EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 18 June 2002
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

£5.00

Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by The Stationery Office Ltd.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office is independent of and separate from the company now trading as The Stationery Office Ltd, which is responsible for printing and publishing Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body publications.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 18 June 2002

EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE
19th Meeting 2002, Session 1

CONVENER

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
*Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
*Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
*Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

*Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP)
*Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:

Keir Bloomer (Adviser)
Sally Brown (Adviser)
Malcolm MacKenzie (Adviser)
Lindsay Paterson (Adviser)

WITNESSES

Victoria Banks (Alva Academy)
Mike Baughan (Learning and Teaching Scotland)
Oliver Berrill (St Modan's High School)
David Caldwell (Universities Scotland)
Sam Cameron (McLaren High School)
Claire Chalmers (Dunblane High School)
Professor Joe Farrell (University of Strathclyde)
Lauren Grant (Alva Academy)
Paul MacDuff (St Modan's High School)
Ian Muirhead (Balfron High School)
Professor Michael Peters (University of Glasgow)
Nikita Scott (Alva Academy)
Iain Smith (Universities Scotland)
Lyndsey Sneddon (Alva Academy)
Denis Stewart (Learning and Teaching Scotland)
Catriona Weatherston (Stirling High School)
Professor Thomas Wilson (Learning and Teaching Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Martin Verity

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Susan Duffy

ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

LOCATION

The Chamber

Scottish Parliament

Education, Culture and Sport Committee

Tuesday 18 June 2002

(*Afternoon*)

[THE DEPUTY CONVENER *opened the meeting at 13:38*]

The Deputy Convener (Cathy Peattie): Good afternoon. I open this meeting of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee and ask members to ensure that their mobile phones and pagers are switched off. I also invite members to indicate if they are present as committee substitutes.

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I am here on behalf of the Labour party as a substitute for Karen Gillon.

The Deputy Convener: I welcome Karen Whitefield to another meeting of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am here as a substitute for Brian Monteith.

The Deputy Convener: I welcome Murdo Fraser to his first meeting of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. We have a ritual of welcoming people every time we meet.

Item in Private

The Deputy Convener: I invite the committee to agree to take item 5 in private. Item 5 is on a proposal for a committee bill.

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Deputy Convener: I am in trouble already, as I forgot to ask Karen Whitefield and Murdo Fraser whether they have any interests to declare.

Karen Whitefield: I have no interests to declare.

Murdo Fraser: I refer to my entry in the register of members' interests, but I do not think that any of my registered interests are relevant to the work of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee.

Subordinate Legislation

St Mary's Music School (Aided Places) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/248)

Education (Assisted Places) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/249)

The Deputy Convener: Item 2 is consideration under negative procedure of SSI 2002/248 and SSI 2002/249. The relevant papers have been circulated to members. I welcome Shirley Anderson, who is from the Scottish Executive schools division.

The purpose of the regulations is to amend the Education (Assisted Places) (Scotland) Regulations 2001 and the St Mary's Music School (Aided Places) (Scotland) Regulations 2001 in order to uprate the qualifying income levels for the remission of fees and charges under the assisted places scheme and the aided places scheme. Full details are available in the Executive's notes. Unless members have strong objections, I invite the committee to agree that it does not wish to make any recommendation in its report to the Parliament on the regulations.

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Deputy Convener: I thank Shirley Anderson for her attendance.

Local Government in Scotland Bill

The Deputy Convener: I invite the committee to agree its approach to the Local Government in Scotland Bill. The Education, Culture and Sport Committee is a secondary committee on the bill. Section 29 of the bill will temporarily suspend the requirement to advertise principal teacher posts as a consequence of the McCrone settlement. We will receive written evidence from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the teaching unions during the summer. If members want to take oral evidence, we should do so in September. I am interested to hear the views of the committee on the bill.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I suggest that, because section 29 is quite a small provision, it might be sensible for us to invite written evidence from COSLA, the teaching unions and anyone else whom we feel is appropriate and to set a deadline of before 3 September. If members feel that we need to hear oral evidence, that option would be open to us. As members' views may differ, I thought that my proposal might be the most helpful way in which to proceed. We will have a meeting towards the end of August, at which we can reflect on the responses that have been received and consider whether to take oral evidence.

The Deputy Convener: Jackie Baillie suggests that written evidence should reach us by 3 September, with the option of taking oral evidence.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I am sorry that I am slightly late, convener. There have been a couple of distractions this morning.

All members are familiar with the discussion and arguments that took place when we considered the School Education (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill about the need to change the law on principal teacher posts. I hope that I quote the Deputy Minister for Education and Young People correctly when I remind members of his advice that such a change was not necessary. However, we now know that the change is necessary.

I rarely support the arguments of Brian Monteith, but he argued that we should examine the entire McCrone settlement and I believe that there is now a requirement to restore public confidence in the settlement, which I have supported throughout. If the minister does not know what is required legally to make the McCrone settlement stick, the committee's duty is to examine the settlement and to restore public confidence in it. That could be done in a brief evidence-taking session on the Local Government in Scotland Bill. It would be quite wrong of the Executive to sneak the change in the law on principal teacher posts into the miscellaneous provisions of the Local Government in Scotland Bill, as that would mean that our voice was not heard.

The Deputy Convener: Jackie Baillie suggested that we ask for written evidence to review when we meet at the end of August. We must agree to a timetable. On 3 September, we will decide whether to invite oral evidence if we still need information. Does Michael Russell suggest that we take oral evidence?

Michael Russell: I am in favour of our taking written evidence, but I suggest that we need oral evidence to explore the issues properly. I am happy to support Jackie Baillie's suggestion, but I would like to keep the door firmly open to taking oral evidence, as we will all want to say something when the bill is introduced.

The Deputy Convener: That is fine. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement*.

Purposes of Education Inquiry

The Deputy Convener: We will take oral evidence for the committee's inquiry into the purposes of education. We will hear from several witnesses this afternoon and we will start with young people. Members have copies of the written evidence. I will suspend the meeting to allow the young people to take their seats.

13:45

Meeting suspended.

13:48

On resuming—

The Deputy Convener: Good afternoon and welcome to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. We are taking evidence on the purposes of education. You are very important witnesses. I introduce our advisers Malcolm MacKenzie and Sally Brown. They, as well as committee members, may want to ask questions. I advise our witnesses that, when they speak, the microphone should switch on by magic. Just relax. I understand that Oliver Berrill will make an introductory statement.

Oliver Berrill (St Modan's High School): I thank the committee for inviting us along and giving us this excellent opportunity. I hope that our responses are of some use to you. All of us have experienced the full range of Scottish education, from primary to secondary school, from the sandpit to the standard grade and from hopscotch to the higher. After many hours' heated debate, the common feeling is that the Scottish system is good at churning out professional, intelligent pupils. However, much can still be done to improve the personality behind the pupil. For that reason, we propose several changes.

The first change concerns citizenship. Knowledge of subjects is not enough; knowledge of society must also be provided. Successful schemes such as paired reading can help to promote the sense of duty and social responsibility that all senior pupils should have.

The second change relates to vocational skills. Too much emphasis is placed on exams and, more contentiously, national assessment bank assessments. There is greater scope for vocational skills in each subject, such as public speaking or personal skills. All pupils should learn social and vocational lessons, to help them to apply their academic skills better.

The third change is about Scottish identity. Without a world cup campaign to help the cause, much more should be done to teach about cultural and national identity. It is hoped that a sense of national pride will evolve into a sense of personal pride and help to produce proud, high-achieving Scots.

The fourth change concerns parental roles. Parents should have more involvement than just waking up their children for school. They should take a more active interest in school and be consulted on many issues, such as the enforcement of uniform. A close relationship between schools and homes would create a sense of community and comradeship between parents and teachers.

The fifth change relates to the pupil-teacher bond. Involving parents is not enough. Pupils and teachers should also have a better, closer relationship. Pupils should have a say in matters such as the appointment of teachers and pupil councillors should be more regularly consulted. That would counter pupil apathy and, we hope, reduce friction between pupils and the opposition.

There is no need for a radical overhaul of the system. Small, well-timed changes should create pupils who not only pass exams, but are proud, confident and well-balanced individuals.

Lauren Grant (Alva Academy): I repeat the thanks that Oliver Berrill gave for the opportunity that the committee has given us. As a pupil who has recently completed sixth year and is moving on to university, I can look back at my school career and, therefore, at the Scottish education system. It is important that people leave school with the typical academic education, but pupils should also leave school knowing their rights and responsibilities. They should know why they should participate and how they can participate so that they can become active citizens.

Schools must take into account the fact that job security no longer exists. They have a responsibility to provide students with transferable skills, such as the ability to work with others, adaptability, problem solving and communication skills. However, they should also teach young people values such as truth, honesty, respect, tolerance and compassion. Schools should give students opportunities to play an active role, not only in their school and community, but in their nation and globally.

My time at school has provided me with the opportunity to learn and to participate in all that I have described and much more. Schools must continue not only to meet the academic needs of students, but to create tolerant, independent young adults who will actively fulfil their roles in society.

Michael Russell: My questions are for anybody who chooses to answer. What has been the one most important thing from your education? How has that changed you? If you could put something

into the education system that is not there, what would it be?

Victoria Banks (Alva Academy): The single most adaptable skill that I learned from school was tolerance and a greater appreciation of other people's views and cultures—an appreciation of the diversity that is out there, rather than a single view. Citizenship is present in many subjects, but it is not emphasised as much as it could or should be. In certain subjects, it is an integral part of the course, but in others it is tacked on as an extra. Citizenship should be integrated into the teaching of all subjects.

Michael Russell: Who has a suggestion about what should be added to education that is not offered at the moment?

Ian Muirhead (Balfron High School): There is nothing seriously wrong with Scottish education, but it suffers from underfunding. I come from Balfron High School, which is a private finance initiative school. However, I believe that Scotland can afford to build schools funded by the public purse or public trusts.

Michael Russell: I should point out that I did not write what Ian Muirhead is saying.

Ian Muirhead: In 2001-02, Scotland will send £7.7 billion more to Westminster than it receives. Think about all the children in Scotland who are living in poverty. Think about all the terrible schools that exist. Think about the lack of resources. More funding is needed for many services. We can sort out the problem.

Michael Russell: I have never been so grateful to see someone in the chamber as I am to see Ian Muirhead.

Ian Muirhead: I have blown my cover.

Michael Russell: Do not worry about that. Are you all sixth-year pupils?

Lyndsey Sneddon (Alva Academy): I am in fifth year.

Michael Russell: When you consider first-year pupils arriving at your school—which may not be an appetising prospect—what do you think that education needs to do to make them like you? Does that just happen as they grow older, or does education do something to make it occur? Does education do that in the right way? Do you see what I am driving at?

Paul MacDuff (St Modan's High School): Exams make us mature more quickly and become better people. Most people say that there is too much pressure to do well in exams, but I disagree completely. If there were compulsory third-year exams, people would mature earlier. We would then have better pupils.

Michael Russell: So you want more pressure to be put on, rather than less.

Paul MacDuff: I am not sure about that.

Lauren Grant: I disagree with Paul MacDuff. In third year, pupils are not ready to sit formal exams. I do not think that exams get us to the stage that we have reached. People learn more through experience than from doing exams. They gain more confidence from experiential learning than from traditional two-times-two teaching methods. It would not be a good idea to put added pressure on people in third year.

Oliver Berrill: It is a poor first year who turns out like me.

The subjects that are studied are not the key factor. In 10 years' time, we are unlikely to remember what we learned when studying higher physics. I do not remember it particularly well even now. Pupils' development is influenced less by the teacher or the subject than by the people who sit next to them in class.

Michael Russell: That is an interesting observation. It highlights the communal nature of Scottish education—the fact that everyone is in it together. Is that important?

Victoria Banks: It is very important to have communal education, as it increases people's tolerance of others. If classes are made up of pupils of similar ability, the result is a two-tier system. The children who intended to go to university would be in one class, while children with practical skills would be in another. There would be no link between the two groups. Splitting people into classes based on ability creates a barrier in society. You cannot communicate with or react to people whom you have no experience of.

14:00

Michael Russell: Do any of you have brothers or sisters in the first or second year?

Nikita Scott (Alva Academy): Yes.

Michael Russell: What do you not want to happen to them?

Nikita Scott: I cannot think of anything that I do not want to happen to my sister. I hope that she is given many opportunities. The experience that I have gained and the responsibility that I have learned are the result of outside activities in which I have taken part, such as appearing before the committee. I have been to many conferences and belong to a challenge group that works outside the school. As Lauren Grant said, without experience pupils do not learn life skills, which they need for when they go out into the world. Schools often overlook that. Pupils need to learn how to communicate with other people. Schools can

sometimes seem to be concerned only with day-to-day work, but pupils need to learn how to tolerate and respect people.

Catriona Weatherston (Stirling High School): It is often the same type of children who end up like us. It is easy to spot the children who will become prefects and head girls even when they are in first year, as they tend to come from the same background. Children like us are the ones who tend to become involved in pupil councils and to take advantage of opportunities such as giving evidence today. Not all children are given those opportunities.

Michael Russell: How do we make such opportunities available to all children?

Catriona Weatherston: That is difficult, as many pupils may not want to volunteer. If people from outside came back to the high school and spoke to pupils at the pupil council and in classes of all abilities, that might make things more equal.

Lauren Grant: I agree. The situation may not be the same in all schools, but it is evident in our school that the elite people—the straight-A students—who work hard and get involved are the ones who are praised. That is not done intentionally; it just happens. Excuses are made for the people who cause a lot of problems for schools through truancy and that sort of thing. They are rewarded even if they are good for one day.

However, the school ignores the middle-of-the-road student who plods along, does not cause any bother to anyone and comes to school every day on time. Because those students are not first in their year, they do not get a prize at prize giving. If the middle-of-the-road students were praised more, that would encourage them to become involved. Schools should do that in first and second year, as those students will not become involved unless they are praised at an early age.

Paul MacDuff: If MSPs want all children to be represented, they should come to our schools instead of inviting a select few to come and talk to them.

Michael Russell: Quite right.

Murdo Fraser: I want to pick up on the point that Catriona Weatherston made. I do not mean to be cheeky, but it is clear that all of you are articulate, many of you are prefects and all of you are well turned out. Is there a class of people in the school system at the moment that does not get the best out of school? All of you are doing so, but are other people failed by the current system? If so, what should be done to make the system better for them?

Ian Muirhead: It is not entirely true to say that a certain class of people has come to give evidence. People may say that we are middle-class, urban—

Murdo Fraser: I did not mean social class; I meant that you are all confident.

Ian Muirhead: It all depends on the type of person. The pupils who are here are obviously hard workers. Perhaps we should consider whether schools cater for everybody. Do they cater for those who are academic and not for those who are more practical? Perhaps some people are less motivated because they do not see a future for themselves at school. That is why they do not participate.

Oliver Berrill: When it comes to exams, although the pupil is just one person sitting in the examination hall, the whole year should pull together to get each individual student the highest possible mark. I have begun to realise that, although in life everybody is an individual, at school it is possible to foster a community atmosphere in which everybody pulls together.

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP): We have heard a great deal of sense and a lot of good suggestions so far. I would like to pick your brains a bit more and ask you for practical suggestions that would help to realise the aspirations that Oliver Berrill and Lauren Grant mentioned in their opening statements. How do you suggest that we help disaffected pupils and their parents—the parent-school relationship was mentioned—to engage with schools? How do we promote the development of personal, transferable and problem-solving skills? How do we get a greater understanding of our national culture and identity into school programmes?

Claire Chalmers (Dunblane High School): One of the main things that needs to happen is that all those who are involved in making decisions on education—a fair few have been teachers—need to get back to the classroom and see what is happening, because they have been away for too long. Things change every day; no two days at school are exactly the same. Children might be doing the same subjects every day, but different things happen. The people who make the decisions should get back into the classroom and see what is going on.

Sam Cameron (McLaren High School): We should try to improve disaffected children's confidence in their abilities. Giving them the opportunity to come to places such as the Parliament and allowing them to realise that they can make a difference and be involved in their future improves their confidence and makes them interested in their future.

Oliver Berrill: One of the most important but simple things is uniform. If you were to wander down the corridors of our school, you would not be able to tell which pupils are getting five As and

which ones are really struggling. It is important that everybody feels the same. Nobody wears Nike trainers; nobody wears expensive clothes. Uniform brings together different social classes—those who can afford expensive clothes and those who cannot—and different academic classes.

The Deputy Convener: Everybody is nodding.

Victoria Banks: That would add to the community feel that was mentioned. Schools have traditionally focused on academic achievements. The education system needs to change to reflect the fact that everything around us is changing rapidly. I do not know whether changes need to be radical, but the system needs to represent the individual, rather than the collective group.

If you were to ask someone on the street what school does, they would say that it allows people to get the grades to go to university. However, school can lead to lots of different career paths. The different career paths that people choose are associated with social class or social standing. The way in which people are taught has to reflect that. If someone who wants to do something practical is taught academically, they will lose interest and drop out, because they will think that their opinion does not matter. They will leave school thinking that they were ignored and that they were not appreciated. They will not participate in society. They will not vote. They will feel that their voice is not heard, because it has never been heard, from the time that they entered education at the bottom level. That feeling will continue in their adult life.

Catriona Weatherston: We are all agreed on the importance of practical and social skills, but it is important that they are incorporated into subjects, rather than forming separate subjects. If there is a practical class and an academic class, universities might not accept the subjects that are taught in the practical class, such as social and vocational skills, as proper subjects and a divide would be created.

Malcolm MacKenzie (Adviser): Mr Muirhead said that some schools are terrible. What is the main thing that makes a school good?

Ian Muirhead: What exactly are you trying to say?

Malcolm MacKenzie: I am asking the question of all the witnesses, but Ian Muirhead said that some schools are terrible. We are interested in what makes schools effective. From your experience—not necessarily just from your school—what are the main characteristics of good schools?

Ian Muirhead: There are different aspects. You might judge the class or school on the building, but Balfron, for instance, used to have a rubbish building yet the school community was achieving quite well. Obviously, that has been enhanced by the new building. The environment that you learn in can make a school either good or bad. Some schools that you go into make you feel really intimidated. In other schools, people greet you and there is a respect between teachers and pupils.

Paul MacDuff: Schools are not about money. Our school is not in a great state, but look how good it is. St Modan's is a good school that has a community spirit. You cannot have a good school without having a good ethos. Everybody—from parents to pupils and from teachers right up to the Government—must have their say.

Sally Brown (Adviser): All the witnesses are now coming to the end of their school careers. People say that we are in a changing world. What sort of changes do they expect in the world over the next 10 years? What do the witnesses think that schools should focus on to help the people who come after them to deal with that changing world?

Victoria Banks: Schools used to prepare children for specific jobs in society that would be there for them. Now, school leavers go out into a society and world in which they will swap jobs many times and turn their hand to many different tasks. Schools need to prepare people for that by giving them transferable skills that they can take with them and use within all those different jobs. I expect that the most rapidly changing thing that I will encounter when I finish university will be that I may not do a job that my degree takes me to. I will need to adapt. That is what schools need to prepare children for.

Ian Muirhead: I want to pick up on Paul MacDuff's point. I agree that schools are not all about money, but we can do better. We have the money to provide better schools. You can have a great school community in a building that is not perfect, but a good building is important because it helps with your learning.

Let me also raise another point. We have talked about the how of education, but we must also focus on the what. Children will be the grown-ups of tomorrow's society, but what will that society be like? For instance, there is not enough emphasis on Gaelic and Scots. Those languages are sidelined and are not even offered in our school. We need to save those languages because they are part of the rich fabric of our nation. Scots and Gaelic are part of our cultural diversity. We need to teach children about all aspects of Scottish culture and society, so that everyone can integrate—whether they are Shazan Asif from the Buchlyvie cost cutter or one of my cousins up in Skye. It is important that we focus not only on the academic side of school, but on the moral and cultural side.

The Deputy Convener: I take the point about cultural diversity.

Nikita Scott: I do not disagree that people should learn about Scottish history, but we must also take into account the fact that Scottish culture is changing. Not everyone who lives in Scotland is Scottish. We have immigrants and people of many different religions. You need to know your own identity, but it is fair that we take into account other people's rights and responsibilities. We need to start thinking of ourselves more as global citizens rather than just Scottish people.

Lauren Grant: I echo that. I definitely think that our Scottish heritage and culture is important, but we should not be narrow-minded—we should look at the whole world picture. More and more, we consider ourselves to be European citizens rather than just Scottish citizens. I do not know exactly what will happen, but as the future unfolds that will be a growing part of our lives. We must look at the cultures of different people to ensure that we do not become narrow-minded and that we are tolerant of other people's religions and cultures.

Lyndsey Sneddon: I do not really feel that the need for Gaelic is important any more—

Ian Muirhead: It is pronounced "Gallic", not "Gaylick".

Lyndsey Sneddon: Gaelic was offered in our school, but hardly anyone took it up. In our new, modern world, who speaks Gaelic?

Ian Muirhead: "Gallic".

Lyndsey Sneddon: Sorry.

14:15

Jackie Baillie: I like the idea of being world citizens, because that makes us outward looking. Sally Brown mentioned that. Part of the reason for our being here is that nothing ever stands still—the world is constantly changing. In my day, there were no computers in schools. We now have faster communications and better technology. How do we ensure that the next generation is properly equipped for that changing world?

I want to raise two matters in that context. Many of you have talked about access to opportunity and how you have the opportunity to learn about and do different things. However, you also said that some kids who are not geared towards academic qualifications get left behind. Should we introduce vocational qualifications or do we place too much emphasis on qualifications? Is there something that we should do earlier on in the system so that people do not get left behind if they are not academic?

Someone said to me that we learn far too many subjects at school—we juggle lots of subjects and do not use them after we have left school. Should there be a focus on a few core subjects? Should we concentrate on the kind of thing that you have been describing: a wider set of skills, which are not so much about learning a particular subject and having a great deal of knowledge about it, but which are about being able to analyse, to research, to know where to go for information and to know how to use it? Would that be a better approach or do you like the current breadth of subjects?

I am sorry about the length of my questions.

Claire Chalmers: Education today is too much about spoon-feeding pupils on how to pass exams. It is not about educating them; it is about saying to them, "If you want to pass the exam, you will have to learn this, this and this." No one will be able to do that for us when we look for a job or when we go into a job. Education is too much about being told what to do, rather than about being given pointers on the direction in which to head in order to do things independently.

Ian Muirhead: I am not against the world citizen idea, but it is important to learn about our culture. That is not a divisive thing. Learning about Scottish culture will not make me anti-European. I am just as pro-European as Lauren Grant. The Labour party is always bumbling on about joining the euro, but has it joined the euro? No. How can Labour members call themselves world citizens? You are the ones who are backing George Bush. If he calls himself a world citizen, what sort of example does that offer us?

The Deputy Convener: Can we stay on the subject? We are considering citizenship and it is accepted that one can be a Scot and a global citizen. Does anyone else want to answer Jackie Baillie's questions?

Lauren Grant: It is good to have a wide range of subjects. I did not know what I wanted to do at university. It is good that I was able to do a wide range of highers, rather than just three subjects. If I had done just three subjects, it would have meant that if I had wanted to change my mind—to be a scientist, say—I would not have been able to do that because, for example, I had studied only English and whatever.

Although a breadth of subjects is good in that way, I agree that different, more general skills are necessary. I did higher maths last year, but I could not tell you one thing about it now. If the paper were put down in front of me, I would not be able to answer one problem. I learned things off by heart for the exam. I did not gain anything from that that I could take into the world of work. I cannot remember anything. I learned it so that I could pass the exam and get my higher. However, I gained from other subjects that I did, such as modern studies.

For advanced higher I did a dissertation, so I learned research and inquiry skills and how to conduct interviews, which are skills that I hope I can use in the world of work. Those skills must be emphasised, as well as problem solving and communication. Communication is a key skill, but I do not know when we are supposed to have the time to acquire it. If you want to go to university you have to get certain grades, and that takes time. I do not know how to solve that problem.

Nikita Scott: It is important to take a wide range of subjects at school, although you might not go on to use them directly in your job—you might go on to do something completely different. However, take a subject such as modern studies. I could do a job that has no relation to my standard grade or higher modern studies, yet I will take things that I learned from that subject, for example about respect for other people, into my work place. The subject has given me experience in that area.

Sam Cameron: The current subject choice system needs to be restructured. I am sitting advanced higher physics this year. There are two pupils—including me—in my class. The class is one teacher and two pupils, which cannot help the management of our resources.

One approach would be to have terms in which we could go to specialist schools to study the subjects that we want to study. Lyndsey Sneddon pointed out that nobody took Gaelic at her school. The system needs to be restructured so that the few teachers that we have teach classes of a good size. I sat higher maths last year and there were 30 pupils in the class. The system is messed up and that cannot be healthy for the pupils who are going through it.

Paul MacDuff: Sam is right; there has to be greater unity among schools. I want to do economics this year, but my school is not doing the subject, so it is looking into my going to another school to do it. Greater unity would allow that.

Oliver Berrill: We need to have an increased range of subjects, but we also need to teach the basics. If you look at the spelling of my speech notes, you will see that English still needs to be taught. It needs to be taught at an earlier age. Basic spelling should be taught at primary school, rather than jumping on to the more advanced stuff.

Karen Whitefield: I have a question on how subjects are taught, and in particular on the importance of learning together. When I was in sixth year, certain subjects were not covered in my school. The schools in Lanarkshire took it in turns to host sixth-year studies classes, so we all went to one school. However, I noticed recently that my local authority has pioneered remote access learning, in particular for Latin, of which there is little uptake. The subject is taught entirely via the internet, by a teacher in a classroom to whom pupils have remote access. What do you think of that? Would you rather learn together, in a class with other students, or via computer links?

Sam Cameron: I could never learn anything from a computer. I need to have the pupil-teacher interface. I do not think that subjects can be taught on computers.

Lauren Grant: Teaching in that way would create more barriers. I am terrible on a computer. If I had to learn a higher from a computer there is no chance that I would pass.

Victoria Banks: If you learn by computer you have no experiences with other people; there is no one-to-one interaction or communication, so you are blank learning. That is along the lines of being spoon-fed for your higher, but it is taking it to the next level. There would be no communication, so you would not learn communication skills. You would just be learning from a piece of paper, so you would lose anything that you might learn from communicating with other people and from being tolerant of the people in your class. You would come away with absolutely nothing from that—nothing transferable, just a straight higher at the end of it.

Oliver Berrill: Computers have always been heralded as the great saviour of education. It is said that they will be the next big thing and that everybody can stay in their beds in the morning and learn physics. However, consider how children use the internet when they are allowed to use it at school. They can be found on music websites and other websites that they should not be on. We are all supposed to have our own computers and e-mail addresses—and we do—but the number of sites that are restricted means that such access is almost completely useless.

Lauren Grant: That is so frustrating.

Catriona Weatherston: A lot of emphasis is put on information and communications technology in schools. Teachers are always talking about the number of computers that we have and the fact that there is a computer in every classroom. Sometimes, there are not enough text books to go round. In the light of that, the question that should be asked is how often we use those computers.

Keir Bloomer (Adviser): In the past few minutes, there have been references to spoon feeding for examinations. To what extent do examinations test the skill and understanding that is needed, as opposed to content?

Victoria Banks: Often, exams and subjects test pupils' memories rather than their ability to adapt skills that have been learned. I took physics and maths—although I do not like to admit that—and

there was a lot of blank learning. Formulae had to be learned and written out. Five marks would be given for a correct answer, for example. It was about memory. To return to what Lauren Grant said, I cannot remember anything from maths and physics. I took those courses so that I could get my grades.

There has been less spoon feeding in English and modern studies this year. The skills are more adaptable and what has been learned has been tested, rather than our memories. There are differences and barriers between subjects. Citizenship education cannot be taught through mathematics. However, examinations in general test the ability to remember things.

Lyndsey Sneddon: I thought that standard grade physics was spoon-fed to me. When I asked why that was the case, I was simply told, "That is what you need to know. Just write it down on your exam paper and you will pass." That puzzled me. If I do not know what something is for, I do not like learning it.

Relationships between teachers and pupils must be better. Teachers need to become more modern. I learn much more in modern teachers' classes. My physics teacher was quite old-fashioned and I thought that she was boring. Therefore, I could not stand the subject. Modern teachers are more in touch with modern things and they are better than old-fashioned teachers.

Ian Muirhead: Subjects are not relevant enough to jobs. There needs to be more involvement by employers, who will give people jobs at the end of the day. My brother passed his highers and is doing an engineering degree at university. However, when he comes out of university, he will find it hard to get a job in Scotland. Education is a link in a chain. Scotland's children should be encouraged to be more enterprising. We have relied on Japanese electronics firms, for example. If they move away, we will be in trouble. There should be more emphasis on starting up our own companies.

Keir Bloomer: You seem to imply that the sole purpose of the exercise is to help you to obtain employment. Is that your view of the purpose of education?

Ian Muirhead: No. Obviously, that is its main purpose. Nowadays, a person must be educated if they want a job. Employers look for qualifications. Education is also about social and moral development—going to school, mixing with other children and developing other skills. That is an important point.

Jackie Baillie: I want to pursue that point, which is central. What do the rest of you feel about whether you are being educated for life or for a job?

Lauren Grant: I hope that I am being educated for life. I want to have left school with more than academic skills. I hope that I have left school with values and the ability to respect others. The main thing that I have gained from school is the confidence to go out, be ambitious and achieve my aims. It is important to leave school with the confidence to strive to do better.

14:30

Nikita Scott: I agree with Lauren Grant that school educates you for life. If you do not go to school and get taught things, you cannot establish who you are as a person. Learning maths helps you to think logically and other subjects, such as modern studies, help you to think democratically and responsibly. School helps you to develop your thinking and make your own decisions.

Ian Muirhead: Ambitious is the key word. We need to be more ambitious. Scotland has one of the best fiscal balances in Europe, yet it has a terrible economic growth rate. I am not an economist, but the growth rate affects jobs and we have to fix our poor growth rate if the education of kids is to mean anything at the end of the day.

The Deputy Convener: We have talked about citizenship and people having responsibility in our communities. Lauren Grant spoke about our responsibility to other people and awareness and so on. What one message would you want the committee to put across to ensure that citizenship is explored in our education system?

Oliver Berrill: Our school has a very successful scheme of paired reading: kids at the top of the school who have done it all take on a smaller child and help them in a particular subject. Not only does that help the smaller child by building up their confidence and boosting them academically, but it helps the older child to learn responsibility.

Lauren Grant: You cannot tell someone to go out and be an active citizen if they do not know what citizenship is. I know that if I asked most people in my year whether they were active citizens they would not know what I was talking about. Citizenship must be an integral part of education and not treated as a separate thing. It is the same as educating someone so that when they reach 18 and have the right to vote they have enough political knowledge to make a good decision about their vote. They must have a basic understanding of that in order to make a decision.

Victoria Banks: That is true. Citizenship education and individual awareness should not be separated from other subjects. It should be taught as a part of everything so that children can see where it fits in with the other things that they do. It is hard to see where that could be fitted in to the education system. Many subjects address some of

the issues by making pupils politically aware and giving them an idea of what they are entitled to do when they leave school. However, not all children take those subjects. Perhaps it could be part of personal and social education or a similar subject. Citizenship is very important because it makes people aware. It could be taught as a core subject.

Malcolm MacKenzie: Generally speaking, would you like more say for pupils in the running and management of schools? If so, why?

Paul MacDuff: When a post needs to be filled in the school, a fifth or sixth year pupil should be on the interview panel. Some children are better judges of character than some adults because they will say what they think without political persuasion or background. The child will see a good or bad teacher.

Malcolm MacKenzie: Would you want a say on the curriculum? Oliver Berrill talked about public speaking as an important transferable skill. Would you like more say in what is taught?

Nikita Scott: It is important that pupils get involved, because it is their school and it is the pupils that have to learn the subjects and who might have to go on to teach other people. The rector and the teachers must recognise that we are responsible and they should take into account what we say. Sometimes the pupil council goes unnoticed. The teachers should take it more seriously and realise that we are not silly wee kids, but responsible young people.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you to all the pupils from Stirling and from Alva Academy.

14:36

Meeting suspended.

14:44

On resuming—

The Deputy Convener: I welcome Professor Joe Farrell and Professor Michael Peters to the meeting. I should tell you that this is the second day of evidence taking for the inquiry, and that members will want to ask you questions. Three of our advisers, Keir Bloomer, Malcolm MacKenzie and Sally Brown, are present and might also want to ask some questions. First, I invite both of you to take two minutes and tell the committee what you think we should be examining.

Professor Michael Peters (University of Glasgow): First of all, I thank the committee for inviting me to give evidence on an important national debate. I submitted three papers to the committee that examine the subject of educational futures and try to make a case for blue-sky research in education. They provide some background on the main international trends that impact on education and also consider what is meant by globalisation, which is a buzzword that has been used a lot in education and economic policy.

My papers also focus on the question of the significant changes that will be evident in the production of knowledge. The Executive has published several papers on the knowledge economy and education that emulate a number of other papers from around the world. Although the matter is very important, it has been interpreted in a number of ways, some of which are more benign than others.

Essentially, my three written submissions to the committee try to answer the question "Why educational futures?", argue the case for blue-sky research in education, accent the contribution of academics to the debate and make the practical case for a centre for educational futures. I examine the whole process of foresight that educational departments in the United States and the United Kingdom are implementing. Indeed, Scotland itself needs such a foresight programme.

Professor Joe Farrell (University of Strathclyde): I come to this issue from an altogether different perspective. I am grateful for the invitation to give evidence to the committee. I presume that the invitation was made because I wrote several letters to *The Herald* earlier this year that the newspaper chose, for its own reasons, to turn into headlines. In those letters, I questioned some of the educational standards that we have attained in Scotland in recent years.

One of the letters mentioned the fact that I have written a book about the Sicilian Mafia. Frankly, I found it altogether safer and a better guarantee of a quiet future to write about the honoured society in Palermo than to question educational standards and put questions to professional educationists in Scotland. So far no one has left a horse's head at the foot of my bed, although—God knows—it might follow from my appearance before the committee today. In some ways, I wish that that would happen, because it would clarify a few of the questions and unobtrusive whispered comments that have been made to me.

I do not want to sound like a Jeremiah or a pessimist, and I most certainly do not want to be branded as some form of conservative. However, I am seriously concerned about one or two of the standards that we are attaining. I am not going to pretend that I can talk across the entire field of education in Scotland—for example, I have nothing useful to say about science or engineering—but I am concerned about the literacy standards that we are now attaining. I seriously wonder whether the skills that we teach in our schools, and in consequence in the

universities, are doing the job that they should be doing. I wonder whether we are producing pupils and students who are articulate and who have the command of the structures of their own language that we expect them to have and are therefore in a position to acquire other languages. We live in an age of globalisation and growing European integration in which that will be increasingly important.

Without trying to be dogmatic or conclusive, I suggest that the situation has something to do with the examination system, and specifically the higher still examination system, in certain subjects. For instance, if it is the case that up to 50 per cent of the marks for modern languages standard grades can be given for an oral test that is prepared in advance, or that we assess such exercises as guided writing, where the writing can have been corrected by the teachers beforehand and then reproduced inside the examination system, I wonder what skills we are imparting and testing and whose skills we are actually testing in those examinations. That plainly has a knock-on effect at all levels of education.

I am not convinced that the matter can be answered by reference to rising grades in the examination system itself, because the standards that are applied by examiners are plainly adjusted according to their own preordained notions and are not implemented in accordance with some fixed and objective standard. Such standards are plainly and patently not there. We are now getting ourselves into a dangerous position and are suffering by international comparisons. The only test that I will put forward—amid all the surveys, ledgers, graphs and pieces of research—is based on my own experience and that of the teachers at every level whom I have spoken to. We have a variety of problems that we should address, and we should not delude ourselves that things are continually getting better.

Murdo Fraser: I would like to start off with a question for Professor Farrell. I am a Conservative, Professor Farrell, but do not let that put you off.

Professor Farrell: God bless you.

Murdo Fraser: I was interested in your view that we are doing less well in relation to international comparisons. What do you think it is about other countries' experience that makes them do better than Scotland is doing?

Professor Farrell: I am a university teacher, not a schoolteacher. I base my view on the fact that universities are now internationalised in a way that they were not even 10 years ago. Nowadays, it is routine to have in the same classroom students from different backgrounds, countries and cultures. I am talking about Norway and other European countries, rather than about other ethnic minority students, either from the third world or from ethnic communities in this country. I mean that we will have Norwegians, Germans, Spaniards and Italians in the same classroom, and I am talking in particular about the level of knowledge of students.

I am not suggesting that there is a deficiency in the national gene pool that means that Scottish students and pupils are somehow less intelligent or less gifted than their counterparts in other countries. However, I fear that what we expect and demand of them in examinations is substantially lower than what is being asked of comparable pupils and students elsewhere. It is Italian that I speak, so it is Italian that I know particularly well, but we could make the same point about other subjects.

For me, knowledge is at the heart of education. You may wish to call it skills, but I call it knowledge. I fear that the level of knowledge that we demand and the number of subjects that students can discuss with knowledge and authority is lower in Scotland than in other countries. Age for age, a comparison reveals a deficit in our students. I am not happy with that conclusion, but I feel that we should face it and see whether we can remedy it.

Murdo Fraser: I read a paper about standards of literacy. Are you saying that we should get back to basics?

Professor Farrell: I would be hesitant to use that particular phrase, and I can understand why you specifically choose to use it. Any phrase that contains the words "back" and "basics" presents a difficulty because the language is loaded. Whether we are going backwards or forwards, we are ignoring a number of fundamentals. In English and languages teaching we are ignoring the structure of our language and its grammar and syntax. That is not good for our young people's ability to express themselves and it is catastrophic for their ability to learn other languages. It is easy to give the impression that other languages can be picked up directly, but we must face the fact that it is not all just beer and skittles. Learning a language involves a level of dedication.

If we know about the structure of one language, whether it is English or Latin, that knowledge is invaluable in going forward with language teaching. That is basic, whether we want to go back to teaching languages in the way in which they were taught in some mythic golden age or whether we want to go forward in a different way. This country—by which I mean Britain and not just Scotland—is almost unique in having ignored its language to the extent that it has. That would be unthinkable in France.

The French are having a debate about education at the moment. At the forefront of that debate are not only the economic benefits of education and what should be expected of people at school and university in terms of their knowledge of science, engineering and other applied disciplines, but the knowledge of their language. France, with its history and culture, would be prone to thinking in that way. It might be valuable for us if we could revive that aspect of the auld alliance.

Jackie Baillie: I have a couple of questions for Joe Farrell. Earlier, we heard evidence that students increasingly feel that they are not being stretched. The system is geared towards exams and the students are learning by rote and not applying the knowledge that they have gained.

I do not want to pursue the issue using the language of back to basics, but I picked up that there might be too many subjects and we are skimming across them when we need a few subjects that can be considered in depth. We need to teach students how to apply knowledge, how to research and analyse and how to cope with knowledge in different forms. Is that your view?

Professor Farrell: If I have understood you, you have asked two questions. It is unfortunate and it is going to appear to be contradictory to complain about the standards of education in Scotland after listening to the intelligent and highly articulate interventions that were made by the witnesses who occupied these seats just before us. However, it is an odd thing to hear intelligent students continually complain that they are not stretched. A certain pessimism seems to have been built into our expectations of students, and that pessimism has been self-fulfilling because we have lowered our expectations of their potential and capacity to attain a high level.

My fear is—and I keep saying that it would be valuable to make an international comparison—that we are alone in that and it is not part of a global trend. It gives me no pleasure to say it, but things are worse in Britain—and in Scotland. A literacy programme is under way in England for people who are having difficulties with basic skills of literacy and numeracy and those that are at a higher level and that programme is reversing certain trends. We might want to do something like that in Scotland. I am not sure.

It is interesting that we hear that people in schools are sometimes bored and could be stretched further and do better. By asking less of those people, we have denied them the possibility of fulfilling their potential. English might be a good example of that, as might the teaching of languages. It was assumed that subjects such as grammar were altogether too complex and because they were complex, they should not be done. That is a strange lesson to be imparting if we are talking about citizenship. I heard the witnesses making the point that they wanted notions of citizenship to be integrated into other subjects. If we are saying that a subject should not be done because it is difficult and the students are not up to it, that is a dubious lesson to be imparting.

I am not sure about the question of having fewer, more demanding subjects. I suppose that I am a traditionalist or conservative in this: I think that there is an advantage in the Scottish system, which, unlike the English system, still offers a range of subjects and does not specialise too narrowly, even at the university level. In my view, there is real value in that system, which should not be jettisoned lightly. While keeping that broad range of subjects, we can still do things with a certain thoroughness, which I do not think we have been doing in recent years.

15:00

Jackie Baillie: I have a question on languages. It has been said that I speak three of them badly, but I did not learn them in school—it was entirely environmental. I was never taught grammar at school, but I think that I can apply my knowledge of those languages in learning other languages. Are you saying that that is not the case?

Professor Farrell: I hope that this does not sound rude, but you said that you speak three languages badly. Perhaps you could speak three languages better if you had studied grammar at the same time.

Jackie Baillie: Smart.

Professor Farrell: If very young children are given the possibility to become bilingual, that is a different matter compared to adults, for whom a certain level of slog and application is required. If adults want to develop a full grasp of a language and get beyond a mere functional knowledge—which will allow you, say, to order a plate of porridge in Paris, if you wish to do such a thing—it is indispensable to have a knowledge of the structure of the language, which is called grammar.

Sally Brown: I would like to ask a question of Michael Peters. You have provided us with three extensive, demanding things to read on this matter. As you know, the committee is concerned with debating what education is for. It does not come to that with a blank sheet of paper, of course. I take it that you have seen the consultation paper that was prepared.

In that paper were six themes. One is a structural theme, but I want to refer to the other five. Those are: coping with change and

uncertainty, engaging with ideas and values, keeping everyone involved with learning, promoting a sense of identity and developing necessary skills. What commentary do your papers give on that as a menu for what school education is for?

Professor Peters: I wrote those papers in reference to a general methodology for the task of considering the specific question of what educational futures we may confront in a five-year or 10-year time horizon. That is a specialised discipline and methodology. When we look to the discourses of futurology, to planning, to scenario planning, to the gamut of future-oriented methodologies, we find that such a task is very specialised, highly academic and discipline trained.

From what I have heard from the various speakers, in particular from the highly articulate group of students, and from the questions posed, the theme of coping with uncertainty and change is an important one. Designing national systems of education is a complex task. Like a huge oil tanker at sea, it takes a long time to change direction. This is an old metaphor used by one of the philosophers of the Vienna circle, but if you want to rebuild a boat at sea, you have to replace one plank at a time.

On the subject of national planning systems, I have just come back after a trip to China, where I spent 17 days talking about the knowledge economy at a range of Chinese universities. I have been invited back to Beijing to talk to the vice-president of the university about the national planning system and the knowledge economy. We can say that all economies now regard education as fundamental to the knowledge economy, as does Scotland. All countries are making the policy changes that are needed to cope with the kinds of questions that are outlined in the briefing paper.

A close relationship exists between some of the advanced economies such as the United States and the economies of countries such as China that are beginning to employ the expert services of people who can make a careful examination of the future. Countries want to build research capacity in order to investigate issues in an empirical way. We are not talking solely about an exercise in democracy or about research that aims to gather the views of all sectors of the community, although that is an important factor for democratic states. We are talking about research that aims to establish informed empirical and theoretical evidence and that points to the kinds of changes that the advanced levels of democratic states face in the next 10 to 15 years.

When people talk about change, they use buzzwords such as globalisation. They also talk about the restless process of economic change and the changing profile of knowledge production. Mathematical and physical processes, about which I have written, are one example of the areas that are under discussion. Down the line, in the future, we need to get an idea of how we might best encourage countries to take a scientific approach to areas that relate to change and uncertainty. When devising a national system of education, it is necessary for its policy directions to be well informed if it is to cope with change.

The committee also raised the issue of engaging with ideas. We heard evidence earlier about the effect of globalisation and computerisation in schools and about the use of the internet. It is clear that the changes about which I have been talking have a tremendous capacity to shape the future of the curriculum. One of the papers that I submitted to the committee was on the impact that globalisation and the knowledge economy would have in 10 to 15 years.

If the committee would like me to address those themes systematically, I am happy to do so.

Sally Brown: I will try to sum up my understanding of what Professor Peters said. You referred to a kind of strategy for the future

Professor Peters: Yes, indeed.

Sally Brown: You spoke about how it would be possible to use available knowledge and continue to build knowledge in your centre, or whatever it would be, rather than mount a critique of the themes that have been identified. Is that the case?

Professor Peters: One could also mount a critique of those themes. One could examine the kinds of debates that have been held on national education over the past 15 years in countries such as Canada, the US, Australia and New Zealand. Some of the debate took place in sub-sectors such as tertiary education. One example was the Dearing report of a couple of years ago—

Sally Brown: We are concerned about the compulsory period of education that takes place in schools.

Professor Peters: Sure, but there are relationships between those areas. A tremendous amount of expertise exists out there. We are policy-oriented organisations. Countries have taken a critical view of the whole process of foresight and what that means for them. The time is opportune for Scotland to examine the possibility of building research capacity in response to questions about strategic direction. It is useful to have a forum in which the views of a number of people are recorded. However, a theoretical and empirical direction needs be taken, one that is based on the experience of experts who have been engaged in the field for many years.

Malcolm MacKenzie: I draw attention to a quote from Professor Farrell's submission, but I address my question to both professors. I would also be interested to hear Mr Murdo Fraser's take on this. He told me that Mr Brian Monteith has gone to Denmark—but I am sure that that is not for the good of his health. Professor Farrell says that

"unlike our predecessors, we no longer have any shared philosophy of the objectives of education."

Does that matter? Do we need a shared philosophy of education? Could there be an alternative scenario, in which a host of schools would have different philosophies from which people could choose?

Professor Peters: I have heard from a number of sources that we are now on the edge of an exciting age of policy experimentation—in social policy, generally, but also in education policy. The key word is diversity. Diversity recognises, in the first instance, an emerging cultural pluralism in which there are several indigenous communities and emerging ethnic identities. However, the word "diversity" is open to interpretation. People on the right want to see it in consumer terms and translate it as the right of the parent to choose the education that their children consume. That is not an ideology with which I would associate myself. Nevertheless, there are social democratic forms of choice and diversity that would provide the kind of education to which you refer. Although there may be some general, national values within a set of parameters, it seems appropriate to encourage diversity.

Professor Farrell: I will answer that question in a slightly different way. I believe that—to coin a phrase—education abhors a vacuum. When there is no shared philosophy, invariably several pseudo-philosophies and surrogate philosophies that are not examined fill the gap. Unless we work out what we should believe in, a variety of unexplained, unexamined and perhaps ultimately untenable notions take the place of the philosophy that was once there.

As I tried to say in my initial submission, we have ended up with the notion—by the back door—that education should be principally, if not exclusively, about the improvement of the economic well-being of society. That notion has been expressed, in one way or another, by representatives of different parties: I have heard both Wendy Alexander and Alex Neil speak in those terms. Nobody will put it in crude terms and say that an educational policy has no validity unless it can be transferred into the economic or industrial sphere. However, no one would say that what we do in education can have no relationship to the needs of the society that we inhabit and that our young people will eventually go out into.

The surrogate philosophy that has taken over must be challenged and I am glad to see that it is challenged in the committee's initial consultation paper, which asks us to talk about citizenship and identity, for example. We could have a different and valuable philosophy that would challenge the status quo in our notion of educational objectives. The disadvantage of the status quo is not just that it is upheld by all the parties—that sets alarm bells ringing—but that, even though it has not been examined or subjected to proper debate, it has come to guide many policies.

15:15

Keir Bloomer: I, too, will quote from Professor Farrell's paper. Like Malcolm MacKenzie, I invite both professors to comment if they wish. In his paper, Professor Farrell says:

"the attainment of knowledge and the level of knowledge which our students currently attain … should be at the centre of our debate".

The young people who gave evidence a little while ago spoke about different matters—skills and personal qualities. They talked about communication skills, learning skills and being active members of a democratic society. In so far as they spoke about knowledge, they expressed concern about being spoon-fed for examinations. Are those two different education philosophies? Is it possible to establish a useful connection between those two points of view, and if so, how?

Professor Farrell: One thing that occurs to me in debates on politics, philosophy and education is that language has a limited shelf life. There comes a time when notions such as knowledge, which we could have discussed tranquilly a generation ago, seem no longer to apply or to belong to a Victorian age from which we all dissociate ourselves.

The term that is in vogue at the moment is "skills". If we burrow just a little, I am not persuaded that a gulf exists between the two notions. When we talk about skills, we can easily add the term "transferable" in front of the word. I am not sure whether what that describes is fundamentally different from the philosophy that you would all reject but that often underwrote the Treasury's appointment policies one or two generations ago. The Treasury assumed that if it employed someone with a solid grounding in the classics—in Latin and Greek—ipso facto that person had transferable skills, although that is not the language that the Treasury used, which would allow the employee to get on top of economic policy or any other policy.

I did not hear the whole of the young people's contribution, but I understood them to be objecting to learning by rote and to being spoon-fed for examinations. I doubt whether anyone disputes

what they said and that is not just because they said it. Simply being required to learn a number of grammatical rules, mathematical tables or chemical or other scientific formulae may be necessary to an extent, but it is not what we are talking about.

I assume that knowledge is involved with culture—not only literate and humanistic culture, but scientific culture. It means that we make some demands of people—and not only memory demands, to which the young people objected. I doubt whether anyone wishes to dispute that. I am talking about knowledge in a wider sense that would give people confidence of their place in society, whether it be Scottish society or international society.

People should also be given knowledge of their history, which requires some memory work. The extent to which memory is a separate faculty from the intellect and the intelligence is an open question in psychology. Is it not continually the case that people who do strong innovative work are also people with strong memories, who therefore have, in the terms that I used, a strong basis in knowledge?

Keir Bloomer: Before Professor Peters speaks, I will pursue that a little. You seem to say that what you mean by knowledge is a little bit more than subject content.

Professor Farrell: Yes. I would happily go along with that.

Keir Bloomer: Does knowledge have an added element of understanding?

Professor Farrell: To cope with some of the questions that have been put requires almost the ability of a Plato or an Aristotle. We could divide the capacities of the mind into understanding, memory and insight, but are those altogether different faculties? Is it conceivable that someone could do valuable work in a particular field unless they had knowledge of what had been done in that field in the past? That must be much more the case in science, of which I am largely ignorant, than in literature, but it is the case in both areas.

I want to refer to knowledge in a wider sense, not just in the sense of knowledge of Spanish irregular verbs, Latin accusatives or, indeed, chemical formulae. I want to separate that wider sense of knowledge from the spoon feeding or the rote learning to which the young people eloquently objected.

Professor Peters: Philosophers have had a lot to say about what knowledge is. The tradition of the philosophy of knowledge—or epistemology—goes back 2,500 years to Plato. He provided us with a simple definition of knowledge as justified true belief. That definition is still worth a lot to us, as it provides us with a basis for making a distinction between information and knowledge.

I see lots of official policy documents from countries that I visit in which those two terms are conflated so that knowledge is information and information is knowledge. Plato's definition—that knowledge is justified true belief—provides us with a basis for distinguishing what he called, or what is known as, propositional knowledge from know-how—knowledge of how to do things. We can also talk about other kinds of knowledge, such as theoretical knowledge or practical knowledge. The distinction that is made between skills and knowledge in most curriculums throughout the world is false, because skills are a practical form of knowledge. Skills are a form of know-how.

I have two final comments on the matter. First, in terms of educational futures, we need to concentrate on the skills of metacognition, as many theorists have indicated. We must give those who are able to learn the metacognitive skills that will enable them to establish themselves as independent learners.

Secondly, we need new skills for living in a knowledge or information society. We have to cope daily with information overload—a kind of saturation of information—because of the ease and efficiency of transmission of large amounts of information. Knowledge management is increasingly required. The question is how the individual, organisation or group begins to acquire the skills to manage the ever-increasing amounts or packages of information that come to us. In addition, how do we store, retrieve, process and analyse that information? We are faced with those critical questions for the curriculum because of the ever-increasing range of information that comes to us in a huge variety of different media.

Jackie Baillie: I have a question for Professor Peters that touches on something that Professor Farrell said. Increasingly, we find tensions between the view that education is for life and is about achieving the maximum potential for an individual child and the view that education must recognise the needs of society as a whole. Professor Peters expressed the interesting notion that the new currency is intellect, ideas and knowledge. He talked about research capacity and developing our knowledge so that we can be ahead globally. If you could do four or five things to our curriculum that made young people—some of whom we saw today—emerge as the knowledge champions of the future, what would those things be?

Professor Peters: My starting point would be a traditional class analysis of who has and does not have access to knowledge. The students whom we saw today—who were highly articulate and made some very useful points—came from a

particular background. Theirs were not the voices of the disaffected in Scotland's schools.

In the knowledge economy, we are faced with what Governments around the world call the digital divide. The old social democratic question about access to schooling is now about access to knowledge and information. I am talking about knowledge outside as well as inside the classroom. Many years ago, at the beginning of the information age, Marshall McLuhan said that the information level was higher outside the classroom than inside it. We must supplement classroom education in schools with informal and social education.

The digital divide and access to knowledge are critical. The committee's discussion with the students revealed their reluctance to take up the opportunities that exist for digital education. I was interested to see their reaction to digital education. I do a great deal of research and work on the internet. The internet can be seen as a series of spaces—gallery spaces, governmental spaces and library spaces. The full texts of all the classic works are available and new ones are rapidly being added. New kinds of discourse—forms of discourse that we have never witnessed before—are arising on the internet. A range of discussion groups, e-journals and e-publications have appeared. We are faced by some fundamental learning challenges, but we have not begun to develop philosophies or pedagogies that are appropriate for dealing with them or to think our way through them. We have not done so because we are only at the beginning of an era of experimentation.

A huge amount of information and knowledge is being made available to us. We can access that information around the clock, 24 hours a day, as individuals, provided that we have access to a terminal. Empirical investigation of the extent to which students have access to knowledge and information outside as well as inside the classroom would answer some questions that we are unable to answer at the moment.

I have given two responses, but there are many more that could be made. I refer members to the submission that I made concerning the future of the curriculum, which addresses some of the issues.

Professor Farrell: I would like teachers to be given an enhanced role and increased prestige. One of the most regrettable developments of recent times is that there has been a confusion of philosophy, to which Malcolm MacKenzie referred. Teachers have been the principal casualties of that confusion, as they have lost the precise role in society that they once had. We should be willing to listen to teachers, rather than to teachers' representatives—whether official or otherwise—when further reforms are introduced. That was not the case in the past, particularly when the examination system was reformed.

I suggest that enhanced prominence should be given to language in schools. I do not mean foreign languages only; I mean people's ability to manipulate and use confidently their own language. If that means a rehabilitation of grammar teaching—even if it means getting back to basics—then so be it. We can discuss the terminology later. The ability to use confidently our own language before moving on to other languages is indispensable.

Despite the impressive quality of the young people who were in the chamber this afternoon, the tongue-tied Scot is still with us. One of the reasons for that is that we no longer give sufficient importance to the use and understanding of our language. I hope that we can move on to an enhanced knowledge of other languages, because it is embarrassing to see on television during the world cup the number of people from other countries who can discuss in good English what is happening in their own and other countries. It is difficult to find people in our country—even perhaps in this august chamber—who would be able to speak with the same confidence and fluency if they were being interviewed in other countries or languages.

15:30

I agree with what Professor Peters said about the potential of information technology and the new computer age. If we are moving into a globalised knowledge economy, two things are required. I return to the point that Keir Bloomer made about the level of knowledge that we impart: information is fundamental. The issue is not just access to information, important though that is, but the knowledge that we start off with. The two points are hand in glove: command of IT skills and the importance that we attach to knowledge and not just to the possibility of accessing the knowledge. We must not say that it does not matter what the individual knows because he or she can use a calculator, a dictionary or a computer. They must have some knowledge of their own.

You asked for four points and I have given you only three. I will try to think of a fourth and post it to you, but at the moment those three will have to do.

Jackie Baillie: I look forward to that. I should add that, since Portugal was knocked out of the world cup, nobody wants me to discourse in Portuguese on any subject.

Professor Farrell: I regret that. There is still Brazil, of course.

Jackie Baillie: It is corrupt—I mean the language, of course.

The Deputy Convener: I am interested in the idea of the tongue-tied Scot and the number of people who say that children learn more when they leave school than when they are in the classroom. I will risk finding a horse's head in my bed and ask whether universities are still relevant. Are we moving towards a time when universities will be irrelevant, as people will be educated online and will not appreciate the value of higher education? I am thinking of other forms of education—those linked to training on the job or to academic information, but not to universities. I hope that we do not reach that stage.

How can we ensure that our children can access universities? Last year, during the Scottish Qualifications Authority debacle, the reaction of universities throughout Scotland was, "We won't bother about results; we will just take people in because we need to fill places." It will be interesting to discover how well those people fared, because the universities usually insist that our kids go through hoops to achieve the qualifications to get in.

Professor Farrell: I steered clear of referring to the universities, as I understood that they are not part of the committee's remit.

I regret that there has been a ministerial division in Scotland between school education and lifelong education, which includes university education. That is a reflection of the rather utilitarian, mechanistic philosophy to which I referred, according to which the function of universities is to provide research that can be applied to industry. I do not want to deny that that should be done, but it is not the only or even the main function of universities. I wish that overall responsibility for education—from nursery through to universities and as far beyond that point as the will of society or the Parliament wants to push—was under one ministerial administrative roof. I regret the division and I frankly abominate and deplore the thinking behind it.

The confusion that I was discussing vis-à-vis the teacher is infinitely stronger in the university sector. The universities no longer know precisely what they are supposed to be doing. Are universities intended to be involved in education? One of the odd things about that question is that the only discussion that is held is about research. Obviously, research has always been important, but it is now financially important, as a large part of the universities' income comes through the research assessment exercise, that rather bizarre legacy of the Thatcher years—if Mr Fraser will allow me to put it that way. The RAE has now become an end in itself and is widely derided, although it has to be respected because the universities are autonomous financial institutions and research is one of their sources of income.

What is required of universities? Education and research, of course, but it is too easy to say that those are two parts of the one continuum. Everybody knows that there are people inside universities doing one or other of the two. Very few do both to an acceptable standard, although there are some.

There needs to be some discussion of what we want, in addition to the separate discussion about the nature of our universities now that we have—as of yesterday, apparently—exceeded the 50 per cent access mark. In other words, more than 50 per cent of young people of the relevant age are now in university education. That will change the nature of the education offered, as everyone is aware. That debate is under way.

The debate that is not, but should be, under way concerns what society requires of universities first and foremost. Are they institutions in which young people are to be educated in skills or knowledge—whatever word we want to use—or are they research institutes? If they are research institutes, should we give equal value to someone who wishes to research the history of painting in Siena in the early renaissance and to someone doing research in naval engineering, which can be more easily and more identifiably transferred into something that will enhance the economic prosperity of the country? That is a question that has to be faced, but I do not think that anyone has so far been willing to discuss it.

Professor Peters: When we discuss the relevance of universities, we are talking about a set of institutions that are changing their form tremendously. Like schools, universities are changing their organisational form. In some countries, people want a seamless education system, with total transferability. In some countries senior schools teach the first stage of university subjects in order to promote that interchangeability and transfer of skills. The day of the notion that schools are compulsory, age-dependent institutions is over. Schools are being opened up as community centres that can bring in people who wish to learn for various reasons, both inside and outside school hours.

In this new era of policy experimentation, there are fundamental questions about the institutional forms that education takes. The relevance of the university is also being examined. I am aware of a little document that the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and the Scottish Executive have produced on technology transfer. It examines the ability of universities to engage in forms of enterprise that they would not previously be engaged in.

We begin to see the blurring of divisions between business and universities and between different kinds of institutional forms. In some instances, the divisions are deliberate; in others, the changes happen accidentally. I am in favour of experimentation and of examining carefully what new institutional forms education should take. I am also in favour of promoting the interchange of learning and knowledge between the institutional forms that education might take.

Nonetheless, the university has a critical role to play. We should go back through the literature on universities—back to Kant and the establishment of the university of Berlin in 1810 or to the establishment of the ancient Scottish universities. I note that the university that I represent was established in 1451. The notion of a critical consciousness role—or a critic-and-conscience role—for the university is involved in that tradition. A difficulty arises when the institutional boundaries between universities and other organisations begin to blur, as one must ask questions about the autonomy of the university and whether it can still play the old critic-and-conscience role that it used to play. Those questions are not easy.

The Deputy Convener: I thank Joe Farrell and Michael Peters for their evidence.

I suspend the meeting for two minutes to allow the witnesses to change over.

15:41

Meeting suspended.

15:44

On resuming—

The Deputy Convener: We resume our inquiry into the purposes of education and welcome three more witnesses, from Learning and Teaching Scotland. Our inquiry is school based, but we are taking a fairly wide approach. Members will want to ask questions. We have four advisers with us—Lindsay Paterson, Keir Bloomer, Malcolm MacKenzie and Sally Brown—who will also be able to ask questions if they wish. Professor Thomas Wilson will start with a two-minute statement.

Professor Thomas Wilson (Learning and Teaching Scotland): Thank you, convener. Learning and Teaching Scotland welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the committee's deliberations. The purposes of education are dear to our heart and we value the opportunity to speak to you.

Along with the parallel national debate on the future of school education, which was initiated by the Scottish Executive, the committee's work is encouraging a considerable number of people—including Learning and Teaching Scotland colleagues—to take an interest in schools and their role in society. It is encouraging people to reflect on what our education system has achieved and to think about the directions in which it should develop next.

I shall say a word or two about Learning and Teaching Scotland to help the committee to understand where we are coming from. As a national body that is sponsored by the Scottish Executive, Learning and Teaching Scotland has a wide remit. It is charged with providing advice to Scottish Executive ministers on all aspects of school and pre-school education and on the role of ICT in education and learning throughout life. Learning and Teaching Scotland also supports the work of teachers, schools and local authorities. We recognise that they seek to ensure the provision of high-quality educational experiences for all young people and to promote learning that is truly lifelong.

Within Learning and Teaching Scotland, the advisory council that I chair takes seriously its responsibility regarding the future possibilities of education and learning. We recognise that it is our responsibility to offer thoughtful, well-informed and independent advice to Executive ministers. Indeed, one of our organisation's strategic objectives is to foster and support informed debate on a long-term vision of the future of education and to encourage evolution towards the realisation of such a vision by promoting creativity and innovation.

Members have received from Learning and Teaching Scotland a short written submission and a copy of one of our publications, "Education for Citizenship", which was published in recent weeks. We heard the young people give evidence earlier and recognise that some of the matters that we have been addressing are perhaps better understood by young people than by many of us. We were greatly impressed by what they had to say. Members may want to refer to that paper on citizenship. We think that it is helpful in the consideration of the purposes of education to discuss how those purposes relate to the broad educational aims that are before us.

Our written submission consists of an organised set of notes, which have been part of the process of developing the advisory council's response to the first stage of the national debate. That work is not completed, but we hope to bring the first part of it to a conclusion later this week. The paper offers a sketch of what we think is the current landscape and indicates several key features—some international in perspective, some national. It also offers an overview of the way in which the advisory council's long-term vision of the future of

Scottish school education is taking shape.

We could probably say that our vision focuses on three things. The first is the need for clarity about the purposes of school education. We suggest that those purposes be expressed in simple terms, such as helping young people to do, be and live well. The second is the need for all schools to develop further into inclusive centres of learning in their communities. Schools should be centres of learning that respond to the challenges around them and are framed by nationally agreed purposes for education. We therefore value the debate. Thirdly, schools and teachers need to be well supported in their essential and demanding work. They must be acknowledged—this was echoed in earlier evidence—and valued highly by the wider community. They provide a public service that is a provider and broker of opportunities for learning. That is not an easy role, and they need support in it.

A clearly and widely shared vision of the long-term future is one thing. To rise to the challenge of providing it is another thing. The advisory council of Learning and Teaching Scotland is charged with both. We must give attention to how we can develop the debate on realising the vision.

We are happy to respond to questions, but we realise that the committee may be interested in the work that the advisory council is doing towards its contribution to the national debate. We would be happy to provide you with that written evidence when the advisory council reaches the conclusion of the first part of its work.

The Deputy Convener: We will take you up on that. The committee would be interested in that written evidence.

Irene McGugan: I am conscious that two words—"need" and "should"—were repeated many times in your written submission and the oral presentation that you just gave. You say:

"there needs to be clarity re purposes in education"

and that

"education should be about enabling young people"

to do various things. You also say:

"education should be for personal growth … should continue to play a key role … should be about inclusive centres".

You get my point. Is education about all that and does it do all that? If not, what needs to happen? That is what we want to know. How do we make education all those things?

Professor Wilson: In using "should", we acknowledged that, throughout our society, there is a true passion to make education meaningful not only for young people but for society. A number of imperatives arise from that. The work of the advisory council has tried to express what some of those imperatives might be. Our view is that they are things to which society as a whole would subscribe. We thought it important to set out in our evidence to the committee some of what we think are the imperatives that arise from the widely held belief that education and learning are fundamental to the nature of a society such as ours.

Mike Baughan (Learning and Teaching Scotland): There is an imperative on us nationally—hence the "should"—to develop a vision for education that attracts a broad consensus. Without that vision, we cannot come to an understanding of what sort of schools Scotland should have and, importantly, what sort of curriculum those schools should offer.

Part of the debate is to develop the vision for education in Scotland. It is a unique opportunity for our nation to hear a variety of voices and views and coalesce them into a vision that can be articulated simply and straightforwardly. That vision must be able to be understood by pupils as well as by professors of education, and by parents as well as by teachers.

To put it bluntly, we might arrive at a definition of the knowledge, skills, dispositions, capabilities, experiences and outcomes that we wish every child to have by the time that they leave school, whether they leave at 16, 17 or 18 years old. The vision must be a lot more than attaining a set number of academic qualifications. It should focus on the qualities and attributes that we would expect from citizens who characterise the Scottish nation. That immediately has implications for diversity being built in.

We heard from the youngsters about the importance of pupils who are leaving school being confident, creative and adaptable. As a secondary head teacher with 10 years' experience, I would be proud of any one of those youngsters if they were leaving my school. They were confident, many of their suggestions were creative, and they were certainly adaptable, as they adapted to the committee environment extremely well—perhaps better than I do. We want youngsters who are knowledgeable about their country but who are not insular, and we heard that coming out quite strongly. We want young people to be enterprising, but with a can-do philosophy, rather than saying, "I can't do this because I haven't got qualification X or Y." Building up a vision of education that encapsulates qualities and characteristics such as those is important, because we do not get off the starting blocks until we coalesce around some agreed statements.

I turn to the type of experiences that we want youngsters to have in school. To a large extent, the behaviours that we want youngsters to

demonstrate when they leave school must be modelled within the school community itself. That is the thrust that underpins the paper on education for citizenship that we have just published. Just as we cannot expect to foster dispositions of creativity and enterprise if we regard youngsters as passive recipients of knowledge, we cannot expect youngsters to leave school and be active citizens if they never get the opportunity, in the context of the school itself, to display and demonstrate those qualities that we associate with citizenship. We are almost going back to a reiteration of the Plowden report on education in the 1970s, which dealt with learning by doing, and we learn by participating.

On the curriculum, I believe that we have an opportunity to build models that reflect the best methodologies in pre-school and primary education. There are notable successes in those areas, where diversity and individuality are welcomed. Another precondition for the vision is a real buy-in by the community and a bottom-up approach to education, rather than a top-down imposed vision that has been articulated in committee rooms or in the corridors of Learning and Teaching Scotland. We need to listen to the pupils, to the teachers and to the parents. However, I suggest that we must listen to all the pupils. We had a highly articulate group of youngsters with us today. Twenty years ago, there was a publication called "Tell Them From Me", which will certainly be familiar to some of the expert witnesses. It was published in 1980 and contains the voices of youngsters who were disaffected and disappointed by their school experience. Some of the statements that were made in "Tell Them From Me" echo statements that we could hear today from some of our youngsters.

That takes us into the challenges for the curriculum. Implicit in the structure of the curriculum, particularly in secondary schools, is the one-size-fits-all mentality. That mentality is reflected in the structures that are outlined in the current secondary guidelines, with coverage of eight modal areas and principles of breadth, balance, coherence and continuity. Those are fine principles underpinning the curriculum, and there are good reasons for them being there to support the concept of a common entitlement for all youngsters, a fair deal for all and the rejection of the old divide between what used to be called certificated and non-certificated pupils. However, there are big limitations in that framework, one of which is the lack of connectivity and the perception of a fragmented curriculum that many youngsters have. They ask about how those areas can connect, but it need not be that way.

The primary curriculum is built on similar principles of areas of knowledge, but a single teacher provides connectivity between them in the context of the classroom. A possible way forward would be to build on the concept of teaching teams, which could be small in number and cover a range of subjects and curriculum areas but which would operate as cohesive units and be responsible for a group of pupils whom they know really well. Such teams could operate across the 10 to 14 divide.

No doubt the committee will have heard evidence about lack of attainment and progression at S1 and S2. That is an issue, or refrain, that has been coming to the fore throughout the past decade. If we do not take the opportunity that is afforded by the debate to highlight the issue and to suggest ways forward, we are in danger of looking back at the end of the next decade and asking why we did not take that opportunity. That is one suggestion.

16:00

Such a structure does not require new school buildings; it requires new attitudes and the removal of the barriers that are associated with the registration of teachers, for example. There is no reason why much greater choice, diversity and flexibility should not be introduced into the post-14 curriculum. A core curriculum time could be retained and that would allow students to engage in the wider experiences that school should offer, such as physical activity, community links, and supported study.

Perhaps, once and for all, we could stop calling such activities extra-curricular, as if they were a bolt-on to the curriculum whereby, by fortune of geography or circumstance, some pupils gain a wealth and richness of experience that is denied to others. If we are using the language of entitlement and curriculum breadth, we must address the issue of richness of experience that we heard the youngsters commenting on when they gave evidence to the committee.

Murdo Fraser: I read something interesting in your written evidence to the committee:

"In a nutshell, education should be for personal growth, for work and for citizenship".

How well are we doing with each of those areas? How well are we doing in comparison with other European countries?

Professor Wilson: It is difficult to answer that question in those terms. In the evidence that the committee took earlier, the young people indicated that Scottish education is achieving a great deal. For many of our pupils and schools, the experience is satisfying and it contributes to those three broad aims, which are part and parcel of the objectives of Scottish education.

However, our evidence has already mentioned the disaffected. From their standpoint, we would have to say that we are not achieving as we should and that there are noticeable areas in which we are not achieving. One example of that is the young male in secondary school. For many such young men, those three aims are perhaps not being met as we would desire.

I offer no generalisation. There are many examples of good experiences and some experiences are not so good. That would be so across Europe.

Denis Stewart (Learning and Teaching Scotland): Tom Wilson is right. There is a limit to the detail that we can give in answer to your question. A general answer would be that, in many ways, our schools are doing an excellent job. In relation to each of those three aims, no one could suggest that good things are not happening for many young people; perhaps good things are happening for all young people, although there are problems.

In a sense, the purposes to which you alluded are not new. They have often been expressed in the past. Perhaps one of the future challenges for us is to relate those purposes to what we regard as the desirable outcomes of young people's learning as we plan our future curriculum. What key experiences should young people have in order to achieve those outcomes? What are the requisite qualities of the context in which they are learning? Mike Baughan touched on those issues earlier.

There are great challenges for us to improve on what we have got, however good it might be. For example, in the qualifications system, I suggest that we have to look critically at what we are asking young people to learn against the framework of those three important purposes. The purposes have been articulated, but perhaps we need not only to articulate and promote them, but to have consistency between those purposes and what we provide for young people.

Lindsay Paterson (Adviser): I am interested in the phrase that Murdo Fraser quoted, which was from section 2.1 of the LTS submission:

"education should be for personal growth".

However, section 2.2 states that schools should convey

"a sense of social cohesion and shared culture".

Nowhere in the submission or in other LTS documents are questions asked about the conflicts between individual growth and a shared culture. Using citizenship terms, that can be expressed as the conflict between citizenship as a duty and citizenship as a right to criticise, including, of course, the right to criticise the institution of Parliament and, I suppose, professors of education.

I would be interested to know how LTS would resolve those conflicts. I do not mean resolve in the bureaucratic sense of writing down guidelines that state that schools should promote personal growth and a shared culture, as the LTS submissions states. The question is how, in practice, a teacher who is faced with rebellious and disaffected 15-year-old males tells them that what they ought to be socialised into is a common culture, when they do not see that culture as having served them in any way at all.

Professor Wilson: Those issues are not only for Scotland; they are reflected across western Europe and beyond. They are one of the dilemmas that advanced societies are facing. There is recognition that individuals have rights, no matter their age. I think that all of us who are of mature years find that a little difficult to come to terms with. However, United Nations work on the rights of children states that children have rights no matter how young they are. Our society must come to terms with the fact that those rights might find expression not necessarily in strengthening what we hold dear, but in challenging those things.

The terms that we use in our paper on citizenship, however, recognise that that degree of conflict is essential if we are to make progress. Dealing with alienation is a difficult aspect of that conflict. I do not use "conflict" in a completely negative sense. Conflict has positive aspects, but alienation is perhaps among the negative aspects.

We must understand and agree that alienation may not be the product of what education has done to young people. However, we must recognise that education is part of the scene that should be influential on both the learner and those who, like us, are engaged in the learning process.

One lesson that I think is clear in the citizenship document is that we should be careful to ensure that education is not something that we do to young people, but something that we do in partnership with them. Part of finding the way forward to face the dilemma that Lindsay Paterson rightly pointed out lies in our developing that line of argument. How can we work with young people so that we respond to their challenges? Perhaps when we respond to them they will recognise that they have a major contribution to make, with us, to the nature of the society in which we live.

Keir Bloomer: The committee's inquiry is specifically about the purposes of education. In the past 18 months, for the first time, Scotland has had, in the shape of the national priorities, a statement of the purposes of education. That is one of the features of the landscape, to use Tom Wilson's phrase. The national priorities are

referred to in the LTS submission:

"the relative importance of, and relationships between, the five NPs".

Can you expand on what you regard as the "relative importance" and the "relationships"?

Mike Baughan: Perhaps the structure of the five priorities is unfortunate, because there is an implicit feeling that there is numerical weighting.

National priority 1 is about achievement and attainment. Because it is the first priority on the list, it is perceived as the most important. It could be useful to send out the message that the priorities are interrelated and that none of them is predominant. However, that is not necessarily the message that comes down to the schools or that reaches young people. If we are to talk seriously about

"education for personal development, for work and for citizenship"

all the priorities have to be seen as important. If schools are receiving a subliminal message that the be-all and end-all is achieving five higher grade passes at grade A to gain entrance to university, that message has a powerful effect on the ethos of the school.

We have five national priorities, but they are not related to a coherent articulated vision for education. There are clear national priorities, but the priorities should not arise from what we hope we will achieve as a result of the debate. I am not decrying in any way the usefulness of the priorities, but I question the order that they are in. We will have an opportunity to revisit those priorities once a consensus has been established by the outcome of the debate.

Sally Brown: Not only do we have the national priorities, but we have the consultation paper from the committee, which identified six themes. One would say that that is a suggestion of what education is for.

The first five themes are coping with change and uncertainty; engaging with ideas and values; keeping everyone involved with learning; promoting a sense of identity; and developing necessary skills. The sixth theme is slightly different because it is structural.

Mike Baughan talked about the lack of connectivity in the curriculum. What is your reaction to those five themes as a framework within which the curriculum might operate in the future? We are looking forward, and we are supposed to be forming a practical vision for the future.

Mike Baughan: Perhaps I can take an oblique approach to that question. I look at the five plus one schemes that you mentioned and I could not imagine a vision of the curriculum, or of schooling in the future, without any one of those themes being articulated within the aims and purposes of education.

For example, we have to work with young people so that they are prepared for change and uncertainty. We have to work not reactively, but in a way in which those young people positively influence change as citizens of the society that we want to develop. One of the youngsters said eloquently that she did not expect to leave school or university and go into a job for life. People certainly expected that 30 years ago, when I began teaching.

I had the unenviable task of trying to persuade the parents of one of my pupils that an apprenticeship at the Caledon shipyard in Dundee at the age of 16 might not be in the best interests of their very able son. Those parents believed sincerely that shipbuilding would have its place on the River Tay for their son's lifetime. They also believed sincerely that the school was giving bad advice to their son by trying to persuade him to stay on at school and perhaps enter the profession with higher qualifications.

The concept is now embedded into our society that, in 10 years time, society will not be like it is today. We see that in the news night after night—when I say "We see that", I mean that the pupils see it too. If those young people are educated in schools where certainty is part of the environment, in the sense that pupils are told what to do in the true tradition of Scottish education—"A telt ye, A telt ye"—they might never have the opportunity to do what Professor Paterson has suggested: to challenge and to engage in all the tensions that are so difficult in any society. If that is the case, I suggest to Professor Brown that we are not preparing those young people for that particular outcome.

Another of the themes is keeping everyone involved with their learning. We are highly unlikely to keep youngsters involved in their learning if they see it as irrelevant to them, or if there is no opportunity for choice in the curriculum that satisfies their particular needs. How do we persuade a youngster to engage in lifelong learning and to learn how to learn if his or her experience in S3 and S4 has been pretty negative? Such youngsters will come back to some form of education, but that might be 10 or 15 years down the line. We would like youngsters to leave school enthused about the experience of learning and having found it fun, as well as personally rewarding. They are then more likely to engage with and prepare for the changes that will confront them.

All five themes that the committee paper has listed are interrelated in the context of the aims for

education. You cannot remove any, although I think that we could perhaps add some.

16:15

Sally Brown: What would you add?

Mike Baughan: I would like to look at the very structure of school itself, the institution in which those qualities are to be developed. We speak about the comprehensive school, but perhaps we are using language that is becoming dated. Comprehensive education represents an opportunity for all to be included in a process, but "all" in that context refers to youngsters. Perhaps we should redefine the comprehensive school and broaden the concept of comprehensiveness to include the community in which the school is located, the adults in the community and the youngsters who have left school. We would expect such an institution to provide the multitude of services that we expect a state to provide for its citizens.

We build a secondary school at the modest cost of £15 million to £20 million. That is an immense investment in buildings. The running cost of those schools may be anything up to £1.5 million a year, which is an immense investment in teachers and other staff. I admit that, to some extent, I am parodying the situation, but a school is open for only 200 days a year between 9 o'clock in the morning and 4 o'clock in the afternoon, although some activities take place after school. We have to ask ourselves what sort of message we are sending out about an institution that costs so much to run and to build, but whose comprehensive scope is so limited.

I would certainly support comprehensive education being maintained in the sense of its inclusiveness, but I would like it to be expanded in terms of who is included and what that inclusiveness means. That might have been a linking theme, Professor Brown, in the points raised in the consultation paper.

Denis Stewart: I return to the five themes that Sally Brown has pointed us towards. Perhaps you are inviting comment on the individual themes. As Mike Baughan was saying, they are bound to be part of a future vision. One of the questions that I have is about how they are presented and how they are related to one another when we are trying to describe a clearly articulated view about the purpose of education in Scotland. I can see how they all relate to that issue.

I would like to make a couple of observations that struck me once I had read through the themes a number of times. Although the accompanying questions pick up this point to some extent, I would suggest that engaging with ideas and values should be an aspect of theme 2. Engagement with values and value issues is absolutely imperative in the world that we now live in. We need think only about the consequences of unethical decisions on the part of individuals to see how technological disasters can come upon us. There are really big questions about young people being confronted with value issues, recognising that they are all around us and affect us all, and finding ways of developing both their responses to those issues and their personal value systems. That is one theme that might be developed a little further.

Another point occurred to me under theme 5, on developing necessary skills. One thing seemed not to be coming through under that theme; something that is important for us all in our working lives, our lives as citizens and our personal lives—and I do not see a tension between those things in myself. That is the ability to integrate and connect things and to apply them, whether to how we understand ourselves or to some practical problem that you were trying to confront. I would suggest that it might be worth developing those two points further in the consultation paper.

Malcolm MacKenzie: I would like to take up a point that Mike Baughan raised on the education of boys. Boys have stereotyped views of what it means to be a man, what it means to do a man's job and what the masculine role in society is. That is not to discount the importance of the education of girls—one must be careful about these matters—but I live in and was brought up in Clydebank on Clydeside and have seen post-industrialisation there. There are still lots of boys who have images of masculinity that are inappropriate to the changing world, at least in terms of jobs and the sort of role that a man should play. Those deep, psychological, perceptual issues tie up with teaching and learning. Although I have ideas, I do not know how to solve those problems, so I would be interested in your comments.

Mike Baughan: I do not know how to solve them either, but I can make some observations. Implicit in your question is the understanding that schools do not operate in isolation, but in the context that the youngsters come from. So far, so self-evident. I do not want to get into the area of stereotyping boys and girls and the way in which they achieve or do not achieve in school. However, this morning I attended the launch of the national literacy and numeracy strategy at Ferryhill Primary School. It was significant that the head teacher could describe the reading attainment of the boys in her school as being well above the national average and certainly on a par with the girls.

Although there is a discrepancy in attainment

between boys and girls in certain areas of the curriculum, those gender differences have been addressed quite satisfactorily in many schools. I do not know the exact reason why that happens. I think that there are clusters of reasons, but there are also signs of hope, such as the use of information and communications technologies to support learning and teaching. Despite the rather depressing evidence that the committee heard from the youngsters who spoke today about their lack of engagement in ICT, there is sound evidence that suggests that young men are more than ready to engage with that type of technology and use it willingly to develop their learning.

A highly complex question has been asked, and there are whole clusters of suggestions that I could make. There are suggestions that schools are pursuing. In North Lanarkshire, work is being done to redress the imbalance between boys' and girls' achievement. In terms of the curriculum, the root cause comes back to what was articulated in "Tell Them From Me" in 1980. It is a question of apparent relevance. It is pretty hopeless saying to a young man, or to a young woman, for that matter, "If you stick in hard at school, you're going to get a job." If they look around a desert in their local environment and do not see any jobs there, they will immediately say, "What's this guy telling us? It doesn't add up. I've been taught to think, question and challenge, and now I'm being given a message that blatantly doesn't square with my experience." Built in to the whole concept of education must be the development of hope with the individual and the willingness to engage with learning, to cope with change and to say, "I can make a difference and be a fully functioning member of society." Pupils must be able to see themselves as contributing members of society, through paid or voluntary employment or by engaging with society through further education, but the hope must be offered within the school community. That hope cannot be built on some fallacious statement that youngsters transparently see is not true.

The Deputy Convener: There has been great discussion of citizenship and how that term is interpreted. There is also the recognition that the child cannot just be educated in isolation. I am interested in how you see the role of modern studies departments in terms of citizenship, in an environment in which the emphasis is not on modern studies and in which we are losing modern studies departments. I am also interested in citizenship in the new community schools in terms of the connection that teachers make with parents and the parents' role as partners in ensuring that their children have the tools to take their education a bit further. Some children return to homes in which there are books and expertise, but that is not the case for many children.

Professor Wilson: It may be a truism to say that schools must be a reflection of the communities that they serve. That point underlies much of what you said. If there is no engagement between the school and the broader community, a meaningful strand of development is lost that would otherwise offer young people good role models for how they can contribute to society and an opportunity at an early stage to make such a contribution.

It is important that schools constantly strengthen their links with the community. Certainly, our citizenship paper makes it clear that citizenship can be expressed in a practical way by pupils working, from an early stage, in a variety of ways in their community. Our paper also makes the point that citizenship embedded in the curriculum can find ways of delivery within a variety of subjects.

I recall from the earlier evidence that one of the young witnesses said that citizenship could not find any connection with the subject of mathematics. Perhaps because I used to be a sums teacher, I do not believe that to be the case. The themes that the citizenship paper develops can find expression in practical situations such as problem solving. A variety of issues in the paper can be dealt with by an approach that involves working with others to solve the problems.

The paper indicates, with practical examples, several subjects in which citizenship can find a context. However, I take the convener's point that modern studies offers a particular set of contexts and an opportunity to explore our society and what is happening internationally. Without that kind of rich knowledge many issues involved in citizenship might not be reached. I understand clearly the convener's point and it certainly is a concern for us all when doors, which might open opportunity to our learners, are closed.

Denis Stewart: I have an additional point. We need to hold together what modern studies teachers provide to young people in secondary schools because it is the responsibility of all teachers and managers in secondary schools to ensure that every young person has the entitlement, which we argue they should have, to develop a capability for citizenship. The issue is holding those things together rather than necessarily seeing modern studies as having a separate and unique role.

Mike Baughan: There was an interesting debate in the reference group when we were developing the "Education for Citizenship in Scotland" paper. The dilemma, in a nutshell, is that all youngsters study and engage with the people in society unit of the five to 14 curriculum. When youngsters reach the age of 14 in schools in which modern studies is offered, that subject is

part of their subject choice. Implicit in the citizenship paper is the need to give youngsters an opportunity to choose. One can see where the dilemma is. We say that part of education for citizenship is the opportunity to make informed choice, but we say to youngsters of 14, "By the way, you are not going to make a choice on education for citizenship as far as that relates to modern studies." The paper addresses that issue head on. First, it considers the contribution that the modern studies teacher can make in other contexts of the school, within the breadth of the curriculum, without the youngster necessarily having to choose modern studies. Secondly, our paper recommends that Learning and Teaching Scotland should provide support, guidance and advice in those schools that do not have the benefit of a modern studies department, for example.

16:30

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I do not know where to start, because I have so many things that I would like to discuss with you.

Section 2 of your submission mentions the three strands of school education, the first of which is for youngsters

"to grow and develop as individual persons, aesthetically, emotionally, intellectually, morally, physically, and spiritually".

I suspect that it might not be totally fair to say that we worry and put in structures that have been designed in a traditional way to develop youngsters intellectually, but that there are gaps in aesthetic, emotional, moral, physical and spiritual education. If there is a long list of qualities like that, and one of them is traditionally raised above the others, how do we redress that balance?

Professor Wilson: The dilemma is how we produce the all-round citizen who has developed across the range of aspects of living. That has always been a problem; ancient societies addressed it in their particular ways, but the problem is still with us.

We need to recognise that a person's maturity is not solely dependent on what is delivered between the hours of 9 and 4, Monday to Friday, over 40 weeks of the year. Maturity is part of the broader range of the individual's experiences. Education must—with society—examine constantly how the balance is being maintained across all those aspects. Where there is a lack of balance, we must agree with society how that balance can be provided, and that means addressing the problem regularly.

From the outset, we need to face the fact that it is daunting enough for society to deliver the all-round person without our thinking that the school can do it all. What is delivered in the formal curriculum and in other ways by schools makes a major contribution to providing what we look for in our citizens. However, I say again that we must recognise that society must meet its other responsibilities.

Ian Jenkins: I will let that lie because I would like to go on to something else that Mike Baughan spoke about. That is the idea of first and second year secondary school pupils having 10, 11 or a dozen teachers, none of whom know the individual as well as the primary school teacher used to.

How do we reform secondary schools in the face of the traditions that secondary teachers have been trained in? Your written submission says that teachers' and pupils' views must be recognised and respected. What is the mechanism for changing the philosophy that pertains to the first and second year of secondary school? I am interested in the idea of the team of teachers who know the kids well. What is the mechanism? There seems to be a great resistance to changing the system. Teachers have their heads down and are working all the time. Some of them have said to me that the education debate is a great idea, but they do not have time for it. How can we bring about that change?

Mike Baughan: The word "radical" has been used quite often by ministers in connection with the debate. Perhaps it has been abused. However, if we were to consider that type of structural change, the word "radical" is appropriate because that would be a radical change.

Schools have tried hard to follow Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education's recommendations to reduce the number of teachers that youngsters come in to contact with during the years S1 and S2. In my school, 10 or 12 years ago, a pupil coming into the first year could have contact with no fewer than 20 different teachers. It was interesting, however, that if you asked the youngster if that caused him or her enormous difficulties, they often responded that it was good fun.

There is a subtext operating there. If a pupil was with Miss so-and-so or Mr so-and-so and that was not a particularly good experience, they would know that they had only 40 minutes of it before they moved on somewhere else. However, it is a fallacious approach to rely solely on the anecdotal evidence that youngsters seem to cope with the system if progression and continuity are not built in. Schools have made a valiant effort to reduce the number of teachers that pupils have through subject rotations, blocking timetables and immensely creative methods, but I do not think that that, in itself, is the solution.

A teacher in primary 6 or primary 7 will be extremely knowledgeable about each of her pupils, because she has a continuity of contact with them despite the fact that others come in to work alongside her. That type of situation cannot exist when 10 or 11 teachers are operating. We hear from teachers in primary 6 and primary 7 that they are finding it extremely difficult to demonstrate the depth of knowledge and level of skill that are expected of them. The cry is being articulated that they would benefit from having the "specialists" from the secondary schools—whether in modern languages, science or technology—come into the primary schools to work alongside them. At that end, there is a welcoming of the team approach, which could be translated into the secondary school context.

You ask how we can make that happen. That is where the radical change must take place. If the leaders in Scottish education—the ministers, the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament—believe that that is an appropriate way forward and if there is a sound research base that justifies such an initiative being taken, the lead must come from the top. However—and it is a very big however—if teachers are not convinced that that would genuinely offer benefits for the children, they will not embrace it. A bottom-up approach is needed.

To be convinced, teachers must be engaged in the debate. They must have the time and space to talk through such initiatives. If a local authority simply says, "This is the way it is going to be" in a cluster of schools as part of a pilot during the next X number of years, that is not likely to be a way to get the message home. However, if teachers feel that an initiative has real benefits for youngsters in the context of their community; if they can be persuaded professionally on the basis of evidence; if they can be persuaded that they have a degree of control over it; and if they are given time to talk and think through what is required, there is hope for a measure of success.

The issue of continuing professional development is fundamental to the debate. I said, in a different context a week or so ago, that if I was looking back, 10 years hence, at the McCrone settlement and I regarded it as simply marking a watershed in teachers' pay and conditions of service, the settlement would have been a failure. I can look back to the Houghton committee and other committees that have produced improvements in pay for teachers, which have been failures because they have not affected the very structures of education. However, if we can look back at the work of the McCrone committee in five or 10 years' time and say that it marked a watershed in the development of a real teaching profession in Scotland, which engaged with and had some control over its professional development and which had the time to think, reflect and keep up to date with developments—as I expect my general practitioner to do—it will have been a huge success. It is in that context that change in education must take place. It is depressing and disappointing that some teachers are saying that they have not had the chance, the time or the inclination to engage in the debate. That is a great pity.

Ian Jenkins: Teachers often say that first and second year youngsters mark time, waste time or fall behind, and that they see the main purpose of education at that age as being simply to increase attainment. However, I hope that you agree that pupils' education during that time should also allow them to be 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14-year-olds and that the schools should look after them as individuals rather than see them just as potential exam passes.

Mike Baughan: I agree strongly. What you describe I call the onward and upward syndrome: not a moment of time must be wasted between the ages of three and 18 on activities not directly related to some progressively upward ladder that leads to the five highers or the three advanced highers. Education is about a heck of a lot more than that. In the first and second years of secondary school, young people come to terms with becoming young men and women and entering adolescence. It has been propounded quite seriously that the drop in attainment in those two years is due to the onset of adolescence. I am not suggesting for a moment that that is an excuse for there being no progression in S1 and S2, which is a serious issue. However, I do not agree with the idea that education is solely about the onward and upward ladder and ensuring that a little bit more incremental attainment can be measured from month to month. If that is our vision of education, it is pretty sterile and it is not one that, as a parent and a grandparent, I would want to subscribe to.

The Deputy Convener: I thank our witnesses for giving evidence this afternoon.

16:40

Meeting suspended.

16:42

On resuming—

The Deputy Convener: I welcome Iain Smith and David Caldwell from Universities Scotland's Scottish teacher education committee. I understand that David will make a statement.

David Caldwell (Universities Scotland): I will make the statement brief as I know that members have had a long afternoon and some of the earlier witnesses have given expansive answers. You

have heard from some good talkers this afternoon.

Iain Smith and I represent slightly different constituencies. Iain is here on behalf of the Scottish teacher education committee and I am here on behalf of Universities Scotland as a whole.

The universities regard this inquiry as important. We were keen to give evidence to it and will submit a detailed written paper in due course but we are pleased to have the opportunity to give oral evidence, because we regard the schools sector as the education sector that has the most important interface with ours.

Jackie Baillie: We heard evidence today that the young people you receive at university are not properly equipped with knowledge. Do you find that across all subjects?

David Caldwell: Iain Smith can respond in detail; my answer will be more general.

Our members tell us of the current high rate of participation in higher education. It is a significant achievement that we have passed the 50 per cent barrier. More young people go from school to university now than do not. There is a feeling that the emphasis on preparing pupils for examinations makes pupils good at passing examinations but means that they have not been taught to think and have not acquired the learning skills that will be important when they reach higher education.

Dissatisfaction is not widespread. We accept that schools are turning out a higher proportion of pupils each year who are capable of benefiting from higher education, and we welcome that.

16:45

Iain Smith (Universities Scotland): I am interested in the articulation between the specific subject knowledge that is studied in the upper secondary school and what is studied or not studied at university. For example, it is striking that of approximately 40,000 people who emerge from undergraduate courses in Scottish higher education each year, 1,500 to 1,700 of them emerge with qualifications in physical sciences. About 1,500 graduates achieve qualifications in a language. Those figures are typical of students who, at the higher education level, study subject areas that they studied at school.

Every year, approximately 7,500 graduates studied business administration and about 2,700 graduates studied social sciences—in other words, they have qualifications in sociology and/or psychology. In those large areas of higher education, detailed articulation between the subject knowledge studied at university and the subject knowledge acquired at school is less important. David Caldwell and other witnesses have talked about the more general skills that are critical in social sciences and in other subjects such as the physical sciences and languages.

Sally Brown: My question is addressed to Iain Smith, as it deals with the teacher education part of higher education. In considering the purposes of education for the future—the practical vision—we have discovered that there is a high level of agreement that being able to deal with change and uncertainty and being able to promote feelings of identity among students are important. However, those issues do not feature strongly in school curricula. What possibilities for change in teacher education are there that could promote those issues in the future?

Iain Smith: Many people in Scottish teacher education would accept not only that teacher education should change radically in the foreseeable future but that it will change radically in the foreseeable future.

We talk about the school curriculum and pupils who are able to demonstrate a high degree of independent learning and thought, so it follows that the curriculum for teacher education must have the same characteristics, which it has not always had. One of the routes into teacher education is through the BEd degree. People move straight from school into a four-year course that trains them to be teachers. It is almost certainly true that the number 1 priority should be not to develop their mathematical or language knowledge, although those things are important, but to develop their independence of thought and their ability to solve problems. If we do not produce a generation of teachers who think in that way, we have much less chance of producing future generations of pupils who think in that way.

Malcolm MacKenzie: Is there potential for conflict between your demand for abstract thought, which is welcome, and the way in which certain things, such as the Scottish qualification for headship, the chartered teacher, and the standards for teachers, are developing? I am in no way trying to denigrate those important developments, but is not the tide of opinion heading more towards a box-ticking approach with clear targets than towards a curriculum that promotes abstract thought, however laudable such a curriculum might be?

Iain Smith: The standard for chartered teachers is being worked on. It has been produced only recently and is still to go out for further consultation. The development programme will start only in August 2003, so these are early days. The consensus that has emerged so far among Scottish teachers is that the concept of a chartered teacher is not about producing some kind of conformist teacher and is certainly not about producing somebody who is an obedient line manager in the school; it is about producing

somebody who is not only competent but who can bring critical faculties to being a teacher.

Malcolm MacKenzie will almost certainly know more than I do about the Scottish qualification for headship, which has been around now for a number of years. It is not about training obedient managers; it is about producing future generations of primary and secondary head teachers who are capable of a variety of things, including approaching education and the management of schools with an open and questioning mind. The Scottish qualification for headship is not a simple competency framework, which says that to be a competent head teacher one should do X, Y and Z. It has dimensions to it, other than competencies, that make it clear that it expects of aspiring and existing Scottish head teachers the ability to criticise and to accept broad concepts of professionalism. The issues that Malcolm MacKenzie mentioned must be balanced.

David Caldwell: The issue is not limited to teacher education: it applies across degree-level education. We should not be saying that we want either one or the other; we should be saying, "Thank you very much—we want a bit of both." One of the defining characteristics of a degree programme is that everyone who goes through it should leave with a capacity for abstract thought. That is not inconsistent with acquiring specific competencies along the way.

Irene McGugan: Do you agree not only that an increasing number of pupils go on to further and higher education but that young people now tend to study for longer? They do not just do a BA or an MA, they go on to do an MSc or a PhD, or both, or even beyond that. Does that tendency have its roots in the current education system? Does it have anything to contribute to our debate on the purposes of education?

David Caldwell: The trend is by no means limited to Scotland. As we move towards a society that depends increasingly on knowledge, we have to expect more people to remain in education longer. That is of benefit to them as individuals and to us as a society. We should also bear in mind the fact that we are by no means at the top of the league table for the length of time that people remain in education. There are many countries where it is quite common for people to remain in the system longer than is the case in Scotland. It is of benefit that people stay in education a bit longer in Scotland compared with in other parts of the UK. We should capitalise on that advantage.

Keir Bloomer: Your submission says that the school curriculum has become too narrow, by which you mean that it focuses too much on passing exams. What would you do about that?

Iain Smith: At least one of the things that we would greatly welcome is beginning to happen: the increasing engagement in study skills, thinking skills, problem-solving techniques and so on in more and more Scottish schools. Some of that takes the form of free-standing courses, often as part of out-of-lesson learning activities. Other schools are trying to embed such approaches in the curriculum. That is one of the implications of what we have said about the breadth—or non-breadth—of the curriculum. The breadth consists not so much of areas of knowledge but of the extent to which the school curriculum addresses those fundamental skills and techniques. We welcome the fact that many Scottish secondary schools are beginning to address those issues in a way that they were certainly not doing 10 or 15 years ago.

Keir Bloomer: Do the higher education institutions have responsibilities in that? Having listened to the young people earlier—I am not sure whether you were here in time to hear them—I suspect that part of the reason for the excessive concentration on examination success has to do with a wish to satisfy demands for entry into higher education in a competitive situation. Could you do more to make it clear that you are looking for a broader range of personal qualities and skills?

Iain Smith: That is increasingly happening in my institution, and there is nothing unique about it. There are serious moves to emphasise the importance of core skills in the university curriculum, rather than subject knowledge per se. That is common across the various faculties of our university; the same will be true in many other Scottish higher education institutions too.

That development in the higher education curriculum should have an effect on the perceptions of higher education and so on the way in which secondary school pupils, particularly in the upper secondary school, behave. Effective liaison between higher education and schools—particularly, but not exclusively, secondary schools—is also important. In higher education institutions in Scotland, there is more and more investment in developing and growing liaison mechanisms between higher education and the school sector.

There is a great deal of evidence that, the higher the proportion of the age group that aims to enter education, the more important it is to have that liaison mechanism. Although the research evidence is to an extent confusing and mixed in its messages, it appears to show that one of the more important causes of drop-out from higher education courses is a mismatch between what students experience and what they expected to experience. Therefore, the more that we can develop various kinds of liaison mechanism

between higher education and the school sector, the more we might be able to address such issues.

17:00

Ian Jenkins: I am interested in the submission from Universities Scotland. I am pleased by the emphasis on creativity and the desire for a measured approach to preparing for work, but some of the things in the submission slightly surprise me. For example, you say:

> "pupils can read but they don't know how to express themselves or to write letters or reports."

That comment has been made before. Do you acknowledge that some of the ways in which schools seek to improve the way in which youngsters express themselves might negate the grammatical approach that Professor Farrell might have spoken about before I came in—I am not sure whether he did?

I am not making my point terribly clearly, but I wonder about the function of school. To what extent do you regard school as a preparation for university in subject terms? It is clear that you think that school is a preparation for university in skills terms. You spoke about the school helping people to do things and, in your submission, you talk about writing essays, for example. Whose job is it to teach kids to write science essays—is it the job of science teachers or of English teachers, or is it the job of everyone? If you want students to be able to do things when they come to university, is it your job to teach them or should it all be done beforehand? Please explore that area.

David Caldwell: Iain Smith referred to the fact that quite a lot of people come to university to study subjects that are not taught in school, so the subject base is an element, but it is not necessarily a critical element; it is certainly not a critical element for every pupil.

It is important that learning skills are developed from the earliest stage. What happens in school should not be determined solely by the need to prepare pupils for university. That is not the only purpose of school education, even though we have arrived at the happy situation in which more than 50 per cent of school pupils can expect to have a higher education learning experience. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of pupils do not go on to higher education, so it would be quite wrong for higher education to drive everything that happens in schools. The fact that about half the pupils at school go on to higher education is one of the factors that schools take into account.

I accept the implication of what Keir Bloomer said. There is a responsibility on us to make sure that the interface between our sector and the school sector works as efficiently as it can and works in the best interests of the learner.

The Deputy Convener: Malcolm MacKenzie has a final question.

Malcolm MacKenzie: A theme that has come up in the evidence that we have taken is that widening access is a good policy to have followed. The Association of University Teachers (Scotland) was one of the sources of that comment. When we talk about abstract thought, is there a conflict between widening access to universities and achieving excellence in universities? I am thinking of Kingsley Amis's old phrase, "more means worse". Is the fact that we are admitting more students endangering academic excellence and standards? It has been put to us that that is a possible danger. What are your views on that?

Iain Smith: Arguing about trends in excellence in higher education over the years is almost as difficult as arguing about whether standards of excellence in school education have gone up, down or remained stable over the years. The evidence is an almost impossible job.

In so far as there is evidence, it shows that, at least in Scotland, the age participation rate has increased from approximately 5 per cent in 1964, just after the Robbins report, to approximately 50 per cent now—David Caldwell mentioned that figure. Therefore, the rate has increased tenfold. By most standards by which we can judge excellence—the quality of graduates from undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and the standard of research output by people who were trained in universities—standards of excellence in UK universities in general and in Scottish universities in particular have certainly not declined in the intervening years. Indeed, by most tests, standards have improved. If the age participation rate increases further and more mature students come into higher education—there is a steady trend in that respect, which we have not discussed today—relatively few people in universities will see any great threat to overall standards. There are immense implications for universities, for example in respect of approaches to pedagogy and learning, but most of us would say that there is little or no evidence of an overall threat to university standards. Most evidence suggests that things are working in the opposite direction.

David Caldwell: I simply do not believe that the ability to think abstractly is related to any significant social class barriers. I have no hard evidence to support that belief, but it seems inherently improbable that the capacity for abstract thought is much more prevalent in one social class than it is in another.

If that is accepted, we must reflect on the huge differences in participation in higher education

between different social classes. The real distinction lies in exam performance. Expectations and aspirations are deep-rooted and certain groups feel that higher education and universities are not for them. They have no such aspirations. The problem must be addressed. To be candid, I say that I do not think that the higher education sector can address the problem on its own. Aspirations must be raised at a much earlier age. We should ensure that the performance of different social groups in school examinations is more equal than it is at present. I do not believe that academic standards are threatened in any way by widening participation, provided that serious work is undertaken. We have set ourselves a difficult target.

The Deputy Convener: I thank Iain Smith and David Caldwell.

The final item, which was to be taken in private, has been withdrawn.

Meeting closed at 17:08.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

No proofs of the *Official Report* can be supplied. Members who want to suggest corrections for the archive edition should mark them clearly in the daily edition, and send it to the Official Report, 375 High Street, Edinburgh EH99 1SP. Suggested corrections in any other form cannot be accepted.

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Friday 28 June 2002

Members who want reprints of their speeches (within one month of the date of publication) may obtain request forms and further details from the Central Distribution Office, the Document Supply Centre or the Official Report.

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

DAILY EDITIONS

Single copies: £5
Meetings of the Parliament annual subscriptions: £350.00

The archive edition of the *Official Report* of meetings of the Parliament, written answers and public meetings of committees will be published on CD-ROM.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT, compiled by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre, contains details of past and forthcoming business and of the work of committees and gives general information on legislation and other parliamentary activity.

Single copies: £3.75
Special issue price: £5
Annual subscriptions: £150.00

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

Single copies: £3.75
Annual subscriptions: £150.00

Standing orders will be accepted at the Document Supply Centre.

Published in Edinburgh by The Stationery Office Limited and available from:

The Stationery Office Bookshop
71 Lothian Road
Edinburgh EH3 9AZ
0131 228 4181 Fax 0131 622 7017

The Stationery Office Bookshops at:
123 Kingsway, London WC2B 6PQ
Tel 020 7242 6393 Fax 020 7242 6394
68-69 Bull Street, Birmingham B4 6AD
Tel 0121 236 9696 Fax 0121 236 9699
33 Wine Street, Bristol BS1 2BQ
Tel 01179 264306 Fax 01179 294515
9-21 Princess Street, Manchester M60 8AS
Tel 0161 834 7201 Fax 0161 833 0634
16 Arthur Street, Belfast BT1 4GD
Tel 028 9023 8451 Fax 028 9023 5401
The Stationery Office Oriel Bookshop,
18-19 High Street, Cardiff CF12BZ
Tel 029 2039 5548 Fax 029 2038 4347

The Stationery Office Scottish Parliament Documentation Helpline may be able to assist with additional information on publications of or about the Scottish Parliament, their availability and cost:

Telephone orders and inquiries
0870 606 5566

Fax orders
0870 606 5588

The Scottish Parliament Shop
George IV Bridge
EH99 1SP
Telephone orders 0131 348 5412

sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

www.scottish.parliament.uk

Accredited Agents
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers

Printed in Scotland by The Stationery Office Limited

ISBN 0 338 000003 ISSN 1467-0178