



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Wednesday 10 February 2010

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**EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE COMMITTEE**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2010, Session 3**

**CONVENER**

\*Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
\*Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
\*Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)  
\*Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
\*Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
\*Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD)

**COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES**

\*Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
\*Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD)  
\*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
\*Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:**

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)

**THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:**

Jackie Brock (Scottish Government Learning Directorate)  
Alison Coull (Scottish Government Learning Directorate)  
Charlie Penman (Scottish Government Learning Directorate)  
Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Eugene Windsor

**SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK**

Nick Hawthorne

**ASSISTANT CLERK**

Emma Berry

**LOCATION**

Committee Room 5



## Scottish Parliament

### Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee

*Wednesday 10 February 2010*

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

#### Curriculum for Excellence (Assessment Framework)

**The Convener (Karen Whitefield):** Welcome to the fourth meeting in 2010 of the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee. I remind all those present that mobile phones and BlackBerrys should be switched off for the duration of the committee's meeting this morning.

I welcome Des McNulty, who has joined us for our evidence-taking session today.

Item 1 on the agenda concerns consideration of the assessment framework under the curriculum for excellence. I welcome Michael Russell, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning. He is accompanied by Jackie Brock, the deputy director and head of the curriculum division in the Scottish Government; Alison Coull, the deputy director and head of the qualifications assessment and skills division; and Charlie Penman, the team leader in the assessment branch.

I thank the cabinet secretary for his prompt attendance. I know that he is keen to start and would like to make an opening statement.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell):** This is the first time that I have given evidence to this committee in my current role, and I am grateful for the opportunity to do so.

One of my first actions as Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning was publicly to emphasise my commitment to the curriculum for excellence. I did so for a variety of reasons but one of the principle ones was that I was there at the beginning of the process that led to the curriculum for excellence, as were you, convener—in the first session of the Parliament, you were a substitute member of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, and I was a permanent member. In 2003, it issued a report on its inquiry into the purposes of Scottish education. That was paralleled by the then-Executive's national debate on education. The inquiry and the debate came to the same conclusion, which was that Scotland needed a more balanced curriculum that developed a wider range of skills, competencies and personal qualities, that reduced

the undue influence of tests and exams—the reports were unanimous in their negative view of the burden of over-assessment—and reduced the amount of direct central prescription on local authorities and teachers.

It is important at the outset to state that we arrived at the curriculum for excellence because of the work of this Parliament and the work of a previous Government and because of an agreed consensus that we should proceed in the way that had been indicated. That has been the approach under the previous coalition Governments and the present Government.

The challenge that I face, as cabinet secretary, is how to put those principles into practice to raise standards and improve learning and teaching. I hope to work positively with the education profession, this committee and the Parliament to meet that challenge. I am particularly focused on ensuring that there is ownership of and confidence in the curriculum for excellence right across the educational spectrum. I believe that the quality of the curriculum for excellence, as it evolves, will be directly proportionate to the enthusiasm and commitment that we generate across education and political spectrums.

The framework for assessment and the associated paper on quality assurance and moderation that we published last month is the last piece of national policy guidance for the curriculum for excellence. In straightforward terms, the framework sets out what we want children and young people to achieve and how we will know that they are making progress towards those achievements.

The framework is fully backed by the curriculum for excellence management board, which represents all aspects of our education system. The management board's collective support gives us confidence that we are taking the right approach.

The management board has been clear that improving teaching and learning requires a more integrated approach towards the curriculum, assessment and qualifications. I agree with that and am mindful of the board's advice. To achieve that, the new assessment system will be based on the experiences and outcomes and associated guidance for the new curriculum and their equivalent within national qualifications.

The new system will promote greater breadth, challenge and application of learning. There will also be a greater focus on skills development. That is important to ensuring that our children and young people have—and can show that they have—the knowledge and skills that they need for further and higher education and employment.

We also need to make better use of our teaching staff and support them in developing their skills in assessment.

Before turning to the support that will be provided on assessment, I want to emphasise that delivery of the curriculum for excellence is a key part of the concordat and the national performance framework that was agreed between the Scottish Government and local authorities. That is a guarantee of our common commitment to making the curriculum for excellence a success. The resources to ensure delivery of the curriculum for excellence at the local level have been provided through the settlement.

The concordat also enables local government and national Government to work together pragmatically to consider how best any new or additional activity might be funded. A key element of the new assessment system is the creation of a robust quality assurance and moderation system to ensure that assessment judgements are reliable and consistent.

Schools and local authorities already invest considerable time and, consequently, resources in moderation of assessment. They make their own decisions about that level of investment. The new arrangements will build upon the best work that is already taking place. On the advice of the curriculum for excellence management board, I have recognised that there will be a requirement for some additional activity, principally to give teachers the time to apply the standards consistently at local and national levels. I am therefore working with local government to agree some additional funding to help support that activity. Positive discussions are taking place with the management board and local government to quantify the additional work involved and the resources that are required.

A range of other support will be put in place. There will be assessment exemplars showing pupils' work assessed by teaching staff against the standards and expectations, with a particular focus on literacy and numeracy across all curriculum areas and health and wellbeing. The exemplars will be available in the summer term. There will be a new online national assessment resource, which will include high quality assessment materials and will be available from mid-September. There will also be an additional in-service day to give teachers some more quality time to prepare for implementation. There will be a particular emphasis on literacy, numeracy and inclusion issues.

A national system of quality assurance and moderation will assist teaching staff to achieve greater consistency and confidence in their professional judgments of learners' achievements. Local authorities, the Scottish Qualifications

Authority and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education will all be involved in supporting staff and promoting high standards.

It is important to remember that this is not a year zero in Scottish education. The best of current practices will help to ensure the success of the new system. We are building on achievement to get more achievement.

On national qualifications, following my predecessor's announcement last year, work is progressing well. The management board is working closely with SQA to develop the new qualifications, and SQA is also working directly with the education community through its network of groups and events. There will be extensive engagement with the profession throughout the process. That will ensure that the new qualifications take forward the aims of the curriculum for excellence and meet the needs of schools, colleges and learners.

I am listening closely to what is being said by the education community, this Parliament and others. The constructive quality of that input will be what makes a difference. I hope that this morning's discussion will be conducted in that spirit.

**The Convener:** Thank you, cabinet secretary. I am sure that your opening statement will lead to many questions.

Can you give us a little more detail about the issue of resources? I noted that you said that you are currently in discussion with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities about the need to quantify what the additional resources will be used for. Can you give us an indication of the timescale for those discussions and say how you anticipate that that money will be used and distributed?

**Michael Russell:** The timescale is short. Those discussions are taking place now and I would like to get them concluded as soon as possible. We are talking in some detail about the resources that are required.

I am determined that we should ensure the success of the curriculum for excellence. There is no limitless pot of money anywhere in Government at the moment, but there will be a need for additional resources for assessment and moderation with regard to the arrangements that are put in place at school level and by local authorities. We need to ensure that that is properly funded.

We should recognise the scale of what has already been provided. Local authorities have to prioritise their own budgets and decide what overall share schools will get.

Local authority funding from 2008 to 2011 is £35 billion and councils are focused on educational

priorities. We have put in place an additional implementation year for curriculum for excellence, added four in-service days and invested £4 million in 100 extra teachers. I am now saying that an additional in-service day will be provided and that we will provide money for moderation and assessment. Discussion with local authorities has been positive so far and that will provide the resource that is needed.

I am open to discussing other financial issues. If any authority says, "We can't do this, for the following reason," I will listen. I do not want that to be an excuse for people to make things up but, if a genuine need exists, local authorities and the Government should and must have a shared commitment to get the implementation right.

**The Convener:** I am sure that you are aware of the comments from Ronnie Smith of the Educational Institute of Scotland and others in the education community, all of whom are committed to making curriculum for excellence work but who ask questions—rightly—about the implementation process and who seek certainty and guarantees. I suggest that that is the job of an active trade union.

Mr Smith suggests that teachers will need more time to prepare for curriculum for excellence. In your previous answer, you said that you had provided four additional in-service days, but people still believe that that time will be insufficient. How much time will need to be dedicated to allow teachers to engage fully in developing curriculum for excellence, so that our schools are prepared for the children who join them in August this year?

**Michael Russell:** We should take the time that that takes. In December, I added—almost *ex cathedra*—an in-service day. I believed that I should do that early, having examined the evidence that I was given and having listened to Ronnie Smith, among others—of course, I listen to a wide range of people. I very much take your point that many people who are committed to the success of curriculum for excellence have points that they want to be heard and which I want to hear. We need to ensure that adequate time is given.

At the outset of my evidence, I stress—as I did in my opening statement—that the management board is crucial. All committee members should have details of the board's members—if not, we will furnish you with them. The board contains representatives of all the trade unions and a wide range of educational expertise. The board's advice is extremely important to me. If the board said again that teachers need more time, that would be very influential on me, but they have not yet said that.

I have said that the additional day that we have put in place needs to be devoted to assessment, moderation and inclusion. We have ideas about how we might achieve that. Of course, if more is needed, it will come. It is important to say that what individual teachers will need depends on who they are, what their skills and experience are, what part of the educational spectrum they work in, what resources they have, how much they keep themselves up to date and what they are looking for. That will vary widely. We need to do the best that we can to support that diverse group of people in getting the process right.

Through its work, the committee is familiar with the substantial enthusiasm in parts of the primary sector and with the fact that more concerns are felt about elements of curriculum for excellence in the secondary sector, which I understand. We will need to do a bit more in the secondary sector, which we are trying to do. Members will have seen that I agreed last week with the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association—and I hope that I will agree with the other unions—a sampling of its members to hear further concerns, to find out how those concerns are arising and to ensure that we can deal with them. The management board needs to be at the heart of that, so it will have to continue to give its views.

**Jackie Brock (Scottish Government Learning Directorate):** The management board is considering the evidence that is available to it in relation to advising the cabinet secretary. One important piece of evidence is the survey that the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland conducted last year to assess progress by local authorities—the association has just issued a request for updated information to every local authority.

A critical piece of that survey is the CPD plans of every authority, which are based on the CPD plans of each school. The management board is concerned to ensure that it provides the cabinet secretary with any appropriate evidence-based advice to assess whether sufficient CPD is currently available and whether more time is required.

10:15

**The Convener:** Thank you for that answer. It was helpful and takes me on to my next question, which is about the development of CPD. How do we get the balance right between a national programme of CPD and a localised, authority-based one? What is the Government doing in that regard? What is the management board doing and what discussions are you having on those issues?

**Michael Russell:** We recognise that it is an important issue. I will give you an example.

About 1,000 early-years and primary headteachers attended five Scottish Government regional events about issues within curriculum for excellence in October. Equally, we recognise that school-based activity is important. Last week, I visited a primary school in which the headteacher's principal plea was that any additional CPD days that the school got be devoted to in-school activity, because they felt that they needed to have a collective discussion about curriculum for excellence and how they were working and that they needed to learn from each other.

The balance between national and local activity will be maintained. The management board has specifically talked about maintaining that balance and about the support that is required at local and national levels. We are scoped on that, engaged with it and delivering the appropriate type of CPD. We want to ensure that there is the reassurance of the national message—in other words, we know what is going on and we are trying to help—with the detail that can come only from local implementation. We are dealing with a programme that relies heavily on the experience and professionalism of teachers—as curriculum for excellence should—so we will also want to ensure that their reflective practice takes place within the school context. We regard that as important.

**The Convener:** CPD at a local level will be key to the successful implementation of curriculum for excellence. You have already mentioned that there is no pot of money that is waiting to be drawn down and that all local authorities face tough choices. How can we ensure that, when local authorities make difficult decisions about the delivery of front-line services, not only our front-line education services are protected but there are no cuts in CPD? What assurances can you give about that? CPD is not an obvious thing for a local authority to do but, if we want curriculum for excellence to work, it will be critical.

**Michael Russell:** There is a legal requirement for a certain amount of CPD to take place, so it is not an optional extra. We are also resourcing additional CPD. To be frank with you, convener, it is a special resource and we would not hand it over unless the CPD took place; it is important.

Curriculum for excellence is not an add-on; It is the way in which education will be delivered in Scotland's schools progressively. It has already started, it is coming in and will grow over the next X number of years. It is the front-line service, so investment in getting it right is not something that we can just put in next year if we do not put it in this year; it is essential to ensure that education continues to be delivered in Scotland.

To be fair, I do not know a single local authority that dissents from that view. Curriculum for

excellence is where education is going and it is important that we think about it not as something that we are simply adding to schools but as the way in which education for our children and, eventually—for some of us—our grandchildren will be delivered in Scotland. It is at the centre of the educational experience that our children and grandchildren will have. No—it is not even at the centre: it is the educational experience.

Therefore, it is a mainstream activity for local authorities, not an add-on. Local authorities want to deliver it well and properly. With all the criticism that they get, they want to ensure that education in their areas is as good as it possibly can be and they will guarantee that by ensuring that curriculum for excellence is as good as it possibly can be.

**Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Cabinet secretary, you are on record, as is your predecessor, as saying that, for the first time, all teachers will be involved in the assessment of literacy and numeracy. I think that we all understand what that means for primary schools. The box on page 15 of the framework for assessment gives a slightly long-winded explanation, but I think that it is reasonably clear.

What it means for secondary education is not so clear. How will all teachers participate in the assessment of literacy and numeracy? What will make that job different today from what teachers have been doing in the past?

**Michael Russell:** With the greatest respect, I would have to take you to a school that is already doing some of this and show you how it works. I was slightly entertained yesterday—I take my entertainment where I can get it—by a newspaper that said that the purpose of curriculum education is to teach children how to fly kites. You might have seen the article. If you were to take part in some of the deep projects that schools are trying to do, you would understand that the process of working together on a curriculum project involves and deepens understanding in all subject areas, and because young people are expressing themselves and trying to use literacy and numeracy skills in so doing, they are gaining literacy and numeracy skills that they might not otherwise get.

I will use the example of kite flying because it is worth trying.

**Elizabeth Smith:** Mmm. I might try kite flying too.

**Michael Russell:** I am sorry?

**Elizabeth Smith:** I said I might try kite flying of a different sort.



**Michael Russell:** Indeed. I am sure that you could do but you would not be unkind enough to do so.

**Elizabeth Smith:** I might be.

**Michael Russell:** You are taking this as seriously as I am—I hope.

Kite flying involves mathematics in calculating whether the construction can fly, its shape, how it relates to other shapes, and how that can be calculated. Numeracy is involved in deciding where to buy the materials and how much they cost. All those things relate to kite flying. For literacy, I know that young people will want to write about their experiences and they will be encouraged to do so. They will be encouraged to describe their experience, and to look at other people who have written about that experience, and the excitement of it.

There has been a description of curriculum for excellence that implies that that is shallow. I think that the reality of curriculum for excellence and where it will work is in deepening experience. It is about going much more deeply into individual subjects, particularly to make sure that literacy and numeracy skills are applied in every area of educational endeavour.

So what you will see in most primary and secondary schools is a collaborative effort across all the disciplines that emphasises the use of the core skills of literacy and numeracy and makes sure that they are applied again and again in circumstances in which, to put it bluntly, they will stick. The assessment is about understanding that process and making sure that it can measure how it happens. As I said in my introduction, the framework is a high-level document. It is the last of the architecture documents, so to speak. What is being put in place now is the plumbing, through the announcement of the exemplars and the national resource.

The best way to see what I have been talking about in operation is to see it in operation, and then we will all understand it.

There is a very good piece of writing that I commend to you, and I am happy to have it distributed to the committee. It is from—I hesitate to use the word—a blog by Don Ledingham, who is the chair of ADES and the director of education in East Lothian. He wrote this weekend about what he thinks curriculum for excellence is. He covers all the points we have talked about, and talks about deepening the experience. Everyone should read it, and then see everything in operation.

**Elizabeth Smith:** Thank you, cabinet secretary. I have in my papers three documents from different primary schools across Scotland. They show me what those schools are doing with

curriculum for excellence and how it is being measured in time for Government inspections.

I have to say that I am impressed, so be careful when you accuse me of not—

**Michael Russell:** I did not accuse you of anything.

**Elizabeth Smith:** You hinted that it might be a good idea if I went into schools. I am never out of schools.

I still want to get at the issue that is raised by many parents and by teachers in secondary schools, which is to do with the transition period in first year and second year. There is a specific issue about how work is assessed in the years before pupils choose the subjects in which they will sit external exams. As you know, SSTA has expressed concern that national 4 courses will not be externally assessed. You are asking all teachers to be involved in assessment. On what basis do you expect children to make subject choices for external exams?

**Michael Russell:** I am not sure that I understand the link between the two issues. The assessment of literacy and numeracy will be clear in terms of the way in which good practice in schools and by individual teachers is shared across the education sector, on the basis of a national understanding of what levels of performance should be.

I say again that we should be mindful of the strong feeling in the early years of the decade that there was overassessment in Scottish schools. I have met the SSTA to discuss the issue that you raised. The qualifications sub-group of the curriculum for excellence management board discussed the issue and came to a unanimous conclusion that there should be moderation within the school rather than external assessment at that level. A representative of the SSTA was part of the sub-group and supported its conclusion.

I am open to people saying, “We are not so sure now”. I said to the SSTA, “Go back and raise the issue again. If the management board comes to a different view, that’s fine.” I understand that there is no other support for a change in approach. In those circumstances and given the structure that we have, the management board and the qualifications sub-group have decided that the proposals are the right ones and continue to recommend them to me.

I do not want to fall out with you and I am not accusing you of anything. I am sure that you visit schools as often as I do and I would be happy to visit a school with you one day. I want to make a wider point about assessment. One reason for the feeling that there was overassessment—I think that that was the right feeling—was to do with

international comparators. The amount of external assessment in Scotland is far higher than the European average. Very few countries do as much external assessment as we do in Scotland. Some places do not do any. Finland, for example, has a single external assessment at the end of the education process. There was a strong feeling among parents and teachers that external assessment had gone too far. When we reduce the burden of assessment in schools, we do so not lightly but on the advice of teachers and the wider management group and in keeping with what many parents have said. We should listen to that advice.

**Elizabeth Smith:** I want to bring you back to the assessment process, particularly in the middle years of schooling. You have added two assessments in literacy and numeracy beyond secondary 3 and you have streamlined standard grade and intermediate 1 and intermediate 2. I am pleased about that, but where is the clear articulation for parents and pupils about the move from S3 into subject choice areas for the gold standard of highers? How do pupils come to their decision, given the changes that are proposed?

**Michael Russell:** I am sorry that I have failed to explain the situation. I invite Alison Coull to respond to you.

**Alison Coull (Scottish Government Learning Directorate):** As happens at the moment, there will be a discussion between the teacher and the young person about the appropriate point at which they should specialise. In curriculum for excellence, the experiences and outcomes gradually allow for specialisation. For example, there is more subject specialisation at curriculum level 4.

There is no disconnect between S1 to S3 and S4 to S6. There will not be two different types of learning for those groups. The experiences and outcomes are designed to articulate into the qualifications phase and ensure that learning is built on in the senior phase. We cannot say at national level when individual children will make their subject choices; that will be a matter for schools and pupils, as it currently is.

**Elizabeth Smith:** Are you talking about a guidance teacher? You are putting more teachers into the assessment process for the child. Will a guidance teacher give the advice?

**Alison Coull:** It will vary from school to school, as happens at the moment.

10:30

**Elizabeth Smith:** Right. Can we move on to the question of highers and advanced highers? Cabinet secretary, you rightly said that one of the

important aspects of curriculum for excellence will be to improve the quality of what we do for our pupils. Are you satisfied that curriculum for excellence will ensure that there is rigorous knowledge testing for highers and advanced highers? Are you absolutely clear that there will be an improved, rigorous academic standard in both?

**Michael Russell:** Yes, and I am strongly devoted to the idea of intellectual rigour in our education system. I have used that term several times since I became cabinet secretary. I am convinced that we need the highest of standards, and I would not approve the system going through if I did not believe that that would happen. I said very early on—if not in response to a question from you, perhaps in response to a question from Margaret Smith in the chamber—that I will not sign anything off unless I am convinced that it is going to work and be an improvement. The management board will continue to advise me that that is the case; I will expect it to be the case and I want it to be the case.

**Elizabeth Smith:** Can you give us a guarantee, cabinet secretary? When it comes to advanced higher, the number of presentations is increasing, but the availability of advance higher in this country is not good.

**Michael Russell:** You are asking me a different question there. I am of course concerned about availability, but I am also concerned that we ensure that there is maximum access and lots of different ways of doing that—for example, people working across schools and opportunities for distance learning. We need to give people the maximum opportunity. We also need to say where the baccalaureate fits into all this. Clearly, major opportunities are emerging through the offering of the baccalaureate. You asked me a question about rigorous quality, and I am absolutely at one with you about that. I also want to ensure that access is as wide as possible. I have no interest in narrowing opportunity—quite the reverse: I have an interest in widening opportunity as much as possible.

**Elizabeth Smith:** But, cabinet secretary, the narrowing of opportunity is happening in some areas of Scotland. Some schools are cutting back on advance highers, so rigorous knowledge testing for some children does not exist.

**Michael Russell:** We have a system in Scotland that requires local authorities to deliver, and that is where we are. Each local authority makes that decision. I want to see the widest access possible, and where any access narrows in terms of physical access, we must work very hard collectively to ensure that other access is available, which can be done through distance learning and other ways. However, we want to

ensure that access is available. I have no interest in narrowing opportunity—none whatsoever.

**Elizabeth Smith:** We will hold you to that.

**The Convener:** Can I just pick up on a point that you made in response to Elizabeth Smith's line of questioning regarding the choice between national 4 qualifications and national 5 qualifications? I do not understand your point about surveying people and there being over-assessment in the system. I accept that, but the issue is confidence in the system. Certainly, I pick up that there is tension around assessment and that some employers and parents may well prefer a qualification that is externally awarded rather than one that is based on internal assessment. That is not because—

**Michael Russell:** No, I understand the point that you are making.

**The Convener:** That is not because they do not trust teachers to do that, because I think that teachers generally in Scotland are absolutely up to the task of doing that. However, the issue is perception and how you challenge that so that people have confidence in the system. We may end up with a situation whereby children do the national 5 qualification rather than the national 4 qualification, although that is not appropriate, just because they think that it will stand them in better stead.

**Michael Russell:** The issue that you raise is about the perpetual tension between assessment for learning and assessment for accountability. How do we get that right? We live in a country that has been driving heavily—for a period of time, it was driving more and more heavily—the issue of external assessment for accountability. Essentially, it was a check: you took the watch to pieces to ensure that it was working, but the issue is that you have to use the watch to tell the time. We therefore need to get the balance right, and we can do that in two ways. One way is that the management board thinks that the balance within the curriculum for excellence programme is right; I think that its recommendations are ones that I accept. Secondly, we have a wider job to do to increase confidence across society in the abilities of teachers.

There are a number of connected issues, such as the way in which society regards teachers and the way in which we encourage people to be teachers. Some people do not want to be teachers because they do not think that teachers are sufficiently well respected in society. There is an issue for us to address. Investing in the professionalism of our teachers and increasing confidence in their judgment is part of the process. I hope that, in time, that will change the balance and that people will recognise that change. As I

said to Elizabeth Smith, we must tell people that in this country we do far more assessment for accountability than is done elsewhere. Finland is one place of high standards that David Cameron, among others, mentions all the time. We must explain to people that in Finland there is a single assessment at the end of education. That is a fact.

**Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** I will continue the same line of questioning. The cabinet secretary replied to questions from Liz Smith and the convener in terms of the principles of the curriculum for excellence and chided us for our lack of enthusiasm. That is not the case—many members around the table are not only keen supporters of the curriculum for excellence but helped to introduce it and, until recently, drove it along.

However, an alarming lack of clarity is developing at secondary school. We all understand how the curriculum for excellence works at primary school and the broad approach of teachers there. There is no lack of confidence in our teaching profession at primary or secondary level, but it is easy for parents to grasp the concepts at primary level. It is quite tricky to do that at secondary level, because of the dominance of exams, to which the cabinet secretary referred. We have subject-led and subject-dominated teaching and divide the secondary curriculum into boxes from first year onwards.

Does the cabinet secretary accept that there is a potential clash between the broad approach of the curriculum and a subject-led framework at secondary school? For example, parents want to know what subjects their children should choose in first, second and third year, and on what basis they should do so? In the past, we had a strong sense that, in the long term, we were working towards exams, qualifications and progression to college, university and so on. At the moment, there is little clarity about what the exam framework will look like, especially in first, second and third year. What criteria should parents and pupils use to choose their subjects in first, second and third year at secondary school?

**Michael Russell:** I will give two answers. The first is the answer that Alison Coull gave. The criteria have not changed at all—there is no difference in what young people will be confronted with at school. I entirely accept that the member is an enthusiast—so am I—but neither of us is an expert on these matters. I will quote briefly from Don Ledingham, because he addresses clearly the issue of subjects. He says:

“As someone who is currently conducting a series of seminars with East Lothian secondary school subject specialists, where I've been highlighting the importance of their subject expertise, I've been mystified by claims that subject specialisms are being watered down by CfE. I'd actually argue the other way—in that there is a much

greater likelihood that young people can study subject areas in real depth instead of the 'mile wide inch deep' approach that often characterised the previous curriculum.

What we now have is an opportunity to provide real scope to meet the **needs** of all learners."

Yesterday I had a conversation with someone else who is senior in the educational world, who said that the curriculum for excellence was more intellectually rigorous than what it replaced and provided a much greater opportunity to dig down much more deeply in each subject and to ensure that there was real understanding of subjects. There are some misconceptions—many of us have suffered from them—about what the curriculum for excellence is. We must now tell people exactly what it is. That is why we have started the process, through the parental toolkit, of explaining to parents the reality of the curriculum for excellence.

Jackie Brock would also like to respond.

**Ken Macintosh:** Before she does so, I suggest that, yet again, the minister has responded to a different question from the one that I asked. I did not suggest that there will be a lack of subject knowledge or specialism. He has replied to a question about the principles of the curriculum for excellence. I am not talking about the principles; I am asking for clarity on subject choice at secondary school. Will the minister describe how many subjects a pupil will choose in first, second and third year? Will they choose five, eight or four? What criteria will they use to choose those subjects?

**Michael Russell:** The criteria have not changed. Jackie Brock wants to come in.

**Jackie Brock:** I want to reassure the member on the evidence that we are seeing. In Glasgow, for example, every secondary school has submitted to the local authority its timetable for S1 to S3. The local authority is using that to think about issues such as CPD in its implementation of the CFE. However, an important point is that Glasgow is also using the process to develop its approach to informing parents, which the cabinet secretary mentioned.

The timetables show absolutely no diminution of subjects. The situation will vary between schools, but we are seeing more interdisciplinary weaving through of the themes of literacy and numeracy. Particularly in S2 and S3, we are seeing more weaving in around the sciences and modern languages. Key themes in those subjects are being brought together into one lesson. I assure the member that the cabinet secretary has specifically asked ADES to inform him, through the management board, of any evidence of diminution of choice in S1 to S3.

**Ken Macintosh:** My question is not about diminution of choice; it is simply about what the system will look like. How many subjects will pupils choose?

**Michael Russell:** It will look as it looks now.

**Ken Macintosh:** It is a simple question.

**Michael Russell:** I have given a simple answer: it will look as it looks now.

**Ken Macintosh:** Will a pupil study eight separate subjects in their third year?

**Michael Russell:** They will be able to study for up to eight qualifications, as at present. We made that point in the debate that took place in the press last week.

**Ken Macintosh:** Will eight be the norm, or will five or four be the norm?

**Michael Russell:** The curriculum for excellence will tailor the system more closely for every child. A child might study eight or five subjects. There will be a choice in that regard. I am trying to be helpful to Mr Macintosh generally. I do not think that there will be a difference in that experience. The difference comes in the tailoring of what happens to children and the depth and nature of the educational experience. We need parents to understand that the outcomes of the experience will be better. I will parrot the aims of the curriculum, because they are important: we are talking about successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. That is what the system is trying to create. It is an improvement on what we have and it is a flexible system. I suspect that Mr Macintosh might get tired of this but, to quote Don Ledingham again, he has talked about how it is a "dynamic" process. Parents are drawn into a dynamic process of involvement in their children's education, which is something that every single one of us round the table has always wanted. That is what is happening and what will happen.

**Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD):** I welcome the cabinet secretary's assurance that he would listen seriously to the management board if it told him that people do not have enough time to bring in the curriculum for excellence later this year. All of us who are genuinely in favour of the curriculum for excellence and who see it as a positive measure that has been in development for many years and which builds on the existing system do not want it to fail. It is better to take time to ensure that it does not.

**Michael Russell:** I assure the member of that, just so that we are absolutely clear. I saw the coverage on the issue at the weekend. With the greatest respect, Tavish Scott is not an expert on timescale and neither am I—I accept that. If the management board told me at any stage that it

needed part of the process to go back at any time, I would listen to that. However, I make it clear that the management board has not said that. I am as determined as the member is and I am not questioning anybody's bona fides on the issue. However, some people seem to be sensitive on it, so I reassure all members that I am sure that we are all committed to making the curriculum for excellence work and to doing so as positively as possible.

**Margaret Smith:** The comments that you have heard from the committee and that you have obviously heard from the profession and a wide range of people will make it clear to you that there remains a level of concern.

**Michael Russell:** Of course.

10:45

**Margaret Smith:** At the heart of everything that we have been talking about is the teaching profession. I am going to ask a question about the teaching profession and I do not want to be misrepresented as having a go at the teaching profession in what I am about to say. Clearly, the teaching profession is at the heart of this broadening and widening. You have talked about the need for professionalism and everything else. First, the teaching profession has concerns about training, which we have covered. Secondly, although the existing curriculum was too top-down, teachers wanted to be able to be creative from the bottom up, but what they have to work with at the moment is possibly still lacking direction—we need to get that balance right. Thirdly, if the curriculum for excellence is to work, we must have good teachers. I have been taken into classrooms by head teachers who have known that the teacher whom they were showing me was not up to standard. Head teachers have a real difficulty with that.

First, how are you dealing with teachers' concerns about the lack of direction? Secondly, how are you working with the General Teaching Council for Scotland to ensure that we have teachers of the quality that we need to make the curriculum for excellence work? What you are talking about—internal assessment, a deepening and widening of the curriculum—is all very well but, if we do not have good teachers in our schools, we could find ourselves in real trouble.

**Michael Russell:** There is a careful balance to be struck in talking about Scottish education, and you have expressed the situation well. It is impossible to say that everything is perfect and that every teacher is a good teacher. There are some problems in classrooms that we need to solve. However, there are also many good, competent and committed teachers whom we

need to support. I will start with that issue and come to the other issue.

In supporting teachers, a clear dichotomy has emerged between an enthusiasm within primary schools—which are more used to a lack of structure—and concerns and fears in secondary schools, where there has been a more structured approach. I recognise that. That is one of the reasons why we are working differently with the unions in primary and secondary schools to listen to teachers and sample teachers' opinion.

We are committed to having a clear timetable in secondary schools, and I have given a commitment to intensify the process. In January, I sent a letter to all schools giving a clear timetable of how we are supporting the curriculum and what materials are coming along. I have talked today about exemplar material that is due out in the summer term and the national resource that is due in September. That is detailed material for schools, and we had a discussion with the SSTA about how we would intensify the provision of that material.

I accept the point that, particularly in secondary schools, we need to do more—and we intend to do more. It is fair to say that, up until now, not enough has been provided. I have also been very firm with Learning and Teaching Scotland. I want the timetable that we have agreed to be observed, and I expect the timetable for materials and support to be observed. I acknowledge that issue. We need to ensure that that material flows through. As it flows through, you could say that this document is the last piece of the architecture to be built, as the plumbing is put in place and the structure is filled out. It needs to be done timeously, properly and in the way that teachers expect. Nevertheless, there is a dynamism in the process. We must recognise that there is a dynamic about the curriculum for excellence that will require a lot of individual activity. Some teachers are nervous about that and we must support them in that—I recognise that.

There is a procedure to deal with teacher competence. Local authorities have been a little reluctant to use that procedure, but it exists and can be used.

Equally, good employment practice—all of us as MSPs aspire to be good employers—requires us to provide support and help for those who are struggling, so that they can be developed. I want to ensure that such support continues to be available. Part of the CPD process is to help those who need help and to ensure that they get help. We need to put in place better mechanisms for recognising that—the GTC is thinking about that. I have already discussed with the registrar of the GTC the question of career refresh—the way in which teachers need constantly to interrogate

themselves about their practice and learn from it—and we will continue to discuss how that can be part of the process. At the end of the day, some people will not make it. We need to be quite clear that those people should not be in our classrooms.

I have an absolute commitment to the highest standard of teaching for Scotland. I want to see that standard constantly in place. If, despite help and support and all the things that we should do as good employers, some people do not achieve that standard, the reality is that those people should be doing something else. Perish the thought—some people in politics should be doing something else. That is true of every profession and it is true of teaching. We should be quite honest about that. We have to say it.

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):**

We have had quite a wide-ranging discussion this morning, so I will try not to repeat any of the questions that have already been asked. I want to ask a bit more about the national assessment resource, which you said would be launched in the autumn, with a focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. When will materials from the resource be available for the whole curriculum? Is any timescale attached to that yet?

**Michael Russell:** Yes, that is a good point. A clear timescale is really important; we need people to know what they are getting. I will talk you through it.

In the summer term, initial assessment exemplars in the priority areas of literacy and numeracy across all curriculum areas and health and wellbeing will be made available on the curriculum for excellence website. That is a clear commitment: that will be there during the summer term.

All the national partners in curriculum for excellence, working with the education authorities and practitioners, want to ensure that the national assessment resource—the national bank of material—provides a range of high-quality assessment guidelines, resources and illustrations of learners' performance. In essence, they exemplify the expected standards across the whole range of experiences and outcomes. We expect that that will be available in mid-September. Staff will have access to it in mid-September—it will be built by then.

The materials in the national assessment resource at that stage will include items from the initial assessment exemplification for literacy and numeracy and health and wellbeing, and they will all be quality assured and kite marked.

In addition, we want to try to get the Scottish survey of achievement materials and some of the five-to-14 materials reviewed and adapted. We are not throwing everything out; good stuff is there. If

the materials are fit for purpose for assessment in the curriculum for excellence, they will be there, too. We will continue to add to that.

On the timescales, I think it is quite clear what will be available in the summer and what will be available in September and how it will be added to.

**Claire Baker:** The issue is really the consistency in teachers' judgements; we want to ensure that parents can have confidence in the system. What will the process be for reviewing teachers' judgments as part of the moderation process?

**Michael Russell:** I will come on to that in a second, but Alison Coull wants to add something to what I said about the NAR.

**Alison Coull:** I just wanted to provide a bit of assurance. We are working closely with a range of groups to populate the NAR. There is a NAR content group, whose job it is to advise, prioritise and suggest what the priority areas are for the NAR. In the first instance, the priorities are literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. We expect that, beyond September, we will go through that process again to prioritise materials for other curriculum areas to be added over the course of the school year.

It is important to say that the content group has been clear that, in the initial stages, the material that goes into the NAR has to be quality assured nationally and kite marked, so that we are all confident about the standards. Ultimately, we expect that we will have teacher-based assessments loaded on. In the initial stages, it is important to build that confidence.

**Claire Baker:** There are priority areas for NAR at the moment and there will be further work into the academic year. As the work in the classroom moves forward, will there be enough materials to support the work that will be taking place, before the materials appear on NAR?

**Michael Russell:** Yes.

**Alison Coull:** There is a range of support material in all curriculum areas on the curriculum for excellence website. There has been a process of exemplification. A weakness of the national assessment bank is that it does not have materials in curriculum areas other than reading, writing and numeracy; the ambition is for NAR to add to that. It will take time to populate NAR fully across curriculum areas, but we are confident that a range of support is already available.

**Michael Russell:** We recognise the imperatives of the timetable to which Claire Baker referred. It might be useful to remind ourselves of the timetable. We are where we are and a range of things will come this year. In 2011 we will have the

arrangements documents for literacy and numeracy national qualifications. In 2012 national 4 and national 5 will be put in place. The final certification of standard grade and the first availability of literacy and numeracy qualifications will be in 2013. In 2014 we will have the first certification of national 4 and national 5, in dual run with the current intermediate qualifications. In 2015 we will have the final certification of the revised higher, in dual run with the current intermediate and higher qualifications. The current advanced higher will also have its final year in 2015 and the first certification of the new advanced higher will be in 2016. Everything has to run to support that timetable.

On Claire Baker's point about teachers' judgments, it is not new that we have to rely on teachers' judgments. That is important. We are dealing with professionals, on whose judgment we should rely. Teachers are familiar with the process of coming to a judgment. What is different about the new approach is that we are giving status and recognition to those judgments—at long last, to tell you the truth.

In those circumstances, we need a number of mechanisms. Claire Baker is right about the need for reassurance. We need and will take a national view of standards. HMIE will be involved in that. Education authorities will need to review standards in their areas, and at school level we will need lead individuals to ensure that they are satisfied with the standards. That is a normal self-checking mechanism, as there is in all professions. The approach will work well, provided that we have the confidence to put it in place.

**Claire Baker:** Teachers and head teachers are positive about the introduction of curriculum for excellence. However, people are still expressing caution about the boundaries for making judgments and the depth of judgments. There is concern about whether there will be consistency. The materials that we expect to be provided during the summer might reassure teachers on those matters, but teachers are seeking a little more clarity.

**Michael Russell:** Teachers absolutely are looking for clarity and reassurance. It would be easy just to say that everything will be fine, but reassurance needs to be based on the facts. We need to reassure you, as well as teachers, that things are in place and are happening. The approach is complex and there is a lot of philosophy and structure in it. We need to get the detail in place and reassure people about it; we also need to listen to people. When teachers are apprehensive about the depth and intensity of their judgments, you are right to suggest that we need to find mechanisms that will support them to get that right.

**Claire Baker:** National 4 will be internally assessed. When the convener asked what that will mean for parents, pupils and employers, the response focused on the need to recognise the status of teachers. Will that be enough to generate confidence in the qualification?

**Michael Russell:** No, but that is part of the process. Engagement between employers, in particular, and curriculum for excellence will be important. Employers will need to understand what curriculum for excellence is and why it is important that we introduce and sustain it. That task lies ahead of us and we are getting engaged in it. We need to build confidence in curriculum for excellence as the right way forward—open dialogue and discussion such as we are having is part of that process. You are right to suggest that we need to build a reputation for what we are trying to do. We will endeavour to do so. To some extent, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. As we see the effect of the new system, people will gain confidence in it.

11:00

**Claire Baker:** A lot of effort will have been put in to help the young people who will be sitting the national 4 to recognise their worth and what they can achieve in school. However, having spoken to headteachers in Fife, I understand that there are concerns that if the exam will not be externally assessed—

**Michael Russell:** We need to explain to people why external assessment is not the only way to ensure that standards are maintained. We have addressed that, but we need to continue to do so. It is not a universal rule that external assessment drives up standards. Judging from the European comparisons, there is no correlation between external assessment and quality.

**Alison Coull:** We recognise that we have a challenge to build credibility for national 4, and we are absolutely committed to that challenge. It is not true to say that the new national 4 has no externality, as the Scottish Qualifications Authority will be assessing national 4 according a quality assurance process. Colleges have similar arrangements for their qualifications.

**Margaret Smith:** I will pick up on some points that Claire Baker has raised. I raised the need for greater engagement with parents with your predecessor on a number of occasions, cabinet secretary. I declare an interest as a mother of an 11-year-old who is heading towards this. It seems from my conversations with constituents on the subject that the only point where parents have engaged with the forthcoming changes is when it comes to budget cuts and their impact. What are

you doing to ensure that parents have a greater understanding about what is coming?

**Michael Russell:** I have a feeling that I should say “I’m glad you asked me that question.” Two weeks ago I launched the parental toolkit at a school in Kinross. It is important that teachers, as part of their engagement with curriculum for excellence, now take on the task of explaining why it is important. We did not choose the school in Kinross accidentally. Parents and children there took part in a curriculum for excellence project involving a secondary school, a primary school and the Vane Farm RSPB reserve. That is an example of a project that ranges right across the curriculum, that covers literacy and numeracy and that really deepens understanding. It was an excellent project. Parents took part in the process and they got involved in developing the parental toolkit.

This is the start of the process. When I came into office in December, I was fortunate enough to be able to influence it slightly. You know that I do not like to meddle too much, but it seemed important to make the purpose of curriculum for excellence as clear as possible with parents. It is increasingly important to tell parents why the curriculum for excellence has happened, why it is important and why it is not just another educational fad to bolt on to what already exists. In world terms, it is rather a revolutionary approach, but it is also evolutionary, and it builds on what is good in Scottish education. I very much take to heart the fact that we need to do more, and the committee, too, may wish to be involved with doing more to help parents understand how important the curriculum for excellence is. Your work on it and your publicising it may well help.

**Margaret Smith:** The vast majority of parents worry when they hear words such as “revolutionary” in relation to their children’s education.

**Michael Russell:** I know—let us use “evolutionary”.

**Margaret Smith:** What they are looking for is evolution and reassurance. The teacher is the key person to put it into a lay person’s terms in getting it across to the parent and in developing an understanding of what it actually means in practical terms.

**Michael Russell:** Let me use those four tags again: successful learners; confident individuals; responsible citizens; effective contributors. That approach aims to equip Scotland’s young people for the 21<sup>st</sup> century in a way that is more closely attuned to their individual needs and to the opportunities that exist for them. If we describe the curriculum for excellence in those terms, rather than in terms that might worry people, people will

relate to it very well. Furthermore, we want to rely on the professionalism and experience of our teachers to help young people get the very best out of their educational experience.

**Margaret Smith:** The focus on literacy and numeracy is critical to the four aspects that you have mentioned. My understanding is that people will be examined on literacy and numeracy from S3 onwards and that about three pieces of work in subjects other than English and maths will be marked externally before being assessed internally. We could probably do with some more hard facts on what that will mean in practice. Overall, the feeling that most people have is that S3 is very late in the day to be worrying about literacy and numeracy.

I know what you will say, but it must be asked where that fits into everything else that will have been happening—and, significantly, what should have taken place at primary school. Another question that can be asked not only on literacy and numeracy specifically but across the whole spectrum of the curriculum for excellence is how what is proposed will be different to what should have been happening in our education system and our schools already. I would have thought that in assessing pupils, not just in English and maths but in other parts of the curriculum, teachers should have been flagging up such matters. Indeed, I have had it said to me at a parents evening that although the content of a modern studies essay by one of my children—who shall remain nameless—was perfectly fine, it was not particularly well written. Why will what the Government is proposing be different?

**Michael Russell:** We will definitely not wait till S3—you expected me to say that, and I am saying it. A concern for literacy and numeracy is being built in from the very beginning. What is different is that that is being built in. Through the CPD process and the way in which we are developing teacher education—we have not yet mentioned Graham Donaldson’s review of teacher education—every teacher will be expected to have at the heart of their professionalism and their practice a concern for literacy and numeracy.

I am not saying that it has happened a lot, but it has been possible in Scottish education for people to put that to one side. Although anecdotal evidence is never great, all of us have heard stories about people not being marked down for their inability to communicate because other things were more important. For the first time since devolution, we are saying that that is not what we should be doing. We should be ensuring that standards of literacy and numeracy are central to how children go through the educational experience. That is what we will do and that is why



our approach is different. We will see the effect of that in the outcomes.

As you know, I have asked the literacy commission to meet the management board of the curriculum for excellence to work out what more needs to be done and to establish whether the concerns for literacy and numeracy are as fully integrated as we believe that they are. We will add to that by producing a literacy action plan—we have committed to doing that. There is a strong commitment to getting it right. The phrase “zero tolerance” is thrown about rather a lot, but we are saying—again, probably for the first time—that there will be zero tolerance for illiteracy and innumeracy throughout the entire educational process, and every attempt will be made to ensure that they do not exist.

**Margaret Smith:** What will that mean for, say, the technology teacher, which I think is the example that is used in the assessment framework, when they discover that they have in their class someone who needs greater assistance? What will happen at school level when that happens?

**Michael Russell:** I do not think that the technology teacher will simply discover that; it will be part of the core process of that child's progress through education that the issue is addressed on every occasion. I think that the present system sometimes just allows illiteracy or innumeracy to be discovered, but from now on it will be a core process.

**Margaret Smith:** The critical point is that the issue is not just school based; it applies across the board in colleges and elsewhere. The figures about literacy that the literacy commission produced are startling and worrying. How will you ensure that the new approach to literacy and numeracy works not just at S3 in schools but across the board, wherever people are taught?

**Michael Russell:** As I have said, I have not only asked the literacy commission to meet the management board but got officials to meet the literacy commission to add to that process what else needs to be done. I made that commitment in the debate about the literacy commission's report. I said that I would bring back the action plan for debate and I will do so.

**Jackie Brock:** To be clear, I say that the action plan will cover the early years through to colleges and beyond, to adult literacy approaches. That is already woven through the experiences and outcomes for the CFE and our work with colleges and with our colleagues in the adult literacy team.

**Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Good morning, cabinet secretary. Before I move on to broader achievement issues, I will ask a specific question. You published a paper on

quality assurance and moderation along with the framework for assessment. As a former assessor and verifier in the Scottish vocational qualification system, that really interests me. Why was it necessary to publish that paper?

**Michael Russell:** Our system is quite strong. We have effective quality assurance and moderation systems, but we need to build on them, just as curriculum for excellence builds on where we are. The whole curriculum for excellence is about raising standards. As part of their job, teachers use—and are expected to use—a wide range of activities to maintain high standards. To know about that, we need an effective moderation system locally and nationally, so that teachers understand the standards, share them with other people and apply them consistently at local and national levels.

That is why publishing information on and asking for a system of assurance and moderation that matches curriculum for excellence provides a double lock. That deals with some questions that we have talked about: it ensures that what exists is good and that the means that we have to measure what exists is good. The management board felt that that double lock would provide much of the assurance that people need. The system would also provide the best standards, so that is why we have established it.

**Christina McKelvie:** Given my background, I am interested in that system. A question was asked about how teachers will undertake assessment and get to grips with the verification and moderation system. I can see the value in having parity of esteem between vocational qualification verifiers and assessors, those in colleges and universities and other teachers who assess and verify in the SVQ framework.

Will you explain a wee bit about how the new system sits with the understanding of employers? I was interested to hear how employers will value the new qualifications. The national occupational standards, which were introduced to ensure that employers had quality, confident and competent members of staff, became really valuable CPD for employees. We are talking about the employees of the future. How will the new system lock in—as you said—with the adult system for employees?

**Michael Russell:** We must understand the equivalences in the systems and we are working hard to do that. I had an interesting conversation on Monday in which it became obvious that the way in which curriculum for excellence would move forward had equivalences with the university sector. We are working with the college sector. The SQA is central to that process and wants to ensure that all the equivalences are understood.

We must ensure that employers understand the quality of outcomes, so that they have no doubt about them—that will be proved by the quality of the people who enter employment—and they must understand the equivalences with what already exists. Some people struggle with the fact that we do not have O-levels, but we are moving on yet again. With officials, I have been engaged in how we describe the system. I want to find words that make the equivalents and help people to understand the quality of what we are doing. Work has to be done on that and we are working on that.

11:15

**Christina McKelvie:** From my reading of it, matching qualifications with vocational outcomes is not such a big paradigm shift, to be honest.

I want to move on to ask about some of the broader achievements. Mention has been made of literacy and numeracy, but another key issue is health and wellbeing. To pick up on an earlier point, learning how to fly a kite might involve mathematics and budgeting and stuff, but I could list a whole load of other things that could also be pulled out of such a project. Those outcomes include: a sense of achievement; ownership; team work; how to deal with failure when the kite eventually crashes; how to cope with nuance in dealing with the wind; and how to have fun. If children have fun learning something, they can learn to deal with the stresses and challenges in later life. They also remember things from having fun. The whole purpose of the curriculum is to produce well-rounded, healthy young people who have a positive self-image. For a nation, happy children make happy adults. Further to that, we have also talked about the importance of information and communications technology and higher-order skills. What are the practical issues in identifying those outcomes, such as learning about nuance and team work and gaining a sense of achievement and self-esteem? What are the challenges in identifying and recognising those outcomes? How will all of those be plugged in?

**Michael Russell:** The document “curriculum for excellence: building the curriculum 5: framework for assessment document”—which is the document that we are discussing today—is about focusing on progress and achievement in knowledge, understanding, skills, attributes and capabilities. Essentially, that is the framework or architecture of what we are trying to do. The previous document “curriculum for excellence: building the curriculum 4: skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work” showed how skills for learning, life and work, including literacy and numeracy, are embedded in experiences and outcomes. In other words, “building the curriculum

4” already made clear the embedding nature of those skills. The document “building the curriculum 5” shows how the development of skills such as leadership, enterprise, employability and higher-order skills are embedded in how we judge things and take them forward. The framework for assessment is different because it actually looks at how those things are working, shows how we can measure them in a modern way and shows how we can relate them to real-life experiences.

However, I entirely agree that enjoyment is part of the process. People learn more if they are positive. Indeed, an interesting experience in launching the parent toolkit was talking to the parent of a child who had been involved in the project. That child—he actually appears on one of the parent toolkit videos—was, if not reluctant, at least not terribly enthusiastic about going to school until he got involved in the project. He then began to get really enthusiastic every morning about going to school and getting involved. That enthusiasm was about learning to do things and learning to do things in a different way. If we can capture that, we have got what many people think is the holy grail in education: kids who want to go to school because they want to learn. Added to teachers who want to go to school because their professionalism is valued, I cannot imagine a better start for building what we want to build in Scotland.

**Christina McKelvie:** I can only agree. The analogy about kite flying reminded me of an experience that I had at school, where we had a fantastic teacher who used all the songs from “Mary Poppins” to teach us creative language. The whole idea of flying a kite to learn about the stratosphere is something that I find really exciting. Like Margaret Smith, I should perhaps declare an interest, in that I have an 11-year-old who will be going through the same stage of the new national qualifications. I want that 11-year-old to go to school every day really enjoying everything that he does. I want him to come out the other side of it as an inventor, an adventurer or a bridge builder or whatever. I want that for all of Scotland’s kids, so I am hoping that the minister can reassure me that that is how this will go.

**Michael Russell:** I hear Margaret Smith saying that she wants her child to be employed. That is a key issue. However, I am sure that people employ inventors, bridge builders, explorers and others. We want to ensure that people are capable of taking the opportunities that exist and that they are able to learn not just in school but throughout their lives. We want to ensure that the highest-quality people are available in Scotland to do the highest-quality tasks that we need done. All those things could come out of the curriculum for excellence, provided that we implement it properly. As I pointed out at the beginning, the quality of what

comes out of the curriculum will be directly proportional to the quality of what goes into it in terms of enthusiasm right across the educational sector and in politics. If we can achieve that, we will get something good.

**Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP):** Much is said in the framework and has been said this morning about the assessment system. You referred, in your opening remarks and in response to questions, to moderation, to creating a robust and rigorous system and to heightening teachers' confidence in their judgment, but concerns have been raised about the amount of assessment. Can you outline how much day-to-day recording will be expected of teachers?

**Michael Russell:** Teachers will be expected to record learning in what you might call an on-going way. It is a continuous process rather than just providing snapshots.

Christina McKelvie talked about the wide range of activities. Teachers must record the wide range of dialogues; interactions; written, oral and practical activities and tasks; and tests and examinations. They have to get a rounded view of what has taken place. Teachers know that that will require a different approach. They will report on inputs and outputs. They will report and, I think, record, enthusiasms as well as performance. They will report performance and feedback on performance and they will identify strengths.

I think that staff who are already good at assessing children overall in the round will not be doing any more than they are doing now. Teachers who are very tick-box driven will have to change their practice to record a more rounded set of experiences. That is not to say that there are not clear outcomes, because any system that has external assessment at any stage has a requirement for clear outcomes, but I think that teachers' recording will need to be more complex.

**Aileen Campbell:** How will that be set against the inter-disciplinary learning and go further through their time at school?

**Michael Russell:** There will need to be co-operation and interaction.

**Aileen Campbell:** Between the teachers?

**Michael Russell:** Yes. There is in schools anyway, but the demand of curriculum for excellence is for much more collaborative working.

**Aileen Campbell:** And teachers are geared up for that; they are happy to get on with it.

**Michael Russell:** I think that they are in many schools. I come back to the point that Margaret Smith raised. I recognise that there are teachers, particularly in the secondary sector, who need more support to work in that way. That is not a

criticism of anybody; it is the reality. We are trying to provide such support and we will go on trying to provide it through materials and through CPD—the quality of school-based CPD is important.

**Aileen Campbell:** Can you outline the amount of reporting to parents and local authorities that will be expected?

**Michael Russell:** Yes. Mr Macintosh asked how parents will react to choice. As at present, parents will get, need to get and must get regular feedback and information about their children's strengths, progress and achievements. That is required and it is what happens now, so it will continue to happen. They will get information about the pupil's progress in achieving the curriculum for excellence as they go through it and on key areas such as literacy and numeracy. That is something different, which is perhaps worth reflecting on. Margaret Smith referred to informal feedback, but there will be formal feedback on that, which is important.

The curriculum for excellence needs to demonstrate to parents, as it reports, how well children and young people are themselves demonstrating progress in relation to the breadth and deepening of learning. Both those things need to be there. Teachers will want to report on the whole child. We talked about education being tailored to the child; teachers will want to report on the whole child and on how the whole child operates.

Testing and assessment is also about taking stock, so they will have the taking stock benchmarks, which are indicated in the timetable that we have illustrated. I think that there will be a good series of continued reports that tell people what progress is being made and I think that those will be better in reflecting on the overall educational experience.

**Aileen Campbell:** What support will there be for children who perhaps need additional support or are in need of more choices, more chances or who do not have their parents there to support them?

**Michael Russell:** We constantly look at and review that process. We have a reasonably good system, although we can always get better, of supporting children in those circumstances. We need to understand that we are working on some base principles, which are outside the curriculum for excellence so they underpin it.

The getting it right for every child principles are very important. We believe that investment in young people from the earliest age is the wisest investment that you can make in society. Those principles underpin what we are trying to do here.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** The GIRFEC principles are very important. How will the assessment framework help narrow

the attainment gap between and within schools, which, as you know, is a particular issue in areas of deprivation?

**Michael Russell:** That is certainly an issue for us all. It is interesting that, in some subjects, the attainment gap in Scotland is wider than it is in the rest of Europe. It is a worry that we have diversity of provision. The worst attainment is often among children who have corporate parenting—looked after children. That is a real issue, with which I am very seriously engaged, as all my predecessors have been. What we can do about that is a constant worry for us all.

When you see the GIRFEC principles in action—there are one or two really wonderful examples in Scotland—you realise that one of the core issues is ensuring that the child's individuality is expressed in a way that can lead to individual attainment. You are not dealing with a group of children but with each child as an individual.

The curriculum for excellence is also based on that principle of individual tailoring. We have an opportunity through the interaction of our early years activity, the GIRFEC principles and curriculum for excellence to focus on individuals, to ensure that they succeed in circumstances where they might not have succeeded.

We need to discuss the long-term investment in the early years as a society, because the more we do of that, the more likely we are to close those gaps.

**Kenneth Gibson:** Even with examinations there is an element of subjectivity, in that they are marked by human beings, not machines. With assessment, there is more room for subjectivity than objectivity. Some teachers are grappling with Promethean boards, which are going to be a huge sea change for them. Leadership and ethos in individual schools will be very important. Will we be able to deliver the level of quality assurance that we need to deliver the policy effectively?

I understand what has been said about the management board and so on. On the issue of deprivation, one of the concerns that I have about assessment being such an important part is that a lot of children do not have support at home while others have parents doing their homework for them, helping them with all sorts of projects and employing tutors for them, which can make a significant difference to any assessment that is made. The decision about whether someone can go forward for a higher might be borderline. One child might be struggling on their own and another might have all that paraphernalia of support. Is there not a possibility that assessment could widen the attainment gap between children who are deprived and do not have support and children who have family assistance?

**Michael Russell:** I do not think that it would widen it, but I recognise the concern that you expressed, which we would all share. The basic inequity in the situation that you describe is a wider issue than one that is simply for education to address. We know from recent research south of the border that the gap has widened rather than narrowed. We need to apply a range of policies to ensure that we try to close the gap. Those policies are in areas such as enterprise, employment and health. Such inequities strike particularly hard in certain circumstances. We also need to improve the quality of parenting in Scotland. That is not a general criticism, but there is a need to ensure that people understand and can be helped with parenting.

I am going slightly beyond my remit in this committee by saying this, but I think that the biggest opportunity lies in investment in the early years. Although that is the hardest investment to make, it will, over several generations, make the difference that you are talking about. How we do that is a very big question.

I also believe—I have argued for this policy in the past—that a national agreement on addressing the key issues in terms of inequality, education and opportunity over several generations would be useful.

I argued—as Mr Gibson will know—for an education convention to reach a national agreement on education, much like the social partnership model. Although I am much more bruised than I was when I began arguing for that, I am still optimistic that we might reach an agreement on how we can achieve the aims that you have just set out.

11:30

On the question of whether we can address those aims in the context of curriculum for excellence, the curriculum will improve the educational experience and the opportunities for all pupils, so there should be some effect. With regard to whether it will produce the long-term societal effect that you seek, I stress that no one policy on its own will do that.

**Kenneth Gibson:** There is an issue with regard to the stress that falls on teachers in relation to assessment. I know of one education convener who took real umbrage at the fact that her daughter was not put forward for a particular higher, and put considerable pressure on the school, and on the class teacher to change her mind. Some parents do not accept that wee Johnny or Mary is not as able to progress in a particular subject as they would like, and they put a lot of pressure on teachers.

If there is assessment rather than an exam to fall back on, that puts considerably more pressure on teachers. Given the increased authority of school boards and parent councils in recent years, will more teachers come under pressure to put children of vociferous parents through four exams in borderline cases, or to give them a higher grading in assessment than they would otherwise merit?

**Michael Russell:** I sincerely hope not. I would have thought that the breadth of the assessment process in curriculum for excellence would counteract that, because we are talking about more than one individual; I referred in my answer to Aileen Campbell to interaction between individuals in such circumstances. I would hope that it would produce the opposite effect.

**Kenneth Gibson:** Thank you for those assurances, cabinet secretary.

**Ken Macintosh:** I will start with a specific question on modern languages. There has for some years been a great deal of concern about the teaching of modern languages in Scotland. Is the teaching of modern languages a core and compulsory part of the primary school curriculum? If so, should modern languages be a core and compulsory part of initial teacher education?

**Michael Russell:** The review of initial teacher education is important. Modern languages are taught as part of the curriculum in many primary schools, but not in every one. We do not have a compulsory curriculum in any primary school in that respect, but modern languages are important. I have just moved from the post of Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution, and I am aware that a number of consuls in Edinburgh strongly believe, as you know, that we should do more on languages.

It is right that you ask whether languages should be part of our teacher training process. Graham Donaldson has been commissioned to undertake the review, and I have made clear to him that he should be wide ranging and radical in his views. We need to consider whether the place of modern languages in the primary sector in Scotland is adequate, or whether more needs to be done.

I am happy to say that Graham Donaldson will examine the issue. I am sure that if you were to contact him to offer your views, he would be happy to listen. I will certainly draw his attention to your question and say that he should consider it.

**Ken Macintosh:** I am asking for your views, cabinet secretary, rather than my own views. Are modern languages a core part of curriculum for excellence? You say that we do not have a compulsory curriculum, but is modern language teaching a core part of curriculum for excellence in primary schools?

**Jackie Brock:** Yes. You ask if languages are “a core part”—the experiences and outcomes around languages are there.

**Ken Macintosh:** I will put the question simply. Do you expect every single child who goes through our primary schools to learn, or get a grasp of, a modern language?

**Jackie Brock:** Currently, around 94 or 95 per cent of children in P7 are studying a modern language. We expect that to continue, and we see no reason why that percentage would decrease. We, and local authorities, need to consider what is happening with the small percentage of children who cannot—

**Ken Macintosh:** Sorry—I do not want to be difficult, but the language that you are using seems slightly equivocal. Maths is a core part of the curriculum for excellence in primary schools, and so is English. Are modern languages similarly a core part?

**Michael Russell:** I am a little upset because I offered you the opportunity to talk to Graham Donaldson and put your point of view. I have indicated my view that modern languages are very important, but you seem to reject that. I will ask you again. If you believe that modern languages are important in teacher education—I certainly think that it is worth considering—then the Donaldson review should look at it, and I would welcome it if you spoke to Graham Donaldson.

Not every child in primary school in Scotland gets the opportunity to learn a language. I would like more children to have that opportunity; 94 per cent seems to be high but not high enough. You want me to say that there is an absolute requirement for every child to learn a modern language in primary school, but that does not exist. The curriculum for excellence should continue to add to the opportunity, and I hope that that opportunity will come to 100 per cent as soon as it is possible.

**Ken Macintosh:** Do you recognise that there might be an issue with initial teacher education when it comes to modern languages in primary school?

**Michael Russell:** That is why I said that I think that the Donaldson review, which is looking at teacher education, should consider that as part of the process. I cannot be clearer than that. The issue should be considered. We have set up a review of teacher education. I hope and expect

that the Donaldson review will be wide ranging and radical. It is entirely legitimate for him to consider that issue, and he will look at it.

**Jackie Brock:** I understand why you are focusing on primary schools, but it is important to look at the performance of young people at

standard, higher and advanced higher levels. We are looking at approximately 80 per cent achievement there, which is really impressive. There has been a diminution in the number of presentations at standard grade, but the presentations at higher and advanced higher levels are going up.

I also appreciate why you are keen to look at teaching, but the number of presentations at standard level are dropping because of a range of factors, not just because of the quality of the teaching. We need to take a broader look at that, and that was one of the committee's conclusions last year.

**Ken Macintosh:** I have a range of concerns about modern languages teaching, but I was concentrating on primary schools so that I could get the cabinet secretary's views. Clearly he thinks that it is important but he is not willing to add to that.

I want to return to the interface between the curriculum for excellence up to S3 and the examinable curriculum. I am talking about the qualifications framework and the point at which parents and pupils become more focused and interested in the qualifications needed for advancement, assessment and their own motivation. I will take literacy assessment in S3 first. I understand that literacy assessment will not be graded; pupils will either pass or fail. Will parents or pupils have a right of appeal over that pass or fail?

**Alison Coull:** The literacy and numeracy qualifications will not be graded but pupils will get either a level 3, 4 or 5, so their achievement will be recognised at the appropriate Scottish credit and qualifications framework level. The SQA is working through the design process for the qualifications, but all qualifications have an appeal process, and I do not expect the literacy and numeracy qualifications to be any different.

**Ken Macintosh:** I understand that pupils will not sit a test. Three pieces of their work will be submitted—I do not know whether that will be with their approval or not—and they will then be told that they have been given a qualification at one of those levels, or not. If they do not make one of those three levels, will they be told that they have failed and have not got a literacy qualification?

**Alison Coull:** Absolutely. It will not be possible for a pupil to get the qualification if they have not achieved the standard for which the qualification is set. The detailed assessment arrangements are still being looked at. Issues such as the number of pieces of evidence have not been finalised and that all remains to be worked through with the profession and SQA. The qualifications will be achieved through a portfolio of evidence, as you

say. That is what the cabinet secretary's predecessor announced last year.

**Ken Macintosh:** I understand that national 4 and national 5 qualifications are going to be one or two-year courses. When do the pupils start national 4? Do they start it in secondary 4 or secondary 3?

**Alison Coull:** There has been a lot of discussion about this topic. We do not want there to be a disconnect in the learning as a result of artificial divides that might occur when someone starts the qualifications. We and SQA are designing the courses in a way that will allow them to be flexible enough to take account of the learning that has happened in S1 to S3. The curriculum level 4 learning will be taken account of in the national 4 and national 5.

**Ken Macintosh:** I do not understand. Are you saying that some pupils could start their national 4 or national 5 qualifications in S3?

**Alison Coull:** That is not quite what I said. We are not proposing that pupils start the unit assessments in S3. In secondaries 1 to 3, pupils will receive a broad, general education. However, some of that learning will be highly relevant for the unit assessments that they will do in national 4 and national 5, which are being designed by SQA.

**Ken Macintosh:** Page 32 of the framework document says, with regard to national 4 and national 5, that

"Schools and colleges will have the flexibility to deliver 1 or 2 year programmes of learning designed to meet their learners' needs."

Do the pupils start that one or two-year course in S3?

**Alison Coull:** Those are notional times for the qualification. For example, the design principles for the qualifications give a notional time of 160 hours. The point is, however, that learning that has happened previously could be taken into account. Not everyone will need to spend 160 hours to do national 4 and national 5. The arrangement is flexible.

**Ken Macintosh:** I am clearly being obtuse, but I do not understand what you are saying. Either they start in S3 or they do not.

**Michael Russell:** To be fair, what Alison Coull is saying is entirely clear. The notional 160 hours may take into account work that has been done. The 160 hours is not absolute, and the concept of an exact time at which the course will be started is, therefore, not a fair one. There is a continuum of experience into which the pupil moves. The experience will be tailored to the child. That is quite fair and quite understandable.

You must also take into account the timetable that we are working to. The arrangement documents for the new national literacy and national numeracy qualifications are to be published next year; the arrangement documents for the new national 4 and national 5 documents are to be published in 2012; and the first certification of national 4 and national 5 will be in 2014. What we have here is an operational framework that involves an expectation that there will be a continuous process and an acceptance that the 160 hours is a target but that there will be flexibility around that target. As that process deepens and is finished, you will get your absolute. What we are clear about, however, is the continuous nature of the process.

With regard to whether you understand what Alison Coull is saying, I would say that the premise of your question is not entirely accurate with regard to what we are trying to achieve in the curriculum for excellence.

**Ken Macintosh:** The premise of my question is simply what you have written in the document. You have said that schools and colleges

"will have the flexibility to deliver 1 or 2 year programmes of learning"

to deliver national 4 and national 5. That is what your document says; I am not making it up.

**Michael Russell:** I am not suggesting that you are making it up, but I think that we are at odds with regard to something that is not, in any sense, a real divide. I do not understand why you are trying to make it one.

**Ken Macintosh:** I am not; I am seeking clarification. I am a firm believer in the curriculum for excellence and accept its benefits and merits. However, I also understand that we need to take parents with us. I know that parents will be extremely concerned about the point at which their child moves into the courses that lead to the qualifications that they will need in order to get into university or get a job. That is a crucial time in a child's life. It does not matter how good their broad education has been up to then, it is very important to everyone that they get those qualifications. Parents will be concerned about divisions that begin to creep in with regard to who gets to go on which course and the point at which the course is selected. For example, are those who take the one-year national 5 course the ones who will go on to do highers and higher stills and go to university while the ones who do the two-year course will not go that far? That is the sort of question that parents will want answered.

11:45

**Michael Russell:** Okay, I am very happy to take that question and—because I think that the more

we do this, the less we communicate—to offer you the definitive view, which is very similar to the definitive view that I offered *The Herald* in a letter last week about the alleged reduction in breadth of courses, which is not true. However, I am happy to ensure that you get an answer, Mr Macintosh, in so far as—to make a general point—I have ever been able to satisfy you with an answer. In so far as I am able, I am therefore happy to provide you with a fuller and comprehensive explanation of the matter. Indeed, I may well ask the management board to provide an answer for you so that you understand where we are.

**Ken Macintosh:** Well, I look forward to that. I find it worrying, to be honest with you—this is at the heart of my worries about curriculum for excellence—that, at this stage, you as minister do not have answers to these questions, which are crucial. This is all about leadership and clarity. If I may say so, these questions were raised three or four years ago when we discussed the curriculum for excellence. These questions are at the heart of the difficulties between a subject-based, exam-dominated curriculum and a broad-based curriculum. They are therefore not new questions: we have been asking them repeatedly for years. Pardon me if I look forward to the answer, but I am disappointed that you do not have the answer now, minister. To put it in an easier way: do you think that any pupil will sit an externally moderated exam before the end of S3?

**Michael Russell:** It is possible, but not likely.

**Ken Macintosh:** Okay. So, the chances are that their exam choice will happen only in S4—

**Michael Russell:** No, not necessarily. What I am disappointed with, Mr Macintosh, to be straight with you—I will be very constructive about this, convener—is that you claim, which I do not dispute, to be in support of curriculum for excellence, but you singularly fail to understand the process that is being gone through in building a new approach to education. I commend to you again Don Ledingham's article, which I will circulate. He analyses very carefully what we need in terms of support and enthusiasm for curriculum for excellence. When you say that you are worried that I am not able to answer your question, what you are actually doing is implying that there is a failure to deliver curriculum for excellence from this Government, which you would not have been responsible for, had you been in Government. I think that that is regrettable, because what we are trying to do is find a way to listen to the management board, all the unions involved and all concerned to ensure that their concerns are taken on board and to plan a process that delivers within a clear timetable, which has not changed—well, it changed once in that it was agreed to move it a year because of concerns. I would genuinely like

genuine concerns to be part of the process of solving problems rather than part of the process of political fighting about the matter, which will not help curriculum for excellence. To be fair, I think that most of the questions that I have had have not been of that regard, but I do think, Mr Macintosh, that your question is of that regard.

**Ken Macintosh:** Well, cabinet secretary, I am sorry, but I have been asking these questions for years. There were several years when you were not in the Parliament, but most of us have been going to our schools and promoting curriculum for excellence in all that time. Some of us have been championing this cause since long before your new-found enthusiasm for it. If I may say so, the drift in curriculum for excellence over the past two years is very worrying. Because of lack of clarity and leadership at the top, teachers are becoming demoralised and lack enthusiasm for something that they embraced just two years ago. It is very important that leadership is shown from you and your department, because these questions are absolutely begging to be answered right now. Our children are about to start curriculum for excellence in the next year or so, and we are very worried. Now, if I may say so—

**Michael Russell:** The first exam that you are referring to will take place in 2013—let us put the matter in context, Mr Macintosh. Now, I am very keen that I show leadership for curriculum for excellence. I have talked about that a great deal in the past two months. I am very keen that we get clear answers for classroom teachers and listen to what they say. I am very keen that the concerns that they express—I accept entirely that they do express them; as I said in answer to Margaret Smith, I am very clear about that. We need to give answers to them. However, the record will show that I have offered you the opportunity twice in this meeting to participate fully: first, with the Donaldson review, but you rejected that; then I said that we will get you the clearest answer to your question and get the management board involved, but you rejected that.

I hope that you will reconsider your decision, be part of the process and engage in a dialogue with the management board, which I will ask to answer your question. You may find me to be inadequate—I am used to that, as I have experienced that from you for a long time—but I will not have the management board undermined in the work that it is doing. It must get on with its work. I hope that, when giving its answer, it will listen to your concern, but I also hope that you will listen to the board.

**Ken Macintosh:** I thank the cabinet secretary for his replies. I seriously object not to his inadequacy but to his patronising tone. I do not need an invitation to give evidence on the matter

to the Donaldson review or anything else. My questions are directed not to the Donaldson review or the management board but to the cabinet secretary, who is in charge of this matter, in theory. I would like to hear his views—not the board's views. Is there a parent representative on the board?

**Jackie Brock:** No. A group of other folk—the stakeholder group—is involved. That group will meet the cabinet secretary shortly and will continue to do so regularly.

**Ken Macintosh:** Does the cabinet secretary think that it is acceptable for parents not to be represented on the board? Does he intend to address that issue?

**Michael Russell:** I do, because I have already had conversations about how we can involve a wider group of people—not just teachers and parents—in the process. I made that clear at a stakeholder meeting that I held at Heriot-Watt University on 16 December. We have on the group—

**Kenneth Gibson:** There is—

**The Convener:** It is questions to the cabinet secretary, not questions to the deputy convener of the committee.

**Michael Russell:** There is no parent representative on the stakeholder group, but there is one on the other group. Ken Macintosh asks a fair question. I have expressed that concern at a stakeholder meeting and will do so again.

**Kenneth Gibson:** I was going to make the point that a number of parents are members of the stakeholder group.

**The Convener:** I understand that you are seeking to be helpful, but it is not practice for committee members to jump in when they feel like it. Members indicate that they wish to speak, and the convener decides whether to allow them to do so. I ask Mr Macintosh to conclude his questions.

**Ken Macintosh:** I look forward to hearing a more detailed response, especially on the issue of when pupils will start their national 4 and 5 qualifications.

**Michael Russell:** You will receive the fullest response on that issue.

**Ken Macintosh:** I thank the cabinet secretary for all of his answers this morning.

**Margaret Smith:** My contribution may not be helpful, now that peace has broken out between the cabinet secretary and Mr Macintosh. However, it is not helpful for the cabinet secretary to attack people for looking at the issue in a party-political way, as we are genuinely not doing that.



At the beginning of the meeting, you said that it was time to move from principles to putting principles into practice. With the greatest respect, Ken Macintosh's questions were the kind of questions that the average parent would ask: what will the curriculum mean in real terms, when will it mean it, and what will it mean when the assistant rector of a high school tells a parent what is and is not possible within its timetable? In a busy high school, there is not the same flexibility, because the practical realities of running such a school infringe on the principles.

No one has a problem with flexibility and the principles—we have a problem with the fact that it is long past the time when we should have been able to move with confidence into the practical reality of what the curriculum means for pupils, parents, teachers and so on. It is a real frustration that we are not yet at that point. Some of the questions that Mr Macintosh asked are exactly the kind of questions to which parents want answers. It may be two or three years before someone's child sits an exam, but they are on a journey. The educational journey of people's children is one of the most important things in their lives; they do not expect to start off not knowing the basics of where their children will end up.

**Michael Russell:** I am with you on three quarters of that.

**Margaret Smith:** That is more than most people usually are with me.

**Michael Russell:** I would say that I have often been with you—at least in three quarters of your argument.

As I said, I am with you on three quarters of what you said. I am certainly with you on the fact that we need more detail, but equally we are talking about a process and it is not possible to fill in every detail of the process at this stage. There are of course areas that I would like to know more about, and the officials will know that I am constantly asking questions about them. We need to know more and we need more detail, and it is frustrating not to have it.

If I may say this in passing, convener, the difficulty that I had with Mr Macintosh's question was not the fact of the question but that none of the answers appeared to be being listened to. I am very keen that we engage on the basis that we find out what we do not know as soon as possible and that—the issue has been raised before—we keep parents closely informed. However, we must also engage on the basis that the curriculum for excellence is something that we all need to get right and that we will work together on it.

I am happy to do that, and I have given every assurance that members have asked for. We need to ensure that our knowledge is as complete as it

could be at this stage of the process. This will not be the only time that I come to committee to talk about curriculum for excellence, and I hope that, every time that I am here, we will be filling in all the detail that we can in the context of introducing something that will be very good for Scotland's young people and very important for the quality of what we are trying to deliver.

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie)**

**(Lab):** The draft programme framework for January 2009 noted that the assessment framework was due to be published in July 2009. As we know, the document was eventually published in January 2010, although a principles document was published in September 2009. Will you give us a stage-by-stage explanation of why we ended up with that delay and, in particular, why there was a final delay? At one point, the document was due to come out in December but then came out in January.

**Michael Russell:** I am probably responsible for the last delay, because having come into office I wanted the opportunity to look at the document to ensure that I understood it. I cannot give you a blow-by-blow account of the other delays, but as I indicated in my earlier statement I think that it is important that the timetables that we are now setting are adhered to and I will do everything that I can to adhere to those timetables. That is important. The teaching profession and parents expect us to provide the information timeously and in a form that they can understand.

**Des McNulty:** Looking forward, do you have any contingency plans for the phased implementation dates arising from the delay that we have experienced?

**Michael Russell:** I made it clear at the beginning, and I will make it clear again now, that I am listening to the management board. If it thought that that was an issue, I would want it to tell me as soon as possible. As is the case for all other issues, if the board—my professional advisers—thinks that there is an issue in the timetable for implementation, I will take that opinion very seriously. I will obviously come to my own judgment about whether there is an issue, but it is important that I listen to the board.

**Jackie Brock:** Again, I can provide a little more detail. Each meeting of the management board discusses a risk register, which includes contingencies. That is published on the website—it is publicly available information. On the basis of that, a report is submitted regularly to ministers, which is part of the evidence that the cabinet secretary looks at in considering the progress of the programme.

**Des McNulty:** Do you expect contingency arrangements to be an item on a forthcoming management board meeting agenda?

**Michael Russell:** I have specifically asked the management board to consider the issue at its next meeting, and I look forward to its response.

**Des McNulty:** I have some questions about governance. You referred to the advisory role of the management board in the process. There might be some questions about it—for example, whether additional groups might be represented—but it seems a broadly based grouping. I am interested in who is in day-to-day charge of the implementation process. Obviously, as minister, you have political oversight, but which individual or team is responsible for driving the implementation, and what skills and qualifications mix do they have?

12:00

**Michael Russell:** It is a collaborative enterprise, although I would not say anything other than that I am ultimately responsible for ensuring that the curriculum for excellence is delivered, as my predecessor was. There is a strong civil service team, some of whom are with me today. The management board advises on the issue. Work is being done in every local authority. Learning and Teaching Scotland has an important role in relation to materials. However, the ultimate decision on how and when the curriculum for excellence is implemented lies with me.

**Des McNulty:** I understand that, but, as you said and as is agreed generally, the curriculum for excellence is a major change that is being driven through the Scottish education system, with wide ramifications. With a change of that nature, it is logical to put somebody in charge of the process. That job cannot be done by a minister—they have political responsibility, but the day-to-day management cannot sensibly be done by a minister or a board of people, all of whom are busy with other things. Who is responsible for organising the process of change and driving it through on a day-to-day basis?

**Jackie Brock:** To build on the cabinet secretary's response, it is a collaborative partnership effort. The Scottish Government has a dedicated programme management team for the CFE. In parallel, there are programme teams in Learning and Teaching Scotland and the SQA. HMIE also has a close involvement. The local authorities have teams that are working on progress in their areas and the requirements there. That is obviously part of the benefit of the 100 additional teachers that we have resourced in the past year. On the accountability arrangements and how we report to the cabinet secretary, the

core of the director of learning's job and my job is to ensure that we drive forward with reporting.

**Michael Russell:** I will explore Des McNulty's question a bit, as it has an interesting kernel. Are you saying that we need a curriculum for excellence tsar who can take complete oversight of the programme and report on a regular basis? If that is where you are going, I would be interested to discuss it with you.

**Des McNulty:** The issue that I am getting at is to do with the concerns about the early and medium stage preparation for the implementation of the curriculum for excellence. Those concerns are not confined to me—they are fairly widespread in the profession. We have heard a description of a rather complicated management structure that might well be appropriate at a different stage in the process. We are now at a stage at which implementation is vital. In that context, it would be helpful to have a clear sense of who is in charge of driving it forward, what resources they have and how the whole thing works. From the answers that I have received, I am not sure that I am clear about the process or satisfied with it.

**Michael Russell:** I am interested in the question, because it refers to an issue that arises when we have a collaborative partnership—which we have—and a strong commitment across the board. I pay tribute to the trade unions, the management and everyone else who is deeply involved in the curriculum for excellence. The issue is that the oversight that certainly comes from the minister could perhaps be more practically expressed on a day to day basis. That is not an unhelpful thought, although I am not sure how the collaborative partners would agree to it. It would be wrong ex cathedra to tell collaborative partners, "This is how we are going to handle it." However, it is worth discussing with the management board whether that approach would be helpful at this stage. I am grateful for the thought. It might create new problems, or it might offer opportunities for solutions. With your permission, Mr McNulty, I will think about it further.

**Des McNulty:** I do not think that you need my permission. There is an interesting set of ideas that you might think about.

You said that resources for implementation of curriculum for excellence have been provided through the concordat. You talked about additional activity and said that positive discussions were taking place with the management board and local authorities. Is the second phase of money ring fenced—you might prefer the term "hypothecated"—for a specific purpose, and will it be delivered to local authorities on a contracted basis rather than through a funding formula? Is the first phase of money hypothecated, or is it part of the general fund? How are you auditing the

process to ascertain that the resources that you said are being made available to deliver curriculum for excellence are being applied for that purpose?

**Michael Russell:** Let me deal with the money that has been allocated. The concordat is a relationship of trust and the meetings that we have had on it have been positive, so I believe local authorities when they tell me that they are using their judgment to apply the resource that they have to ensure that curriculum for excellence happens.

We think that modest additional resource will be required, which would be hypothecated—in the sense that it will be money that is paid for something. We are discussing with COSLA how it will be paid and whether it will be formula based or contractually based. The money will go directly to curriculum for excellence. I do not think that there will be difficulty between us and local authorities in that regard; there is recognition of what we are trying to do.

**Des McNulty:** Can you provide a written statement that sets out the moneys that are involved and the arrangements that are being used?

**Michael Russell:** On the new money, I am happy to do so when we have an arrangement. On the existing money, the individual local authorities would have to say what resource they are applying to curriculum for excellence. I hope and expect that resource to be substantial and targeted, but that is up to individual local authorities.

**Des McNulty:** We are talking about a process that is central in taking forward education. It is difficult for the committee to scrutinise the process without having the information, whether it comes to us directly from the Government or from local authorities via the Government. In the context of the audit of public finance and policy, it is reasonable for the committee to ask for a full statement of how finances are being provided for a central Government policy.

**Michael Russell:** Local authorities have not provided such audited figures before. I think that the committee would have to ask them for such figures, if that was appropriate. It might be entirely appropriate for you to do so as part of your inquiry into local government funding of education services.

**Des McNulty:** But you would not—

**Michael Russell:** I do not see how I could provide what you asked for, given how we operate. I do not think that it would be appropriate to do so, although I am prepared to consider the issue and write to the convener.

**Des McNulty:** In response to a question from Mr Macintosh, you said that pupils might do four or seven subjects at—

**Michael Russell:** I think that I said five or eight, but never mind.

**Des McNulty:** I wrote down four and seven. Perhaps I was imprecise.

**Margaret Smith:** You have a numeracy problem.

**Des McNulty:** Will a pupil's subject profile be to do with whether courses meet their individual needs, as I think that you suggested, or will it be determined by the school's timetabling arrangements? If it is the latter, will we end up with a postcode lottery in Scotland?

**Michael Russell:** We will not end up with a postcode lottery. You have taken Mr Macintosh's question to its logical extreme. There will always be a balance between what is provided and what can be provided and there will always be tailoring. Somewhere in that mix will be the answer for every child. That is how it is now and that is how it should be. The implication that that will change because of curriculum for excellence would be utterly inaccurate and I am sure that you did not intend to make such a suggestion.

**Des McNulty:** I did not.

**The Convener:** Cabinet secretary, thank you for attending and for your responses to our questions. The committee will reflect on the information that you provided. I am sure that we will return to the subject, because there is some way to go before curriculum for excellence is fully implemented in schools.

**Michael Russell:** Thank you, convener. I have found the meeting stimulating and interesting. I repeat what I said at the start of the meeting: the quality of what we achieve in curriculum for excellence will be directly related to the quality of the input throughout not just the education sector but the political sector.

**The Convener:** Thank you for those comments. I am sure that the committee will reflect on them. That concludes the meeting. I hope that members will have a good week working in their constituencies during the recess.

*Meeting closed at 12:11.*



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