EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday 28 September 2005

Session 2

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CONTENTS

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EDUCATION COMMITTEE
16th Meeting 2005, Session 2

CONVENER

*Iain Smith (North East Fife) (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 Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)
*Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (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:

Tam Baillie (Barnardo's Scotland)
Dr Bronwen Cohen (Children in Scotland)
Peter Lee (Scottish Educational Research Association)
Dr Christine Stephen (Scottish Educational Research Association)
Catriona Thomson (Children in Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Eugene Windsor

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Mark Roberts

ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

LOCATION

Committee Room 5

Scottish Parliament

Education Committee

Wednesday 28 September 2005

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

Early Years Inquiry

The Convener (Iain Smith): Good morning. I welcome colleagues to the 16th meeting of the Education Committee in 2005. We have received apologies from Wendy Alexander.

Item 1 on the agenda is our first oral evidence-taking session for the early years inquiry. Last week, the committee began the next phase of its inquiry by visiting the Jeely Piece Club in Castlemilk in Glasgow and the Whitdale early years centre in Whitburn. I understand that both visits were extremely interesting and look forward to reading the reports in due course.

This morning, we have two panels of witnesses. First, I welcome to the meeting Dr Christine Stephen and Peter Lee from the Scottish Educational Research Association, who will give us an academic perspective on early years issues. As the committee has received your written submission, you might wish simply to introduce yourselves, after which we will go straight to questions.

Dr Christine Stephen (Scottish Educational Research Association): I am pleased to be here. I am a researcher at the University of Stirling, with a particular interest in early childhood education. With Peter Lee, I am co-convener of the Scottish Educational Research Association early years network.

Peter Lee (Scottish Educational Research Association): I am the director of the childhood and family research and development centre at the University of Strathclyde and co-convener of the Scottish Educational Research Association early years network.

The Convener: Thank you for giving evidence this morning. Your written evidence has thrown up some interesting questions. Dr Elaine Murray will lead the questioning.

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I have a couple of questions about the issues that you have flagged up on the effective provision of pre-school education study and practice in Scotland. First, will you comment on the difference between what seems to be the current philosophy in England, which is that there should be an equal balance between child-initiated and adult-initiated activities, and the view in Scotland, which is that activities should be child initiated and that children should be provided with resources and given a free choice of what they want to do? Will you expand on the suggestion in your submission that more research needs to be carried out to find the most effective approach?

Dr Stephen: The EPPE study, which covers England, Northern Ireland and Wales, is the most robust piece of research that we have on what happens in the United Kingdom. I do not know whether it represents a consensus on actual practice or whether it simply presents the most recent research evidence, but it suggests that in centres of excellence that have added the most value the ratio of child-initiated to adult-initiated activities is about 50:50. That is not the case in some English provision, in which activities are more adult directed or adult led. In Scotland, the consensus is that activities should be predominantly child led. As a result, two and a quarter hours of the two and a half in an average education session will consist of child-led activities.

Is provision in Scotland better because there are more child-initiated activities or is that 50:50 balance crucial? Is the current provision in Scotland a default position? After all, it has been argued that, because we do not have particularly well-articulated pedagogy, we do not know whether Scottish children are getting an even better deal than English children, a different deal or a deal that is based on what I would describe as a naive, Piagetian approach.

Dr Murray: Would you suggest that there should be a cross-border comparison because England is coming from one direction and Scotland is coming from another direction?

Dr Stephen: Questions need to be asked about what the position is. Empirical work needs to be done. Alternatively, the rich source of data in the EPPE study could be interrogated in different ways. I am sure that one could begin to do that, but we are talking about a longitudinal study and effects will be found only after a good number of years. There are no quick answers; a parallel study in Scotland would take time.

Dr Murray: The EPPE study suggests that centres of excellence involve a good component of teachers. You suggest that it may not be necessary to have only teaching qualifications and that other degree-level qualifications, such as childhood studies degrees, would encourage

"the ability to engage in critical thinking and reflective practice"

and might be equally valuable.

Dr Stephen: The EPPE team was asked a question on that issue at the Warwick early years conference, but it did not have any evidence about alternative qualifications because there were not as many of those when it began its work, so it did not ask such questions—people with those other qualifications were not in its sample. I have learned from working with practitioners and from current research that we are doing with practitioners that the ability to think critically and reflectively is crucial. Peter Lee will have more to say about that.

Peter Lee: The EPPE programme has been robust and rigorous and the evidence is sound as far as it goes, but its major premise at the beginning was to consider good-quality pre-schooling and preparing children for the challenges of primary school. That relates back to the original question about a child-centred approach. We see early childhood education and care as a unique sector to be considered on its own and not in preparation for anything else. Our award-bearing higher education courses are based on the premise that we want to prepare practitioners who are going into early years service with underpinning knowledge and skills in order to promote high quality, not to prepare children for primary school. That is the major distinction between England and Wales and Scotland at the moment.

Dr Murray: Is there anywhere outside Scotland where we could look for evidence to show that other qualifications are equally effective? Are there international comparators?

Peter Lee: First, we should consider the benchmark in Scotland. Many people have now graduated with a BA in childhood studies at the University of Strathclyde and operate in high-quality centres. They lead and head such centres, not necessarily with teacher input. We regard such qualifications as being commensurate with what we see in primary schools or teachers.

On international comparisons, there are many pedagogues and other people in the Scandinavian countries, Spain and Belgium who promote such a child-centred approach in the early years. There are comparators all over Europe and studies are being done. I think that John Bennett has produced a paper for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which has informed the Scottish Executive.

Dr Stephen: There are certainly other places to look. One must think about the knowledge that is needed to do the job properly. A specific kind of training that is not an aspect of teacher education is associated with pedagogues elsewhere. It is also important to consider how much experience in teacher education courses a practitioner gets in the nursery as opposed to getting a taste of being a practitioner for a range of ages.

Dr Murray: The difficulty of getting people to want to do pre-school teaching was certainly raised during last week's visit to Whitburn. People do not get much of that kind of teaching in their training courses.

The Convener: You mentioned Scandinavia. The committee will visit Sweden and Finland in a couple of weeks' time. Are there particular lessons that we should learn from our visits to Scandinavia?

Peter Lee: The historical context of the development of early childhood education and care in the Scandinavian countries is unique and useful comparisons can be made. One major issue is the role of parents—how parents are treated in relation not only to early years centres but to schools. Some 100 years ago, it was written into some constitutions that parents must be involved in the educational development of their children in institutions. You will see particular curricular areas and excellent, high-quality centres, but I ask you also to look at the processes for linking the home, the school and the community. We do not have those links in Scotland. We still tend to isolate our children in centres, away from and without interaction with their homes and communities. I make a plea for you to consider that issue. Obviously, there are other areas that you could examine.

Dr Stephen: For me, the important questions are what the Scandinavians are trying to do, what they are offering to children and whether that is what we want for Scotland's children. Fundamental values and cultural issues underpin everything that is done. Practitioners come from the cultures in which they live, so they bring their values with them. Clearly, that makes a difference to what they do.

Peter Lee: In Scotland, we tend not to use words relating to children's emotional well-being or to see self-esteem and interaction with other human beings as the foundation on which all personality and curricular areas are developed. We tend to think in a box about the physical activities in which children participate. The Scandinavian countries do not have that box. They do not have the rules, regulations and parameters that we impose on our children. I am sorry for using the term, but they tend to take a constructivist approach. They start where the child is and move out. They use terms such as emotional well-being and recognise that as a strong foundation for children's attainment in later life. We can look at and learn from that approach.

Dr Stephen: My experience of visiting a pre-school in Spain is that it looks very different and

that children may be doing things that you would not expect children to do in pre-school in Scotland. However, it is important to unpick the structure of the system and to take into account the age of the children and their stage of cognitive development. The structural issues and the child development education issues are not necessarily in parallel.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): I am intrigued to know whether the model can be replicated here. Some of it is influenced by cultural issues—how Scandinavians approach educational development. There is a great wee Scottish poem that sums up Scotch education as "A telt ye, A telt ye." In Glasgow, we would have added an extra line—"Ah'm no tellin ye again." How do we shift that mindset? It is partly to do with the cultural framework—the sense of where children are and the role that they should play in society.

A second issue is the tax base that is needed to deliver much of the Scandinavian model. My instinctive perception is that the electorates of Scotland and the UK as a whole may not feel comfortable with the level of taxation that that requires. That is a political debate for all of us as parties and citizens, but it strikes me as one of the big dilemmas that we face. Almost anyone with a broadly social democratic view of society sees the Scandinavian countries as good models.

Dr Stephen: We need to ask questions about how good those models are and to appraise them critically. The Scandinavian countries are not the only models. Reggio Emilia has a model of educational provision that was much talked about and admired, but recently I attended a conference at which there was much critical thought about that—it was suggested that the situation had not shifted in 40 years. We need to ask what would fit for Scotland. I guess that we are talking about progressive changes, rather than dramatic changes. We need to consider not just the society, but where practitioners are going and what they are comfortable with. We have all-day provision in places, but we also have practitioners who do not really like that.

Mr McAveety: What are the immediate barriers in Scotland that you think, from your experience and research, need to be overcome? What should we ask about when we are over on the visits, so that we can learn from them?

10:15

Peter Lee: This comment is not party political in any way, but we have moved towards an amazingly wonderful service in early childhood education and care in Scotland. People are already coming to Scotland to have a look at it. We should not underestimate the size of the cake that has been given to early childhood education and care; what we are doing just now is fighting over the recipe, as it were.

The barriers that we have in Scotland now are the barriers that we had in 1998—the professional barriers and the hierarchies between professions. People do not communicate well between health, education and social work services, although I know that the Scottish Executive is trying hard to integrate those areas, to move forward and to ensure that what is provided is best for children and families in Scotland. We are not yet reaching the vulnerable children and families. The reasons for that are manifold and we need answers and empirical evidence to suggest what we should do. My plea is for research to be undertaken. At the moment, it is all gut feeling. Although anecdotal evidence is in many ways sound, it is not empirical.

I think that, when you see the Scandinavian countries, you should ask, as Christine Stephen suggested, "Is this really as good as people say and can it be transferred into Scotland?" You will not see anything in Scandinavia as good as some of the provision that you may have seen at Whitburn, the family learning centres in Glasgow and the voluntary sector provision in Inverness and Aberdeen. There are great centres in Scotland. What we are dreadful about is documenting them, researching them, flagging them up and saying that those are the things that people should be looking at. There are also great centres in Edinburgh.

Dr Stephen: One of the barriers is a reluctance to talk about pedagogy, about what we are doing and about how we are working with young children. Part of that is to do with child-centredness. Attitudes have come about by an historical route. People say, "We don't teach." However, if they do not teach, what do they do? Partly because of the training that they have undergone in the past and partly because looking after little children has been undervalued, practitioners have not been supported in talking freely and confidently about the excellent work that they do and why they are doing it.

The Scottish Executive Education Department is examining that issue. I am aware that it is thinking about what early years provision means, albeit in an educational, rather than a broader social, sense. We need to ask what it means, what we are doing, how we can best work with young children, whether early years is a distinct stage and how it articulates with everything else around it.

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): The committee has been considering pupil motivation, looking particularly at those young people who disengage from the system around the

secondary 3 stage. One thing that has become clear is that early intervention can make a tremendous difference, particularly for the young people whom Peter Lee mentioned—those who are having difficulty at home and those who are most deprived, whether through drug and alcohol misuse or for other reasons. Bringing those young people into early years provision with the right structures as early as possible is obviously the best way forward. Do you think that the formalised curriculum that is now in place for nought-to-three and three-to-five provision is hampering and hindering some of the child development work that is done in early years, by trying to take young people at a pace that they may not be ready for? Should we be examining that more closely or do you think that those problems are being ironed out?

Peter Lee: There are a great many answers to your question. Intervention strategies work as long as the intervention continues. When the intervention resources are withdrawn, children go back to where they were at the beginning of the intervention. That is very important. If we are looking to target in their early years children who in S3 will be excluded from the formal education system for a whole variety of reasons, the intervention must be sustained for many years.

The significant and sustaining adult in a child's life is usually the mother. If we are to address the complexities of what is wrong and what is going on in the lives of children in terms of parenting styles and other issues, resources must be sustained, especially in poor areas. We cannot have projects that last one year, three years or four years—they must go on for many years. We have appalling drug and alcohol abuse problems. The committee will know the statistics better than I do. Interventions in early years alone will not solve those. There will be no solutions if interventions are stopped; they must be sustained. The question is complicated, but that one aspect sticks out. It must be dealt with by research.

Dr Stephen: Thinking about the micro level and bearing in mind the evidence that we have on children's transition between educational sectors, we must start from where children are. That is crucial. I do not think that what Rosemary Byrne describes as the formal curriculum presents any barriers. I welcome the nought-to-three guidelines. They do not look like a curriculum. They talk about the importance of having intimate, familiar relationships. That is how young children learn. Clearly, we need the resources to be able to offer that, but nothing in the guidelines gets in the way of children's development if they are applied in the way that is suggested. There is a good research base for that.

The same applies to the guidelines for three to fives. I can think of one little boy whom, as part of a longer study, we watched throughout his last year in pre-school and his move into primary school. There was potential for that child to disengage in primary 1, never mind when he went to secondary school, because what he was being offered in primary 1 was different from what he needed. He had thrived in pre-school. He loved to choose and he loved to make things, but the shift to that much more adult-directed education in primary 1 meant that he did not get to do the things that he wanted to do until after he had finished his work. He was slow at doing that, so he did not get to do the things that he liked very often and school became disengaging for him. It was obvious to his teacher that he was being disengaged, but she was working in a structure that did not allow things to be done differently.

Transition needs to be examined, in relation not just to the nature of the curriculum but to the nature of the relationships with adults in the playroom or classroom. Typically, when children go to school, the relationships become much more emotionally distant, which is a barrier for some children.

Ms Byrne: What disadvantages are faced by young children, particularly those from deprived backgrounds, who do not experience the nought-to-three provision but go into the pre-school year only? What should we be doing to provide more universal access?

Dr Stephen: We do not have good academic research evidence on that, because typically there has not been much nought-to-three provision. Sure start is more likely to provide answers on what children are gaining. There is no good worldwide evidence either, because not enough children have received such provision. Typically, the provision that is most appropriate for nought to threes has a high ratio of adults and is not necessarily out-of-home care. We do not have the answers.

Peter Lee: We have indicative evidence on economic activity in houses with lone parents showing that, where greater resources are coming in, there is a better learning environment. However, there is little evidence on the development of children in such circumstances. We presume that, where a mother in a poor area is economically active and more resources go into the home, there is an impact on the children.

Dr Stephen: We should not think that children learn only in institutional settings. The EPPE report has some interesting evidence on the home learning environment, suggesting that the greatest difference is made by what parents do with the children. There are differences relating to social and economic background but, if we take into account only the family factors rather than the educational factors, we see that it is what happens

in the home that makes the biggest difference in children's attainment thereafter.

Mr McAveety: Anecdotally, I can say that, in asylum-seeker families, there is a strong sense that they want to use education as the route for improvement. A lot of those families are trying to provide support for their children, which is why those youngsters do well when they are put into appropriate school settings.

Peter, you said that the intervention has to be consistent through a substantial period of time. However, earlier, you said that the integration of services was uneven or perhaps non-existent in some places other than in the early years. How much of a seismic shift will be required to meet the needs of the youngsters who are likely to cause difficulties in their teenage years because of behavioural or social problems as they move into more formal settings or settings in which integration has not always been effective?

Peter Lee: My colleagues in local government will kill me for saying this, but the resources already exist in the areas that we are talking about. We just need integrated approaches. We need to examine the way in which health, education and social work services, as well as national organisations such as the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration and various voluntary organisations, are communicating with one another and impacting on the lives of children and their families. From a major piece of research that we did on the impact of integrated services, we discovered that, for a variety of reasons, resources were not reaching vulnerable children and families. One major reason was the lack of communication between the professionals who were operating in the neighbourhoods in which we were working.

The examples that we have of integrated provision in early childhood education and care show that such provision has a major impact on the lives of vulnerable children and families. Whether that is sustained into primary school is a moot point. I think that Christine Stephen was saying that, often, when the transition is made into the more formal setting of P1, P2 and P3, no professionals come into the class, there is no integrated provision in the school and parents are kept at the school gate. We need to look at the intervention strategies.

Dr Stephen: There is also a shift at that point from children learning about what is interesting to them and being able to decide when they are finished to having targets set for them and being told that they can fail to meet those targets.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): The EPPE study is an influential body of evidence and it is good to hear you say that we should view it in a critically constructive manner. As policy makers, we need to be able to measure the various outcomes and to make judgments about the various service providers in early years education. If the EPPE study is only one part of the story, what measurements should we be looking at to enable us to make effective comparisons between the various sorts of early years provision in Scotland?

Dr Stephen: You could begin by deciding which of the kinds of services that the EPPE study considered are most like the ones in Scotland. That would enable you to interrogate that evidence further and to make use of what was an expensive, robust piece of work. You need to decide whether school effectiveness is the model of research that you want to use. You also need to decide what you expect early years education to do. It could be about social issues, social justice issues or attainment, but until you have decided what you want the end product to be, you will not be able to work out how to measure it. Is it about children having fun, having a good time or feeling secure when they are three years old or five years old? You must unpick the issues that far back. Does that help? It probably does not help a great deal.

10:30

Mr Macintosh: It raises more questions, but I suppose that it was a good answer.

Dr Stephen: That is my job, really.

Mr Macintosh: You commented on the need for further research. That is a good point because when we went to the Jeely Piece Club in Castlemilk last week, although it was obvious that it was a fantastic place, it did not have any empirical evidence to demonstrate that. The centre is voluntary-sector led and receives a cocktail of funding. It was clear that there are tensions because of the involvement of the local authority and the voluntary sector. Although funding still comes predominantly through the local authority, it is not mainstream local authority funding and the centre does not have evidence to back up the work that it does. Although its services are child centred, they concentrate on the whole family—it is really a family support service. It would be interesting for the committee to know whether such an approach represents a more beneficial use of public money, training and expertise for the Government to support.

Dr Stephen: That is an empirical question, to which we do not have the answer.

Mr Macintosh: You say that the EPPE data are too limited.

Dr Stephen: I do not think that they are too limited; I just think that one must interrogate them

appropriately. Kathy Sylva would be much more able to tell you about that.

The centre that you described sounds as if it would be classified as a children's centre under EPPE's categories. One would want to consider what EPPE says such centres do, why they do that and how they achieve their aims. One would assess whether the Castlemilk centre's staffing model resembled the EPPE children's centre staffing model, according to the way that it categorises centres. It sounds as though it probably does. In the EPPE evidence, integrated centres come out as having the highest impact on attainment, but of course that does not mean that they will close the gap, because merely adding value does not necessarily mean that everyone will come out the same at the end.

Mr Macintosh: I want to ask about a related issue, if I may. I will give you a quote from the submission by Barnardo's, which will be represented on the second panel. It states:

"There should be no conflict between child development goals and those relating to increased parental participation in the labour market".

We can all agree that there should be no conflict between the two policy streams of providing early years education and supporting families—especially mums—back into employment, but how much conflict is there? Can you provide evidence on the difference between the two policy streams, which work in parallel but might be in conflict? It has been suggested that encouraging women back into the labour market does not necessarily lead to the best outcomes for families, but perhaps it does. Is there any evidence on that?

Peter Lee: Research in America by Belsky has provided such evidence, although it is controversial to say the least. That was a major piece of research, one aspect of which was examination of women who return to employment and children who go into full-time child care. Many of the people who were involved in that research withdrew from its conclusions, one of which was that the mother, in particular, should be at home interacting with children under the age of one. That conclusion has been challenged repeatedly over the years since the research was published.

I do not think that there is a conflict between mothers returning to work and child development. For reasons that have already been mentioned, I regard early years child care as being an essential part of the early childhood education and care service that we provide. There are many lone parents in Scotland. If we want lone parents to have resources, one of the major ways to get the resources to them is to ensure that there is economic activity that is fully supported by the provision of high-quality child care. We must be careful to ensure that that child care results in no disadvantage for the child. The EPPE study stated that there was no major contribution to development of children in full-time child care, as opposed to those who were in half-time care; however, it did not say that it disadvantaged the children, but that there was no immediate advantage to full-time child care. We must be careful about how we read that. We cannot divorce the two policies for child development and women returning to work—they must be merged.

Dr Stephen: If we think about the child's experience, it helps us to get a handle on the matter. What is it like being a small child? If the provision that you are experiencing meets your needs, regardless of the funding stream, it is going to be supportive. Funding streams do not make any difference to small children and, typically, they do not make a lot of difference to practitioners either. It is about good practice.

There is a little bit of evidence, which EPPE also mentions, on whether extended times in full-day provision at about 18 months to two years of age influence aspects of later social development, but that evidence is disputed. By the time children are about seven, that effect is washed out anyway, if there is a slight dip in the level of some aspects of social behaviour. It is very complex when one starts to look at the EPPE reports. They go through what children are like when they are five, what they are like when they are seven, and so on as time goes on. The effects shift over time. I cannot imagine that practitioners can care without educating, or educate without caring. Getting the practice right, in terms of the impact on children, is the important bit.

Mr Macintosh: I can see that it is difficult to provide evidence and that there are difficult values to be brought to bear. There is quite a big difference between helping mums back to work and encouraging mums back to work. If we are veering too far in one direction, that may or may not be beneficial.

In some early years provision, the ethos around the care that is provided is about looking after kids while their parents are working; the flexibility in the system suits the working parent. By contrast, much of the more school-based provision offers little flexibility to parents. It is clear that the provision is for the child, but it is intolerant of demands on parents. However, the EPPE evidence suggests that school-based provision is probably better for the child. That is the difficulty.

Dr Stephen: Because EPPE is about a school improvement model, it considers intellectual and cognitive development, although it also looks at social development. Therefore, the questions that are asked in that study are probably different from the committee's questions. The report reflects what the people who conducted the study were measuring.

It depends also on how one sees early years education. Do we want it to do something for parents, or are we thinking about what happens to the children? My experience is typically of sitting in playrooms and watching the experience that children have, regardless of what time of day it is or where their parents are at that time. I think that early years education can do both, and lots of places do both very effectively. Providers that are in receipt of Government funding for pre-school education will interpret the curriculum guidelines, as would any provider whether the setting was school-based, in the voluntary sector or wherever.

Mr Macintosh: The Jeely Piece Club, which we visited, greatly benefits parents and children, but I suspect that it is not rewarded in financial policy terms.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): If I am correct, you would like more research in this area. Could you do a paper for us on where the research should be targeted and on what particular issues? It lies within the powers of the Executive and Parliament, through the Scottish Parliament information centre, to conduct research programmes. A short paper would be helpful.

Dr Stephen: That is certainly something that we could take on.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have two quick questions, of which you have answered the first in part. Is there a marked difference between demand for full-time and part-time provision?

Dr Stephen: I do not know, because I have not done research on provision and not much is available. The witnesses on the next panel will have a better handle on that than we do. However, studies in which we were involved up to 2002 suggested that many parents are happy with part-time provision.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Has your research suggested whether sufficiently flexible capacity exists to enable mothers to place their children in nursery and pre-school centres on the days and times they want?

Dr Stephen: Again, my experience and our studies suggest that there is sufficient flexibility, but also that grandparents are important at the beginning and the end of the day and that holidays create problems. However, the picture is constantly changing, because an increasing number of places offer after-school care and provision before school starts. Our evidence from 2002 suggested that one centre was not opening early enough for a particular set of families, but I went back recently and found that that centre had changed its opening hours.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Your information is generally anecdotal.

Dr Stephen: That information is anecdotal. We have not done any studies in the area and I do not know of any. However, I am sure that the witnesses on the next panel will have more evidence on that.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Is there enough capacity in pre-school centres to ensure that parents who seek local authority provision can place two siblings in the same centre?

Dr Stephen: I do not know of anyone who has asked that as a research question. However, something like 98 per cent of four-year-olds and 86 per cent of three-year-olds now have pre-school provision. That is as near as we can get. Whether parents get the centre or the times of day that they want is another issue.

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP): This is interesting, but I want to go back to vulnerable children, particularly those who are classified as having social, emotional or behavioural difficulties when they arrive at school. Teachers in primary schools, including those who teach older children, often tell me that many children's problems could have been identified and addressed during their pre-school years. What evidence is there that child care and early years education can compensate for a child's coming from a home background in which they have not developed relationships with adults or acquired social interaction skills with children or adults? Would it be more sensible to offer whole-day provision for children in that category?

10:45

I was interested in your comment that early intervention is fine but that that kind of support must be sustained over time, right through children's schooling. I take it that that does not mean that you are doing the same things over time. For example, I have taken an interest in the nurture-group approach that Glasgow City Council seems to be rolling out, which shows that working with children can turn around their behavioural difficulties. Children who are very disruptive in class can become integrated in the mainstream school within a term. I would like to hear your reflections on that.

A particular issue has been raised from time to time about the need for social pedagogues. You talk about there being in Scotland slightly different styles of pedagogy than in England and Wales. Do we already have social pedagogues in Scotland that we do not recognise?

Peter Lee: Yes, no and maybe are the answers to your three questions. [*Laughter.*]

We can identify and intervene on behavioural difficulties very early and that intervention can be

sustained. There is a strong movement away from the compensatory and deficit approaches that say that the state or school can fill the gaps that exist in people's lives; they cannot. We have to move towards what we in research call a partnership model. Partnerships should be with the significant adults in children's lives, who are not necessarily the parents. We need to identify the significant adults and work with them.

The nurture-group approach is close to my heart because I have evaluated some of the work that has been done on that. Again, it works very well when it involves communities and the home as well as operating in the school. I have seen nurture groups in which the children, having been included in the school, are then excluded from the classroom to deal with them in laboratory conditions so that they can be put back into the classroom. That is a very dangerous approach. We need to ensure that children are not excluded from the run-of-the-mill working of the school. The school has to continue with a nurturing approach and must have dedicated staff where there are behavioural difficulties.

I will offer an anecdote. There was a child who had severe eczema and would not leave his home. Through the nurturing programme that was—as Mr McAveety said—an integrated approach between health, education and social work, transport was supplied so that the child could leave home, go to the nurture group in the school and be gradually brought on board to work with the other children in the school who were told that the child had eczema. He looked appalling because his face was covered and the reaction of the other children to that caused the child to go home weeping and gnashing his teeth. Gradually, through the nurturing approach, we were able to bring that child on; the child is now in primary 7. The nurturing approach in Glasgow and in Argyll and Bute has been very positive.

The notion of intervention and compensating for the deficits in the home needs to be considered and a partnership model has to be used. We in Scotland do not have evidence on that, so we need to research it. No evaluation has been done on the nurturing programmes in Glasgow and no documentation has been produced, which is quite appalling because what is happening there is revolutionary. If people came from mainland Europe to see what is going on in Glasgow, we could not give them anything to read or see before they arrived.

That is a microcosm of what happens throughout Scotland. We do not document, trumpet research or point out the great things that are happening here. That is another plea for research.

Dr Stephen: We need to be wary of the deficit approach and the assumption that, if children have problems in primary school, somebody else should have done something about it earlier. We know that, typically, secondary school teachers say that about primary school teachers and that primary school teachers say it of others.

In the study of transition, we became aware of children who apparently had no behaviour problems pre-school, but who suddenly acquired that label at primary school. There were various reasons for that, some of which were to do with the structure of the primary school education that they were being offered and the nature of the relationships there.

Some of the difficulties become apparent only when the child moves into a set of circumstances that does not necessarily meet his or her needs. There are two approaches to that. Either the child can in effect be told, "This is how it is. You need to fit in here", or one can ask how the child's needs can be met differently and how activities can be restructured. That would apply to any centre of provision. We need to ask those questions.

We used a social inclusion model to assess some of the research findings. We were struck that there is a sense of blaming children for not fitting in easily. We need to ask whether we can change structures and relationships—perhaps children need a different kind of entry into primary or secondary school.

Mr Ingram: We have to focus on discontinuities between nursery and primary education.

Dr Stephen: We have to ask some very serious questions about that.

Mr Ingram: I mentioned the notion of a social pedagogue. Could you give me your views on that role?

Peter Lee: My question is, "What the hell's a social pedagogue?"

Dr Stephen: Yes—what do you mean by that? We are the researchers, so we ask the questions.

Peter Lee: I presume that it means someone who is aiding the child's social development and socialisation processes. Every single person who interacts with the child in a centre should be a social pedagogue. If you were to identify a particular professional, that would become that individual's job. It is like learning support teachers in primary schools. The job of the learning support teacher is to support learning, but for me, that is the job of the teacher.

If we were to have social pedagogues or other categories of teachers operating in our institutions, that would become their job. Another example is a home link teacher. The job of linking between home and school becomes the home link teacher's job and is not the head teacher's job or

the teacher's job, although it should be. I am wary about the increased diversification of bits of teachers' jobs, where the approach is, "That's your job, not my job." That might happen when people are employed to do such specific tasks.

That said, there are specific aspects of a child's development in which there is a need for people who are dedicated to those aspects to work with them, although I do not know whether we would call them social pedagogues. That is a wonderful term. You will be blamed now, Mr Ingram, for that term being used the length and breadth of Scotland.

Dr Stephen: I recently reread a book by Tizard and Hughes, which I think was written in 1983. They attempted to investigate whether the social relationships that children have at home, particularly in respect of language and communication, are different to those which they have in pre-school education. There was a sense that they were getting something much more valuable during pre-school provision, and it was felt, "If only the homes did the same as we did." The findings of the study were that children got very rich communications at home, but of a different sort. The nature of the relationships that children form at home is different. At home, people know about a child's past and future, as well as their present. We ought to be cautious about saying that we can fix things in the institutional learning setting. It offers a particular kind of communications system. It is different, but it is not necessarily better.

Mr McAveety: In my time in teaching, I met a lot of antisocial pedagogues. I do not want to include myself among their number.

Our pupil motivation inquiry highlighted a massive tension between the child-centred approach and the use of exclusion in schools. From the evidence that we received from professionals, particularly teachers and the representatives of teachers' organisations, it was clear that the issue is very sensitive. What happens if you want stability in the pre-school, primary or secondary environment, but one child is causing absolute havoc? For example, I know of constituents whose kids have ended up in a nurture group. There is no doubt that that has made a real difference to them; they will not disappear into the system and eventually emerge badly damaged.

However, the massive problem in schools is that folk feel that they are sometimes under siege. How do you deal with the tension that is caused by a child's misbehaviour in early years development?

Dr Stephen: If you go into playrooms where there are 80 children, you will see that there is no disruption. One or two children might have particular needs that are being addressed by practitioners but in my experience—I must point out that my work centres on pre-school activity—the pre-school environment does not suffer from the same problems that I have heard arise in schools. That is partly because of the way in which practitioners work with children and partly because of the desire to meet children's needs by giving them choices, getting them engaged and allowing them to learn through play. Play is intrinsically motivating and pre-school education is set up to ensure that some of those issues are avoided.

Peter Lee: I agree. As children move through primary school into secondary school, the problem of motivation gets worse and the examples of disruption become more dramatic. My wife is the deputy head teacher at Hermitage Academy in Helensburgh, so members can imagine the debates that we have at home about whether children should be excluded.

Mr McAveety: Does one of you say, "Just take them away"?

Peter Lee: Actually, it is more like, "Please take them away".

I think that, with this question, we continually return to the point about taking an integrated approach.

Mr McAveety: But when you have that discussion around the table, a secondary school teacher might say, "You expect to get more from children in secondary education than them playing, exploring or sharing initiatives. I don't get any more from them, so there's conflict. I could give into them and make it easy". I should point out that those are not my views, but they reflect what folk say in some of the passionate debates that we have had.

Dr Stephen: Such a debate does not arise in early years education, because the assumptions are different. We start with questions such as, "What can we do to support children? What are they interested in?" and then follow those up. Practitioners are good at carefully observing children's activities and then finding out how to add to and extend them. Indeed, the EPPE study has emphasised the importance of sustained shared thinking and of practitioners following children's leads. It is a different approach to education. In fact, one of the crucial differences is that, as the explicit curriculum guidance and all our studies on practitioners' implicit theories and practice show, practitioners do not aim to achieve particular goals, get certain grades or results or make everyone able to do something by a certain stage; rather, they simply seek to nurture the activities that children would take part in anyway.

Ms Byrne: Is any research available on the experience of children who do not find the

transition from pre-school to school terribly easy? I am particularly interested in the number of adults who engage with children in pre-school rather than in a primary 1 class of 30 children and how the pre-school environment is structured. After all, the learning style in school becomes very rigid whereas in pre-school and nursery education the style is much freer and allows children to find their own ways of learning. Do you know of any research on that crucial area?

I would like to go back to discuss social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. You say that there are fewer problems with children in the pre-school set-ups; but when children in S3 are having difficulties, nursery nurses could tell you that they had identified those difficulties before the children even came out of the nursery. Something is not working as children go through the system.

I totally agree with what you said about partnership. However, there are still some concerns that we have not tapped into today.

11:00

Dr Stephen: Many factors may influence the future behaviour of a child as identified by a practitioner in the way that you describe. However, there is huge and, I think, warranted anxiety about labelling children early on and about self-fulfilling prophesies.

You asked about research into transition. Work on the transition of records, and on progress and continuity issues, has been done by Aline-Wendy Dunlop at the University of Strathclyde; and, as I said earlier, we have done a study with colleagues at the University of Stirling into children moving from all-day provision into primary school. Our work is Executive funded, and a summary of it is in the "Insight" series of publications. I do not know where Aline-Wendy has published her work, but I am sure that you could find it. You are right to ask about the change in style.

Peter Lee: It is published as being by Fabian and Dunlop.

Dr Stephen: The work is in a chapter in that edited edition.

Peter Lee: The work gives a good broad sweep of the issues surrounding transition and picks up on many points that have been asked about. It is an area in which there is a glaring need for further research. However, research is needed into more than just the transition between institutions. Children's lives are moving fast, from reconstituted families to reconstituted families, and we need to know about those transitions as well. Children are making transitions all the time. We tend to relate transitions to institutions, but we should look at all the changes in children's lives.

Dr Stephen: If the focus is on the child, rather than on the institutions, things look very different. This is not just a Scottish issue; lots of work is going on in New Zealand and Australia.

The Convener: Thank you for that. You have raised the issue of whether five is the right age for children to start their formal schooling. However, we probably will not want to go into that today.

Thank you for your interesting and helpful evidence. You have raised a number of issues to do with the purpose of early years education; we will bear them in mind as we go through our inquiry. We would be grateful if you would forward us a brief paper on the areas that you believe require further research. Thank you.

11:02

Meeting suspended.

11:07

On resuming—

The Convener: For our second panel this morning, I am pleased to welcome Tam Baillie, who is the assistant director of policy for Barnardo's Scotland. From Children in Scotland we have Bronwen Cohen, who is the chief executive, and Catriona Thomson, who is the early years development officer. We have received your written submissions and supplementary statements. I ask you to introduce yourselves briefly, after which we will ask questions.

Tam Baillie (Barnardo's Scotland): I am Tam Baillie, the assistant director for Barnardo's Scotland.

Mr McAveety: Just in case we confused you with the other Tam Baillie.

Tam Baillie: Just in case you thought one of the other two witnesses was Tam.

Dr Bronwen Cohen (Children in Scotland): I am Bronwen Cohen, the chief executive of Children in Scotland. We have generously brought along some magazines for the committee, which I hope will be distributed. I am here with my colleague Catriona Thomson.

Catriona Thomson (Children in Scotland): I am the development officer for the opening doors to learning project, which is an Esmée Fairbairn-funded project on children with additional support needs and their experiences of early years education services.

The Convener: I welcome you to the meeting. Your submissions raise interesting questions for the committee's inquiry. One subject that is covered heavily is parenting. I ask Rosemary Byrne to open questioning on that.

Ms Byrne: The previous panel told us that partnership with the significant adults in a child's life—parents or others—is extremely important. Given the number of young people who suffer from lives that are chaotic and disrupted by various social circumstances at home, I am interested in what both organisations have to say about parenting. How do we make progress?

As Ken Macintosh said, we were at the Jeely Piece Club last week, where we saw a wonderful example of integrated work with parents, sustained with children from the age of nought to children who were in school. Facilities were available all the time and parents became involved as volunteers. How can we make such models work throughout the country? How will we fund them? How will they best be achieved?

The voluntary sector is heavily involved in the Jeely Piece Club. One problem is that the organisation must apply for funding on a rotational basis. That takes much time away from the work of the people who manage the project, who must prepare bids and so on, when the focus should—rightly—be on the good work that is happening. Given the number of young people who become disenchanted with school and who suffer problems, and given the conditions that some young people live in, how can we enhance such work and bring it together in a model that is integrated throughout all agencies? I know that that question is huge.

Tam Baillie: Much of the evidence that I have provided—particularly the supplementary evidence—is about support for parents. I speak in other forums for services for children of all ages and I endorse what was said earlier about the approach to the early years and child care. The position is positive. Such services are well funded—significant additional funds have been provided.

The relationship between the age of children and support for parents is almost inverse. As children grow up through the primary years and into secondary education—several comments have been made about this—fewer universal services to support parents are available and it is less accepted that parents need that support, not just in times of trouble, but all the time. In contrast, in the early years it is widely accepted that the job is difficult and that parents need support, whether or not problems exist.

Your second point was about integrated services. We await publication of the Scottish Executive's integrated strategy for early years child care. We back strongly several comments that were made today about the need for integrated services. That is a major development that is needed throughout all services, which include those for the early years.

Your third question was about funding. As I am from a voluntary sector agency, it is no surprise that I have plenty to say about funding. Short-term funding drains agencies such as ours. First, it brings uncertainty about future funding to the work. It also involves time and energy in chasing not just one, but multiple funding streams. If anything is to arise from considering how we enable agencies to deliver services better, it should be that the Scottish Executive examines how funding arrangements are constructed, for how long they last, who bears the risk for projects and other matters. It is within the Executive's powers to simplify the funding process and funding streams. It is to the Executive's credit that it has established several funding streams, but that creates a complicated matrix of funding, which consumes energy.

Dr Cohen: Parental involvement is important for all parents and we must take a much more multifaceted and systematic approach to it. There are many good projects; what Barnardo's projects do is second to none and the investment in sure start Scotland has been significant in showing what it can bring.

The problem is that we still have cocktails of funding—a previous witness referred to that. The approach to funding is fragmented. We all believe that having a systematic policy is important, but the approach to involving parents is still fragmented. We need to look across the board. We must consider employment provisions, with which we can do more to enable parents to spend more time with their children. As in several other countries, we could provide leave so that parents can visit their children's pre-school service or school. If we think that they should be involved in learning—and all the research shows that they should be—why not symbolise that by giving parents three days a year to visit their child's service?

It is also a matter of not taking a deficit view of parents. Our research shows that parents do not like labelling or stigma—they like to go to professionals to whom everybody is going. There is a risk in our seeing it as much more important that parents are involved with some children. We sometimes put that into a category that makes it less likely that some parents will access the services that are available.

11:15

Mr Macintosh: I have a question that I asked the previous panel. Perhaps Tam Baillie could answer, because Barnardo's flagged up the issue in its submission. You suggest that there should be no conflict between supporting parents to get back into the workforce and centring on child care. No one would disagree with that, but there is a

difference between “should be” and “is”. Is there a conflict? Does it affect the quality of provision? In other words, is there a difference between the funding for places for 3 and 4-year-olds in a pre-school nursery and the provision provided by private nurseries, which offer far greater hours but are specifically designed to encourage parents back into work? Are the funding streams and the twin policies creating difficulties? Should there be a rationalisation or a more coherent link between the two? Which is the priority?

Tam Baillie: The starting point is children living in poverty. The United Kingdom Government has already set its sights firmly on getting children out of poverty, and all the figures are moving in the right direction. However, evidence shows that the children who have been removed from poverty are those who were just below the poverty line. Some significant policy initiatives will be required to get all children out of poverty in line with the Government’s targets. For that reason, we are in tune with the general Government policy, which is to remove barriers and encourage parents to access employment. However, that comes with tensions, one of which is ensuring that children from families with parents in work have appropriate child care facilities. It has already been mentioned that that is most significant for children who are under the age of 1, although the Government has recognised that and has announced extended leave for parents.

We have to maintain some element of choice. The policy must not be interpreted as forcing parents to go to work, which would not be the choice of all parents. We need to ensure that there is an element of choice, and that parents who choose to remain at home and care for their children have sufficient income to ensure that the youngsters do not fall below the poverty line. I may be asking for the ideal, but given the importance that people have placed on early years development, and the need to provide support for parents, there may be additional costs to ensuring that youngsters get appropriate child care, whether at home or provided by the state.

Your other question was on the balance between private and state provision. Parents may choose to use private provision, but that should not be based on level of income. We should ensure that there is adequate access to state provision. I do not know if that covers all the angles that you were looking at.

Mr Macintosh: Yes. You covered the first point admirably. Choice is at the heart of it. You could not have summed up Government policy better.

Tam Baillie: I am a spokesman for Barnardo’s, by the way.

Mr Macintosh: My concern is that the policies drive different funding streams. There is specific funding for pre-school provision, which supports many places in what all the evidence suggests is high-quality, school-based provision. However, the funding stream that supports child care has different benefits. Because that funding stream is different and is driven by a slightly different policy, it has different outcomes and develops a different ethos. I just wonder whether that is helpful or damaging. It might increase choice, which is perhaps not a bad thing, but on the other hand, it might also sacrifice quality in some respects.

Tam Baillie: There have been some interesting developments. The Scottish Executive has created the working for families fund, which gives money to one of our services, which provides support to lone parents and helps them find employment. There are still barriers however. For instance, although the labour market is incredibly flexible, particularly with regard to part-time employment, we do not have a flexible enough child care system to enable some young lone parents to go into employment. Many of the youngsters with whom we come into contact talk vociferously about wanting to enter employment and about the barriers to gaining employment—I think that I gave an example of that in our additional submission.

There are areas in which policies come together but I contend that the fact that we lack an integrated strategy means that there are not enough of them.

Dr Cohen: We feel strongly that there is a problem with the divided approach. In all our evidence, we have made it clear that, like Tam Baillie, we are keen that parental care be examined and that employment provisions be improved. I know that those matters are reserved to Westminster, but I hope that this committee will consider some of the messages that could be sent to Westminster about those issues. We are not doing enough in terms of the level of payment for parental leave, for example.

To deal with your question, I think that it is a problem when one puts services for pre-school education in one pot, support for young children in another pot and child care tax credits to support parents in paid employment in yet another pot. That contributes to the fragmented state of the provision that we have in this country, which is among the most fragmented in Europe. Although we welcome the commitment to improve provision through funding various initiatives and so on, it seems to us that the current approach is not the most sensible way in which to offer those services.

We all know that pre-school and school-age child care services are late-comers to established services. We think that those newer services are marginalised in relation to schools, for example. The school-building programme—which is actually a school and nursery-building programme—has

built very few nurseries. We should ask ourselves why that is the case. I think that it is because, as Tam Baillie has said, the funding is short term and insufficiently stable to enable nurseries to be included in some of the new spaces that we are providing for schools, which would be the logical approach.

We think that children should have an equal start. Some of the vision that came from the Scottish child care strategy in 1998 was to do with having access within the neighbourhood to simple provision. However, at the moment, children go to many different kinds of services. If your parents are in paid employment, they will probably purchase a place for you in a private nursery, and if you live in a place that is lucky enough to have an integrated service you will perhaps go there. Children have different experiences.

We can learn from looking at other countries. We do not need to copy, but we can certainly ask ourselves questions about what we are offering in comparison to what is offered in other countries. It is interesting to note that Sweden, for example, introduced its pre-school services to the education system for a number of reasons. One was the fact that the country hit a period of unemployment and suddenly realised that its very good, well-established pre-school services were all linked to employment, so that people who were not employed did not have access to those services. Sweden also picked up on the research that shows clearly that we should regard the pre-school period as the first stage of lifelong learning. The Swedish education system was, therefore, extended to bring in pre-school services, and those services were treated as the first stage of lifelong learning. I think that we can learn from that.

Mr Macintosh: As you say, Dr Cohen, continuity of funding is especially important for the non-pre-school area. However, the first recommendation that you make in your written submission is that we should expand the provision of part-time pre-school places to full-time places. Given the fact that we are always working with limited resources, is that really what we should be doing? Should we be expanding the part-time places for three and four-year-olds when the EPPE research and other research—we discussed the matter earlier with SERA—shows that there is not much evidence of the benefits of a full-time place? It is clear that there is a huge need for better-funded and more continuous support for the other child care provisions—early years provision as well as the pre-school provision that already exists.

Dr Cohen: It was important that a target was established, back in 1997; however, Scotland met it very swiftly and we are now looking at a target that was met six or seven years ago. I would like us to challenge ourselves a bit by moving on from successfully achieving that target to something more.

Nobody is saying that children will be in such care for a full day; we are looking at the experience of children and parents who have to go to different services to make up the hours that they need. We are taking a child-centred approach to provision. By offering a full-time, whole-day place, we will save some parents and children using a variety of services to get the number of hours of provision that they require. That is one suggestion that can be made. We have not moved on from the 1997 target, and that is an obvious thing that we could do; however, that is only one of several suggestions that we have made.

Mr Macintosh: I understood something slightly different—that is the trouble with reading the two different policies. Funding a pre-school place is not quite the same as funding whole-day child care provision for families

Dr Cohen: We see it as being provided on a whole-day basis—on the integrated basis. Everything that we advocate is to be provided on a whole-day, whole-child basis.

Mr Macintosh: Do you think that that is the way in which to do it—to fund the pre-school place rather than to fund the family to choose whatever provision they wish? Do you think that we should expand the pre-school place rather than provide funding that would allow the family to choose the child care that would be best for their situation?

Dr Cohen: As I say in my submission, I believe in enhancing the payment for parental leave and extending it. Scotland can well look to some of the nordic countries, as there are many common traditions. Those countries provide, pretty much, paid leave for 12 to 18 months of the child's life, which enables parents to spend more time with their children.

Looking overall at the finite pot of money and what we spend it on, I agree that there are choices to be made about what we do. However, we do not have a choice—I feel this strongly, and I will put it strongly—about trying to develop a much more coherent set of pre-school services. Questions were asked earlier about demand. What we know about demand is that, whenever a demand survey is carried out, there are always more people wanting more places—although what they want often reflects what they know about, so one always has to interpret demand from that perspective.

11:30

We should take a systematic approach to considering what is needed. We need to see

trends in employment rates and the expectations that we have of pre-school services, how they can help and the agendas to which they can contribute, such as children's learning and creating a safe space for children. We know that outside space for children is diminishing and that children need safe, creative space. We might consider the role that pre-school services can play in developing healthy eating habits or the role that we expect them to play in contributing to the assessment of children through diagnostic testing. We expect and want them to do more and more, because we recognise that they can play such a role. What are we going to do to up the game in terms of what they are providing? Lots of good people are doing lots of fantastic jobs, such as in Barnardo's projects, but we still have a largely poorly qualified, poorly paid workforce that we expect to do all the things that I have mentioned. I do not believe that we have a choice about trying to do better.

Mr Macintosh: Thanks.

Dr Murray: I want to investigate further the idea of universal full-day provision, which Barnardo's is suggesting should be on offer. A piece of research done for the Scottish Executive called "Parents' Access to and Demand for Childcare in Scotland" suggested that in an ideal world parents would prefer to look after their own children. Perhaps we are demanding that childcare be more and more flexible when we should be saying that employment needs to become more flexible. We have a problem with people working long hours and not getting enough quality time with their families. Are we approaching the matter from the wrong direction? Should we be considering how to allow parents more time with their children? Does employment practice need to change?

Dr Cohen: We need to approach the matter from both directions. We need to consider employment provisions, flexibility in working arrangements and the ability of mothers and fathers to spend more time with their children and to contribute to learning and outside activities. We need to support that. We need to consider the services that we are providing for our children and make them simple to access, unstigmatised and not seen as being special. We know that pre-school services can contribute to diminishing child poverty in the short term and that quality services can do much for children's aspirations in later life. I want to ensure that we draw on my colleague Catriona Thomson's knowledge; she has been working on a project on children with additional support needs for learning. Please bear that in mind.

Dr Murray: The survey that I mentioned suggested that 72 per cent of parents found it relatively easy to pay for child care. If we move to a universal free system for all children, will that not mean that there will be less funding available for families on low incomes who need particular assistance to be lifted out of poverty? I suppose I am asking whether, if we offer funded services to middle class people who have a reasonable amount of money, we will diminish the services available to those who most need them. A middle class lone parent will not have the same experiences and difficulties as a lone parent living in an area of significant deprivation. Is there a danger that we will skew resources away from those who most need them?

Dr Cohen: We accept that parents should make a contribution to fees, although we believe that that should be assessed and capped in the way that it is in other countries. We do not believe that it is acceptable that Scottish parents pay six times more for their child care place than parents in Sweden. That is one of the reasons that we think more money needs to go into funding services. We believe that providing a network of accessible services for everyone reduces the need for targeted approaches.

Tam Baillie: I think that both measures are needed. A key question for the inquiry and for policy makers is how many universal services should be provided. We already have universal services and Scotland met its targets quickly, but the question is what priority we should give to universal provision. The evidence is that when child care partnerships, for example, are left to supplement what is provided universally, there is patchy coverage. If the priority was to provide universal, whole-day provision and extend that down the age groups, I am certain that that would happen. However, if other measures were left to child care partnerships to implement, I am not certain that they would happen. It may be appropriate to have different geographical spreads of appropriate child care, but an opportunity exists for the Executive to set a minimum national standard.

Dr Murray: If you argue that parents should not have to pay so much for child care in Britain, are you also arguing that people should be prepared to pay higher taxes so that parents do not have to fund child care? Or are you saying that other aspects of the education and child care sphere are unnecessary and that the money could be better used?

Dr Cohen: We think that there is room for increasing the proportion of funding that goes on early years services. We recommend spending 1 per cent of gross domestic product on early years, which would be a modest increase. That figure was recommended back in 1995 in the European Community quality targets, which we have not met. We commended in our written evidence the

Treasury's identification that investment in early years is incredibly significant. Internationally, the Treasury's strong view on that stands out. It recognised that investment in early years is worth while because it brings dividends in later life.

We must put more resources into early years. The problem with the current structure and the cocktail of funding approach is that there is a lot of duplication. It is difficult to know how much we spend and I am not convinced that we know how much we spend on certain services. I have looked at what other countries do. It is difficult to work out half the time what is happening in this country relative to much simpler systems elsewhere. They are simpler for children and for parents and make it possible to monitor more carefully what is going on.

Catriona Thomson: I want to add something on parents of children with additional support needs. My project work has made it clear that, to get the support they need, parents must seek out different funders from different sectors to find a way of coping with their everyday lives. Services are fragmented for them and that is particularly the case for early years. Parents say that early years services shape their ability to cope with their lives and with the challenges that raising their children brings. Trying to fit together a reasonable package of care that supports them and their families is an additional burden. Parents talked particularly about family support to help them look after their other children. The issue is about making it easier for parents to get the services they need.

Tam Baillie: I am sure that one of the first calls of an integrated strategy for child care in the early years would be to have an audit to find out what we currently fund and where the gaps are. I heard an example the other day of a parent who used six different ways of caring for their child from the cocktail of funding and the cocktail of different employment provision.

Dr Murray: It is very difficult to quantify, but more investment in the early years could mean less expenditure on the problems that arise later in childhood.

Tam Baillie: That is commonly said but it is a bit more difficult to find the costed evidence for it. We spend a fortune in the later years on services that deal with youngsters who have suffered traumatic experiences in their earlier years that have not been picked up. We would have to search deep to find the cost-benefit analysis of that. Common sense tells us that such youngsters should have been picked up earlier, but it is not easy to come across the empirical evidence that proves that input at such an early stage will save money in the longer term.

Mr Ingram: I am very interested in what you have to say. As, at one stage, I had three children under the age of five, I have to question the Executive report finding that 72 per cent of parents found it easy to pay for child care. That is an astonishing figure. I would go so far as to say that one of the reasons for Scotland's falling birth rate is the cost of raising children, of which child care costs must be a major feature.

It is certainly my experience and the experience of others that if people are unable to afford their first choice of child care, they fall back on second-best options such as asking the grandparents to look after the children, which causes strain on them. In my view—I would like to hear your comments on this—we have had a second-best system of child care in this country until now, notwithstanding the developments in bringing children aged three and four into part-time nursery care.

I would like to hear your reflections on moving towards a universal provider-subsidised system. Would you expect the level and quality of child care to improve as a consequence? Would you expect the birth rate to rise? That is obviously in the national interest given the difficulties we expect to face paying for public services in the future. Will there be any other general benefits for Scotland in the future by moving away from the current fragmented services that we are talking about?

Tam Baillie: I am not sure that I am qualified to comment on demographics or on the rise and fall of the birth rate. I have already touched on the impact of poverty on children and the need for child care policies that run alongside employment policies. That is what I was getting at earlier. Although there is an element of choice, we have to ensure that youngsters do not remain in poverty. One of the most potent ways of getting them out of poverty is to increase the level of employment in their households. If that is coupled with universal child care, it will go some way towards that aim, although there is a limited pot and the Government has to make choices about how high a priority it places on good and integrated child care services.

I repeat that we are still waiting for the integrated strategy to be produced. It could go some way towards answering some of the questions about relative priorities.

11:45

Dr Cohen: There is an interesting interface between employment rates, particularly of mothers, birth rates, the cost of child care and other factors. I remember a 15-year-old research study that showed a direct correlation between maternal employment rates and the mortgage rate. When the mortgage rate goes up, maternal employment rates go up and vice versa. The

research is mixed, but there is certainly some kind of relationship between those matters.

There is evidence that the policies in Sweden support higher maternal employment rates. Of course, a lot of evidence exists to show that policies in the nordic countries have produced substantially lower levels of child poverty—about a third of the rate here.

A lot of good things have happened in early years education. When I first started going to the Scottish Office, in the days when Lord James Douglas-Hamilton was there, he had about two people whom one could talk to about pre-school services. I am sure that Lord James agrees that the level of discussion about early years services has gone up significantly since then. However, we still have some way to go to realise the potential and to have an effective system of services to contribute to the learning and well-being of children.

I am absolutely delighted that the Education Committee is examining the issue, because a lot has happened—there have been many initiatives and developments with separate funding streams. We need more of a woods approach to make sense of the trees. I encourage the committee to take a woods approach in considering the provision that we should have in Scotland.

Mr Ingram: I am putting it to you that the quality of our present child care services is constrained by the approach that we are taking. For example, I am referring to the fact that we provide tax credits rather than universal provider subsidies. Do you agree?

Dr Cohen: Yes. The training and pay and conditions of staff in many of our services are significant issues. I will ask my colleague, Catriona Thomson to comment, because the issue has a knock-on effect on the experience of parents of children who have additional support needs. In general, we still have a low level of qualification among staff, although a lot is being done to develop qualifications. I support the Scottish Executive's attempts to produce a new profession of working with children, but I want a move towards a situation in which at least half of those who work in pre-school services have a graduate or equivalent qualification. The thrust of EPPE does not necessarily relate to teachers per se, but it suggests the need for a graduate or equivalent qualification. By equivalent, I mean that I would like more experience in the workplace as well as academic learning. A broad-based learning approach would make a considerable difference to the quality of the service.

We should also consider other groups. We mention schools because we think that pre-school services should be considered in relation to schools and school-age child care. Classroom assistants in schools are a rapidly expanding group. They get 12-week training on the job, but they are the people who, in conjunction with special needs support workers, provide support and care in schools for the children who need it the most. Is that training adequate? If we want to create a new profession in the way that is happening in other countries, we must consider how to give those who work alongside teachers in schools much better and more extensive training to enable them to play a more substantial role.

Catriona Thomson: As far as additional support needs are concerned, the opening doors to learning project asks parents and local authority staff for their views on those who work with children. Both sides have highlighted staff training and experience as a major challenge and indeed have expressed concern about additional support workers' level of training. Very often, the type of people who are attracted to additional support needs posts in schools are mothers who want to work in a school and have a job that suits their lifestyle. However, they are also worried about the fact that there is no training. Our research also shows that people are concerned that a lot of nursery and pre-school staff are very young and inexperienced and that they do not have the skills and thought processes to handle complex cases.

Tam Baillie: On tax credits, a fundamental point is that there is a limit to what the Scottish Executive can do. The Executive is able to remove barriers and provide additional support, but as long as we have a system of devolved and reserved matters and as long as employment remains reserved, it has to work within certain parameters. If a more radical overhaul is needed, that raises a bigger political question.

The Convener: I do not think that we want to get into that matter.

Tam Baillie: But it is relevant.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Mr Baillie, which of your recommendations is the most important?

Tam Baillie: I return to the need for an integrated strategy which, as I have explained in my submission, should have four elements. First, we must promote horizontal integration to continue the work initiated in the sure start programme, which links education, social work, health and the voluntary sector. There needs to be a step-change in our approach to that area.

Secondly, we must examine the critical transition period between pre-school and primary education. I realise that witnesses have already highlighted that issue. Our submission sets out some examples of how we might address it. Indeed, as someone pointed out, not only do we need to

prepare youngsters for primary school, primary schools must make preparations for youngsters who come from the pre-school environment. I can think of some good examples in Scotland that could be followed. The five-to-14 curriculum acknowledges the need for continuity; the same approach should be taken with the transition from pre-school to primary education.

Thirdly, we need a parents strategy that cuts across all age groups. However, with the age group in question, we do not have to operate with the deficit model, because we accept that all parents of these youngsters need support. If we set the pattern in early years education, we have a fighting chance of securing additional universal support for parents of primary and secondary school pupils.

Fourthly, and as has already been pointed out, more attention must be paid to youngsters' play facilities. That issue is left to local planning. In our submission we highlight the impact that a lack of play facilities can have on youngsters, particularly those from poor areas, and mention issues such as traffic, back yards and so on. We need to concentrate on all those areas.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: That response was helpful.

How is the expansion of local authority centres affecting private nurseries?

Dr Cohen: As far as we know from the available statistics, private nursery provision is continuing to grow. I have already said that it is difficult to be precise about these matters, but when I looked at the figures for some research that I was carrying out I found that there had been a relatively small net increase in the number of places. There is quite a high turnover rate in voluntary and private services, but that is not always recorded.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: What factors affect whether parents choose independent or local authority pre-school provision?

Dr Cohen: That would, no doubt, be determined partly by what is available, what they know something positive about and their ability to pay for such provision. For example, in the private sector some all-through schools take children from pre-school through to the age of 18. That is a choice that some parents would make.

I could add more about choice, if anybody wanted to hear me. Choice is a relative concept that is determined by what is available, what parents know about and what they can afford to pay. We sometimes need to treat choice quite warily.

Mr McAveety: One of the advantages of driving to get the train at times is that I get to hear the morning radio shows. There are always programmes that are led by calls for additional resources and things. This morning, much of what I heard was about trying to raise the issues that we have heard about today. Have you costed the core recommendations that you make? Your submission talks about parental leave, flexible working, universal provision, parent support services and a graduate-led profession.

Dr Cohen: I have done so in the past, although I have not costed them for more than a decade. I was involved in a cost-benefit exercise that considered a system of universal services and parental leave. It found that the increase in parental employment offset the costs of expanding the services at that time. That was a report that I was involved with for the Institute for Public Policy Research, back in the early 1990s. I would not say that the situation is exactly the same now, as employment rates have gone up.

Nevertheless, it was extremely interesting to do that cost-benefit exercise, as it made me realise the various elements that are involved. For example, a nursery-building programme is economically important to an area and enabling people not only to work but to upgrade their skills through providing simpler access to services has a positive contribution to make to the economy.

People often assume that pre-school services are just a cost—that we just pour money in and nothing comes back—but that is not the case, as we have heard in some of the discussion that we have had this morning. Such services contribute in the here and now by enabling people to work and contribute to the economy, and in the longer term by enabling the work force to be more creative and more skilled. In our written evidence, we draw attention to the extremely interesting research on brain development that shows the significance of space in encouraging creativity. If we are talking about benefits to the future work force, I would argue that investing in early years provision has a place in that.

Mr McAveety: I was not being cheeky, but that was a good, expansive response that put me back in my place.

First, there seems to be a fear of trying to persuade decision makers who have other priorities, especially given the fact that there is lots of pressure on budgets. Over the next two, three or four years, budgets will be very tight because of settlements and so on and there will be a whole range of things that we cannot do. If anybody is doing any research on this—I remember the IPPR stuff—it would be helpful to get a signal of that.

Secondly, of the four or five bullet points that we have outlined, which would you say are the most important and which you could move towards quickly?

Thirdly, people have talked about cocktails of funding. That means that there is money in the system. It is finding the process, as much as getting the money, that is difficult. It is almost a lethal dose of absinthe that people get, rather than a cocktail, given the treatment that they get when trying to go through the system. If we can get that sorted, and if we can get greater clarity around the issue of the cost benefit, we might be able to shift some of the decision makers here and beyond towards saying, "This is going to be worth doing in the long run" and make them see that it is not the ridiculous demand that it could easily be caricatured as.

Do you have any comments on that wide survey?

Dr Cohen: Where do I start? I would like us to establish the relationship between schools, pre-school services and school-age child care. I appreciate the developments that are taking place in Glasgow and some of the neighbouring authorities, for example, in relation to the establishment of learning communities that make the links between secondary, primary and pre-school education. If you consider what is happening elsewhere in the world, you can see that that is just the beginning of what can be done in that regard. There is room for national encouragement of the work that is being done. More can be done with it if it is encouraged.

12:00

I would like us to get schools right and for us to ensure that, as the OECD said should be the case, school provision and pre-school provision have equal status. In that regard, I note that the OECD saw the issue of full-time access to pre-school services as a weakness in the UK and talked about the implications of that for particular groups.

I take the point that you are making: that it is easy to encourage lots of things but that funding has to be found for that work. I agree that a simpler, more coherent, system would create savings. However, given the number of agendas that the issues that we are talking about can contribute to—poverty, workforce skills and so on—I do not know why we are not putting more money into early years education. Perhaps I am missing something.

Tam Baillie: A lot can be done within existing resources. In that regard, I repeat my call for an integrated services strategy.

This policy should not be seen in isolation from other policy initiatives. We have already heard mention of additional support for learning, which is a significant piece of legislation that will affect this age group. If it is implemented properly, it will have a significant impact on the way in which schools support youngsters' learning.

A consultation about integrated assessment frameworks is under way. Those frameworks will impact on some of the better co-ordinated working in early years policies and policy areas relating to children and young people. Early years policies should not be viewed in isolation from related policy areas, which will contribute to the issues that we have discussed today.

Catriona Thomson: On implementation, it is important to ensure that local authorities and the structures at a local level support implementation of the legislation and the code of practice and that sufficient resources and trained staff are in place to ensure that that opportunity is not missed in the early years.

The Convener: How could the transition from early years provision to the more formal primary structure be improved?

Tam Baillie: I think that I have already commented on that issue. Continuing support for youngsters is one of the fundamental issues that must be tackled. The crossover into primary schools is crucial. The issue has implications for nursery provision and, particularly, for primary provision. We have already heard evidence this morning about the ways in which primaries could develop the curriculum that they have in place for that transition period.

Dr Cohen: Maybe we should be conceptualising community schools as children and young people centres. That would signal some changes that need to be made in schools in relation to a whole-day, whole-child approach. The idea of conceptualising schools in that way was slightly tongue in cheek, but it was meant to get people thinking about what schools are. Schools have moved away from seeing children as passive pupils and now view them as partners in learning and as children who have rights. That has been one of the big achievements over the past decade, but we need to move further in that direction.

Perhaps we should be thinking about the way in which we conceptualise schools, to enable us to help some of the transition issues. Pre-school services have a lot to teach schools.

Catriona Thomson: Parents I have spoken to have raised two points about transition. First, transition into pre-school services can be stressful for children and parents, especially if the children have additional support needs. Secondly, planning for transition has to start early. For children with very complex needs, the services, equipment and any necessary alterations have to be considered as early as possible.

The Convener: That concludes our questions and I thank the witnesses for their helpful

contributions. You have raised a number of issues—especially in relation to funding streams and the integration of services at pre-school level—that we will address as we continue our inquiry.

Pupil Motivation Inquiry

12:06

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is on the report on our inquiry into pupil motivation. Following our previous meeting, the clerks circulated a revised draft report for comment. None has been received, but we put the revised draft on the agenda so that we could consider it. I will go through it quickly, page by page, and people should shout out if they wish to comment. Page 1? Page 2? Page 3? Page 4? And page 5? Ken?

Mr Macintosh: You thought you had got away with it. Correct me if I am wrong, but I had thought that we were going to take the conclusions from the longer paper and print them, either as a separate document or as part of this report. Was I totally wrong in thinking that?

The Convener: In essence, we took the questions that arose from the longer report, because we wanted to use them as the basis for discussion.

Mr Macintosh: Are we including none of the recommendations?

The Convener: The problem is that there were no—

Mr Macintosh: There were a few.

The Convener: But the recommendations were not specific enough.

Mr Macintosh: Well, some of them were a bit vague.

The Convener: I think that the recommendations are included in the draft report, although perhaps not as such.

Mr Macintosh: The draft is not what I was expecting and I am a bit worried that the report ends a little lamely in paragraphs 16 and 17. If that is all that we are going to have, why have conclusions at all? This is a paper designed to get the contributors to participate, is it not?

The Convener: Yes.

Mr Macintosh: I am therefore slightly concerned. If we are going to include conclusions, we should include all the conclusions. I thought that we were going to include conclusions even if they were open-ended. If we do not do that, that is fine, but I am concerned that we should not throw things away at the end by saying that we hope that the report “will stimulate further debate”. There is nothing wrong with that, but I wonder whether we need a conclusion like that at this stage.

The Convener: You always need something to end a report.

Mr Macintosh: But is the point of this not to get people in the workshop to come up with a range of suggestions for us to consider?

The Convener: That is the intention, yes.

Mr Macintosh: So should we not say that? Should that not be how we end the report? We have given a brief summary of issues that we have identified, and we should tap into the workshop resource that we will then make available. We want a range of suggestions that we can either consider further, or forward in their entirety to the Executive.

The Convener: Are there any other comments?

Dr Murray: My understanding of what we were doing might be slightly different from Ken's. I was not surprised to see questions because I had thought that our purpose at the moment was to present evidence and encourage discussion. However, I agree that the conclusions seem a bit out of place. They are not firm conclusions and, if we want to discuss things further, we should not be forming conclusions at this point. All we are trying to do is encourage people to come forward with their comments on the evidence that we have received and the questions that arise from it. I would rewrite the final bit.

Mr McAveety: The conclusion should be about further exploring the issues and opportunities. We should take out the phrase "magic bullet" because it is useless.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: If I understand Frank correctly, "conclusions" should come out and "further examination" go in.

The Convener: Or "next steps".

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes.

The Convener: If members are content, I suggest that you allow me and the clerks to finalise the wording. I make it clear that this is not a full stop in the process; it is a comma, or rather a semi-colon, to be grammatically correct. It is part of the on-going discussion that we hope to take further in the participation event, which we will come to next.

Are members content with that approach?

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Convener: We will circulate the revised version of the report. Do members agree to the publication of the report at a date to be agreed between me, the clerks and the relevant parliamentary authorities, to ensure that the date is appropriate? It is probably due towards the end of next week.

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Convener: Now we come to a paper from the clerks on the proposed stakeholder event on pupil motivation. Our original date of the end of October is optimistic, if we are to get organised and circulate information to people. It is suggested that a date in January would be more appropriate. Do members agree?

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Convener: We will delegate authority to the clerks to identify suitable venues that will meet the needs of the committee and the event.

Are members content with the proposed format, which is contained in the annex?

Mr Macintosh: I have two questions. You propose 50 or 60 attendees, but the list of invitees looks like it has double that. It includes committee members, witnesses, teachers and pupils from the schools that were visited, journalists, and two pupils whom we are each to invite. We will end up with 100 people.

The Convener: I would be delighted if we did, but we have to be cautious with these things. You invite people, but you do not expect everyone to turn up. If they all turn up, though, that is fine.

Mr Macintosh: If you are confident about the numbers, that is fine. I like the idea of inviting pupils from our constituencies.

I am not sure, however, about having a different venue. The attraction for people coming to the committee is that they are in the Parliament. We should not underestimate the impact and importance of that. The big committee rooms can hold 70 or 80 people.

The Convener: Our problem is that it would be impossible to do everything that we want to do on an ordinary sitting day. The aim is to hold the event as one of our ordinary Wednesday slots. We would probably have to hold it on a Monday or Friday if we did it in the Parliament, because the required number of rooms would not be available.

Mr Macintosh: Is there no break-out room upstairs?

The Convener: There are not enough. It would be difficult to organise eight break-out rooms within the Parliament on an ordinary committee day when all the committee rooms are in use, even if we allow for the fact that one room would be available to us. That is the problem. The clerks will continue to investigate whether it is feasible to hold the event in the Parliament. If it is, that will happen, but I suspect that it will not be feasible to hold the event during a Wednesday morning slot because of the pressure on accommodation.

Dr Murray: We have to decide whether to do it on a Monday in the Parliament.

The Convener: That would take additional time out of members' diaries. I am reluctant to commit members to a Monday at this stage, unless it becomes essential. It is about getting the balance right. I accept Ken Macintosh's point, but it may not be practical.

Are members content with the proposals?

Members *indicated agreement*.

Budget Process 2006-07

12:14

The Convener: Item 4 is the Scottish Executive's budget. We have a paper from the clerk and an annex from the budget adviser to the Finance Committee listing the issues that the Finance Committee wishes to address in this year's stage 2 process. Do members agree to the clerk's suggestion on how we approach the matter, which is to take a relatively limited approach this year? We can, however, note the useful paper on local authority inputs that we received from the Education Committee's adviser, which we can take into account at a later stage when a bigger review of the budget takes place.

Are members content with that approach?

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Convener: That concludes the business of this meeting. At our next meeting we will take further evidence on the early years inquiry from Unison and four local authorities.

Meeting closed at 12:15.

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