EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 25 June 2002
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE
20th 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)
Malcolm MacKenzie (Adviser)
Lindsay Paterson (Adviser)

WITNESSES

Serwan Kaur Bhogal (Scottish Inter Faith Council)
Andrew Brookes (Action of Churches Together in Scotland)
Colin Brown (Action of Churches Together in Scotland)
John Deighan (Action of Churches Together in Scotland)
Matthew Farrow (CBI Scotland)
Chris Foxon (Scottish Inter Faith Council)
Jack Laidlaw (Action of Churches Together in Scotland)
Graham Leicester (Scottish Council Foundation)
Tristan Leicester (Scottish Council Foundation)
Alex Reid (Scottish Inter Faith Council)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Martin Verity

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Susan Duffy

ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Education, Culture and Sport Committee

Tuesday 25 June 2002

(*Afternoon*)

[THE DEPUTY CONVENER *opened the meeting at 13:33*]

Items in Private

The Deputy Convener (Cathy Peattie): Good afternoon. I ask everyone to ensure that all mobile phones and pagers are turned off.

I invite members who are present as committee substitutes to say so. Karen Whitefield is on her way and I will invite her to say that she is a committee substitute when she arrives.

I invite the committee to take in private item 2, because it is a draft proposal for a committee bill, and item 3, because it is a draft report. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement*.

13:33

Meeting continued in private.

14:16

Meeting continued in public.

Protection of Children

The Deputy Convener: The committee is to agree on whether to appoint an adviser for stage 1 of the expected bill on the protection of children.

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I ask the clerks for clarification on how an adviser would help the committee at stage 1. None of the other committees of which I have been a member has had an adviser to help with drafting a stage 1 report. Why is an adviser necessary?

Martin Verity (Clerk): An adviser is not essential. The decision is up to the committee. Advisers give advice on the subject matter of bills, prepare lines of questioning for witnesses and assist in drafting reports. Whether to appoint an adviser is up to the committee.

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I feel instinctively that we need as much advice as we can get. I see no rooted objection to people helping us to have an insight into the detail of the bill. Employing an adviser would cost the Parliament, but it might make the committee more efficient. I see no reason to oppose the idea.

The Deputy Convener: You feel that an adviser would be helpful and Karen Whitefield feels that an adviser would be less helpful.

Karen Whitefield: I will not argue about the matter. I just wanted to know the purpose of appointing an adviser.

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Which other committees will feed into our stage 1 report?

Martin Verity: We do not know yet. The bill has not been introduced yet, so the Parliamentary Bureau has not referred it to committees. We expect that, because the subject matter of the bill falls within the committee's remit, the committee will be the lead committee.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Having had experience of the issue in a previous existence, I see no need for an adviser, but if people feel the need for one, I have no argument against one.

The Deputy Convener: We need a decision.

Irene McGugan: The bill does not seem to be the most complicated that we have considered. Its intention seems clear. Like Jackie Baillie, some of us have experience of the issues that are involved. I think that we could probably manage to work our way through the bill at stage 1.

The Deputy Convener: I agree. Sorry, Ian.

Ian Jenkins: That is fine. It is no big deal one way or the other.

Scottish Media Group

The Deputy Convener: For item 5, members should have a copy of the letter that we received from the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union regarding any reduction of regional programming by Scottish Media Group. The committee has discussed the issue before, but concerns have been raised about recent announcements.

Does the committee have any views on how to deal with the letter?

Jackie Baillie: Members may have received by e-mail a copy of a press release from Tessa Jowell's office. Given the fact that we are about to go into recess, it might be useful if we first write to Tessa Jowell to indicate the concerns that have been expressed and to receive her views.

The Deputy Convener: Do members have any other thoughts?

Irene McGugan: I agree with Jackie Baillie's suggestion. Perhaps other useful information could be pulled together in the summer to ensure that people are better informed.

The Deputy Convener: That might be helpful. We can liaise on that and perhaps produce a briefing paper.

Scottish Borders Council

The Deputy Convener: Item 6 is to note the publication of the controller of audit's follow-up report on financial management of education services in Scottish Borders Council. I invite the committee to note the report.

Jackie Baillie: "Progress Report on Scottish Borders Council" is helpful because it charts the progress that has been made since the appointment of a new chief executive and explains how a number of positive actions have been taken. Further progress is still to be made on the action plan. Will Audit Scotland continue to monitor progress? If Audit Scotland has fulfilled its remit, I suggest that we write either to Audit Scotland or to the Executive to suggest that the matter be seen through to its conclusion.

The Deputy Convener: The Accounts Commission for Scotland will consider the report on 10 July. Perhaps we should see the outcome of that discussion first.

Ian Jenkins: I understand that Audit Scotland will go back to the council for a follow-up. As Jackie Baillie said, there have been many positive changes in recent days. I hope that, if the auditors go back in September, they will come away with positive feelings about the council.

Purposes of Education Inquiry

The Deputy Convener: Under item 7, we will take oral evidence from several witnesses as part of the committee's inquiry into the purposes of education. We have also received a number of written submissions.

Our agenda has been slightly reorganised. We will start by taking evidence from Graham Leicester and Tristan Leicester, who are from the Scottish Council Foundation. I give a very special welcome to Tristan. Hello.

Tristan Leicester (Scottish Council Foundation): Hello.

The Deputy Convener: We will give you an opportunity to say something about our inquiry. Committee members will then be invited to ask questions. After that, I will invite our advisers—Malcolm MacKenzie, Lindsay Paterson and Keir Bloomer—to ask any questions that they feel are appropriate.

Graham Leicester (Scottish Council Foundation): I have brought Tristan along. I describe him as the educational consultant to the Scottish Council Foundation, as he has played that role on a number of occasions. This morning, we did a similar double act with the civic commission on the purposes of education in Alloa.

Obviously, Tristan knows far more about the education system than I do as he has participated in education in the recent past. Last year, he came with me to the United States of America to spend a week in a primary school in California doing some action learning and action research. We will draw on his experience along the way, when we need to.

I do not have a great deal to say by way of introduction and I am very much in the committee's hands. When taking up the invitation to submit a short paper, I found myself sympathising and empathising with the committee's challenge in dealing with a huge variety of material and evidence. The Scottish Council Foundation has produced a great deal of material and I am sure that all your other witnesses have done the same.

All that I have suggested in my paper are some ways of framing the evidence in the debate. I have offered a number of models, which we can talk about if members are interested. The key is to find a way of structuring the evidence that the debate produces and find some guiding lights, or guiding principles, to help us weave our way through it.

I want to emphasise the five principles at the end of my paper. Those principles seem to me, and to others in the Scottish Council Foundation, to come up time and again in all the evidence and research.

The first principle is the need to develop a future consciousness. We have to think constantly about educating for the future rather than the past. A vast array of material is available on the analogy between the education system and the factory age.

The second principle is the need for diversity. I suspect that not one answer will come out of this debate but many. Diversity would be a good guiding principle to enshrine in whatever conclusions are reached. One of the reasons for taking Tristan to the United States was to show him that school does not have to be like every school he has ever seen in Scotland. There are other ways of doing things. It would be good to have more opportunity to experience diversity without having to leave the country.

The third principle is the need for feedback. As I say in the paper, better feedback leads to more responsible action. We need more feedback in the system, especially from the pupils, who are an integral part of the system. I suspect that we do not invite that feedback partly because we would not know what to do with it—a point that is magnified when we consider the national debate. That is why I am suggesting that we should have principles to guide the system, rather than having a master plan.

The fourth principle is to do with relationships. We have heard a lot this morning about the relationship between pupil and teacher and about the distinction between the primary relationships that learners and facilitators build up and the secondary relationships that design and build the system within which those primary relationships are conducted. It is the primary relationships that seem to motivate and inspire learning and the secondary relationships that sometimes get in the way of that. We have to pay attention to those relationships and the balance between them.

The fifth and final guiding principle is that of learning. Again, we have talked a little about that this morning. If we accept that learning is the goal, and the motive force of the system, we have to ask how that can be applied throughout the system, in the primary and secondary relationships that I have spoken about. What does it take to learn? I would suggest that it takes experimenting, failing, feedback and trying again. It takes diversity and a number of the other principles that we have talked about.

If I had to pick out one other thing from the work of the foundation, it would be to say that we have been trying over the years to move from this kind of analysis to action. Almost any action to introduce diversity to the system would be good.

We have talked to stakeholders in the system about what prevents experimentation from happening. In our submission, we home in on the three issues of infrastructure, the curriculum and the governance system. My plea is for the committee to focus on the governance system and on secondary relationships. Many people in the Parliament, the Executive, the teaching profession and all levels of the system are crying out for the approach that we advocate. It would be good if we were able to deal with the secondary relationships that are preventing experimental or innovative actions.

14:30

The Deputy Convener: How old are you, Tristan?

Tristan Leicester: I am eight.

The Deputy Convener: You are very welcome here. I hope that members ask you lots of questions and that you give us good answers.

Jackie Baillie: My first question is for your dad, if that is okay, Tristan. We will give him a grilling.

You say that we should educate for the future, not for the past. I am keen to tease out what you mean by that, as how we educate for the future is the subject of debate. What are the key competencies that are required? It has been suggested that we should teach children and young people to think, rather than simply to pass exams. How do children learn to be creative? How do we equip them with the skills that they can carry through life? Are we over-reliant on an academic framework? Are people who do not achieve academically branded failures at an early point in the system? How would you construct a curriculum for the future?

Graham Leicester: One reason that I brought Tristan along was to show that we are always educating for the present. When I was in Tristan's position, today's present looked like a very distant future to me. That says something about the pace of change. Tristan is living in a world that I barely understand and that he understands much better than I do. Our children are already living in the future.

Jackie Baillie asked what competencies are required. They are the competencies with which we are born—the drive to learn and to try things, curiosity, the wish to experiment and discover, creativity and play. I am attracted by another set of three Rs, which was mentioned in the discussion that I had this morning—the core competencies are resilience, rootedness and resourcefulness. We need to generate the ability to learn, the ability to adapt and the confidence that comes with resilience. These are difficult times to which to adapt, but we need to be resilient in them. Children need to know how and where to find resources, and how to develop their inner resources. They need a rootedness that gives them a place to stand—that is the importance of having a values base.

How do we provide those things? The design of the system looks familiar—certainly to me—but there is something about it that suggests that the system does not value the behaviours that I have described. I set great store by seeing those qualities in teachers—the education professionals—in education departments, and in the changes that I expect to be made to the structure of school buildings and the way in which space is used.

I am struck by the fact that, in the outside world, we have become much more sophisticated in the way that we conduct meetings and discussions and use various thinking and creativity tools. In the classroom, those methods and tools do not seem to be used as much as they should be.

In response to the question whether we privilege academic achievement, the answer is that we probably do. I would have made that a guiding principle in considering what we mean by achievement. There is a lot of pressure in the system to achieve and to raise attainment, but attainment is described in the general terms of exam success. Some things are more difficult to measure and, as a result, they do not get measures. It is said that someone has to attain good qualifications before they can get a good job, but that loop is beginning to break down.

I wonder where the pressure to achieve qualifications is coming from. I suspect that it comes from us, the parents, saying, "That did us proud," which is another example of thinking that sees the past rather than the future driving the present. I suspect that it also comes from a political system that responds to the public expression of, "What was good enough for me is good enough for my children."

We need to open up the question of how we are to measure achievement if we are not going to measure it in those terms. I suggest that genuine achievement should be used to measure the means of certifying that someone has achieved something. That would save us adopting a model in which we sift young people by saying, "You should have achieved more," or "Your peers achieved this level."

Something about our approach to achievement creates failure almost by definition. Failure is a logical consequence of the way in which we go about measuring achievement. Person-centred learning is an approach that values progress and appreciates and develops the intrinsic value of all

people in the system. If we were to take that approach, we would come up with a very different model.

I do not know the answer to the question of what is driving the obsession with qualifications, but the committee needs to address that question. It is no longer true to say that the business community demands qualifications. I think that it is something in the system. Matthew Farrow may have something to say about that.

Jackie Baillie: I have a follow-up question. Increasingly, we talk about a balance between educating children for life and educating them for work. It is natural for people to say that they want to realise the potential of each and every child and want to do things in a child-centred way, but we also need to realise that society makes collective demands on the system. I am not sure whether those demands result from the qualifications system. Are you suggesting that we have not got the balance quite right?

Graham Leicester: Ten years from now, that question will not even be asked. We are beginning to see signs of the merging of those two streams of thought. If we can distinguish between educating for work and educating for life, we are beginning to see the two merge. Part of the interest in citizenship studies, social skills and so forth is beginning to break down that distinction, as those belong in neither category; they belong in both.

The fact that we are beginning to talk about work-life balance and work-life harmony elsewhere in our lives marks the beginning of a process. The distinctions cannot be made as clearly as was the case in the past. The way that the economy is going means that the distinction is breaking down. That is why employers are not paying so much attention to qualifications.

If the economy adopts a model that says, "If it can be mechanised, it can be done by machines," it will also need people who have people skills and act like people. That takes us back to the argument that we are educating the person to be a whole person and that to have a whole person is to have an effective person who can serve the economy.

That is the way in which the debate is going, and I suspect that it is part of the shift that the education system needs to make. We use the metaphor of moving out of the factory age. There are no factories any more, but there are still jobs and those jobs require a different range of skills that are much more about life. Life skills are work skills.

Jackie Baillie: I have not seen a copy of your submission, but you produced a piece of work about a year ago. Will you please circulate that to committee members? That would be helpful.

I have a final question for Tristan. Did you like going to school in California? Was it good fun?

Tristan Leicester: Yes.

Jackie Baillie: What did you do that was different? What did you do each day? Can you tell me what it was like? Can you remember?

Tristan Leicester: Yes. They used Fahrenheit to measure the temperature and every day they looked at the thermometer to see what temperature it was.

Jackie Baillie: That is good. Was it warm?

Tristan Leicester: Yes.

Jackie Baillie: Was it much warmer than Scotland?

Tristan Leicester: Not much warmer.

Graham Leicester: What was different?

Tristan Leicester: They said "math", not "maths".

Jackie Baillie: Did they? Was the work harder or easier, or was it just the same?

Tristan Leicester: Yes, but there was more work.

Jackie Baillie: Did they make you work harder?

Tristan Leicester: No, but there was more work.

Jackie Baillie: There was more of it. Okay. Was the teacher nice?

Tristan Leicester: Yes.

Irene McGugan: Graham Leicester's submission—which I have read—mentions that one of the barriers to change in the education system is the infrastructure. You suggest that teachers cannot teach for the 21st century in spaces that were created for a Victorian model of education. You say that you have examined best practice throughout the world and that you have devised a set of 13 criteria that could improve the situation. Can you tell us what some of those criteria might be and how important you think that a discussion of buildings is in the debate about the future of education?

Graham Leicester: I will start with the last question. The discussion of buildings is very important, although it might be missed. On looking for ways to prompt and promote change, changing spaces changes behaviour and is a good way in which to introduce diversity. We would probably have a different conversation if we rearranged the chairs in this room or took the tables away. Some simple principles of design and space make an impact. I am happy to send the committee a list of

the 13 criteria that we derived.

There is a huge amount of material about good practice out there. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has produced a volume and the Department for Education and Skills has produced a volume. It is wonderful, inspiring stuff and some things surprised me. The important point is the need for feedback. People who live in the system have some pretty good ideas about how it could be adapted, and much of the good work uses capital refurbishment budgets to go through a participative process of saying, "Here is some money. We can make some changes to the school. Where shall we start?" That kind of process makes people think about how they can change the way the school looks. After a while, creative solutions are produced that are not so much about how the school looks as they are about how it operates, how the timetables work, who does what, and what flows and movements there are through the building.

Some of the other evidence that is coming out of the debate concerns the need for space for reflection—private space—in schools. Schools are busy, busy, busy places and there is a need for quiet space in which to reflect as well as for social space. There is a lot of material about how the building itself can act as a learning tool. Legible architecture allows us to talk about the building as a learning environment. There is a lot of material about how the building can be used along with its environment to discuss sustainability and the principles of what it takes to run a building.

There is interesting stuff about the role of the janitor as the person who has much control over how space is used. That goes back to the governance system and to who makes the rules about how we operate the space. If we have a neat building that tells us something interesting, the janitor will probably talk about it and thereby become part of the teaching staff.

How do we provide spaces that are flexible enough to allow the kind of diversity that we are talking about? There is a huge amount of material out there; we have one of the biggest opportunities to use it, because we are building new schools and refurbishing old schools. Examination of designs from elsewhere and factoring in some of the information provides a quick and easy win.

We considered a number of projects in which there had been a participative approach to design. Those included a couple of Scottish projects, but in neither case had any of the work been put into practice. That becomes dispiriting, because there are opportunities in the building programme.

14:45

Lindsay Paterson (Adviser): In your written evidence you list a number of problems with the existing system, which is

"a system that:

- teaches facts
- is designed for an industrial economy
- is based on mass delivery".

You talked earlier about citizenship and education for life. People have for at least half a century articulated those as aspirations for Scottish education. Why do people keep articulating those aspirations, possibly in the face of real change in the education system? That is not the same as asking why they have not been implemented, because it is perfectly possible that aspects have been implemented gradually.

Graham Leicester: Could you ask the question again?

Lindsay Paterson: I am saying that your vision has been articulated several times. Why have people felt it necessary to say repeatedly that the system is not fulfilling the vision?

Graham Leicester: Do you mean because you think it has it has fulfilled the vision?

Lindsay Paterson: I am not taking a position on whether the system has fulfilled the vision. That might be part of your answer, but I am interested to know why the issue keeps coming up.

Graham Leicester: I, too, am interested in why it keeps coming up. I am not an educationist; I enter the area as a concerned parent. The analysis that the system has not fulfilled the vision has been around for more than 50 years. I do not know how to answer the question other than to say that people would not say that the system was not fulfilling the vision unless that needed to be said. I am trying to avoid saying that people would not say it if the aspirations had been implemented.

I can tell you only why I keep saying that the vision has not been fulfilled. My experience is pretty much as I summed it up at the start. I come across a lot of dedicated individuals who also say that the vision has not been fulfilled and who feel constrained in practice. That is what lies behind my remarks about moving into the governance system. Diversity might exist in Scotland and although there are examples of world-class practice in Scotland, there are not enough such examples. The system still fails too many people and it is not doing simple things that would address that.

Jackie Baillie: I read with interest a Sunday newspaper's article about the report "The Possible Scot". It contained no mention of education at all.

Graham Leicester: That is interesting. For those who have not seen that report, we did some work for the Health Education Board for Scotland and the Public Health Institute of Scotland. We held a series of day-long workshops with a variety of groups from different parts of Scotland and from different age groups.

To cut a long story short, we ended up asking young people about their vision of a possible Scotland of 10 years' time and what might bring that vision about. There was very little mention of learning and education, either as a vision or as the means through which to achieve one. That surprised us—education is a means of adapting to the future, but that did not come across.

Keir Bloomer (Adviser): One of your guiding principles is diversity, specifically diverse provision. The Scottish education system is notable for its homogeneity. What kind of diversity would you like and how could it be promoted?

Graham Leicester: I will try to describe the kind of diversity that I think can be promoted. Once we adopt diversity as a guiding principle, all sorts of things are possible. There are infinite possibilities, and we could learn even from systems in other countries.

If we start from where the Scottish system is, I envisage diversity developing in a number of areas. As I said, I have seen diversity in school buildings. I would like more diversity through the introduction of new teaching and learning styles in existing schools. Simple things can be done alongside the existing system; I accept Lyndsay Paterson's point that many of those things are being done and that encouragement is all that is required. I refer to teaching, thinking and creativity skills, for example, which provide children with a sort of thinking resource kit in addition to the accumulation of content.

The Scottish Council Foundation runs seminar programmes, which offer glimpses of other world views. Members, for example, might take a couple of hours out of a day to go and learn something new. I think that we could do more of that within the school system. I was thinking this morning that, if a claim is being made for diversity, I would find it difficult to accommodate that with the use of school uniforms which are, of course, about uniformity. The two things do not seem to add up. The absence of school uniforms—the ability of parents to send their children to school as themselves—is one of the things that I found to be different in the United States.

There might be particular room for diversity around the transition points, such as from primary school to secondary school and from secondary school to work. We have a one-size-fits-all system at those stages, which fails a number of people. The conventional wisdom is that S1 and S2 represent difficult periods in secondary school education; I like the idea of opening up a diverse system that would allow two extra years at primary school—P8 and P9 instead of S1 and S2.

There is room for more diversity in the learning that takes place outside school, such as work experience and moving into other forms of education at the time when many children in our system are ready to do that. I am conscious of the diagnosis of the disenchanted, the disengaged and the disappeared. Those are the people for whom other diverse forms of provision should open up. At the moment, all we have is disappearance or exclusion.

Lindsay Paterson: How would you set about promoting more diversity in the system?

Graham Leicester: From where does the pressure come? From where does the pressure for conformity come? At which points can we intervene in the system to relieve that pressure for conformity? There are structural devices—although I do not advocate education vouchers or individual learning accounts—to encourage a greater force for choice in the system. The force for change resides at head-teacher level and should be supported by the local authority. Some head teachers are itching to experiment with more diverse provision, but that gets lost further up the system. Somebody at some point says, "No." I do not know when that point is, but I suspect that a more supportive local authority that operated a regime that was based on the principle of learning and therefore on experimentation and failure would be more likely to allow such head teachers to experiment with provision. That is what I would do.

There are other more dramatic and radical methods through which to introduce diversity to the system, but given the system that we have, just taking the heat off some of the head teachers who are willing to try something new would be the most effective way forward.

Lindsay Paterson: You touched on school uniforms. Last week, the committee heard oral evidence to the effect that the use of school uniforms avoids invidious social distinctions. It has often been said that a school uniform provides a level playing field. How do you introduce diversity to a system without it becoming a covert form of social selection and reinforcement of social status? That is a practical, rather than rhetorical, question.

Graham Leicester: I know the argument that a school uniform hides some social distinctions and is therefore a good thing because it allows us to ignore those distinctions; the distinctions are removed from the equation. However, that attitude

is a symptomatic response to a deeper-seated problem. Much of the education debate is about opening up emotional intelligence and developing empathic skills and conflict resolution and all the rest of it, to cope with such divisions. Out in the real world, most people do not have uniforms to hide behind. Learning such skills should be part of the education process.

I am not sure that I make the connection between diversity and social status. I know that there has historically been a connection between diversity of provision and some kinds of provision being privileged. However, that is not the kind of diversity that I am looking for. I want different children to be able to develop different talents. I would rather take on the challenges of the class system as the challenges of the class system, rather than try to tackle them through the school system. If we were honest about opening up that debate in the education system by allowing our pupils to be themselves and to develop the skills that allow them to relate to each other as individuals, we might bring about such social changes. That is my hope. Who knows?

15:00

Malcolm MacKenzie (Adviser): I would like to ask about an image that fascinates me. On page 2 of your submission, there is a diagram under the heading "Beyond the Clockwork Orange?" According to you, the system

"teaches facts … is designed for an industrial economy … is based on mass delivery … and is … driven by a bureaucratic system. We call this world the 'Clockwork Orange'."

When I think of "A Clockwork Orange", I think of Anthony Burgess's novel and Stanley Kubrick's film, which showed an horrific future where the droogs have taken over and the only way to treat them is through aversion therapy. Why did you pick that image? Am I reading too much into it? Is it the clockwork side rather than the orange side that you are concerned about?

Graham Leicester: The phrase was picked by a Portuguese gentleman, so I will have to ask him about that. It is an image of the present rather than of the future. The diagram provides a framework for thinking. One does not have to accept the divisions, but the image allows us to conceive the education system that we have. We have moved quite a long way from the clockwork orange world anyway, whatever we choose to call it.

The diagram is also a map of diversity. If I sat here long enough, I might be able to construct an argument to say that the education system should be active in all parts of the grid. The model that is customised to the individual—teaching personal development, rather than how to learn facts—works towards a creative society in which the work-life distinction does not make any sense. The question whether the economy serves society or society serves the economy no longer makes sense if we live in a creative and fulfilling society. A system that is owned and driven by the needs of communities and individuals is a pretty tall order, but that is the world that I would like to live in.

The Deputy Convener: I thank Graham and Tristan Leicester for their evidence.

I welcome our next witness, Matthew Farrow from the Confederation of British Industry Scotland. You will be aware that we are taking evidence for our inquiry into the purposes of education. If you wish, you may make a short statement. I will then invite members and our advisers to put questions to you.

Matthew Farrow (CBI Scotland): Good afternoon. When I saw that Graham Leicester had brought his son Tristan along with him, I realised that I had missed an opportunity, as two weeks ago I became a dad for the first time. I could have given my wife a break and brought along my son to contribute. However, he might not have been as helpful as Tristan was.

I have circulated a short written submission to members. I apologise for not sending it until yesterday, but I have just returned from paternity leave and am trying to get a work-life balance. Because members may not have seen the submission, I will summarise two or three points that are made in it. I would be happy to expand on those in discussion.

Over recent years, the CBI has tried to identify a set of skills, characteristics and attributes that are becoming increasingly important for a wide range of employers—for different sectors and sizes of companies and for people in self-employment and employment. We have sought to define those skills in what we call an employability template. In my submission, I itemise the characteristics that we seek.

One of the key points that we are making is that education should develop all the characteristics that we have identified in all our youngsters. That is a strong statement, so why do we make it? We make it for two reasons. The first reason is collective. As I say in my submission, if we can improve skills in youngsters and the labour market, we can improve the performance of the economy. As members would expect, the CBI argues that a more prosperous economy is better for society as a whole. The second reason relates to individuals. Education ought to be about equipping people to negotiate the labour market of today and tomorrow and helping them to have the characteristics to flourish in contemporary employment and enterprise situations. If we are

not performing that task through education, we are doing young people a disservice and failing to equip them for life in the way in which we should.

We see no conflict between equipping young people with skills and education for life and for work. One reason why we are keen for the CBI to play an active role in the national education debate and the committee's inquiry—we organised a breakfast seminar that the convener attended, along with similar events—is that we believe that we need to make more effort to explain why we do not see a distinction between education for work and enterprise and a broader, more rounded education.

Members may have seen the latest guidance from Learning and Teaching Scotland, which is about citizenship and education. The paper contains nothing to which employers would take exception and many statements that they would welcome. I sit on the advisory council of Learning and Teaching Scotland and had no difficulty in signing up the CBI to the paper. There is a great deal of overlap between the sort of things that Learning and Teaching Scotland discusses in the paper and the employability characteristics that the CBI has identified. Both Learning and Teaching Scotland and the CBI stress the importance of values, attitudes and working with others.

I was interested to read the submission that the Scottish Inter Faith Council provided for this meeting, which also highlights the dangers of distinguishing between education for work and education for life. In paragraph 10 of its submission, the council expresses concern about the move to introduce enterprise education in primary schools, which

"would suggest that education is only of value if it is directed towards business and making money."

The council goes on to say that what is needed in primary schools is more emphasis on people skills—on young people learning to communicate and co-operate with one another.

We are trying to say that, to us, education for work and enterprise is also about those things. In the modern employment situation, people must co-operate; that is all about interpersonal skills and customer service skills. I agree with Graham Leicester that it is no longer the case that there is a division between the attributes and capabilities that the majority of people need in their work and those that they need in the rest of their lives. We do not see a distinction between the two.

My final point is that there is more difficulty with the question of how to develop those characteristics in the curriculum. There is a particular difficulty with curriculum overload. In the past 10 years in Scotland—and in England to some extent—we have tried to say that certain skills are more important and we will try to embed and develop them in a fairly traditional curriculum. Given that the inquiry is designed to look 10, 15 or 20 years ahead, we are asking our members whether that is going to work. The HM Inspectorate of Education report on education for work and enterprise contains evidence showing that, because of the overload on teachers and burdens in the system, all the good guidance material that is being produced is having a limited impact in schools. The proportion of youngsters benefiting from it is fairly small. One of the questions that we are grappling with—and we urge the committee to consider it—is whether we need to think about a more radical review of the curriculum if we are looking 10 to 20 years ahead.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I contributed to the business breakfast with the CBI, along with the convener and Mr Monteith, and I want to talk about one issue that was raised there and one that was not.

I welcome what you have said and what is in your paper about the broad purpose of education, rather than the narrow purpose of enterprise education. Your paper defines education as a preparation for adult life. It is important that the CBI and those working with it make that as clear as possible.

From what one reads in the papers—who knows whether what one reads in the papers is true?—the present Government appears to desire to invest more heavily in what it calls enterprise education. That seems to be a fairly narrow discipline that is designed to ensure that most young people become entrepreneurs or get involved in entrepreneurial activities. In the past few weeks, when I was going around school prizegivings, I was happy to see young people getting awards for being involved in all sorts of enterprise-related activities in and outside school. However, many of us remain sceptical about the introduction of entrepreneurial education.

I made a remark this morning that might bear repeating because only the convener heard it. At the time when Scotland was at its height as an entrepreneurial nation—in the 19th century—half the young people left school at age 11 and the other half continued their education, learning mostly Latin and Greek. That situation led to an enterprising society, although I do not know whether there was a causal relationship.

I would like you to tease out the issue of a well-rounded education as opposed to an increasingly specialised education that the rise of entrepreneurial education would seem to support. That kind of education is widely talked about south of the border and I hope that it is not to be widely talked about north of the border.

Matthew Farrow: You have mentioned two or three issues. I am not sure that I would go with a causal relationship between Latin and Greek and entrepreneurs, but it would make for an interesting pilot study.

On the first point, I agree that it is important for the CBI to emphasise that it does not recognise the conflict between education as preparation for life and education for the qualities that employers are seeking. I hope that the national debate and the committee's inquiry will recognise the false dichotomy in the idea that employers want education to give some attributes that are not helpful to young people when they are trying to find their way in life, as opposed to a liberal education that is about better and more important things. The sorts of attitudes, dispositions and skills that employers tell us that they are looking for in young people seem to be similar to what people say are the life skills that young people need.

The narrowness of enterprise education seems to be an issue for schools and the curriculum. Employers want certain characteristics to be developed. They are not particularly concerned whether those characteristics are developed through contextualisation of the subjects or whether they have a separate segment of the curriculum. Employers are looking for outcomes. There must be questions about what makes sense for schools. I alluded to the broad shape of the curriculum and to the subjects and capabilities that we want young people to develop. It is not hugely important to employers whether that is done through a range of other subjects or in other ways.

15:15

Michael Russell: I think that we are talking broadly the same language, although I remain somewhat nervous about the current impetus and I would be even more nervous if it were to lead, for example, to commercial sponsorship of schools, which appears to be the case south of the border. I regard that development as highly undesirable.

I want to ask a more specific question about employers' requirements. Several members of the committee sat on the inquiry into the Scottish Qualifications Authority and we were assured that industry had an understanding of the qualifications with which young people leave school. Having recently seen the examples of this year's certificates, I wonder to what extent you feel that there is an understanding in business and industry of the qualifications that young people show to their employers when they leave school. Is the problem one of presentation—the present SQA certificate could well be a cuneiform tablet for all the sense that it makes to many people—or is it deeper than that? Is the problem to do with our understanding of the examination system?

Matthew Farrow: There is not necessarily a link between sponsorship of schools and the sort of education that we are talking about. In my opinion, those are separate issues. I do not know about the details of the English situation. I would not want members to feel that the sort of attributes and capabilities that we are talking about can be developed only through schools that are run or sponsored by businesses. We might want to encourage contact between schools and businesses, but that is perhaps a different matter.

There are two difficulties in relation to your point about understanding. First, there is inevitably a lag between a large number of employers' understanding of qualifications and the current position of the qualifications system. That lag is obviously more severe when we have had a period of sustained change in qualifications. We have made it clear to the media and to ministers that we feel that part of our role is to help employers to get to grips with the new qualifications and the way in which they are set out.

The bigger problem is whether the qualifications are telling employers what they need to know about young people. In some ways, the difficulty is that we have tried to keep a fairly traditional qualifications system, on top of which we have layered some things that employers talk about, such as core skills. That has been a complex exercise, which may or may not be settling down. There is a question about whether our qualifications and the way in which they are presented tell employers the things about young people in which they are most interested.

For example, the SQA put the core skills profile to the Executive, because people at the CBI said that core skills matter. The SQA tried to audit the core skills content out of existing qualifications by saying to schools, "Here are some free-standing units into which young people can also be put." Most schools, being busy and under pressure, did not bother with the free-standing stuff. They just said, "Right, you have done your highers in these subjects and this is your profile." There were cases in which youngsters complained that the profile did not show them doing well in communication, for example, even though they knew that they were good at communication. It just so happened that the subjects that they had done did not give credit for communication. One could argue about whether the schools should have taken up the free-standing units. That shows the difficulty in the qualifications system of giving employers the information that they need.

There are two problems. The first is that employers lag behind developments. We try to address that. The second problem, which is a

bigger issue, is whether the information is the right information for employers.

Keir Bloomer: In your submission and in your presentation, you put forward a case for a more radical restructuring of the curriculum in the medium term. Am I right in saying that your criticisms of the existing curriculum are based on the fact that the assessment regime is weighted towards knowledge rather than skills and that it is difficult to promote the personal qualities and skills in which you are interested through a subject-led curriculum?

Matthew Farrow: Yes.

Keir Bloomer: It would be interesting if you speculated a bit on the directions in which the more radical change in the curriculum that you propose might move.

Matthew Farrow: Speculation is always highly dangerous, especially in such a public forum. We find the issue difficult. Through the national debate, we are taking the opportunity to talk to our members in more depth about their thinking on how radical they want us to be in what we say to people such as members of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee and the Executive.

To answer the first question, the problem is that the assessment regime is loaded towards content and subject knowledge rather than skills and competencies. Employers have told us—this is supported by research into young people's attitudes—that a lot of that subject knowledge is of limited value because either it is not retained for long once young people have left education or it is not relevant in the workplace.

We want more emphasis on the assessment and accreditation of skills and competencies; if you want us to, we can go into the ways in which that could be done. We are not saying that there should not be any content and that education should be entirely about skills and competencies. Although our eventual official position depends on what our members tell us, we are thinking about issues such as whether it would be possible to specify less in terms of the knowledge that has to be demonstrated in assessments. A lot of curriculum guidance could still be provided to schools and schools would be free to set up programmes of study in subjects that cover whatever content they think fits with the guidance. However, less time would be spent assessing the retention of that knowledge and more time would be spent assessing the skills and competencies, perhaps using the subject as a context for that.

Keir Bloomer: Graham Leicester talked about the aspects of the system that inhibit change. To what extent do your members make use of the kind of assessments that come at the end of the school system, such as standard grades?

Matthew Farrow: That question is often asked of the CBI in these debates. People say that, although we talk about skills and competencies, employers still ask for a set of qualifications. Because education has been unable to provide employers with information about the things in which they are most interested, employers, particularly those who recruit a significant number of people, have to find basic ways of dealing with job applications. Although they want the successful applicant to be a creative person who can work well in a team, can make a contribution to the company and has the potential for further development, they have no way of telling whether that is true of a certain applicant by looking at their qualifications. They will look for those qualities in the interview but are forced to assume that a degree or a set of highers is a reasonable proxy for long-term development potential. That is why, although the language in job advertisements tends to be about personal skills and competencies, many job advertisements contain a threshold level of qualifications.

That relates to the issue of the difficulty of change. Parents think that, as a person with those threshold qualifications is better placed in the labour market, those qualifications are all that they should care about. The parents and the media become concerned only with whether schools have high exam pass rates and politicians come under pressure to deliver that agenda. We have found it difficult to show employers or young people how well the young people are doing in terms of the skills and competencies that matter in the long term. However, it is easier to explain the problem than it is to suggest ways of addressing it.

Lindsay Paterson: You said that CBI Scotland endorses, without reservation, the "Education for Citizenship in Scotland" paper. You said that there were no conflicts between what employers want and what education for life as a democratic citizen might be.

Near the beginning of that document is a paragraph that suggests that one of the goals of citizenship education should be to encourage young people to challenge existing conventions and question the status quo. Would all CBI members sign up to that? Would they encourage active criticism of the status quo among the junior employees in their company? If not, what changes in our industrial structure and management attitudes are required in order to make it worth while for the education system truly to educate people for citizenship?

Matthew Farrow: We talk about businesses and employers as if there were three of them outside whose views we could ask, whereas there are 250,000 businesses in Scotland, all of which have slightly different views. The role of the CBI—like

the role of the political parties—is to try to articulate and shape their common ground or centre of gravity.

I am sure that we could easily find an employer who would look at the document and say, "My God, we do not want any of this." Equally, we could find a lot of employers who would say, "This is fantastic stuff." What I hear from companies is that they want young people to question and be innovative. They want young people in a given situation to challenge things about their company. If those young people disagree fundamentally with the market economy or the capitalist system, employers will point to the fact that we have a democratic process whereby people can articulate and debate those views. They do not want the young people to go and smash up the companies, but they want them to question the status quo in a business or economic sense.

It is not hard to think of some major, household-name companies that, even two or three years ago, were seen as impregnable and in no danger but that have been completely reshaped. Their businesses have almost collapsed and their share prices have dived. Often, what those companies do in that situation is say, "My God, we need more people who can recognise that our business model is becoming out of date and can see that the market is changing very quickly." Companies want people who are challenging and creative, although that must be tempered with acceptance of the fact that, if those people choose to enter into a contract of employment, they have rights and responsibilities. If they want to campaign against the market economy, that is fine, but they should do that through the democratic structures.

I do not think that there is a conflict between the thoughts that emerge from the document and what the mass of employers want. Nonetheless, I accept that one can always find individual employers who will take a different view.

Malcolm MacKenzie: Several people have talked to us about the knowledge economy and the knowledge society, yet you talk about an assessment regime that is weighted towards knowledge. The word "regime" always strikes me as faintly pejorative. Would you advise us to have a closer look at the relationship between knowledge and skills? Is there an ambiguity that we have not resolved? Do we need to think more deeply about that relationship or is there a conflict?

Matthew Farrow: There is an ambiguity in the terms that are bandied about in all sorts of education literature and that ambiguity needs to be unpicked. The easy answer to your question is yes. The committee could usefully spend time considering the issue—I am sure that you have done that already.

You are right to suggest that there was a pejorative tone. I am concerned about the current curriculum assessment arrangements. Unlike Graham Leicester, I am a layperson coming to these issues as a business representative. It strikes me that there is an emphasis on retained subject knowledge that may have limited scope for long-term retention and limited scope for application in life or the labour market. One might say that knowledge, in its true sense, is about more than that—it is about understanding a wider picture and relating oneself to that. It could then be argued that that is not very far from some of the skills and attributes.

You are right to point out that there can be some ambiguity in the language. In our documents and reports, we try to be as clear as we can about what we mean and what employers say to us. However, if one is to have a big debate about the future of education, one must look closely at the distinctions between skills, competencies and knowledge.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you very much, Matthew. We will take a break for five minutes and resume at 3.35 pm.

15:28

Meeting suspended.

15:37

On resuming—

The Deputy Convener: I invite Andrew Brookes, John Deighan, Jack Laidlaw and Colin Brown from Action of Churches Together in Scotland to give evidence for the committee's inquiry into the purposes of education. The witnesses may make a statement, after which I will invite committee members to ask questions. Our advisers are also present this afternoon, and will ask questions if they so wish.

Andrew Brookes (Action of Churches Together in Scotland): As convener of the education group of ACTS, I thank the committee for inviting us to give evidence. ACTS co-ordinates the activity of most of the mainland churches in Scotland, including the Catholic church, the Church of Scotland, the Episcopal Church, the United Free Church of Scotland, the United Reformed Church, the Methodists, the Salvation Army and the Quakers. The organisation examines areas of common concern, common agreement and common action and has been doing that in relation to education for a couple of years. I point out that that does not preclude individual churches from speaking on their own behalf and according to their own interests. Although we have many common areas of concern and activity, that does not mean that we

speak unanimously on all issues.

I am accompanied by John Deighan, who is the parliamentary officer for the Catholic church and who also speaks on behalf of the Catholic Education Commission; Jack Laidlaw, who is the convener of the Church of Scotland's education committee; and Colin Brown, who is currently the moderator of the United Free Church. Although we will speak on educational issues this afternoon, our views are informed and directed by our Christian faith. We are of the conviction that what we say speaks to many people of other religious traditions and to people of other backgrounds.

The committee has our submission and the summary of its themes. However, I want to highlight one or two key points that have arisen from our discussions and our involvement in consultations on the national education debate and the committee's inquiry. The first is our concern for a vision of what is meant by a human person. We agree with the United Nations statement that a person's educational needs should be defined in

"physical, intellectual, social and spiritual"

terms. We are concerned that the spiritual aspect should not be neglected; indeed, we have to bring together and integrate all those aspects.

Secondly, we believe that education is about formation as well as information, and that it should focus on values as well as knowledge. Furthermore, we are convinced that there is no such thing as a value-free society or a value-free education and that we must choose the values that we bring to either. We are clearly concerned about moral values, justice, peace, respect, tolerance and the spiritual side of those matters. Ethos is crucial not only to a school but to all education; however, we need an ethos of inclusive relationships as well as an ethos of achievement.

We believe that the education system must meet the needs of all Scots, so we welcome the fact that different learning styles now form part of the educational approach. Although there is a need to be comprehensive in the widest sense, we do not feel that everyone's needs can necessarily be covered in the same classroom or even the same school. We have to include people who have different educational needs, including those who have special educational needs. Moreover, in a pluralistic society, we must embrace ethnicity, faith communities and the issue of language divergence in the country.

Relationships, including those among pupils and between pupils and teachers, and the wider relationships between educational establishments and families, churches, industry and other groups in society are pivotal in education. Educating people into relationships is crucial to citizenship and to the feeling that people are engaged in society and are able to participate. Connected to that, we must educate people in mutual understanding.

Jackie Baillie: Under theme 3 on the first page of your submission, you say:

"Providing a 'fair' education for all does not mean an equal distribution of resources."

Although I looked carefully in the supplementary papers, I could not find where you tease out that statement. Will you expand on what you mean by that assertion? How would you achieve it? Indeed, how would such an approach result in positive outcomes that would allow each child to achieve their own potential?

Andrew Brookes: Are you happy for me to share the questions around the group?

Jackie Baillie: Absolutely.

Jack Laidlaw (Action of Churches Together in Scotland): Fairness in education is an interesting concept in itself. One cannot distribute the money or resources to a school simply on the basis of the number of pupils who attend it. Pupils have different learning needs. Of course, some have what we call special educational needs and finding the appropriate resources that will help and benefit them requires a great deal of careful consideration. Fairness is about equality and trying to level the playing field for all young people, without thinking that they must all be given exactly the same resources. We must ensure that all potential obstacles are removed and that each child has as many advantages as possible to develop their potential.

15:45

Ian Jenkins: You stress—I would not expect otherwise—that values should underpin education. Do schools engage enough in that at present?

Jack Laidlaw: There is concern about the amount of time that schools can find for values education. That is partly a result of the huge pressures on schools—particularly secondary schools—from the assessment-driven curriculum. Teachers sometimes find it difficult to take time out because they must teach according to the syllabus. A few days ago, I heard a mathematics teacher say that she did not have enough time for practical activities such as measuring the heights of trees because to do so takes too much time out of the syllabus. It is sad that teachers cannot get off the treadmill of the syllabus and do things that they feel are worth while and of interest to the youngsters.

The same happens in values education. We are good at rhetoric about what kind of schools and values we want, but when value issues arise—

which can happen not only in religious and moral education, but in any part of the curriculum—teachers need time to step aside to allow youngsters to think about and talk through those issues. Sometimes, the curriculum is overcrowded.

John Deighan (Action of Churches Together in Scotland): Passing on values and virtues is integral to Catholic schools' approach to education, which means that great emphasis is put on teachers' relationships with pupils. We think of teachers not only as experts who provide knowledge, but as witnesses to the transmission, however imperceptible, of values. Education must focus on character building. If we are to prepare children to be good citizens, we must consider not only what they know, but other aspects of their character, such as whether they are industrious and prudent and whether they respect other peoples' rights. That must be taken into account throughout the curriculum, which is why we place great emphasis on the preparation of Catholic schoolteachers.

Andrew Brookes: One aspect of values education is that it is about formation rather than information; it is not just education of the person's intellect. That brings us back to what was said about ethos and relationships. Attitudes such as respect are caught as much as they are taught. The teaching of the concept of respect belongs to a philosophy degree, but three, four or five-year-olds have an instinct about it.

The pressure of the curriculum and what we have to teach means that other aspects that are crucial to the people who we turn out sometimes slip down the agenda, although that is not deliberate. Teachers do not have sufficient time to spend with people. They feel pressured in trying to build up relationships. The issue relates to engagement with citizenship. Unless people feel respected, they will not engage with society.

Colin Brown (Action of Churches Together in Scotland): Most of the comments have been about secondary schools, but I have a comment on primary schools. Until recently, primary school teachers were not under the same pressure from the curriculum, but in my experience, situations such as Jack Laidlaw's example about measuring trees are becoming increasingly common and such pressures are becoming the norm in primary schools. At primary school, children are at an age when values are important and when the teacher-pupil relationship is perhaps stronger than at any other time in formal education.

Ian Jenkins: It is quite heartening that much of the evidence that we have received from various sources—as diverse as the Confederation of British Industry, the universities and ACTS—has talked the same kind of language. That language has been about getting away from the curriculum's being driven in a direction that is not quite the direction in which we want people to go. Overall, the balance needs somehow to be struck again. Are there common shared values that can be taught without their presenting difficulties for people of different religions inside the same system?

Jack Laidlaw: If we take a value such as honesty, there will be various points at which all of us round this room would probably want to make a stand about what we thought "honesty" was about. We use the word in conversation with lots of different people. For example, we sometimes ask, "Are we really honest or do we flatter people?" From my point of view, there is sufficient agreement about where the discussion on values should be, in that we all value honesty, although we might have different interpretations of what honesty means. There are lots of such examples.

Schools already have such an agenda. It was phrased in the moral and religious education part of the five to 14 programme, in which a string of values were supposed to be encountered. Those are not necessarily the kind of values about which one can stand up and say exactly what people must think and believe. Rather, they are the kind of things in which everybody must get involved in working out exactly what the values mean. A school community will need to work out what it means by "honesty". If a school community is led well, its idea of what that word means within that community will be informed by all sorts of things, including the homes from which the youngsters come. One hopes that there will be a community sense of what "honesty" means and of what people expect. That is my view.

Andrew Brookes: Although there is a divergence of views among the churches and a greater divergence of views on belief among religions, the values are, at the practical level, in many respects common. Different churches and religions hold the same values, but for different reasons, as part of their belief systems. However, all the main religions—and many other people—agree in practice on the need for things such as respect, honesty, truth, compassion, commitment, a sense of justice and fairness, integrity, service, self-control, forgiveness, listening and dialogue. They may give different reasons for the need for those things, but values are about living and expressing them as much as they are about the reasons behind them. There is quite a lot of common practice.

Colin Brown: One of the key values that is bound to concern everyone is the way in which people treat one another. The school is a community and people gain values in the experience of living together in a community.

Whether a school is large or small and whether it is in a diverse or homogeneous community, the school can deal with issues such as bullying and citizenship that are of great concern to many people at the moment, just by the way in which it encourages people to treat one another. That is one of the key values to which we would hold.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): On page 3 of your written submission, you say that it is your conviction that

"Education should be child focused and family centred".

On the face of it, that statement is laudable—at least, in my view, it is laudable—but it contains contradictions. One can be child focused but still believe that families have responsibilities. Alternatively, should schools, the local authority or the Government have responsibilities? Every day, teachers and head teachers face issues in schools and education, such as family planning, prescriptions and so on. When one considers those issues in more detail, one realises that there are potential conflicts in your statement. Where should the authority to make decisions lie? Should it lie with the school or with the family, or should the school expect the local authority or Government—through Parliament—to tell it what decisions it should make? If authority does not lie with the school, the local authority or the Government, your statement is merely glib.

Andrew Brookes: I suspect that different churches will approach that question from slightly different angles. It would probably be best for the committee to hear different views.

John Deighan: Education is a partnership between schools, parents and the local authority. The primary responsibility for education and the rearing of children lies with parents. They have a right and a duty to ensure that their children are educated in accordance with their values and wishes, and they rely on schools to be able to exercise that right and to discharge that duty. Schools must work in partnership with parents to ensure that they are delivering, but we must allow schools to show leadership in addressing problems and issues. Nonetheless, if Brian Monteith's question is trying to get at the heart of where responsibility and power lie and how education should be ultimately directed, our view is that the answer should come from the parents' perspective.

Jack Laidlaw: We must be careful about what we are saying about the child-focused nature of education. Children have all sorts of needs, and education is really centred on children. If education is not about what the child, pupil or young person is learning, we begin to fool ourselves.

Education must be child focused, in that the child's needs and development should be the driving force behind everything. An important part of child-centred or child-focused education is the possibility of encouraging children to begin to learn about learning and to take charge of their own learning. If you go into a nursery school, you see children beginning to make choices about what they want to do and about what they want to learn. That is part of what child-focused education is about. If we encourage children as they go along to continue to be involved in their own learning, to self-assess or self-evaluate, and to appreciate and understand the progress that they are making, we would to a degree be saying simply that we want education to meet the needs of every child.

Education must also be family centred. We can talk about children's intellectual development, but we must also talk about their emotional development. For example, if I were discussing values with a child, I would want to encourage that child to think about the values of the home. I would not simply ask for the child's opinion; rather, I would ask what that opinion was based on and what people at home think about the issue in question. I would ask the child, "What do you think? What do you think other people think?" Although education is child-focused in that sense, it is not self-centred. I want children to look around at the family, too.

Of course, parents are crucial in that. We give them choices about what they are prepared to have their children learn in school so that they can withdraw the children from religious education and religious observance if they do not like it. They can withdraw them, I am advised, from any aspect of the curriculum, because that is the way things are. The role of parents is crucial, and they need to be in partnership with schools.

16:00

Mr Monteith: Page 5 of your submission states:

"For Catholic Education there is an additional dimension. An essential feature of Catholic Education is that it engages in Christian formation, mission, and evangelisation."

I wish to hear from Colin Brown and Jack Laidlaw whether they think that that is unnecessary in schools and whether Catholics think it is necessary. I am trying to tease out what is different.

Jack Laidlaw: I wondered whether you would ask a question like that.

Mr Monteith: You were right.

Jack Laidlaw: I take the view that the family and the faith community should be sufficient support in the business of beliefs and values to any youngster. The majority of young people are

brought up in exactly that way and they share their schooling with people from many different backgrounds. That is the way I look at the issue. That is not to say that, as a Christian, I am not concerned about the way in which children, for example, from my church community learn about and develop their faith, but I do not think that that is necessarily the job of the school. I do not think it is the job of the school to undermine the home and its values, but I hope that young people would be robust enough and, at the appropriate age, critical enough to be able to defend the beliefs and values that they hold and bring from their homes.

Colin Brown: I go along with that. I add that we represent ACTS, but ACTS has not discussed the issue.

Mr Monteith: I have one more simple question. Thank you for answering the previous question. I found that helpful. I have a comparative point. What is the view of ACTS or its individual members on the place of religious observance in non-denominational schools or Roman Catholic schools, separately from religious and moral education? We know the difference, and I am sure that most of the public appreciate the difference, but what is the view of ACTS members?

Andrew Brookes: There is no collective view on observance. Individuals will have to make their own comments. My view, speaking as a Catholic, is that all Christians agree that expression of their faith through worship is part of being Christian—worship is part of other religions too. Within the context of a faith school or a Catholic school, there is continuity in terms of the whole of the school's activity. The practice of one's faith and its expression and worship link to what goes on in the classroom, which links to the relationships in the school, and how citizenship and commitments are practised. There is continuity, which needs to be respectful of parents and children, but in going to a Catholic school they accept that that is part of the environment.

Jack Laidlaw: The Church of Scotland, as part of ACTS, wants to listen. I understand that the religious observance working group has just begun to take evidence. It will be going around the country listening, and I want to listen as well. What happens in religious observance, in the non-denominational sector, cannot be described as Christian worship of the kind that I might want to be involved in if went along to my local church. It is quite different.

If I were grinding an axe, I might say that the experience in secondary schools is largely negative for many pupils. That is what we have found in our research. If it is largely negative, some basic questions may have to be asked about it. I am sorry, but I am going to sit on the fence and say, "I'll wait and see." I want to listen to other people's views, without expressing publicly a view from the Church of Scotland.

John Deighan: From a Catholic perspective, we see the school as part of the faith community. Religious worship and observance is very much part of the school. We believe that Catholic schooling allows children to encounter Christ through witnesses who believe in the values of Christ. We believe that pupils are entitled to full religious formation and school gives them that opportunity. That comes through worship, as well as through religious and moral education.

Michael Russell: Convener, I have to leave shortly and I apologise because I will not be able to hear the end of the witnesses' evidence or the evidence to come.

I would like to ask two questions, going back to the first set of questions from Ian Jenkins. You are right to argue that the curriculum is too full. I am resistant to people—around this table or elsewhere in the Parliament—who want to keep adding their latest pet subject to the curriculum. However, I would like to hear some positive thinking from each of the witnesses on how we can reform the curriculum to create space for the kind of things that you have been talking about, allowing our young people to develop as fully rounded human beings rather than simply as receivers of more and more information so that they can churn out more and more examination results.

Andrew Brookes: We have talked about how children learn, as well as what children learn. As has been pointed out, there has been a lot of concentration on the what. That has been accentuated by the league table syndrome. Teachers become preoccupied with getting children through exams. Children learn facts but are not necessarily fully intellectually engaged. There may be no critical thinking. We need to take the pressure off so that we allow more reflective and critical thinking in the intellectual sphere and a more holistic education. By taking the pressure off, we will allow other things to come into play. We must consider issues to do with ethos, using soft indicators to measure that.

Michael Russell: I entirely accept what you say—it is music to my ears and I have no difficulty with it. However, I want to delve deeper. How can we take the pressure off? The national debate and this inquiry are philosophically based, but they are also based on some new thinking about education.

John Deighan: Part of the answer may be to try not to do too much. Someone pointed out earlier that every time a social problem comes along we think that the schools must deal with it. Perhaps we should consider society in general and ask why such problems arise. For example, issues arise

over the stability and strength of the family. Many problems are to do with family breakdown. Issues such as drug abuse, early involvement in sexual activity, sexually transmitted infections, contraception and abortion are all having to be dealt with at school, whereas perhaps we should be taking broader social issues into account.

Jack Laidlaw: I am a great believer in lifelong learning. Perhaps we cram too much information into the curriculum, without letting people learn and reflect. How is that changed? I once took a group away to a residential situation and discovered, to my amazement, that a third-year pupil was an expert in ornithology. He had also brought a guitar with him, which he played very competently. He had taught himself about those two areas of learning and understanding, yet he was considered average in the school.

Since then, I have always wondered why the school did not know of the abilities and achievements of that youngster. How could opportunities have been provided for that youngster to follow up such interest and curiosity? If we start with such questions, we might dismantle some of the big wall curriculum that we have built up, particularly in secondary schools.

A long time ago, a group called the Munn committee examined the philosophy behind secondary education, and there were other groups before that. That committee's recommendation was never implemented as the committee wanted it to be, because the committee thought in terms of a core, to be dealt with by big chunks of some things and small chunks of others, so that youngsters could follow their interests. If we look back at that and ask whether we learned lessons for the future, we realise that we have to ask questions about where we want to go and what we want to deliver for young people.

If we specify that, we might dismantle the curriculum and reassemble a freer curriculum that would allow some such choices to be made and some of youngsters' interests to be followed. That would keep them better motivated when they were in school and happier to be engaged. They might therefore not look askance at the possibility of further learning, if they ended up in a job from which they were made redundant and they needed to acquire another skill.

Colin Brown: The last thing that we want is another subject in the curriculum called values. The time needs to be provided for teachers to be professionals and to use their professional judgment. When someone in the school where I am chaplain lost a grandparent, that person's teacher sat down with their class and said, "Let's talk about families and relationships." That teacher took the time to do so and did not feel that because it was half-past 10, for example, the class should do maths. The fact that attainment and targets are so crucial in the eyes of head teachers, who must deliver on them, puts pressure on the curriculum.

Michael Russell: I greatly enjoyed and valued those responses. We are nearing one of the big issues. We take it as read that pressure in schools must be reduced. The evidence of the SQA inquiry, in which the convener and I as well as others participated, showed us that. If we take that as read, I will explore and build on another issue, which John Deighan referred to in passing.

W B Yeats said that education was not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire. The people with the matches should be the teachers, by and large. How do we put the matches in the hands of the teachers? Is our teacher training at fault? Do we teach primary teachers how to do origami and to work with sticky-back plastic, but not how the big issues inspire children? What is wrong with education, if we do not light those fires for young people? We do that in some places, but we are not doing enough of that in the right way. Let us take it as a given, although it is not a given, that pressure is being reduced. How do we accomplish the other task?

16:15

Andrew Brookes: A teacher who is enthusiastic or passionate about their subject or passionate about and interested in young people will convey that to their pupils. There is a sense that, if good education practice and vision are contagious, we need to look at what fires up the teacher. With respect, we are talking not only about the teacher, but about what goes on at home. In saying that, I am not being judgmental, but what goes on at home has a huge impact on young people.

Kids coming to school in a fairly poor social area are heroic just for turning up. We need to examine what is going on there and where their motivation comes from. We need to find an education system that meets pupils where they are at and engages them. Pupils need to feel that they are part of a child-centred learning system. We need to find a system that takes on and develops their enthusiasms. The system needs to start from what is within.

Jack Laidlaw: Trying to transform the situation will not be a quick-fix job. We will have to target our actions if we want to see radical change. A lot goes on in teacher training, but we may have high expectations of what are short-term courses. We are trying to teach a graduate in 36 weeks, of which 18 weeks are spent in the university and 18 weeks in schools, followed by the new one-year, training-place induction period. We may not be giving our teachers enough training or we may not be giving them it at the right time.

It may not be possible to teach people to be imaginative and creative unless they have been brought up that way and encouraged to develop their strengths. It may take a while for us to get to that level. That said, I have seen schools where these things happen. I have seen primary school children take charge of their own learning—those children were eager to learn. The problem in that instance was that the children moved on to a secondary school that soon knocked that kind of approach to one side. The transition from primary to secondary needs to be examined. Perhaps it would be possible for small teams of teachers to work with groups of pupils. Pupils do not necessarily need to move around schools and see 17 different teachers in one week.

Colin Brown: I agree with everything that my colleagues have said. With all due respect to the committee, one of the key issues—particularly as we approach election time—will be the tone of debate that takes place as a result of the committee's inquiry and the national debate on education. If the debate is not seen to be positive and constructive, the education system could be damaged. We are all involved in the process, but politicians also have a part to play.

John Deighan: Without providing an answer, I would like to point out that teachers whom I have come across are usually quite enthusiastic about their subject, but I hear often that they do not get a chance to teach their subject and that their enthusiasm is sapped out of them. My advice would be to find out why teachers lose heart, why so many pupils appear to be unenthusiastic about learning and why other pupils are resistant to learning. Part of the answer would be to help the people at the chalkface overcome their obstacles.

Lindsay Paterson: I appreciate your interesting written submission and your comments so far. However, the problem is that I am an atheist. What is specifically Christian, leaving aside the issue of religious observance, about what you said in your written submission and your oral evidence today?

Andrew Brookes: We tried to frame the written submission in educational terms, for the most part, to create as big a dialogue as possible with educationalists. It could be said, generally, that our motivation or intention is Christian. People uphold the value of truth for different reasons. A Christian upholds the truth because it is tied to such matters as Jesus's teaching or the 10 commandments.

I would say that our key organising principle is our sense of people being made in the image of God and what that means. We regard each person as being of absolute value because they are made in God's image. Our understanding of people physically, socially, intellectually and spiritually derives from that perspective. Tied to that is that we are made for relationships and that community is important. All those are key Christian understandings.

The fact is, however, that that image of God is tarnished and that we are all damaged personally, and that there are issues in society that need to be sorted out by a commitment to justice and to restoring that image. All those are linked. The Christian belief is that Jesus is God made man. The divinity dignified the human state by becoming human and by pouring his spirit into us. We regard that as animating a Christian formation. I do not know whether that answers your question.

Jack Laidlaw: It was important for the ACTS vision statement to state where we were coming from. That is probably not as important in the education debate as where we are trying to travel and our presuppositions about each person being unique, about people being made for relationships and being inter-dependent, about values being important in relationships and about education being for mutual understanding so that we know one another and have respect for different persons.

Those are the principles on which we want to travel. We know where we are coming from as far as those principles are concerned. However, my experience of working in the educational sphere suggests to me that those are values or starting points with which many other people would be happy to go along. Therefore, there is not necessarily a Christianising aspect to accepting where we are going with our written submission. We just thought that we should be open and honest about our presuppositions.

Malcolm MacKenzie: What future do you see for ecumenical schools in Scotland?

Andrew Brookes: I am not a prophet. It could be said that some schools are de facto ecumenical, if that means that a school contains practising Christians of different denominations. That would be true of Catholic schools and some other schools. Therefore, we could say descriptively that ecumenicalism has already happened. Even in the non-denominational sector, anecdotal evidence on the ground will suggest that one school has a more explicit Christian ethos than another does. As regards pragmatic or institutional co-operation between the churches, I am not aware of any extensive discussions on that, although it would be possible to look at that matter in some areas.

John Deighan: The Catholic church in Scotland's position is to retain Catholic schools, because we see that as important in passing on our Catholic ethos and beliefs. Lindsay Paterson asked where the Christian content in the document was. When we work ecumenically, we sometimes have to go to the lowest common

denominator and we do not get the chance to pass on our belief system in its fullness.

Jack Laidlaw: I return to a point that I made earlier. If people from children's home backgrounds want to nurture children in specific beliefs and values, with the faith community supporting them, that can help children to grow and develop. All schools are ecumenical in the broadest sense, although there is a specifically Christian idea of being ecumenical, which involves bringing people together. An education in an area where there is no choice between denominational and non-denominational schools is not necessarily to be devalued just because the parents did not have a choice.

I hope and trust that education can go forward with breadth and diversity being celebrated and welcomed in schools—indeed, being seen as a positive enrichment rather than a problem or an issue. I wish my fellow Christians in the Highlands, for example, well whether they are Roman Catholics or in the United Free Church. They have the opportunity—in the home, in the family and in the church group—to instil and encourage their values. At the same time, there is a richness in the whole school community, in which they all mingle.

The Deputy Convener: I thank Colin Brown, Jack Laidlaw, Andrew Brookes and John Deighan for their evidence. I suspend the meeting for a minute for the changeover of witnesses.

16:26

Meeting suspended.

16:27

On resuming—

The Deputy Convener: Our next witnesses are from the Scottish Inter Faith Council. They are Serwan Kaur Bhogal, Alex Reid and Chris Foxon. You have an opportunity to outline briefly issues that you want to raise with the committee. Committee members and our advisers will then ask questions.

Alex Reid (Scottish Inter Faith Council): Thank you very much for this opportunity to present our discussion paper. I invite my colleagues to introduce themselves.

Serwan Kaur Bhogal (Scottish Inter Faith Council): I am Serwan Kaur Bhogal and I am here on behalf of the Scottish Inter Faith Council.

Chris Foxon (Scottish Inter Faith Council): I am Chris Foxon. I am the chairman of the Scottish working party on religions of the world in education—a complicated title for a group of people who try to foster, through education, mutual understanding in the world religions. As such, I am a member of the Scottish Inter Faith Council.

Alex Reid: Dianne Wolfson, who cannot be here, sends her apologies.

There are two general points that I shall make before we start. The discussion paper that you have in front of you reflects the views and concerns of some of the Scottish faith communities. It is not meant to be comprehensive or systematic in its approach to the subject of education, nor should it be taken as representing a consensus view. You will appreciate how difficult it is to get any consensus view of all the faith communities. Although the paper addresses issues that are mainly concerned with the moral and spiritual welfare of young people, it also touches on more general matters of concern.

We all share the general belief that our educational system should be holistic in its approach—the education of body, mind and spirit—and truly comprehensive in the sense that it should always strive to be relevant to the needs of pupils of every level of ability and aptitude. The welfare and development of the child should be at the centre of the educational process and the needs or requirements of society should be secondary—if I dare suggest that. Education should be child centred.

The paper that you have before you represents the views that were expressed and does not arrange them into any particular order. However, the views can be divided into two areas: those relating to the educational needs of our young people and those relating to the spiritual and moral welfare of children.

Views relating to the educational needs of our young people include the belief that the curriculum should be directed towards the development of the child's potential and should not require them to sit too many tests and examinations that might have the effect of making some feel that they are failures. It is also felt that the teaching of basic skills should always have priority over the teaching of information technology skills.

On the spiritual and moral welfare of children, it is suggested that it is important to have a quiet time or quiet room for children and that there should be religious and moral education in schools. The paper also makes points about religious observance and the development of a sense of values.

We are here to represent the views of the wider faith community. Apart from Chris Foxon, none of us are experts in education, but we are happy to try to answer your questions.

16:30

Jackie Baillie: Paragraph 6 of your submission

deals with the notion of replacing religious observance—as opposed to religious and moral education—in non-denominational schools with an assembly that would be used to provide a common time for reflection on human values and so on, similar to the Parliament's time for reflection. I know that you said that it is difficult to reach consensus, but is that an agreed view? Is it preferable to allowing parents to exclude their children from the religious observance if they do not like it?

Alex Reid: Opinion is divided on this issue. Perhaps Chris Foxon is in a better position to answer your question.

Chris Foxon: There is a reasonable amount of agreement that there should be a kind of open reflection time, rather like the Parliament's time for reflection, because people saw the idea as valuing a range of traditions. Partly because it is already there, there was a feeling that the ability to opt out should be maintained. Whether that is an opt-out that is designed to allow the young person to do a Jewish thing, a Christian thing, a Baha'i thing or whatever as an extra-curricular activity is a different kettle of fish. There was a feeling that it was good for the ethos of the school to have pupils coming together to celebrate shared values—to pick up on what the previous witnesses said—and the values of others, even though one might not fully embrace them. However, we thought that it was inappropriate for a teacher to go into a class—as happens in many primary schools—and start the day with the Lord's prayer as that would be insulting not only to people from the Sikh and Hindu community and so on but to those who were non-theistic.

The Convener: Serwan, would you like to comment on that?

Serwan Kaur Bhogal: My children went to a private school. They joined in prayers; they never felt insulted.

Jackie Baillie: Do you think that it is common for children in non-denominational schools in Scotland to spend quite a lot of time celebrating the Christian faith? For example, they go to services in church at Christmas time, which can exclude people of other faiths.

Chris Foxon: That is the case particularly in primary schools. In the religious and moral education that we have in primary schools now, there will be a celebration of Diwali and other religious festivals, but that will consist of a project, wall display and "formal assembly". A lot of people are uncomfortable. There is still the assumption sometimes in the teaching profession that we are a practising Christian country and that therefore it is natural that prayers in schools should be Christian. I realise that there are contexts in which that can be done sensitively, but although we celebrate Christmas and Easter we do not celebrate Diwali or Eid.

Serwan Kaur Bhogal: I have always celebrated Christmas. It is a good experience for children to learn about other people's religions and festivals. I have never had any problem with that.

Alex Reid: Paragraph 4 of our submission states:

"No child should go through school learning about the beliefs of others while their own is ignored."

Serwan Kaur Bhogal: My beliefs were never ignored. I taught my children my beliefs and the beliefs of others side by side. I gave them basic education at home, which is where the learning process starts.

Jackie Baillie: I am making a distinction between what is learned in the classroom and the home and children going to particular religious observance en masse.

Serwan Kaur Bhogal: That is where the grandparents came in very handy, because I did not have the time.

Jackie Baillie: Excellent, bring back the grandparents.

Serwan Kaur Bhogal: They were there to teach the children about religion.

Alex Reid: The situation depends on the area. The situation in schools in Glasgow will be different from the situation in schools in Inverness. We would not expect something to be imposed on every school.

Mr Monteith: Are you saying that a non-denominational school in Newton Mearns for example, might add to its celebration Passover and still include the nativity at Christmas, where pupils of all faiths may take part? Are you suggesting that we consider that rather than removing the nativity, so that nobody is offended?

Alex Reid: Part of the educational process is making children aware of different faiths. We would not necessarily insist that every faith be represented in every school. I am sure that there is a difference of opinion on that and I am sure that you will not get a consensus view.

Chris Foxon: I want to grind my axe again and say something slightly harsher than what Alex Reid said. I am not convinced that I as a practising X can celebrate Passover, given that I am not Jewish. I can learn about it and with good religious and moral education I can value, share and embrace the symbolism of freedom that Passover is all about. I am not a Jew, however, so I cannot say a Jewish prayer and, in a sense, I cannot eat the Passover food with the same meaning that my

Jewish colleague would attach. I would want to move away from the practising side of celebrating religion, but learn about the incarnation, about Guru Nanak or about the various bits and pieces of religious and moral education, allowing the observance side to be either neutral or opt-in.

Serwan Kaur Bhogal: I come from a cosmopolitan upbringing. My basic education was provided by tutors from all over the world. The first things that we were taught were respect and value. If you bear those in mind, you will reach your goals.

Irene McGugan: You are all saying that values are very important. Your paper suggests that they be made explicit in the school system and that a programme of values education be developed. How would you suggest that that be done? How can values be made explicit in the school system?

Alex Reid: I am out of touch with teaching now, but I was a secondary school English teacher for 20 years. I would like to see values education developed across the curriculum, but that is a personal view. We should not necessarily have a subject called "values", but it should be built in across the curriculum. If there is an awareness among educationalists that that is something that we have to provide, I do not see a problem in introducing it, but, as I said, it should be integrated across the curriculum.

Chris Foxon: One of the key things not to do in introducing citizenship into the curriculum is to set up citizenship classes. Rather, we should do a curricular audit and establish which aspects of citizenship ought to be explored in the school and whether they are being explored now. If they are not, we should nudge certain curricular areas in particular directions.

It would be easy to say that religious and moral education à la five to 14 delivers all the values education we need. In fact, other curricular areas deal with it. In my teaching career in secondary school, we would explore the ethics of war and the taking of life in religious education classes, only to be told by fourth year pupils, "It's all right, sir, we've already been told war is wrong in English," because they had studied the work of the war poets there. We need some kind of audit that stops school being boringly repetitive while checking that topics or areas of the curriculum are being approached correctly.

The five-to-14 approach is fine. It is a good starting point and lists a series of commonly held values in the moral values and attitude strands and in the personal search areas. It is a matter of checking that those are being explored properly.

Serwan Kaur Bhogal: I agree—I do not have anything to add to that.

Malcolm MacKenzie: Is it an objective of the Inter Faith Council to foster human spirituality? Can that be done using an approach that some might view as the sociology of comparative religion?

Alex Reid: I do not think that the aims of the Inter Faith Council could be described in that way. One of its main aims is that people of different faiths should learn to respect one another. It aims to encourage dialogue between people of different faiths, hopefully to the point where we as a society can demonstrate that people of faith need not always be at loggerheads or in conflict with one another. That is a process, rather than a movement. The Inter Faith Council exists to bring people of different faiths together and to promote dialogue.

16:45

Serwan Kaur Bhogal: Alex Reid has described the main aim of the Inter Faith Council. We have organised a number of events at St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art. We seek to bring people together and to get them to respect one another, appreciate one another's values and learn more about one another. We never stop learning until the day that we pass away. It is all about learning.

Chris Foxon: The sociology of comparative religion is the danger side of religious studies—the knowledge-based approach to studying religion. At standard grade and higher still the SQA has avoided the danger of making the examination structure totally knowledge based. Our approach must be evaluative and must involve a key element of understanding. That relates to the point that Serwan Kaur Bhogal just made. At interfaith meetings, people do not just learn what Sikhs or Hindus do, but ask themselves what difference other religions or a non-theistic stance make to their lives. They start to explore below the surface, resulting in a genuine dialogue. The process may not foster spirituality, but it fosters respect for those who accept a spiritual stance. I am afraid that some universities are beginning to make the error of approaching religious studies as the sociology of what some would call madness. There needs to be an understanding and unpacking of how religion works for the individual.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you for your evidence.

Scottish Parent Teacher Council (Letter)

Jackie Baillie: We have all been sent copies of feedback from the Scottish Parent Teacher Council concerning the evidence-taking session on the School Meals (Scotland) Bill in which it took part. I am conscious that letters are being exchanged in the pages of today's edition of *The Herald*. It is depressing that people feel that they had an unpleasant experience at any meeting of a committee of the Parliament. I suggest that we refer the matter to the Standards Committee and ask it to take a view on what can be done to prevent that happening in future.

Mr Monteith: It was quite appropriate for the Scottish Parent Teacher Council to write in the manner in which it did. I do not think that the council's representatives were alone in receiving the treatment that they received. I was not present at the session at which they gave evidence, but I was present at other evidence-taking sessions at which I felt the emphasis was on political point scoring rather than exploration. Given the committee's high standards, that was regrettable. I agree with Jackie Baillie that we should seek guidance on this matter.

Ian Jenkins: The record will show that I commented on the incident at the time. If referring the matter to the Standards Committee will show how seriously we take it, I would be happy to do that.

Irene McGugan: As Brian Monteith said, it might be useful to find out what is the procedure in situations such as this. The Scottish Parent Teacher Council made it clear that it was responding to the information sheet that all witnesses receive, which invites them to provide feedback, good or bad. It would be interesting to know what the sheet says will be done with information that has been received. I would like to know whether there is a standard procedure for dealing with negative or critical feedback or whether, as in this case, such feedback is simply passed on to the relevant committee for consideration.

Martin Verity: This is the first time that the Education, Culture and Sport Committee has received negative feedback from witnesses, so there is no precedent. I would expect comments by witnesses about their experiences at committee meetings to be noted or circulated to members of the committee for information.

Jackie Baillie: The Standards Committee needs to address the wider issue of the way in which members of the Scottish Parliament behave in relation to witnesses. We invite people to give evidence to us and they do so voluntarily. We do not want the experience to put them off ever coming back.

Martin Verity: It is possible for the convener to refer the matter to the convener of the Standards Committee.

Karen Whitefield: The Scottish Parent Teacher Council points out in its letter that it has given evidence to many committees before, and that the experience of its representatives on this occasion was not normal. The council points out that, if witnesses are treated badly, they will not want to give evidence. For that reason it is important that we seek guidance on the matter and ensure that witnesses are not treated badly again. All members of the committee who were present at the meeting in question felt that there was a cause for concern.

Mr Monteith: Karen Whitefield's points are well made. Anyone who has been involved in taking evidence from the Scottish Parent Teacher Council previously will know that Judith Gillespie, who usually represents it, can give as good as she gets. She is no spring chicken—

Jackie Baillie: Is that an ageist point?

Mr Monteith: I mean it in the kindest sense. Judith Gillespie is a formidable evidence giver. The fact that the Scottish Parent Teacher Council wrote such a letter says something about the day in question. We are not looking for the Standards Committee to reprimand members. We simply want a mechanism that will enable members to realise that the Education, Culture and Sport Committee is concerned about what took place at that evidence-taking session, so that in future all other committees will be able to have regard to that.

Meeting closed at 16:51.

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