OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 11 March 2026

Session 6

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website—
www.parliament.scot or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Wednesday 11 March 2026

CONTENTS

	Col.
SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION	**1**
Erasmus+ Programme (Data Processing) Regulations 2026	1
SCHOOL REFORM (CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT)	**2**

EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE
10th Meeting 2026, 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)
Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)
*Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
*John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
*Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP)
*Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab)
*Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Kirsty Ayed (School Leaders Scotland)
Dr Keir Bloomer (Commission on School Reform)
Ollie Bray (Education Scotland)
Sarah Brown (Qualifications Scotland)
Andy Harvey (Educational Institute of Scotland)
Professor Louise Hayward (University of Glasgow)
David Macluskey (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland)
Donna Stewart (Qualifications Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Pauline McIntyre

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 11 March 2026

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]

Subordinate Legislation

Erasmus+ Programme (Data Processing) Regulations 2026

The Convener (Douglas Ross): Welcome to the 10th meeting in 2026 of the Education, Children and Young People Committee. Our first item is consideration of a type 1 consent notification sent by the Scottish Government that relates to the proposed United Kingdom statutory instrument. Do any members have comments to make on the consent notification?

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): It is important to put on the record that it is five years on from when the Scottish National Party Government made a solemn promise in its manifesto, which, if the committee will bear with me, reads:

"we will create a Scottish programme of exchange to provide mobility and cooperation opportunities in higher education, vocational education and training, school education (including early childhood education and care), adult education, youth and sport."

Five years on, the SNP has failed to deliver that programme. It had a £1 million pilot programme, which was dwarfed by the £65 million Welsh one that my colleague Kirsty Williams delivered when she was in government. It has taken this Labour Government to help the SNP to deliver its manifesto promise.

Manifesto promises are incredibly important. The young people across the country who were given hope in 2021 that the Government would give them an exchange programme equivalent to Erasmus have been badly let down. It is important to put all of that on the record.

The Convener: Thank you. You have done that.

No other member has any comments to make, so do members agree to consent to the SI and to write to the Scottish Government accordingly?

Members *indicated agreement*.

School Reform (Curriculum and Assessment)

09:01

The Convener: Our second item of business is an evidence session on school reform—specifically on the curriculum and assessment. Our first panel will be focused on the curriculum improvement cycle. I welcome David Macluskey, who is strategic lead and chief education officer at Perth and Kinross Council and represents the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland; Dr Keir Bloomer, who is chair of the commission on school reform; Andy Harvey, who is national officer for education at the Educational Institute of Scotland; and Ollie Bray, who is strategic director at Education Scotland. Thank you, all, for coming and for the written evidence that we received in advance.

I will start the questioning. We are weeks away from the end of this session of Parliament and of this five-year term of the Scottish Government. What are your reflections on the progress or otherwise that the Scottish Government has made on curriculum development and education in this term of Government and Parliament? Mr Macluskey, you have a wry smile on your face for that question—although it might just be a welcoming smile—so I ask you to respond first.

David Macluskey (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland): It is merely a welcoming smile.

We have made significant progress on the curriculum improvement cycle, particularly in the past 18 months or so. We have a clear route map for deployment of the evolving curriculum. Really hearteningly, that curricular development has been involved in all parts of the education and practitioner systems until now, and there are plans for further involvement.

At ADES—certainly in my context, in Perth and Kinross—we are feeling optimistic and positive about the progress of the curriculum improvement cycle and we are looking forward to the draft technical framework that will arrive with us in June as a concrete step in the CIC's development and deployment.

Andy Harvey (Educational Institute of Scotland): The EIS is pleased with the progress that has been made on the curriculum improvement cycle. It is not only a recognition of the esteem in which the values, aims and principles of curriculum for excellence are held, but a recognition that reform is required in order to make it more workable.

As David Macluskey referenced, the first release of the curriculum improvement cycle to the system is coming in June. For the EIS, there is a certain urgency around ensuring that we have time available for teachers to plan not only in the here and now but also strategically, through additional in-service education and training time as well as planning time, to help us to overtake that.

We welcome Education Scotland's approach to the curriculum improvement cycle, which is to co-create the new framework and the CIC with the teaching profession, but we must also address the fact that a lot of our teachers, particularly in the primary sector, simply do not have the time or resources to come out of school. That is significant, because there is a risk that the outputs will be skewed if the voices of primary and early years teachers are not heard as much as the voices of those from other sectors.

Dr Keir Bloomer (Commission on School Reform): I welcome the fact that there is an improvement cycle, but I regret that there is, as yet, insufficient recognition of the shortcomings of the curriculum as it is currently implemented and that there is a lack of principles as to how the curriculum should be developed in the future. It seems to me that there is an opportunity but that that does not yet rest on any firm philosophical foundations.

Ollie Bray (Education Scotland): I think that there has been good progress in the past five years. Things could perhaps have been quicker, but we have taken time to ensure that we have all the correct building blocks in place.

Back at the start of this session of Parliament, in 2021, we had the report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which led to a number of other external reviews that have been scrutinised by this committee. Each of those external reviews tried to address a recommendation from the original OECD report, and the work on the curriculum improvement cycle in the past 24 months has taken the best of the recommendations from those independent reviews and has worked with the system to progress the cycle. I feel quite heartened by the fact that both David Macluskey and Andy Harvey have said that the work seems to be going in the right direction. We certainly feel that it is going in the right direction and that we are roughly on track to meet our delivery deadlines and to put materials out into the system this June and in January next year.

I take Keir Bloomer's point about some of the fundamental challenges with the implementation of CFE, but the curriculum improvement cycle does have philosophical principles behind it. We are trying to abide by those principles, which we published a couple of years ago on the curriculum improvement cycle website.

The Convener: I can be quite pedantic, so I will pick you up on the fact that you said you are "roughly on track" for June. We are coming to the end of scrutiny in this session of Parliament, and a new Parliament will be coming in. Can new members and a new education committee expect that you will deliver what you have said you will deliver in June? To say that you are "roughly on track" does not seem to be a cast-iron guarantee, but that may just be the way that you phrased it.

Ollie Bray: It is the way that I phrased it. We feel that we are on track for June. I can say for the committee's benefit, and because there may be a question on it later, that, when we get to June, we plan to publish draft refreshed curriculum guidance along with the draft technical framework that David Macluskey and Andy Harvey hinted at. I apologise if people know this, but I note for the committee's benefit that, when we talk about the technical framework, we mean the materials that teachers and practitioners use to plan learning. In Scotland, that would include things such as the experiences and outcomes, benchmarks, local approaches to progression and exam syllabuses from the SQA—sorry—Qualifications Scotland.

As part of the curriculum improvement cycle work, we have been thinking about how to evolve the technical framework, to produce something that is more fit for purpose for 2026 and beyond.

The Convener: Mr Bray, you talked about whether things could have gone quicker and you left that as an open-ended question. Mr Macluskey, you began by saying that progress has been more significant in the past 18 months. Has time been wasted during this session of Parliament? Could we have made more progress more quickly in the past five years?

Ollie Bray: When I talk about things going quicker, it is important to note that anything we do to reform education in Scotland has to fit into the rhythm of the school year, which people sometimes do not appreciate. When we think about planning to introduce curriculum change in schools, we have to be really cognisant of school holidays, of other things that happen in the calendar cycle and of Qualifications Scotland exam dates. We sometimes have to pause and wait for a moment before we can go forward.

The Convener: Those are not unknown dates for you. They are not unknown obstacles that you have to navigate around.

Ollie Bray: They are not unknown obstacles, but my point is that there is sometimes a perception that the work can happen all the time, although that is actually very difficult for schools,

because there are natural pauses in the school year. People who do not work in education, or who are trying to introduce policy and change in other areas, sometimes do not appreciate the delivery that our schools, local authorities and teachers are working on.

Could delivery have been faster? Yes, it could have been, had we been working on it constantly, all the time. However, that would have had a significant effect on things such as teacher workload and it would have impacted on what I called the rhythm of the school year.

David Macluskey: I will build on what Ollie Bray said.

The work involved a significant amount of sense making and thought at the beginning, to ensure that we are sitting on fit and sound principles. That takes time. The work is also consultative in nature. If we are going to involve the system in the form of practitioners, we have to be mindful of the fact that—as Andy Harvey said—they all have day jobs. We have to be mindful of that if we are to get the co-creation that we want in order to make this a successful curriculum improvement cycle.

The other issue that we are acutely aware of at ADES—and certainly in the day job at P and K—is the system's capacity to take on the new and developing within workload and within the pressures that we all face in the education system at any given time. That makes it a tricky and dynamic space in relation to the speed at which things can move forward.

The June publication will represent the next concrete step that will be apparent and visible to those who have been involved in the co-creation. My expectation and hope is that people will see their own voice represented in that once it is published.

The Convener: Mr Macluskey, I put Mr Harvey's point to you, as a director in Perth and Kinross and as a representative of ADES. Do you recognise that teachers, particularly in the primary phase, do not get enough time out of the classroom or school to help to develop some of this work? What can be done to address that?

David Macluskey: It is challenging. The way that education is delivered in the primary and secondary sectors means that the class cover that is required to allow practitioners to engage can be tricky to get. We have a local approach in Perth and Kinross through a peripatetic team that is there to allow that to happen. That team goes in and provides class cover to allow that engagement and leadership in general. I think that most of my colleagues across the piece would look to have something similar.

In ADES, we heard from some of our primary specialists that they felt that they could have been more sighted on this work, so we engaged with them and linked them with Education Scotland, to ensure that they felt that their voices were heard more. However, I agree with Andy that it is a challenge for us all.

Andy Harvey: I agree with that, and I will explain a wee bit about why this is so important. Both our primary and our secondary teachers are very busy, but they have their own patches of interest. The secondary school is driven largely by the senior phase, the examinations in that area, and subjects. Our primary teachers are specialists in generalism right across the way. All of the work that comes towards them has to be manageable, working across all eight curricular areas and the cross-curricular themes, and, because of that, teachers will come at things in a different way. That is why the outputs are so dependent on the inputs.

I will give the committee a wee example in relation to political literacy, which I am sure that colleagues here will be interested in. If you take a bunch of teachers and get them to talk about political literacy, it is almost inevitable that it will lead to discussion of the modern studies curriculum, electoral politics and civil rights. Our early years teachers also do political literacy, but for them it might be about sharing, using your voice, and your sense of self and of those around you, which are much more fundamental. There needs to be parity and understanding, so that we can get the cohesion absolutely right.

Another issue that has been raised by the OECD report and various other reports is the tendency of the senior phase to drive the rest of the curriculum, although we are looking for real integration and cohesion.

That is why it is important to hear everyone's voices.

The Convener: I have a final question for Dr Bloomer. You chaired the commission on school reform. Is this where you expected Scottish education to be in March 2026, or are we behind or ahead of where you hoped we would be?

09:15

Dr Bloomer: It most certainly is not where I hoped and expected Scottish education would be. What has been absent in the discussion so far is any recognition of the utterly lamentable state of the Scottish curriculum. We know far too little about how the Scottish system is actually performing. The lack of data is a serious matter in Scottish education. We used to be better informed than we are now. At the moment, the only really objective source of information that we have is the

programme for international student assessment—PISA.

I am delighted that the Scottish Government has rejoined, or is in the process of rejoining, the other two major international surveys, the trends in international mathematics and science study—TIMSS—and the progress in international reading literacy study, or PIRLS. It is about time that it started to think about reinstating something like the Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy, which was an extremely important and very economical source of data on the performance of Scottish education. However, we do not have those things at the present moment.

What we do know is that there has been a process of continuing decline in relation to PISA, which, as far as we know, is continuing at this moment. There is therefore something fundamentally wrong, which, in our view, is the lack of emphasis on knowledge as the basis for the curriculum. Until we start addressing that kind of fundamental issue seriously, we are not going to make progress.

The Convener: Do you continue to make those representations to Government? What reason would Government ministers have for not wanting to be part of those comparisons—other than, potentially, our standing dropping against comparator nations or in international rankings?

Dr Bloomer: At the time when the Government took us out of TIMSS and PIRLS and withdrew the survey of literacy and numeracy, it was rather hard to avoid the conclusion that an attempt was being made to hide the evidence. In fairness, the Government is rejoining those two international surveys, which is a step forward. We will have slightly better knowledge about our performance in the future than we have at the present moment. I recognise that, on several occasions, the cabinet secretary has made statements about the importance of knowledge, although that is not yet getting fundamentally built into the reviews that will be undertaken, nor is there a recognition that that is the essential cornerstone of the curriculum, without which nothing else will succeed.

The Convener: Mr Bray, from Education Scotland's point of view, if the cabinet secretary is making those positive comments about knowledge and so on, why is that not being carried through? Do you not feel that you are getting that direction? Is it more about words in the Parliament chamber or in press releases than it is about instructions?

Ollie Bray: No—I think that that is exactly what we are doing, Mr Ross.

The Convener: So, why does Dr Bloomer think that you are not doing that?

Ollie Bray: I am not sure. Dr Bloomer is perhaps not sighted on the work that we have done. I read Dr Bloomer's report for the commission on school reform. There are some aspects of it that I agree with, but I think that there is a bit that is fundamentally missing from the report in that it does not take into account any of the work that has gone on in the past 24 months. I am not sure why that is. We have not had a discussion about that, and I would welcome a discussion about that offline.

Dr Bloomer: Yes—any time.

The Convener: That is why you are here today.

Ollie Bray: This is not about getting into a debate with Dr Bloomer today. We have known each other for many years.

Could I give a bit of background, if that would be useful? In evolving the curriculum, we are evolving the technical framework and we are moving away from experience and outcomes. Our recommendation, back in June 2024, was to move to what we call a know, do, understand curriculum. As part of that, we sought to be clear about what young people would need to know, what they would need to be able to do and, ultimately, what they would need to understand at developmentally appropriate times in their learning.

In all of the work that we have been doing over the past 18 months—all of the co-design work that has been going on, which David Macluskey mentioned—our teacher practitioners and our partners who have been part of that work have been basing it around that framework. The draft materials that you will see in June this year and then the final materials, which we will publish in about a year's time, will be very focused on that. They will be very clear about what we require children to know and to be able to do at developmentally appropriate times in their learning. We are not losing that important aspect of developmental appropriateness. Ultimately, we are working towards a curriculum that is more geared towards teaching for understanding.

I mention that because, sometimes in these debates—not this particular debate, obviously—people use the term "knowledge rich", but, as Keir Bloomer will probably be the first to tell you, there are five or six paradigms of "knowledge rich", some of which neither of us would want to buy into. It is not about simply learning facts; it is about understanding the direction of travel that we want children and young people to take to develop understanding. I feel very confident that we are doing some of those things already.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Good morning. Thank you for joining us. I have a quite open question to start with. Is there a clear

understanding of what school education is seeking to achieve for all learners in Scotland? I ask that question because of some of the evidence that we have heard in different inquiries over the past year. For example, we heard about schools having part-time timetables of 15 minutes. I put that question out there: is there is a clear understanding of what we are trying to achieve in schools?

Andy Harvey: I will speak from the perspective of the teaching profession, which largely embraces the values, principles and purposes of curriculum for excellence. This is about the four capacities. Successful learners are important, but so are confident individuals and effective contributors. I have forgotten the other one because I am in the limelight—

Dr Bloomer: Responsible citizens.

Andy Harvey: Thank you, Dr Bloomer. It is about creating rounded people for the future. We do not need a debate on knowledge versus skills and it has been unfortunate that that has happened. As a teacher for more than 27 years, I know that young people are taught knowledge, but they need knowledge and skills. The big challenge is what they do with that knowledge, how they understand it, how it leads to understanding and how it is applied.

The teaching profession is clear that it does not want tight prescription. That is the transmission form of education that Ollie Bray alluded to, in which young people are vessels and teachers pour information and facts into them. What we in the teaching profession need is a bit more clarity about knowledge at particular stages that will help us to select the content of our teaching and to further realise the visions and aims of curriculum for excellence.

David Macluskey: It is refreshing to agree entirely with my colleague from EIS. That is the first thing that I would say.

Miles Briggs: It is a real first.

David Macluskey: To answer your question about the clarity around the purpose of schools and education, that rests with the four capacities. They remain unwavering and unchanged. In the world that we live in, certain things come in and interfere with those four capacities or cause some to bulge out more than others and our current qualifications approach is probably one of the things that can do that. It can create incentives for schools to behave in certain ways that are sometimes a wee bit less than coherent with those four capacities. The final thing is that, as Andy Harvey said, there is a false dichotomy between skills and knowledge. Knowledge is important, but without skills it is nothing and it could go into a world of rote learning. It is about what is appropriate and right at any given time.

Miles Briggs: Does anyone else want to come in on that?

Dr Bloomer: I agree with what Ollie Bray said about dispensing with the experiences and outcomes. One of the central problems in Scottish education for the past 15 years has been the way in which the curriculum is specified, because that is in effect what the Es and Os are. Apart from the rather patronising and juvenile way in which they are expressed and put in the mouth of the child, which is unfortunate in itself, they have managed to obscure the place of knowledge in the curriculum. Teachers do not easily understand them, so their abolition is welcome and cannot come quickly enough. It will be interesting to see what kind of specification succeeds them, because that will be absolutely fundamental.

Ollie Bray: To come back to your question, Mr Briggs, I agree with some of what has been said. It might be helpful for me to explain a little about how we are thinking about the overall structure of the curriculum and, therefore, linking to the purpose.

All three of my colleagues have mentioned the importance of the four capacities: we want young people to be individuals, citizens, contributors and learners. You will notice that I have ditched the adjectives; sometimes, in the political debate in recent times, we have become obsessed with the adjectives. We want young people to have those capacities: that is the purpose of Scottish education at which we are aiming.

Beneath that, there is a series of layers. First, in order for young people to be those things, they need a collection of experiences. That is the notion of curriculum design, which is realised at a local level.

Young people also need to be able to engage with key ideas. In our paper, we sometimes call those “big” ideas. In order for young people to develop those big ideas, they need to develop conceptual understanding.

In order to develop conceptual understanding, they need to know and be able to do things at developmentally appropriate times in their learning.

In order for young people to know and be able do those things at developmentally appropriate times, our teaching profession needs to be really solid on pedagogy, so that teachers understand how young people can achieve those things.

In order for teachers to be really solid on pedagogy, we need good professional learning and capacity building in the system.

All five of those layers—I sometimes describe them as the why, the what and the how of Scottish education—need to be in place in order to give the curriculum conceptual strength. Dr Bloomer mentioned in his report, I think, that he feels that the CFE does not have conceptual strength. That is one of the things that we have tried to put in place with our work over the past 24 months.

Miles Briggs: Both David Macluskey and Andy Harvey have touched on where skills sit in the development of the curriculum. Over the past year, probably my best visits to schools have involved meeting young people who are furthest removed from the curriculum, who are often not in class and are in hubs. Fantastic work is going on in school-college partnerships to get them back into learning—often, to get them into a construction apprenticeship or a foundation apprenticeship; then, all of a sudden, they realise that they enjoy maths because it will be needed and will get them into a life. Has the opportunity been missed to stretch that out across schools, to see it as not just something for those who have checked out of education but a much more beneficial opportunity for so many young people, and to embed it into the curriculum much more strongly?

David Macluskey: I entirely agree. We need to look at everything that happens in the learning environment, whether that is in a school or elsewhere, as being the curriculum. In our qualifications system, a focus on national qualifications might exclude certain young people and might fail to motivate more young people for success.

You mentioned the applicability of learning as being important. Nationally and locally, across all 32 local authorities, there has been a lot of effort on the applicability of learning—the use of interdisciplinary learning and so on—and its development over time. However, in all truth, people have probably been developing that together in groups. The curriculum improvement cycle gives us the opportunity to recognise exactly what you are saying, in the totality of the curriculum. I am sure that, when you meet colleagues from Qualifications Scotland, they will be able to reinforce that. We recognise that aspects of what we do on the measurability of outputs is not suitable for all, nor, perhaps, engaging for many.

Andy Harvey: I concur. There would also be a rich seam of response from Professor Louise Hayward, who covered that area.

In Scotland, sometimes, the curriculum breadth that we talk about has been viewed as the number of subjects that someone does, whereas it is more important to think about applicability—how the knowledge from those subjects stretches into and across other contexts. I think that that is why David Macluskey referred to IDL—interdisciplinary learning. However, there is also project-based learning. It is absolutely right that more school leaders and teachers should go to the Scottish credit and qualifications framework, certainly in the senior phase, and that they look at more skill-based and project-based learning.

I know that it is not the specific topic of this meeting, but the lack of progress around national 5 is unfortunate. The secondary senior phase is still largely hidebound by a narrow band of national qualifications on a range of subjects, which works for some young people but not for others. The fact that we do not have timetable, staffing and resource flexibility really limits our ability to be dynamic and responsive to the breadth of needs.

09:30

Miles Briggs: Does anyone else want to comment?

Ollie Bray: I am happy to come in. I completely agree with you on that point, Mr Briggs. I have seen at first hand, as a teacher and headteacher, the transformational impact on children and young people of the type of experiences that you have described. As part of the work on the curriculum improvement cycle, we are trying to create the enabling environment for more of those experiences to happen consistently.

If it is useful, it might be worth reminding everybody that we define curriculum in Scotland as the totality of all planned experiences for children and young people, so it is not only about curriculum areas and subjects. It has already been mentioned that the totality of all planned experience for children and young people must include interdisciplinary learning, opportunities for personal achievement and, importantly—this links into exactly what you have said, Mr Briggs—the life and ethos of the school as a setting. I agree with what you have said, and we hope to address some of the issue through that work, with more robust guidance around curriculum design.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind): Knowledge has been mentioned already, and also cohesion. There is quite a lot of jargon going around, with which I am not totally familiar. The OECD said that

"Clarifications are also needed around the concept of knowledge itself",

and that

"This will also help re-align learning through BGE and the Senior Phase."

How joined up have we gotten? The suggestion has been for a long time that broad general education and the senior phase are not very joined

up, so are they now more joined up? Mr Harvey, I think that you used the word "cohesion" at one point.

Andy Harvey: Yes—sorry if that was jargon.

John Mason: No, I got "cohesion", which is why—

Andy Harvey: I am an English teacher—it is just a word.

The point that is made in the OECD report corresponds to a reality where, for some time, we have noticed a disconnect between the broad general education and the senior phase. The broad general education is, as it says, fairly broad, but suffers from the fact that there is a vagueness there and, although teachers do need support, the framework has become overloaded in efforts to support them. There is definitely a disconnect with the senior phase, because the senior phase is about subject knowledge and attaining national qualifications, and we have seen a backwash of that exam culture into the broad general education in the early years of secondary school.

John Mason: That suggests that the two phases are more joined up, so is that not a good thing in some ways? You are perhaps suggesting that it is having a negative influence.

Andy Harvey: I do not think that it is a positive thing, because it is misaligned with the vision of the curriculum. Underlying the OECD's point is that although our curricular vision goes from three to 18 with the four capacities, the curriculum, in effect, stops at age 15, and then we have the senior phase, which is determined by qualifications. That is not the way that things are supposed to be.

For that joining up to happen, it is important that all partners collaborate, which, in the present work, is really significant to the success of the curriculum improvement cycle. However, I do not think that it is only about asking people to collaborate. There needs to be a system response of leadership to ensure that everything is moving in the same direction, and I think that the Government has a role to play in that.

We must also think about the role of the inspectorate, because the accountability and scrutiny mechanisms have an impact on the behaviour of the curriculum. It is really important that that is taken into account as well. As I said, there is a role for Government to play to ensure that the movement forward is collaborative and results in more cohesion.

John Mason: Mr Macluskey, is cohesion improving?

David Macluskey: There is a way to go. It is instructive to think about the key transition points in the educational journey. Consider what the delivery of the curriculum and learning for a child in an early years context looks like, in comparison with a primary 1 experience. There are similarities in how the learning is delivered in the classroom, the pedagogy that is used and even the organisation of the learning. However, the transition point between primary 7 and secondary 1 is different—it is far less smooth, which is quite a challenge for many young people.

John Mason: I remember that, when I was at school, the big jump in my school life was from P7 to S1, not so much from age 15 to 16.

David Macluskey: The backwash with curriculum for excellence is that the lack of cohesion with the senior phase that we have been addressing and all the things that we have heard about accountability, which is important, have largely stayed in place. Often, children in primary 7 might have three or four key adults who support their learning. That is helpful for relationship building and for health and wellbeing. However, they might then move to a secondary experience in which there are far more key adults than that and sometimes they have short interactions with those adults. There is an opportunity with the curriculum improvement cycle and the redesign of the senior phase to help smooth that transition, which would create a better experience.

John Mason: It was said at one point that kids in primary school do not interact with enough adults and that, in secondary school, they may interact with too many—or, at least, too many teachers. Is that inevitable or is there a way around it?

David Macluskey: It can be modified. In my context, we have done much about that issue. At one stage, in some schools, children were coming in to S1 and interacting with 20 teachers in a week. That is far too many to create any meaningful relationships and to deliver learning effectively. We have moved that forward locally. The curricular structure that is being developed will help us all to do that more effectively. It will also help us to resist the temptation to deliver a Scottish Qualifications Authority subject in S1 just because somebody might want to choose it in S4, S5 or S6. That is part of the legacy of where we have been.

Dr Bloomer: The terms "broad general education" and "senior phase" were introduced by "Building the Curriculum 3", which was probably one of the more disastrous pieces of curriculum advice that has been wished on Scottish education in the past 25 years. One of its immediate effects, as you may recall, was to restrict the breadth of the curriculum in S4 in a large number of Scottish schools. Those that followed the advice precisely ended up with a narrower curriculum than they had

had before, while those that ignored the advice did better as a result.

As far as I can see, the notion of broad general education has done nothing to correct the problem of the transition from primary to secondary education that you referred to with your own experience, Mr Mason—I would concur, although my experience was even longer ago. We have not managed to sort that problem.

The removal of that particular piece of guidance, which was envisaged in what Ollie Bray said, would certainly be welcome. There is also a need for a thoroughgoing look at the senior phase. S6 is now a more meaningful experience and offers a richer variety of experiences than it did in the past, which is positive. However, there are issues that, in cash-strapped times, are ultimately unavoidable, such as the co-existence of four-year degrees with the six-year school curriculum. That will only get unravelled following serious discussion—which has not yet even started—over a sustained period of time. There is a lot that remains to be done.

John Mason: Mr Bray, is the whole three-to-18 spectrum becoming more coherent?

Ollie Bray: I genuinely think that it will become more coherent as part of this piece of work—

John Mason: You say that it will be. Does that mean that it has not become more coherent in recent years?

Ollie Bray: There are a few challenges, at which Dr Bloomer has hinted. Having taken other evidence, the committee is aware that some experiences and outcomes are open to interpretation, which sometimes means a lack of strong building blocks on which to build the qualifications phase. For example, a secondary school geography teacher might look at the exam syllabus, because that is where the content is specified, but that causes a rather unhelpful backwash into broad general education. That has been recognised. It was in the report that we published in November 2024. What we are trying to do, therefore, as part of the curriculum improvement cycle, is to be clearer on what young people need to know, do and understand at developmentally appropriate times in their learning through the BGE, which means that we can then be clearer on the building blocks as they move into qualifications.

Secondly, we feel that, at the moment, there is a slight disconnect between CFE fourth level, which is currently open ended, and SCQF level 4. We have published information on that. Again, it gets a bit jargonistic, because those two things sound the same but are different. As part of our work, we are aligning those two layers to bring the two frameworks closer together.

There is a third thing in our work with Qualifications Scotland—you will speak to witnesses from it later on. When CFE was developed, the experiences and outcomes were developed by one group of people and the qualifications phase was developed by another group. We will make sure that some people will be on both teams that develop that work. We are trying to encourage that coherence structurally and technically in the alignment of the SCQF, but also on the human level, to try to reduce that ambiguity.

John Mason: I will leave it at that.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Good morning. Will the new framework in the approach to curriculum for excellence lead to more consistency? How is the tension between consistency and coherence and local autonomy being navigated?

Ollie Bray: The answer to the first question is yes. I feel as though I have rehearsed the line on consistency a couple of times before. We are trying to be clearer on what young people need to know, do and understand at developmentally appropriate times in their learning. Part of that is the development of what some might call a national progression framework. At the moment, although progression exists in literacy and numeracy, it is absent, in some ways, from the other six curriculum areas. The framework will be phased in as part of the curriculum improvement cycle, so teachers will be clearer on what is expected of children and young people at those developmentally appropriate times.

Jackie Dunbar: Is that at a national or a local level?

Ollie Bray: It is at the national level, although it can still be interpreted locally—in pedagogical principles, for example, or in local case studies that could be used. For the technical framework that we are developing, one success criterion is adaptability for different sectors—early years, primary and secondary—and for different curriculum areas, acknowledging that a young person may, for example, engage with mathematics and science differently from how they engage with English and the expressive arts.

The current technical framework is one size fits all. As a result, it creates tensions in some curriculum areas. To answer your question, Ms Dunbar, the work that we are doing will help with that.

One thing that has come out of all the work that we have done over the past 24 months—particularly the pilot curriculum reviews, because

we tested a lot before we started to roll out the overall programme—is that teachers were really clear that they did not want a prescriptive curriculum. They did not want a system that you might find in Singapore or Korea. However, at the same time, they did not want the complete autonomy that they have now. They valued autonomy and local decision making, but they wanted more clarity about what children need to know, do and understand at those developmentally appropriate times. The term that we use internally, which seems to have landed quite well with the groups, is that we are trying to develop a curriculum that has clarity but the flexibility to take on board children's needs and the local context, which is, of course, vastly varied across Scotland.

David Macluskey: I concur with what Ollie Bray said. There has been interesting engagement with professionals across Scotland as we have developed the curriculum. On Ollie's point about the balance between prescription and autonomy, we want to avoid being in complete reaction to what has gone before, do we not? Otherwise, we will just end up as a pendulum that swings from one side to the other. However, it was clear that people wanted more clarity. We could agree on some things nationally, but other things would be dependent upon local context. That has been teased out in the work.

One of the lessons from previous experience concerns the progression framework and what is happening with its delivery. In the past, local authorities have tended to do that themselves, but we do not need 32 of those frameworks—we need one for each curriculum area; that makes perfect sense. That is the building block for the curriculum: it is about what is actually happening in the classroom.

09:45

As Ollie Bray said, there is the big idea at the top, and that feeds into a more conceptual understanding, but the layer below that is what actually happens. We will have much more clarity around that in the draft technical framework that we will see in June. The message has been not only that that is welcome, but that, given that around 1,600 practitioners across Scotland—I think; Ollie Bray might know the specific number—have been involved in developing it, there is a sense of shared ownership of it in moving ahead. That feels like a more positive place to be.

Dr Bloomer: In a democratic society, a well-run education system has a limited amount of genuinely strategic national policy and widespread autonomy at school level, so that is what we want to achieve. We await the publication of the framework that Ollie Bray talked about to see whether that is what we are going to get, but that underpins your question as to what we should be aiming for.

Andy Harvey: I think that the framework will bring more consistency. It goes back to the problems with the present arrangement. For more than 20 years, there has been an accretion of competing priorities that have just fallen on teachers and schools, and nothing is ever removed. Teachers use the Es and Os—there are hundreds of them—to plan the learning—

Jackie Dunbar: Sorry—they use what?

Andy Harvey: The experiences and outcomes—sorry; I am slipping into jargon.

Jackie Dunbar: Sorry—you have to keep it simple for me; I do not do acronyms.

Andy Harvey: Apologies. Teachers refer to and use the experiences and outcomes—the Es and Os; there are hundreds of them, and there are more benchmarks as well. It is really confusing, and it has been a struggle for classroom teachers, in particular in primary school where they cover all the curricular areas and cross-curricular themes, to cover the curriculum meaningfully in the time available. It is quite clear to the EIS that the process must lead to less, rather than more. It must be simpler and clearer, and it must assist with providing greater consistency and clarity at the transition points when young people are moving on.

What we do not want is a list of additional prescriptive attainment rungs that young people have to achieve. It is important that the framework is about looking at progress, which informs young people's next steps.

Jackie Dunbar: When you talk about looking at progress, I presume that you mean for the individual pupil.

Andy Harvey: Yes.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I thank everyone for the explanations. I am going to ask a technical question, which I think will be aimed mainly at Ollie Bray. What does Education Scotland mean by "hierarchical" and "horizontal" subjects, and how will the technical frameworks be different for different subjects while retaining coherence across the curriculum?

Ollie Bray: That is a good question. I will partly repeat what I said before. One way to explain it would be that young people engage and progress in the different curricular areas in different ways, depending on the structure of knowledge and skills. An example might be the way that young people learn mathematics and science. We would want to put in place certain building blocks, and want a young person to be secure on those before

they move to the next stage to understand the next concepts. We would refer to that as developing vertical knowledge. In other subjects, such as the expressive arts and even some aspects of literature, art and design, they can learn some—not all—of the concepts in any order, but they will reach the same end point as a result. You do not have to sequence the learning, if you like. Young people have to cover the learning by the time that they get to a certain point in their career. Does that make sense?

Bill Kidd: Yes.

Ollie Bray: As I have mentioned, at the moment, we think about there being four levels in curriculum for excellence. That is slightly strange, because there are actually five levels, as there is an early level part of it. We have the early level and the first, second, third and fourth levels. All the experiences, outcomes and benchmarks, which people currently use to plan learning, are put together into each of those buckets. We have been producing draft materials and we have already shared some of them in mathematics, which we are currently testing. Mathematics would be a vertical subject, so the draft materials are quite specific about the order in which young people should engage with the knowledge and skills.

I will use expressive arts as an example. You might expect that the order will not be specified in the June technical framework, but it will be grouped as a level. One of our defining principles, which I have already mentioned, is to ensure that the technical framework is adaptable for the different sectors, early years, primary and secondary. We also want to ensure that it is adaptable for the different curriculum areas. We accept that the eight curriculum areas are important and they are especially important in secondary schools, because that is how they are structured. However, if all the materials arrived as individual curriculum areas in primary schools, that would increase their workload. We are considering how we can repackage that material in a different way so that it is more appropriate for the different sectors.

We have been thinking a lot about that, as David Macluskey has already hinted at. We have been doing some of the thinking, but Education Scotland is the facilitator. We have been engaging with the profession and have worked with those who work with children and young people every day in order to help us to develop the strategies that we hope will make the materials land well in the classroom so that they are more appropriate going forward.

Andy Harvey: We are supportive of what Ollie Bray has described. It is an enormous challenge to make it workable, particularly in the primary sector where teachers have a full spectrum of responsibilities. This will not be the first time that the committee has heard about the independent research that shows that, on average, Scottish teachers are working in excess of 11-and-a-half hours more per week than they are contracted or paid for, which is a symptom of something that is seriously structurally wrong in education. If there is an ambition to declutter the curriculum and strip out much of the bureaucracy, planning and documentation, there must also be a real-terms reduction in the huge number of things that schools are expected to cover. If the same workload is packaged in a different way, that would not be acceptable to the teaching profession. We are hoping that the outputs of the CIC and some of the work that Ollie Bray has described will lead to decluttering and, to some extent, address the workload challenges that the teaching profession is facing. Ultimately, that will impact our young people and children.

Bill Kidd: Do you think that Education Scotland's proposal will benefit teachers in their education of children?

Andy Harvey: I think that it will be better than what we have now but, ultimately, it needs to be properly resourced and teachers need to have the time to engage with it. That is why I am saying that it is mission-critical for the system to start a discussion about how we support the change in approach by providing a programme of INSET days, which would give teachers the time to engage with the change. In the past, we have tended to grant INSET days at the last minute when there has been a reform, but there is a timeline for these changes that would allow us the opportunity to place INSET days at a time that would allow for effective leverage of the opportunities.

Bill Kidd: Would teachers have to learn a new way of doing things, or would it fit into work that they are already doing anyway?

Andy Harvey: I point out that what we are talking about will not necessarily change pedagogy—actual teaching—but, as Ollie Bray said, it is one of the key tools that teachers use to plan. There are also spin-offs such as the progression framework, so there is a significant task for teachers. The change will involve revisiting the aims of the curriculum, and it will support some of our wider ambitions throughout the curriculum, for those aged three to 18.

Bill Kidd: That makes sense. Thank you for those answers.

The Convener: The suggestion relating to INSET dates seems to be very straightforward and sensible. Mr Bray, in your answers to my questions at the beginning of the evidence session, you mentioned that certain dates are immovable and

that you have to plan ahead, which is perhaps why progress cannot go at a quicker pace. Is Mr Harvey's suggestion about INSET dates on your radar? Ultimately, who is responsible for INSET dates? Does Education Scotland stipulate when they should be, or can individual local authorities choose when to have them? What is the plan in that regard?

Ollie Bray: David Macluskey can correct me if I am wrong, but all local authorities have five INSET days over the course of a year. We are working with ADES on different programmes of support that might be able to be provided as part of local authorities' existing in-service days. However, it is acknowledged that that will probably not be enough for a new curriculum. My understanding is that additional in-service days are being considered but that no decision has yet been made.

The Convener: Mr Macluskey, who can make the decision? Could the council in Moray, where I live with my two boys—one is at primary school and the other will be going this summer—say that it needed to double the number of in-service days or add another couple? Could that number be different from the numbers in neighbouring Aberdeenshire Council and Highland Council?

David Macluskey: At the moment, the five INSET days are set at the behest of individual local authorities, depending on their individual school years. We are going through an exercise with Perth and Kinross Council in that regard, and a lot of factors feed into such decisions.

ADES believes that an additional two INSET days, as Ollie Bray said, at this stage in the curriculum improvement cycle would be welcome. In fact, they would probably be essential in helping us to get to grips with the significant change that is coming. There would be strength in providing some coherence in the timing of the INSET days, because, as we discussed with Ollie Bray and his team recently, that would create opportunities to hold bigger events involving colleagues from various local authorities, given that we are looking to roll out a national programme. We would welcome that approach, which Ollie Bray is trying to progress.

The Convener: I have picked up that everyone thinks that extra INSET days would be welcome and would be needed, but I do not know how that would work. There are five at the moment. Would there be seven in the future, and would the dates be the same for all local authorities? Mr Macluskey, you have suggested that that would be the way to do it, so that bigger groups could come together. However, given that the school year would have been planned out, might some local authorities think that it would not be right for their schools and staff to take in-service days at the same time as schools in other local authority areas?

David Macluskey: From the point of view of ADES, the earlier a decision is made on any additionality, the easier it will be to plan.

Andy Harvey: My understanding is that there are regulations around the issue, but I will cut to the chase: in our view, political leadership is required. The Government should be required to make the decision and to progress the necessary collaboration to implement it. If there was the political will, that could happen.

The Convener: Why are we sat here, in March, with a panel of education witnesses saying that this is needed but with no one able to tell me, as the convener, or anyone who is watching this evidence session how it will be delivered?

Andy Harvey: I might be speaking outwith my professional ambit, but we have written to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to ask her to take the necessary steps, in collaboration with local authorities, to make it happen.

Dr Bloomer: Under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, the cabinet secretary has the power to vary the length of the school year, so she could agree to the kind of reduction that we are talking about.

The Convener: We have seen no progress on that to date.

Mr Harvey, roughly, when did you write to the cabinet secretary? Did you do so recently?

Andy Harvey: Yes, I think that it was in the past month to six weeks. The response that we received was that no decision has been made.

The Convener: I am guessing that we need to decide this pretty quickly. If you got a positive response to your letter, ADES and others could start planning, and the 32 local authorities and Education Scotland could work with them on what they would deliver. You need that sooner rather than later.

10:00

Andy Harvey: It is important that the first outputs of the project hit the system at the end of June. That is the timeline. Thereafter, there is quite a short order of action points that need to be met. The benefit is that we have that timeline. Unlike situations in the past, there would be an opportunity to strategise and ensure that the requisite time is identified and located at appropriate points where it could be best used.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): I refer members to my entry in the register of members'

interests: I used to be on the commission on school reform when I was an East Lothian councillor several years ago; I was also an advisory board member with Enlighten, which was Reform Scotland at the time.

We have heard about the aims of reform and talked about the changes that are being proposed. I want to talk a bit more about the process itself, which involved a wide range of stakeholders, including teachers. How will it ensure that outputs, approaches and names in the updated curriculum are well understood and accepted across the whole profession? I think that that will be key. I come to Ollie Bray first.

Ollie Bray: There are a couple of things there. I was not involved in the development of CFE, although I was involved in its implementation at the school level, and the way that we are going about developing the technical framework this time around feels very different from how we have done it previously. It is highly practitioner focused. For example, whenever we have a co-design group that is writing curriculum, we have a rule that out of every four people in the room, at least three are practitioners—people who have contemporary classroom experience. The figure that David Macluskey quoted came from that. More than 1,500 classroom practitioners and setting leaders have been involved in that work. The way that things have been generated in itself gives us buy-in across the system. We are trying to get that balance between something that is nationally led and, at the same time, something that has good bottom-up momentum and good buy-in across the system, which is always really tricky. We are trying to make that work, and that is one of the ways in which we are doing it.

Paul McLennan: The curriculum will probably look slightly different in different parts of Scotland, as it must reflect local issues. Ollie Bray mentioned the practitioner point of view. I will come to David Macluskey for the ADES point of view on the same question. Also, how is that process implemented across the various local authorities?

David Macluskey: The job of ADES is to bring directors and other local authority staff, and then school staff, together in that shared space, where appropriate. With colleagues from ADES, we have run a number of joint sessions for people below director level who are part of the implementation in local authorities. That has led a good number of headteacher sessions, practitioner sessions and school leader sessions in individual local authorities, and there has been a bit of joining up of local authorities where we have regional improvement collaboratives. There are economies of scale around that—Ollie's team, for example, is relatively small.

The job of people at director level in a local authority is to help people in the system to get the message in a digestible way, so that people feel that they are involved and part of that co-creation. That work has been on-going. Andy Harvey mentioned the workload; we are giving that to them in a way that is digestible, not overwhelming, understandable and applicable.

A lot of our work has been at local authority level, ensuring that people do not panic, quite frankly, and do not worry unnecessarily but are sighted on the co-creation if they feel that they have something to give, and that they understand that they will be supported when the implementation comes down the line. That is a delicate balance.

As an example—and I am sure that I am no different from others in my position—one of our three education improvement plan priorities will be about curriculum development. We are encouraging all our schools and settings to make curriculum development a priority. That might look different in different schools and settings, and it might even look different in different local authorities. We are doing long-overdue work on our senior phase, so we do not need to wait for the technical framework to come out to improve our curriculum, because the principles remain the same. That is the message that we are trying to put out.

There is a thing about the curriculum improvement cycle: the aspiration is that it delivers the curriculum for excellence that we wanted. I was an English teacher previously—a practitioner in a school, like Ollie Bray. There are plenty of people in the system with long memories of what we perhaps did not get quite right last time, so we need to ensure that that does not happen this time round.

Paul McLennan: Andy Harvey, I will come to you now, because David Macluskey made the point that this is fed down right through the school, and if there is going to be curriculum reform, there must be buy-in from everybody involved. You touched on the issue of work balance, so how do you see the involvement of your members in the process? If we do not have buy-in at the start, it will be incredibly difficult to implement the change.

Andy Harvey: Absolutely. We cannot de-clutter the curriculum if we are going to simultaneously overload the workforce. There are a lot of hearts and minds to be won on that. There are a lot of positives about the CIC, but workload is a deal breaker for a lot of teachers. I do not want to rehearse the arguments about the INSET days, but they are important because it is not about teachers engaging after school on an individual professional learning basis but rather teams of

professionals—learning communities, from director to headteacher to individual classroom teachers and support staff—getting a collective understanding of what this is all about. That makes it really important that time is allocated for this work. I go back to the point about a sense of ownership and the importance of ensuring that staff from all sectors are released from school for that work and that there is capacity in the system for that, because those voices are really significant if we are to have a cohesive output. I am sorry for using the word "cohesive". [*Laughter*.]

Dr Bloomer: I do not have much to add, except to say that, traditionally, we have not done implementation terribly well. One of the reasons for that is that we have not taken account of the teacher workload dimension sufficiently carefully. It is therefore important that the process is structured in a way that makes the workload manageable and gets teacher opinion positively engaged in a way that has not always characterised similar programmes of change in the past.

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): I will follow on from the point about teachers' views of the curriculum improvement cycle. We have heard a lot this morning about what teachers feel that they need in order to engage properly, and we have covered in detail the point about INSET days and so. However, I have spoken to some teachers who feel some trepidation about ensuring that we get this right. I spoke to a number of religious, moral and philosophical studies teachers, particularly about the Es and Os and some of the challenges in the denominational and non-denominational sectors. There is a sense of anticipation about the opportunity but also some trepidation. Does Mr Harvey want to reflect on that and say what more we can do to give confidence to rank-and-file teachers about their role in this?

Andy Harvey: Anyone involved in education will have a sense of trepidation whenever there is reform. Part of that is natural and part of it is informed by a lot of past reforms—past errors have been alluded to—so I understand those feelings. We are discussing the CIC, but there is an awful lot of stuff in the system that, although related to the CIC, actually needs to be addressed. The CIC offers the possibility of acting as a catalyst in that regard.

I mentioned the inspection and the cottage industry of quality assurance, external scrutiny and top-down accountability that that engenders. There are also data-driven pressures on schools, which distort education performance. As David Macluskey referred to earlier, we would see that as something that is not necessarily deliberate, but inadvertently part of the system, and it drives the system. We need to ensure that the CIC is an opportunity to address that, but there are many other things that are tangential to it that also need to be addressed.

I suspect that when you speak to teachers, you will hear an element of trepidation about those things. Ultimately, Ken Muir's report spoke about the need not only for structural change, but for that to be accompanied by cultural change. The CIC in its philosophy and the philosophy of curriculum for excellence offer opportunities to realise that, but that requires specific action.

Paul O'Kane: Do you think that teachers are scunnered?

Andy Harvey: Absolutely—what a great word to describe how the teaching profession feels. At the same time, however, I would also say that teachers are by nature very positive, however they react. Ultimately, they are working with young people and they want the best for those young people, but they need the support of the system, and the resources and the time.

Paul O'Kane: I do not want to seem flippant, but that is the sense that I get when I talk to professionals: there is a balance of feeling frustration but also a sense of opportunity.

It was interesting to hear what you said about the tangential issues that sit around the CIC. When Mr Rennie, Mr Briggs and I were at the EIS manifesto launch, a contributor from the floor said, "If, as a primary teacher, I'm given another thematic week to deliver, I'm just gonnae go mad. I'm trying to engage in a curriculum improvement cycle, look at my Es and Os and do all that, and then I keep getting these thematic weeks." Those weeks are supposed to enhance the experience of young people, but they actually clutter the landscape to some extent. Would you recognise that that is something that we need to look at in tandem with the CIC?

Andy Harvey: I would say that that is at the top line. I think that the CIC will play a role in addressing that, but we need to keep in mind the idea of decluttering. That must mean doing less, but doing it better and in a way that is aligned with the principles of the curriculum. What you have just described is characteristic of the experience of all teachers. We have talked about the 11.5 hours of excess work, which involves teachers sitting at the coffee table at night with piles of work, planning, or sitting at the laptop at weekends. We often hear—sometimes from teachers' families, in fact—about how difficult it is. The message goes around that teaching is an onerous profession, but actually it can be a very inspiring one.

Paul O'Kane: Does anyone else want to offer a reflection on any of that?

David Macluskey: The discussion about decluttering the curriculum is important, but it is also important that the curriculum is not then reduced and that it does not become excessively narrow. That is to be guarded against as well. One of the key measures of performance is how children are doing in literacy and numeracy, and that is right and proper, but we have to find something that allows the proper breadth of curriculum to be delivered and which does so in a way that is not overly bureaucratic. We hear the phrase "cottage industries" a lot from teachers, particularly primary teachers. It is about getting a balance.

In leading the curriculum and qualifications network for ADES, we come together as local authority officers, and even within that network, Ollie Bray and his team will come and talk to us. People want to be involved in the development phase, but there is always a point when we feel a bit of panic and think "We're not quite there yet with that—we're still discussing it." We need to be mindful—to pick up on the question from Mr McLennan—of how and when we engage with professionals so that they feel appropriately engaged but, as you suggest, not overwhelmed.

Paul O'Kane: I will move the discussion on slightly into a different area; I may be about to open—or reopen—a can of worms. During the passage of the Education (Scotland) Act 2016, there was a wide discussion about the role of the chief education officer and statutory powers. However, those were not defined with regard to what further role the chief education officer might have in this area, for example. Without relitigating, if you like, much of that, I would be keen to get a sense of whether you think that there is a wider role for the chief education officer in this space at a local level. I am not asking you to define what that would be today, but should we be having that debate once again, in the light of wider curriculum improvement? I appreciate that the witnesses may take different views.

10:15

David Macluskey: I suppose that I will have to go first in responding to that question, being a chief education officer. Yes, it is important that the levers to make change are situated appropriately. ADES is having an on-going discussion on that at a variety of fora. You mentioned the 2016 act, and it is part of that discussion.

Without being glib, I would say that the idea of partnership is really important for us. For me in my role as chief education officer, it is crucial that ADES, with its cohesive function, has a seat at the table so that we can engage with Scottish Government colleagues. In this instance, crucially, we are engaging on the roll-out and delivery of this work on the basis of equality with colleagues from Education Scotland. We feel that our voices, as directors or chief education officers, are heard. That has been one of the big positives of the curriculum improvement cycle. I was in the classroom the last time that I looked at curriculum reform, so I cannot say whether that happened then.

Paul O'Kane: Dr Bloomer, do you have a view on whether we need to revisit much of the debate around the role of the chief education officer in local authorities, with a direct read-across to the curriculum?

Dr Bloomer: I would see it in a slightly wider context. It used to be the habit to have fundamental legislation on Scottish education at intervals of 15 years or so. There were base acts in 1946, 1962 and 1980, but there has not been one since. In my view, that is a misguided approach. We need another piece of fundamental legislation.

This directly touches on your concern. The way in which education was managed in Scotland in 1980 is very different from the way in which it is managed in practice today. The 1980 act is almost all about the duties, responsibilities and powers of local authorities—an organisation like Education Scotland does not get a mention. We are operating in a situation where the law describes something that no longer exists, and there is no regulation of what actually does exist, or of the place of the chief education officer within it.

My answer to your question is yes—we do need to look again at that debate, but we need to do so in the broader context of the need for a consolidating act to succeed the 1980 act and roll up the multitude of pieces of legislation that have been enacted since 1980.

Paul O'Kane: I dare say that that will be on the agenda for the Parliament in the next session, and perhaps for our successor committee. It is useful to have that on the record this morning.

The Convener: Since Mr O'Kane has opened this can of worms, I will ask whether we need 32 directors of education in Scotland.

David Macluskey: We have 32 local authorities in Scotland, so in that sense, the answer is simply yes. I would say, however—

The Convener: We used to have eight police forces, eight chief constables and numerous deputy and assistant chief constables. A decision was taken that, despite that historical precedent, things could change.

I was a councillor for 10 years, and I worked alongside several directors of education. Back in my time in local government, I wondered whether

we needed to replicate that role in every single local authority. Much of what we have been discussing today is Scotland-wide. Why did Moray need a director of education when we were cutting the number of teaching assistants and suchlike? We were always struggling to meet the education budget, yet we had a director of education, and so did Highland, Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City and all of the 32 local authorities.

David Macluskey: The revolution since that time has been that not all local authorities have a director of education any more. I have a long, convoluted job title, but the bit in brackets at the end is "chief education officer". That is the key thing. Traditionally, directorship posts have perhaps been wider—education and children's services, for example. A lot of local authorities are evolving their management framework and, in light of the fact that we have 32 local authorities, perhaps posts at directorship level are not appropriate. However, while we deliver education at local authority level—and we have that role within the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities—having somebody statutorily responsible for the delivery of education within the local authority is crucial.

The Convener: Somebody else will become responsible if we do not have an individual director of education for each of the 32 local authorities. In the same way, we no longer have chief constables for Grampian, Tayside or Glasgow; we still have people who are responsible, but efficiencies were made. I wonder why you—and, I assume, ADES—do not agree that there is an ability to make efficiencies in that area.

David Macluskey: If we are getting into local government reform, that is different.

The impact and context of my role in Perth and Kinross are different from what existed in the broader Tayside region. I have more than 3,000 employees. My role, as regards its span and scope, allows me the correct balance of breadth and ability to influence change within that local authority. Of course, I would say that; otherwise, why would I do my job every day in the way that I do it?

Ultimately, if change comes down the line, we will all adapt to and change with it. However, there is strength in the current balance between locality and breadth, which is always a dichotomy and a dilemma.

Paul McLennan: Again, I can speak from experience. From 2010 to 2012, I was the leader of East Lothian Council. We talked about a shared service between our council and Midlothian Council. Key were the legalities that were involved in the issue of a single entity, which prevented it from happening before there was a change of administration. A Labour-Tory council came in and did not go for it, but the principle had been established of a shared service, which included a director of education. It would have been a true shared service between two local authorities.

That was at the time of the Christie commission. I am interested in what would stop us from doing it now. David Macluskey, I think that you talked about where we are, and balance of breadth and locality, but what would stop us from doing that now? I will open it up if we have time, convener.

We have lost the principles of the Christie commission. At all levels—national and local government—the Christie commission, which was about shared services, was incredibly important. Mine was a real live experience about the route that we tried to go down to embed the principles of the Christie commission.

David Macluskey: When it comes to my responsibilities within the local government organisation, I am accountable to the elected members of Perth and Kinross Council, who, ultimately, are accountable to the residents of Perth and Kinross. There would be a challenge in terms of our governance and the way in which we operate as an education—

Paul McLennan: East Lothian Council was led by the SNP and Midlothian Council was led by Labour. Both local authorities had approved the proposal. It had gone through local governance. Again, I know that there would need to be political ambition from local authorities to do such a thing, but it had the political governance for going ahead.

I am talking from an education point of view, probably, and it comes back to the point that the convener mentioned, but why do we need 32 directors? Alternatively—I have not discussed this with the cabinet secretary—can we look at something like that live example from 2012?

David Macluskey: Much of that is not in my gift or experience. It is an experience that you have had. This morning, I speak from my experience in ADES, my role in the curriculum and qualifications network and my leadership of education and learning in Perth and Kinross. That is probably about as much as I can say.

Paul McLennan: I understand your limitations in that regard. Does anyone else want to comment?

Dr Bloomer: There have been two instances of that kind of partnership—when I was at Clackmannanshire, it had a similar arrangement with Stirling—and it is significant that neither of them lasted all that long. The fact is that, at the present moment, education is managed by local authorities. We have 32 local authorities and are

therefore almost certain to have 32 directors of education.

Again, we could look at the issue in a somewhat wider context. This Parliament has now existed for 27 years. It represents the most significant change in the governance of Scotland in an enormously long time, yet it has not looked at all—other than in relation to the police and the fire and rescue services—at how Scotland is managed below the level of the Parliament, and there is a good case to do so. It is not a question of simply looking at whether we have too many directors of education; it is a question of looking at how public affairs generally are managed in a situation in which an organisation exists that did not exist in the past.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I will carry on with the can of worms that Paul O'Kane opened.

Dr Bloomer, with regard to the suggestion of introducing another education bill in the next parliamentary session, would how we deliver education locally not be part of the debate that would take place during the bill's proceedings? The matter has been part of the other debates that we have had in the Parliament. Surely, when we look at it, we should look for a statutory way in which there can be regionalisation and still be democratic accountability. We used to do that with the eight fire and police boards.

Dr Bloomer: I would think so. There are two reasons to pass a new consolidation bill to replace the plethora of legislation that has built up since the 1980 act.

First, in a democratic society, it should be possible for a citizen to find out the law in relation to education. That generally means that they should be able to get hold of and read a single source, which is not possible at present. We have an act that is 46 years old, and limitless pieces of other legislation have succeeded it. In order to state with confidence the law in relation to some aspect of education, an interested citizen has to flick through enormous numbers of different pieces of legislation.

The other reason why it would be useful to introduce a fundamental bill in the next parliamentary session is the one that you gave: it provides an opportunity to reconsider the fundamentals. That has not been done for 46 years, which is a long time. Therefore, I agree with what you have said.

George Adam: Thank you.

Willie Rennie: Curriculum reform will be stalled, and could grind to a halt, if we have industrial action. Some of the key players are here as witnesses today, and we could solve the problem right now around reducing teacher contact time and the dispute that has been going on for years. Can Mr Macluskey and Mr Harvey give us an update on where we are on the potential for industrial action?

Andy Harvey: No. While we appreciate the question, Mr Rennie, and while I can confirm that everyone is determined to avoid the disruption that is caused by industrial action—I am sure that David Macluskey agrees—I think that it would be better to leave that discussion to the parties in the room in which they are discussing those matters and, I hope, aiming to reach a resolution, rather than have it here.

The whole issue of teacher contact time is fundamental to curriculum reform. If you are party to some of the issues—such as teacher preparation and correction time—I will clarify that the situation is not like it was in the past, when a teacher might go in in the morning, put some stuff up on the blackboard, hand out some jotters, take in the jotters and correct them. The planning process is much more dynamic.

Now, 43 per cent of our young people in mainstream classes have additional support needs. Teachers have to plan for a huge variety of complex and additional support needs, as well as other issues in the class. We understand much better the importance of feedback in relation to individualised progression conversations that we have with young people and so on.

The proof of the pudding is in the fact that teachers are working an average of 11.5 hours in excess of their contract. That is an indication of some of the issues involved, but I think that it would be better just to keep our fingers crossed, hope that there is a resolution and leave the discussion for the people who have been assigned to take it on.

10:30

David Macluskey: I agree: we all hope that there will be a resolution. I do not want to comment on it, but, for the good of everybody, we hope that we reach a resolution, while we consider where we are.

I also endorse the point that there is no doubt about the complexity of the educational landscape and the fact that it is different to what it was even 20 years ago. That is the meat of what we have talked about this morning, is it not? That means, necessarily, that what we see as a classroom experience will also be different, and we need to take that into consideration.

Willie Rennie: It is about more than hope and crossing fingers, if you do not mind me saying so. The dispute has been going on for far too long, and the ballot was overwhelmingly in favour of industrial action, which speaks to the mood in the

profession. I hope that those watching who are in a position to make decisions fully understand how important it is to resolve the dispute.

Do you want to come back on that, Mr Harvey?

Andy Harvey: I absolutely endorse that point and what Mr O'Kane said earlier about the level of scunner, which is a reflection of a working reality.

Ultimately, teachers want changes in order to improve outcomes for young people. We are not going to achieve excellent education when we have a profession that is absolutely worn out, so we need to use any change as part of improving outcomes for young people. We hope that a resolution will be attained—that is certainly the view of EIS.

Willie Rennie: I will move on to the new Qualifications Scotland. Previously, the concern was about a sudden transition into the senior phase, with the two-term dash—a sudden change of culture, from curriculum for excellence, with a broader more inclusive approach to skills right across the piece, to a race to get everyone prepared and get the qualifications done.

What is your interpretation of the new qualifications body? In the past, the qualifications body has seemed to be a law unto itself, and, at the end of the day, it decided what happened. Has that changed with the new body? If you think that it has, what evidence do you have for that?

David Macluskey: Ollie Bray will have more concrete details. The cultural shift that you have spoken about is something that I can speak to in relation to our engagement at ADES with the new Qualifications Scotland and some of its senior office bearers. It feels markedly different with regard to partnership and collaboration as we move ahead—not only with professionals in the system but with learners, employers and the wider world out there. It feels like a more optimistic place to be. It also feels as though we are in a more optimistic place with regard to the evolution of the curriculum improvement cycle, but I will let Ollie talk about that.

Ollie Bray: I also feel really optimistic. The working relationship between Education Scotland and Qualifications Scotland is really positive and has been for the past 12 months, since Qualifications Scotland became Qualifications Scotland—if that makes sense. I have not articulated that particularly well.

To provide reassurance, when we are talking about the development of the curriculum and qualifications, it is important to remember that we are all in the same room and that we are discussing that. We now have checks and balances in place, which I mentioned in answer to the previous question, in relation to building out from the curriculum into the qualifications phase, so we hope that that will not be as much of a leap as previously.

I mentioned trying to align CFE fourth level and SCQF level 4, and Qualifications Scotland is involved in those discussions. I also mentioned that, with regard to the development of new qualifications and of the curriculum, we are hoping to have some of the same practitioners involved—rather, we are not hoping; we will have the same practitioners in the room to work on that.

Another thing, which I did not mention in my previous answer, is about what we expect when we produce the draft materials in June and the final materials next year. We expect the materials for the technical framework to be presented in the same way as the final replacement for the national qualifications. That is not just about presentation; it is also about practitioners who are planning their learning over the BGE and going into the senior phase, so that clear progression is also available in relation to the guidance. That all feels genuinely positive.

Willie Rennie: There was a big gap previously, with a sudden change of culture from BGE to the senior phase. How have you closed that gap? Has the culture from the old SQA infected BGE, or is it the other way around? How have the two different approaches and cultures been brought together?

Ollie Bray: One of the key points about reform, which has been mentioned in a number of independent reports, is that the curriculum needs to drive qualifications, not the other way around.

We have already mentioned the backwashing effect. As we have carried out our work over the past 24 months, we have had that in mind. We know that nearly all young people will take some sort of qualification when they get into the senior phase, which means that that work needs to be done in partnership.

As soon as the work started, we sat down with Qualifications Scotland to think about who should be in the room and what the plan should be. We ensured that we had representatives of the SQA and, now, Qualifications Scotland as part of what we call our core and collaboration groups, which are part of the curriculum design. Sometimes, their role is as observers, because they might not be as interested in some of the work on early years and primary education, for example, but they are certainly in the room and make contributions when we talk about work that is going on in secondary schools, including in relation to the senior phase.

Willie Rennie: Will we see an improvement in performance as measured in Scotland and internationally? If so, when will we see it? Will we

see it within one year or two years? What will be the outcome of the work?

Ollie Bray: If we think about the theory of change, we hope that, if we are clear about what children and young people need to know, do and understand, and if that provides better building blocks from broad general education into the senior phase, learning will not be repeated, as it sometimes is at the moment. That will allow more time for quality teaching and learning, more time for recall and more time for practice. The theory of change suggests that, as a result, examination results should improve over time, because the systems in place should be more robust.

Your question about international measures is important. We have already talked a bit about PISA. Like Keir Bloomer, I am quite pleased that we have also re-entered TIMSS and PIRLS, because that gives us different data sets to look at.

To provide a bit of reassurance to the committee, I note that, as part of the work on the curriculum improvement cycle, we have looked quite deeply into what some of the international measures measure. It is not about teaching to international measures, because there are other important things in Scottish education. However, having dived into the detail, we noticed that, in relation to Scotland's performance in mathematics, Scottish learners do not do particularly well on space and shape at the moment. Therefore, when you see the draft materials that will be published in June, you will notice, as you would expect, a focus on space and shape, because we have recognised that we need to give specific advice and guidance on that.

Although I cannot promise that there will be an improvement in national measures over the next year or two, I hope that, once the new curriculum framework is in place and is more aligned to national measures and our Scottish values, we will see change over time, and I hope that it will be significant change.

David Macluskey: One of the issues with the original curriculum for excellence documentation was that it stopped at level 4. That led to much of the disjointedness, because that left what happened at levels 5 and 6 in the hands of the Scottish Qualifications Authority, so there was a bit of a void and supposition in that regard. One of the key concrete things that will create a better transition will be the extension of the curriculum improvement cycle into levels 5 and 6, because the qualifications framework and the assessment of it will be based on the curriculum, rather than the other way around, as Ollie Bray said.

Willie Rennie: How long do you think it will be before we see tangible improvements based on international measures?

David Macluskey: I guess that it will depend on the measure that we use. We have talked about three different measures, which will all have different outputs at different times.

In relation to the new curriculum finally being assimilated with Qualifications Scotland, 2031 is the end of the timeline that we are working to. Much of this involves a lengthy process, and we want to ensure that leavers in 2031 have been through the entirety of the revised curriculum that we are looking at.

Andy Harvey: On Willie Rennie's first question, I agree with David Macluskey that our interactions with Qualifications Scotland have been healthy, positive and open. However, it is wise to take a step back, because the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. We still do not know a lot of the details about the committees and charters that are provided for in the Education (Scotland) Act 2025. As representatives of the teaching profession, we want to know the extent to which the new organisation will act and how close the representative voice of teachers will be to the heart of decision making.

On a wider level, the gap that David Macluskey mentioned is still pretty massive, so we need to join things up. That is a huge task, and Qualifications Scotland has its own purview.

Willie Rennie asked when things will change. We are hopeful that things will change, but I reiterate that the two-term dash still exists, so there is a huge bit of work to do. In many ways, the central plank of the independent review of qualifications and assessment has been untouched or meddled with, so we still have the two-term dash, which significantly distorts the curriculum and teaching and learning in the senior phase.

Willie Rennie: While we are talking about the new qualifications body, do you want to comment on the representation of ordinary classroom teachers? I am told that only one such teacher is represented. Are you familiar with the representation on the Qualifications Scotland board?

Andy Harvey: I believe that there is more than one teacher, but I am not au fait with the specific details. We still do not know the composition of the teacher interest committee.

We are taking a step back and taking a longer view before coming to a decision on how effective the transformation has been.

Willie Rennie: Dr Bloomer, do you have anything to contribute to this discussion?

Dr Bloomer: I do not think so.

The Convener: Thank you all very much. We have gone a bit over our time, because we sometimes went off on tangents, but the evidence session has been helpful for the committee, and I hope that it has been helpful for the witnesses, too. I am grateful for your time and your answers.

I suspend the meeting to allow for a change of witnesses.

10:42

Meeting suspended.

11:00

On resuming—

The Convener: We will now hear from our second panel of witnesses to discuss progress towards reform of the senior phase qualifications. We are joined by Donna Stewart, chief examiner, and Sarah Brown, senior adviser, at Qualifications Scotland; Kirsty Ayed, president, School Leaders Scotland; and Professor Louise Hayward, professor of educational assessment and innovation at the University of Glasgow, who joins us remotely.

I will begin the questions. I go to you first, Professor Hayward, with a similar question to the one that I put to the first panel of witnesses. We are coming to the end of the current session of Parliament and the current Scottish Government's five-year term in office. What progress, or lack of progress, have you seen in this area over those five years?

Professor Louise Hayward (University of Glasgow): Thank you for the invitation to the committee and for the question. I am really interested in responding to it because, in preparation for the meeting, I sent out a request for examples of things that were happening in the system, and I have been incredibly heartened by the responses that I have received. I will respond to your question at two levels: first, at the level of the national agencies, and secondly, by looking at what is actually happening in schools and classrooms.

I know that you have heard earlier this morning a great deal about what is happening in relation to the curriculum. I think that both Education Scotland and Qualifications Scotland are working hard to change the culture in Scottish education. You have heard a great deal about what is happening in relation to the curriculum improvement cycle and the ways in which Education Scotland has developed ideas from the independent review of qualifications and assessment for how to build capacity in the system by engaging people in the processes of development.

I know that the chief executive of Qualifications Scotland is out every week in schools, trying to get a handle on what is happening on the ground and how people are reacting to ideas. I know that he is very heartened by what he sees in schools across the country, and I think that the establishment of new groups of teachers and learners is another really positive sign of work in progress.

I know that the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership is involved in a range of initiatives. As a practical example, it has just commissioned seven interdisciplinary learning programmes from the Wood Foundation and the futures institute at Dollar academy. There will be seven of those across the country, developing ideas from the IRQA.

However, I was most heartened by the responses that I got from schools and colleges. Schools have recognised that they are not serving all their learners well and so, rather than waiting for policy developments, they have started to take action. In some senses, in some areas, practice is actually leading policy. I will give you just two examples of that.

The first involves working on parities of esteem. The West Partnership of nine local authorities, working with Glasgow city region, is identifying where employment is and building opportunities for young people to link the curriculum opportunities that they have in school with what is available post school. Banff academy has developed a model in which interdisciplinary learning, skills development and applied qualifications are part of a learning profile that pupils are working through.

Schools across the country are in touch with me to share ideas that they have been developing for project learning. External organisations, too, are involved in taking forward ideas—Daydream Believers is one such organisation that I am sure that the committee will have heard of. There are other organisations such as ITZA, which is a partnership of media experts and educationists working with the BBC, Netflix and other bodies to develop pupil-centred materials.

There is a great deal going on—to be honest, there is much more than I had expected to find. We are getting many parts of the jigsaw in place; we now need to ensure that we are working towards all those pieces of the jigsaw coming together to create the picture.

The Convener: What needs to happen to bring those pieces together? Was it a surprise to you that schools are doing their own thing because of the vacuum created by a lack of direction or otherwise by the Government, or is that what you would expect?

Professor Hayward: Governments have to have priorities, and a place to start. When I came to the committee on a previous occasion, my concern was not so much for the longer term, because I think that you can see from what is happening now, and the timeline for progress, that most of the issues that I identified in the IRQA are under consideration and indeed under development.

At that meeting, I raised a concern about young people who are in the system now, and I suppose that that is reflected in what I am hearing from schools: that they, too, are concerned for young people who are going through the system now. Rather than waiting for the longer-term programme, therefore, they are taking action now to ensure that they can serve all the young people as best they can.

The Convener: Would you like to add anything, Ms Ayed?

Kirsty Ayed (School Leaders Scotland): I absolutely agree with what Professor Hayward said. School leaders want to make sure that they are serving their young people as best they can, so they are constantly adapting and looking for new ways to serve them and ensure that they are giving young people the best chance of leaving with the best achievements or attainment that they possibly can, by whatever means they can do that.

Louise Hayward spoke about practice moving ahead of policy, and I think that that is right. The caveat to that would be that some school leaders will have the courage to be able to do that, but where they may be less experienced, that would be a huge consideration, because ultimately schools will still be judged by the same measures as they traditionally have been. At this point, it comes down to the courage of a school leader to be able to do that.

The Convener: Ms Stewart, it will not surprise you, in a session about assessment, that I will go back to an issue that I have regularly raised at the committee—the higher history exam of a couple of years ago. Do you agree with your chief executive, who said that he had concerns about the validity of the exam board's position on higher history in 2024? Was your chief executive right to have those concerns?

Donna Stewart (Qualifications Scotland): From my understanding, the chief executive, when he commented on higher history, was new in his post; he still is relatively new. His approach was to ask whether, if we were in a similar position again, he would explore it in a different way, and he was open to doing that. That is my understanding of his position—anything beyond that on his position would be a question for the chief exec himself.

The Convener: You must have discussed it, though—it was raised in quite a prominent article in *The Herald*. Did you, as the chief examiner, question the chief executive about his position?

Donna Stewart: To be fair, we would all have to ask questions, given what came out of the situation with higher history and the questions that were raised about it. Of course we would consider whether there was a different way of doing this and what we would do differently. I would not be in disagreement with the chief executive on that—that would be absolutely right.

On higher history, we are trying hard to work with other people in the system, including the Scottish Association of Teachers of History and various working groups. History—in its totality, not just higher history—is one of the subjects that we will consider as part of our qualifications reform.

In the past few weeks we have taken on four teachers, who will be seconded to work with us—in particular with Sarah Brown, who is leading our schools engagement team. One of the teachers who are coming in will be a historian, who can support some of that work. That work is moving forward and making progress.

We are strengthening our system and what we do all the time. We are a new organisation, and we are absolutely open to strengthening what we do. As an awarding body, it is our role and our responsibility to do that. I really hope that we do not find ourselves in the same situation again, but it would not be appropriate for us not to consider how to do things differently, especially under the scrutiny that was applied last time. I would not disagree: it would be right to consider the most appropriate or a better approach.

The Convener: Is that an acceptance, in hindsight, that you did not get it right last time?

Donna Stewart: No. As I have said before, at the committee and in many other forums, we absolutely stand by the results of the review that was carried out—and it was peer reviewed.

The Convener: But, as you have said yourself, it is a matter of having a fresh pair of eyes. A new chief executive, relatively new in the job, said that he had concerns about the validity of what the SQA and the new body came back with.

We are looking to the future, too.

Donna Stewart: Yes—100 per cent.

The Convener: This is an issue that I have raised a number of times. It is an important one for that cohort of students, and for their teachers, parents and carers.

If rates in a subject drop 13 percentage points in a year and then rebound the next year, what do

you do? I made this point at the time. When I spoke to the new chief executive and to the chair of the SQA, they did not even expect higher history in 2025 to get back to where it had been in 2023, but it did. They thought that it would climb back up, but not to where it had been pre-2024.

If that happens, what do you do to work out what went wrong or what happened, or to reassure students? Of course, we all hope that that does not happen again—I accept that.

Donna Stewart: Absolutely. First of all, looking to what we might expect to happen with qualifications, that is not a mindset that we would go in with. We have some level of independence in setting assessments and qualifications. It is about demonstrated attainment from learners; it is the learner's performance that we are measuring. To be clear, we do not have any targets or a prediction of what we would expect the qualifications or attainment rates to be. It is important that, as an awarding body, we do not have that. That is the first point: we do not predict or expect a particular result from a qualification.

Regarding the rebound, it is important to recognise that there was a clear action plan on the back of the concerns that were raised about higher history in 2024, with investment in lots of different parts of the system to support teachers of history and to build the confidence of learners going into that subject and in the wider parts of the system. You may anticipate seeing that, with a good level of drive in a particular system, but there is not an expectation or a target that we would achieve.

On the regulation of our qualifications, we are in the process of establishing an expert group on standards, which will involve a range of academics. That is an element of our enhanced governance. An academic from the University of Cambridge will chair that group. That will give us additional reassurance, with that almost external element, in supporting our standards for qualifications.

The Convener: What is the timescale for that? Should that not be up and running by now?

Donna Stewart: We are in the process of establishing that now. The convener of that group has been appointed, and we are in the process of forming it.

The Convener: When will it be formed?

Donna Stewart: I can come back to you on the date and timescales. I am not sure about the exact date. We have agreed that the group will be convened, and I am happy to write to you about the date.

The Convener: Will it be formed before the upcoming exam diet?

Donna Stewart: I do not have a date, so I do not want to speculate—

The Convener: I do not want to be difficult but, as the chief examiner, should you not know that?

11:15

Donna Stewart: I know that we are in place, that we have had conversations and that we have set up a convener. I understand that we are working with other people to form the group. That is the process, but it depends on who comes in and the date at which the agreement is set. I do not have a firm date for when that will be set, but we hope to do that as quickly as we can. As I said, I am happy to write to update you as that progresses.

The Convener: Will the group have a role pre-exams, during exams or post-exams?

Donna Stewart: There is already a system in place for the process of exams. The group will be an additional layer that we put in, with a particular focus on qualifications reform.

As we make changes to our qualifications, it is important that, year on year, there is not any change to their integrity. Year on year, we monitor that. If, when making changes to qualifications, we were to have some concern or wanted to check that we were not damaging or having any negative impact on the integrity of the qualifications, we could say to the group, "This is the approach that we are taking." We would not necessarily go to the group with every question paper, qualification or element; we would go to it on much bigger themes regarding our approach.

For example, in the same way, we would have discussions with Louise Hayward. In general terms, we would say to her, "We are thinking about doing this—does it sound like a good idea?" The group would be a more formal version of that, and we would be able to go to it to talk about our broader approach.

The Convener: I still do not understand why, as the chief examiner, you cannot say whether it is your plan or your intention for the group to be set up before or after the upcoming diet.

Donna Stewart: The setting up of the expert group will not have an impact on the upcoming diet—I can be clear about that. However, I do not have the date to hand on when the group will first convene.

Miles Briggs: Good morning. Thank you for joining us today in the Parliament and online. I do not know whether you saw the previous session, but I want to ask a question in relation to holistic education, which curriculum for excellence is meant to be taking forward. Where does holistic education sit within the development of skills?

Donna Stewart, maybe you could start on that point.

Donna Stewart: A positive thing in the independent review of qualifications and assessment, which was supported by Louise Hayward and which a large part of the system had input into, was a focus on the holistic element of the learner and on celebrating achievements as well as attainment. That is something that I value, not just from my position within the organisation but as a teacher of 25 years, having worked in the classroom with learners.

I heard some of the earlier evidence session on the train in the way in. The point about the separation of skills and knowledge—that they work well together within a holistic approach—is absolutely sound.

On our approach to qualifications as an organisation, our qualifications will assess learners and allow them to demonstrate what they know, what their skills are and what they understand. That has always been and will continue to be a format in the more rounded way in which we assess.

It is important that teachers, learners and lecturers feed into how we develop our qualifications, particularly as we move into qualifications reform. That is because our qualifications are delivered in centres other than schools, such as in colleges and through employers and training providers. It is important that, through the development of our qualifications, we consider what feeds into them.

Although it is important that teachers and learners have a strong voice in that, we must also consider stakeholders with regard to the credibility of our qualifications. For employers, that means asking what skills are required and what we need for Scotland's future, for our economy and for Scotland's social context. It is a question of the skills drivers and what needs to be driven forward in our qualifications in order to make them credible, not just for Scotland but for international mobility.

Therefore, I am absolutely on board with the holistic element.

Miles Briggs: I do not think that anyone will ever disagree with the four capacities in the curriculum for excellence; they are almost a given. Anyone in education should be looking towards being a successful learner, confident individual, responsible citizen and effective contributor. My concern is that employers are saying that the young people who are coming out do not have the skill set, and there are concerns that literacy and numeracy are not being prioritised beyond secondary school. I will bring you in, Professor Hayward, because your review was a big part of looking towards changes in that area. You might want to pick up on the first question as well, but where do you think the Government is with your review?

Professor Hayward: As you know, the review was developed in partnership with employers—international employers, the public sector and small and medium-sized enterprises—and their thinking was highly influential in the development of the approach.

The IRQA came to a position that there must be a very clear line of sight between curriculum assessment and qualifications. Although I totally accept that, from the perspective of what was SQA and is now the new organisation, Qualifications Scotland, knowledge and skills are part of that qualifications process, we found that neither young people nor, indeed, employers saw those in the system.

The model that was developed, which became known as the Scottish diploma of achievement, was structured in a way where the skills that employers and others—such as universities and young people themselves—argued were central to what it is to be an educated Scot, came into not only the programmes of learning, which are the traditional qualifications, but also into project learning, which meant that it was about how you used the knowledge that you had built up in different areas. It was that knowledge and qualities such as the ability to collaborate and to persevere that employers, universities and the wider population believed to be crucial.

As you know, the third part of the diploma was the personal pathway, which recognised not only that it is all the wider learning that goes on beyond classrooms and schools that makes the individual, but also that many young people make poor decisions about what they do next—they go into employment or to college or university because they like a subject or a teacher, which is a fairly superficial way of looking at things. The idea of the personal pathway was to give young people a much deeper insight into the factors that would influence the decisions that they take.

My position would be to reflect what the IRQA said, which is that all three parts must be part of the future of qualifications in Scotland if we are to address the issues that you have raised.

Miles Briggs: In recent weeks, the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) Bill went through its stage 3 process in Parliament. Most of the really good work that I have seen in schools has been around those who are disconnected from their education and are put on to a foundation apprenticeship. That bill abolishes foundation apprenticeships, which I know is a key concern for many members.

Whether or not some of the aspects of your report have been taken forward, do you think that there is a total vision for different models of learning in school, especially for those who will not necessarily be put forward for exams, or is it only piecemeal? A lot of good work is happening with the school-college partnerships, but it is not universal, which is where we are missing a great opportunity. Some of your report, in which you said that you wanted to see that work taken forward, does not really seem to have been prioritised by Government.

Professor Hayward: I would hope that the response is "Perhaps not yet." The work that I referred to previously, which is work that is already going on in schools, and the ways in which not only schools but clusters of local authorities have started to build developments in this area is extremely heartening.

However, if I am interpreting it correctly, the main issue just now is that there needs to be a national vision of a direction of travel. Today, the curriculum and assessment board is looking at a draft vision statement, which will be an important part of what happens. Often, the vision is almost seen as something that is on the periphery—just a nice idea—but, actually, it drives everything.

I am not sure whether you will remember, but, as part of the IRQA report, we articulated a vision, which was to have

"an inclusive and highly regarded Qualifications and Assessment system that inspires learning, values the diverse achievements of every learner in Scotland and supports all learners into the next phase of their lives, socially, culturally and economically."

That is an important vision. The question is: how do we all contribute to it? How do the national agencies contribute? How do schools contribute? The vision is more hard edged than that, though, because that is also the way by which we gauge progress. To what extent is the reform programme inclusive? How would we know that? To what extent is it highly regarded? Who would we have to ask in order to be clear about that? To what extent does it inspire learning? How do we find that out from the learners? Does it value the diverse achievements of every learner? What is the evidence that it does, indeed, deal with every learner, as you have described, and not just some of them? How does it provide support?

The vision is hard edged. It is a statement that everyone follows, and it is also the means by which we can gauge progress as the system develops.

Miles Briggs: That is very helpful. Given that we have two weeks left of this parliamentary session, I think that the successor committee in the next Parliament will pick up on the conversation on the vision. Does anyone else have anything to add?

Kirsty Ayed: The vision that Louise has spoken about is really important. There was also a vision in the national conversation that took place that runs in parallel with that. School leaders across Scotland have absolutely listened to employers, as you suggested earlier, and they have adapted courses to ensure that metacognition is a huge part and that young people are clear on the skills that they are developing so that, in the future, they can articulate that. It is really important for them to be clear on that.

Donna Stewart: I mentioned earlier that our chief executive has been out to a number of schools, colleges, employers and training providers. I have joined him on many of those visits, as has Sarah Brown and other members of the organisation. We have very much seen that different centre types are working with learners who work and learn in different ways and in different environments compared to the experience in the past.

One of the things that is at the heart of what we want to do with qualifications reform—it is only one part of the whole qualifications system, but it is really important, and we hear about it—is about having flexibility and adaptability for the changing learners who are in front of us and for what is required in the system. The qualifications that we have and the qualification change that we want to achieve is ambitious in aiming to meet the needs of the range of learners who are in our system and to provide the flexibility that we believe is not currently there.

Miles Briggs: It is about final outcomes. I have met a lot of young people who have had a great school career and gone to university but are now working in Starbucks here in the capital. The jobs are not there for them. I have also met young people who were about to drop out of school but were given access to construction skills through apprenticeships or training and are now earning £36,000 a year working on building sites here in the capital. Aligning opportunities in school to where there are jobs in our economy is working sometimes, but, sometimes, it is clearly not. That is a big area that any vision needs to work backwards from.

However, that is me on my high horse.

11:30

Jackie Dunbar: Good morning. I have a very quick question. What are the main aims of the reforms to qualifications—and what would they be, if you ruled the world?

Donna Stewart: To pick up on my response to Miles Briggs, it is absolutely about recognising the way in which things have changed over time: the experiences of our young people; the settings and

environments that they are in; and some of the challenges and barriers to their learning and, in turn, their access to qualifications and assessment. It is key that what we offer in our qualifications is absolutely fit for Scotland's needs, the needs of our learners and what we need for our economy and to drive our society forward.

That is a big vision and a big aim. However, there is absolutely some rigour behind it. Some really good things went on in our previous organisation, the SQA, but we as Qualifications Scotland need to take a look at our portfolio of qualifications and make sure that they are fit for purpose—most important, that they are fit for our learners.

There are changes in not only the experiences of learners but the curriculum offer in schools. In the previous session, Ollie Bray spoke about the curriculum being the totality of all that is planned in experiences for learners. Qualifications, from where we sit, is a significant but small part of that. There is a wide range of offers—Louise Hayward has talked about Daydream Believers, and another example is the John Muir award—as well as our qualifications, in the totality of qualification that is offered

We recognise that there is a change in uptake even of the qualifications from Qualifications Scotland. That perhaps feeds into what Mr Briggs mentioned about foundation apprenticeships, but it may also have something to do with NPAs—our national progression awards. Those have much shorter units and are shorter awards. We are also seeing a change in presentation levels. There is a change in the landscape of the curriculum offer within the various types of school and educational settings. There is a role for us to be clear and have an evidence base on why that change is happening. Is it an unintended consequence? Can we drive that change?

What is key for us in that drive for and change in qualifications reform is that we will absolutely not do it on our own. We are committed to co-creating it with others in the system, including partners such as Education Scotland, to have alignment in the curriculum, particularly in the technical framework between BGE and senior phase, so that we do not make the mistakes of the past, in which that misalignment existed, and so that we have the coherence that is easier for people—in particular, and most importantly, for learners—to navigate.

Jackie Dunbar: Would anybody else like to come in?

Sarah Brown (Qualifications Scotland): Good morning. Excuse me, I will be a bit nervous, as this is my first time here.

To summarise the ambition, it builds exactly on what Donna Stewart said: the ambition for qualifications reform is to make sure that the qualifications that we offer are fit for the young people of today—the learners that we have. To build on what Miles Briggs said, it is to provide them with a pathway: it encapsulates their learning and puts them on the path to success.

I was heartened when Professor Hayward spoke about the change that she has seen in the past five years in education in Scotland, including the national bodies. She mentioned how the curriculum improvement cycle has supported the building of the capacity of teachers to deliver a new curriculum. The second part of our ambition for qualifications is to make the voices of learners and teachers part of the drive for our new qualifications, so that we can build the capacity of teachers and support our learners to achieve those new qualifications.

As Donna Stewart said, we do not want to do it on our own. We absolutely want to put the voices of our teachers and learners at the heart of the reform of the qualifications that we will provide as the examining board body.

Jackie Dunbar: Thank you.

Kirsty Ayed: School Leaders Scotland is keen to see different methods of assessment to having young people who are in fourth, fifth or sixth year going into a hall and sitting a closed-book exam for hours on end. In no other situation do young people ever have to face that again, even through university. The methods of assessing young people are now very different. We are not saying that there does not need to be any formal exams in a hall, but we need to see significant changes in the methods of assessing our young people. We also need recognition that there should be parity of esteem for young people who are taking qualifications that might lead to a NPA, which are as valuable for those young people and for the future of our society as a national 5 or a higher qualification might be.

Jackie Dunbar: How do you see that changing? As you said, sitting in a hall in front of a table is probably everybody's worst nightmare—or most people's—and sometimes we do not get the best out of people by doing that. What could we do to ensure that the person gets the qualification but does not have to go through that way of getting it?

Kirsty Ayed: Professor Hayward's review of qualifications looked at a variety of systems that are used internationally. There could be open-book exams, digital assessments or continuous assessment for young people, so that it does not all rely on one day in an exam hall when it might just not be a good day for that young person. There are a variety of methods out there that we could

look at and learn from to build a system that would suit the young people that we have in front of us today.

Jackie Dunbar: That sounds promising.

Bill Kidd: You have covered everything that I was going to ask you so well that I am asking myself what I am going to say now. You have given a lot of really good answers, and it is all very positive. There are a lot of benefits in the changes that have been talked about.

Can I ask something a wee bit dodgy? Are there any potential risks in the introduction of these ways forward in terms of how children will adapt or how teaching will have to develop differently to put these things across? Does that make sense?

Donna Stewart: It does. One of the potential risks that we carry at the moment is not doing anything at all and keeping the status quo. We hear loud and clear that there have been a number of reviews in the past five or six years that have got us to a point of change, so we have planned systematic change over a reasonable period of time.

The reason for that is that there has been widespread acknowledgement that assessments and qualifications have previously driven what is done in the earlier years at school. The expression that is sometimes used is that qualifications and assessment are the tail that wags the dog. We are taking a sound planned programme approach with Education Scotland in looking at the curriculum and the technical framework to ensure that we have a strong foundation to align with our qualifications.

The timeframe is such that we are not trying to make sudden changes that would be a risk to learners who are already in the system. Having planned progression means that we are thinking about how we can strengthen the system and not break or disrupt it in a way that has negative impacts or consequences. In taking such an approach, we are trying to de-risk that.

From the qualifications and assessment point of view, we recognise that there are learners in the system for whom we want change now, so we have already made some changes to the way that we assess woodwork, metalwork and practical cake craft, and we have just announced changes to fashion and textile technology. We have also surveyed a number of qualifications that we consider will rely less on external examinations.

I completely align with what Kirsty Ayed said earlier about approaches to assessment, and we are open to that co-creation element. That is why it is so important to make sure that we get it right for the people who are going to deliver those assessments.

Going back to your question about risk, the biggest risk is that we do something very quickly that does not take people with us, involve co-creation or engage people properly. We also recognise the risk of doing nothing.

Bill Kidd: On that basis—

The Convener: Sorry, Mr Kidd. Professor Hayward wanted to come in on Jackie Dunbar's questions, but by the time that came to me, we had moved on to Mr Kidd's questions.

Bill Kidd: I apologise.

The Convener: Professor Hayward, you can address any of Mr Kidd's questions as well as Ms Dunbar's questions.

Professor Hayward: My point, which answers Mr Kidd's question, is that there is still work to be done and I totally agree that the risk is not in change but in maintaining the status quo. I am not sure whether you picked it up, but *The Herald* reported on a journal article in *The Lancet* about the impact of high-stakes assessment on young people and their futures—the increased risks to mental health, self-harm and a whole series of other issues. The risk is that we do not take the issue sufficiently seriously and recognise that, for the good of all our young people, the system has to change.

I will draw attention to two areas. First, there are still issues to be tackled and I am not sure how they will be. The previous panel referenced the two-term dash, and I am not quite sure how our plans will address that issue. Secondly, linked to that, examination rehearsals still dominate learner experiences. I appreciate that Donna Stewart has said that Qualifications Scotland is changing the assessment balance in examinations, but I encourage the body to do more, and to do so as quickly as it can.

Bill Kidd: From the replies, it is obvious that qualifications development is going on from a pretty young age right the way through to the end of mainstream education, and is bringing people into the adult world and getting them opportunities that they might not previously have had. Is that true?

Donna Stewart: Absolutely. There is the curriculum itself, which covers ages 3 to 18, the planned experiences for learners that go right the way through education and the qualification element, which sits in the senior phase, which learners then prepare for. All that, in totality, prepares learners for life and work.

Bill Kidd: That is very positive. Thank you.

John Mason: I will come to Professor Hayward first. The OECD had suggested that there should perhaps be more structured pathways in place

during the senior phase, including a limited number of compulsory courses, specialisation courses and space for additional or optional units. Where are we with that? Has the approach changed?

Professor Hayward: I am sure that Donna Stewart will respond to that question in greater depth, but my understanding is that Qualifications Scotland is moving towards a more modularised approach. Scotland has always wanted parity of esteem. Its aspiration for that has been present in education for as long as I have been in education. The challenge is how we achieve it.

The idea of pathways is very helpful, but they should not become tramlines, so that once you are in a particular route, you can take courses only in that particular area. We talked about the fact that there is no job as practical as that of a surgeon, and there is no job in which the ability to communicate effectively is more important than that of a doctor. However, people who are moving through the system just now and considering medicine as an option might not have opportunities to develop those skills, which will be crucial for them in the future.

What was envisaged was a modularised system in which people could take courses, perhaps from different pathways, that would best support them into the next phase of their lives—so, there should be pathways, yes, but flexibility between them.

11:45

John Mason: I will come to Ms Stewart in a minute. I get the bit about tram lines—you do not want people to be on a fixed course, or in silos or something like that. However, even the word "modular" seems to me like the opposite of a broad general education. I am a lay person— I do not know all the jargon—but can the broad general education and the modular approach be combined?

Professor Hayward: It is interesting that you raise that issue; "modular" may not be the best word to describe what we are talking about, and we need to think about how we communicate that.

It is about having building blocks from across the broad general education, and as people move into the senior phase, they can gather different building blocks to build their own particular design of wall. It is about breadth and giving young people broad opportunities while allowing them the flexibility to design particular programmes that best meet their needs.

We use the expression "three-to-18 curriculum", which slips off the tongue very easily, but it is not easy, and we should not underestimate that. One of the major challenges will be to ensure that the good intentions of Education Scotland and Qualifications Scotland to provide a continuous, flexible, coherent programme are actually translated into practice.

John Mason: Thank you for that.

I come to Ms Stewart. It was mentioned in the previous evidence session today that different approaches appeal to different young people. I quite like the fact that I chose three subjects in S3 or S4—whenever it was—and I was then just told what else to do. What we are discussing sounds quite complex, if we are going down the route of modules and giving people more choice.

Donna Stewart: I recognise that there are sometimes challenges in the delivery of that, but I am completely aligned with Louise Hayward's vision in terms of that flexibility. I go back to one of my earlier answers about the flexibility of approach.

There could be a situation in which we have qualifications in maths, English, history and other subjects, but there is scope for a much broader range of qualifications that meet the needs of local communities. Perhaps there is a particular industry or sector in a community, and a local authority or school may be able to pick and choose different elements to create a qualification.

That also takes in the recognition that we are seeing much more work-based experiences in school. That comes back to the point about school-college partnerships, where qualifications have a work-based element. Such an approach would allow for the flexibility to incorporate workplace elements into a qualification. That is part of co-creation, thinking about what people need and ensuring that we fit in with what Scotland requires.

However, I recognise the challenges with that. If we had an approach where everyone could choose something different, the practicalities of delivery would be challenging. That is why it needs to be co-created, and why we need the right people around the table to support us and consider what type of model we should have. I am absolutely aligned with Louise Hayward's thinking on that, and on a flexible approach as the way forward. That also supports the needs of learners in our schools and educational establishments. For example, some learners are perhaps not attending school, but that does not mean that they are not able to achieve a qualification. They may have a challenge with being in a school setting, so we might set it somewhere else.

The whole element of having a flexible approach is absolutely core to what we want to do to support learners in particular.

John Mason: Is that what the OECD was mentioning? When I read what the OECD has

said, it seemed almost like it wants a more structured and less flexible approach—or am I misunderstanding what it is looking for?

Donna Stewart: It is about the alignment between the BGE and senior phase. We currently have—as Louise Hayward touched on—the technical framework that is being delivered through Education Scotland, which is broadly leading that in a strong, collaborative way with a lot of different partners in a lot of different parts of the system and ensuring that the coherence goes all the way through to 18 and our qualifications.

We should remember, though, that our school qualifications—what we would call our national courses, such as the traditional maths and English courses and so on—are part of quite a small sample of what we do and what we offer, and of what the uptake is in schools and educational establishments just now. The range is much broader—Sarah Brown and Kirsty Ayed will probably have more experience of that—but the curriculum offer has broadened with regard to the range of types of qualifications to meet learner needs. Anything that we can put into the system to support that flexibility should be about trying to support the system, rather than establishments having to work around it for their learners.

John Mason: Do you want to come in, Ms Brown?

Sarah Brown: I would be delighted to. You mentioned how complex it is for young people. I want to reassure the committee, from my experience, that young people are really ambitious, and they want to try a lot of different things, such as new qualifications, that they have not done before.

There will be a team of guidance staff within a school—I am sure that Kirsty Ayed will acknowledge this, too—who are clear about how to support pupils choosing an individual pathway. As a school leader, that is certainly what you want for your learners: something that is individual and that is meeting their needs and their aspirations. There are people in the system who can provide support. It is easier if you are just told what you are doing, but if you have the option of personalisation and choice, it will be a better learning experience for you and you will have better outcomes in the future.

John Mason: Ms Ayed, perhaps you can say something about this. Ms Stewart mentioned the workplace, the relationship with employers and that side of things. I am interested in that, because I used to take in young people for work experience. Around October, we had young people come in for a week's work experience, and some of them came to my office. That has stopped now— as I understand it, the local secondary school does not do that any more. Are young people getting an idea of what the workplace needs and, therefore, of what they should be looking at?

Kirsty Ayed: It is certainly my understanding that, across Scotland, work placements are still taking place, but perhaps in a different format. It may not be the traditional week in October, as you described, when every fourth year went out. It is now much more flexible, so it could be that one or two young people go out at one point for a few days, or somebody could go out every afternoon over a six-week period to a local nursery or something like that. Work experience placements absolutely are still taking place, and schools are very good at bringing employers and partners into school to work with young people. We recognise that it is really important that we do that, because it gives young people a clear flavour of what the workplace is like.

You mentioned the OECD report a wee bit earlier. Probably the biggest misalignment with our broad general education is that our assessment is mainly formative. We are asking young people how they think they are doing, and getting their feedback, and we are observing them as learners and making our judgments based on that kind of information. The pedagogy that will be used in our broad general education will, at times, be much more active and engaging for young people. Professor Hayward spoke about project-based learning—a lot of schools have moved forward with that.

The misalignment in that, moving into the senior phase, has historically probably been driven by the SQA. At that point, the assessment is summative in nature: it needs to be an exam or test that young people sit so that we are confident in the judgment that we make. As a result, the pedagogy is slightly different; it can be much more teacher-led and less interactive. I think that schools are looking for an approach that is much more aligned and which follows through from the BGE to the senior phase in both pedagogy and assessment.

John Mason: Do you think that employers understand a lot of what is going on? All of you from whom we are taking evidence this morning are very expert on education. However, does an employer who employs somebody perhaps every four or five years understand the changes that are taking place in the system?

Kirsty Ayed: There is still work to be done on that in relation to both employers and parents. Quite often, when we meet with parents, they still talk about O levels or O grades, or about foundation, general and credit. They have not moved on to those other things. There is a big exercise to be done to inform and support our parents, and also employers.

Professor Hayward: I note that we cannot do that alone. We need to work in partnership with organisations such as the Confederation of British Industry, because it has ways of getting to its members that we do not. We need a communication strategy that identifies the key people who have to be involved in the process in order to ensure that we are not in a position in which, as Kirsty Ayed described, 10 years from now, employers are still asking about national 5 qualifications.

John Mason: That is helpful.

Paul McLennan: Similar to what we heard on the previous panel, we have heard about current practice, the aims of reform and the changes that are being proposed. Donna, you touched on the engagement with young people, teachers, higher and further education and employers so far. Will you say a little more about that? It is important to hear what feedback you are getting at this stage and what you are learning as you go through the process.

Donna Stewart: At the moment, most of the engagement has taken place through Education Scotland and the work that it is doing through the curriculum improvement cycle. We have been part of that process. We are going through planned engagement, and we plan for greater acceleration in relation to that over the next wee while. Some of the work that we are doing is quite intense.

Louise Hayward spoke about CBI, for example, and we work closely with CBI. It goes back to the point about credibility—it is really important to us that our qualifications are credible for universities, colleges, employers, industry and mobility. They have to be credible, and for them to be so our co-creation requires to go beyond schools, although that work is a significant and important part of what we do. We welcome the input of teachers—which all of us sitting on this panel are—and it really supports us.

We have stakeholder mapping of those we will engage with and how we will engage, and we have core governance in the organisation that supports that work. A third of the new board of our organisation is practitioner representation, but we also have representation on our board from human resources, industry and construction. We therefore have good representation through our board. Alongside that, we have strengthened governance through our different committees. The qualifications committee supports the work that we are doing to have extra voices and externality around the table.

Sarah Brown—she may wish to come in on this—has been leading a fantastic piece of work to set up a schools partnership team, which is a single point of contact specifically for schools. It is a way of supporting teachers through what we do as an organisation and also supporting us, as an organisation, to better understand what is happening externally. We are also scoping out an equivalent for colleges and for our employers and training providers. Those will be critical forums. The governance is there, as well as learner interest groups and practitioner interest groups, which Sarah will talk about. Those are all things that we, as an organisation, have put into our governance to ensure that we have that representation in a formal way.

Over and above that, the first phase of our qualifications reform engagement is about picking up on the very issues that we are talking about today, such as what flexibility is required. There are learners who are learning in different settings at the moment and who are suited to be in work-based learning or who want more experience of the workplace. We want to gather the evidence to support that, so that we can make that work.

The next part of that is the design of our qualifications and the model that we use. We would go out and engage on that to identify the different proposed models that we will co-create with other people in the system.

Those are the different phases that we will go through with the design.

12:00

While the work on the technical framework and the content of what sits within qualifications is going on through Education Scotland—and we are part of that—we are starting to do the modelling and to consider assessment approaches, engaging with all the right people around the table and ensuring that those approaches are absolutely credible and aligned with the curriculum improvement cycle and that we are open to different approaches to assessment. That is a real shift. It is real openness to different approaches to assessment, and that is fairly ambitious.

Paul McLennan: That is really helpful. One of the key things for me is the work with the regional collaboratives. What are the key issues? What are the key opportunities in different parts of Scotland? They will be different in different parts of Scotland. You can adapt what you are trying to do through getting feedback. That is really important, because the situation will be different in Edinburgh, in the Highlands and in Dumfries, for example. How do you deal with the local aspect? How do you avoid taking a one-size-fits-all approach, and how do you provide the flexibility that we are talking about? I suppose that the key thing is to get feedback from learners themselves. Can you say a bit more about the regional aspect and about the learners themselves?

Donna Stewart: We are alive to that regional variance. Our chief executive is going up to the Highlands and Islands to visit some schools there next week. We see differences across the central belt, too. We are very alive to that.

We were talking earlier about flexibility of approach, and I am thinking about a local authority that we went out to just a couple of weeks ago. There was something that the authority particularly wanted, so as to meet the needs of the sector within its local area. That is the kind of flexibility that we are trying to adopt—thinking, "How do we do that?" There will be times when it might be appropriate for us to engage with secondary teachers only or industry only. Equally, it is important to have cross-sectoral involvement and to develop that connectivity. We look at it through the element of parity of esteem. Whatever we can do in this space to support parity of esteem is our focus.

Paul McLennan: Do you want to add anything, Sarah? Louise Hayward and Kirsty Ayed can come in as well.

Sarah Brown: I would be delighted to add a little bit more detail, although I am aware of the time. I will try to tailor what I am going to say.

First, Qualifications Scotland is absolutely committed to engaging with stakeholders. I am in a really unique situation, having been brought in to deliver and develop a schools unit, which has become the schools partnership team. The commitment to bringing in somebody from a school to lead that work shows the commitment of the organisation. I have an opportunity to develop my team by taking expertise from within the organisation and by appointing practitioners—teachers—from outwith the organisation. Again, that shows a real commitment to engaging and listening to the voice of teachers. I have been bringing that team together, and I am excited about the work that we are going to take forward.

Donna Stewart mentioned the regional approach, and the importance of that has come back through the feedback that I have had already. We have a range of regional events planned for June this year, and that will be the first cycle of our engagement. It is important that we ensure that our engagement is consistent. Individual approaches have been mentioned, and we want to make our approach responsive, so we are reaching out to the profession. We say that, if people would like us to come and work in a different way and to get involved at a local level, we are very willing and happy to do that within our capacity.

Donna also mentioned the interest committees. My week gets better, because tomorrow I am meeting one of our board members who is a recent learner and who is going to lead the learner interest committee. He recently finished his education, and I am looking forward to meeting him tomorrow. I am also meeting a headteacher who will be leading our teacher and practitioner interest committee. As I am speaking, I hope that you are seeing all the different touch points that we have structurally within the organisation, which demonstrate a commitment to working in partnership and to engaging.

I will stop there, as I know that others will wish to come in. I could talk for longer.

Paul McLennan: Thank you for that. I do not know whether Louise Hayward or Kirsty Ayed wants to come in on that point.

The Convener: Yes—Professor Hayward would like to come in at this point.

Professor Hayward: Earlier, I made reference to what is happening with the West Partnership, working with Glasgow city region. It will be important to bring together initiatives that are already under way. That involves the national organisations, but we should consider what is already happening and bring those things together into a coherent system.

Kirsty Ayed: SLS was initially very concerned about the reform of the SQA when it became Qualifications Scotland and about whether that was just a "shuffling of the deck chairs", which was the phrase that was used. However, the work that Sarah Brown and her team have been involved in, as well as the work that Donna Stewart and Nick Page have done in meeting headteachers and national groups, certainly gives us a sense that things are moving in the right direction and that the organisation is much more collaborative than it has ever been. That is to be welcomed, and we hope that it continues.

Paul McLennan: That is good to hear.

Paul O'Kane: We had a discussion with the previous panel about the purpose and role of sixth year. I do not know whether you caught any of the discussion, but Dr Bloomer was reflecting that sixth year has evolved as an experience for learners, and he said that it is probably in a better place than it was previously. He noted that there is a range and depth to the experience that did not exist many years ago. Dr Bloomer argued that, if we have four-year degrees plus a sixth-year experience, there may be a need for better synergy. Is it your view that we need to look at reform of the very senior phase, if I can use that expression? I ask Kirsty Ayed to respond first, as she is engaged with school life.

Kirsty Ayed: Increasingly, I think that the secondary 6 experience is of less value to young people. Very often, young people gain the qualifications that they need in S5 if they want to

go on to university or college. Part-way through S6, they will get a letter that tells them whether they have a conditional or an unconditional offer. Very often, if the offer is unconditional, they start to opt out of what they are doing in S6. It is an expensive resource for schools that could potentially be better used elsewhere in schools and in the education system. Quite often, our degrees last for four years, but they are not always four years in other nations, which we could also look at.

Paul O'Kane: That is interesting. Two decades ago, a sixth-year student who shall remain nameless had exactly that experience in that he received an unconditional offer midway through the year. He was doing two advanced highers that he did not require, and he was also head boy, which took up his time. Many of us around the table who experienced sixth year, even if it was two decades ago, would probably say the same thing. It is interesting that Dr Bloomer felt that it had advanced, but perhaps it has stagnated. Is it fair to say that?

Kirsty Ayed: Yes. Leaders across Scotland have built in lots of opportunities for young people to enhance their skills, because universities are looking for much more than just five As in highers. That is what we have used it for, but it is still very much the benchmark for getting into university.

Paul O'Kane: I appreciate that other panellists want to come in. We will have a framework review of universities, which will focus on structural issues, predominantly funding. Do you think that it will be important for many of the people we are speaking to in the meeting to be part of that conversation? If we are going to look at all the issues and put them on the table, does this conversation have to be part of that?

Kirsty Ayed: I think so. It goes back to the potential change in assessments and how we assess young people in schools. Universities were very much on board with part of the work that Louise Hayward was doing. As Donna Stewart mentioned, universities still look for certain qualifications that are credible, and there is a lot of discussion about how credible it will be if there is not a formal final exam that takes place in a hall.

Perhaps we need to look at alternative means of entering a university. Should universities have to hold their own entrance exams if there is any dubiety about what a school has done? I hope that there is not dubiety, because I think that schools working with Qualifications Scotland will ensure that any judgments are robust. That is another thing for Qualifications Scotland to consider.

Paul O'Kane: We must also reflect on the work of college partners, as well as Professor Hayward's work, because we do not want to exclude that from the broader conversation. Perhaps Professor Hayward will comment on that, but do you want to comment first, Donna?

Donna Stewart: Learners have a real range of experiences in S6. Not all learners in S6 will go to university or college, so we must recognise that those experiences—Kirsty Ayed was absolutely right about some of the enhancements to the curriculum in S6—are really positive.

One thing that we noticed about delivery models in S6 relates to advanced higher provision—resources not being in abundance means that there are many opportunities for learners to learn virtually, but pupils' experiences are sometimes perhaps not what we would want them to be. That is one thing that we have noticed as an awarding body. We recognise that all learners, including those who go on to university or college, have different experiences in S6.

Professor Hayward: I wonder about the extent to which young people are successful in university or college if they have had a little more time to mature. I am conscious that young people in the United Kingdom tend to go through the education system more quickly than young people elsewhere. They are younger when they go to university or college, which is an issue that should be looked at very carefully.

We must also consider the purpose of school. If you believe in curriculum for excellence and the four capacities, you recognise that school is almost a passport to society. It is about more than getting the qualifications that get you a job; it is about transferring the baton from one generation to the next. What kind of Scotland do we want to see in the future, and, therefore, what are the characteristics of the young people who will best support such a society? We need to think about sixth year while recognising that it is a valuable experience for many young people.

Paul O'Kane: There is a lot of merit in it, given the development opportunities that we now afford young people in sixth year and the experiences that they have, which we know to be very important in that wider context. It is not all about preparing people for university, because not everyone goes.

Based on what you said, Professor Hayward, could we focus a lot more on the transferable skills that people will require for the next stage of their journey? Is it your sense that sixth year could be used more meaningfully—not only to provide the qualifications that enable someone to move to the next phase, but also to prepare them for life more broadly?

Professor Hayward: I will go back to IRQA. We tend to think of qualifications as the exam bit, but we should change our thinking, because what

does it mean to be qualified for life? The three parts of the original diploma represented the three components that people across different societal groups had argued were really important.

We have the building blocks, but we need to think about what those building blocks will look like in the different years of secondary education and how learners will take lessons forward into the next stage of whatever they do, whether that is employment, college, university or the voluntary sector.

Paul O'Kane: That is helpful. There is a lot in there to reflect on, which will take us into the next parliamentary session. These are issues that clearly should be addressed, and it was interesting to hear the witnesses' different perspectives.

12:15

Willie Rennie: I should declare an interest, because Mrs Brown was the headteacher of my youngest son for several years. After having been grilled by her staff for years at parents' evenings, now it is my turn for revenge. However, I welcome her to the committee and thank her for her evidence so far.

We have learned about how pioneering headteachers and staff often need to swim against the tide to get parity of esteem so that the vocational offer is on an equal level as the academic. Why are they needing to work so hard? You have all talked eloquently about the need for there to be a focus on parity of esteem. Why is it still so difficult for those heads to do that? Why do they feel that they need to conform to the traditional format of five highers in order to get their schools measured as excellent institutions? What do we need to change in order to incentivise those leaders to make such a change in the way that you have all discussed this morning?

Who would like to start?

Kirsty Ayed: I am happy to respond. As you have suggested, part of it is about the inspection process and what we are measured against. However, those measures also come into the Parliament, because they are often used to beat other parties over progress that has or has not been made. A plea from School Leaders Scotland is for there to be a cross-party group that looks at education for young people and the measures of success, because we are talking about young people's futures in Scotland. Young people should not become political pawns or be used in an inspection to say, "That is a good school and that is not a good school," in a traditional means of measuring success.

As I said earlier, a more experienced teacher who has come through a successful inspection will have the confidence and the courage to make bolder decisions, because parents will be with them and they will have the authority to do so. A teacher who is newer in the post is less likely to do that if they still have all those things to face.

Willie Rennie: Is it just the debate in the Parliament that is causing that, or are there other things? Let us say that all of us on this committee agree that we are gonnae focus on the things that you want to do. What else needs to change? I know that we are really influential in the Parliament, but I am not sure that we are the only thing that is influencing these matters.

Kirsty Ayed: I will make a note that you will all agree in the future. [*Laughter*.] There is that aspect, but inspections and the means by which schools are measured are also important. The narrative that is out there is also important, such as what is published in the press about where schools are on league tables, which do not take into account anything other than five highers, three highers and so on. That is not a helpful narrative.

Willie Rennie: I have heard about the Insight programme, which is the measurement tool for schools. Has that got better? There was mention of it measuring things such as foundation apprenticeships. Has that changed?

Kirsty Ayed: Yes, those things are now covered by it. We look at young people's sustained destinations, but a lot of the success that is celebrated comes on the day that national qualification exam results are released. However, we do not get the full array of a young person's qualifications and achievements until the Insight data is released, which is much later.

Willie Rennie: You think that celebration day should be Insight day.

Kirsty Ayed: Yes, absolutely, and it should be later. That would ensure that all young people's successes are celebrated, which would provide parity of esteem.

Willie Rennie: I presume that that would require quite a bit of organisational change to happen.

Kirsty Ayed: I am not sure that it would. Certainly, having spoken with the chief executive of Qualifications Scotland, I know that he is keen to look at that, although I am not sure how that would play out with regard to the nuances within the organisation.

Willie Rennie: Okay. Over to you, Donna Stewart.

Donna Stewart: We are really keen to celebrate learners' achievements at school, whether those achievements are in our national courses or beyond, and to ensure that parity is central to the work that we are doing because, as I said earlier,

we can see the practice happening in schools and the benefits for learners.

Last year, we celebrated 100,000 learners achieving vocational, technical and professional qualifications—which is more than we have ever seen before. Results day for the national courses all happen at the same point in the year, whereas, for other qualifications, results can be issued throughout the year—there is a difference between the awarding process and when they are awarded. We are really focused on that celebration not just being about those national courses and those five or three passes at level five.

Equally, there is a cultural aspect, and I think people understand that. Someone—my apologies, I cannot remember who—mentioned highers earlier. We understand highers. I sat highers. I know that you are thinking that I am very young, but it was not that long ago. My parents would understand highers. There is that currency element—there is definitely a communication aspect there. That comes back to what we are talking about: the reform of that co-creation—

Willie Rennie: Would you change the descriptions of all qualifications to align with those of the SCQF?

Donna Stewart: Yes.

Willie Rennie: Would you do that explicitly so that it is in everyday language?

Donna Stewart: We are very comfortable with having SCQF levels pegged to qualifications. We have discussed some of the practicalities internally, and we are working through those just now.

We are certainly not a driver. We have thousands—a full suite—of qualifications. The qualifications that we offer in the school sector—those that people traditionally think of as their school qualifications—are actually very limited; they represent only a small part of the overall qualification offer that we provide.

We offer a full range of qualifications, and we want to celebrate all those achievements. We are absolutely committed to doing anything that we can to drive forward parity and to celebrate the full range of qualifications and achievements of all learners.

Willie Rennie: Sarah Brown, when you were the headteacher, what pressure did you feel from the local authority? Were you incentivised to deliver that vocational offer, or did you have to swim against the tide?

Sarah Brown: I was in a good position in that we were supported to meet the needs of all learners, that the SCQF levels gave us an opportunity to compare qualifications and that this feeds into the Insight tool that has been mentioned. As Kirsty Ayed said at the beginning, we are looking for a more sophisticated way of measuring schools than simply counting the number of qualifications.

The Insight tool is very sophisticated, but it is also very complicated. People who are not in education tend to look at the number of highers, the number of national qualifications, and at English, as they may perceive that to be more academic than another qualification at the same level. There is a degree of education to be done across the system to ensure parity of esteem for qualifications. A lot of the pressure is external—as schools feel the need to demonstrate that they are performing well. However, the performance measures that are used internally in a school through the Insight tool, and those used by a local authority through the Insight tool, may differ from the performance measures that the wider public look at.

I hope that makes sense.

Willie Rennie: Absolutely. There needs to be a greater understanding not only of the SCQF but of the Insight programme's measurements for each school. I am not sure that we can ever get to a point where everyone fully understands the Insight programme, but it should surely become more common language so that people understand the full breadth of qualifications. You will face pressure from parents on how schools are performing, and they will often base their views partly on the headlines, in the way you have described. If we can make the Insight programme much more public, is that something that would become more widely understood? What do you think?

Kirsty Ayed: It would certainly improve the narrative if we were looking at a much broader range of measures. That would really help not only schools, but, more important, young people to feel celebrated. You do not want any young person leaving your school with the thought or the feeling that their qualifications and achievements are not as valuable as somebody else's.

Willie Rennie: Yes. Professor Hayward, would you like to come in on this?

Professor Hayward: Yes—in a sense, I want to support what you said, Mr Rennie. We perhaps need to give consideration to the language that we use around qualifications. If we are thinking about different qualifications at different levels of the SCQF, perhaps we should start thinking about using common terms for those different qualifications, because there is a limit to what we can expect people to understand. We in education should seek to clarify the system rather than expect people to understand an increasingly complex system.

Willie Rennie: I turn to your report, Professor Hayward—well, I know that it is not your report, but you chaired the review. The Scottish Government has gone a bit cold on the report. The Government is undertaking a number of workstreams, but the energy has gone out of that. However, some local authorities have moved ahead. In particular, Fife Council and Glasgow City Council are keen to develop some of what is in the report. As a Liberal, I am keen to let a thousand flowers bloom, but there is a challenge for the inspectorate: how will it measure schools that are doing something slightly different from the others? If Fife and Glasgow are moving ahead and implementing more of your plan, will that not create a challenge in relation to how they are measured and judged?

Professor Hayward: I have two points on that. One is that we have a new inspectorate emerging, so there are opportunities to ask some of those challenging questions as part of setting up that new inspectorate. There are some fundamentals, one of which is about the extent to which an establishment is serving the needs of all learners. That can be done in different ways, but that is the fundamental question, and the evidence should be gathered in response to it. I would not talk about letting a thousand flowers bloom, but I would talk about allowing contextual differences in different parts of the country. As we have said, Scotland is one name, but different parts of the country have different requirements. However, there are certain common themes that underpin all of them. The progress of different schools and of different parts of the country should be gauged against those fundamental sets of ideas.

I support the point that Keir Bloomer made in the earlier panel about the need for a national survey. I absolutely support that, and that was part of the report. We need a means of gathering evidence that does not have the kind of washback into schools that has been described. Keir Bloomer mentioned the Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy, but there was a better one, which was the Scottish survey of achievement. I know that colleagues have been looking in the archive of Qualifications Scotland, and that much of the material for that survey still exists. If the committee was minded to do so, that would be a starting point to think about how we might gather evidence on progress in dependable ways, but ways that do not have the negative impact that our current system has.

Willie Rennie: I will conclude on that point of agreement. I am not a supporter of the Scottish national standardised assessments, and I think that going back to a survey system in a more comprehensive way would be a far superior option.

The Convener: That almost concludes our session, but I want to come back to the questions that I started with to Ms Stewart on higher history in 2024 and the review by the then SQA. At no point when I asked those questions, at no point when you provided me with an individual briefing with the chief executive and chair of Qualifications Scotland, and at no point in either of the two sessions that the committee has held on the subject, have you or anyone from the former SQA or Qualifications Scotland ever mentioned the national ratings data. Why is that?

Donna Stewart: National ratings can be quite a complex area, but I will do my best to explain.

The Convener: I do not want to necessarily go through it. I now know what national ratings data is because, during this meeting, I have been alerted to it by a journalist. My question is: why has that never been mentioned by anyone representing Qualifications Scotland or the SQA when we, as a committee of the Parliament, have discussed the higher history results of 2024?

12:30

Donna Stewart: As you will be aware, national ratings are a guide. They are a good guide for subjects that are comparable in nature, so they are good for comparing one science against another, for example. They are less comparable when looking at one subject area against another—for example, sciences compared to something in an expressive arts context. The reason for that, obviously, is that the subjects use different knowledge and skills.

The ratings also do not take account of any external factors. If there were factors that impacted on specialist subject teachers, the learning environment or learners' experience in learning and teaching, the ratings would not take account of those. Therefore, we do not use them when we set grade boundaries. They are not used at all to set an A, B or C; they are used purely as a guide from one subject area to another.

The Convener: I know that because I have the response from a Qualifications Scotland spokesperson to the journalist. I ask again: why has that never been offered to the committee when we have asked multiple questions through multiple evidence sessions? In the summer, you provided me with a briefing as convener of the committee or as someone interested in the issue when I asked a number of questions about higher history.

The data is damning for Qualifications Scotland and the SQA because

"national ratings … show how many grades higher or lower candidates obtained in"

a

"subject than they obtained on average in their other subjects".

It is clear from the data set that 2024 was a more difficult year for higher history than 2022, 2023 and 2025. Therefore, everything that students, teachers and politicians have suggested was at the root of the problem is confirmed by your data, which has never been shared with the committee. Why?

Donna Stewart: The fact that the data has not been shared does not in any way mean that we have avoided being transparent. It is on our website. It is shared every year and is accessible. However, we would not use it as a core measure for setting grade boundaries or achievement, so we would not use it on that point.

We are working hard on history broadly with other parts of the sector to build confidence in our learners who are in the system and in practitioners who teach in the system and work with those learners, and to ensure that we are forward looking and improving.

The Convener: Do you accept that the data shows that the higher history exam of 2024 was more difficult than those of previous years and last year's exam?

Donna Stewart: I accept that data as a guide.

The Convener: That is what the data shows.

Donna Stewart: I accept that data as a guide but I go back to the point that we stand by the review that was carried out, which the Scottish Government accepted at the time, and stand by the results of the 2024 history exam.

The Convener: But the data says that the review was wrong. The review put the blame on students and teachers when your data, which you have held for months and years, shows that 2024's exam was far more difficult. It is not me saying it; it is your own data. Indeed, Qualifications Scotland states that there should not be major variations year on year in single subjects because that would suggest a problem. Therefore, that variation in 2024 in the single subject of higher history suggests that there was a problem. Is that correct?

Donna Stewart: That data and the attainment data that came out on the back of it in 2024 sparked the review that was carried out. All the processes and everything that went on throughout that year was peer reviewed by somebody in Wales. That came through our board, went to the Scottish Government and was accepted. Whether we look at that data or the data from attainment, a concern was raised and there was a response to that concern. The response to that concern was to carry out the review. The review was carried out and put through the appropriate channels and appropriate governance.

The Convener: This is the clearest evidence that I have seen throughout my time considering the issue that what I was concerned about and what pupils, parents and teachers were concerned about is exactly what happened. The 2024 exam for higher history was more difficult than those in previous years. According to Qualifications Scotland itself, that means that there is an issue. I am worried that the information was deliberately withheld from a parliamentary committee. Can you provide an absolute guarantee that no one at the SQA or Qualifications Scotland at any point considered withholding that information?

Donna Stewart: To my knowledge, that was not discussed at all. As I say, it is publicly—

The Convener: Can you provide that guarantee?

Donna Stewart: I was not in post at that time.

The Convener: But you were in post when you came to the committee.

Donna Stewart: Only just. I was not in post during the time of the issues around the higher history exam and my first appearance at the committee on the issue was when I was first in post. You will remember that that was my first appearance at the committee. In that respect, I cannot provide the guarantee that you ask for. However, I can say to you that the information is in the public domain. It is on our website, so there is no attempt to hide it.

As an organisation, we are clearly focused on the way that we work. I hope that you and other members have heard that today. We are trying to be much more open and collaborative as a new organisation and to be absolutely focused for, most importantly, the learners who we are here to serve, work for and support. That is our forward-looking approach and we want to continue in that vein.

The Convener: I accept what you say, but I take a different view on the accessibility of that information and the multiple opportunities that you and your colleagues have had to present it. There are serious questions as to why it was not provided at any point. Based on that evidence, the concerns that students, parents and teachers rightfully expressed are now shown to be correct. However, I am grateful for your answers on that.

I thank all the witnesses for their time and for their evidence and answers.

Meeting closed at 12:36.

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.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000
Textphone: 0800 092 7100
Email: sp.info@parliament.scot



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba