of your bill?

**Liz Smith:** I have spent an awful lot of time on bringing the bill to Parliament. I have welcomed in particular the engagement from this committee

and from the Finance and Public Administration Committee, and I credit the Scottish Government for its engagement.

I will finish on this point. If we want all young people in Scotland to experience the kind of education that society believes they deserve and we want to see, the bill can make a huge difference through inspiring confidence, self-esteem and resilience, and by giving children an extra dimension that too many of them are missing out on.

**The Convener:** I thank you for your time today, and I thank the officials from the non-Government bills unit and Parliament. We have heard sincere cross-party good wishes offered to you, Ms Smith, for the work that you have done and will continue to do in this area. This has been the final session of our consideration before we construct our stage 1 report, and it has been extremely helpful.

That concludes the public part of our proceedings. I suspend the meeting to allow our witnesses to leave and the committee will move into private session.

10:52

*Meeting continued in private until 12:01.*



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

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