

# **EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 10 November 2004

Session 2

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## EDUCATION COMMITTEE

### 22<sup>nd</sup> Meeting 2004, Session 2

#### CONVENER

\*Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD)

#### DEPUTY CONVENER

\*Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con)

#### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

\*Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab)  
\*Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP)  
Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP)  
\*Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
\*Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
\*Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)  
\*Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab)

#### COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con)  
Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP)  
Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

\*attended

#### THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Joe Brown (Scottish Executive Education Department)  
Colin MacLean (Scottish Executive Education Department)  
Peter Peacock (Minister for Education and Young People)  
Gill Robinson (Scottish Executive Education Department)  
Philip Rycroft (Scottish Executive Education Department)

#### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Martin Verity

#### SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Mark Roberts

#### ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

#### LOCATION

Committee Room 4



## Scottish Parliament

### Education Committee

*Wednesday 10 November 2004*

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 11:06*]

### Interests

**The Convener (Robert Brown):** I welcome people to this meeting of the Education Committee. We are in public session so, as usual, I remind everyone to switch off mobile telephones and pagers.

I welcome Frank McAveety as a member of the committee and invite him to declare any relevant interests.

**Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests and declare that I am still a member of the Educational Institute of Scotland.

## Budget Process 2005-06

11:07

**The Convener:** Item 2 is evidence on the Scottish Executive's budget process 2005-06. The details of the budget were published on 15 October and the Finance Committee is due to report to Parliament on the Executive's proposals later in the year. As part of the process, subject committees are asked to consider the Executive's plans for their area of responsibility and to report to the Finance Committee.

I welcome Peter Peacock, the Minister for Education and Young People, and from the Scottish Executive Education Department I welcome Philip Rycroft, the head of the schools group, Colin MacLean, the head of the children and young people social care group, and Gill Robinson and Colin Brown of the qualifications assessment and curriculum group. If they are not enough, we have added somebody else at the end of the panel. Could you introduce yourself, please?

**Joe Brown (Scottish Executive Education Department):** My name is Joe Brown and I work in the Scottish Executive Education Department in the policy support unit.

**The Convener:** You must be fearful of a grilling by the committee to bring such a heavy list of officials with you today, minister. I invite you to make a few fairly brief comments to introduce the budget process.

**The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock):** I apologise for holding the committee back slightly at the beginning of the meeting—we got caught up in traffic in the city.

There are a few key points that I would like to make to give some context for the budget. Education clearly remains a key priority for the Executive, and that is reflected in the substantial growth in our budgets for the coming period, in the spending review period that the Minister for Finance and Public Services recently dealt with in Parliament, in the central Government line and in the local government line as well. In fact, central Government growth on spending will increase by 42 per cent over the period that the committee is examining. The local government line will also grow significantly over that period.

I would like to make one comment on the targets that were set for the spending review period. Because of the growth in teacher numbers that we seek and the impact of that growth, we were exempted from the normal efficiency targets that have been set across the system as a whole so that we can make those teacher numbers grow as

we want them to. That will allow us to meet a number of our key priorities, as will the additional resource that we have. The extra teachers we are looking to recruit to bring numbers up to 53,000 by 2008 will allow us to have lower class sizes, which is another major commitment.

The budget will allow us to meet all of our commitments to the school building programme, which is massive in its extent. It will allow us to make some important developments in child protection inspection and in child protection services and children's services. It will also allow us to get ahead with initiatives such as the schools of ambition programme, and with initiatives relating to the developments that we want to take place in relation to leadership and many other matters.

The committee's principal scrutiny today relates to the central Government line. As I did last year, I want to make it clear that, although that is a significant sum, it is dwarfed by the money that goes directly to local authorities through grant-aided expenditure. Central Government expenditure is about £600 million and will rise to £866 million over the spending review period, but a further £3.9 billion, rising to about £4.1 billion, goes directly to local authorities.

I will be happy to respond to any questions. I have a phalanx of officials with me because they understand the fine detail of the points that will arise. I will ask them to pick up any technical points of detail.

**The Convener:** As you were speaking, it struck me that the question of efficiency savings is not necessarily contradictory to extra spending and extra recruitment. I might come back to that later.

I want to talk about the question of transparency that arises from the local government settlement. You might recall that we went into this matter at an earlier stage in our budget discussions and I gather that there has been some contact between our officials and your officials since then. However, I believe that the contact did not achieve as much as everyone would have liked it to.

The committee was clear that the ability to monitor output from Scottish Executive spend had a lot to do with the ability to read through what was happening at local government level, where most policy delivery takes place. The national priorities action fund, which is a subset of that issue, seems to have grown at the expense of some of the other items without being specified in the budget papers that we have seen. Is there anything that you can usefully say to the committee about increased transparency in terms of the availability of information, an analysis of what happens at local government level and, in particular, the

relationship between the Executive's targets and what happens on the ground?

**Peter Peacock:** I am more than happy for your officials and our officials to maintain a close dialogue about the issues in which you are interested. Please take that as an open invitation for your officials and advisers to ask any questions that you want answers to. That is in everybody's interest.

Because I have not been involved in the local government finance side of the Executive's work for a year or so, I am not entirely sure whether we still publish the individual grant-aided expenditure calculations, which we used to do. I will look into that. Again, I have no problem with sharing that information with the committee because it is part of understanding what lies behind the calculations that relate to the large sums of money that local authorities receive. If that information is still produced as it used to be, I will see what I can do to make it available to you.

The difficulty that exists in relation to all public expenditure that involves local authorities is that, although we have ways of calculating the relative share of the fixed cake of money that goes to local authorities—that is where all the grant-aided expenditure calculations come into play—local authorities decide how to spend the money and are accountable locally for how they exercise their discretion. There will always be a tension between our ability to explain what our assumptions are about the funding that goes to local authorities and Parliament's ability to scrutinise in a detailed way what happens on the ground.

However, we have been doing a number of important things recently to try to make the situation better not only for reasons of transparency but for reasons of performance improvement. Last year, we published the "National Priorities in Education: Performance Report 2003" and we will publish one again in 2006. That is a very comprehensive and detailed document about all the national priorities and how each local authority is performing relative to the frameworks within the national priorities. That is one mechanism, which I commend to the committee and invite it to examine in detail. We would be happy to come back and give evidence on that in due course if the committee desires. It plots carefully what is happening, which is the first time that that has been done, and it is opening up new ground internationally in terms of what people are reporting about educational performance. It is a rich source of data. In addition, data on financial performance are available from the Accounts Commission for Scotland and Audit Scotland, which examine local authorities' expenditure.

11:15

The reason why we have the national priorities performance report is not only to give local authorities feedback about how they are performing, but to ensure that there is much wider public scrutiny of how they are performing, so that we see progress year on year on the targets around the national priorities, which they set with our help. That is an important part of the future. The improvement framework that was set up by the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000, of which the national priorities—and therefore their reporting—are a part, is an important driver of performance improvement and an important vehicle for releasing information.

I will ask Philip Rycroft to talk about the detail of the national priorities action fund, but you have to keep it in context. I recollect that we are talking about less than £200 million in the fund, against total spending on schools education approaching £4.8 billion. It is a small part of the total.

**The Convener:** It is quite a big part of the Executive's spending, however.

**Peter Peacock:** Indeed, that is the point that I was going to make. It represents a significant proportion of our spending, but it is designed to drive and to incentivise some of the changes that we want in the system. It is entirely legitimate that central Government has a source of cash that it can use to facilitate, drive and make changes in the system as a whole. Given the amount's scale relative to total spending, it does not seem to be out of proportion to what we need.

**The Convener:** There is no dispute about that, but the issue is that it is a substantial part of the Executive's budget and there is no breakdown. The fund seems to be absorbing things from other areas. The committee would like to have a breakdown of what it boils down to in practical terms, because we cannot relate anything to targets or priorities without that information.

**Peter Peacock:** I am more than happy to help the committee with that. The fund is broken down into several parts: part of it is for continuing professional development; part of it is about investing in improved behaviour in our schools, following the "Better Behaviour—Better Learning" report; part of it is in relation to free fruit and meals in our schools; and part of it is for information and communications technology. We are more than happy to give the committee the information that members want. Perhaps Philip Rycroft can say more about the fund, and also how within the fund we are planning to remove some of the restrictions on local authorities to vire between parts of the fund to ensure that they meet their local priorities.

**Philip Rycroft (Scottish Executive Education Department):** As the minister said, the fund is

divided into a number of strands: school in the community; integrated community schools; social justice, which covers inclusion and so on, the line for which has increased significantly, partly because of the addition of funds for the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004; discipline and ethos; school infrastructure; and nutrition in schools. We can give the committee details of all those.

The committee expressed concerns last year about initiative funding. Local authorities have frequently spoken to us about that. In response, we have tried to make management of the national priorities action fund more flexible so that it can respond to local need. For example, if a local authority has good policies in place in respect of school discipline and has done the job on that that is required of it, it should have flexibility to vire money into other areas—perhaps into the school meals side or whatever. Authorities have asked for more local discretion and the committee implied that it supported that when it spoke about the excess of initiative funding. We are working with local authorities to see how we can increase the fund's flexibility over time. However, the purpose of the fund is to enable local authorities to respond to national priorities. That is why the fund remains within the central Government "Specific grants" line instead of transiting through into grant-aided expenditure.

**The Convener:** The committee would be grateful to receive that breakdown as soon as possible.

Before finishing on that matter, I want to return to the local government issue. The committee has no desire to interfere with the discretion of local authorities, but we still want to know what is happening at local authority level. According to the information that we have, there is some sort of perceived blockage in the ability of Executive officials to give us more information or to work with us to develop mechanisms for providing that. From the discussions of our predecessor committee, we understood that ministers quite favoured being as open as possible. We would like to see progress on that, which might lead to measurable results at the end of the day.

**Peter Peacock:** I have absolutely no problem with that—we all share the same issues. A huge proportion of the day-to-day targets that I am committed to delivering are not in my hands but in the hands of local authorities so I, too, need to have clear handles on the performance of local authorities. There is a constant tension between central Government and local government on the extent of the information that we seek.

I stress that the national priorities system and the performance reporting on those priorities is very new. We have had only the first report, but

we have learned a lot from it. Officials are currently working with local authorities on how we might refine the data and use them in the next round of reporting. The clear intention is that the system will be a centrepiece for seeing what is happening with the resources that we provide so that we can monitor performance on the ground. If the committee's officials can give us clear ideas about the kind of data the committee seeks, I give my commitment that our officials will work with them to see what we can do about that.

I know that a wider dialogue is taking place between Tom McCabe, who now has responsibility for local government, and the local government community to try to get a clearer handle on the kind of data that we all desire so that we can monitor performance and make policy decisions on the basis of the changing trends in the challenges that local authorities face. Quite a lot of thinking is going on about how we might focus much more precisely on what we need to know. That information can then become publicly available.

**The Convener:** Clarity of information is a crucial issue, which Wendy Alexander will pursue.

**Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab):** I apologise for not giving prior notice of this question, but it came up only after discussion with our budget advisers.

I seek direction from the minister—I want to ask the first-principles question about what we are trying to achieve with the education budget. As a committee, we thought that the statement of priorities that appears both in "Building a Better Scotland: Spending Proposals 2005-2008" and in the "Draft Budget 2005-06" was incredibly helpful. The statement of priorities lists 11 key commitments, which we had hoped would be reflected in the targets. I think that that is happening, but it is happening slowly.

Let me run quickly through those 11 priorities. The first priority is first-class schools, for which there is a target. The second is that there should be more flexible learning, but we could find no target for that. The third target is on improvements in outcomes, but the target relates only to the bottom 20 per cent of pupils. The fourth priority is children with additional support needs, but we could find no target for that. The fifth priority is to deliver more teachers, for which there is a target, and more support staff, for which there is no target. The sixth priority is the development of social care, for which there is a target. The seventh is the protection of children, for which there is a target. The eighth is the expansion of early-years provision, for which there is no target. The ninth is to increase the availability of child care, but that priority has no target. The 10<sup>th</sup> priority is for more active involvement of young

people, but there is no target for that, and the 11<sup>th</sup> is the review of the children's hearings system, for which there is no target.

However, some issues—such as Gaelic—that appear in the targets do not appear in the statement of priorities. Over time, can we expect to see alignment of the 11 priorities with the 10 targets? We felt that having different priorities and different targets might allow some people out there to pick and choose the things that they respond to; they might not respond on some priorities that are key for the Executive. Directionally, over time are we likely to see targets that reflect the 11 priorities? Obviously, it is helpful that some targets have been made redundant in the recent past.

**Peter Peacock:** My hope is that the answer is yes. I am as keen as Wendy Alexander to get real clarity on what we are seeking to achieve. We have much more clarity today than we had two years ago and we will have even greater clarity in two year's time than we have today. We want to keep moving forward in that way.

In setting our targets, we have tried to respond to what this committee has been telling us—indeed, to what the Finance Committee has been telling Parliament that all Executive departments should do—which is to have fewer targets. The immediate difficulty is that if we are to try to have fewer targets we must work out what they are. We are also being implored not to shift our targets radically but to maintain some continuity year on year. We are trying to do that and, at the same time, slim the targets down.

I am sure that Wendy Alexander could ask me all sorts of questions about why we decided to drop one target and not another. At the end of the day, however, we had to come to a decision. The Finance Committee wants each department to have 10 targets, so that is what we have sought to do. Over time, I hope that there will be more alignment—we are trying to work towards that.

The other factor in all of this is that we are dealing with a set of moving targets. In the past, we tried to have some sort of continuity by updating targets where we could and dropping others that seemed not to be as important as the 10 we must now pick. Policy developments happen all the time; things are moving and changing. In a sense, our statement of priorities reflects our more current agenda and not the one that we have in our targets. For example, some of the areas that Wendy Alexander highlighted are picked up in "ambitious, excellent schools: our agenda for action". The funding that I have got is very much aligned to meeting what is in that document. That is reflected in some of the targets.

Wendy Alexander will find in "ambitious, excellent schools" not only a series of policy



announcements but a series of timelines against achieving all of them. In part, the timelines allow me to ensure that I can drive forward the process of change and development internally. Technically, they are not targets, but measurable outcomes that are available in the system. If Wendy Alexander also examines other documents, she will find many more areas that have timelines against them.

The essential dilemma is that, although I have only 10 targets—so that the Parliament can focus clearly on them—I also have many other areas of activity and I need to have in place the internal processes that will help to drive them forward. There will always be a degree of mismatch—that is inevitable. We have to keep our thinking fresh—we have to move forward on new initiatives, ideas and developments and we have to respond to change in the environment in which we work. There will always have to be some kind of overlap between those kinds of statements. That said, I intend to try to move in that direction; the points that Wendy Alexander made will help us to focus on that more effectively.

If I may, I will make one final point. Target 10 of the list of targets is a process target and not an outcome target on achievement or attainment. Within target 10 are a set of processes that will ensure that our priorities work from local level right through to national level. Every local authority will have realistic targets that it must meet. The targets will move performance on from where local authorities and their schools are at the moment.

Target 10 is the driver for a series of other things that happen at local level in respect of performance. I am talking not just about the bottom 20 per cent, but much more widely about the system as a whole. Again, that will come out in the national priorities performance report in 2006—as, indeed, it did in our report of last year.

**Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab):** I have a few specific questions on targets. I will try to put them as succinctly as possible. Target 1 is to ensure

“By March 2008 ... that children and young people who need it have an integrated package of appropriate health, care and education support.”

The target sounds laudable, but how will you know whether it is achieved? Given that the previous target was set for March 2006, will we get a milestone report in 2006 that will show us the progress towards achieving target 1?

**Peter Peacock:** You might not have seen these, as they might not yet be published, but a series of technical notes backs up the budget documents. The notes set interim milestones and provide much more detail about how we will know whether we are moving towards a target. The meeting of

target 1 will be assisted by, among other things, the work that we are doing on single assessment and support for young people. The target reflects the need for young people to have integrated packages of care, appropriate health care, educational support and so on. The technical notes will give much more detail of the interim milestones on the way to meeting the targets.

11:30

**Dr Murray:** Given that the Scottish Executive Education Department does not bear all the responsibility for social work, target 3 seems to relate to other departments. The justice and communities portfolios will have a role in ensuring that the target is met. Are such targets joint targets that apply to other departments?

**Peter Peacock:** Yes. Target 3 deals with inspection and quality assurance. Across the Executive, a huge amount of work is going on collectively in relation to the inspectorates. For example, on integrated children's services inspection, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education is leading a team that involves HM inspectorate of constabulary, the quality assurance people in the health service, the social work services inspectorate and others. The Executive places a great deal of emphasis on trying to ensure that we consider inspection in a much more joined-up way than we perhaps have done in the past, to try to ensure that there is no overlap of inspection of individual establishments and organisations and to ensure that the principles and strengths of our inspection systems are shared more widely across the Executive. We are trying to join up the approach as effectively as possible. Colin MacLean might add some detail on that.

**Colin MacLean (Scottish Executive Education Department):** Graham Donaldson will host a conference tomorrow at which he will lay out how he proposes to take forward the inspection of child protection. As the minister said, a number of organisations will be involved, including the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care. When the detail has been thought through, the next step will be to consider how the process might be applied to other aspects of children's services. Target 3 is about quality assurance for social work and the thinking across the different Executive departments and various inspectorates about how best to ensure that we consider social work coherently across the system.

**Peter Peacock:** In response to Elaine Murray, I mention that I had discussions with officials yesterday about the work that is going on in the social work review group, which is considering a performance improvement system for social work

as part of its work on social work as a whole. The social work services inspectorate has already become a shadow agency and is working on plans to integrate its inspection with other aspects of social work. That work is in hand and we fully expect the deadline of March 2008 to be met.

**Dr Murray:** Target 5 is to increase teacher numbers to 53,000. I understand that there has been some loosening of that target in relation to requirements in specialities. We will consider this issue again during tonight's members' business debate in the Parliament, but there are significant shortages in mathematics and science. A third of science teachers are more than 50 years old and half are over 45. Target 5 could be met by recruiting a lot of teachers in areas that are already quite well equipped, which would not address the problems in mathematics and science. How can we address the need to monitor the recruitment of science and mathematics teachers?

**Peter Peacock:** The target reflects the top-level political commitment that the Executive made in the partnership agreement to increase teacher numbers to 53,000. That priority is focused on reducing class sizes to 20 in mathematics and English for secondary 1 and secondary 2 pupils and on reducing primary 1 class sizes to 25. Target 5 reflects that clear political commitment.

Beyond that, we now have in place increasingly sophisticated work force planning for education, which did not exist in any degree of sophistication before the McCrone settlement. One outcome of the settlement was that we realised that we had to understand the work force much more effectively, principally to work out all the costs of the settlement and how it would be phased in and implemented. That has given us the basis of intelligence for monitoring closely in every subject the current vacancy rate, the expected retiral rate and, if they will create a shortage, what increase is required in the supply of teacher training places in our universities. Also taken into account is a range of factors such as the rate at which we can expect to recruit from outside Scotland or to bring other professionals into teaching. We consider science, music, physical education and every other aspect that involves our work force.

Underneath the target, which is for the high-level political objectives that we have set out, is a matrix that is available for us to examine. I am not sure how much of that is broadly in the public domain—perhaps Philip Rycroft can help with that. I have no particular difficulty with sharing the techniques and logic that we apply and how we try to pick up such details to adjust the supply of teacher training places to fill shortages.

**Philip Rycroft:** The teacher work force planning exercise and all the detail that accompanies it are

put into the public domain. I think that the last lot of information was published three or four months ago. It was made available to the Scottish Parliament information centre and others. All the information is in the public domain.

**Dr Murray:** I have a final question on target 10, which says that local authorities set targets—we have discussed that. Are those targets yours or theirs? Target 10 refers to

“the position as published in 2003”.

Is that publicly available so that we can examine it, or is that information that only the Executive holds?

**Peter Peacock:** The national priorities performance report reflects performance against the targets for that time and is publicly available. You asked whether the targets are centrally imposed and standard throughout the system. They are not. We discuss with each local authority the setting by it of challenging targets for its range of schools, wherever they happen to be.

You will appreciate that schools in local authority areas have different performance levels. We want to ensure that everybody drives up improvement, which is why we have more of a focus locally. The danger of national targets is that they could lack a challenge for local authorities that already exceed them. We want those authorities to be challenged, too, and to raise their performance. Local authorities set a range of targets and we are happy to supply the committee with that information if members have not seen it. Local authorities will be monitored against those targets for the performance report.

Philip Rycroft can keep me right, but it is interesting to note that, when we had national targets, some local authorities set targets that were higher than ours. Evidence suggests that because local authorities consider their circumstances and not average performance in Scotland, some authorities build more challenge into the system. Target 10 allows us to challenge local authorities on whether their targets are stretching enough and ensures that we set achievable targets that push forward performance in a more locally sensitive way. Local authorities should work with schools on how schools' performance can be progressed.

**Philip Rycroft:** I draw the “National Priorities in Education Performance Report 2003” to the committee's attention. The document contains a national summary and, to save a few trees, a CD-ROM is attached to it to give details authority by authority on local targets that have been set. A wealth of information is provided about what is going on in every local authority in Scotland. We have a commitment to consider performance

against those locally set targets and we will publish a follow-up report in 2006.

I do not want to give the impression that we have sat back and left that process to run. The committee is aware that local authorities are subject to HMIE's inspection regime, which involves periodic inspection. The Executive has also vastly improved its dialogue with local authorities. We are in the middle of a round of visits to every local authority in Scotland to talk about how they are getting on against the national priorities, what issues they have and what they think about national policy development. It is our intention to continue that dialogue, which is far richer than it used to be and gives us a far better understanding of some of the pressures under which the local authorities operate, as well as some of their ambitions.

**The Convener:** There was an undertaking to monitor the progress on the dropped targets so that there is some consistency. Will you reassure me that that will happen and tell me in what format it will be reported?

**Philip Rycroft:** Absolutely. In a sense, those targets were not dropped, because we are still operating to them. Indeed, a number of them are in the partnership agreement, so we expect close scrutiny of how we perform against those ambitions. Take, for example, the target on school meals. As the committee is aware, following "Hungry for Success: A Whole School Approach to School Meals in Scotland", we have a huge programme of activity under way to improve the school meals that are offered to kids. That programme will continue. The same applies to integrated community schools and health-promoting schools, for example. All those things remain embedded in our continuing activity.

**Mr McAveety:** Peter, you mentioned in your earlier comments that the document that is relatively fresh—"ambitious, excellent schools"—is another template of the Executive's vision for education and you specifically mentioned that resources have been made available to meet the objectives set out in the document. Will you give us a flavour of what you mean by that and how it relates to our earlier discussion about targets and objectives?

**Peter Peacock:** Off the top of my head, I can say that "ambitious, excellent schools" contains things about curriculum review, to which costs will be attached, and extra teacher numbers, to which costs will also be attached. It also talks about our ambitious schools programme and the investments that we require for that and it makes reference to the creation of a leadership academy. Those are four quick illustrations of what is in "ambitious, excellent schools" and we have funding for them all.

Some of that money is within our existing baseline. For example, we have, I think, £45 million a year for curriculum matters in the division that Gill Robinson operates, so we will simply attach that existing resource and reprioritise activity that we have been undertaking in curriculum development into the curriculum review. From the spending review, we have secured resources for the leadership academy and the ambitious schools programme—£8 million between the two of those measures, which are in the budget—and sufficient resources to fund the commitment to employ 53,000 teachers.

Those are four examples of measures that are in "ambitious, excellent schools" and for which we have resources, but they are not the only ones. As you go through the document, I would be happy to answer any points of detail.

**Mr McAveety:** You mentioned earlier that, in the spending review, there was an exemption from efficiency targets, although, from yesterday's Finance Committee meeting, I think that we are still awaiting information on the likely direction of those targets. Given that a lot of the costs in education are staff costs, where do the efficiency targets that might be placed on local authorities feature in the debate? How will they impact on the comments that you have just made?

**Peter Peacock:** There are two ways of looking at that. One relates to cash efficiency and how we measure inputs and outputs in those terms. We are rapidly increasing the number of teachers at the same time as school rolls are falling, so the unit cost per child is rising, which makes us seem, on the face of it, less efficient. However, the clear policy direction is to ensure that we have more resources in our schools to allow for smaller class sizes to intensify and enrich the learning experience. That is why we are exempted from the 2 per cent efficiency gain, which would otherwise mean putting cost pressure on the service at time when we are trying to expand places.

That does not mean that we do not expect schools and local authorities to work more effectively and more efficiently. Doing so is about working smarter, releasing time and investing that released time into productive activity to bring about better attainment in our schools. It also involves how we build our schools—the physical infrastructure—and a range of other things that we still expect local authorities and individual schools to work on to try to gain the efficiencies that we are looking for. It is about creating space and opportunities to enrich the whole learning experience even more. We may be exempted from the cash side of efficiency, but we are not exempted from considering ways in which we can improve the performance of our system and I have

given members illustrations of some of the ways in which that can be done.

11:45

**The Convener:** I know that other members want to come in, but Wendy Alexander has a question on that matter.

**Ms Alexander:** I do not know whether you will be able to give answers to everything that I want to ask about, minister, but I will try to get answers. At the Finance Committee meeting yesterday, finance officials confirmed that Executive departments will collectively make £500 million of savings. However, they also said that individual departments' contributions had not been reflected in headline budgets and that we needed to wait for those figures. You have given us useful information today about an exemption for the Education Department.

A much more significant development yesterday was that finance officials confirmed that a different approach had been taken to the local government settlement. Because it was assumed that local government would make £150 million of savings over the next three years—a 2 per cent saving—the grant had been reduced by that amount. In Scotland, of course, more than 50 per cent of local government expenditure is on education and a significant proportion of expenditure goes on social work. Has there been any discussion with your officials about how that £75 million of savings in education, which have been assumed from local government, will be found?

**Peter Peacock:** We have volunteered a couple of items in the spending review, which would make part of our contribution, although I am talking about very small sums of money relative to the total. I recall, for example, that there is a line for new national qualifications development. Those are all developed, so we will remove that line. A line has also been overtaken by new expenditure on educational maintenance allowances, which displaces previous expenditure in local government in relation to bursaries. Those are two examples of where we have made specific cash contributions to the savings target.

Beyond that, we have been clear in the discussions that we have had with the local government community about teachers' pay. It should be remembered that we have just settled a four-year deal on teachers' pay. Prior to entering the spending review, we had detailed discussions with colleagues about how the deal would be funded and whether we could give a four-year commitment to it. We made it clear to local authorities that we would fund all the cost in the spending review period, although they are making

a contribution in the earlier period. Those things were all calculated.

Further discussions are still to be had with local government colleagues about those matters, but the point that I am making is that, in a cash sense, we were exempted from the normal thinking in order to allow our policy objectives—which are top-level policy objectives for the Executive—to be achieved. That means that, if one bit of the system is exempted, the target for the remaining bit of the system rises marginally.

**Ms Alexander:** Indeed. However, the issue at hand is not what you are doing with your own budget—as I say, we await the details. It has been confirmed that £150 million of savings in local government in Scotland have been assumed, more than half of which will come from education and social work. Are you leaving directors of education and directors of social work to get things right on their own in finding their share of those savings, or have there been extensive discussions on how the education and social work elements of that £150 million should be found?

**Peter Peacock:** We are in the middle of discussions with the local government community about all those matters. In particular, our discussions are about how we should allocate the resource for the extra teachers. There are specific challenges. For example, if we want to have 53,000 teachers by 2007—we are absolutely committed to that target—we must have a mechanism with the local authorities to ensure that the extra cash that we are putting in on top of the existing cash will buy extra teachers and not leak away elsewhere in the system. We have had preliminary discussions with the local authorities about how that can be managed without our ring fencing funding in the traditional way, but those discussions have yet to be concluded. There is an awful lot more discussion to be had about all that.

**Ms Alexander:** I have one final question. In the English spending review report, the chapter on the education departments indicated how the education savings would be found and stated that they would be externally auditable. That raises the question whether the same savings will be externally auditable in Scotland and whether your discussions with local government will be visible. If you could write to us in due course, saying how you expect the savings to be realised and whether you expect them to be audited, that would be helpful. In the rest of the United Kingdom, at the end of a 14-month process that began last July, there was considerable transparency to ensure that individual education authorities got resources to the front line. It was not left to their discretion whether to bother with that.

**Peter Peacock:** When we conclude our discussions on the arrangements with the local

authorities, it will be in everyone's interests to understand exactly what has been agreed. I need to know that because I have to ensure that the commitment that we have got will be met. There will have to be quite a lot of detail about that. We want to give local authorities a good deal of flexibility in how they apply the resource, but the way in which we arrive at what resource they get will have to be explicit and open.

**The Convener:** We have spent a bit of time on that issue and need to move on. Rosemary Byrne has a supplementary question.

**Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP):** It is a quick question on targets 7 and 8. When are we likely to get a progress report on how those targets are developing? Is there anything available at present that could tell us that?

**Peter Peacock:** I cannot tell you off the top of my head, but I will check. If there is anything that we can give you about the rate at which we are increasing training, residential child care and so on, we can get that to you. I do not know whether Colin MacLean has that information to hand.

**Colin MacLean:** A set of statistics on social worker numbers was published last week, so there is up-to-date information on target 8. That is part of a regular series of statistics to be issued.

**Peter Peacock:** We will check the other point and get back to you on that, convener.

**The Convener:** My understanding is that there may well be an issue with regard to improving skills and qualifications in the residential child care work force, where it has proved difficult to make progress on those things. Some detail on that would be very welcome.

**Peter Peacock:** I will look at that. We are trying to address the fact that we have low levels of qualified workers in those settings. Currently, only 27.6 per cent of care staff are either qualified or are undertaking qualifications. An additional 30.4 per cent of care staff are either partly qualified or are undertaking qualifications that, if completed, would make them partly qualified. However, 42 per cent are not qualified at all and not dissimilar figures are apparent for those on supervisory grades in those settings.

**The Convener:** It is worse at the managerial level, I think. Managers are not qualified to the appropriate level in a significant number of cases and that is reflected right down the grades.

**Peter Peacock:** Absolutely. That is why we are putting money into training and trying to increase the number of places to address that issue. Those staff are working with the most challenged young people in our society and we must ensure that the qualifications structure is improved over time. I am

happy to provide the committee with more detail if we can find that for you.

**The Convener:** Has the timescale for that target moved at all—it is set at 2009, which seems quite a long way away—and do you believe that it will be achieved?

**Peter Peacock:** We intend to achieve it and I have no reason to believe that we are not en route to achieving it. We have not changed the deadline, which is 2009, but we have changed the percentage of qualified workers that has to be achieved within that time. In the second bullet point of target 7, we have increased the required percentage of qualified early-years, child care and support staff from 66 per cent to 85 per cent. I will check the development of the first bullet point of target 7.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con):** I have a question about special schools. Provisional plans for specific grants are for £292.5 million in 2005-06 but for only £271 million in 2006-07. That represents a drop of £21.5 million. A child who suffers from dyspraxia and cannot walk or eat unaided needs a great deal of assistance, as do children who suffer from cerebral palsy or who are deaf or blind. At present, such children are looked after in the public sector in special schools. Can the minister give some reassurance that funding for those special schools will be maintained and that the position of those children will be secure? If so, that would give some peace of mind to the teachers and the parents of those children.

**Peter Peacock:** As you know, there are national schools that receive funding directly from the state and there has been debate, over the past four or five years, about the future funding of those schools. We have given an absolute guarantee to maintain that funding for, I think, a seven-year period, so those schools are not going to be subjected to change.

As the committee will know from its work on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill, we have invested an extra £12 million in the current year and £14 million in the next year, which is consolidated into our baselines for the future, for support for those who have barriers to their learning. As you may have picked up from the budget documents, we have transferred some of the spending from one part of the budget to another for special needs—it is a direct administrative transfer, so there is no reduction in funding. In one of our other budget lines against additional support for learning, there is an increase in the current or coming year that will be maintained right through the spending review period.

I assure you that, far from there being any reduction in funding, there is an increase in funding to support the implementation of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 and to target exactly the groups of people whom you are talking about.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Does that mean that, in the meantime, there will be continuity of provision for special schools such as those for children with dyspraxia who need a great deal of additional assistance?

**Peter Peacock:** Absolutely. Our overall spending on those who have additional support needs, whether they have dyspraxia or whatever—I would not want to focus on any specific category—is set to increase rather than decrease.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** I also have a question about rural schools. Target 6 in “Building a Better Scotland” is:

“Provide a modern, high quality learning environment through the completion of 300 either new or substantially refurbished schools by December 2009.”

Does that in any way imply that there will be a reduction in the number of rural schools?

**Peter Peacock:** No, not in itself. As you are aware, over many years there has been a pattern of rationalisation of schools in rural areas and in urban settings. Part of the extra investment that we are putting into school buildings—which is now colossal, with more than £2 billion being released into the system; we have never seen anything like that before—will help us to meet our targets.

As a consequence, local authorities are, rightly, taking a long-term view of their school estate and asking what kind of schools they will need not just next year, but in five, 10, 15, 20 or 25 years. Given the fact that we have predictable falling school rolls, that is inevitably leading some local authorities to think about how they manage their school estate. However, nothing is implied in the target to force the closure of schools—quite the reverse. More money than ever before is being invested in school buildings, so there is probably less pressure than ever to rationalise so that less investment is required.

That said, throughout the past century, schools and other provision have been looked at. That is why there are a lot of debates at the local level about the future of those schools. Such matters are determined at a local level, with the normal local democratic processes at work.

**Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I have to confess that I am somewhat confused by the budget documentation. If it has been designed to confuse, it has succeeded, as far as I am concerned.

Wendy Alexander touched on the need for targets to be linked to priorities. I would like to see more evidence of budget figures being linked to targets. There does not appear to be a great deal of explanation of why some budget figures have gone up and some have gone down. For example, you indicated that there has been movement between budgets for additional support. Table 3.03 shows that, in the 2003-04 budget, something in the region of £33 million went into the two categories of “Pupil support and inclusion” and “Additional support needs”. However, by 2007-08, the figure is being reduced to £23 million or £24 million. Nothing in the documentation explains that reduction. I assume that it is because money has been moved to a different heading, but the budget documentation does not get the message across as to how spending is being allocated and why certain things are happening. Your target is to have a support package for every child who needs it, so the amount of money allocated should relate to the priority that you are giving to that target and that should be clear in the budget figures.

12:00

**Peter Peacock:** I have been dealing with public sector budgets for more years than I care to remember. There is always an element of change in the administration of budgets; bits of money always get moved between budget lines. The best I can offer you is to say that we will happily set out where money has been transferred from one budget line to another. We would have no difficulty in doing that and it would help you to follow our track.

You raised a particular point about pupil support and inclusion and additional support needs. I reiterate the point that I made to Lord James: the overall resource available for additional support needs is increasing, not diminishing. We need to implement the new Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, so we are providing an additional £12 million this year and £14 million next year, plus other adjustments on expenditure, which, although minor, are all in the right direction. Some moneys have transferred from one budget line to another for administrative purposes. I will ensure that we provide further information on the transfers.

On the wider point of whether our spending is aligned with our priorities, I would argue that, for the most part, it clearly is. For example, we have key targets on increasing teacher numbers and we have put in the resource for that. We have just been speaking about additional support for learning; we now have new requirements on local authorities and there is additional support for that. We have provided cash for our priorities in relation to inspection in social work and children's

services. There are other examples, so I would argue that there is, as is proper, a degree of alignment between the targets and the budget. Perhaps we have to consider further with our officials how we can better illuminate the information in the budget documentation that we provide.

**Mr Ingram:** On the target of providing a package of additional support for every child who needs it, your original target specified 15,000 vulnerable young children, but that figure does not appear in the new target. I therefore assume that you have revised the number down, or that some other revision has taken place. We have no feel for how many young people are in the category or for the extent to which we are achieving the target at the moment. For example, why have you moved the target deadline from 2006 to 2008?

I have raised two or three fairly interesting questions and this committee would certainly benefit from hearing answers to them—as would the general public.

**Peter Peacock:** Page 205 of annex B of the budget document sets out a reason for each change to a target. I do not think that I can really add to that; the information is there for you to examine.

I want to pick up on your point about the 15,000 vulnerable children. We think that the new target is much more appropriate because, when one tries to predict the number of vulnerable children, it is inevitable that there might be slightly more or slightly fewer than 15,000. What is important is that those children who need the package of services get it. That depends on good assessment of their needs. It is a question of turning round the 15,000 target, which might be wide of the mark either way, and saying that a child should get the package of support that meets their needs when they are assessed.

**Mr Ingram:** I have two further questions on that. Do you have a feel for the extent to which we are meeting that target at the moment? How formidable will it be to achieve the target and why have you moved the deadline for achieving it from 2006 to 2008?

**Peter Peacock:** That is set out on page 205 of the draft budget document. The target is challenging. Our desire is to ensure that every young child who requires a package of support gets it. The changes have been triggered partly by the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 and partly by other changes that are around in the system. We are getting the professions to make a joint assessment of what a young person's needs are—not just their additional needs, but their wider needs in society—to ensure that they have the right

package of support around them. That is why we have moved on integrated community schools and why we have at our disposal a range of other measures to improve the packaging of services. We still have a long way to go, but we are clear about the direction of travel. It is the assessment of a child's needs that should determine what services they get. We do not want just to put figures on that; we want to ensure that we are meeting our target. I would be happy to come back to you on some of the detail that you have asked about.

**Mr Ingram:** That is not the only target for which the deadline has been moved from 2006 to 2008. To the untutored eye, it might appear that you are failing in achieving those targets.

**Peter Peacock:** Oh, come, come. I can hardly believe that you have suggested that.

In any exercise that involves examining targets afresh and considering the period ahead, one must set targets that are stretching and demanding as well as achievable. It is a question of trying to find the right balance. It is difficult for you to read all of what is on page 205 at a moment's notice. I suggest that you read that page and if there are further questions that you want to follow up, please let us know and we will try to respond to them.

**The Convener:** I have a specific question on the line on looked-after children and youth work in table 3.04. It is a bit odd that those two areas should be joined together; I think that they used to be in the larger group of youth justice. The figures under that heading appear to be pretty static—they remain at £13.3 million—even though there will be significant pressures as regards foster-children, on which there will be a parliamentary debate tomorrow. I think that I am right in saying that there is a need for about 700 additional foster-parents in Scotland. There are issues in the background about funding on an entitlement basis rather than on a discretionary basis people such as grandparents who take on the job of looking after their grandchildren. There will be important pressures under that heading.

We mentioned residential schools earlier on and, as regards youth work, there are the administrative burdens of implementing the Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003. We already know about the training needs, as the committee has raised that with you before. If we are to get best value from the voluntary sector in that area, central support for some of those burdens will be important.

Why does that line in the budget appear to be flat, which amounts to a decline in real terms?

**Peter Peacock:** That is where the next level of detail in the budget will be useful. You will find that

some of the matters that you referred to are dealt with in other budget lines. I am not clear in which line fostering is covered. We have just put money into fostering, which Euan Robson will be saying more about in tomorrow's debate.

On looked-after children, we have announced in the past few weeks that we will provide local authorities with an additional investment of £6 million—I think that that is the correct figure—which has been found from other budget lines. As with any budget year, we are talking about estimates of expenditure at a particular time. If we find that we are under pressure, we have the capacity to vire money between headings to withstand that pressure. That is what we have done with looked-after children. Andy Kerr announced additional provision for fostering in his spending statement in September.

I look to the officials to keep me right on the details, but we have also transferred money for the voluntary sector into a unified voluntary sector fund, which I presume sits apart from the fostering provision. So other resources are available for that area. A series of movements have taken place within the budget lines to try to accommodate the issues that you raise, but that is not apparent from the budget line that you mentioned.

**The Convener:** That is my point: if we get level 3 details from the Executive, we need, in one form or another, reasonably clear explanations about what the differences are from previous years—what has been moved and what has been added. If money comes from all sorts of pockets and goes here and there, that makes it extraordinarily difficult to carry out our job of monitoring the budget. I do not doubt what you say on the matter—what you are telling us is obviously good rather than bad news, but that does not appear to be the case from the budget lines.

**Peter Peacock:** That is one of the great dilemmas of the budget documentation. It is created at a particular time on the basis of our best estimates of costs and pressures at that time. However, things always change, which is why we have the capacity to move money around. I presume that the procedure now is the same as it was when I was the Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Services: the spring and autumn revisions to the budget track changes as we go through the year. That is done for the reason that you state: to try to ensure transparency in the movements in budgets and what happens with end-year flexibility. We can return to the nature of the movements through the system during the spring and autumn revisions. I have no problem with that, as the information is public anyway.

**The Convener:** It would be helpful to have a note on how end-year flexibility impacts on the proposals.

I have allowed the questions on the issue to run on for quite a long time, but it is important.

**Dr Murray:** I have a brief question on the efficiency issues on which Wendy Alexander touched. Seventy per cent of the schools budget goes on employee costs, but we hear that the efficiency element will not be applied to teachers' salaries, although I am not sure whether that applies to classroom assistants and other staff—I see that the minister is nodding. I am a little worried about the way in which the efficiency element will be applied because if it squeezes down on the remaining 30 per cent of the schools budget—if that is subject to fairly rigorous efficiency savings—directors of education might use that as a rationale to close schools. Can you offer any comfort on that issue? How will you ensure that the finance-driven rationale for school closures does not come back on to the agenda?

**Peter Peacock:** As you know, we have just issued revised guidance on school closures that makes it clear that the principal issue that authorities must consider in deciding on closures is the education of children. If anything, financial issues will drive rationalisation less than they have done in the past decade or more. We are putting more cash into boosting teacher numbers, which will potentially allow schools in rural areas to stay open when they might not have stayed open before because of pressures arising from the pattern of provision. In the past couple of years, we have given additional resources to local authorities specifically to allow schools to stay open. The authorities argued that the distribution formulae did not sufficiently recognise the issues in sparsely populated areas and that that put pressure on authorities to rationalise schools. We tackled the issue by putting in more cash and, as part of the future distribution of the money for new teachers, we intend to try to remove that pressure.

The efficiency savings will not drive the education system in the way in which Elaine Murray anticipates. The target of 53,000 extra teachers is opening up territory for discussion with local authorities. The issue is difficult and will take a lot of working through, because the implication of meeting the target is that a certain block of spending will become more fixed than it has been in the past in order to ensure that the extra cash allows us to meet the target on extra teachers. That is also true of other parts of local authority education spending. We fund school buildings through the contributions that we make to public-private partnerships, but that is the only place that that funding can go. It cannot go anywhere else in the system so, again, that block of expenditure is becoming more fixed than ever. A number of things are happening in education spending to make the position firmer than ever and to ensure that we can achieve our targets and objectives.



The detail of that is being worked through with the local authorities.

**The Convener:** With that, we draw the item to a close and thank the minister. However, his ordeal is not yet over.

## Curriculum Review

12:15

**The Convener:** We move on to item 3, under which we will take evidence from the minister on the outcome of the curriculum review, which was published, with his response, on 1 November. The committee agreed at its meeting on 29 September to await the outcome of the review before finalising the terms of reference for its inquiry. The minister is here at his own invitation, as it were, to give us some background on that. There has been a slight reshuffling of chairs, and we have with us the minister, Philip Rycroft, Colin MacLean and Gill Robinson. We have lost one or two of the other officials; there is a smaller team this time.

I invite the minister to comment briefly.

**Peter Peacock:** I am conscious that the committee has been considering the issue for some time but, as members know, I have made some significant announcements on the matter in the past 10 days or so and there was a debate on it in Parliament last week. The announcements that I made are wide ranging and far reaching. They address the heightening of expectations in our schools; the opening up of much more space for teachers and headteachers to operate in a greater atmosphere of trust; and the opening up of more choice for pupils in a variety of areas, including what they learn, when they learn and which exams they sit.

At the heart of my announcement a week past Monday are three linked issues. The first issue is the curriculum review, which is central to all that we seek to do and is a key liberator of the changes that we are trying to make. Linked to that are two other measures: the abolition of age-and-stage regulations; and decisions on assessment and testing. Those measures support the direction of travel of the curriculum review.

As you will be aware, the curriculum review followed on from many representations made by professionals, parents and others. It also followed the national debate on education, in which a large number of professionals and parents took part. That debate identified the problem of clutter in the five-to-14 curriculum—we knew about the problem but the national debate confirmed it clearly. Teachers feel pressure to teach across all the guidance that we issue at the expense of reasonable depth of learning and challenge for young people. We also heard concerns in the national debate about too much assessment and testing in the system and we heard that perverse incentives were beginning to apply because of the testing regime, with narrow learning around tests instead of the broad approach that we want.

We know from our wider evidence that, particularly in secondary 1 and 2, there are significant problems with children disengaging from the learning process, not feeling challenged or stimulated and not seeing relevance in their learning. Because of that, they lose motivation and drop out of learning. We also know that there has been something wrong with our science curriculum for a period of time. Inspectors have pointed that out and, in international measures, our performance in science is not as good as our performance in English and maths.

The curriculum review group, which is chaired by Philip Rycroft, has been sitting for nearly a year. It is important to recognise that a wide range of people and bodies are represented on the group, including HMIE, teachers, parents, businesses, teachers' unions, education academics, Learning and Teaching Scotland and others. That is a wide range of people with quite disparate interests. I mention that because it is important to know that the outcome was unanimously agreed by that group of people and there was no dubiety about the direction of travel.

The curriculum review document and my response to it should be seen together. The document puts forward the case for change and, for the first time, sets out in a clear, diagrammatic way the focus and purpose of education and the principles of future curriculum design. My response accepts the conclusions in full, triggers a series of actions for a further systematic review of the curriculum and sets a timetable for that work.

The review and the changes to the age-and-stage regulations, assessment and testing provide a recipe that will give teachers much more freedom than we have seen before and will free up time for them to design learning and to become more engaged in the particular needs of their pupils. That approach will potentially give pupils more choice and, for the first time, we will have a curriculum continuum from three to 18 instead of the current situation in which we have the three-to-five curriculum, the five-to-14 curriculum, standard grades and higher. We will immediately go on to examine in great detail the science curriculum; to thin out what currently constitutes five-to-14 guidance, with particular focus on expressive arts and environmental studies; and to consider the content of the S1-to-S3 curriculum. We will still have a broad curriculum for S1, but we will try to design a new one in light of the new objectives and design principles. We will also allow pupils to make choices earlier so that they can get more focus on and relevance into their learning; commission new skills for work courses; and try in general to get more pace and relevance into that period of education.

I want to make it clear that this is not simply a job for the Executive. We are going to facilitate the

teaching profession's wide engagement in the forthcoming process; it is not a case of ministers sending down tablets of stone from on high for people in schools to follow. We are creating the framework, principles and objectives and making it clear that we want to engage the profession in designing the detail of learning. After all, that is their professional skill, and we need to utilise it.

All the changes will be implemented from 2007 onwards, so we will need to do a lot of work as we systematically go through the curriculum. As part of that work up to 2007, we will examine how standard grade fits with the new national qualifications system. I have no intention of throwing out the good work that has been done and the time that teachers have invested in standard grade. It has many good features that we want to retain, but we need to ensure that it meshes properly with the continuum of learning and progression in our new national qualifications. We will decide what we want to do by 2007 after detailed conversations with the profession.

Those are the highlights. I and the two learned doctors on either side of me are more than happy to answer any questions that the committee might have.

**The Convener:** I will ask Wendy Alexander to kick off, because I believe that she has some questions about the purpose and broader context of the review.

**Ms Alexander:** I thought that I said that I was going to pass on that question.

**The Convener:** In that case, I will kick off myself. The key purpose of freeing up the curriculum is to give teachers more time to teach and their pupils more opportunities to learn. As you rightly have pointed out, minister, the major complaint from teachers over the years is that the curriculum has not allowed that to happen. However, I wonder how it will happen in practice. It is all very well to set out aspirations, but it will be extremely difficult to fulfil them. After all, if people make gaps, things come along to fill them in. How will you manage the process to ensure that teaching time is freed up effectively?

**Peter Peacock:** I will say a few words about that and then ask Gill Robinson and Philip Rycroft to tell the committee about the curriculum review group's discussions on this matter.

We need to take two levels into account. Although we did not intend the five-to-14 guidance to be prescriptive, it is widely acknowledged that it has become so. It provides schools with considerable detail, particularly on the broad areas of expressive arts and environmental studies. The work and the curriculum review that we have been carrying out confirm what people have been telling us for a long time: we simply have to thin out that

guidance and assess the current five-to-14 curriculum against the broad principles that we have now established in “a curriculum for excellence” on the purpose of learning and the attributes and characteristics that we are trying to allow young people to develop. We will involve professionals in that detailed process.

Even under the new guidance, teachers might feel that they want to teach across all of the curriculum, but there will be much less content than there was before. That will open up some space and take the pressure off teachers who currently feel obliged to teach everything and who fear that they would be criticised if they were not doing so. It will help to make sure that we capture what is important for five to 14-year-olds to learn and allow more space to pursue those items of learning in a way that has not been possible hitherto.

There will be a similar mechanism for S1 to S3 but it will have other components. We have to consider what we currently teach in S1 and S2 in particular and test that against the principles that we have set out for curriculum design and the objectives of the curriculum. That is a task in which we will actively engage the profession. I refer in part to the changes in age-and-stage regulations and to the dispositions that we want to adopt. We want to make sure that in S1 and S2—but in S1 particularly—there is still a broad curriculum.

S1 and S2 have two purposes. One is to complete the five-to-14 curriculum; the other is to help people to decide what they might want to pursue in later study in school. The exercise is about opening up choice for people.

In the past, we have erred because we required those choices to be made only at the end of S2, and it is becoming increasingly evident that young people could make some choices earlier and begin to narrow the range of subjects that they study in S2 while studying them in greater depth and gaining confidence. They need to study the things that they want to study in order to become engaged.

Examining the content of the S1 and S2 curriculum against those principles would be one mechanism of thinning things out. By allowing some young people to choose earlier and to narrow down what they do in S2, we could open up space for other things, such as consolidating literacy and numeracy in S1 and S2. I have seen schools in which that is already being done. In those schools, young people are working on a much narrower set of studies but working in depth on their weaknesses in literacy and numeracy. That freed-up space could be applied to other things, such as music, dance, drama or enterprise education. Alternatively, there could be more

vocational courses. That is the other big change to options in S1 through to S3. New skills for work courses are being designed. Young people will have the chance to consider that option and to look at links with colleges, in order to move to doing bits of their education in college.

A range of things is happening. Through those broad mechanisms, we are examining how we thin out the curriculum and create more space for the kind of things that teachers have been telling us they need time to do so that they can engage more with young people's learning. That is the broad overview, but Gill Robinson might want to say more.

**Gill Robinson (Scottish Executive Education Department):** Looking at what we have proposed for the primary school area, at the end of the process of engagement with teachers we would have a considerably slimmed-down set of guidelines. At the moment, as members will know, teachers have an extensive pile of guidelines. The existing guidelines approach every part of the curriculum in the same way so there is the same level of detail across the board. The curriculum review group pointed out that that is not necessarily the best way to do things. Some areas such as numeracy and language need very specific outcomes, but there are quite a lot of other areas in the curriculum in which teachers need guidance on broad outcomes rather than on very specific and precisely defined outcomes. That is the means by which we will be able to give teachers much clearer guidance and build into that scope for flexibility and depth.

**Philip Rycroft:** On the question of doability, I do not want to leave the committee with the impression that the review group did not think very hard about how all this would be implemented. We have given you some of the detail of how it would be worked through in the curriculum. However, it is important to reiterate what the minister said about the process that we will adopt and the involvement of the profession. We have to make absolutely certain that any changes that we put in place will work in the classroom, and we are doing that by working through those changes with the profession.

I point you to what we have been doing on the assessment is for learning programme, on which you might have picked up feedback from teachers. We pick up a lot of feedback and there is a great deal of support for the way in which the programme has been implemented and for what is happening in classrooms as a result. The principle that we adopted was to work the programme through the classroom to ensure that the changes we put in place and the development of techniques would work. That will inform everything we do on implementation.

12:30

**Mr McAveety:** I thought that last week we had a fairly good-quality debate in the chamber. Some members had experience in the classroom and others had experience as parents and their contributions were constructive.

Teachers knew what was expected of them in relation to standard grades and highers and there was good guidance on subject development at secondary level. Having been involved in teaching over the years, I am interested in how we transfer the principles in guidelines, which often end up occupying a dusty corner of a staffroom, to operational activity in the classroom.

I am interested in two fundamental issues. Peter Peacock and I discussed how we should interact on the issues that might emerge from the work of the Cultural Commission. Last week's interim report touched on the idea of creativity and the use of imagination in schools. First, how do we move from the rhetoric to the reality, and how do we ensure that we do that equitably? The other compelling issue is how we get a sense that we are making a positive impact, which will depend on the level of volunteer and parent activity and the social and economic environment in which schools operate. How do you see the curriculum review impacting on the experience of those who are in primary 5 at the moment and will be in third or fourth year in five or six years' time? How will pupils' experience of schooling and education in 2008, 2009 and 2010 differ from pupils' experience now?

**Peter Peacock:** I will ask my officials to come in on the detail of that. One of my strong impressions since I have come back into education in the past 18 months through my present job is that, because of all the pressures on the system through guidance on the five-to-14 curriculum and the focus on standard grades, we have squeezed out of traditional school life a number of things that used to be more available, such as sport, drama and music. If pupils do not choose one of those subjects as their route of study, it will not be part of the school environment for them. That has cost schools' character—what a school is, its statement of what it does, what it believes in and how it helps the creative aspects of young people's lives. Part of the purpose of creating space is to allow those subjects to come back into school in a much better way.

We also know that in schools that have created more choice earlier and which have placed more emphasis in the curriculum on music or sport, the kids are better motivated and, as a result, their learning and their engagement in school improve all round. The issue is not just about creativity, but about other factors that help the learning process.

I will have to think more about how we ensure equity across the system as a whole, so that young people do not lose out on future options. I presume that in part that will come from the new guidelines that we produce about how schools might want to apply the new space that they have.

The experience of a child who gets to secondary school in three or five years' time will be different from the experience of a child in secondary school now in several ways. There will still be a broad curriculum in S1, because we need to allow pupils to experience learning and decide what they want to do, but a child could be asked to make choices about their future study a year earlier. That will have implications for what children study. They might study fewer things in greater depth or they might use the space to have more choice and to include enterprise education, sport, music, drama or community involvement—a series of options would open up.

A child will have more choice about going into vocational study as well as academic study. Those will be seen not as alternatives; rather, they could be seen as a new mix of study that pupils would not otherwise have had. That will mean more choice. Children will have more choice to begin to plan their route to college or to do more work-based learning than they have had in the past. If they choose to sit standard grades, they might choose to sit them a year earlier than they would have sat them traditionally. That will not apply to all children, but it might apply to quite a number of them. If a child decides to sit standard grades a year earlier, that will open up an extra year to have space to study for highers and to consider the options.

I have spoken to young people and have listened to what they have been saying, and I have also watched young people being interviewed on television over the past 10 days. They have been saying that we have got the system upside-down. They point out that they have four years in which to do standard grades, which are much less important than highers, yet only one year in which to do their highers. We ought to be opening up more space for pupils to do highers. If we did that, several things would happen. Children could sit the same number of highers, but take a year longer to do so, and they might well get a much better-quality pass as a consequence, which would open up opportunities for them in future. Alternatively, they could choose to do the same number of highers, or one or two fewer, in the one year, and then do another group of highers later. They might wish to sample other forms of learning, which could open up space to do more of the things that schools are doing around community engagement, community involvement, community enterprise and so on.

There is potential for children to experience a much wider range of choices. I believe that they will experience much more challenge and relevance in their learning in S1 and S2 and that they will become much more engaged as a result. A series of things might happen to a young person that are different from what they would experience in today's system

**Gill Robinson:** Aside from the matters of choice and timetabling, if we are to be successful in developing a curriculum that takes seriously the purposes that the minister has been describing, much of what happens in classrooms will change. That is because many of the things that we are considering following the purposes of education consultation need different teaching and learning approaches.

The member mentioned engaging with teachers and how to keep them on board. The proposals are about a combination of structural and curricular design steps, but we can start right away in the classrooms. Teachers have been coming to terms with the documents over the past few weeks and we have had indications from them that they see the proposals as making a strong and quick impact on how teaching and learning approaches are considered. That is because of the purposes that are being spelled out, which are very broad and emphasise aspects such as learning to learn.

As well as changes to the curriculum, there are changes to assessment, which means that there could be new ways in which teachers and young people can engage with each other about their learning. Another set of changes that we would hope for would result in young people being clearer about the purposes of their learning and about their achievements, and they would have greater motivation as a result of that.

**Mr Ingram:** I want to pick up on that last point. The minister read out a list of the people who have been involved in the curriculum review group. Absent from that list was somebody who could directly represent the pupil perspective. We have a fundamental problem in the system, in that youngsters, particularly boys, switch off in the early years of secondary school. We also know from a recent Careers Scotland report that there is a strong correlation between educational achievement and having career goals—people who know why they are in school and who have a vision of what they are going to do beyond school and of why the subjects that they have chosen are important to them.

There is a need to realign pupils' expectations and needs with the teaching that is provided and the learning environment in school. We want to bring about that fundamental change. The committee is considering the motivation of youngsters. Will you tell us how, rather than

focusing on teachers' perspective on the process, you are engaging young people in the process, listening to them and investing that in what we are doing?

**Peter Peacock:** The national debate, which began to set the agenda and established the points to which we are responding, involved a wide consultation. We can get detail for you on young people's involvement in that process.

We have also run a series of discussions with young people throughout Scotland through our assessment is for learning programme. I have received the minutes of those meetings and reports from officials about what young people were saying at them. They are saying exactly the kind of things that I have been reflecting. Some young people—boys in particular—are bored by S1 and S2. Some of them find that S1 goes over what they did in primary 7, so we need to ask why that is the case. Part of the reason is that some teachers have taken the view that they need to reconfirm where a child is in their learning before they move on, but many kids are at the required stage of learning and need to move forward. Some pupils feel that they are standing still.

By S2, pupils certainly know what they do not like and what they are not engaging with. They know what they find really difficult, but they also know what they want to do about that. They want to be given more support for the work that they need to do on numeracy, literacy and so on, but they want more choice so that they can say, "I hate chemistry. It doesn't engage me," or whatever—I apologise to Elaine Murray; I have revealed a personal prejudice from my schooldays. Pupils know that, but they also know that they love physics, and say that they would love to get into that subject in much more detail and develop a greater depth of understanding.

Opening up such choices for pupils earlier in the system allows the kind of engagement that we want to take place. Pilots are being run and teachers are reporting to us that where such options are made available to young people, they respond extremely positively. Pupils are showing that they are perfectly capable of moving forward a year earlier than we have given them credit for in how we have previously structured the curriculum. They are finding more relevance in their learning, they are enjoying it more and, because they are doing that, their performance is improving.

I have met kids in classrooms I have visited in the recent past and they have told me about their experience of having those choices earlier. They are thriving on it. Some of them find it challenging and we need to provide them with extra support, but generally speaking they are thriving on it. That is the spirit in which we want to move forward with the proposals.

I will consider Adam Ingram's point about how we engage young people more as we move the agenda forward. We must continue to get their perspective as the consumers of the service. Pupils are highly perceptive; they know what they want and they understand a great deal more about all this sort of stuff than we give them credit for. We must keep that engagement going.

**Mr Ingram:** I notice from the Careers Scotland report that kids respond best to one-to-one discussions about where they are going in life and what they are looking for. Should not we focus resources on that to try to help children to reach an understanding of what they want to do?

**Peter Peacock:** That is absolutely right. You will find in the detail of the documentation that we have published in the past 10 days that we are putting at the heart of the learning process good-quality conversation between teachers and pupils—and, wherever possible, pupils' parents—about the nature of children's learning, the direction they want to travel in and how we can design learning increasingly around their individual needs. That is a major challenge for us all, but we want to do that.

There are real fears in the teaching profession about how the proposals will impact on teachers' work. There are also worries that we will end up with personal learning plans that are rigid and inflexible, and that teachers will end up filling out bits of paper sent out by the Executive or by local authorities. I want to make it clear that we have deliberately changed the emphasis in our documentation. We are looking for good-quality personal learning planning. Plans are, per se, a consequence of good planning, but how teachers record a plan with a young person will be a matter for them; it is not a matter for me to prescribe from the centre.

From the assessment is for learning programme, we know that young people are perfectly capable of recording much of the information and setting out their aspirations, understanding their direction of travel and setting themselves objectives for their learning with their teachers. That works, they respond to it and they manage their learning more effectively. That is one of the ways in which we try to create in young people the capacity to manage their learning and become more effectively engaged in it throughout their lives. We want to ensure that that notion is right at the centre of what we do.

12:45

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** If children want to learn subjects such as Chinese, Japanese or Russian, or even Gaelic, Spanish or Italian, and no teachers are available in the school concerned,

could consideration be given to videoconferencing, or to harnessing the white heat of modern technology to extend opportunities?

**Peter Peacock:** I will be happy to quote Harold Wilson back at you for many years to come.

The answer to your question is yes. There are several factors at play here. Technology has moved on enormously, and it will continue to develop in the next few years. In a few years' time, the things that we aspire to today, such as broadband capacity and the devices that we use to communicate, will be taken for granted. Falling school rolls mean that, in some parts of Scotland and for some schools, holding together courses at the senior level is becoming much more difficult. Learning and Teaching Scotland is exploring how we can use modern technology for more effective learning. As it happens, because of questions about the viability of the Gaelic medium for secondary units, there is a specific project on Gaelic-medium education to consider how learning can be provided electronically to a much greater extent. That will give us a much greater insight into electronic learning across a range of languages and other subjects. So the answer is yes, we need to ensure that harnessing technology is central to our thinking about the future.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Is not distance learning very much used in the Orkney and Shetland islands? Similar methods could be applied to great advantage on the mainland, when young people feel that they are not being given sufficient opportunity to follow their choice of curriculum possibilities.

**Peter Peacock:** Absolutely. There are good examples of that, not just in the islands. Argyll and Bute Council's mainland schools and island schools are doing quite a lot. We have connections between schools in Scotland and in other countries in relation to using modern technology for learning. A range of exciting things are happening, which open up possibilities that would not otherwise have existed.

**Ms Byrne:** How will "Better Behaviour—Better Learning" fit into that? What are the implications of McCrone for reducing guidance teams in schools? What implications will there be for personal learning plans, and whether there will be the staff to engage one to one with young people to talk about their aims and objectives and what they want to choose within the broader choice that they will have?

**Peter Peacock:** I am waiting for a review of guidance, which I expect to receive almost any day, which will allow us to reflect on the central place we want pupil support to continue to have in our system. Guidance is part of that, but it is not just guidance teachers who should be involved in

those conversations, but teachers in the round. Philip Rycroft mentioned the assessment is for learning programme. Some of the work that is going on there, including how we are managing that programme—exploring new practices with teachers in classrooms—is allowing teachers to have conversations that they did not have before and is allowing young people to manage their learning more effectively with teachers.

All that exists and I want to keep developing it. In recent times, I have seen some excellent practice in pupil support and guidance in schools and we want to ensure that that existing excellent practice is much more extensively apparent throughout the education system.

**Ms Byrne:** Will there be a proposal to put more resources into those teams to build them up? As you know, in some schools, pupil support is recognised in one integrated department, but we have not reached the stage of integrating the departments in other schools. Therefore, resources and the number of staff can differ from school to school and from local authority to local authority.

**Peter Peacock:** There are two points to make about that. More resources are going into the system and the commitment to increase the number of teachers to 53,000 will have a wider impact than just on maths and English in P1 and on reducing class sizes. Resources from that pool will also allow people to make advances in pupil support.

Linked to that, and to our devolved school management policies, is one of the things that I have been talking about in the past 10 days. We must try to ensure that head teachers and their teaching staff have much more discretion to configure their schools. Again, I have seen good examples recently of schools who have dedicated staff for pupil support, which did not happen before. That is paying real dividends for the schools as communities.

More resources are going into schools in the round and I want head teachers to decide where their resources go rather than dictating from the centre. Each school is different and has different requirements in different periods of its history. We need to have flexibility at the local level to build services.

One of the secondary schools that I visited recently is a stunning example of what can be done. The staff had clearly recognised that groups of their children who were high achievers and required to be stretched even more needed particular pupil support, and the staff had built that in. Equally, there was a large group of young people who had traumatic lives because they were caught up in family circumstances and simply

could not learn as a result. A resource had to be attached to supporting those children through all the challenges in life to allow them to learn and to make progress. There is stunningly good practice out there, which we need to ensure is applied more widely.

**The Convener:** I ask one question about language, because language—by which I mean foreign languages and not English language—does not feature much in the documentation. One of the notable failures in the UK in general is that we have not created a society in which people have a facility for foreign languages, in particular European languages. That is in contrast to some of the vocal people who visit from abroad.

That is linked to people's aspirations and interest. Again, I speak from personal experience when I say that nothing turned me off at secondary school more than French.

**Peter Peacock:** Ditto.

**The Convener:** Although I can read French, I certainly cannot speak it with any facility. I am sure the same applies to most of my fellow countrymen. Have you given any thought to the need to be able to converse and engage in the language of another country, and the need to provide our people with a facility for modern languages, especially in the context of new countries entering the European Union and the importance of trade and enterprise? We might build on the Gaelic experience, which shows that if one is bilingual at an early stage, it makes it easier to have a facility for other languages later on.

**Peter Peacock:** My sentiments are exactly yours. I have frequently been ashamed because of my lack of language skills, both in English and more widely. That was particularly the case when I was a member of the European Committee of the Regions and attended meetings in Brussels as part of the UK delegation. I always felt ashamed of our nation's inability to speak other languages, when the ability of people from other nations to speak our language was tangible on every occasion that I visited.

Having a facility for languages is good for young people. In the modern Europe in which we live, the more that young people have a facility for other languages, the more they will succeed in the competition for jobs.

The evidence is that where young people learn a second language early in their lives, their ability to pick up a third or fourth language increases, as you rightly imply. There seems to be further evidence that exercising the brain in that way has wider consequences, so there is a huge amount to be said for language learning.

We have tried to develop such learning in recent years and we have moved the situation on further.

The best thing to do would be to send you a note about the precise nature of young people's entitlement to start learning a language by P6 and to so many hours of further learning beyond that. More young people are engaging in learning another language in our primary schools as a consequence of that measure.

As I recall, parts of Scotland are experimenting with language immersion, which involves teaching through the medium of another language, including, but not limited to, Gaelic. A range of things are happening. Last Monday, I was in a French class in a school and discovered that I could understand more French than I thought I could, although that was still not very much. My experience of French at secondary school was the same as yours—the way that French was taught discouraged me from learning. Now we have hugely innovative ways of teaching languages and the resources are there to help the uptake of those new methods. We need to keep focused on the issue and to move forward in a spirit of giving young people the opportunity to learn rather than forcing a subject on young people who do not have a facility in that regard or who are not engaged by the subject, as we did in years gone by.

**The Convener:** But that does not arise specifically from the curriculum review, does it? There is nothing additional in what you have outlined.

**Peter Peacock:** There is nothing additional, but there should be the opportunity to rethink many of our approaches as part of the process of identifying future design and the characteristics of what we want young people to experience.

**Dr Murray:** One of the exciting things about the curriculum review is the recognition that space has to be created for people to learn skills, whether they be the skills of language learning or any one of a range of academic and vocational skills.

The section of the Executive response that deals with new courses in skills for work talks about developing new courses and assessment. Who is leading that work? The document also says that piloting will begin next year, which tends to suggest that some of the work is progressing quite well.

**Philip Rycroft:** Yes. We have been working closely with colleagues from around the system, particularly those in the Scottish Qualifications Authority, which has a responsibility to help us to develop courses and so on. We recognised a while ago the need for the work that you mentioned and we hope to be able to trial some courses next year.

I emphasise that we need to learn what works best in the context in which we are working, how

courses can best be designed, what appeals to young people, what can work effectively in a school and a college context and so on. We will explore those issues through the trials that we will run next year. We will build on what we learn from that process.

The courses are not about producing mini-plumbers, much as we might want to have more young plumbers. They are about giving people around the ages of 14 to 16 experience of broad areas of work, whether that be in the construction industry, the care industry or whatever, so that they understand the dynamics of those sectors, gain an understanding of what work is like in those sectors and can pick up some of the communication, team-working and problem-solving skills that are associated with work in that area.

The title that we have chosen for the initiative, “skills-for-work”, was chosen deliberately because we want to expand people's work skills to give them a secure foundation for their later experiences.

**Dr Murray:** Is the pilot likely to be rolled out across the country or is it concentrated in certain local authority areas?

**Philip Rycroft:** We will have to develop that with the SQA. We do not have precision on that point yet. However, the initiative will be thoroughly tested.

**The Convener:** I thank the minister and his officials for their attendance. This has been a long but useful session.



## Budget Process 2005-06

12:59

**The Convener:** Because of the tight timescale that we are working to, we have to give a steer to the clerks to enable them to draft our budget report. We have to reach some sort of agreement, based on the evidence that we have heard, about what we want the report to say.

Transparency issues about the local government settlement arrangements remain fairly much unchanged. We accept the independence of the local government sector, but we need to force some sort of resolution of some of those issues and of issues relating to the national priorities action fund, on which the minister has promised to give us further information. We have to work better with ministerial officials to try to tease out some of the issues. We ought to push for that, because I had hoped that things would have moved a little bit further. I do not accept that things cannot be done because of the independence of the local government sector. That is a different issue.

Another issue is the alignment of the 11 key commitments and the national funding priorities with the targets. The minister gave us some reassurance, suggesting that there were moving targets. However, it is clearly difficult to monitor what is happening if there is a misalignment between what we say that we are trying to achieve in education and the mechanisms for monitoring.

13:00

**Dr Murray:** We have to structure our report around what the Finance Committee is doing, and we have to agree whether we are content or not content with the report. I do not know whether we can do that by circulating a draft report.

**The Convener:** We will discuss the draft report next week but, before we can produce a draft report, we will need some input from members. Perhaps we should look through the questions posed by the Finance Committee. Question 1 asks whether we are content with the Executive's response to any spending recommendations that the committee made at stage 1. We had an answer on additional support for learning, but not much else was said on those recommendations. I do not think that there is a big issue there. Is that fair?

Question 2 is on the Executive's response to other budgetary issues that the committee raised at stage 1. That covers the issue of transparency and all that goes with it.

Question 3 is on the revised statement of portfolio priorities, objectives and targets. We

touched on the issue of targets. Wendy, you are the expert.

**Ms Alexander:** Adam Ingram made the point that links between priorities and targets are one issue, and links between targets and the budget are another.

**The Convener:** Question 4 is on the Executive's highlighting of the portfolio's contribution to wider cross-cutting priorities. We did not hear too much about that in the evidence.

**Dr Murray:** Before the meeting, our budget adviser said that there has simply been a restating of the priorities in a different order. There has not really been any further explanation of a link to budget headings.

**The Convener:** Things have not really moved.

Question 5 is whether we want to draw any other budgetary matter to the attention of the Finance Committee. That probably relates to the more individual kind of issues. I raised the issue of looked-after children and youth work. We got an answer of sorts—saying that things now came under another budget heading—but that re-emphasised the point about how difficult it is to follow the budget document. There ought to be a clearer explanation—perhaps there is in various other places—of what changes the Executive has made. That should not be too difficult to provide. In Glasgow District Council, we used to provide detailed information on what had changed from the previous year's budget, so it should not be difficult for the Executive to give us some meaningful information.

**Dr Murray:** An issue also arises about how the measures in "ambitious, excellent schools" and all the new announcements relate to the budget. From what the minister said, that information is elsewhere, so this budget document already looks a bit out of date.

**Mr McAveety:** Peter Peacock talked about "ambitious, excellent schools" and the spending announcements related to it, but we should know what information has been superseded.

**The Convener:** We certainly had confirmation that monitoring—albeit at a lower level—would continue even if targets had been dropped. Issues might arise over how such issues are kept in the public domain. The Finance Committee might want to consider that.

Question 6 asks for comments on the efficiency target. A few issues arose in terms of the local government settlement.

**Ms Alexander:** Exactly. We cannot comment on the portfolio, but we know that savings of £150 million are coming from local government and we know that education and social work together—on

which we properly have a locus—account for more than £100 million of the £150 million. We have heard that 70 per cent of the schools budget will be excluded. As Elaine Murray said, that puts enormous pressure on a small part of the education budget, as well as on the social work budget. Simply telling local authorities to use their heads about where they could find some savings is not the approach that has been applied elsewhere, where there is clear guidance about how to release resources for the front line.

**The Convener:** That is right. We have previously considered issues to do with targeting money in certain directions—although this is a sort of reverse targeting. We might end up in the silly position of recruiting more classroom assistants and having to sack teachers. We must be careful about this. There seems to be a significant fear about whether it would be possible for local government to fulfil the Executive's intentions in practice.

**Ms Alexander:** It seems highly questionable to tell authorities that they cannot take funding from teachers' salaries without being at all transparent about where we suggest the £100 million should come from. That is buck passing and it is not very helpful.

**Dr Murray:** We are also committed to increasing the number of social workers. Presumably, that target will not be touched either. There are a lot of unanswered questions here.

**Ms Alexander:** In England, education is funded separately, through local education authorities rather than through local government. There are commitments to make savings in England, but it is done differently there, because the local government budget there no longer covers the local education authority allocation.

**The Convener:** It is not quite true to say that staff cannot be considered. There may be things that are being done that do not need to be done, so staff could be saved and diverted to doing other things without affecting the overall targets. I do not think that staff can quite be excluded in the sense that the minister suggested. We do not want to affect the targets on staff.

**Ms Alexander:** It might be helpful to engage officials on this subject. There seemed to be a lack of clarity, and it would be worth finding out what is in the public domain. If the £150 million is to come from local government, the Executive should tell us about what guidance it has given on how that will impact on education and social work.

**Mr Ingram:** A specific issue is that the Executive is pushing forward devolved school management. That begs the question whether we need all the bureaucracy at the education authority level. If the

education budget is going to be managed at school level, there is a case for efficiency savings.

**The Convener:** There are a lot of issues around the matter of 80 or 90 per cent of budgets being devolved to head teachers and how that is defined in terms of what I covered. I think that some authorities take back a slice, which complicates matters even further.

Question 7 in the introduction to our issues paper asks:

"What written evidence is available to the Committee, and from which individuals and organisations did it take evidence?"

There is nothing much to be said about that.

Is there anything else on which we need guidance? We will have the *Official Report* of today's meeting, and we will be able to dredge through that. Is there anything of a more general nature that we might have missed?

**Ms Byrne:** It would be helpful to know when we are going to get performance reports about targets 5, 7 and 8, which I and another member asked about. It is always helpful to know how things are progressing there, especially with regard to social work staffing. If performance reports are available, it would be nice to be told; if they are not, it would be nice to know when we will get some information and how the reports are progressing.

**Mr Ingram:** The other issue relates to the national education priorities, on which the minister showed us a report. Perhaps we should have considered that today.

**The Convener:** I might have seen that report before, but I do not remember it.

**Mr Ingram:** No, I do not remember it.

**The Convener:** There was also the question of the measurement of targets. There is still an issue to do with what targets should be measured and what targets cannot meaningfully be measured. There is on-going work on that. We will have a draft report on that next week.

## Curriculum Inquiry

13:08

**The Convener:** Item 5 is the curriculum inquiry, which we have had a thrash at before. Members have a paper before them, which takes on board the points made by the committee previously. The central issue is whether the committee is satisfied with the paper as a statement of where we are going. Is there any aspect of it that we want to tweak, either in general or in response to what we have heard today?

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** I am very content with the paper overall, but I have two minor suggestions. One is about

“examples of approaches which ensure that vocational training and alternative curriculum experiences are recognised and valued appropriately”.

Can we also add detail on the extent to which those approaches should be integrated into the existing school diet?

The minister agreed that the use of modern technology could be both cost effective and beneficial for students. Perhaps we should include that as an additional issue, as the Executive is reviewing the matter and any input that we have might be of value.

**The Convener:** We do not want to wander too far off course from the issues of motivation and aspiration.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The matter could have a bearing on those issues because modern technology means that students can do subjects that they could not otherwise do.

**The Convener:** The matter probably comes under the heading of examples of best practice. It is a second-level issue from the point of view of our inquiry.

I have a small thought on the detail of phase 1 of the inquiry, when we will call for evidence. One set of organisations that can inspire and move people is voluntary sector youth organisations. Perhaps we should ask for input from those organisations, because they have a lot to say on issues such as leadership development and confidence building. Given that young people do not have to go to those organisations, their success is shown by the number of people going through the door.

**Ms Byrne:** I would like more information on how we will achieve an equal system. I heard what the minister said on that, but we must pursue the issue further.

**The Convener:** Is that an issue for the inquiry, which will deal with aspiration and motivation issues?

**Ms Byrne:** The many proposed changes could make it difficult to make the system equal.

**The Convener:** That is true about the curriculum review generally, but does it relate to the part of the curriculum review that we want to consider? We will consider the issue of people being turned off in secondary school. Equity issues may arise as part of that—

**Ms Byrne:** Yes—those issues are relevant. I am concerned that we still have a group of pupils who switch off early, in the main in S1 and S2. Although the minister talked about how he will try to motivate those young people, many of them do not have the ability to deal with the curriculum when they get to secondary level—hence the number of people with dyslexia who are in prison. I do not know how we will provide an equal system and an appropriate curriculum for those young people if we are to have the range of choices and provision by teachers that we are talking about.

That brings me to my next point, which is about the ability to provide for young people's individual needs. I do not think that we have hit that yet. That brings me to my next point, which is on the minister's and Gill Robinson's comments on the changes to the primary sector curriculum. It seems that we are in some senses returning to an integrated curriculum and I would like more information on that.

**The Convener:** To return to the point that I made earlier, we are not conducting a general inquiry into the curriculum as a whole; we are trying to add value on a particular issue by focusing on what turns kids on, particularly in secondary school.

**Ms Byrne:** What I said is relevant to that because if we have not sorted out appropriate provision for individual needs, we cannot make progress. In speaking to the minister, we did not touch on the development of the curriculum in sport, music, dance and drama. That is another issue that we perhaps missed out. Where are the teachers for some of the developments in those subjects? There are many questions, all of which are linked to the motivation of young people, because they are about the curriculum that we will provide for that disillusioned group.

**The Convener:** I stick by my point, but we will see what other members think.

**Ms Alexander:** I have one comment on the process of the inquiry. I find it difficult to reconcile what we heard today with what we heard from the vice-chair of the curriculum review group at the start of the process about what the review would produce. Perhaps SPICe could probe the issue a little. The evidence from Keir Bloomer and Mike Baughan was about a step change. Although what we heard this morning was incredibly worthy, it

was about a progression. I wonder whether SPICe could work up a brief note on this issue to help us to shape what we are trying to do. I simply find it extraordinary that there was unanimity on everything to do with what we should teach kids in the future.

**The Convener:** That does not happen.

13:15

**Ms Alexander:** Exactly. That does not help to tease out the issues on which we should take a view. I was under the false impression that the group was more independent than it now appears to be; I had not realised that the minister's lead official was chairing it. There is nothing wrong with the Executive trying to find out what can be done, but that is very different from blue-sky thinking. Although I have no problem with the inquiry's remit, I would like SPICe to draw up a note on how far the evidence that we heard today has moved from the evidence that we heard at the first session and what implications that might have for the issues that we should tease out.

**The Convener:** Let me deal with that before we move on.

**Ms Alexander:** Let me just say that I am not objecting to the terms of reference. However, if we had such a note before we called for evidence, it would inform the people from whom we are seeking evidence about the issues that we are trying to address. I just want to build a week into the process to allow us to tease out the areas of difference on this matter and use that information as the basis for our call for evidence to ensure that we receive slightly more focused submissions.

**Mr McAveety:** We could have a big tent or we could have a nicely laid table and know exactly what we are going to eat—that is what I would prefer.

**The Convener:** The difficulty is that we cannot review the whole matter ourselves. We are simply trying to add value to a particular aspect where we think we can make some mileage. As I said when Rosemary Byrne raised certain other issues, I think that we are moving a little bit away from the main theme that the committee had already identified. I know that we cannot separate out the issues in that way, but—

**Ms Alexander:** But could we not ask one or two leading members of the curriculum review group—perhaps the two people who gave evidence to us—about the report's implications for these areas? I am not suggesting that we change the inquiry's remit; I am just trying to focus on the points of difference. Frankly, the report is so anodyne that it makes it difficult to find out the issues that we should debate.

**The Convener:** I accept that general point, but it goes much wider than what we are trying to do in the inquiry. It struck me that the ministerial response was much more focused than the report that preceded it, although perhaps that is only to be expected. The report itself did not seem to raise enough of the issues.

We could conceivably carry out some work on that matter because, as you have said, it does not change the remit of our inquiry. In fact, that information might send us off in different directions for different purposes and we might find that we want to do something different with it instead of using it to change the direction of our inquiry.

**Ms Byrne:** One of our major concerns was that disillusioned group of S1 and S2 pupils. I raised those issues earlier because they are integral to the question of how we will move forward with those young people.

I should also point out that the minister said that trade unions were involved in the group, but the list does not contain a single trade union representative.

**The Convener:** I thought that people such as David Eaglesham are mentioned in it.

**Ms Byrne:** No. George McBride is on the list, but it says only that he is the principal teacher of Govan High School. We should correct that misconception.

**The Convener:** That is a broader point about the group's report. We are dealing with the call for evidence for our inquiry, which will cover teachers' representatives and so on.

**Dr Murray:** It is only right that we focus on what we want to do. After all, in our earlier discussions on this matter, we reached a consensus that, instead of trying to cover everything, we could add value by concentrating on issues of motivation and demotivation. Rosemary Byrne has highlighted some issues that relate to motivation; for example, the issue of identifying early signs of particular pupils' disaffection with the school experience could bring in issues such as dyslexia and the sort of strategies that help pupils to learn. As a result, the remit is fairly sensible, but there might well be some merit in trying to find out how our original experts feel about it and the way in which the review group developed. We must be careful, because it would be very easy for us to get distracted.

**The Convener:** The question is whether the remit is preventing people from pursuing some lines of inquiry. Elaine Murray is right: if Rosemary Byrne wants to pursue certain lines, she can do so under the existing remit. However, the conclusions that we reach might well differ according to our

individual perspectives on the matter. Do you accept that, Rosemary?

**Ms Byrne:** Yes. We will see how the matter progresses.

**The Convener:** Lord James Douglas-Hamilton made a couple of points. I repulsed the second one, but I cannot remember what the first one was.

**Martin Verity (Clerk):** I believe that it was the extent to which innovative teaching approaches would be integrated into individual school diets.

**The Convener:** I think that if Lord James wants to pursue such angles, the remit will cover that.

I suggested that it would be valid to include youth organisations in our call for evidence. Are members agreed?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** That is our only change to the remit. We have taken on board certain issues and roughly know where we are going. Bearing in mind the addition that we have discussed, do members agree to the paper?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** With that, I close this late meeting of the Education Committee and thank everyone for their attendance.

*Meeting closed at 13:21.*



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