

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday 18 January 2006

Session 2

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EDUCATION COMMITTEE

2nd Meeting 2006, 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

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP)

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Eileen Carmichael (Learning and Teaching Scotland)

Kate Cherry (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education)

Margaret Clarke (Learning and Teaching Scotland)

Kenneth Muir (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education)

Sheena Wardhaugh (Educational Institute of Scotland)

Norma Watson (Educational Institute of Scotland)

Carole Wilkinson (Scottish Social Services Council)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Eugene Windsor

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Mark Roberts

ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

LOCATION

Committee Room 5

Scottish Parliament

Education Committee

Wednesday 18 January 2006

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:32*]

Early Years Inquiry

The Convener (Iain Smith): Good morning, colleagues, and welcome to the second meeting in 2006 of the Education Committee. Today, we will proceed with our early years inquiry. I remind those of you with short memories that we are resuming this inquiry after our break to deal with the Joint Inspection of Children's Services and Inspection of Social Work Services (Scotland) Bill. There will be three further weeks of oral evidence taking, which will culminate in the meeting with the minister on 1 February.

The first panel of witnesses consists of Eileen Carmichael, who is an early years development officer at Learning and Teaching Scotland; Margaret Clarke, who is director of information and communications technology and learning for Learning and Teaching Scotland; Kenneth Muir, who is chief inspector at Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education; and Kate Cherry, who is an assistant chief inspector with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education. I welcome you all. A representative of each organisation might want to make brief introductory remarks. Members may then ask questions.

Kenneth Muir (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education): Members will be aware that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education inspects the quality of educational provision in pre-school establishments in Scotland. In the past three years, we have, in conjunction with the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care, undertaken approximately 2,000 inspections of such institutions throughout Scotland. We are nearing completion of the cycle of inspections of a variety of settings, including independent school nurseries, nursery classes in primary schools, voluntary sector centres and so on. We are now considering ways forward for looking further at the quality of educational provision in those pre-school centres.

Margaret Clarke (Learning and Teaching Scotland): Learning and Teaching Scotland is committed to supporting early years education and therefore welcomes the opportunity to be represented at this meeting.

I draw members' attention to our submission, including our revised remit, which the minister

approved in November 2005. Our role in supporting early years education is consistent with what we want to do to fulfil our remit.

In my current role as acting director of ICT and learning, early years education is part of my overall management responsibilities. My colleague Eileen Carmichael has lead responsibility for early years education and will be our main respondent during the meeting.

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): A difference between here and south of the border has emerged out of previous evidence sessions. That is that in Scotland there is more emphasis on child-centred or child-directed learning, as opposed to adult-directed learning. HMIE's written submission states:

"The pre-school sector in Scotland reflects a consistent approach"

in which

"Learning is firmly placed in the context of play".

Do you have any comments on the practice of the child learning through its own experience and through experiment rather than being directed by adults? Does that cause a problem during the transition to primary school if, when the children get to primary school, they have to adapt to a more adult-directed and traditional method of learning?

Kate Cherry (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education): I will answer that question first, as it comes from the paper that we submitted. Scotland has been especially known and well respected for its approaches to early years education. In fact, the three-to-five curriculum document that supports early years education is well used, and other countries have based what they do on that document.

It is a false argument to say that the approach is either child centred or adult directed; there is a positive mix of what children are engaged in in their early years. It is significant that, in our early years sector, children have the opportunity to learn through their own experiences of investigating and solving problems. They learn to be independent learners and to love learning—they have fun when they are learning. What we are looking for when adult intervention takes place is for it not to be adult directed from the top down to the child, but for it to engage with the children to develop them in a way that meets their needs at that particular time.

The methodology of learning in the early years will achieve very clearly the four capacities that are expected by the three-to-18 curriculum, "a curriculum for excellence". Where a difficulty might arise is in the transition to the methodologies that are used in some primary classes, when the

children move from making choices and being independent and involved in their own learning, to a situation in which they are not allowed to move around and in which their learning is much more contrived. That is one of the difficulties that we have to overcome to enable a smoother transition. It is about the methodologies rather than the content of the learning.

Dr Murray: Do we need a change in the methodology in the early years of primary education, rather than in pre-school education, so that pre-school methods of learning are carried on into primary schools?

Kate Cherry: Yes. I am not saying for one moment that what is happening in primary schools is at all incorrect, but we must ask what the learning is like from the children's point of view. Aged four, they are the owners of their learning in the early years sector and are able to make choices about it. They do that in a very good environment that has to be of the best quality. Adults intervene in the early years through what they provide to enable the learning experience—the environment is not the choice of the children, it is there. Primary schools could better support the children in a smoother transition by adopting the best of the methodologies that are used in early years education and by continuing to offer choice and independence. Obviously, however, there are differences in the skills structure and the learning that go with the early development of literacy, numeracy, science skills and so on.

Eileen Carmichael (Learning and Teaching Scotland): Learning and Teaching Scotland has a role in that it provides support materials for staff and information about play with a purpose. Children are not just set loose in a room with a variety of materials; the resources that are made available to the children are chosen carefully. Ideally, there should be learning points behind the choice of resources. The skill of the adult is in being able to pick up, for example, opportunities for learning maths in the house corner, in the construction area and in other areas. The adult must be aware of such opportunities and be able to pick up the learning. It is play, but it is play with a purpose.

Dr Murray: What does that tell us about staff training and qualifications? Evidence from south of the border seems to show that the intervention of teachers in nursery education is particularly important and effective, yet others have said to us that the important point is for staff to have an educational qualification of some sort, not necessarily a teaching qualification. It would not necessarily need to be part of the teaching structure—we could have a child educator qualification. There is a debate about how child care workers should be trained. What issues

should we examine in relation to the training of people who work with young children?

Eileen Carmichael: Early education is complex. What matters is that the educator understands how learning takes place and can break it into steps. A difference arises on that in the training of people who work with young children. The educator needs to know what they want the children to learn and how they want them to learn it. Learning for young children is often described as messy—it is not a linear approach to learning. I gave the example of how maths can be taught in a variety of situations. The educator must know how to introduce maths. They may think that they are going to do one thing, but the child's interest may be in a completely different area, so they have to be able to follow that interest. However, they must also provide a balanced curriculum for the children over the term that includes all the required key aspects. The educator must also know what came before the child entered nursery school or pre-school provision and what will come after, so that they create a smooth path with, as Kate Cherry mentioned, smooth transitions.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): What should be the connection between the pre-school learning environment and experience and the starting point for children in primary?

Eileen Carmichael: There should be a smooth flow. The pre-school curriculum framework can be used within primary school. At the launch of the framework, it was clear that, for some children, that approach to learning should be carried on into primary. That happens in some places, but many primary schools feel under pressure to move straight to more formal learning, with the five-to-14 guidelines and targets. The exciting thing about the curriculum for excellence programme is that it is recommending that pre-school approaches be moved into the early years of primary.

Mr McAveety: We have been referred to a research paper by Peter Tymms of Durham University, the key claim of which is that there is little connection between children's pre-school experience and their starting point at school. We are getting into a major philosophical debate about the value of pre-school education to what happens in schools. Do schools need to shift dramatically? I know the tensions that must exist. Do you have any comments on how we might address them? A fair amount of time is spent on pre-schooling, but it may not have any real benefits.

Kenneth Muir: Other evidence, for example from the European longitudinal study, which is known as the effective provision of pre-school education—or EPPE—study, suggests that pre-school has a significant impact on children's attainment when they enter the early years of

primary. There is a particular impact on young children's social development. The study shows that the pre-school experience prepares children to be more able learners in the primary context. Therefore, the available research gives varying views on the usefulness or otherwise of a pre-school experience.

Kate Cherry: In England, there is much more emphasis on formal literacy and numeracy targets for children—they must be able to recognise several letters. In Scotland, the approach to literacy is based more on whether the child is beginning to show an interest in letters. If children are not making the connection between printed letters and sounds, they are not ready to do that work. There are concerns south of the border that some children are being pushed into formal education too soon, which will lead to difficulties later on.

In Scotland, we have a much more gradualist approach. People have said that the English curriculum is full of nouns such as “goals” and words that describe things that must be achieved, whereas the Scottish curriculum is full of verbs—it talks about “working towards” various achievements. We are not saying that children must know certain words before they leave nursery. Rather than teach in such a specific way, we want to develop an interest in literacy and an understanding of the point of learning to read.

10:45

Kate Cherry: It is also true to say that, in England, there is the added difference of the reception class, which is made up of four-year-olds. There has been a drift to providing more formal education for those four-year-olds. The foundation stage was developed to address the difficulty that was experienced with that. We do not have the same problem in Scotland.

It would be simplistic to say that there is no continuity between pre-school and primary education in Scotland because the evidence that we have gathered from talking to teachers is that they appreciate that children are much more developed in a number of ways when they enter the early infant classes. There are many benefits to what has already happened. We need to stop, take stock of the best work that has been done and build on that so that, in three to six years, children do not face a discontinuity.

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP): Are we starting our children in primary school too early? Committee members have visited Scandinavia over the past two or three months and the experience there seems to be that the transition between pre-school and primary school is dealt with by a pre-school year, which tends to

be taken by children when they are six years old or older. The holistic approach that you say is a feature of the Scottish system seems to be akin to the approach that is taken in Scandinavia. Are we pushing our children into formal education too early?

I would also be interested to hear your views about the problems that we seem to be having with the social, emotional and behavioural difficulties of some children. Many teachers tell me that a significant number of those difficulties can be identified at the pre-school stage. Are we trying to smooth the transition between pre-school and primary school in an effort to address the difficulties that those children have? Has any development work been done on that?

Kate Cherry: I have visited Sweden and I know it well. It has been interesting to watch developments there. It used to be the case that children officially started their formal learning at the age of seven. The reasoning behind taking the pre-school year into primary schools was that there was a desire to bring into primary schools the influence of the excellent early years education that Sweden offers children between the ages of nought and six. That was an interesting phenomenon. In some cases it worked, but in others it did not. In Sweden, the workforce for early years education is almost entirely teacher led. What happened was that when those teachers went into primary schools, they were influenced by the teachers in the schools and thought that that would be a better way of doing things, which meant that, initially, a bit of reorganisation and rethinking had to be done. One could call the year in question a transition stage. The methodologies that one would use in an early years setting are still used, although the way is smoothed into subsequent teaching stages.

I sometimes think that it is setting hares running to ask whether we start our children in formal education too early. Different countries have different ages at which children start school. Rather than the children's age, what is important is what they do when they start school. When I have gone round other countries, I have not noticed the experiences that their children get at the age of five being significantly different to those that might be provided in our primary 1 and primary 2 classes, even though the children in those countries do not get a formal education. There are lessons to be learned on how we approach what we do with children of that tender age in primary school. We must ensure that what we offer meets their needs.

To turn to your second question, we did the pilot stage of the expansion of pre-school education in 1996, so it is nearly 10 years since we began to develop the universal provision of early years

education in Scotland. Huge strides have been made in developing expertise since then. When we started looking at it, there was little support for children with particular social, emotional or behavioural needs. That has improved; the early years sector is more aware of and can identify quickly children who experience difficulties. The problem arises if particular staff do not understand what they have to do once the problem has been identified or do not have the expertise to know how to intervene properly. They may even not know who the right person is to help with that intervention. We still have some work to do on that.

However, identification is generally not the problem, although it needs extra funding. For example, some motor-control difficulties are good indicators of a child—once termed the clumsy child—who needs specific input at an early stage. The earlier that input, the better it is for that child's confidence. That early input helps with the more formal forms of education, such as writing. Intervention has a huge impact on children who have had difficulties with motor control. Those are the children who will have difficulty sitting down to write and read for a time in a class at age five, when they are not ready. Their teacher may wonder why they are not concentrating. That child needs a different kind of support. That is where we need to be cleverer at meeting individual needs and recognising and identifying where we need to give support.

Eileen Carmichael: I agree with what Kate Cherry said. There is a lot of talk about a developmentally appropriate curriculum and whether an activity is appropriate for the needs of the child. Are we aware of the child's stage of development? The clumsier child might not be ready to sit for long periods. Are we forcing that child to sit and do things that they are not physically able to? One needs well-developed finger muscles to control a writing implement. Are we perhaps encouraging that child to take part in the activities that help them to develop their finger muscles before they are asked to write their name? It is about knowing what is required for that child.

Kenneth Muir: Dr Murray mentioned the training and expertise of those who deal with children of pre-school age. From our inspection evidence, we have repeatedly highlighted the need for staff to be sufficiently trained to deal with those young children who exhibit social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. There are training and skills issues for people who deal with those youngsters.

Mr Ingram: If I could just pick up that point. We saw a different mix of staff in Sweden and Finland. As in this country, there were highly qualified

teachers, but ancillary staff were given more training and could develop more qualifications, particularly the pedagogue-type—the upbringing—staff. There is currently a review of workforce issues in early years staff. Is increasing expertise a way to develop not only the specialist skills of staff but also their more pedagogic training? Is that how we ought to proceed?

Kate Cherry: There is a lot to be said for having staff that have been educated to a particular level. That level of staffing should be in all centres. In Sweden, pedagogues and teachers work beside each other. They have both been educated to degree level, but their emphasis is different. Pedagogues will have branched out at a different stage in their career to learn about their field. That has worked well over the years. Again, work on looking at a joint degree and at the courses that are common to social work staff, teachers and others who work in that area is being pioneered in Sweden. There is certainly something to be said for common understanding, even at a modular level, for professionals who are going to work with children at all stages. We should not single out early education, because we need to be cleverer about joint training in other areas.

We cannot walk away from the fact that, in Scotland, our early years staff are mostly female; only 2 per cent of staff in the early years sector are male. The sector is also very young—it is mostly young women—and most of the staff do not have qualifications at a high level. We have to move from that situation to where we want to be and a step along that line would be to consider what kind of qualification would give those staff a pathway to a higher level of achievement in their own education so that we can equip them to be better aware of the development that children need at different stages.

At the moment, we have a workforce that works only in the early years sector, mostly on the nurturing side, and then teachers who come in with the educational and other aspects. The one benefit that teachers have is their linear understanding of what will happen to the child beyond ages four and five. If we are considering a three-to-18 curriculum, we need to put down a marker and consider how those who work in the early years sector will know what must happen beyond the early years, up to the age of 18, if we want children and young adults to be confident, independent and resourceful in their learning. We must think about who the experts will be who will foster children's development at those early stages and what will happen after that.

Training is a big task, and we are examining it at a good time.

Eileen Carmichael: Learning and Teaching Scotland's role is to support all staff who work with

young children. In our written submission to the committee, we said that the composition of the workforce since the publication of "A Curriculum Framework for Children 3 to 5" has changed, and we find that we need to broaden some of the support materials that we provide.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Is it definitely relatively clear—despite the research by Peter Tymms—that pre-school provision is of visible and measurable benefit to children as they progress through their school life? If it is, are there educational benefits? We are considering how we approach other areas of child care, particularly for nought to three-year-olds. At the moment, the motivation is purely to help parents, for whom the key issues are trust and security. Are there educational benefits to provision for nought to three-year-olds that would help to guide us in our decisions about the public support that we should put in place for child care, much as educational benefit has influenced the provision of free nursery places for three and four-year-olds?

Kenneth Muir: As you are aware, we have the five-to-14 levels in Scotland. Those are measured in a primary context, not a pre-school context. During recent years, we have recorded improvement in that children have achieved level A much earlier than P3, which was the traditional point at which it was expected that they would achieve level A in reading, writing and mathematics in particular. Although it has levelled off slightly and there has been a bit of a plateau, there has been a period of improvement. Our inspections show that youngsters are sitting those tests earlier and that approximately half achieve level A in reading and slightly less than half achieve it in writing by the end of P2.

That is a discernable measure of improvement. It cannot be attributed directly to pre-school education, because a range of factors impacts on that achievement, but it is the closest measure that we have.

In our inspections, we see the social behavioural development of youngsters progressing, which better prepares them for making the transition. As you will be well aware, any transitional point is a challenge to youngsters. It should be about better preparing them to make the transition into early years education and primary school.

11:00

Kate Cherry: Our inspection process takes into account the progress of children when they are in the centre. We find that, in most settings, children make good progress. They do not make good progress, however, when the levels of expertise and leadership do not support their development.

To return to the discussion about the nought-to-three age group, we do not want to have another transition point between nought-to-three and three-to-six or whatever age it is. That would be invidious. The benefit of many of the centres for children is the existence of nought-to-five support. Learning and Teaching Scotland has a nought-to-three advice document for staff. It is not like the English one, and it benefits from that. In England, there is a "nought to three matters" box kit. It is very much about asking, "What will I do with my one-year-old today?" taking a card out of the box and then doing that activity. In Scotland, we have tried hard to steer away from that.

This should be about an understanding of where the child is and of their relationships. Research clearly shows the close relationships between children and the trusted adult at an early stage, and the parent has to give their trust if they are having their children cared for at that early stage. I wonder whether there is some kind of support for parents that advises them on what is a good experience for their children. Sadly, we still go into centres where the children are not well cared for at that early stage. They are in that setting for many hours of the day, probably for more waking hours than they spend with their parents.

We must grasp the nettle. We want to have an economically viable Scotland, and we want to have an inclusion agenda according to which parents are allowed to be brought into the workforce while benefiting from good child care, which allows them to be comfortable that their children are being cared for while they are economically active. That helps move Scotland forward. It takes young people, who might have had children at an early stage, out of the system of deprivation, and that will, we hope, help in the long run.

The tangible benefits and gains are sometimes more difficult to measure. The age groups of nought to three and three to five need to be examined carefully and treated as a cohesive nought-to-six group. In Sweden and, I think, in Norway, a nought-to-18 framework is used. There is not one that starts at three. When do education and learning start?

Mr Macintosh: One of the difficulties is that it is relatively easy to allow policy to be driven by the needs of parents. It is a matter of how we shape it, so that it gives benefits to the children at the front of the system, as it were. There will always be benefits to parents, which we can fit round the system, but we should make sure that we are quite clear about what those benefits are. The benefits of provision for three and four-year-olds are clear now. It is just a matter of working out the right criteria and establishing whether those

criteria can be applied across a wider age range. Perhaps LTS has something to add on the matter.

Eileen Carmichael: There can be a conflict between the needs of parents and the needs of children, and that is very difficult.

There is another area concerning support for parents that I would like to touch on. Effective centre staff and parents work closely together. The parent is the prime educator of the child, and they can be given support in understanding how young children learn and how important it is to talk to them, listen to them and so on. Parents do a very good job, but there are some parents who have less knowledge about how young children learn. The staff in the centres and other establishments give terrific support in helping parents see how their children are learning.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I want to expand on the theme of parental involvement, which is a key issue for later schooling. We cannot suddenly create parental support and make someone an educator when their children reach the age of five, go to school and meet their teachers. The key point about intervention—not necessarily for children, but for parents—comes at an earlier stage. Do the witnesses see the linkages in the policy framework between the parental involvement agenda for later schooling and what is happening, or what should be happening, from age zero to three or zero to six? On the curriculum, is there a danger that, although it is great to have a three-to-18 perspective, we could be missing a trick if we all sign up to that and lose the zero-to-three perspective, making parental involvement the key thing later on but ignoring the early years?

Kate Cherry: We have to work an awful lot harder at parental involvement the older a child gets. It is natural for children to have their parents involved in learning at the earlier stages. Parents naturally come into the centre; they do not stand at the gates and hand over their child or baby, so they are automatically involved. Parents are involved at different levels, because if they are out working they cannot be in helping. Ten years ago, when we started the expansion in early years education, a lot more parents would work alongside the nursery staff with their children. Now, because more parents are at work, of necessity the child is there and the parent is not, so people have to help and be supported in other ways.

Nevertheless, the informal dialogue that takes place on a day-to-day basis between the parent and the early years sector is far greater than the dialogue that takes place in primary schools, where it is not so simple to achieve as it is at the early years stages. People might have to work harder in primary and secondary schools to

facilitate meaningful engagement for parents. I say “meaningful”, because it must be about more than saying, “Well, you can help by reading their homework.” It is a question of involving the parent in how the child is learning, and it might be the case that the converse of what Fiona Hyslop said is true when it comes to early years involvement.

Fiona Hyslop: What I am saying is that, if we capture the parents when the child is extremely young and keep them involved in the child’s learning, that can encourage better parental involvement. We are debating the transitions for children, but there is also an issue about transitions for parents. Perhaps that is where curriculum development has a role to play, if it is about understanding learning.

I was on the visit to Finland, and I was struck by the fact that the focus there is not on what the child does or what the child learns, but on the critical inputs to the child’s success. Finland has achieved great success in education, and that comes back to the skills and training of those involved. That also means that parents have to understand learning, and I am not convinced that the first formal contact on the education development side is being made properly. Parents are involved in nursery for care but not for development. Is there an opportunity to intervene when children are at that very young age?

Eileen Carmichael: I think that it does happen. I was a nursery school head teacher for well over 20 years, and I regarded my role as being as much about working with the parents as it was about working with the children. I aimed to support parents and to talk about what we were doing and why we were doing certain things, such as why we had certain play materials out for the children and how that could be developed at home. We also did a lot of activities with parents in the classroom taking part in what was happening. We had parents rooms, adult classes and a whole range of different services bolted on.

We also talked to parents about their children going into primary school and learning to read, emphasising the importance of all the pre-reading activities so that they understood what was coming before the children began formally learning to read the words. It was easy for us to meet parents, because they were coming in every day.

Fiona Hyslop: You are probably in the position that you are in because you knew about and demonstrated best practice. Is that experience reflected across all of Scotland, or is engagement with parents in the early years somewhat patchy?

Kate Cherry: The quality of engagement is patchy. All early years education providers engage with parents on the care aspect of their provision, and they talk to parents when they come in.

However, there is a variety in quality when it comes to staff explaining what they are doing with the children. For best practice, we are looking for exemplification of the curriculum—everyone agrees that “curriculum” is an odd term, but we have to have a handle on the matter and a way of organising what we are doing—and photographs or information sheets can be used to show what will happen on an outing and how parents can help. That is quite prevalent in the early years sector, but explaining why certain activities are chosen can be more difficult for some staff.

Parents can get quite anxious. Sometimes, they will say, “But we love this centre. It’s doing really well,” and we have to say, “I’m sorry, but it’s not meeting the needs of the child.” What the parents have seen is the quite formal work that goes on in the early years—they see children sitting with a book and doing little activities, which we see as school activity. There is a wash down of the expectation of what children should be doing. That might be an anxiety of parents or because a lot of parents did not have a pre-school experience and only had school experience—early years provision expanded more recently—and they remember what they did when they were very young.

There is also a parental anxiety when children go into primary 1. If the children do not have their reading book for the third week in, we can see neurosis setting in, and if they have not learned to read by Christmas, they think that something must be going wrong.

If we are really and truly concerned about engaging children and having experiential learning where the depth of engagement and learning is important, we have a wee task to do to help parents understand that there are other ways to learn to read than having a tin of words home and that all the other activities are helping the child to do so.

Fiona Hyslop: Does that help to explain the Tymms report, which is more about the specifics of learning? Kenneth Muir reflected that the EPPE project is more about the readiness to learn. If the approach in Scotland is more about the readiness to learn, that is what people have to sign up to.

If 20 per cent of our children have real problems later in life in education, employment or whatever—I am thinking about what we learned from our pupil motivation inquiry about the problem of the clumsy child whose motor skills have not developed—a huge cohort of people are having difficulties. Is that not a strong case for early identification and intervention to help with transition to the later stages, as well as for the need to support and nurture children who have such difficulties? That emphasis should be added to early years education. From the HMIE point of view, is that happening adequately? I recognise

that big strides have been made, but how far must we go to start to make a difference for that 20 per cent of pupils who have later difficulties in learning?

Kate Cherry: Yes, we have to do something about that. We have to put the questions: why are children having fun in early years; why do we not identify children with huge behavioural difficulties in early years settings; why is there more inclusion in early years settings; what happens to the child as they go through formal education so that they stop having fun and enjoying their learning?

I know that learning cannot always be fun all the time, but something happens to the child as they go through the education system that disaffects them. We need to look more closely at children’s needs that are not being met.

If children get the wrong kind of learning at too early a stage, they start to fail. Children between three and five do not see themselves as failing; they make their own choices and they enjoy and engage in what they are doing. We need to support better the transition from that stage to the next, so that children’s behaviour is caught early and the right measures are put in at a very early stage, rather than identifying problem children later and saying, “What do we do with them now?”

By the time children have reached age 10, their behavioural pattern is set. The earlier we make a start on early education, the better. We can see even in three-year-olds the development of difficulties, for whatever reason, in their background and they need to be better supported.

Eileen Carmichael: We are dealing with motivation and self-confidence. I have worked with three-year-old and four-year-old children who have said, “I can’t do it,” because they were scared to attempt something and the motivation was not there. We need to try to catch the child’s interest—what are they really interested in—and use that to help them move out into lots of other areas of learning.

That takes us back to the question of the developmentally appropriate curriculum. I sat in a primary 1 classroom yesterday and watched children sending e-mails to each other. They were having difficulty with their keyboard skills, but every one of them was involved in trying to do it and they were getting there with help. There needs to be sustained shared thinking between the adult and the child. We talk about a co-construction of meaning, which means that the child and the adult work together and the adult helps the child over the little difficult bits. Every one of those children yesterday was totally involved and focused on what they were doing. It was the computer and the e-mail that caught and held their interest.

I have seen children in other circumstances sitting on the floor, being told a story or something else. It was not appropriate for them because the children were losing interest, looking around and moving about. We need to catch their interest to keep them focused. Young children are like little sponges and soak up learning, but they are also vulnerable. There are young children who are already saying no.

Fiona Hyslop: My final question is on nurseries that are attached to primaries and the availability of nurseries with teachers. Do you have a view on the preferred model for that? EPPE points to certain combinations. Is there a Scottish perspective on what is most appropriate in Scotland?

11:15

Kate Cherry: It is good to have a mix of staff working with children, particularly in the early years sector. That was the basis of the repeal of the school code. There is a recognition that in the early years sector in particular a range of staff are involved, rather than just the teaching member of staff.

The training and experience of nursery nurses, to use the old-fashioned term—there are now any number of terms for the equivalents—was complementary in helping move children forward with the teacher present. Unfortunately, there are a range of qualifications throughout Scotland, which I know that we are considering. Qualifications for early years education, particularly in the private and voluntary sectors, have not been particularly good. Historically in the education authority sector, a teacher and nursery nurse would be in every class of 20 children, whereas in the private and voluntary sectors there were very few teachers; there were some nursery nurses, some staff would be trained to Scottish vocational qualification level and some would have no training at all.

About 60 per cent of staff in the early years sector have qualifications, as a result of a big push to provide more support. Something like 23 per cent of the people working with our young children have no qualifications at all. We have to consider what the best qualification is for those people. There are pluses and minuses. Where SVQ is done well, it is as good as any other early years training, as long as there is a mix of skills, with the involvement of the degree-level professional. I have experience of going into centres where the staff with SVQs are supported by management who have no qualifications whatever in early education, so there is nobody to lead them in their development. Their qualifications are only as good as the people who are minding and supporting them. All that has to be a little better organised. A

more coherent pathway for qualifications is needed.

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): How can we ensure the quality of the service provided to young children and their parents if some settings have less qualified people than others and if in some settings there is no teacher or professionally trained person to set the scene? Do we need to legislate for that? I am keen that nursery nurses—to use the old term—have their professional qualifications increased and that we recognise the value of the work that they do. I am also concerned at moves to remove teachers from early years settings, given the disadvantage that that could create in relation to the understanding of child development and how to plan, monitor and evaluate what the young people are doing at the time and in relation to transitions.

When you are inspecting, what focus do you have on children with additional support needs and the transition from nursery to school? Is it favourable to have such transitions when the children are already in the school setting in their nursery class, rather than outside that setting? We know that often the nursery copes well with the inclusion of those young people, but when they go into their primary 1 class, disaster strikes quickly. I know of children who have had part-time education for a whole year at primary 1 simply because people were not prepared and ready for them. That is a disastrous start to a child's school education, but it happens fairly frequently.

That brings me to my final point. In some cases, there is a dramatic difference between pre-school classes and primary 1 classes in terms of their size and their ratio of adults to children. We want to promote active learning and to take account of children's different learning styles, but at primary 1 we often have a one-size-fits-all approach. The teaching has to fit all the children and their individual needs are slightly lost. There is something to be learned from discussing that and I would like to hear your views.

Kate Cherry: I will try to remember your three points. The first was about how we ensure that provision is of good quality. HMIE carries out inspections in partnership with the care commission, which regulates provision for the nought to fives in all settings. We inspect the educational element, which is funded.

By dint of our going in and inspecting pre-school education provision, we are considering the equality of provision. We have identified that provision is not equal and that, in some settings, the service that is provided for children is not as good as it could be. The good news is that there are not many of those settings. Now that we have done a sweep in the first round of integrated

inspections, we want to go back, to look more closely at the ones that do not perform as well and to consider how they can be supported. We cannot tell them how they can improve their qualifications, but those that work in partnership with local authorities are well supported by those local authorities, whether through the work of education officers or by teachers going in on a peripatetic basis to support learning.

Throughout Scotland, teachers have different types of involvement in pre-school provision. We are examining the impact of that in a project that has been running for a year and will continue into next year. We do not have a lot of results yet because the nursery nurses' strike and other factors had a big impact on the project, but it is interesting to see how different authorities handle teacher involvement. Some are thrilled to the idea that they should not remove teachers from early years settings because they regard them as essential, but others have a different approach. We understand that, in rural areas, there might not be a supply of teachers with expertise in early years education, so authorities have to consider the matter more pragmatically. Also, teachers are an expensive resource. A lot of staff in early years provision are poorly paid. One will not attract highly qualified people if one pays low wages. That is a significant factor.

Your second point was about transition. We have got better at that. There has been a big push to make sure that some documentation goes from the pre-school setting to primary schools. When we inspect pre-school provision we ask, "What information do you send to the primary schools?" Equally, when we go into primary schools, we ask, "What information did you get from the nurseries and how have you used it?"

In most cases, staff are paying more attention to that information, but there is a tendency to concentrate on the emotional and social side. Staff tend to ask whether the children are all right rather than considering where they have got to in their education. That is perhaps because of the disparate provision in the early years. A single school might have an intake of children from three playgroups, two private nurseries and its own nursery class. Effective liaison with all those sources will take a lot of time and effort, but where will that come from if there is just one class teacher doing the work? Things are improving, but we need to examine the transition much more closely. I regard the three-to-18 development as another area in which we can support the transition, particularly if we look closely at the three-to-six part.

I have forgotten your final point. I apologise.

Ms Byrne: It was on class sizes.

Kate Cherry: When we talk to P1, P2 and P3 teachers, many of them tell us sincerely that they want to be more experimental, to make better choices and to be more flexible in how they deliver the curriculum, but they ask how they can do that when it is one teacher and 30 children, and not a ratio of 1:8 or 1:10.

Money has gone into schools for assistants to help with early intervention, and gains were made from having another person in the class. However, the funding was short term and some of those assistants have now left because schools could no longer afford them.

I will play devil's advocate. Fers Laevers is a professor in Belgium and is very influential in a programme called experiential learning. Some places in England are very keen on his way of working—as, indeed, is East Renfrewshire.

Experiential learning goes from pre-school right through primary. When I asked Fers Laevers about class sizes in Belgium, he said that it was not an issue and that primary teachers would want children to engage in that kind of learning regardless of the class size. In Belgium, class sizes are bigger than they are here—although I am not advocating that our primary teachers should be expected to work in that way. Extra support is needed to do that.

Eileen Carmichael: We have been talking to local authorities recently: they have made more and more formal attempts to bring pre-school and early years primary staff together. Each local authority keeps records that are passed on from pre-school to primary, but the words used in those records have to be understood. If the pre-school person says that a child is "coping very well" in such-and-such an area, what does that mean to the primary teacher? Do the words mean the same thing to each of them?

In 2001 or 2002, Learning and Teaching Scotland produced a pack to support transition. It contained videos, a CD-ROM and papers on staff development. The pack asked what children were able to do and how we could make progress with their learning as they moved from pre-school to primary school. I do not know how many packs were sold, but a fair number were.

The newsletter "Early Years Matters"—issues of which we sent to the committee—also tries to pick up on developments in transitions and right across the early years world in Scotland. The newsletter goes to every pre-school establishment and every primary school, as well as to a number of other places. We are trying to bring examples of good practice to people's attention.

Ms Byrne: For children with additional support needs, the pupil support team in the primary school may well link up with the nurseries—and

that linking is of course easier when a nursery is attached to a school. Do you know of examples of good practice of that kind?

At the time of transition, some young people may be assessed as having additional support needs, but, when they go to their reception class, what they need might not actually be there. However, if there were better links, the transition could be much smoother. Has work been done that we could look into?

Kate Cherry: I cannot think of any specific work. You are right: most children will benefit if they have links with someone who is already dealing with support for learning in the school setting.

If a child is having severe difficulties, the local authority will often say that it has a place for the child in one of the authority's own nurseries. That can lead to better support for the child.

There can be a difficulty because of the range of provision. We do not always know the children; their difficulties might not have been picked up on—by staff who understand—until they went to school. The quiet child may not simply be quiet; something else may be involved. Identification is important. It would be good to have input from all the schools to ensure that support is available.

11:30

Kenneth Muir: That said, we could also look again at our inspection evidence. Moreover, because we work closely and share good practice with Learning and Teaching Scotland, both organisations could advise members on places they might wish to visit.

Margaret Clarke: Learning and Teaching Scotland is happy to support that approach. We could also pick out some exemplars from the pack that was produced in 2001 and, with the inspectorate, look into and provide the committee with information on current effective practice.

The Convener: That would be very helpful.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): I have a brief question for Kenneth Muir and Kate Cherry. Could the Joint Inspection of Children's Services and Inspection of Social Work Services (Scotland) Bill, which will go through its final consideration stage in the Parliament tomorrow, affect early years provision by, for example, encouraging providers to work more closely together?

Kate Cherry: It would be good if we could anticipate its effects. However, I wonder whether all the providers are as aware of the bill as they might be.

With regard to overseeing the quality assurance aspects of the proposed legislation, the

inspectorate is certainly working more closely with other organisations and inspectorates. We hope to liaise with them on their findings and to advise on what is happening in the children's services unit to ensure that early years provision and other aspects are approached in an integrated way.

People have become more willing to work together, although I should point out that that is not because they have been unwilling to do so previously. The question is whether there are, for example, enough speech therapists to support children, enough social workers to visit families, and enough health visitors who are aware of the changes in the responsibility for identifying children with health needs. The critical point is that we must liaise with the people who work with the children, but there might not be enough people on the ground for that to happen.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I assume that that issue is highlighted in your reports and recommendations.

Kate Cherry: Absolutely.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: When you make recommendations, are they, on the whole, implemented?

Kate Cherry: Yes. There is certainly a determination to do things better. In fact, we are sometimes barely out of a particular nursery before we receive a letter that gives us a picture of what it has been doing.

However, because of the three-year sweep of our integrated work with the care commission, we have had to come back on our own follow-through. Next year, we will find out whether the settings that did not do terribly well in the previous inspection have improved and whether those that we had felt had established good practice have sustained their performance. We are anxious to get on with that work.

The Convener: Ken Macintosh has a brief question.

Mr Macintosh: I should say, in passing, that I am one of the parents who had a slight moment of anxiety about the tin of words.

I realise that my question, which concerns the lack of men in early years education, is probably for our next panel of witnesses. Is it possible to measure whether involving more men would make a difference to children's educational outcomes? For example, I recently saw a programme in which a child was asked to draw a house. When the child interacted with the mother, she helped and guided the child's efforts; however, the father simply scribbled down a picture of a house and said, "That's how you do it—just copy that." I wonder whether the educational benefits of men might be different from those of women. Common sense

would suggest that getting more men into early years education would be socially beneficial; however, would it be educationally beneficial for our young people?

Kenneth Muir: As the only male at this end of the table, I should perhaps begin to answer that question.

Our evidence suggests that what counts is the quality of the individual who interacts with the child. However, our pre-school inspections have shown that establishments that have instituted good or very good practice often use the surrounding environment by, for example, taking the children out into it. Although there might not be male staff within the centre, the children interact with them on visits or outings.

I suspect that it is quite difficult to give a definitive answer but, in the very best practice, we would ask centres to engage with males as well as females, particularly when there is a diet of one particular gender.

Kate Cherry: I come back to low pay. A couple of years ago, there was a big push to encourage males to go into the early years sector, but we have not made great gains out of it. I wonder whether it is a bit of a red herring to push more money into something that we will not overcome because society views it differently. There are also barriers because of child protection issues. Sadly, men are more wary of their involvement at the earlier stages in children's education.

I do not know of any research that shows that there is a huge detriment because children have mostly female carers at an early stage.

Mr McAveety: Perhaps the story should have been "The house that Josephine built" instead of "The house that Jack built".

Obviously there has been substantial progress in early years policy, and Government agencies, local government and the Executive have been working on that. During the next year, everybody sitting round this table will need to reflect on manifesto commitments and commitments for beyond 2007. Can you give me a snapshot of the discussions that you have had among yourselves as professionals and colleagues about the three things that would substantially change and improve early years provision in Scotland? What are we not doing already, or what could we do better? Are there any quick, snappy responses to that?

Kenneth Muir: One idea would relate to skilling staff, whether through formal qualifications, improved staff development or a combination of both. That would be high on the agenda because it has come through in our inspection evidence as an area for improvement, particularly when pre-

school staff do not get as much opportunity to interact with other colleagues as they might do. For example, in a local authority setting—particularly in the voluntary centres—there might be less scope for working alongside colleagues who are working in the same area.

Kate Cherry: That would make a huge difference. When we visit places such as Sweden, we can see where the quality shines through. I was struck that the staff who are working with the children could be engaged in a pedagogical conversation, and I wondered how many of our Scottish staff I could have engaged in such a fashion. Upskilling all staff to a higher level would certainly improve things. I suppose that that also has ramifications for the amount that would be spent on the sector.

There also needs to be a better awareness across the different age groups of what is happening at different stages. There is still a feeling that the older the children a teacher teaches, the more important they are, or the more important that sector is. That does not recognise the key influence of the earlier input on a child's development and learning. That is vital.

From my own pragmatic, inspector's point of view, I would like there to be a much more proportionate approach to how we are assuring the quality of what is happening in early years education, so that we can focus our attention where we need to rather than take a scattergun approach that covers everything, whether it be very good or just fair.

Margaret Clarke: There is a connection with the lifelong learning strategy. We are looking at the curriculum review for three to 18-year-olds; we have already published work and are doing new work to support the curriculum documents for children between birth and three years old, which were mentioned earlier. So if as part of the lifelong learning strategy we are looking at a young person from birth right the way through, we can reflect on some of the words that have been used in the early years setting, such as "fun".

The lifelong learning strategy currently talks about a passion for learning. As part of addressing a curriculum for excellence and development through early years into primary and secondary, we should be trying to rekindle that enthusiasm, which can get a bit lost. That was touched on in the committee's pupil motivation inquiry, and could be considered for the future. There are links between the curriculum for children aged between three and 18 and the benefits of not looking at the early years in isolation: there is a continuum in a young person's development. That is one point that I would like to chip in with at this stage.

I endorse what was said about continuous professional development and the quality of the intervention. That needs to be continuously considered.

I would also like to mention inter-agency working and the integrated services agenda. We have to remember that the young person is at the heart of what is happening and that there should be support from a range of different providers, including the parents. We were discussing that earlier—what was talked about there was terribly one way, going from the early years centre and nursery school to the home. We should try to encourage the quality of the interaction in other ways, whereby the most effective practitioners take account of learning in the home and build on that.

Those are two or three ideas.

The Convener: I thank the members of the panel for their evidence, which has been very interesting and will be useful for our inquiry. We look forward to the additional information about special needs issues that you will send us.

11:41

Meeting suspended.

11:47

On resuming—

The Convener: Okay, colleagues, we can resume. The second panel of witnesses is not doing much for the gender balance either, but I am sure that, as I said to the previous panel, it is the quality that counts. I am pleased to welcome Norma Watson, vice-convener of the education committee of the Educational Institute of Scotland, Sheena Wardhaugh, a past president of the EIS, and Carole Wilkinson, chief executive of the Scottish Social Services Council. The witnesses can make brief introductory remarks, then members will ask questions.

Norma Watson (Educational Institute of Scotland): Good morning. It was interesting to hear the contributions from the previous witnesses. My opening gambit, taking on board the point that Rosemary Byrne made, is that we agree about the need for legislation. I want to make that point early. Someone else asked how we could improve the early years sector. Our answer is money, training and legislation.

Carole Wilkinson (Scottish Social Services Council): Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence. Like my panel colleagues, I found the earlier evidence interesting. When I tell you what we do, you will see that we have a particular

interest in education, training and workforce development of people who work in the early years sector. We are the regulatory body that is responsible for registering and regulating social service workers, which includes early education and child care workers. We have responsibilities for educating and training that workforce and for workforce planning and workforce intelligence. Later this year, we will open a register for managers of early education and child care workers.

Members will see from the paper that we have submitted that we think that a number of areas in relation to the workforce need to be addressed. Some of the earlier witnesses spoke to the committee about that.

Ms Byrne: I will pick up on points that I made to the previous panel and cut right to our concerns about removing qualified nursery teachers from the pre-five setting, especially from that for three to five-year-olds. Before I read out a paragraph from the EIS submission, I declare an interest as a member of the EIS.

The EIS submission states:

"The EIS would agree with a statement made by Cathy Jamieson in January 2002 i.e. 'Teachers play a vital role in the pre-school education of our children. They always have and will continue to do so'."

A similar point was made in other evidence regarding the key element of having a professionally qualified teacher in pre-school settings.

I mentioned legislation earlier because I do not know how else we could get an equal service, so I am interested in hearing the witnesses' views. I also want to know from the SSSC what qualifications will be required in order that a person can register. The view that we are picking up all the time is that although workers in the pre-five sector do a good job and are key people in our young children's development, we do not treat them professionally. We must ensure that they get good professional qualifications and that they have decent wages and conditions if we are to succeed in bringing our most vulnerable young people through into the education process later on. I am interested to hear Carole Wilkinson's views on that.

Sheena Wardhaugh (Educational Institute of Scotland): Can I start?

The Convener: Certainly.

Sheena Wardhaugh: The EIS is particularly interested in the delivery of high-quality education in the early years, and in equitable provision; there is currently not consistent provision across Scotland. The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 is good legislation. If its principles were

extended to the three-to-five sector, that would guarantee what we are looking for.

On equitable provision, how can we say that youngsters should have an entitlement to quality education when three and four-year-olds will not necessarily have the same entitlement as five to six-year-olds? That is not equitable. There is not equity in provision from one local authority to the next or between public and private providers. That is just not good enough and we must do something about it if we want a quality education service in Scotland.

Norma Watson: I had better declare an interest, too, which is that I am a nursery head teacher in a free-standing nursery—one of those dinosaurs.

We feel that the teacher's role in the pre-school setting and any other school setting is, as Sheena Wardhaugh said, pivotal. However, we have to justify that. We must have evidence to say how what we do is different from what others do. I must applaud all our other colleagues and workers in the pre-school setting. We work closely with our nursery nurses and classroom assistants and, when we can get them, our speech therapists. I applaud those others, but we believe that it is vital that we have our teachers there.

What do we do that is distinctive? Our management and delivery of the curriculum is distinctive. As we have heard, an important review of the three-to-18 curriculum is taking place. Thankfully, we are involved in that. There is also the important matter of assessment and transition, about which we heard a lot in earlier evidence. Nursery schools' good practice in respect of transition means that there is not just a bit of paper that goes from the nursery school to the primary school; instead, nursery school staff engage with primary school staff and with parents. In the completed profile for each child that wings its way, or is taken, to the primary school there is an important section for parental comment. That is evidence of engagement between staff and parents. We might not always be entirely comfortable with the comments, although most of the time we are because we know the parents and they trust us.

Carole Wilkinson: One of our difficulties is that we do not regard pre-school services as a single service. There is a hierarchy of services and workers, with teachers and nursery schools at the top and playgroups and play workers somewhere near the bottom. Rather than have services in compartments, we must start to develop a single service that is linked to a single workforce, in which we regard the different elements of early education and child care as part of the whole. Whether a person is a play worker who delivers two hours twice a week or a qualified teacher in a nursery school teaching children full time, they

have equal value and should have equal status. Needless to say, with status goes pay, as the previous witnesses said. Some early education workers earn less than people who stack shelves in Tesco. We must change such aspects.

We have set a range of qualification requirements for workers and there are different parts of the register to which workers must apply. I do not want to go into all the details of that, but I will be happy to send members information and to talk to you separately in more detail. We will register managers of early education and child care services and require them to have practice qualifications and a management qualification, and we will register staff at the front line who have supervisory and other responsibilities but who are not quite at the level of managers. They, too, must have a range of qualifications. There is also the practitioner level. There are several dozen qualifications within the range of practice qualifications, including vocational, degree and nursing qualifications.

I agree with earlier witnesses that issues to do with the level of training and qualifications must be addressed. There are, for example, issues to do with the general educational attainment of staff. Early years workers attain quite good levels of vocational qualifications—slightly higher than Kate Cherry suggested—and are making impressive progress, but their level of educational attainment below their vocational qualifications is not good. We need to raise staff skill levels because, as earlier witnesses said, services need a skills mix and people with different skills who can work in different professions.

Ms Byrne: It would be helpful to receive from you an indication of people's skills and qualifications.

Carole Wilkinson: That will be no problem.

Ms Byrne: I have a brief final question about the ratio of adults—I say “adults”, because the people in question are not all teachers, nursery nurses or whatever—to children in the settings that we are discussing in comparison with ratios in primary schools and primary 1 classes, in which there could be 30 children to one adult. I am interested in the panel's views on the impact of ratios on teaching children, on their learning and on addressing individual needs and learning styles.

Sheena Wardhaugh: Obviously, the differences can seem stark, and we must welcome Parliament's commitment to reducing to 25 the number of pupils in primary 1 classes.

As well as being an ex-president of the EIS, I am a primary teacher who works for South Lanarkshire Council. In our primary schools, we use classroom assistants and other members of an integrated team, to which we have access

because the council operates an integrated services strategy. If there are particular problems, such as those that were discussed earlier, we know how to access appropriate professionals who can come in and work with children. We also target classroom assistants more heavily at primary 1 classes. I agree that there are differences, but the differences are not so stark in reality. Situations can be improved by the deployment of other staff.

Ms Byrne: Is such deployment possible in other local authority areas? Is deployment patchy?

Sheena Wardhaugh: Policies vary from authority to authority and perhaps even from establishment to establishment. However, the schools in which I have worked have certainly always tried to concentrate resources on primary 1 classes.

Fiona Hyslop: Workforce planning is obviously a thorny issue. Today's papers say that Peter Peacock is having problems and is employing the First Minister's former adviser to help with the early years workforce inquiry.

Mr McAveety: A wise choice.

Fiona Hyslop: We await the results of that.

There is an issue. Everybody agrees that we must improve the skills and training of people in the sector. I am interested in the panel's views about what Stirling Council told us. It said that all its early years workers are referred to as "childhood educators". In the previous session, we heard that having teachers in the environment adds value because they know about the transition to what comes next and the preparation for it.

How would the EIS feel if the direction of travel was towards pedagogy and having different types of degree-educated people involved in early-years education? Would you be willing to move in that direction, or is the steadfastness of teachers—the primary teachers who can go into nursery teaching—something that you feel strongly about? Is there a dialogue about moving towards there being degree-qualified people with teaching and educational qualifications who are not necessarily teachers in the traditional sense of the word?

12:00

Norma Watson: I will put on my General Teaching Council for Scotland hat. A professional recognition framework could go a long way towards addressing some of the problems that we face. We are proud of our teaching degree—there is no doubt about that—but we recognise that the BA is not necessarily linked to teaching. It is regrettable that we have not been involved in the national review of the early years and child care

workforce planning group—the EIS was not invited on to that group.

Fiona Hyslop: Really?

Norma Watson: We were not invited although the group discusses career paths and so on. It was with great pleasure that I received a back-door copy of the minutes of the fourth steering group meeting. We certainly wish to be involved in that group, so perhaps something can be done about that sooner rather than later.

To go back to degrees, we feel that the teaching degree is a robust one that has stood us in good stead, but we must be prepared to consider other qualifications. As I said, the establishment of a proper framework is perhaps the best way forward.

Sheena Wardhaugh: We have to live in the real world and acknowledge that recruitment of teachers into early years education is difficult for various reasons. Staff would have to be degree qualified—people who work in early years education need the underpinning knowledge and skills that teachers have from their training and they need to be capable of critical thinking and reflective practice, for which they definitely need degree-level qualifications. We need properly qualified people in there, not instead of teachers, but as well as teachers.

Funding is available to local authorities for upgrading staff's skills. My local council is providing fully funded places for local authority staff and for staff in private partnership nurseries to upgrade their qualifications. Staff who have Scottish vocational qualification level 3 at the moment are undertaking SVQ level 4, some staff are undertaking a professional development award and others are studying for the BA. They are all being funded to do that, which is excellent. That practice could be spread a bit more widely because it does not seem to be consistent across Scotland. It is also short-term funded—again and again, we come across short-term funding. If that initiative were promoted more widely and funding guaranteed for longer, that would be really helpful in upskilling the current workforce.

Norma Watson: Kate Cherry made the point that it is useful and beneficial for people to have knowledge and understanding not just of the bit that they are working in—the early-years part for three to five-year-olds—but of the whole three-to-18 curriculum. Obviously, no one could claim to have complete knowledge of that curriculum, especially towards the older end, but if people are aware of what is taking place that can only be beneficial for the whole picture and for the continuum.

Carole Wilkinson: There are arguments in favour of having a skills mix. We would not want a

health service that was delivered only by qualified doctors; similarly, we would not want a child care service that was delivered totally by graduate professionals. We should not devalue vocational qualifications, and there is a danger that we will keep pushing more people into universities to get degrees. Unlike the rest of Europe, we have an ambivalent attitude towards vocational qualifications, which is a shame for the people who work hard to get them. They do not feel that their qualifications are given equal status.

There is a pragmatic reason for thinking about the skills mix if we consider what is likely to happen to the population in Scotland over the next few years. We are going to have fewer young people coming through, because the birth rate is falling, and an increasing number of older people, so there will not be loads of people out there in the population for employers to recruit. All of us will be competing for the same workers, which might mean the public care services sector competing with the private care services sector or care services employers competing with other employment sectors. We have to think carefully about how to make the best use of our staff and about how to encourage people to come into our sector rather than to go and work for somebody else. There are big issues on the horizon; we need to start addressing them now.

Norma Watson: I note from the minutes of the teacher workforce planning advisory group that it has been accepted that degree qualifications help managers to face challenges such as working with children who have complex needs. The group has also decided on the use of joined-up services rather than taking the integrated approach.

Fiona Hyslop: Norma Watson's first request was for money. We have also heard about our aging population. One of the arguments that others might want to make to policymakers is that the reduction in the population will mean that money should go not into early years provision but into care provision for the elderly. The aging population presents us with a huge challenge, so how would you argue your case that the nought-to-five sector needs to have more and not less resources?

In terms of the age profile, we also heard that about 36 per cent of parents use grandparents to help with child care. The current profile of the early years workforce is that of very young women who may move in and out of the sector. Is there a case for looking more widely at the range of people who have experience of child care? Perhaps we should be looking to recruit older people into the nought-to-five sector? It may be pragmatic or necessary to do that, given the aging profile of the population.

Carole Wilkinson: The argument for investing in children is simple: children are the future. We

need to invest in developing young children to ensure that they become major contributors to society because they are the workers of the future. That is not to say that I would not, if I was sitting in front of the Health Committee, argue that the increase in community care demands means that we need to invest in that workforce. The argument is about investing in the future. We must ensure that the needs of less advantaged children in particular are addressed so that they can also become major contributors to, rather than burdens on, society in the future. We should seek to achieve a more balanced workforce in the early years and child care sectors.

It will not surprise the committee to hear that the reverse is true of the age profile in community care—the majority of people who work with older people is upwards of 45 or 50. We have a serious problem in terms of how we will provide that care in the future. I agree with the case that Fiona Hyslop made. We should also make use of other unpaid carers.

Norma Watson: Bluntly speaking, in addition to looking at children as our future, investment in early years provision provides positive outcomes, even in the short term. We saw that in the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education report and in the findings of the effective provision of pre-school education project. There is also evidence from the United States of America on the longer-term benefits. I admit that their sample was small, but the American researchers found that good early years service provision prevents youth crime. That is a winner.

The PISA—programme for international student assessment—2003 results indicate that children who have had early childhood education score significantly higher in maths at age 15. The results also indicate a correlation between the quality of early childhood education and the level of cognitive and social development.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies produced a report in 2005 that highlighted independent research into how long the impact of early years education lasts. The report defined pre-compulsory education as any education prior to the child starting school at the age of five. It found that

“early education leads to improvements in cognitive tests, including both maths and reading at age seven. These effects diminish in size but remain significant throughout the schooling years, up to age 16.”

The research also found

“evidence that there are small gains from early education in adulthood, both on educational attainment and labour market performance, through a higher probability of obtaining qualifications, and in turn marginally higher employment probabilities and wages at age 33.”

I am not sure how they arrived at the age of 33.

There was a positive impact on early test scores among people who attended nursery and playgroup before primary school. There was similar evidence of the effects on wages at age 33. According to the authors, those effects were

“of a similar magnitude to the wage effects found associated with pre-compulsory schooling”.

The magic age of 33 crops up again. According to the research,

“the presumption is that any intervening changes in the practice, curriculum and organisation of pre-school institutions would have worked towards increasing the quality of the educational experience provided.”

Those are not my words: that is independent research. Money spent on early years education is money well spent.

The Convener: Is it downhill all the way after 33?

Fiona Hyslop: I agree with many of your comments, but I would like to play devil's advocate. Are you making the case that, in a world of limited budgets, there should be a movement from spending on the secondary sector? If we want good results when pupils are 15, perhaps we should move our resources from secondary to nursery education. Does the EIS have a view on that?

Sheena Wardhaugh: Thank you for that question.

Fiona Hyslop: In reality, they are difficult choices.

Sheena Wardhaugh: We all know the bottom line: you get what you pay for. If we want quality, we have to put funding into it. We are saying that the proportion of funding that goes into early years provision is perhaps not quite right. Arguably, it could be described as the most important sector in education for all the reasons that Norma Watson outlined.

I return to your question about bringing in grandparents or people with caring skills and say that that certainly should be done. We want to recruit the best people into the early years sector, subject to their having some level of qualification. We do not disagree with Carole Wilkinson about mixed skills and mixed teams, because that is how we operate very effectively at the moment. We do not say that all staff should be educated to degree level—that is just not possible—but degree-level education must be part of the team in some format.

Dr Murray: Sheena Wardhaugh talked about the supply of teachers who are interested in doing pre-school teaching. Is there a problem attracting qualified teachers to teach in pre-school? Is there a problem of status: the older the pupils, the

higher the status? Or is it that pre-school teachers are not adequately paid for their qualifications? Is there a lack of pre-school places or an insufficient emphasis on the pre-school curriculum in initial teacher training?

Sheena Wardhaugh: It can be a mix of those things, most definitely. There is the question of the terminology used for early years workers. There is something to be said for trying to raise the status of early years workers by whatever means. For example, we could talk about early years educators rather than nursery nurses. The public perception seems to be that the older the child an educator teaches, the more important they are. That is just a public perception. There is no difference in pay. A qualified teacher will be paid exactly the same whether they are in early years, primary or secondary education.

Dr Murray: Presumably there are not quite the same opportunities for promotion in early years education.

Sheena Wardhaugh: That is true. The career structure of early years education would have to be looked at—and it should be looked at—given the mix of skills and teams that we have. To retain good staff, one should provide better levels of pay and a career structure.

You made an important point about placements. Some local authorities do not have teachers in early years provision, so it is not possible to place students with them. With the intake into teacher education institutes increasing, it is becoming even more difficult to find placements in early years education. All those factors play a role.

Norma Watson: It is unfortunate that we are talking about trying to encourage people to work in the early years sector when a number of authorities have already decided that they will remove their nursery teachers from classes and schools. I think of the guidance on the role of teaching in the pre-school setting and Cathy Jamieson's statement that teachers play a vital role—which we certainly agree with.

We have to make up our minds about whether we want teachers in pre-school education and whether we are prepared to pay for that. It should not be left to any one local authority to say, “This is what we are going to do,” and decide that it will change policy. We have to be politically honest.

12:15

Carole Wilkinson: Eventually, legislation will have an impact.

We are moving towards registering and regulating early years workers. Like social workers, teachers and nurses, they will be on a register and expect to be qualified. One hopes that

that will have an impact on their status: they will be able to go around saying that they belong to a regulated profession. They will have to have a qualification to be registered—Scotland is the only country in the United Kingdom that has gone down the route of a qualifications-based register.

Those workers—and others, on whom we are not concentrating this morning—will have, as part of their registration, to continue to produce evidence of their continuing learning, and they will start to say that they need to be recognised and rewarded for being a registered worker. That will have an effect, over time.

We need not wait for the crisis to occur: we need to be thinking about the resource implications of the situation that I have described.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: You have given clear and helpful evidence. In approaching this subject, what would be your advice as to the top priorities?

Norma Watson: I would have to say legislation.

Sheena Wardhaugh: I think that training to upgrade the skills of all staff is important. I take Carole Wilkinson's point about certain qualifications being necessary for registration, but we have to remember that, as far as I understand it—and I hope that Carole Wilkinson will correct me if I am wrong—those requirements are for managers and, perhaps, the level below them rather than for the whole staff. I would like an upgrading of qualifications for all staff in early years education and good continuing professional development, which does not happen in the private sector.

Norma Watson: I support what Sheena Wardhaugh said.

In October, there was an international round table meeting on education. At that meeting, the child's right to access to high quality early childhood education and qualified teachers was reiterated. The draft policy paper that was produced as a result of that meeting is going to the Education International congress in December this year. We have every reason to think that the congress will accept it and that it will become a directive. We should keep that at the back of our minds. It would be terrible if, when Europe is getting more and more teachers—we heard about Sweden and Finland—we moved away from using the expertise of teachers.

Carole Wilkinson: I would like to clarify the position that Sheena Wardhaugh outlined. The Scottish Social Services Council will register and regulate all early education and child care workers, including workers on the front line and those in a range of settings in the public, private

and voluntary sectors. That means that around 30,000 workers will be regulated by us.

I echo what my colleagues have said. The issues relate to raising the profile of this sector. Politicians can do a good job by talking up the importance of this area of work. Secondly, there is a need to stress the importance of development and investment in the workforce. That is the route to quality services. People sometimes think that it is possible to get quality services while skimping on training, investment and the support of staff. It is important not only that staff get initial qualifications but that there is continuous learning and development.

The Convener: Norma Watson mentioned legislation a couple of times. It is easy for people to demand legislation—"We need a law to deal with this"—but I think it is important to be clear about the purpose of any piece of legislation and why it is needed.

Could you say a little more about why legislation is required and what that legislation should contain?

Norma Watson: At the moment, some authorities are thinking about moving teachers out of nursery schools and classes and back into primary schools—if there are posts for them. That seems to be a terrible loss.

If there is legislation, that will protect the whole sector. It will also give a status to early years education that it has never had before. I know that it is easy for me to demand legislation. I do not know how to go about producing legislation. I would turn the question around and ask you whether you would consider legislating on the issue.

The Convener: The committee may wish to consider that in producing its report. I just want clarification. Are you looking for legislation that requires teaching professionals of a certain level to be involved in the education of three and four-year-olds?

Norma Watson: Yes.

Fiona Hyslop: Sheena Wardhaugh mentioned the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000. We are looking at the three-to-18 curriculum, if not the zero-to-18 curriculum—thinking is going that way, anyway. Will specifics in that act need to be changed? If you cannot reply now, perhaps you could write to us about that.

Sheena Wardhaugh: We would be happy to respond in detail. The existing legislation is excellent; merely extending its principles into the early years sector would achieve what we look for.

The Convener: Members have no more questions, so I thank the panel for its useful

evidence, which I am sure we will reflect on when we draw up our report.

Norma Watson: Thank you for the opportunity.

Carole Wilkinson: Thank you.

The Convener: We move to agenda item 2, which concerns an issue that was touched on in this morning's evidence. Fiona Hyslop wrote to me about it last week. I thought that it would be best to make it an agenda item and to circulate her letter, to allow members to comment. I ask her to outline the background to her letter.

Fiona Hyslop: It is clear from today's evidence that the workforce that is involved in early years education is an issue. Glasgow City Council's proposal to withdraw teachers from nursery education is a live point of discussion. I am very interested to hear the council's rationale for its proposal. Obviously, it is not for the Parliament to interfere with the council's decision-making process. I would not necessarily want to do that, but the case is live and we have heard that politicians can help to raise awareness of such issues.

Not only Glasgow is affected. This is an opportune time to find out the rationale behind the proposal: Glasgow City Council might well have a strong case that it wants to put. Such a move would affect many people outside Glasgow if other councils adopted it. For example, I know that, where I live, West Lothian Council is adamant that it wants to keep teachers in nurseries. That is the point of the debate and we should hear from the people who are making the decisions. Taking such evidence would be a good way of informing the early years inquiry.

Dr Murray: A lot of concern will be felt about some of the decisions that Glasgow City Council is taking and the reasons behind them, but the idea in Fiona Hyslop's letter—that we would call in the council—made me a little uncomfortable. The council is not accountable to this committee; ministers are. We can call ministers and we can ask Glasgow City Council to give us evidence on its rationale, but we cannot demand that it appear.

Fiona Hyslop: No. We could request that it help with our inquiry.

Ms Byrne: I support Fiona Hyslop's proposal. It would be interesting to get a handle on the background, why Glasgow City Council reached its decision, the impact that it feels the decision might have and the justification for it. What we have heard today has run counter to all that. It would be remiss of us not to hear from the council, if it is willing to give us evidence.

Mr McAveety: So the precedent that could be set would be that a parliamentary committee could address any concern that it had about any of the

32 local authorities. I have my views on the local authority's proposal, which I have transmitted to it. If the local authority that Fiona Hyslop mentioned wishes to retain teachers and another does not, the logic of Fiona Hyslop's proposal is that we should invite both local authorities to articulate their reasons.

The suggestion is that we are saying, "I disagree with council A doing X and we want to bring it before the committee to give it pelters for that, but we will forget about the rest." That is selective and we need to be careful about that argument. If we are keen to have information, nothing stops the committee being given information from the local authority about the educational thinking behind its proposal. However, I am pretty unpersuaded that the committee needs to issue another invitation, because doing that would set a precedent for the 31 other authorities.

Fiona Hyslop: We have heard today that there is a need for legislation that would mean that the matter would be treated in the same way throughout Scotland. That is what we have to explore. Councils have given us evidence. I think that we had a combination of the City of Edinburgh Council and Dunbartonshire Council—I cannot recollect because it was such a long time ago.

The Convener: It was councils from Edinburgh, Stirling, and Argyll and Bute.

Fiona Hyslop: Stirling Council was quite keen. It raised the issue of childhood educators, which we have been pursuing today. What we did not pursue in that session—it was perhaps remiss of us not to do so—was the issue of the status of teachers within nursery education.

Frank McAveety is right. I am not saying that we should set a precedent by inviting a council in, thereby implying that we are unhappy with its views. However, the matter is pertinent. We must get to the bottom of it and take views from throughout Scotland on how much it matters whether there are teachers in nursery schools. If it was decided to leave that decision to local authorities, that would be the status quo. On the other hand, we could reflect on evidence that we have heard today that qualified teachers should be part of pre-school education and that that should be provided for in legislation.

This is an opportunity to find out about the rationale behind councils' decisions. Inviting at the same time a council that considers pre-school teaching important would give us a good juxtaposition of the arguments that we will have to wrestle with in our inquiry.

The Convener: I should also mention that we took evidence from Shetland Islands Council—I do not want anybody to think that we had forgotten.

I understand the reasons behind Fiona Hyslop's suggestion, but I have some concerns about what is being proposed. The committee agreed on a group of witnesses, including a representative sample of local authorities. I am slightly concerned that inviting Glasgow City Council might be seen as an opportunity to challenge it on a decision that it has made legitimately as a local authority.

I suggest that I write to Glasgow, asking it to give us a background paper on the reasons behind its decision. If, having received that information, we feel the need to take further evidence from Glasgow and other authorities on this specific issue, that would be the time to do it. Otherwise, inviting local authorities before us might be seen as a "We're inviting Glasgow because we don't agree with what it's doing" session. It might be better to write to the council, asking it for a written report on why it has decided to go down that route. Would members be content with that approach?

Dr Murray: Fiona Hyslop referred to today's evidence in favour of legislation. If we are going to consider that suggestion, rather than simply consider the views of two councils that might have different views about whether to use teachers in nursery schools, we should write to all local authorities and to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to seek their views on the desirability or otherwise of legislation.

The Convener: I agree. We have received one piece of evidence from one witness suggesting that legislation is required. We can reflect in our report on whether we would wish to go down that route. Once we pull together the evidence from the inquiry, there may be some issues that we feel we have not resolved. We should perhaps take further evidence at that stage, before we draw up the final report. I would rather do it that way than bring in an authority that just happened to be making a particular decision when we were doing the report.

Fiona Hyslop: A big decision!

The Convener: It may be a big decision, but the council is entitled to make it. There may be other authorities that have already done that or they may have chosen a different route. We are second-guessing a decision that has been made by a local authority. I suggest that we write to that local authority to ask it to indicate the educational justification for its decision. Once we have received that information we can decide whether we wish to take further evidence on that topic or that area of the inquiry. Are members content with that approach?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: I shall write today to Glasgow City Council and ask it to provide that report, hopefully before we meet the minister but certainly before our meeting next week, if it can do it in that timescale.

Our next meeting is next Wednesday, when we will take further evidence on the inquiry and consider our draft report on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill. I remind members about the round-table discussion with private providers on 31 January at 6 pm. It would be helpful if members were able to come along to that.

Meeting closed at 12:29.

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