

EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Wednesday 27 February 2008

Session 3

£5.00

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body 2008.

Applications for reproduction should be made in writing to the Licensing Division,
Her Majesty's Stationery Office, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ
Fax 01603 723000, which is administering the copyright on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate
Body.

Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by RR
Donnelley.

CONTENTS

Wednesday 27 February 2008

	Col.
CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE	649
PROPOSED SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION	693

EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE COMMITTEE 5th Meeting 2008, Session 3

CONVENER

*Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP)

*Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)

*Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab)

*Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)

*Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD)

*Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Alan Armstrong (Learning and Teaching Scotland)

Christine Carlin (Scottish Government Schools Directorate)

Alison Coull (Scottish Government Schools Directorate)

Chris McIlroy (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education)

Gill Stewart (Scottish Qualifications Authority)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Eugene Windsor

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Nick Hawthorne

ASSISTANT CLERK

Andrew Proudfoot

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee

Wednesday 27 February 2008

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:04*]

Curriculum for Excellence

The Convener (Karen Whitefield): Good morning and welcome to the fifth meeting in 2008 of the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee. We have received apologies from Rob Gibson, who is unable to attend the meeting. Shirley-Anne Somerville has joined us as his substitute. Do you require to make any declarations of interest, Ms Somerville?

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): No—there is nothing worth noting.

The Convener: Thank you.

The first agenda item is to take evidence on the curriculum for excellence to inform the committee's future work programme planning. We will take evidence from two panels of witnesses.

I am pleased to welcome our first panel. Alison Coull is the deputy director of the curriculum division of the Scottish Government's schools directorate; Chris McIlroy is a chief inspector with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education; and Alan Armstrong is director of education improvement at Learning and Teaching Scotland. I thank all of them for coming to the meeting and for their joint written submission, which we received in advance of the meeting. I know that members have found that submission to be helpful and useful.

I think that everyone on the panel wants to say something brief before we ask questions. We will therefore kick off with opening statements.

Alison Coull (Scottish Government Schools Directorate): I am the deputy director of the curriculum division of the Scottish Government's schools directorate. I want to say something about my specific role in the curriculum for excellence programme and a bit about the programme itself. The committee will be aware that the programme covers a vast array of issues in the education world.

My role is in the curriculum review element of the curriculum for excellence programme—I oversee the engagement process for the programme as a whole. The curriculum review element covers the guidance that Learning and Teaching Scotland is preparing in the form of draft outcomes and experiences, to update the content

of the existing curriculum guidance with an outcome-based approach, which is about the use to which knowledge can be put, the acquisition of knowledge, and the need for every teacher to contribute to numeracy and literacy skills.

My team also has lead policy responsibility in the Scottish Government for work on national guidance, which will provide a new framework for how the curriculum could be organised, not just in respect of the subjects that are taught, but in respect of schools' ethos, opportunities for personal achievement, interdisciplinary studies and the focus on the four capacities: being a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor. The committee will know that those outcomes are now among the Scottish Government's national outcomes in the concordat.

It is important to highlight that the curriculum for excellence programme goes much wider than the curriculum review elements that are within my responsibility, which I can talk about in this meeting. We are talking about the biggest change in Scottish education for a generation: about how everything that happens in schools, colleges and pre-school centres should be aimed at the national aspiration for young people. That means that the programme encompasses the work that we are doing on the curriculum, which we will talk about, and work on continuing professional development, initial teacher education, ensuring that teachers have professional confidence to exploit the new freedoms that the curriculum arrangements will give them, changes in the way that learning is assessed, changes in the way young people experience the qualifications framework, and changes in the accountability frameworks. My colleague Christine Carlin, who will be on the second panel, has responsibility for some of those issues—those relating to qualifications and assessment, skills for life and work, recognition of achievement, and the need to ensure that the new curriculum delivers for those who need more choices and chances.

The other aspect of the programme that I want to mention is the partnership approach that has been taken from the outset. The key education bodies have worked closely together in developing the programme. That is reflected in representatives of those bodies appearing together in two panel sessions. The written submission that members have received, which the convener mentioned, also reflects that partnership approach.

Chris McIlroy (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education): I would like to say a little bit about HMIE's role. We play a full part in supporting the curriculum for excellence in several ways. We provide professional advice that is based on our

inspection evidence and advice that is based on our wider experience of curriculum change. During inspections we discuss with schools, colleges and pre-school centres their plans for addressing the curriculum for excellence programme. We gather evidence about their thinking, the issues that arise and the progress that is being made. We feed all that back into the partnership so that we have a picture of the progress that schools, colleges and pre-school centres are making.

We report on and actively spread good practice by encouraging well-considered innovation that is associated with the curriculum for excellence. We also have a role in evaluation. Over time, we will evaluate the impact of the curriculum for excellence on the quality of the educational experience and on the achievement of learners.

Alan Armstrong (Learning and Teaching Scotland): Learning and Teaching Scotland is a non-departmental public body. In close partnership with the Scottish Government, the other national organisations and local authorities, we work to ensure that the curriculum, the approaches to learning and teaching and the use of information and communications technology assist all young people, including those who need more choices and more chances to reach their potential. Within the programme, we have worked on the draft experiences and outcomes and we are currently leading on engagement. We collect and share good practice in effective classroom activities and we seek to find effective ways of sharing those with the wider profession.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Good morning. I preface my remarks by acknowledging the huge amount of work that has been done on the curriculum for excellence, which I think is an excellent potential change in what happens in Scotland's schools.

I ask for clarification from Ms Coull on the timescale. As I understand things, most of the development work—the draft outcomes—will be in the hands of schools by this autumn. Is that correct?

Alison Coull: Most of the draft outcomes have already been released for engagement but outcomes are still to be released on technology, Roman Catholic religious and moral education and health and wellbeing. Our timeline is that everything will be available by mid-May so people should have the draft outcomes by the end of the current academic session.

Elizabeth Smith: Once feedback has been received on the draft outcomes, what is the timescale in which things will happen between this autumn and the start of academic session 2009-10? If concerns arise about particular aspects of the curriculum, what will happen in the process

between this autumn—when all the draft outcomes are made available—and the final process of implementation?

Alison Coull: There will be two phases for engagement on the draft outcomes. We will first consider the feedback on the individual curriculum areas as those become available and we will then look across all curriculum areas once all the draft outcomes are out for engagement. We need to ensure that the curriculum adds up as a whole so that the sum of all the parts meets the aspirations of the programme. To take account of the feedback, there will be a process of considering all the draft outcomes.

On exactly when different outcomes will be implemented, “implementation” is perhaps a strange word to use in the context of the curriculum for excellence as the programme is very much a continuous process. We expect changes to happen on an on-going basis. When measures are phased in will depend very much on the feedback that we receive on the draft outcomes. We want to ensure that the curriculum works across the piece and that we have tested it fully. There may be some phasing in, but that will depend on the outcomes of the engagement process.

Elizabeth Smith: Given that answer, is there a concern that some schools will be much more advanced in their preparation work than other schools, or will the phasing in generally be complete by a certain time or by a certain academic session?

Alison Coull: There will be differences among schools—we know that some are further ahead than others—but there will be a point further down the line when we are able to say that everything is in place. However, the process will be continuous. Another aspect is that the outcomes and experiences are not the only part of the framework. We will issue guidance on the framework for how the curriculum is organised. That will be another part of the implementation process. Chris McIlroy might want to say a little more about that.

10:15

Chris McIlroy: Scottish schools have a well-established system of improvement planning, which relates to, and is based on, self-evaluation within schools, pre-school centres and colleges. Where schools know their strengths and weaknesses well, that will help them to identify which aspects of the guidance to focus on. Those areas will probably feature in their improvement plans before other aspects of the curriculum that are already in good shape.

Schools and local authorities interact around their development plans to ensure that they can make changes at a realistic but good pace that will lead to improvement. During inspections and other contacts with schools, we are seeing them start to think about the process and relate it to outcomes and experiences. It makes it more of a localised model than a national timescale type of model.

Elizabeth Smith: I have had anecdotal feedback that there has been a huge amount of satisfactory progress in primary schools, and in many cases the underpinning four principles of the curriculum for excellence fit together remarkably well with what Scottish primary schools have been doing for quite a long time. It would be fair to say that, in secondary schools, there is concern about the level of progress that is being made for different subjects. Do you agree with that?

Alison Coull: That reflects our assessment of progress. The secondary sector is influenced by the qualifications framework. We are keen that the curriculum should drive progress, not qualifications, so the curriculum outcomes should come out first and qualifications should then build on them. However, the secondary sector has issues with curriculum outcomes because there is an existing qualifications framework: we are conscious of that.

That said, the ongoing engagement process is starting to feed into the secondary sector more—Alan Armstrong might want to say more about that—through the trialling of the outcomes that will be taking place between now and the end of December.

Alan Armstrong: From our links with local authorities, we know that several secondary schools have been thinking carefully about the early stages of secondary school and how that can be reorganised. We are collecting examples and sending out development officers to look at how those examples are operating, then bringing that information into developments with the other partners.

As part of the engagement strategy, we are currently working with local authorities that are seeking expressions of interest from schools and pre-school centres that want to be involved in formal trialling. Secondary schools are very well represented.

Elizabeth Smith: In your relationship with local authorities, you see that they are looking for best practice and finding out how they can best develop their schools. Is that also being done in the private sector?

Alan Armstrong: Yes. We are working with the private sector in several areas on the framework for learning and teaching and considering some of its ideas and practices. It has expressed its wish to

be involved in the trialling of a number of curriculum areas.

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): A number of concerns have been raised about the pace of reform and a perceived lack of clarity about the direction of travel. Is that a true reflection of some of the reactions that you have received? Could you say some more about the reactions that you have received to the curriculum for excellence?

Chris McIlroy: During the inspection process, we have received comments from teachers who are seeking more clarity and expressing concern about the pace of developments. So we are also picking up what Aileen Campbell seems to be picking up.

In the initial period of the curriculum for excellence, the focus was on the four capacities and the principles. That is a values-based approach to curriculum change. A lot of good debate and good development took place in schools, colleges and pre-school centres about what the four capacities meant, whether they reflected the aspirations of teachers and other professionals in schools, how well they were currently achieved in practice and what changes might be made to achieve them better—to have more confident individuals and more responsible citizens. Following that, people said that they would like to have the curriculum area guidance more quickly, so that they had a bit more clarity about what the curriculum looked and felt like in classrooms. In the secondary sector, advice about the overall curriculum design principles was wanted to help people to shape the curriculum.

As the committee has heard, the first curriculum area advice is now out in the system. That helps to give people the picture. The curriculum design work is under way and will be out in the system soon—perhaps Alison Coull can comment on that. The emphasis on the core discussions about the values and principles continues to be important and we do not want to lose sight of that, but the messages that you are picking up are fair comment on the views that some teachers are expressing.

Alan Armstrong: About a year ago, we released the draft example—“draft” just means that it comes from planet Earth. We ran a series of seminars up and down the country for several thousand teachers, to which we invited primary practitioners, secondary specialists and—which is important—other subject departments and people who were examining the curriculum as a whole, to try to add to the debate in schools. From the six months until the first outcomes were released, those seminars succeeded in building momentum.

Chris McIlroy: One of the biggest impetuses for a renewed pace should be the trialling in

education authorities throughout Scotland—all of them have signed up to that in groups of their schools. That should regenerate the pace.

Aileen Campbell: So the reaction has been positive.

Chris Mcllroy: Yes.

Aileen Campbell: Will people take to the system easily?

Chris Mcllroy: The authorities' reaction and willingness to engage in trialling have been positive. They are signing up to that readily and willingly. The reaction in schools is being collated, so it is probably too early to give a picture of that.

Alan Armstrong: Trialling is just one aspect of the full engagement approaches. It will give us a focused response from teachers. Every teacher and practitioner is also invited to examine the draft experiences and outcomes and to try them in their practices every day. They can give us feedback regularly for the rest of the year. As well as the formal trials, all teachers are invited to participate. Focus groups will also be run up and down the country.

Alison Coull: It is fair comment that concerns were felt about a lack of momentum. Some of that has come from the fact that we are trying to do the programme slightly differently. There has been debate on values and principles, but people have been used to receiving a detailed guidance pack quickly, whereas the programme is not of that sort. We thought that it was important that people should have the values and principles firmly embedded before we produced the draft outcomes and experiences, so that they were considered in the context of the values and principles. A cultural issue arises from how we have previously done curriculum change.

Elizabeth Smith: You have just made an important point. The curriculum for excellence is different. With a little hindsight, I wonder whether having two phases might have been better. One phase would have involved debating why the change that the subject content of the curriculum for excellence will make is important. That would have been debated before production of the materials for which teachers are crying out now.

The issue is part of a bigger debate about the direction for the whole education system, for all age groups. The innovative and encouraging feature of the curriculum for excellence is the development of a three-to-18 scope, but education does not stop there. Changes need also to be made for the older age groups, and in relation to how schools articulate with universities and colleges. It might have been more productive if we had first had a debate about the subject basis to drive education in Scotland—which underpins the

curriculum for excellence, if I understand it correctly—got feedback on that and then started planning. Is it fair to say that you are trying to do both those things at the same time?

Alison Coull: The period up to the production of the draft outcomes was in effect a debate about the values, principles and purposes of the curriculum for excellence. A substantial period of time was spent with schools considering those issues—Chris Mcllroy can say more about that. A cultural issue arose because people were not used to having that kind of debate and wanted the comfort of detailed guidance, which perhaps meant that they could not engage fully. I think that that is a fair comment, but Chris Mcllroy might want to say something.

Chris Mcllroy: It is fair—something of what Alison Coull said happened. The national debate on education was part of the process, too. It was a debate about the values and aspirations and what we want our young people to gain from their educational experience. Those issues were crystallised when the report of the curriculum review was produced and the capacities and principles were set out. The phase of focus on that had huge buy-in and won many teachers' hearts and minds. I suppose that the smoothness of the transition has caused some issues. Alison Coull's point about culture is important, too. Previous major curriculum developments gave detailed specification quickly—the approach that was taken with the curriculum for excellence has been significantly different.

Elizabeth Smith: An issue arises about the philosophy. Your joint submission speaks eloquently about trying to simplify the process and the underpinning values that you think are important. I agree entirely with those points but, at present, education in Scotland is not a simple process, because we have many levels of qualifications. These days, teachers in classrooms deal with standard grade, intermediate 1 and 2, different access levels, higher and advanced higher. At the same time, we are putting the curriculum for excellence on top, which may well lead to a change in qualifications—the next panel will be asked to address that. In the minds of teachers, there is a lot of confusion and—dare I say it?—apprehension. We need to ensure that the process of education is not only more rigorous, but simplified and that it appeals to employers, colleges and universities. We need to make sure that the system is articulated because, as Mr Mcllroy said, the transition period is important if we are to get the system right.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Mr Mcllroy mentioned the national debate on education, which was back in 2002. How will we collectively judge whether the

sum of the parts, which Alison Coull mentioned, matches the outcomes of the national debate in 2002? To follow on from Elizabeth Smith's comments, what is the mechanism for judging the big picture, rather than for considering individual responses on outcomes and materials?

Alison Coull: That is about the overall success of the education system. The curriculum for excellence touches on every aspect of the system. The success factors are articulated in the concordat that the Scottish Government signed with COSLA, which reflects the national outcomes that we seek, which in turn reflect the four capacities in the curriculum for excellence. One indicator in the concordat is on sustained and positive destinations for school leavers. The success of the programme in terms of how we judge progress is tied up with the national performance framework that we are working on with COSLA and the local authorities.

10:30

Chris Mcllroy: In some ways, "Improving Scottish Education", which was published in 2006, gives us a benchmark. It contains collective evidence on how well the education system in Scotland is doing. A number of strengths in the system were recognised, as were some issues that we need to address.

The time period within which it is reasonable to expect change in outcomes and experiences is something of an issue. Change in education does not happen overnight; it is a long process. That said, as subsequent editions of the report are issued in three and six years' time from now—or whatever the time period is—they will act as signposts of progress.

Jeremy Purvis: I appreciate that we are still part way through the process. The national outcomes in the concordat may also have individual merit, but it will be quite a long time before we get an indication of whether the national outcomes have been met.

I understand that some conclusions that resulted from the national debate relate to the teaching process, pupil involvement and so forth, which are not covered by the national outcomes. What is the most appropriate timescale for HMIE review? I ask in the knowledge that, whatever the timescale, your recommendations will not be implemented for a couple of years in any case.

Chris Mcllroy: Our plans are to issue periodic editions of "Improving Scottish Education", at roughly three-year intervals. I do not want to put a pin on it and say that that date is the point at which we will judge things. That would be unfair. Over the 40 years that I have been involved in education, I have seen a lot of change and I know

that change does not happen overnight. Change takes a while to bed in and develop in learning and teaching, particularly the change that takes place in the classroom, including teaching methodologies.

Jeremy Purvis: How will the curriculum adapt or react to other national policies? I am thinking of policies such as determined to succeed and health-promoting schools. There are also the new policies that will be introduced down the line, including policies on additional support for learning. There is a suite of statutory duties on schools and local authorities in addition to the national policies that are being taken forward. What is the interaction between those policies and the curriculum? How will the curriculum adapt to new policy introductions?

Alison Coull: Part of the answer lies in the way in which the outcomes and experiences are framed. They give considerable professional freedom in the way in which an outcome is reached. Determined to succeed, which in effect brings enterprise into education, is an approach that can be taken throughout all the curriculum areas. We are talking not about something extra that is being added on, but about having scope for teachers to use the outcomes in a creative way that reflects the new national priorities.

Jeremy Purvis: How much scope is there for that to be done? One response to the national debate was on how cluttered the curriculum is. If you are saying that the curriculum for excellence is a base that can absorb new policies, I would be very taken by that. We do not want teachers to view this as another set of pressures and initiatives. Does the Government intend the curriculum for excellence to act as a base? If so, how will it work in practice so that new initiatives are not simply seen as add-ons? Has the Government put in place policy structures to ensure that new policies are consistent with the evolution of the curriculum for excellence?

Alison Coull: Everything that we are doing in a policy sense is geared around the curriculum for excellence, which is the overarching theme. Any policy development would need to be consistent with the curriculum for excellence and take account of the aspirations of the programme. We do not want a situation in which things get added on over the years. There is a clear commitment on that at national Government level.

Alan Armstrong: The draft experiences and outcomes have been developed in partnership with the Scottish Government and others, so they take account of the current policy framework. The engagement process is about finding out whether teachers and practitioners can see the opportunities for rich, deep learning and for connections across the curriculum and whether

there is space for them to teach in motivating experiential ways, which they asked for during the national debate. During the rest of the year and as we look to the next stage of refinement of the draft experiences and outcomes, we will have a chance to take account of what the profession is saying.

Alison Coull: That is one of the issues that we will consider when we examine the outcomes to see whether we have achieved decluttering and whether there is enough space in the curriculum.

Jeremy Purvis: Thank you. That was interesting.

The Convener: The recently published Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report on education in Scotland highlighted the importance of vocational education. You probably agree that our children and young people's experience of vocational education is patchy and depends on where they go to school. The report seemed to conclude that vocational education is essential for all children in developing their interpersonal, social and cognitive skills. I am interested to know how you anticipate vocational education being delivered. What influence will the curriculum for excellence have in developing vocational education in Scotland?

Alison Coull: My colleague Christine Carlin will deal with questions on vocational learning. We expect that the outcomes and experiences will be used in creative and imaginative ways, so that people can make connections with skills for life and skills for work. Christine Carlin will be able to say a little bit more about that.

Chris McIlroy: You make a valid point, which was raised in our report, "Improving Scottish Education". It relates to our traditions in Scottish education whereby at times we have separated academic and vocational education. The word "vocational" should describe preparation for becoming a doctor or lawyer just as much as it describes preparation for becoming a plumber or joiner. However, we have had a separation of routes in Scottish education. One of the questions that is asked in the ISE report and in the debate on Scottish education is whether that is right. Christine Carlin will be able to talk more about the steps through skills for work and enterprise in education that are being used in the curriculum for excellence to try to address those issues.

The Convener: Thank you. I am sure that we will return to that issue with the second panel.

You might not have a view on my second question on vocational education, but given that you are here I will ask you anyway, just in case. The OECD report was quite critical about the relationship with further education colleges and the fact that some local authorities and schools farm out vocational education rather than

delivering it themselves. Do you have a view on that?

Alison Coull: I will let Christine Carlin deal with those points.

Chris McIlroy: I do not think that the place in which vocational education is delivered is crucial—it is the quality of what is delivered that matters. In secondary schools that put strong emphasis on vocational education and FE colleges, we see good practice in that regard. We also see less high-quality practice. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution for any part of the country. Some secondary schools would have great difficulty in delivering a range of vocational courses, but secondary schools in other places can do so. The debate should not polarise around place.

The Convener: I want to ask about your role as an inspector, Mr McIlroy. Obviously, HMIE has responsibility for inspecting what goes on in schools and further education establishments. If there is a greater expansion of vocational education in Scotland, how will HMIE ensure that that education is properly evaluated and inspected in schools as opposed to in colleges? As you pointed out, the issue is not necessarily where education is delivered, but where it fits into a child's or young person's educational experience.

Chris McIlroy: First, issues will be debated as part of the post-Crerar agenda. One solution is to follow secondary pupils into colleges, but doing so leads to a lot of inspection activity in those colleges. A debate is taking place, and working groups are considering the best ways of addressing the matter. It is probably too soon for me to say where the debate will go. We will not be the only decision makers in the process.

Secondly, we have produced aspect reports that consider skills for work. In another part of Edinburgh this morning, we are launching a report on enterprise in education, in respect of which our focus task activity is following children and considering the joins in their experience between schools and further education.

Elizabeth Smith: I want to turn our attention to the feedback that you might expect from heads of departments in schools. Are you asking for a whole school to respond to an outcome or are you dealing more with subject areas?

Alan Armstrong: Various approaches can be taken, depending on how the stakeholders wish to proceed. Any individual in Scotland—from a stakeholder in the profession to a person in industry, a parent or a pupil—has the opportunity to provide feedback, as networks, departments and whole schools do. That process is replicated in the more formal trialling arrangements. For example, if a subject department is trialling one of the curriculum areas, it could decide to give

feedback and so could the individual teachers in it. We collate the information accordingly.

Elizabeth Smith: Would I be correct in thinking that both types of feedback might be helpful to you? Obviously, subject groups—history and modern language groups in particular—are campaigning on behalf of their subject areas. They want more time and resources to be committed to their subjects in the curriculum. There is an interesting debate on how the curriculum for excellence underpins each subject area in a senior school. A whole school feedback would focus more on the implications of, and—dare I say—the more administrative issues relating to, how the curriculum for excellence can be implemented. When you publish the full raft of proposals, I take it that both types of feedback will be considered.

Alan Armstrong: Local authorities are also taking the initiative and pulling together local focus groups to give us feedback from their perspective on the whole suite or certain aspects of experiences and outcomes.

Elizabeth Smith: Is the same being done for the private sector?

Alan Armstrong: Yes.

10:45

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): I welcome your saying at the beginning of the session that the curriculum for excellence has been welcomed, and the enthusiasm of teachers in considering the opportunities that it will bring.

It is clear that teachers will play an important critical role in developing the curriculum for excellence. How have you worked with teacher training providers to ensure that new teachers coming into the profession appreciate the changes that are taking place? Once the curriculum for excellence has been rolled out to schools, how will you continue to support teachers through their continuing professional development to ensure that they are approaching and delivering the curriculum in the right way?

Alison Coull: We have had close links with the teacher education colleges throughout the development of the draft experiences and outcomes. We have had some interesting ideas from the teacher training institutions about ways in which they can align their courses to support the curriculum for excellence—for example, chartered teacher opportunities.

CPD is an issue for local authorities to think about in their own contexts. We think that it is important not to impose a one-size-fits-all approach, because there will be different CPD needs locally. However, we want to support teachers' CPD through the national CPD team in the Scottish Government.

It is important to remember that the engagement activity itself is CPD for teachers. All the on-going work on the curriculum experiences and outcomes as teachers work in focus groups and as they are involved in trialling is part of CPD and capacity building in the profession.

Mary Mulligan: I appreciate what you say about needing flexibility to deal with CPD, but I would be concerned if the approach were too loose and we were not giving support and guidance. How do you get the balance right?

Alison Coull: We are looking for the engagement process on the outcomes to give us feedback so that we can pick out some of the key issues around CPD where national Government might have a role in facilitating or supporting it. Asking teachers to think about what sort of support they will need is part of the trialling and engagement process.

Mary Mulligan: Are there any early indications of what might be necessary?

Alison Coull: It is possibly too early to say. What might be necessary will vary depending on the teacher. There has been a bit of feedback: some people feel that they will not need very much support and other teachers feel that they will need quite a lot. To an extent, it depends on the age profile of the profession and on people's experience. Some of the experienced teachers are saying, "This is fine for me, but my younger colleagues may have more difficulty."

Mary Mulligan: That is an interesting comment. I tend to think that those who think they need least development probably need it most.

I return to the different approaches that the curriculum for excellence will encapsulate. Do you want to comment on allowing flexibility and differing local approaches, which I think we see as an opportunity? How do you imagine supporting that to happen but ensuring at the same time that we maintain a quality standard in the education provided?

Alison Coull: There is a balance to be struck between local flexibility and national expectations of our education system. Ministers will have views in due course on what the national expectation of a broad general education should be and the entitlement to it of every child in Scotland. Ministers are actively considering that. Perhaps Chris McIlroy wants to say more about that.

Chris McIlroy: That is the sort of thing that we will need to monitor in practice and provide feedback on.

Alan Armstrong: Learning and Teaching Scotland is collecting examples of good practice and will continue to do so. We will make them available online or through the development of

glow—an intranet mechanism for supporting curricular development and innovation. We will build up not just subject networks, but networks of additional support for learning teachers and quality improvement officers in local authorities so that the system can find examples of what works well for others and draw on that to help us meet the needs of local children in those teachers' classes.

Aileen Campbell: What is HMIE doing to ensure that inspectors are up to speed with what is going on, and what CPD is it offering? Inspectors need to have knowledge to monitor what is going on in schools and to monitor teachers.

Chris McIlroy: The answer is quite a lot. Over the past three years, we have had regular inputs at our national conferences. Each year, we have had tours of all the offices and have brought together teams with the people in the offices to ensure that they are up to speed. A number of colleagues have been involved in the curriculum for excellence, and we have got them to share practice with the rest of their colleagues. We have given it major emphasis over the past three years, because it is important that every one of our inspectors is up to speed, understands the development and is equipped to address it in their dialogues in schools.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Someone mentioned that the curriculum for excellence is the biggest change in a generation. It is difficult for any sector to bring through such a change. From your different perspectives, what are the main challenges and what is being done to alleviate those problems and ease in the curriculum?

Alison Coull: The biggest challenge is the one to which we alluded previously, which is the cultural change from a system that has been used to quite a prescriptive approach and is being given new freedoms. That is quite scary for some people. Some people will welcome those opportunities, but others will need more support. It comes back to CPD, good practice and the networks that are building up. For example, glow—the new national intranet for all Scotland's schools—will provide a powerful tool to support teachers by providing learning communities in which they can share good practice.

We have been trying to take a gradual approach in order to let people get up to speed with the new experiences and outcomes as they come out, and giving them a chance to think about them and reflect. Throughout the curriculum for excellence programme, the idea of people having time to reflect has been key. We have tried to take account of the fact that the curriculum for excellence will be a big change and that people need time to adapt to it.

We have a new team located within the Scottish Government. It is a joint team with COSLA and is similar to the teacher agreement communication team that looked at the teachers agreement. It will work to support local authorities and will try to pick up and support the change process.

Alan Armstrong: Another important aspect is the provision of comprehensive and co-ordinated support for the profession through having sufficient examples to draw on. We can help through our networks and our contacts with local authorities. We also work closely with the inspectorate to bring together the good practice from inspections as well as the good practice that local authorities recognise is emerging from their schools and pre-school centres.

Chris McIlroy: Previous curriculum developments, such as five to 14 and others of that vintage, gave tight advice to teachers. The system benefited from that, as it helped to bring up all schools to a base level—I do not mean that in a derogatory sense. That approach brought greater consistency in practice, and we know that our system does well in international comparisons and that standards are strong.

What the previous approach did not address so well—and what curriculum for excellence is trying to address—is how we push the system towards excellence. That is the tricky game that we are into. Achieving high-quality learning and teaching in classrooms involves a big cultural change and an approach by which we give schools and teachers more professional responsibility and less detailed advice. If the adjustment is to work, a lot of CPD and cultural change are needed. The biggest challenge is to keep the great strengths in our system, such as the emphasis on the professionalism of teachers, while moving the system forward so that it is fit not only for the current years, but for the future.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The witnesses have said a lot about the cultural changes that are required in the classroom. Are there any other areas that present difficulties, such as the links with further and higher education and the private sector? Does cultural change need to be developed in those areas, as well as in the classroom?

Alison Coull: One aspect is that, until now, the programme has perhaps not been thought of as going beyond schools, although it does. That is a challenge to the system as a whole. Everybody who is involved with schools, including in the voluntary sector, the partner providers, the private sector, FE colleges and universities, has a contribution to make to the curriculum for excellence and needs to be part of the process. In the next phase of engagement, we are considering that wider involvement, because the programme

will not work if it is thought of narrowly as being schools based.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: You mention the programme being seen as schools based, but another challenge is the perspective that exists that we are considering the three-to-15 age group and that the national qualifications are a separate matter. What reassurances can you give the committee that the curriculum for excellence will be a straight-through development that takes into account the young person's education all the way through?

Alison Coull: Christine Carlin may want to comment on the qualifications. We think of the curriculum for excellence as being for the three-to-18 age group. The fact that we have outcomes and experiences for the three-to-15 group simply reflects the fact that beyond 15 is the age at which young people begin qualifications. However, we are examining the senior phase closely and considering how it should be organised. We want to ensure that there is still a focus on the four capacities and that the qualifications reflect the values, principles and purposes of the curriculum for excellence. We are taking a joined-up approach by considering the three-to-18 age group. That will come through in our work on the framework for organising the curriculum, which involves considering the curriculum as a whole, but reflecting its different aspects. We will have a focus on qualifications in the senior phase and a focus on the outcomes and experiences for the three-to-15 age group.

Chris Mcllroy: One issue that is clear from the work of the OECD and from our work is that some of the most vulnerable people in society do not get as high quality a deal as they ought to out of education. If they are to have full access to the curriculum for excellence—I am talking about access not just to teachers, but to partner agencies, community learning workers and a variety of other people who contribute—that makes the task even bigger and more complex. We want people who come from families with drug dependency, chaotic lifestyles and all sorts of expectations to become confident individuals. If we are to achieve that, which is hugely demanding, we must involve a wide range of services in the process.

Mary Mulligan: It is clear from the joint submission and the witnesses' comments that the curriculum for excellence is about the three-to-18 agenda. However, much of the focus is on schools and skills, which we will perhaps come to later, and the vocational element. How will the curriculum for excellence affect what is provided for the early years—the three-to-five range? Will there be significant changes that we should be aware of at this stage?

11:00

Chris Mcllroy: The three-to-five curriculum forms the early stage, and we know from the "Improving Scottish Education" report that that stage is one of the strengths of Scottish education. The reactive learning in the early years is helped by approaches that involve knowing each child and wrapping experiences and outcomes for that child as appropriate.

We now have the chance to ease the transition from pre-school by including the early years in the three-to-eight approach. This year, as part of that engagement, we are looking to ensure the involvement of the many pre-school centres that local authorities and private providers run because many practitioners in those centres have a huge amount to offer through their good practice, which we can pick up and share with older children's learning approaches.

Mary Mulligan: You made a good point about private sector provision. Perhaps the larger proportion of it is for early years. Are there particular challenges for private early years providers compared with local authority providers? If so, are the relationships good enough to overcome them?

Alan Armstrong: We will work with local authorities this year to ensure that they are involved. We actively support local authorities in the roll-out of experiences and outcomes, and in bringing people together to discuss them. That allows local authorities to take responsibility for briefing and providing CPD to their pre-school and partnership centres. We will find out during the year to what extent further work needs to be done to help local authorities support the pre-school centres.

Chris Mcllroy: The good practice in many pre-school centres is often closer to the principles of the curriculum for excellence than are other parts of the system. However, on the point about the private and voluntary sectors, our evidence from inspections shows that, although there is very good and good practice in all sectors of pre-school education, there is a higher incidence of high-quality practice in the education authority sector. There are requirements for CPD for upgrading the qualifications of staff and so on across the board, but that is particularly the case for the private and voluntary sectors.

Mary Mulligan: I think it was you, Mr Mcllroy, who mentioned the professionalism of teachers and that there has been a question about recognising professionalism in early years education. Will you be able to approach that issue through the curriculum for excellence?

Chris Mcllroy: It provides opportunities for that to happen. There is a social issue about how

people value the education and care of very young children that is much wider than the inspection of education. We see excellent, high-quality work in pre-school education, but sometimes that sector is not valued as fully as it should be. We hope that the curriculum for excellence will give opportunities to raise esteem for that sector. You will be aware that other parts of early years developments are trying to increase opportunities to upgrade qualifications, undertake more CPD and so on.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): It is clear that the development of the curriculum for excellence is a major change. I am impressed by the work that is being done to involve the wider education community and encourage an engagement that does not have a top-down attitude. It is clear that teachers have been widely involved.

I am, however, less clear about how the wider education community, particularly families—parents on behalf of pupils—have been engaged. How much awareness do you think there is among parents of the curriculum for excellence and what it will mean for their children? What have you done to prepare the way and to work with parents?

Alison Coull: It is fair to say that there has not been extensive engagement with parents to date. In 2002, there was an extensive debate on our education system with Scotland as a whole. I suspect that parents have very little knowledge of what the curriculum for excellence will mean. They will be interested in the qualifications side, so it is about finding the right time to give them the information that they will want.

We are considering providing authorities with information for parents that they can adapt locally. We know from research that giving parents information from national Government is not usually the best way of getting the message across. Information is more credible if it is provided locally, by the school for example. Nevertheless, we are considering what we can do to support people and what information might be helpful to them.

The focus groups that LTS is organising are considering the issue. We want to use those groups as part of our engagement with parents. The issues for parents will be different; they will not be engaging in the detail of the outcomes and experiences, but they will have questions about what the curriculum for excellence will mean for their child, and when.

Ken Macintosh: Indeed. I echo your remarks about issues for parents, certainly in relation to secondary schools. Parents' views of secondary school tend to be framed by the examinable curriculum. I will ask the next panel about that. We

can all appreciate how the curriculum for excellence will work at primary school level, but there will also be changes at secondary school level.

The development of the curriculum for excellence will be a cultural change rather than prescriptive, but parents will want to know what it will look and feel like. Will the current situation remain, whereby most secondary schools have a boxed curriculum in which pupils in secondary 2 choose to take maths, English, art, history and geography for example? Will parents continue to have that experience of the secondary school curriculum?

Alison Coull: I suppose that relates to the issue of the right time at which to engage parents. The questions that you have asked are the sort of questions that parents will have. We are actively engaged in considering how the curriculum will be organised in primary school and in S1 to S3 and in S4 to S6. We will not be in a position to tell parents what the curriculum will look like until the guidance has been worked through.

Ken Macintosh: What do you think it will look like? A huge amount of work has gone into it. We are heading somewhere. Where are we heading? We cannot be heading into the unknown.

Alison Coull: No. We are doing a lot of work on the framework for organising the curriculum. That follows on from the curriculum outcomes and experiences, so there is a logical staging of this work. Only when we see the outcomes and experiences can we start to think about how everything will come together as a whole. I am not in a position to say what the framework will look like, because ministers are considering that. They will certainly have views about the breadth that we want in the Scottish education system and how it should be reflected in the framework.

Ken Macintosh: We have already heard about some of that. We had a debate on the teaching of history recently. I am not sure what the minister said about it. I think she said that there will be greater teaching across subjects, but a week later there was an article in *The Scotsman* that suggested that there will still be a need for history teachers to teach history mostly. The position is unclear.

Do you think that secondary schools will look more like primary schools? Will they be organised along those lines, with a more open teaching approach? Alternatively, will we still have a system in which a history teacher teaches history, a maths teacher teaches maths, a geography teacher teaches geography and pupils choose which subjects to take when they are 13 or 14?

Alison Coull: I come back to the cabinet secretary's comments in the history debate and

the context in which they were made. It is important that all teachers have the appropriate professional skills and knowledge for the teaching duties that they are assigned to. That is reflected in the statutory position and it is a matter for local authorities to determine.

The debate is not about whether there should be subject teachers or interdisciplinary teachers—it is not one or the other; there will be both. The cabinet secretary was clear that subjects taught by subject teachers will have an important role to play in the curriculum, particularly as pupils go on to secondary school and specialisation. Chris Mcllroy will want to say more about that.

The research shows that subject teachers bring a huge amount to the subject they teach. They have a sound knowledge of their subject area and are able to engage in open-class questioning. We are looking for exciting, engaging and relevant teaching and subject teaching provides a lot of that experience for young people. Having said that, we also need subject teachers to look across the curriculum for connections that they can make with other subject areas. We know that reinforcement of learning is very important.

The point that the cabinet secretary made in the history debate was that there is real scope and opportunity for other teachers to think about the contribution that they could make. They will not be teaching the detailed history syllabus; they do not have the knowledge and skills to do that under the statutory education position. However, maths teachers could think about the contribution that Scottish mathematicians have made, which could be fitted in with history teaching on the enlightenment. There is a range of rich opportunities for teachers to make connections across the piece and work collaboratively.

Ken Macintosh: I do not want to be hostile because I am not against the direction of travel, if I can put it that way, but it is still so vague—the lack of clarity is quite unsettling. My understanding of the changes is that there will be more focused teachers who will be teachers first and subject specialists second. In other words, the emphasis will not be on the history; it will be on the teaching. That is of concern to parents and teachers, who want to know exactly whether that is the case.

We do not want to frame the debate in terms of winners and losers, which was perhaps part of our earlier discussion, although we still have to face up to such worries when they arise. I do not know how far off we are from introducing the curriculum for excellence, but it is imminent. Do you not find it a little unsatisfactory that parents do not yet know the shape of secondary schooling?

Alison Coull: We are certainly not saying that subject teaching does not have a role in the new

curriculum; that is not the message. We expect subjects to continue to have a very strong role in the secondary curriculum.

Elizabeth Smith: I ask for clarification on Mr Macintosh's point, which was valid. If I understand the curriculum for excellence correctly, subjects will continue to be a big part of the secondary curriculum, as will an interdisciplinary approach, which I have to say is nothing new. Such an approach will be extended under the curriculum for excellence, but it is not new in teaching, especially from a faculty angle where you might study science, social science or arts, to which lots of interdisciplinary approaches have been taken for quite a long time. That is laudable.

What I think is different and exciting about the curriculum for excellence is the principles and ethos that underpin it. I am not too frightened about that because schools are excited about the prospect. Pupils will still choose different subjects that will have an interdisciplinary approach right across the curriculum, but the new curriculum is also about some of the immeasurable things in education such as the values that children learn as responsible citizens or more confident learners—whatever you care to call it. Will you comment on that?

Alison Coull: The outcomes and experiences were drafted with the four capacities in mind. As part of the engagement process, we will consider whether we have got that right—whether we have outcomes and experiences that will give sufficient opportunities to facilitate the development of all four capacities. You are absolutely right that that is the ethos of the curriculum for excellence.

11:15

Jeremy Purvis: I have a brief question. We have not heard about the input from learners. What mechanisms are there to ensure that you actively and genuinely listen to learners? They should have considerable input, especially given that, as Mr Mcllroy said, one priority is to engage pupils who are currently not engaged or not responding to the existing structures. We need to deal with that through the approach to the curriculum as well as through the approach to the school environment.

Learner input is a valuable tool. To its credit, HMIE has developed its ability to get that input through pupil panels and to respond actively. What proper and genuine involvement is there with pupils? I will ask the panel on qualifications the same question, because it is relevant to that issue, too. How is that involvement happening in the overall structure? I note that the annex to your report, which is on roles and responsibilities, does not make one mention of pupil involvement.

Alison Coull: We are considering that as part of the engagement process on the draft outcomes and experiences. Many local authorities will be thinking about how they can take account of young people's views in their feedback. We expect those views to come through in the trialling and the focus work that will be done alongside it. Alan Armstrong may want to say a little about that, but we expect the feedback from the trialling to take account of young people's views. Young people should be asked how the experience was for them and whether it was more interesting, exciting and relevant. Those are important questions. The process is not just about how teachers find working with the outcomes and experiences— young people's views will be important, too.

Jeremy Purvis: I am interested in hearing from Mr Armstrong, but I want to press the point. This is not a criticism of any teacher, but if a teacher does not like the trial, there is a good probability that they will say that the pupils did not respond well and so the trial was not particularly good. We need a genuine structure that gives a robust indication of pupils' responses, rather than simply have someone report to you what they think the pupils' responses were. The pupils' views are a key component, although I am aware that the process must be carried out properly. Will you take away those thoughts, because it seems as though not one of the partners has that specific responsibility? I understand that all partners are expected to engage with pupils, but there does not seem to be a robust mechanism for doing so.

Alison Coull: That work is part of the partners' overall engagement responsibility. I did not mean to suggest that, in the trialling and focus work, pupils' views will be fed back via teachers, because that is not what we expect to happen. Alan Armstrong may want to say a little more about that.

Alan Armstrong: We will talk to groups of pupils. There are two aspects to that. One is to ask pupils who have had changes in their learning and teaching how those changes went. They may not be the best evaluators of that because they do not know any different, but the second aspect is that we have run several events with local authorities that have fairly high-profile pupil forums to get in among what young people think they require in the 21st century for their futures and pathways. We ask what skills they require, how they like to learn and whether they have that opportunity now. That begins to open up issues about whether the development of the curriculum for excellence and the changes in CPD will bring about the approaches to learning that young people want.

Jeremy Purvis: That is helpful, but it would be good to communicate those points more strongly

in your work. That follows on from Mr Macintosh's point, because when pupils are involved, that can feed back to parents, so they are part of the process.

Ken Macintosh: I will continue where I left off, but in a friendly vein. I was conscious that I came across as rather aggressive. I do not mean to be—I am just trying to probe the issue, because I am concerned about it.

From your comments, it is clear that the curriculum in secondary schools will still be divided by subject and that there will not be the open teaching that we have in primary schools. Will there continue to be a division between S2 and S3, when pupils make subject choices? Will there still be a big change from S2 to S3?

There is an academic hierarchy in the school curriculum. Maths and English are compulsory subjects; it used to be compulsory for pupils to take one language, but that is no longer required. Most people are aware of the hierarchy that exists, even if it is not written down. It tends to be shaped by mechanisms such as the way in which the school curriculum is offered to pupils. Subjects are grouped together in a particular way, to guide pupils to make certain choices. How many of those structures will continue to exist? Parents and, in particular, teachers will be concerned that the number of pupils taking a subject may plummet if it is no longer given protection, perhaps because the subject is perceived as difficult.

Alison Coull: You have raised a number of issues. The existing position is not statutory. As members know, the only statutory requirement in schools is for the religious education element. The national guidance on which HMIE reports influences the curriculum that schools offer, but schools and authorities have ultimate responsibility for organising the curriculum.

The work that we will do on the framework for organising the curriculum will take account of the purpose of the curriculum for excellence, which is that the curriculum should be more than the subjects it comprises. At national level, we will provide clear guidance on the contribution that the ethos of the school should make towards the curriculum and on opportunities for personal achievement and interdisciplinary studies. All those issues will be taken into account in the national guidance. The curriculum will not be subject focused.

I am unable to say much more about what the curriculum will look like between S1 and S3, as ministers are actively considering the matter. However, ministers will set out clear parameters within the framework that will give local flexibility. I expect that the parameters that we will set will be less input focused. The current guidance is based

on hours for subjects and curriculum areas. I expect that, in future, guidance will be based much more on outcomes and will give schools freedom to organise themselves to achieve those outcomes. However, there will be clear national expectations of the outcomes that we want schools to achieve across the curriculum areas.

Chris McIlroy: The published advice on the curriculum for excellence that is already in the system makes clear that subjects and curriculum areas are components of the curriculum. Subject teaching is one of the strengths of the education system in Scotland and provides expertise, confidence and high-quality training.

Similarly, interdisciplinary subjects should be a component. Such subjects can be very motivating, and can make learning relevant, bring teachers together and help children to see links between different aspects of the curriculum. The wider ethos of the school contributes to children's education—that is an important component, as are opportunities for personal achievement. All those building blocks are in the public domain. What Alison Coull is saying is that ministers are actively considering how those building blocks will be put together in the context of a secondary school.

The other point was about whether there are some areas that are very important. The guidance is already clear that certain things are the responsibility of every educator, including literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. That definition of important areas is already a part of the jigsaw.

The Convener: That concludes the questions. Thank you for your attendance.

11:26

Meeting suspended.

11:32

On resuming—

The Convener: I reconvene the meeting and welcome the second panel of the morning. We have been joined by Christine Carlin, who is the deputy director of the qualification assessment and skills division in the schools directorate of the Scottish Government—that is quite a title—and Gill Stewart, who is the deputy director of national qualifications at the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

Thank you for your written paper in advance of the meeting. I understand that you would like to make some brief opening remarks.

Christine Carlin (Scottish Government Schools Directorate): I will make opening remarks on behalf of myself and Gill Stewart. I will

briefly outline the work that my team has been leading, very much in partnership, on skills for life and skills for work; recognising achievement; assessment; national qualifications; and ensuring that the curriculum for excellence links up with the work that is being done on young people in need of more choices and more chances.

We are considering how the curriculum can help all young people to develop skills for life and skills for work. That links to the skills strategy. The aim is that, rather than being a separate experience for some, vocational learning should be equally valued and should be for all young people.

We are undertaking work in partnership with local authorities to consider how greater recognition can be given to young people's achievements beyond formal qualifications. Other colleagues in the Government have been considering how we can use the Scottish credit and qualifications framework to recognise more of what young people achieve. We are looking at the current range of approaches in schools throughout the country and at what additional ways might be adopted, and we are engaging with stakeholders to identify the issues. That work is telling us that, whatever form the recognition takes, it should be focused on the development of young people's skills and talents, and must enable them to articulate those skills, rather than just listing their activities. It must also have credibility with employers, further education and higher education.

We have been looking at assessment prior to national qualifications. It is well recognised that assessment is a powerful lever for change in any education system and that it has the potential to determine what happens in the classroom. We want to ensure that our approaches to assessment support but do not drive or narrow the new curriculum as it comes in. Now that the outcomes are being made available, we are considering what changes we might have to make to all forms of our national guidance to ensure that it supports the curriculum for excellence.

Our current national qualification structure is in many ways successful. Challenging but achievable courses are available for learners of all abilities, from those with additional support needs to the most able. Our qualification system has credibility with employers, higher education, further education, schools, parents and young people. We also have a wide range of subjects in which qualifications are available. However, the recent OECD report indicated that there are issues to be addressed; there is a continuing achievement gap and children from poorer backgrounds are more likely to underachieve than are those from wealthier backgrounds. The system is flexible but complex, and there is a continuing

concern that it is too heavily driven by exams. The content of national qualifications at all levels will have to be reviewed to ensure that it reflects the values, purposes and principles of the curriculum for excellence and that qualifications follow the curriculum.

On structure, as we said in the briefing paper, there are particular issues around the national qualifications at standard grade credit and general/intermediate 1 and 2—that is, SCQF levels 4 and 5. I am happy to talk to the committee about that. Ministers have said that they intend to hold a consultation this year on future arrangements for qualifications. The committee may also be interested to know that ministers intend to develop Scottish science and language baccalaureates to recognise high attainment in the number of highers and advanced highers that are achieved.

Finally, I want to highlight the work on more choices and more chances. As members have heard, the curriculum for excellence aims to provide engaging experiences for all young people, involving a wide range of providers to support the learning: colleges, private sector providers and, of course, schools. To ensure that that happens, we have established within the programme a project that looks specifically at young people in need of more choices and more chances, which challenges the rest of the programme to ensure that new proposals meet the needs of those young people and helps us to make links with other policies, such as the early years, getting it right for every child, health inequalities and determined to succeed policies.

I hope that that quick run-through was helpful. Gill Stewart and I are happy to answer questions.

The Convener: Thank you. I am sure that you have raised issues that committee members will pursue with you. You will not be surprised to hear that, as the previous panel said that you were the experts on the issue, I will ask a question on vocational education. As you have had at least an hour to think about what to say, I expect great things from you. However, I am sure that you would have been able to answer even if you had not been tipped off.

How will you ensure that the curriculum for excellence delivers vocational education for all young people in schools throughout Scotland?

Christine Carlin: So there is no pressure there.

We have started to talk about skills for life and skills for work. My team has been looking at ways of making connections between the skills that were set out in the skills strategy and how the curriculum can help to deliver those for all young people, so that everyone gets to experience vocational learning. The other side, as we might

expect, involves looking at ways in which more traditional vocational learning can deliver the core skills and the four capacities for young people who are in that kind of environment. It is about trying to have parity of esteem between those two sides of vocational learning and ensuring that, wherever someone's learning is happening and however they are doing it, it delivers the capacities and the values of the curriculum for excellence.

The Convener: On parity of esteem, how will you ensure that teachers and parents see that a vocational education has value for all young people, not just for those who find that their interests and passions do not lie within mainstream education? How do you ensure that parents in particular see vocational education as an important method of delivering education so that their children and young people can grow and develop as individuals?

Christine Carlin: As we have said about many other issues, it is a question of tackling the culture. We also have to explain what we mean by "vocational". Many universities have said to me that they deal with vocational subjects. It is about trying to make people understand that, especially if we are trying to deliver the skills strategy, employability and core skills can be delivered through different methods, whether it is in the more academic setting or in a vocational setting.

We have been using programmes such as skills for work, which is about building links between the schools and, for example, colleges. Many of those programmes are successful. Again, they have to reflect the curriculum for excellence. We are looking at all the work that is being done, including on the skills for work courses, to ensure that youngsters are not just sent to college to do a particular course but also get the benefits of the four capacities and the skills in the skills strategy.

We also need to do that within the traditional setting of the curriculum, so that young people can understand what it is to be in the world of work and how they are learning that in the classroom.

The Convener: You rightly pointed out the importance of the potential relationship between schools and further education establishments, and a good working relationship could be developed between those two sectors. Some very innovative work is being done in my area, North Lanarkshire. The OECD report recognised and highlighted the example that is being set there for vocational education. However, the OECD report was also quite critical of the notion that, for some local authorities and schools, vocational education should be farmed out to FE colleges. How should the curriculum for excellence be developed, and how should schools and FE develop their relationships so that the delivery of vocational education is not seen as being farmed out but is

based on a genuine partnership and the best interests of the young person?

Christine Carlin: You have absolutely hit the point. This is not just about what happens with teachers in classrooms but about what happens wherever young people are learning. I made this point about the engagement strategy with the curriculum for excellence earlier when I was talking about more choices and more chances, although it is much wider than that. We have to make others who are involved in the teaching of young people appreciate what they are bringing to the curriculum for excellence and the role that they have to play, whether they are a college lecturer delivering a particular practical course, or whether they are delivering a course in a school.

We are also talking about flexibility. You were right to say that the OECD report was positive about North Lanarkshire. We have to find the way that works for the young person in their school and local authority. It is about making everyone realise the role that they have to play. The curriculum for excellence is not just for the teacher to deliver; it is for everyone who is involved in working with young people.

Gill Stewart (Scottish Qualifications Authority): Some good examples also came from the skills for work course pilot, and a lot of good practice guides were developed about how schools, colleges, training providers and employers can work together.

One of the tricky issues around the question that Karen Whitefield raised is that this is not about dumping kids who are at the lower end of the achievement scale on colleges. Good mechanisms have been developed for the selection of young people who will benefit from vocational experience in a college or with a training provider. There is good practice.

11:45

As Christine Carlin said, it is very much about ensuring that the young person has a good experience. The evaluation of the skills for work course generated positive feedback from young people about their experience of further education—that does not mean that they did not have good experiences in school. Young people responded positively to the ethos in further education colleges, where they had more responsibility and a bit more was expected of them. The skills for work course also had a positive impact on young people's work when they were back in school, because they were expected to continue doing their other school work in order to be able to continue to have the vocational experience.

Christine Carlin: The convener asked how we make vocational experience important to all young

people. We are considering wider achievement. Even when we deal with young people who are particularly academic, we need to explain that the world out there is very competitive, so other skills, which they might gain from vocational learning and skills for life and skills for work courses, will be important when they are trying to get into universities, colleges or employment.

Gill Stewart: The Government's skills strategy plays a key role in helping to shape the culture in Scotland, so that the essential skills that the strategy described are regarded as important for all professions and as being part of Scotland's direction of travel. Schools and the curriculum for excellence play a key role in that. All those things will help.

It is important to offer vocational courses that are not just for construction and hairdressing but can help people with their career choices. For example, a person who is considering a career as a primary teacher should be able to find out whether they like working with children. In the context of efficient government, we do not want people to enrol on courses only to find that they do not like the work. A person might find that they do not like being on a construction site early in the morning when it is cold; they might be more suited to another profession. It is about putting in place appropriate vocational experiences for the range of career aspirations that young people might have.

The Convener: What discussions are you having with the business community and the private sector? A reason why North Lanarkshire Council has successfully addressed vocational education is its determination to implement fully the determined to succeed strategy and enterprise education. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning visited St Margaret's high school in my constituency last week. The school has a mock call centre, which was funded by beCogen, a local employer.

There has been quite a lot of private sector support for schools in North Lanarkshire. I think that business partnerships have been developed with all primary and high schools in the area. Cardinal Newman high school has a centre of excellence in hospitality for young people who want to enter that industry. There are many positive examples. What discussions are you having with the private sector to ensure that such activity happens in other parts of Scotland? Government cannot do everything on its own.

Christine Carlin: That is absolutely true. Such engagement is going on as part of the curriculum for excellence. We have also engaged with the Confederation of British Industries in some of our thinking on vocational learning and the skills for life and skills for work programmes. Many parts of

these programmes are linked, and we are trying to make as many such links as we can.

As far as wider achievement is concerned, we are hoping over the next year to undertake some very specific project work that would involve real engagement with employers in the area around schools as well as with colleges and universities. Such an approach will allow us not only to consider things from the perspective of achievement but to examine the part that various elements of the curriculum can play, not least the need to build up skills for life and skills for work. After all, young people should recognise that such skills are essential for them.

Jeremy Purvis: As a member for a half-urban, half-rural constituency, I am aware of certain practical issues with regard to the skills for work programme. However, it has developed well and has produced some very good examples.

I want to ask about the continuation of and funding for skills for work courses, although I realise that, because it might touch on policy decisions, the question is probably more for the minister. I understand that there are certain practical aspects involved in the evaluation, but I want to highlight an example from my constituency of what I am talking about. Beeslack high school in Penicuik is proposing to reconfigure and improve its home economics department to make it more akin to a restaurant-type catering facility. Although such a move will result in a much better fit with the skills for work courses that the school is developing, the school needs to know whether these courses are continuing before it invests in those improvements, and I sense some uncertainty among the staff about their future.

Christine Carlin: Skills for work courses, which were introduced in a two-year pilot, have now been mainstreamed as a Scottish qualification and are available for use by local authorities and schools. In fact, 13 courses are currently or will soon become available. We have certainly been building on this programme, but I point out that we are not telling local authorities how vocational training or the skills for work programme should be delivered in their areas. It is up to them to consider how individual pupils might best benefit from such courses.

Gill Stewart: We are also developing new courses. As the convener pointed out, to deliver a programme such as skills for work, we need to build capacity in the system. For example, we have published case studies on the different approaches that are taken in different local authorities. After all, these courses can be delivered in all sorts of interesting and innovative ways, and we should try to share best practice. I realise that the approach that is taken in one authority will not necessarily apply in every area,

but it might give people ideas, let them know whom they should contact if they want to find out more and so on.

Jeremy Purvis: With regard to the second part of my question, which was on funding, the fact is that in some areas it is more expensive to deliver these courses. I realise that responsibility for delivery on the ground has been devolved to a certain extent, but I also understand that the funding for the pilot took into account the fact that the cost profile of running the courses is not the same as that for other courses or exams. Does the funding to ensure that these courses continue also take that into account?

Christine Carlin: Our funding was for developing the courses and running the pilot to see how the programme would catch on. However, it is now part of the funding that has been devolved. I should point out that the approach itself has been mainstreamed, with SQA developing skills for work courses as part of the work that it usually carries out on various subject areas.

Jeremy Purvis: I might contact the minister independently about the matter. If the funding is wrapped up in the local government settlement, identifying different areas' capacity to deliver the courses will be an issue. It is good that the courses will continue to be available, but there is no point in their being available if the schools cannot afford to deliver them for pupils.

Gill Stewart: The funding council provided money for additional places. It is not increasing, but that funding is still in place for young people in further education colleges who are undertaking skills for work courses.

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): I want to pick up on a point that the convener raised with you about the vocational education work that is done in schools and in partnership with colleges. In the past, I have heard teachers refer to vocational courses and qualifications in schools and colleges as being not for the academically gifted—that was the expression that was used. Young people might have wanted to do such a course but found that the group was disrupted, because of whatever challenges were in the system at the time. If teachers have the impression that vocational education should be for young people who are challenging for the academic education system, have you addressed that attitude with them, as well as with pupils—there is a bit of academic snobbery involved—and parents, so that they understand the importance of vocational courses and give those courses parity of esteem? What work have you done with teachers, parents and pupils to bring the academic and the vocational to the same level?

Christine Carlin: That is a good point. It goes back to the issue of changing the culture and changing perceptions, which is not achieved overnight. The engagement that happens around the curriculum for excellence should make it clear what we mean about developing skills for work and vocational learning. I referred earlier to the need to make it clear to all young people of whatever ability that they must develop such skills if they are going to progress in the world of work. It is also a matter of our engaging with colleges and universities to ensure that they understand the need to develop those skills as part of their work, whatever courses they deliver.

As part of that engagement, we now need to move forward as the curriculum for excellence becomes more developed. We must ensure that it is not just about teachers delivering—it is certainly not about putting young people out to colleges to get them out of the classroom. Schools are still responsible for the young person, wherever they are, and they are responsible for ensuring that their learning ties in with the ethos of the school and the curriculum for excellence. You are right to suggest that a culture change is required.

Gill Stewart: When we originally designed the courses, we thought about what they should be. We decided that they should be national courses, just like any other national course, and that they should be at a particular SCQF level. That helps with the parity arguments. Vocational courses are just a different type of national course. That is a helpful part of the picture.

Young people are themselves advocates for the positive experience that they have had through skills for work. A certain point needs to be reached before attitudes and the culture start to change, and that takes time. One of the strong messages from the OECD report was about finding qualifications and curriculum experiences that motivate all our young people. Some young people are responding well to practical, experiential learning, and it is having a positive impact on both their vocational learning and their other school work. Schools will begin to see that effect. I am sure that within your own constituencies schools have seen the benefits of providing the right opportunities for all their young people. However, it is not an easy question.

12:00

Christina McKelvie: One exciting thing that I have seen within the curriculum for excellence, the review of qualifications and the skills strategy is the person-centred approach to young people. I come from an adult vocational education background, and when we tailored qualifications to what the person needed to operate in their workplace, they were far more successful.

We should sit down with young people and ask them what they want to be. If they want to be a rocket scientist, we should give them whatever they need to develop the skills to do that. It would be better to do that in primary 7 rather than in second year at secondary school. Some children in primary 7 have unrealistic goals, but some do not. By the time they reach second year, some young people have lost their goals and dreams.

I have a son sitting his standard grades this year, and one complaint that I have heard is, "Mum, they are just giving me what I need to pass exams." Schools do not always give young people enough to expand and be creative or to make learning exciting. One challenge of the person-centred approach is to make every subject exciting and engaging, so that young people want to go to maths and biology lessons, for example.

In my experience of working with adults, the person-centred approach is successful, so I hope that that is where you are going.

Christine Carlin: You made a good point about relating subjects such as maths to the real world. It is a question of making young people understand how what they are learning relates to the world of work, even if they see themselves as having an academic career. As I mentioned before, the universities have often said that a lot, if not all, of what they do is vocational.

Gill Stewart: A strong feature of our preparation work for the qualifications review involved speaking to young people, and the idea of relevance came through strongly. They need to understand the relevance of what they study, but they do not always understand how it relates to real life.

Aileen Campbell: I will follow on from the points that have been raised. In North Lanarkshire, there is a good example of how to prepare young people for the outside world of work. How do you plan to monitor the transition so that we do not go from not having enough vocational training and skills to there perhaps being too much emphasis on schools being places where people are trained for businesses and work?

Christine Carlin: That all falls within what was said earlier about how we judge the success of the curriculum for excellence and is obviously a key component of delivery. My colleague spoke earlier about how we will monitor the curriculum for excellence outcomes and how HMIE will be involved, and the area that you raise falls into that category. We want to examine how young people emerge from school, the long-term destinations that they are aiming for and what part vocational training has to play in that. However, it is a question of how overall balance in the curriculum for excellence is delivered.

There will also be an emphasis on the skills strategy to ensure that all young people have, in some way, an idea of what it is like to be in the world of work and the skills that they need to go to those positive destinations.

Elizabeth Smith: My questions relate to examinations, so perhaps they are for Mrs Stewart.

Alison Coull and Mr McIlroy, who was on the previous panel of witnesses, were eloquent about the curriculum for excellence being more flexible and, therefore, less prescriptive about what schools are expected to do compared with the five-to-14 guidelines, higher still or whatever came before. As I mentioned earlier, I strongly favour that flexibility, but it throws up two important questions about the examination system.

First, the current examination system is extremely prescriptive. There are many different levels of examination and, in my opinion, there is too much testing, which sometimes takes teachers' time away from what the curriculum for excellence might expect of them because they have to teach to test. Will you say something about how you envisage the future structure of school examinations?

My second question relates to the top end of the system. In senior 5 and senior 6 in Scotland, pupils do highers and advanced highers. Will that system still be appropriate once the curriculum for excellence has been developed right through to 18?

Christine Carlin: It might be easier on and fairer to Gill Stewart if I take some of those points and try to work through them.

There are issues with what is happening in the upper school, particularly with standard grade and intermediate 1 and 2. Ministers are actively considering the situation at the moment, so I am not able to say more, except that we recognise that the qualifications have come together over different periods of time, so we now have a structural issue to sort out.

On highers and advanced highers in S5 and S6, as I mentioned earlier, the ministers are committed to considering baccalaureates in science and languages as a way of reinforcing the strength of highers and advanced highers in those subject areas.

Elizabeth Smith: If there are to be baccalaureates in science and modern languages, that will mean two additional qualifications. However, you are talking about decluttering the exam system to make it more relevant, as you described it earlier. I am slightly concerned that the system that we have at present does not articulate with that new thinking. There is a need

for fewer levels of examination. There is also a need to ensure that examinations are more rigorous and more appropriate to what the curriculum is likely to be two or three years down the line and that that curriculum articulates with the needs of colleges, universities and employers. That point was, I think, made in the OECD report, and it has certainly been raised several times in the deliberations about the curriculum for excellence.

Christine Carlin: We are still considering how the science and languages baccalaureates might be brought together. It could be that we take a different approach to the highers and advanced highers that young people already have and recognise them as a baccalaureate rather than adding something in, but we are still considering the detail of that.

We have quite a cluttered landscape around SCQF levels 4 and 5 because things have developed over different periods of time. The standard grade has been around for quite a long time, but intermediate 1 and 2 came about in 1999, I think—I am sure that Gill Stewart will correct me if I am wrong on that. They were created for different purposes and age groups but the way that schools use them is not, perhaps, how they were originally intended to be used. We are looking actively at the cluttered landscape around SCQF levels 4 and 5, but I cannot say much more on that, because ministers are actively considering it.

Elizabeth Smith: I totally accept that you cannot comment on the detail, but I would be interested to find out about the thinking behind the idea of having a baccalaureate in modern languages and science but not in the social sciences or other arts subjects. The issue is extremely relevant to fifth and sixth-form pupils, in particular. I know that you cannot be specific about Government policy, but can you explain why you want to have a group award for testing in certain subject areas but not in others? How does that fit with the thinking on the curriculum for excellence?

Christine Carlin: Ministers have asked us to look at science and modern languages first because of their commitment to those areas. It would be difficult for me to say more than that.

Elizabeth Smith: I will ask the cabinet secretary.

Mary Mulligan: In response to Elizabeth Smith, you said that science and languages are the subject areas in which you are considering introducing a baccalaureate. Have you received any comments from employers—perhaps through the Confederation of British Industry—or from colleges and universities on the recognition of such an award?

Christine Carlin: We are still in the early stages of developing the idea. We have had some informal—I stress the word “informal”—discussions. People are interested in finding out what proposals might be made, but they obviously want more detail, which it would be for the minister to announce. From what we have heard so far, people are certainly interested in baccalaureates and are keen to hear more about the idea.

Gill Stewart: We have had discussions with university deans of science in the context of science in general, not the baccalaureate. They want to encourage more up-to-date science qualifications, deeper problem-solving abilities and the ability to work across science disciplines, which reflects current industrial practice. Those are some of what they see as the key drivers in how we take forward science education in general, rather than specifically in relation to the baccalaureate. That might provide pointers to future directions of travel.

Mary Mulligan: My main question relates to the comments that were made about assessment. How do you see that developing?

Christine Carlin: As I said, we recognise that assessment is a driver for change, both within the classroom and beyond. Given that we have the outcomes, now is an appropriate time to start looking at all the different levels of assessment. Assessment should be about learning, whether it is for the young person, the teacher, the school or the Government. Different strands of assessment cover all those areas.

In the classroom, the assessment is for learning programme has been successful, but we need to look more widely than that to identify what forms of assessment would help to support the new curriculum that is coming in and what might risk narrowing it. We also need to talk to local authorities about the performance agenda around the concordat and what types of performance measurement would be most appropriate to deliver what they need, while ensuring that we do not narrow the curriculum. The assessment is for learning programme has been a success and we must consider how we can build on it.

Gill Stewart: Without saying anything about the specifics, general best practice on assessment would drive one to use a wider range of assessment methodologies than we use currently. That does not mean getting rid of examinations, of course, because they are fit for purpose when it comes to particular types of assessment, but we hope to develop general principles, such as the desirability of having a wider range of assessments, more of a focus on the learner, greater flexibility and assessment that supports learning in any future revisions of qualifications to reflect the curriculum for excellence.

Mary Mulligan: My view on assessment is that the way in which it has been used in our schools has allowed us not to go down the road that was gone down in England, which resulted in much more testing in the earlier stages of pupils' education. However, in the later stages, we have much less assessment than is used for qualifications in England.

I get the sense that assessment might have been tried out when higher still was introduced but never really took off to the extent that it was perceived it might. I am interested in Gill Stewart's comment about how we would not want to lose examinations. Would we not? Is there not a role for asking whether examinations are the best way of providing information on the extent to which a child or young person has benefited from education? Given that things seem to be working well in the earlier school years, is there an opportunity to develop that at a later stage?

12:15

Christine Carlin: In fairness to Gill Stewart—I will leave her to defend exams—I should say that we are looking at the entire structure of what is done between three and 18 and we are focusing on SCQF levels 4 and 5 in particular. As I said, ministers have not yet come to a decision, but we are looking at all the different aspects of assessment. I think that it would be fair to say that.

Gill Stewart: The rest of SQA's portfolio—higher national certificates, higher national diplomas, Scottish vocational qualifications and a range of other qualifications—is internally assessed. However, even though the graded units in HNCs involve projects, coursework or investigations, some HNCs involve examinations. I think that we need appropriate use of examinations, which probably means less use of examinations than is the case currently.

However, one of SQA's roles is to maintain the credibility of the qualifications for our young people. I always think of the qualifications as a passport on to something else, and a good passport needs credibility. If we think about where we are culturally in Scotland just now and where we could move to in the next phase, I do not think that we would advocate getting rid of exams; I think that, as we move forward, we could use exams more prudently, and use them where they are appropriate.

Mary Mulligan: Clearly, the issue is about recognising the skills that young people have learned, so this might be an opportunity to say that that need not necessarily be through an exam. However, I recognise the point that exams are understood.

Gill Stewart: All advanced highers have a mix of examinations and coursework, such as a

dissertation or investigation. That might be a good model to think about as we move forward. Advanced highers have a very high credibility. Coursework, investigations and so on are required in lower qualifications but they are not as prevalent as they are at advanced higher level.

Mary Mulligan: I also have a question about the national assessment bank materials, but we can come back to that if we have time.

Ken Macintosh: Many of my questions echo those that Mary Mulligan has asked. However, given the response of this panel and the previous panel that some of these decisions are for ministers, I suspect that there is a limit to the issues that we can explore.

Is the general direction of travel that we should expect a reduction in the use of exams? Should we expect the removal of some exams? Given that exams are recognised as being a driver for change—they certainly dominate the thinking of many parents—is it possible that we might see new exams in subjects such as citizenship or sustainable development?

Christine Carlin: Ministers are actively considering what should happen with SCQF levels 4 and 5, so it would be wrong for me to comment too much. However, I can say that there is a recognition that we have quite a cluttered landscape just now. For example, quite a lot of youngsters sit two sets of examinations for standard grade and there is also quite a lot of use of intermediate 1 and 2 at ages at which they were not intended to be used. It is fair enough to say that the issue is being considered, but it is for ministers to reflect on that.

You asked about what is embedded in the curriculum for excellence. National qualifications will have a role to play in reflecting some of the wider values and principles in the curriculum for excellence—there will always be subjects for which there will be examinations. As I said earlier, all national qualifications will, over time, have to be reviewed to reflect as far as they can the values and principles in the curriculum for excellence. That is where how we consider young people's other achievements outside the qualifications system, which I mentioned, will be really important. The qualifications system will have a part to play, but another strand of work will have to consider how we recognise the other things that are coming through and that we expect to see from young people.

Ken Macintosh: I saw Mrs Stewart shaking her head at the idea of exams in subjects such as sustainable development or citizenship.

Gill Stewart: Yes.

Ken Macintosh: I still think that there is a difficulty in principle about moving to a system that

I am sure we would like. Exams reward achievement and success and are a passport to other things, as Gill Stewart said. The fact that exams are a passport to university and college does not so much reward achievement as make them a tool to separate some pupils from others. The bane of exams has been that their impact has been defined as much by who does not get them as by who gets them. That influence is felt strongly in subject selection early in the secondary curriculum.

Without drastic reform of secondary school exams, how can we embed the curriculum for excellence's admirable aims in the early years of secondary school? I asked questions about that earlier. Parents are driven by what qualifications their son or daughter will get and whether their qualifications will enable them to enter university or get a job. Those are the practical considerations that we all face.

I am not sure where I am leading with this—I do not know whether you can answer the question.

Christine Carlin: I will pick up your points about the links we might make between university and achievement. There is great competition for university places. We need universities to understand what we want young people to have through the curriculum for excellence—the skills and capacities that we are trying to deliver. If we are considering how to recognise that beyond just pure attainment—through achievement—and universities started to say, "What skills do you as a young person have?" that would have quite an influence on what young people thought was valuable and needed.

I go quite often to the SQA awards ceremony, which involves children who obtained six As in their highers and advanced highers and so on, but those children also do many other things, because they want to secure a place with a college, university or employer. The aim is to make children, their parents and the whole system understand that such skills are necessary and desirable and will not always come just through qualifications. Qualifications have a part to play and need to be considered in relation to the curriculum, but the achievement area that we are looking at is exciting.

Gill Stewart: What Ken Macintosh said about exams being used for selection is true but, when the SQA revises qualifications—for example, science highers are being looked at—we work closely with higher education and industry to consider what is required.

Qualifications are used in a blunt way for selection purposes, but we also consider the content of courses to ensure that they will prepare young people for the next steps that they want to

take. For example, somebody studying science highers should be well placed to study science at higher education level, if they want. Indeed, advanced highers also have that effect because they encourage student-centred learning and much more self-motivated learning than some highers do. Advanced highers are highly regarded not only by our HE institutions but by some prestigious universities south of the border, which regard them more highly than they do A level exams.

Qualifications are indeed used as selectors, but part of the Scottish Qualification Authority's role is to ensure not only that we get progression from the curriculum for excellence outcomes, but that we look outside and see where people go with their qualifications. Which end users of qualifications does the SQA need to work with to ensure that the qualifications prepare those who have them to take the next step, whatever it is?

Ken Macintosh: I cannot disagree with that sentiment, but I am slightly frustrated because I do not know what that would mean in practice. What decisions would be taken about the examinable curriculum in a secondary school, for example? I also want to be reassured that you are working with parents on the issue of change. We talk about exams in the context of employers, universities and so on, but, rightly or wrongly, exams really matter to parents and they hugely influence pupils' choices. I am worried that, if we do not get the qualifications process right, we might undermine the ethos of the curriculum reforms.

Christine Carlin: My colleague said that we are trying to get the outcomes and values of the curriculum for excellence out there and understood. However, we will come forward soon with the qualifications side, so you are right that it is essential that we engage with parents and young people, as well as with the teaching community, to help them understand what any proposals mean and how they will fit with the curriculum for excellence. We firmly believe that the qualifications must follow the curriculum. That is why we have done things in a way that has enabled the outcomes to go forward while we help people to engage with them, prior to the introduction of the new qualifications and any potential consultation on them.

Jeremy Purvis: Forgive me if you touched on this point previously. I acknowledge that ministers will have to make certain decisions, but the previous panel helpfully explained when the curriculum for excellence is due to be implemented. I do not get a sense from the picture that you have given us that it can be guaranteed that the qualifications timeframe will be consistent with the curriculum timeframe. As far as parents are concerned, the curriculum for excellence is

being implemented at the same time as decisions are being taken on qualifications. If decisions on a replacement for standard grade have not been made, that leaves a tight timescale for introducing a replacement for the 2009-10 school year.

Christine Carlin: At the heart of what we do around engagement and trialling, and our continuing work on qualifications, is ensuring that the timescales fit. Because of lessons learned from past experience, we want to ensure that, when the new curriculum comes in, the appropriate qualifications are ready for youngsters when they need them. That is very much at the heart of our thinking about the programme.

Jeremy Purvis: Your colleague said, and the written evidence indicates, that the new curriculum will not be in place until after the 2008-09 school year. The written evidence also states:

"Changes in qualifications will have a lead in time and would need to be phased."

That point will cause concern, because it is not clear that the qualifications will come in at the same time as the new curriculum.

Christine Carlin: I see what you mean. We will need to consider how the curriculum will come in after the trial period. I think that you asked other colleagues how they envisaged that happening. I hope that you understand that it is not yet entirely clear. However, we very much want to ensure that action to embed the new curriculum is taken on the basis of an understanding that inevitably it will take time to alter the qualifications and ensure that there is a match, so that there are appropriate qualifications for the young people who come through the new curriculum.

On the longer-term changes to the values and principles that underpin qualifications, there is already a process for reviewing and renewing qualifications. However, work remains to be done on how we will introduce the changes and how long it will take. Part of that work will start when there is an announcement about what will happen to SCQF levels 4 and 5.

12:30

Jeremy Purvis: This question is similar to one that I put to the previous panel. Not long after the previous Government published guidance on the age and stage for taking exams, in 2005, I had a meeting—in this room—with the student council, rector and school board of Peebles high school. It was fascinating hearing pupils' perspectives on taking exams early, and learning about the stresses that they and their friends experience. Modelling often does not take account of such views, which are genuinely important if we are to offer proper qualifications.

I have been slightly encouraged by structures for

pupil involvement in Learning and Teaching Scotland, but the Government does not seem to have such structures. Are there structures in the Government or the SQA for pupil feedback on the qualifications work that is being done, so that we can properly hear accounts from learners themselves?

Christine Carlin: We expect there to be consultation on SCQF levels 4 and 5, so we need to think about who should be involved, as we would do for any consultation. Gill Stewart might talk generally about engagement with young people on qualifications.

Gill Stewart: The SQA carries out a survey—every three years, I think—of candidates from schools and colleges, and of employers and training providers. We ask standard questions, in accordance with good research practice, so that we can ascertain whether views are changing. We include topical issues that people have raised and we publish the results on our website. We take the outcome of the survey seriously.

On individual qualifications, we involve focus groups of candidates. For example, we might ask pupils who sat the higher exam in product design to talk about their experience and what they think should be done differently. Such input is part of the process of revising qualifications.

To inform work on the future of qualifications at SCQF levels 4 and 5, which Christine Carlin talked about, we carried out quite a bit of consultation. We talked to 2,500 people, including managers, teachers, lecturers in further education colleges and learners. We ran about 300 focus groups and 11 workshops and seminars. We went into 70 schools in 25 local authorities, and in each school we ran focus groups, which were made up of managers, chalkface teachers and learners.

We did a similar exercise in 27 of the 42 FE colleges. We tried to ensure that we struck a balance by considering colleges' geographical location—north, south, east or west—size and whether they served an urban area or a rural area, so that we heard views from across the board.

The views are sometimes very different. As Jeremy Purvis says, learners' views can be quite enlightening and are not always the same as teachers' or senior managers' views, so it is important to listen to them. The consultation events on flexibility involved mixed groups of learners, teachers, managers and others. I remember seeing people's views changing in the discussion groups, in large part because of what learners said about qualifications. Pupil feedback will be a highly important dimension as we move forward.

Jeremy Purvis: Thank you. That is encouraging.

Aileen Campbell: Are the witnesses confident that they are getting feedback from a good range of pupils and that teachers are not just putting up the most confident or the most academic to feed back?

Gill Stewart: When we have gone into schools, we have been careful to ask for a range of pupils. Of course, we cannot always guarantee that a school will give us that, because it is the school's decision. However, we have also had some specific focus groups for young people who fall into the more choices, more chances category to ensure that we get some of their views.

Christine Carlin: That is why it is really important that the challenge of more choices, more chances is embedded in the programme to ensure that, whatever part of the programme is moving forward, none of it will be to the detriment of those young people.

The Convener: That concludes our questions to you. Thank you very much for attending and answering our questions.

The meeting will be suspended briefly to allow the witnesses to leave.

12:36

Meeting suspended.

12:38

On resuming—

Proposed Subordinate Legislation

The Convener: The second and final item on our agenda is consideration of correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning and the Minister for Community Safety on the charitable status of Scotland's colleges.

Committee members will see from the correspondence that the Scottish Government seeks the committee's view on its suggested approach to the possibility of colleges losing their charitable status. The Government intends to introduce a Scottish statutory instrument that will exempt colleges from the independence requirement in the charity test, thus enabling them to retain their charitable status.

I am keen to get the committee's views so that we can respond to the cabinet secretary. The matter has certainly concerned me. Howard McKenzie, on behalf of further education establishments in Scotland, gave us some particularly good evidence on the effect that the loss of charitable status could have on their budgets and the dire consequences that they would face. I recognise that, in some dire circumstances, ministers might need to intervene in the management of further education establishments. That is important but, if it happens, the establishments cannot possibly pass the independence test.

To me, the Scottish Government's suggestion for addressing the problem is wise and worthy of support, but I am keen to know what other committee members think about it.

Elizabeth Smith: There is a debate to be had a long time in the future about whether colleges become fully independent. However, that debate is not for now, and I am happy to support the Government's proposal.

Ken Macintosh: The potential financial cost to colleges of losing charitable status is worrying, and it is important that it is addressed. I imagine that the Government is not desperate to make up the £15 million that it would cost colleges not to have charitable status.

There are two potential routes to address the matter. One is to remove ministerial control, so that colleges pass the independence test. There is a strong argument that, in the long term, as Liz Smith said, colleges should be put on the same footing as universities, but I have more serious worries about governance in colleges than in the

university sector. That might be slightly unfair, but a number of colleges have had difficulty, and any changes to their status should be part of a general review of governance. There are a number of governance issues; it is not just about ministerial control, which is not exercised often, if at all. The simplest and most obvious solution, therefore, is to make an exception for the colleges, and I support that.

Christina McKelvie: I concur. I understand that there is a debate to be had, but the consequences for colleges if we do not support the proposal are too big a responsibility for us to bear.

The Convener: That means that there is consensus in the committee that the suggested way forward—oh, sorry: Mary Mulligan wants to comment.

Mary Mulligan: I do not want to comment specifically on the issue, as I do not have a problem with what the committee is agreeing to. However, I am a little puzzled as to why we are being asked for an opinion at this stage, rather than when the instrument is presented to us. Will that be the pattern for the future?

The Convener: I am not sure. This is a new approach from the Government. It is not the normal way in which it would address such an issue—it would normally have laid the instrument—but I think that it is taking this approach partly because the cabinet secretary discussed the matter with us at the committee's away day. You were not present at that, Mary, because you had not joined the committee then. When she joined us at our away day, the cabinet secretary said that she was grappling with the issue and genuinely wanted the committee's views at an early stage to inform her deliberations. She listened to our views, so I think that that is part of the reason why she has written to us to advise us of her intention.

Jeremy Purvis: When you reply to the cabinet secretary, convener, it would be well worth thanking and commending the Government for its proactive approach. There will be difficulties in the future if it seeks our view before we see instruments but, without setting a precedent, we should say that committee members are grateful that the Government has given an early indication of its line of approach and are interested in seeing the instrument. Future pre-legislative scrutiny might involve the drafts of instruments but, as far as this matter is concerned, I am grateful that we have early sight of the Government's intentions. It is a good way forward.

12:45

The Convener: You are correct to point out that the approach does not in any way prevent us from

scrutinising the instrument fully when the Government lays it before the Parliament and the committee. We are being asked only to indicate whether we are content with the direction of travel, rather than guarantee that we will fully endorse the instrument. We will want to ensure that the instrument does what is proposed, and the appropriate time to test that will be when it is before us. However, there is consensus that we are content with how the Government is addressing the issue, that we appreciate the committee's continued involvement in the matter and that we look forward to receiving the instrument. I hope that it will offer some reassurance to our further education establishments, which have raised the potential loss of their charitable status with the committee.

Is the committee content for me to correspond with the cabinet secretary to advise her of our deliberations?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: That concludes the meeting. Our next meeting will be on 5 March.

Meeting closed at 12:46.

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

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

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Friday 7 March 2008

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

OFFICIAL REPORT daily editions

Single copies: £5.00

Meetings of the Parliament annual subscriptions: £350.00

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

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

Single copies: £3.75

Annual subscriptions: £150.00

Standing orders will be accepted at Document Supply.

Published in Edinburgh by RR Donnelley and available from:

Blackwell's Bookshop

**53 South Bridge
Edinburgh EH1 1YS
0131 622 8222**

Blackwell's Bookshops:
243-244 High Holborn
London WC1 7DZ
Tel 020 7831 9501

All trade orders for Scottish Parliament documents should be placed through Blackwell's Edinburgh.

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

Telephone orders and inquiries
0131 622 8283 or
0131 622 8258

Fax orders
0131 557 8149

E-mail orders
business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk

Subscriptions & Standing Orders
business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk

Scottish Parliament

RNID Typetalk calls welcome on
18001 0131 348 5000
Textphone 0845 270 0152

sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

All documents are available on the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk

Accredited Agents
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers