



Official Report
Aithisg Oifigeil

DRAFT

Education and Gaelic Committee

Comataidh an Fhoghlaim agus na Gàidhlig

Tuesday 22 September 2026

Session 7



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EDUCATION AND GAELIC COMMITTEE **4th Meeting 2026, Session 7**

CONVENER

*Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Katherine Sangster (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)

*Duncan Dunlop (South Scotland) (LD)

*Patricia Gibson (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

*Laura Moodie (South Scotland) (Green)

*Angela Ross (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Stuart Bain (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Sheena Devlin (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland)

Kevin Funnell (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland)

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education and Gaelic Committee

Tuesday 22 September 2026

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Pre-budget Scrutiny 2027-28

The Convener (Karen Adam): Good morning, and welcome to the fourth meeting in 2026 of the Education and Gaelic Committee. We will be taking evidence for our pre-budget scrutiny in advance of the budget documents being published on 3 December. This year, we will focus our scrutiny on progress towards children's care system reform and on class contact time in school education. Today, we are taking evidence on the second theme.

I welcome Sheena Devlin, general secretary of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland; Kevin Funnell, co-chair of the resources network at ADES; and Stuart Bain, chief officer of the employers team at the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Thank you all for coming and for your helpful submissions.

I will go straight to questions, which I will start before opening up the session to other members. I note from the ADES submission that

"Local authorities remain committed to supporting improvements in educational outcomes for children and young people."

How will reducing class contact time deliver improved educational outcomes for our young people?

Sheena Devlin (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland): That question goes to the heart of the ADES submission. At the end of our submission, we draw attention to the fact that, at the outset, no clear metrics or measures have been identified that could be evaluated over the course of implementation of the policy intent, then monitored and reported on. For such a significant investment in the education system, it is a concern for us that those metrics have not been established at the very beginning.

It is therefore incumbent on local authorities to set out, in their guidance to schools and headteachers on planning for this, that all the planning needs to take into account the aim of providing the greatest continuity in the curriculum, so that children and young people have the quality learning experiences that we would want for them.

Of course, we are planning for implementation at a time of significant curricular change, when familiarisation with the revised curriculum will be required, so it is not an insignificant task that lies

ahead for each classroom teacher, each headteacher and each local authority to ensure, as people are planning towards this, that front and centre of people's minds is the quality of learning experiences and the curriculum offer that is provided, as well as ensuring that there is as little disruption as possible for children and young people.

I do not have a simple answer to say, "This is how it will be done." It will be done in a range of ways through careful planning by education professionals at all levels in the system.

The Convener: Your submission says—you just touched on this—that

"there are currently no clear metrics of impact/success that will be able to be monitored, evaluated and reported."

What could or should those metrics look like?

Sheena Devlin: We want to ensure that we avoid thinking about teachers getting their requisite number of non-class-contact hours in the same way every week, for example, because we know that different approaches are required to provide non-class-contact time for teachers across Scotland in different contexts. First and foremost, we need to build flexibility into how that is done, to avoid a one-size-fits-all model of implementation across all parts of Scotland.

Teachers, headteachers and local authority support teams are skilled at curriculum planning. They will still need to exert the same level of skill and the same judicious approaches to planning to make sure that learning experiences provide the greatest continuity.

Under this model, the number of adults and teachers who interact with children and young people in primary schools will be increased in any given week. For our very youngest children, it is a concern that the same adult or adults will not be with them for the entirety of their class contact time, which remains unchanged. Careful planning among those staff in each school on the experiences that are offered will therefore be really important.

We need to ensure that we think about the teachers, too, because in primary schools, teachers are generalists in terms of the breadth of curriculum that they provide. We do not want an approach that would narrow individual teachers' curriculum experience down to one or two areas. The task is not inconsiderable.

The Convener: We have a supplementary question from Katherine Sangster.

Katherine Sangster (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab): Apologies—I thought that Duncan Dunlop would be first.

Sheena, thank you very much for your answer. You said that reduced class contact time will increase the number of adults who children have exposure to over a given week. That jumped out at me when I was reading the papers. Can you bring to life for us what a child's week will look like? They will have 25 hours, but teachers will have 21, so there is a gap of four hours. What are your thoughts on how those four hours will be made up? Will there be timetabling changes to chunk up a child's day a bit with physical education or music?

I am interested in what that will look like from a child's point of view. You are right that there must be consistency, including from a teacher's point of view, if they are going into a class of children who they have not spent as much time with.

Sheena Devlin: To give you a clear picture in committee this morning of what a child's 25 hours will look like across all schools in Scotland would be an impossible task. The really unhelpful answer that I could give is that it will look different in different classrooms, and it will look very different in different parts of the country.

I have recently been with some of our island authorities, which currently operate quite a different model of non-class-contact time and reduced class contact time given the availability of qualified teachers on islands. In a big town or big city, there will perhaps be a greater sufficiency of supply staff or part-time staff to call on to provide different aspects of non-class-contact time, as opposed to the situation in the more rural, remote and island areas, where the model will look very different. On a weekly basis, that will look different.

I go back to my point that there will be a requirement for flexibility, because some arrangements might not be in a child's best interests, or because there might not be a sufficiency of staff on a weekly basis in an island school, for example, to allow the same reduction in class contact time every week. However, perhaps over a fortnight or a month, there might be plans that suit that context.

Until now, it has routinely been the case that plans are put in place over a week. What could happen is that the main teacher or core teachers—we have a number of posts that are a job share, so a number of classes already have two teachers—would be there for 21 and a half hours. Then, for the additional four hours, the position would depend. There might be a teacher who provides, say, physical education, modern languages or expressive arts to all classes in a school—it could be a range of things. Local planning is critical, because it will reflect the local context.

Duncan Dunlop (South Scotland) (LD): I know that this was not necessarily your idea but, to go back to Karen Adam's initial question, what do you

think the metrics of success are that will allow us to know whether the policy will benefit children and young people? What should we look for that says that the policy will benefit education?

Sheena Devlin: From my experience in schools and local authorities, one issue is increased numbers of transitions for young people, such as a transition from one member of staff to another. A young person might have one teacher until the break and a different teacher after the break. After a transition, it can take longer for children to settle, or they might not settle as well.

If you increase the number of transitions, you need to be mindful of the amount of support that is provided. Early on, you would need to ensure that there was not an increase in low-level disruption, dysregulation and children taking longer to settle because of the different routines, so those transitions would need to be carefully planned. At a school level, you would need to see that there was not an increase in low-level indiscipline, for example. However, the hope is that any significant change to how education is provided will ultimately—it will not necessarily happen quickly—lead to improved learning outcomes, which are reflected in young people's assessments.

Duncan Dunlop: Will the policy deliver that?

Sheena Devlin: The honest answer is that I do not know. When the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development recommended providing staff with more time for planning and preparation, that was also about allowing staff to use non-class-contact time to come together to work collaboratively on wider system improvement.

The McCrone agreement used a metric to determine how non-class-contact time is divided and split—some of it is at individuals' discretion and some of it is for collegiate and collective endeavours. The same metric is not being applied to the additional time, so it is difficult to know how we will be able to effectively monitor and evaluate the positive impact that we hope something of this size and scale would have on children and young people.

Duncan Dunlop: If you do not mind my saying so, I am hearing a bit of scepticism about whether the policy is beneficial for children, so who does the policy benefit?

Sheena Devlin: The ADES paper makes it clear that we have concerns about learning and teaching and continuity. We want the policy to benefit children and young people. For that to be the case, it is right to think about teachers' terms and conditions, because good-quality terms and conditions and good-quality professional development mean a good-quality workforce, and

children and young people are the beneficiaries of a good-quality workforce.

At this stage, this is such an unknown. Right now, I cannot say whether we can quantify the value of the policy.

The Convener: Does COSLA have an opinion on the outcomes for our young people as a result of the reduction in class contact time?

Stuart Bain (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): From the perspective of COSLA and my role, our engagement with the reduction in class contact time has been as part of a negotiation. It is an industrial relations issue, and it is reflected in teachers' terms and conditions.

A reduction in class contact time means that the teacher will spend less time teaching and have more time for other activities in support of teaching. As Sheena Devlin said, a benefit is assumed in relation to how teachers are then able to deliver teaching to the children. There is also a benefit to the teacher in terms of their workload, which is obviously regarded as important.

On your question about how we have engaged with the policy, it has been a negotiation. At the outset of discussions about a reduction in class contact time, one area of negotiation was about what the additional non-class-contact time would be used for. As you will be aware, we have tripartite negotiations in the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers, where COSLA represents the councils as employers, the teaching unions represent the teaching workforce and the Scottish Government represents its interests in education delivery, education policy and so on.

09:45

In the original part of the negotiation, we were focused on the OECD's definition, which is wider than what has been agreed. In any negotiation with a union, the employer will ask for one thing—in this case, we were relatively closely aligned with the Scottish Government—and the union will ask for something different. That happened in this case, too, as the unions were keen on having not the wider OECD definition but a narrower definition around preparation and correction.

During the negotiation, it was agreed that the additional non-class-contact time would come under what would have been the heading of "preparation and correction", but that would be redefined as "professional time", and there would be scope in further negotiations to define what that professional time was to be used for. Therefore, there is still wiggle room for that non-class-contact time to be used in a slightly different way, with the definition in the SNCT handbook and the terms

and conditions for teachers—that is, their contract at a national level—being modified to reflect a different definition of professional time. That is still a work in progress between us, the teaching unions and the Scottish Government in those tripartite negotiations.

The Convener: Patricia Gibson has a supplementary question.

Patricia Gibson (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I am interested in the comments that Sheena Devlin made about how teachers will manage the school day when there is a lack of continuity because of the extra time for primary teachers. It struck me, as you were speaking, Sheena, that we have been here before, because we already have a lack of continuity—if you want to use that expression—as a result of primary teachers being released for McCrone time under a previous agreement.

I might have got this wrong—I am not from the primary sector, so please correct me if I have—but there are primary teachers who might, for example, have the last two hours on a Wednesday away from their class to do some preparation or development work, and another member of staff, such as the assistant head or the headteacher, will take their class for that time. We have some experience of that in the primary sector. Do you not think that it might be a good idea, if the proposal goes ahead, to use the experience and expertise that the primary schools have built up to help inform how best to manage the situation as they go ahead with the new reduction in class contact time?

Sheena Devlin: I apologise if I was not clear in my earlier answer. The proposal is an extension of what already exists. However, it brings even more people into the equation.

The McCrone agreement—which was established in "A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century"—ended up being fully implemented from 2006, so this is not new; it is what already happens in schools. We know that the implementation of McCrone has had a really positive impact on staff by providing them with time for planning, preparation and correction, and also with that collegiate time when staff come together as groups and work together as a whole school staff or, indeed, across schools. So, you are absolutely right that the proposal represents a further extension of the agreements around the reductions in class contact time that have been in play in Scotland since 2006.

As for the impact of that on, for example, the quality of learning and teaching or the quality of attainment outcomes, I am not aware of any reports that have been undertaken over that time that have said that it has led to a significant

improvement in outcomes for children and young people—there might have been some, but I am not aware of any. The point that I was making is that the proposal will bring in further opportunities for more transitions and potential discontinuity.

You are absolutely right that the traditional model that a lot of people think about—of one teacher, one class—has not existed for a long time. Often, there can be a job share, so there are already two teachers, and there will be another member of staff who provides the cover for non-class-contact time. The changes could add two, three or four more people to the mix—that is the point that I was making about discontinuity. It would, absolutely, be foolish to ignore what has worked well, and I do not for one minute imagine that schools and local authorities will not build on the models that they already have in place.

Patricia Gibson: Despite the comments that Stuart Bain made about greater professional development and higher morale in the profession—I am sure that you would say the same—do you think that, certainly in the primary sector, where there are some very young children, this might be a step too far?

Sheena Devlin: All that I can say is that I know that a number of young people find it challenging to deal with having a range of transitions and adults. I know that the teachers who work with children are committed to ensuring that the planning that they do for their class or classes is the best that it possibly can be. All of that will remain, but there will need to be a careful eye on the impact. The minute you change something, there is potential for good and for less good, so careful and close monitoring will be critical.

On staff development and the use of time, it is said that, if you want to go fast, you go alone and if you want to go far, you go together. ADES has made no secret of the fact that we would have liked more of the available non-class-contact time to be given to collegiate and system-wide improvement activity. We have had those discussions with the trade unions, but we are where we are.

It is important that we are working assiduously to plan for the best possible experiences that we can. That happens day and daily across Scotland, and it will continue, but there are a number of significant unknowns, not least of which is whether there will be the required staff availability across the country for implementation, but that is another point.

The Convener: Angela Ross has a supplementary question.

Angela Ross (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform): Good morning. I am still not clear on the purpose, and I wonder whether sharpening the

purpose would help with the focus on what problem we are trying to solve. I know that the proposal was originally in the 2021 programme for government, so it has been around for a long time, but I wonder what the driver was back then. From reading all the information, I know that a few different purposes were set out in various documents. The one that I landed on—this might be because of my background as a primary school teacher—is that of reducing workload burden. Is that the core driver? I just want to understand the purpose.

Sheena Devlin: The 2015 OECD review, which is what sits behind the measure, made 12 system-level recommendations, which were about the fact that there should be more protected time for teachers to plan learning, more time for assessment and moderation and more structured time for professional collaboration and strengthening collegiate activity for system-wide improvement—that is the bit about coming together that I mentioned.

As our written submission points out, the OECD said that

“without change, policy ambitions would continue to outpace delivery.”

The association that I represent was clear that the driver was the OECD review. We were also clear that the issue with the status quo was a structural one and not an individual workload issue. One thing that I and ADES have been keen to do since the proposal was announced is consider in detail the contributing factors in relation to workload. Every job has an expected workload, but, when that workload strays into being unacceptable or intolerable, work must be done to understand what the causes are and how to address those. I feel that the system has not done enough to truly understand that.

I cannot sit here and say that I think a further reduction in non-class-contact time will necessarily be the solution and will reduce workload. I do not think that there is a linear cause-and-effect connection between those two things. Unless you really understand the causes of workload—which are not necessarily uniform and can differ from area to area—and tackle them by using local negotiations and agreements to help manage workload, I am not sure that you can say that implementing the policy will, over time, create a significant and sustainable reduction in workload.

Angela Ross: Given that the estimated cost is £310 million per year and that there is no causal link between what we are trying to do and what we want to achieve by that, would it be prudent not to continue until we have a value-for-money case?

Sheena Devlin: We are working on the basis that there is political agreement that a reduction in

class contact time will be implemented and that it is incumbent on all professionals in the system to plan appropriately for that.

We are clear that planning for implementation must include planning how we intend to monitor it, so that the potential issues that I have raised—such as discontinuity in learning or the need to be mindful of the additional support that might be required by the increased number of transitions—are all factored in. ADES is not advocating for the reduction to be stopped, but we are saying that we need to plan carefully. Political agreement has been reached and we will work with that as best we can.

Laura Moodie (South Scotland) (Green): In their submissions to the committee, both ADES and COSLA highlighted the challenges that the proposal will bring for rural and island communities, given the existing recruitment challenges there. What steps have already been taken to address that and what more needs to be done to support those communities?

Stuart Bain: To be candid, a relatively limited number of steps can be taken to address those factors. One issue is the supply of teachers who are interested in working in those areas. The current training system does not require new teachers to go to a particular area. We do not send people to specific areas, as happens in some other countries. Instead, trainee teachers who are about to go into their probationary year are asked to list three areas where they might be interested in working, and they then go where jobs are available. So, there is a limited amount that can be done to address supply.

Regarding teachers' terms and conditions, we have a distant islands allowance that applies to the three island authorities—Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles—as well as to a number of named islands within Highland and within Argyll and Bute. At the moment, the allowance is an additional payment of more than £2,000 on top of the teacher's normal pay, so it is a not insignificant sum and is there to motivate all council staff to work in those areas. There is also a remote schools allowance, but the criteria for that are really quite complicated, so I will not go into much detail now, although I could look that up on my laptop and read it out to you. That allowance is there to remunerate teachers and to encourage them to go to those areas.

As part of this negotiation, the Scottish Government has promised an additional £1 million so that more remote councils can apply mitigations to encourage people to move to those areas. I cannot say what those councils will do, but, from an employer perspective, they might want to consider providing assistance with moving house

and a golden handshake approach. That financial support can be provided to encourage people to move to different areas.

10:00

Probably the most practical thing that a lot of councils are doing is ensuring that potential applicants are made fully aware of the benefits of living in certain communities. Perhaps petrol and your shop at Sainsbury's will be more expensive, but you will be living in a beautiful part of the countryside and will be able to use lots of amenities such as parks, walks and hills. It can be emphasised that working in a particular council area is not just about turning up, getting the money and then going home; people can be encouraged to consider the wider quality of life. If you look at our myjobscotland recruitment portal, you will see that councils are actively promoting themselves in that way in order to encourage people to move to their areas.

However, the bottom line is that we cannot kidnap a teacher, a social worker or anybody else and hoick them off to somewhere that they do not want to go. That is not how we do things in Scotland.

Laura Moodie: Rather than transplanting people from elsewhere, although that is welcome—I am a transplant in my rural council area—you can grow your own, but that is quite challenging. For example, in my rural council area, and nationally, there is a shortage of computing teachers at secondary level, because we are not training as many as we need. However, if someone in my local area decided that they would like to become a computing teacher, they could not do a computing course at the local college. That immediately makes the options quite limited. What work is going on behind the scenes to ensure that there is access to training in rural areas, so that they can have a workforce in sectors in which we acknowledge there is a deficiency?

Stuart Bain: Those points are well made. COSLA and councils, as employers, have limited control over those aspects. Anecdotally, we hear from our members that people from more remote parts of Scotland often go to the central belt to do their teacher training then think "I quite like it here" and decide not to go back. We think that that happens.

Sheena Devlin: I can give a couple of examples of exactly what you have described. Grow your own or learn to teach schemes—they are branded or labelled differently—have focused on enabling council staff who are not teachers but are looking for a change to undertake study to get a professional graduate diploma in education or a bachelor of education, for example. In a number of

geographies across Scotland, the University of the Highlands and Islands has worked closely with local authorities in a very targeted way. For example, there was a big drive to ensure that there was a sufficient number of home economics teachers.

I know that particular local authorities have worked closely with their local UHI education providers to ensure that council employees are able to undertake the required study and training to become teachers. They are facilitated to undertake their teaching practice time—they remain council employees but are given the necessary time off to undertake their teaching practice. It is quite likely that there would be a postgraduate agreement with the council whereby the person would agree to work for a minimum period within that local authority area, given the investment that the council had made in them. Those local schemes have been quite successful.

Laura Moodie: Thank you.

The Convener: Do you have another question?

Laura Moodie: It is okay—I will save it for later, because it might fit in elsewhere.

The Convener: No problem. Katherine Sangster, Patricia Gibson and George Adam would like to ask supplementary questions.

Katherine Sangster: I want to ask Stuart Bain about the cost of maintaining teacher numbers. The Government said that it was going to put in £186.5 million, whereas COSLA said that it would cost between £250 million and £310 million. What do you think about the differences in those estimates?

Also, on Laura Moodie's point about rural schools, you said that one of your concerns is limited subject choice. I know, both from my experience as a parent and from constituents who come to me, that there is already limited subject choice in secondary schools. What has the impact of the teacher numbers policy been on that?

Stuart Bain: Sorry—I was distracted by the second part of your question. Could you repeat the first part?

Katherine Sangster: The first part was about the difference in the cost estimates. I want to understand why there is a difference.

Stuart Bain: I have the answer here. It is worth thinking about the sequence of modelling that has been carried out over the period in which the policy has been considered. I think that the first modelling was carried out in 2023. It was commissioned by the Scottish Government and carried out by a consultancy. As the report said, it was very much a desktop exercise and kind of assumed that, as the number of pupils declined, the number of

teachers would also change, and that, if non-class-contact time increased, the number of teachers would have to increase by 7 per cent. It was a very basic calculation that did not take account of geographical factors or the fact that, if you lose one child out of a class, that does not mean that you need one fewer teacher or part thereof. You still have a whole class to teach. The report acknowledged that that was a fairly simplistic way of looking at it.

The next modelling was done by ADES, and the very large figure—£371 million—was based on imagining the policy being switched on tomorrow and our magically getting all the teachers we needed. Obviously, that would not happen, and it takes no account of possible changes in pupil numbers going forward. The assumption, as of August 2023, is that this is how many teachers we would need to be able to deliver the policy—and that would give us the £370 million figure.

Neither of those ways of modelling properly reflects the reality. Since then, the Scottish Government has done a slightly more sophisticated form of modelling, taking account of the change in pupil numbers. In discussion with COSLA, a factor has been applied for small schools. For a school that has 50 pupils or fewer, a percentage is added to the number of teachers that are required. That is a slightly more sophisticated way of modelling.

That is pretty much where we are now. The policy is being considered by COSLA at a national level, and we are engaging with local councils to validate the figures. We think that it is an improved model, but it is still not quite there, as is evidenced by the fact that, if you use the model and look at the actual number of teachers at the moment, they do not quite match up. Modelling is ongoing, and we are getting closer to the overall cost. We have moved from having quite a large difference in cost in 2023 to something much more logical.

We are looking only at the cost and are not considering any other aspects—for example, whether we will be able to motivate teachers in hard-to-fill subjects or in subject areas that schools are crying out to deliver, if teachers for those particular subjects exist at all. The work that is being done at the moment does not cover that, so we may still have to address that issue.

Patricia Gibson: We are considering the reduction in class contact time and its implications for the workforce. However, as Katherine Sangster said, we already have problems with recruiting teachers to rural and island areas.

I will stick with the primary sector for a moment. You have talked about incentives. I understand that a golden handshake is available whereby, if a teacher indicates that they are willing to go to a

hard-to-reach area—let us call it that—they are given a payment regardless of whether they are then called to go there. That is what I have heard anecdotally—I would not say it in a court of law, but that is what I have heard.

It strikes me that the real problem is that the cost of living is particularly high in rural and island communities, because of the proliferation of holiday homes and second homes. You talked about tied housing, but many people who come out of teacher training, and indeed established teachers, want to put down roots: they want to buy a house and raise their family there. A tied house does not give them ownership.

In the interest of solving the problem once and for all, would it be worth while piloting a system for recruiting—and, we hope, retaining—teachers in rural and island areas that are short of them, through a different salary structure? Might that be the way to go? You are giving newly qualified teachers more than £2,000, but that is not a huge amount when we consider the costs of moving, the disruption and their commitment to the long term. Would it not be better to pilot a different salary structure whereby the teacher would know that their salary would help them to live reasonably well—perhaps as well as they could if they lived in an urban area where the cost of housing was much more competitive than in an island one? It is all about supply and demand, and I do not think that offering tied housing and a £2,000 payment even touches that.

Stuart Bain: There are three parts to my answer. First, I did not mention tied housing earlier. I talked about a golden handshake purely because, if an employer who has some money and wants to encourage people to move to take up particular jobs were to ask me, as a human resources professional, what they might do with that money, I would say that they need to give people a one-off payment to encourage them to come.

Secondly, speaking in my role as chief officer on the employers team, I note that we have not been asked about a different salary structure, and it is not something on which we are currently negotiating. From the viewpoint of an HR professional, I would say that remuneration can change people's behaviours.

The third aspect is the need for a cost benefit analysis. Can we afford to remunerate effectively enough to get people to move? As I said, we already have a distant islands allowance, which is a not inconsiderable sum. We already have modification of the salary structure in that way.

We would need to be careful about how we applied differential salaries, particularly in a pilot. We could run into significant problems if we paid

people with the same employer more to do the same job in one area than in another, because there are employment law implications in doing that. We would need to be careful about how we constructed a pilot.

The first part of my answer was about terms and conditions, and we have not been asked about the matter from that perspective. I do not want to speak for the teaching unions but, for example, when I have spoken to Andrea Bradley of the Educational Institute of Scotland, she has not mentioned that to me as an initiative that she would be interested in. She has talked much more about ensuring that housing is in place and encouraging people to move in that way. However, if she were here in the room, she might have a different view on the question.

Patricia Gibson: My point is that you are already doing those things, but they are not working to the extent that you and everybody else would like them to. What else can you do? Of course, unions would not support that proposal, but I am thinking about the perspectives of communities on islands and the children who need teachers who are not there. Are there other things that you could do to bring teachers to islands?

10:15

Stuart Bain: I agree—from a professional, human resources point of view, remuneration policy is very important. However, there is a collective bargaining arrangement with teachers in Scotland and, from a collective point of view, we prefer, as far as possible, to treat everybody the same, regardless of the authority area in which they are employed.

Sheena Devlin: The idea of encouraging people to relocate is a complex one. Lots of factors can affect a person's decision to do so; those can be linked to the availability of housing, but they can also be down to personal circumstances. For example, people are sometimes not able to move to where an employment prospect is, because of family ties or caring responsibilities.

One of your earlier points was interesting. I hope that I understood it correctly. We have been giving thought to having discussions at an early stage about where people undertake their initial training. It might be worth while considering changing where initial teacher education currently takes place and to what degree, which could mean having more places available in the north of Scotland than are currently available there, and perhaps slightly fewer places elsewhere. That would hopefully lead to a pull—or a push—of people to those areas. When someone starts doing their teacher training placement and all the rest of it, and when they live as a student in an area

and get to know it, they might be more likely to remain there. Even now, there is a divergence with teachers who train in the central belt and have a reluctance to move elsewhere, perhaps because people have established connections by living there.

You were talking about what is called the waiver scheme. When a student graduates from training and becomes a newly qualified teacher, they can apply to be on the waiver scheme, which means that they can have no preference as to where they go. For an additional amount of money, they are then allocated to a place that could be remote or rural.

Local authorities currently offer a range of incentives, including covering moving costs and support while looking for accommodation, although that does not mean providing a tied house. There has been some discussion about the affordability of housing. Landlords and housing associations will be key to that. Not everybody necessarily wants to buy a house, but they all want good-quality, affordable housing. There is also scope for national discussion on that point.

The Convener: We have a supplementary point from George Adam. You can ask your substantive question as well, George.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I will make my supplementary point first, which is similar to what Sheena Devlin just described. My wife, Stacey, did teacher training in Aberdeen, and her mother's family is from the north-east, so if she had completed her training—she did not, because she had a massive multiple sclerosis attack after that—it would have probably been easier for her to work there.

My substantive question is on what Stuart Bain said earlier about teachers in some countries staying in the area where their training happened or being appointed to a certain area. Will you give me more detail on that, Stuart? The idea seems quite interesting, but I come at it from a different angle. I live in Paisley, and there are young qualified teachers who say that they cannot get a job in Paisley. If you go, "Here's one in Motherwell," they will think that that is quite far away. Having commuted to Perth when I worked in the real world, I know that those things need to be done. Which of the plans in the other countries that you mentioned earlier might it be helpful for us to consider?

Stuart Bain: I am afraid that I cannot give you more detail on that, because what I have is anecdotal and I do not have detail on what other countries do. However, from conversations with my education directorate colleagues, I understand that the ways in which we do our teacher training and probation allocation are different from those in

other countries. For example, in some European countries, once a teacher's training is completed they will go where they are told to go, regardless of their views on the subject. There is also the aspect that Sheena Devlin described, about someone moving to a place and putting down roots there. That is the approach that is taken in some countries. I know that only anecdotally, from conversation with education directorate colleagues, so I cannot even remember specifically which countries they referred to.

George Adam: Is it possible to send us those details?

Stuart Bain: I will ask education directorate colleagues for examples and, if I get them, I will send them on.

George Adam: That would be helpful. It has been an issue for all the time that I have been on this committee. Would you believe that I am trying to find solutions? I know that that seems unusual for a politician, but my mother must have played John Lennon to me too often—he said that there are no such things as problems, only solutions.

You are trying to deliver all this with regard to class contact time, but the only show in town in politics at the moment is public sector reform. We now have the Government's discussion paper. I will not ask you to give me details on that, because it only came out yesterday, but it talks about having six to 10 regional authorities and millions of community authorities—well, 120 to 160. As part of that, responsibility for early learning and school education will sit with the strategic regional body.

Against that backdrop, over the next three years, how would you be able to deliver what we are asking you to deliver now, in relation to what we are discussing today? What measurable changes could you make in order to get something done, rather than having others do it for you? There is always that dynamic between local and national Government—the Government tells you what to do—but the Government clearly wants to have a conversation about this, because the paper that was published last night cannot be called anything other than a discussion paper, given that it has no conclusions on what it wants to do. What would you do over the next three years to deliver the policy that we are looking at today? That is a nice easy one to start with.

Stuart Bain: I do not think that I can answer that question—I am sorry. There has been a three-month conversation that started a few weeks ago. The Scottish Government was kind enough to provide its idea of how it might take its proposals forward, but we do not know what will come to pass. All that I can say in relation to my experience of councils is that we try to make things work as best we can, so we will work with the situation—

George Adam: I know the situation with councils myself, and I know that you guys have everything planned years in advance. You know what you are looking at here, too. That is partly why I am asking the question. Some kind of public sector reform has always been on the cards, so I just want to know what your ideas are.

Stuart Bain: From my perspective—the employer's perspective—I am interested in employees' terms and conditions, so I will be interested to see whether those will change. I do not think that they will change for the teaching workforce, so I see no change in the teaching workload.

With regard to other council employees, if we were to move from 32 councils to eight, there would, in effect, be eight employers, so there would be a lot of work to do to harmonise terms and conditions across the workers in the various council areas. You can imagine moving together three disparate councils. You would find, for example, different holiday entitlements, different hours of work and different public holiday dates, all of which would have to be harmonised.

Those comments are very narrow, from the perspective of my area of expertise, which is the employment aspect. That would be a considerable challenge, even—

George Adam: Would that be a major aspect, financially?

Stuart Bain: In such situations, you try to level up, so you try to create a situation whereby, if you are harmonising terms and conditions, everybody gets the best of what is there already, which obviously involves costs.

The second approach that you can take is to keep everybody in separate little bubbles, if you like. In that case, if you were to amalgamate three councils into one larger one, the three different employee groups would retain their existing terms and conditions under TUPE—the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations—which you will be aware of.

That legislation has costs, too, because, instead of having one workforce with one set of terms and conditions, you now have three workforces, all under the same employer, but with different terms and conditions, admin overheads and so on. People may also start to say, "Hang on, that person over there gets an extra week's holiday, but I do not get that." Those are the kinds of issues that can start to arise.

There are challenges. If the model that is adopted is the one that came out yesterday, you would have to deal with those TUPE-type questions.

George Adam: I have my own ideas that are different from that model—but that is just me.

Stuart Bain: We might, too, but—

George Adam: Tell me them, Stuart.

Stuart Bain: I am not going to speak for leaders at the moment.

Kevin Funnell (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland): I will add to that. I apologise for coughing throughout the evidence session this morning; I hope that my cough will disappear.

It would be difficult to quantify how regional factors would impact on RCCT. I work in a local authority area with quite a large geographical boundary, and trying to put the right teachers in the right place and at the right time is always a challenge. I can offer employment to a teacher in one part of my local authority area, and they will reject it because they consider it too far to travel to. I am not sure how we will be able to see a link to RCCT and a benefit if we move to a regional model, because we might not be able to pick up a teacher and say, "We have a post for you," thereby solving some of the rural questions that were raised earlier. The teacher might just say, "That is not for me."

George Adam: It is not rocket science. In the past we had Strathclyde Regional Council, Fife Regional Council and so on. Surely they used to appoint people that way, too.

Kevin Funnell: Yes—and we do. Speaking not for ADES but for my own local authority, which is one of the authorities that you have mentioned, I can appoint a teacher to one part of the authority area, but they will just not go there. They will say, "That's not for me," because it involves a 30-minute commute, and they will tell me that they can get a post closer to home. The regional model might not solve the part of the RCCT issue about moving the workforce so that we have the right workforce in the right place and at the right time. It will still come down to employee choice and the posts that employees think are suitable for them.

George Adam: I wish that I had been involved in an industry like that, back in the day.

Kevin Funnell: That is a challenge when we are doing workforce planning.

Stuart Bain: This is not a Fife contingent, but I used to work for Fife Council. I joined Fife Council in 2000, and I worked there for 18 years. Local government reorganisation had occurred in 1996. I can say, from an HR perspective, that it took until 2010 before most of the harmonisation from the three districts and one regional council was completed—such things take a long time.

George Adam: Fife was one of the councils that kept quite a bit of its area, and I would say that it was probably one of the ones that got it right at that point. That is quite unusual.

When the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland went for reorganisation back in the day, it had Renfrewshire, which is my patch, going from Eaglesham to Newton Mearns and all the way down to Wemyss Bay—like “Make Renfrewshire great again.” That seems like an idea: we would get a more strategic view, especially in education, which, over the years is the one thing that everybody has been looking at how to do in a more strategic, regional way. The Scottish National Party manifesto from 2016 had an element of that in it.

Surely you have plans, or there have been ideas, of what you are going to do if we pursue that model. I am just trying to tease out some more information on that.

Sheena Devlin: I have written down “2016”, when there was an initial proposal to move to a form of what were called regional boards for education. There was a lot of discussion and debate around that, and born from that was the establishment of what were called the regional improvement collaboratives. At that time I was working in one particular local authority, but I became the lead director for the Tayside regional improvement collaborative, which brought together Angus, Perth and Kinross and Dundee for aspects of education provision and professional support.

10:30

There were six regional improvement collaboratives. They did not operate as legal entities; for example, my collaborative started as a coalition of willing volunteers because we already collaborated quite a lot in a range of educational ways. Some modest funding came, I think, from the Government, to support the regional improvement collaboratives, and they were reviewed and evaluated by the OECD as beginning—as Stuart Bain said, sometimes, things can take a while to bed in—to make a bit of a difference, particularly in one area, which was better professional development and improving the quality of learning and teaching, which was one of the purposes of RICs. They were also intended to provide equity of opportunity for pupils in some areas in which that might not have existed if individual local authorities had been making the offer. That work was evaluated very positively, against the backdrop of a budget of about £6 million in budget that had gone with the RICs.

The RICs were then dissolved. They were stopped. It is no secret that ADES was

disappointed with that, because we felt that really good progress was beginning to be made nationally in a different way, which did not require, if you like, a wholesale legal restructuring but brought people to work together under a different structure, albeit for the same goal. We had thought that we were beginning to make progress.

Although the funding for the RICs stopped, much of the work has continued—in some RICs areas more than others, but certainly across all of them to some degree.

The notion of public service reform is not new—the only certainty is change, is it not? We absolutely recognise that, and we are also absolutely clear that continuing with the status quo is not always the right thing to do.

In the absence of the formal approach to RICs, ADES set up its own way of working across all local authorities, called collaborative improvement. We were pleasantly surprised that all 32 local authorities opted into that, and it was a means by which Education Scotland and His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education were involved in working informally with ADES to improve the approaches to learning and teaching, curriculum design, a range of other things, and, ultimately, the outcomes for children and young people. All 32 local authorities have participated in at least one collaborative improvement activity. A formal report was produced afterwards and is available in each local authority.

We then set about re-revising the quality management improvement framework that local authorities use for self-evaluation. We are now in year 2 of using that. This time, each local authority is working with three other partner local authorities whose metrics—demographics, if you like—most closely mirror its own. That involves the local government benchmarking framework families, and interesting work is beginning to develop through that self-improvement. That is another model of working across local authorities that does not require formal structure and governance, although we have clear guidance on and expectations from it.

In the absence of clarity about what public service reform might mean for education, we certainly recognised that we needed to ensure that local authorities were working better together to provide critical support and challenge to each other to bring about improvement.

George Adam: I will finish, Presiding Officer—I promoted you, there, convener. From my perspective, the idea of regional bodies that councils feed into is a good one, because the opportunity exists to work together, especially in education, and that may be made to happen

without wholesale change. That is an important part of the debate.

As Sheena Devlin rightly said, we can look at this question in other ways. I hope that we can get the Government to consider that. For example, we could have a Strathclyde region educational model, so that local councillors could be accountable, as we had with the old fire and police boards back in the day. There might be a way of doing that without totally reinventing the wheel. I am not in government any more, though, so I do not know what they are seeing behind the curtain. That is just a statement, not a question.

The Convener: We will move on. We have supplementaries from Laura Moodie and Patricia Gibson, and then we will move on to Angela Ross's questions.

Laura Moodie: I want to pick up on workforce planning around this. It strikes me that the supply teacher system is likely—in the interim, if not in the long term—to play a part in how we address the need for additional time out of classrooms. Wherever you put the boundaries, there will always be a challenge. There will always be somebody who lives near a boundary between local authorities, and that can be a bit of a barrier. At the moment, if a supply teacher is looking for supply work, they have to ring several different local authorities. That is a lot of work, even though they might be easily able to travel over that border or might have family or other personal connections in a nearby authority that would make it easier for them to work there. Has any thought been given to co-ordinating that aspect of workload in the workforce nationally, such that teachers can go on a national supply availability list?

Stuart Bain: I am happy to come in on that. Kevin Funnell might have already alluded to some of the issues that an authority—even one as small as Fife—can have. If somebody is in Kirkcaldy, at one end of Fife, and they are asked to teach in St Andrews, they will probably say no, because of the distance that they would have to travel.

We have been asked the question whether there should be a national system on several occasions. Our assessment has found that the number of teachers who are in that situation is comparatively small compared with the potential costs of having a national employer system. There is absolutely nothing to stop a teacher being on a supply list for Dundee, Perth and Kinross, and Fife. If they live in Tayport, it makes perfect sense for them to be in those three supply pools. The reality is that, in quite a lot of the supply arrangements, the teacher is interested only in a small number of schools, for reasons of simple logistics. They do not want a huge, long journey in the morning, particularly in a supply situation where a teacher has phoned in

sick. In those cases, they might get a call from the head or deputy head at 8 am asking whether they can get to a school for 9 o'clock that morning, and there would be a limited amount of time for them to get there.

Our view is that, although a national system might seem attractive, it would be the answer to a problem that does not really exist. As I said, there is already nothing to stop a teacher being in three different supply pools, if that is suitable for them. Obviously, it would depend on which council phoned them first as to where they might end up going.

Kevin Funnell: As Stuart Bain alluded to, there have been a number of working groups over the years that have looked for a national solution. I recall that the last time such a project was undertaken, one of the issues that arose was around who would hold each person's enhanced disclosure for protected and vulnerable groups information, because we could only hold information on our own employees. Would we need to share it across the 32 authorities?

That is not to say that a national solution cannot be explored in the future if there is an appetite for it and we have a system.

Another challenge that we faced was that each of the 32 local authorities had its own unique system. Some were better than others. In one system, the member of staff would phone the council and look for employment, while in another system, the local authority had an automated system that sent out a text message or email. Those differences went through to the systems for creating a timesheet, for leading to payroll and so on. The systems were so diverse that it would have been a challenge to bring them together into one. However, the main stumbling block was the sharing of someone's personal information with an authority that might never engage with them and that the person might never accept an appointment with.

Most of the supply systems work on a six-month rota, so if an employee does not engage for six months, they are removed from the supply list. However, that idea could be explored.

Patricia Gibson: I am exercised on the issue of workforce; that is even before we get to the reduction in class contact time. As you will know better than I do, there are problems right now, before we even get to that point.

Teachers here are now the best paid in Europe; I speak as somebody who was a teacher for 25 years. They are now better paid than they have ever been. Obviously salary only goes one way, so that would be true nonetheless, but they are the best paid in Europe.

I come back to what I said earlier. I have a graph in front of me—I am not sure whether it comes from one of the witness submissions—that clearly shows the reality now, because the figures are from 2025. Physics teachers are like hen's teeth. We have real shortages in all the sciences, in particular in physics and chemistry, as well as in biology, and we also have real shortages in English and maths. It does not take a genius to work out the reason for that. Even though teachers are the best paid that they have ever been and the best paid in Europe, teaching does not compete with other opportunities, such as those in industry, that are available to those graduates—it just cannot compete.

In my view—I will not speak for anyone else—it is clear to the children and to the teachers in schools that there is a hierarchy of subjects. The teachers that we are short of are at the sharpest end, because there are fewer of them. I think that it is fair to say that not every subject carries the same workload for every teacher, if I can put it that way. There are much greater demands on teachers who teach academic subjects. We can argue about why that is the case, or even whether it is the case, but in reality, we know that it is true. Parents and children know it, and teachers know it. It might not ever be discussed in schools openly, but everybody knows it.

If we cannot fill the gaps in those key subjects now, the prospect of filling them when we need even more of those teachers seems ever more distant. I come back to my earlier point. I know about collective bargaining and all that, and that we do not want differentiated salaries, but it seems to me that we have a choice. We can have collective bargaining to set minimum salaries for teachers so that everybody has a minimum. However, it seems to me that, if we do not go down the road of differentiated salaries in some key subjects in order to compete with industry, the only alternative—please correct me if I have got this wrong—is that we offer a narrowing curriculum, because we simply cannot deliver the teachers for those subjects.

What is your response to that? Do you agree with it? If not, why not? I suppose that that question is for all of you.

Stuart Bain: Yes, I agree with that. With regard to the dichotomy that you highlighted, we can motivate people by paying them more, or we can accept that if we do not pay them more, it is going to be more difficult to motivate them to do certain types of work without pay being part of the equation. However, pay is not the only part of the equation. I would say that the way in which teachers are employed in Scotland is different from other parts of Europe, even. In many parts of Europe, primary and secondary teachers have

different terms and conditions, and they may have different levels of pay. In Scotland, we have all teachers on the same terms and conditions, regardless of whether they are a primary school teacher or a physics teacher—

Patricia Gibson: Do they all have the same workload?

Stuart Bain: They have the same terms and conditions, so arguably they have the same workload. It may be different types of work, but they are remunerated on the basis that they do a 35-hour week and they currently have 22.5 hours of class contact time. They will have collegiate activities that they are expected to undertake, and they will have time for preparation and correction. Those duties are the same across the board.

I absolutely take your point—I could not teach maths. I could not teach anything, to be honest, but maths would be much more difficult for me to teach than, say, English, which my degree is in. Those may be subjective viewpoints—had I done a maths degree, I might have a completely different view; I might be thinking that I could not teach English for anything, and that all this maths stuff is very logical and simple to my mind, and that I find it much easier.

10:45

I think that I agree with what you said. You could throw money at the problem, but from the point of view of terms and conditions or the way in which the SNCT is structured, that is not something that we could do without the agreement of our teaching unions. I suspect that they would not agree to that, because they like the idea of everybody being on the same terms and conditions for primary or secondary teaching and regardless of subject matter.

I do not think that we would get agreement to do that, and if we cannot do that, we have to try to manage shortages in different ways, such as by trying to attract people to particular areas.

The one thing that councils do not have a great deal of influence over is the number of trainee teachers in different subject areas. The Scottish Government could work with higher education institutes to motivate that. It might help if there were a greater supply of teachers in those subjects.

Patricia Gibson: It is not unreasonable to think that the reason, for example, people with a physics degree are not going into teacher training for physics is that it is not as attractive as other opportunities. I am thinking about salary, because it is a motivator. Salary also reflects your objective value, I suppose, in society and in the workplace.

The number of teachers in the teacher training pipeline is the source of the problem, and we can tackle it at source by making it more attractive and making it competitive with industry. Understanding that those people are perhaps more valuable than teachers of other subjects because there are so few of them—it is supply and demand—is basic economics.

If I have a skill that very few other people have, relatively speaking, in a school, I am at the top of the tree—I am special. On the other hand, if teachers of subject X are 10 a penny, that is a different situation. We cannot ignore that. It might be an uncomfortable truth, but we cannot ignore it.

Stuart Bain: From a professional perspective, I agree with you about remuneration. As a negotiator in the SNCT space, I cannot see any route to getting to the position that you describe.

Angela Ross: After listening to all the issues, I want to reiterate that we have staff issues and workload issues—there are many issues in implementing the 90 minutes of no-contact time. From following the evidence and reading through the documents, I think that we have the wrong solution for the problem. Sheena Devlin said that there is not a causal link between the problem and the solution as defined. The 2010 OECD report suggested systems issues and highlighted the burden on teachers. Every workload review since 2013 has identified issues such as bureaucracy, over-detailed planning and data demands.

Stuart Bain, this might be one for you. Having been a teacher and sat there with piles of paperwork, I know that the average amount of unpaid overtime for teachers in this country at the moment is 11 hours a week, so I do not think that the 90 minutes of no-contact time will even touch the sides of that. If a systems redesign is needed and that is the actual problem, reducing paperwork and data burdens seems to be a more logical assumption, and possibly a more cost-effective solution, than putting £310 million in every year to try to free teachers up. Are we looking at the problem from the wrong angle?

Stuart Bain: The 11 hours of unpaid overtime comes from an EIS-sponsored report. Unions came up with different figures on the amount of additional work that teachers were doing over and above their contracted hours.

That said, most of us would probably agree that teachers' workload can be an issue. It is not one of the things that I negotiate as an employer, but I know that my COSLA colleagues work with colleagues in the education directorate to look at that and that they are considering things such as finding ways to reduce the burden of admin.

Angela Ross: I know that the 2021 programme for government included plans to get 3,500 extra teachers—although teacher numbers have actually dropped since then—and 500 more classroom assistants. Given the teacher workload issues that we keep hearing about, would having more additional support needs staff not be a better use of the money that we are talking about? Having more admin support would also free teachers from doing the photocopying or preparing classroom and lesson resources. Would that not be a more logical way of using the money?

Stuart Bain: That is not my area of expertise, but the anecdotal evidence from teachers I have spoken to and from colleagues who have a remit for education policy agrees with that.

Angela Ross: Sheena, you said that there is no causal link between the problem and the solution. Do we need to do more work to understand the issues? You framed the problem well by talking about the OECD report. I am still not convinced that reduced contact time is the right way to achieve better, less stressful, working conditions for teachers. There is a burden that is caused by paperwork and systems. Do we need to do more work in that area to ensure we are spending money in the right way?

Sheena Devlin: There are a few things I would like to say about that, some of which I have mentioned already.

First, what workload consists of and what it looks and feels like is not uniform. The different activities that contribute to workload need different amounts of time. I have been a primary headteacher and, although that was not yesterday, I can still remember how it felt when the responsibility for everything that happened in the school rested at my door. The workload that goes with that is considerable.

What you said about varied workloads in different subjects is not something that I have ever heard being discussed, but workloads can look and feel different depending on whether someone is a class teacher, a promoted member of staff or a member of senior management. Workload will also vary from school to school and from individual to individual. I know from my own experience that folk find some things burdensome but still like to do them and that that can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In my role as general secretary, I have been trying genuinely to understand the causes of workload and to know what that looks like across all sectors and in different local authorities. It should not be beyond our collective wit to work towards an agreement in principle about how workload can better be managed. We talk a lot about aspects such as photocopying. If I were still

a headteacher, I would be quite sad if folk were still doing that every day because there should be no need for that.

There is a genuine need to understand whether planning the curriculum is a burden. I know that all the groups involved in the curriculum improvement cycle are mindful of the need to build in, from the get-go, minimal additional workload expectations for all staff, from subject specialists in secondary schools to primary teachers who will be implementing all areas of the curriculum.

That is one of the key principles that has been built into the curriculum improvement cycle work from the get-go. However, until we can actually name and articulate the causes of workload, we cannot understand what is an acceptable level of workload for a senior post—for a well-paid professional, as you said yourself. There has to be some level of workload that is acceptable and goes with each job; we need to focus on that which is excessive or is not useful, or which does not add benefit to staff or pupils.

I would like us to take a wholesale approach to looking at that specific issue, because if we do not tackle it, the issues around workload will be perpetuated, regardless of what structural changes might be made. We need to find ways to resolve it.

Angela Ross: The commitment to 90 minutes of no-contact time was in the programme for government in 2021. The curriculum improvement cycles that we have talked about are more recent. Have they been built into everything in terms of risk, and does the 90 minutes of no-contact time commitment cover the implementation of the new elements of the improvement cycle? I know that there is a 10-year plan, but is that aspect considered within the plan, given that it will take a lot of time and effort from teachers who are involved?

Sheena Devlin: A lot of the tripartite discussions were distilled down to the use of the 90 minutes. As I said earlier, there is already a metric in the existing McCrone agreement that says that, for non-class-contact time, two thirds would go to X and one third would go to Y. For some reason, the metric in the McCrone agreement was not considered to be acceptable, nor was it agreed as a means to address the issues.

A key part of curriculum improvement development is about coming together and working with colleagues. If the total 90 minutes is all for an individual to direct, that diminishes the opportunity for some of that collegiate work. There is still collegiate activity built in because of the existing McCrone agreement, but the provision that we are discussing is over and above that. There will need to be judicious use of existing

collegiate time and in-service days to enable staff to come together and consider the materials as they are developed, and then to think about the application and how they will plan an appropriate curriculum using those in the time available.

The Convener: We have questions from Duncan Dunlop and then from Katherine Sangster.

Duncan Dunlop: The more I listen to and read about the discussion on this area, the less sense it seems to make to me as a priority that we are choosing for an education system which—as we know after last week's programme for international student assessment results—is struggling in certain areas.

The Institute of Physics in Scotland says that 18 secondary schools do not have a full-time physics teacher. I know people who have been trying to teach themselves online. A total of 55 per cent of our secondary school teaching positions are filled, and we are going to reduce further, by between 6 and 7 per cent, face-to-face teaching time with students. I cannot see how that is going to benefit the students, given the current situation that we are looking at. I wonder whether there is something else in which we should invest that money. We know that we are going to be facing significant reductions in the public purse in the current session of Parliament.

You have experience, and I get that you all represent different bodies. What would you invest the resource in, if you had £300 million to improve the outcomes for our learners? I am interested in hearing contributions from all of you, given your different perspectives. You have been teachers or have been involved with negotiating through your various bodies in your lifetime.

Sheena Devlin: I am happy to start. Throughout the periods of negotiation, the role of ADES, which is not an employer but a professional association, and my job as general secretary, has been to represent the various constituent members. There are 400 members of ADES across Scotland, all of them in senior education positions in local authorities, from directors through to chief education officers, heads of service and quality improvement managers.

11:00

Folk often conflate ADES and COSLA as if they were one and the same, but COSLA is the employer body and ADES is a professional association. Kevin Funnell is the chair of the ADES network that deals with resources and has been at the heart of an awful lot of this work because the role of the resources network has been to look at the different models. We offered to do detailed modelling and picked three quite diverse local authorities so that we could show the implications

for that kind of investment in those three authorities. All 32 authorities then followed the templates that had been designed.

That left us with the concerns that we have reflected in our paper. However, as education professionals, we will take the brief that we are given and will work tirelessly to ensure that we can do the best we possibly can with that brief.

If we were starting with a blank piece of paper, and if there was the opportunity for investment, I would certainly like to see more investment going into additional support needs and the ASN workforce. Work on some of that has begun, which is promising, but it would move faster if more resources were available. Traditionally, people who have moved into working in additional support needs have found that there is not the same career structure as they would have found if they had remained in mainstream education. It takes investment to add those progressive steps to any new workforce, so I would like to see further investment there.

We must also look at the entirety of the education workforce, not just teachers but the additional support staff who are called different things in different schools and who do invaluable work. Those core staff are absolutely central to the success of any school and therefore to the success of any pupil, so anything that can be done to support that workforce would be really critical for schools.

We have spoken today about workforce issues. I am not necessarily someone who thinks that having different salaries for teachers of different subjects would be a good thing, because of how that might play out in schools. We should seriously tackle the workforce issues by looking at different models for where people might train, what that training might look like or what other opportunities there might be for someone like a physics specialist to engage in other work in different educational establishments, not just in schools.

There is a fundamental question about whether someone wants to be a teacher or a physicist, because those are not the same thing. Someone might want to teach physics but that is not the same as wanting to be a physicist and to do other things.

Education is a social construct with a strong moral purpose and that is what really brings people in, so we need to understand why that is not bringing people into certain disciplines and to look at what we might do there. Investment will be important.

I would like to ensure that the curriculum improvement cycle is properly resourced and supported too, because that is significant.

Workforce, additional support needs and the curriculum improvement cycle are three of the big areas that we must ensure we are targeting appropriately, but I have another thing to add. When children and young people come into schools they come with their experience of family and community. If we are going to be serious about prevention and early intervention, we must ensure that we are focusing the right resources at the right time and in the right places. That means looking at family learning and family support so that, when young people come into school, they are able to benefit most from what a teacher is uniquely placed to offer. The other professionals who work with children and young people can do that.

Working together does not mean that we do not honour the individual professions. It absolutely does mean that we honour the profession of social work or the profession of teachers, but, when those things come together, everybody is able to exercise their full professional authority, knowing that they are making a really important contribution to Scotland's future, because our children and young people are the future of our country.

Stuart Bain: There are opportunity costs associated with any policy direction, and I am involved in negotiations not only in relation to teaching but for the rest of the local government workforce, and you could certainly spend money on other parts of the local government workforce that would have benefits to the education system. However, those are political decisions, and that is above my pay grade.

Duncan Dunlop: I am interested in your personal view—you have enough professional experience in this—but I guess that that might create a conflict of interest for you.

On a slightly associated area, it is good to hear about additional support needs. As a political party, we were very strong on recognising that issue, because teachers told us that it was a solution that they really wanted us to focus on.

You talked about an equivalent to Teach First, with the potential to retrain local authority employees or transfer those who have the skills. In England, they have the Teach First programme, in which the training is condensed so that somebody from a different profession can come into teaching in the area. Are there ways to enable that to happen—to meet the needs of those living in more rural areas, for example?

Sheena Devlin: I do not know how effective and sustainable those condensed approaches are in relation to people staying in the profession.

The examples that I have been involved in and that I know about that are currently happening are much more focused on freeing people up from

their current role in a local authority to participate fully in the learning and teaching at a further or higher education institution. That is not a process of condensing training; it is a full experience, because we want quality people coming out of the end of the training. I am not familiar with the staying-on rates or sustainability of the condensed approach, so I would need to find out more before I would advocate going for something like that.

Giving people the opportunity to retrain requires investment from each of the local authorities that do that. They are still paying the salaries of the people who work for the council while they retrain, so there is opportunity for investment, without a shadow of a doubt.

Duncan Dunlop: It was somebody who works in the system in England who told me this, so it might be wrong, but I was told that Teach First-qualified graduates in England are not allowed to teach in Scotland, because their qualifications are not recognised here. I thought that that was a shame, if we have massive deficiencies in certain areas, that those people could not fulfil those positions. Even if somebody is just there for the short term, it is better to have somebody teaching the subject than nobody, as far as I can see.

Sheena Devlin: I have had some discussion with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, and if GTCS colleagues were here today, they certainly would not advocate for allowing anybody who does not meet the standards in Scotland to teach in Scotland's schools.

Patricia Gibson: [*Inaudible.*]

The Convener: My apologies, Patricia, but Duncan is finishing his questions.

Duncan Dunlop: At the moment, we do not have teachers at all.

That is all—thank you, convener.

The Convener: We will move to questions from Katherine Sangster.

Katherine Sangster: Sheena Devlin spoke to a lot of my questions in her reply to Duncan Dunlop, but I want to reiterate this point because we have had a really good conversation and it is clear that there are concerns about the policy, which does not seem very child centric.

As you said, Sheena, we are not thinking about the number of different people who will be involved in a child's day. You spoke about transitions. We have seen a huge rise in the number of children with additional support needs, and, for those children, transitions are where there are crisis points. You answered this question a bit, but, if we are wedded to reducing class contact time, what are we going to do to ensure that children with additional support needs are not—I do not want to

use the expression “left behind”—challenged by this.

Sheena Devlin: I would draw your attention to the second page of our submission where it discusses continuity of learning in early years, primary schools and special schools. I can only reassure the committee that the profession is live to the concerns around continuity of learning for all children and young people, and about the consistency and sufficiency of support for children and young people who may have some kind of additional support need.

Back in the early 2000s, I was involved, at a local authority and a school level, in planning for the implementation of McCrone, as it was then. There was a great level of detail in the planning that is necessarily undertaken in schools to establish and get agreement on what the risks might be, and then on what appropriate mitigations would be. This time, that work will also be about careful use of a range of different supports for children and young people.

Importantly, as I raised earlier, we need to be alert early to where things might not be going terribly well and to be okay about saying so at an early stage, so that we can look again and make any necessary changes, rather than continuing with something that we can see might not be having the best impact.

We must also not lose sight of the fact that this is a huge change for education, so it does not come without risks. It is incumbent on all the professionals who are involved, at a national and a local level, to work together and to be honest with each other about what the potential risks might be and what the best mitigations for those might be. Often, the best mitigations will be local solutions to very particular local issues, within a national framework.

The Convener: Thank you. That brings this morning's session near to a close. As this meeting is part of our pre-budget scrutiny, the committee would like to know your opinions on whether the reduction of class time by 90 minutes should be in the Scottish Government's priority list for the 2027-28 budget, given everything that we have heard today.

Sheena Devlin: I am going to answer your question, but from a different perspective. We have been clear from the get-go that the implementation of this change requires to be fully funded, or it will not be successful. Without full funding, we are unsure how the proposal can be of benefit. There is a question about whether the money should go on that priority, and I hear that, but I come back to what I said earlier. A political decision has been taken, and we are currently

working on the basis that it will go ahead if full funding is available.

The Convener: Stuart, do you have an opinion?

Stuart Bain: It is very much what Sheena has said. From a negotiations point of view, you could invest money in other parts of the workforce, and that would have different implications for what could be delivered. I cannot comment on whether that would be better or worse.

Kevin Funnell: Following on from what Sheena and Stuart have said, in our local authority we have been given a mandate by our leaders to prepare for the delivery, and that is what we are striving to do.

For my area—resources—that requires two things to be available. One is sustainable funding: we need to know what the funding will be so that we can do workforce planning 18 months or two years in advance. The other is teachers. We need those two things to be available together to make the RCCT a possibility for the primary sector in 2027 and to face that challenge for the secondary sector in 2029.

The Convener: On that, we will close our meeting. Thank you all very much again for attending.

Meeting closed at 11:14.

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Official Report
Room T2.20
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