EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Wednesday 5 March 2008

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6th 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:

David Cameron (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland)
Brian Cooklin (Headteachers Association of Scotland)
Larry Flanagan (Educational Institute of Scotland)
Linda Kinney (Stirling Council)
Jane Liddell (North Lanarkshire Council)
Gordon Smith (Association of Headteachers and Deputes in Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Eugene Windsor

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Nick Hawthorne

ASSISTANT CLERK

Andrew Proudfoot

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee

Wednesday 5 March 2008

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

Curriculum for Excellence

The Convener (Karen Whitefield): Good morning. I welcome everyone to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee's sixth meeting in 2008.

Under agenda item 1, to inform our future work programme, we will take further evidence on the curriculum for excellence from two panels of witnesses. I am pleased to welcome the members of our first panel: David Cameron, vice-president of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland; Jane Liddell, head of education quality and development at North Lanarkshire Council; and Linda Kinney, head of learning and development, children's services, at Stirling Council.

I thank the witnesses for joining us this morning and for their written submissions, which were helpfully received in advance of today's meeting. Do the witnesses want to make a short opening statement?

David Cameron (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland): Thank you for the opportunity. I will simply emphasise some key points in our submission.

The curriculum for excellence is at a critical stage, but there is a concern, which is reflected in some of the other submissions, about where we stand on issues such as pace and clarity. There is certainly a need for greater definition of what the curriculum for excellence will encompass. An appropriate emphasis has been placed on the quality of the learning experience as a key determinant of young people's success and achievement, but the curriculum cannot be content free. As well as meeting the demands of personalisation and choice, the curriculum is required to meet social needs both by generating social cohesion and by underwriting the needs of the economy. We need to be somewhat clearer about what the essential building blocks are for progression and development in the curriculum; the outcomes alone will not cover all of that. People are looking for that greater definition.

That said, the curriculum for excellence was introduced against the very positive background of the national agreement on teachers' pay and conditions. In my view, the agreement is an extremely forward-looking document that has already enhanced professionalism throughout the education system, and we are building on that. The massive investment in glow, the national schools intranet, is also critical, as it opens up a whole new vista of potential development.

There are several issues around assessment, but the key issue is that we need styles and forms of assessment that reward the kind of pedagogy that we are trying to encourage. At the moment, there is still a massive industry in exam technique and revision for certificate courses. That ensures that young people acquire qualifications, but it does not necessarily give them the general abilities to take full advantage of those qualifications once they move on to higher and further education. Such young people may be successful in attainment terms but not as successful in learning terms as we would like them to be. They will certainly not be as successful as will be required in a society that will be dominated by change and the need for learning and in which learning and knowledge are in danger of quickly becoming outdated. A key issue is the need to ensure that we assess what we wish children to learn and what we wish our educators to teach.

On the four capacities, a key issue is the need to ensure that we do not end up putting hundreds of ticks in the successful learners box while the boxes for the other capacities simply record that the young person was engaged in a particular experience, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's award or enterprise education. I think that Jane Liddell also made that point. The other capacities are equally important in underwriting successful learning and in turning round the futures of children and young people in Scotland.

Practicalities and pragmatism are also key elements. There is a commitment to a much more flexible curriculum in both primary and secondary schools, but we need people working on whether we can develop that organisationally within our schools and institutions, given our current staffing arrangements. A lot of empirical work will be needed to determine what can be delivered. Flexibility is complex, so we need to see whether the system has the capacity to deal with it.

As well as those issues of definition and clarity, we also need to give people the confidence to take risks, as I argue in my submission under the heading "Risk and Reassurance".

There is still massive concern about assessment and how Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education uses assessment to make judgments about the profession and schools—such concern is reflected in another submission that the committee has received. We need a system of accountability that places due emphasis on all aspects of the

curriculum for excellence and not simply on one part of it.

Continuity, progression and transition are key issues. We must ensure that there is better transition at different stages. We must ensure that we do not move the focus to particular organisational issues in secondary schools and that there is appropriate flow-through from the magnificent early years practice that there is in Scotland to the secondary stages. There must be good transition, overlap, development and progression at all stages.

That feeds into the issue about academic and vocational education. We should establish courses that are based on the four capacities that will automatically have parity of esteem, and it should be clear to everyone that there is parity of esteem.

My final point is about engagement. Development has been cloistered since the national debate. Only in a limited number of local authority areas have parents, stakeholders and—this is critical—young people been given an opportunity to engage. Development has tended to happen through debate among teachers, excluding the wider educational community. It needs to move forwards significantly in that regard.

The Convener: Thank you for your comments. You covered a number of issues that committee members will want to pursue with you.

There seems to be a little tension about what the new curriculum will mean, not just among parents and young people but among ordinary teachers. There is a sense that the curriculum for excellence could do great things for education in Scotland, but there are concerns about whether teachers have been fully engaged. How will you address such concerns and improve engagement with ordinary teachers who work in schools every day to deliver education for our young people? How will you improve engagement with parents and young people, who are the service users, so that they know what changes they can expect and how things will improve?

David Cameron: I will respond briefly before giving colleagues an opportunity to respond.

First, we should be clear that there is no longer such a thing as an ordinary teacher. Annex B of "A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century" makes it clear that everyone who works in our schools under the national agreement is an extended professional, who has responsibility not only for the delivery of education to classes but for the pastoral care and development of pupils and for curriculum development. We should not talk in terms of how teachers will be engaged; we should talk about how teachers engage in the process.

We are talking about a development that offers the opportunity to establish local solutions to the learning needs of the young people with whom teachers and schools engage, which means that people cannot be passive. People need to seize the opportunity that is presented. It is of concern that a number of people are so used to top-down developments that are assessment-driven and qualification-driven that they find it difficult to deal with a development that is about innovation and creativity. There is a need for clarity and for direction, but when that is established people need to be empowered to take the development forward. My colleagues will talk about the specifics of that.

On engagement with parents, I have started a blog and the first post was on the curriculum for excellence. At our conference this year, we based the parent-council session on the curriculum for excellence. Simply to start to talk to parents and young people would be a massive step forward.

Linda Kinney (Stirling Council): I would like to think that Stirling Council understands its responsibilities around the implications of the values and purposes of curriculum for excellence, which were set out in the original review document.

On the second page of my submission, I make some comments about providing a framework so that teachers, head teachers and others can come together, engage and discuss the curriculum for excellence. I like to think that the work that we are doing in Stirling is proactive in supporting teachers to have confidence and to consider practice—the type of thing that I have set out in page 2 of my submission. It is also the authority's responsibility to set expectations. For example, we produce regular information for every teacher in our authority. I have with me the most recent document, which sets out how we expect head teachers to engage, and to ensure that their teachers engage, in considering various approaches to the curriculum for excellence, the outcomes and new learning and teaching methodologies.

We see engagement as a major responsibility, so we spend a lot of time creating opportunities for teachers and head teachers to come together and share practice.

Jane Liddell (North Lanarkshire Council): Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee, convener. I will reiterate some of the main points in my submission, from North Lanarkshire Council. We, too, have been proactive in supporting the implementation of the curriculum for excellence, the principles and rationale of which are based on a policy of raising achievement for all. We have developed a framework to support schools and nurseries in the

implementation. We have short and medium-term targets that are based on the good practice that already exists, particularly in the early years and primary sector, in relation to pedagogy, methodologies and active and interactive teaching approaches.

We have processes for improvement in place through the school development planning or school improvement planning cycle. Schools and nurseries consider their practice and engage in how they can improve what they do. In the development planning cycle, a framework already exists to drive forward improvement. It is a necessity that we engage with parents, the community and young people in schools and nurseries.

I agree fully with David Cameron that we are at a critical stage. Initially, there was huge enthusiasm for considering changing radically some of what we do in Scotland, for the betterment of our children and young people. We are now at a critical time, because key supports are needed to encourage the creativity and innovation that will be necessary. Like David Cameron, I believe that it is every teacher's and educator's responsibility to grasp the opportunity and to develop and work in their schools and clusters to drive forward the improvement and to ensure that we meet the requirements of the four capacities.

The Convener: I do not for one minute think that teachers are ordinary—Jane Liddell will know that, as she works in the authority that covers my constituency. I was talking about teachers who are engaged in the everyday life of a school and in getting on with the job of teaching.

Jane Liddell's point about support is critical. Many teachers throughout Scotland will be enthused about the curriculum for excellence—they will see its potential and will want it to work. However, if they take up the challenge to engage with the process and enter into their end of the bargain, we must ensure that the necessary supports are in place. Are you confident that, throughout Scotland, the supports exist in local authorities to meet the challenges? The committee gets the sense that there is apprehension, because although there has been some talking and a lot of enthusiasm, everything is not quite in place yet.

10:15

David Cameron: We need to set against that the number of teachers who have for years been frustrated by the restrictive nature of curriculum development in Scotland and the number of people who have found that the five to 14 curriculum has constrained them, rather than freed or liberated them. A significant number of teachers in Scotland have demonstrated excellent practice and wish to continue to do that.

In secondary schools, there is much innovative, exciting and successful learning going on in S1, S2 and S3; however, there is far less of it in S4 and significantly less of it in S5 because the focus in those years is on preparation for qualification and examination. A significant number of teachers see the curriculum for excellence as an opportunity to achieve the ambitions that they brought into the profession—indeed, the ambitions that brought them into the profession.

We must ensure that this does not become a major workload issue. The workload issue with curricular change has tended to be around the revision of materials, support materials and resources. There is now a completely different issue going into the curriculum for excellence. We have never confronted a development with a resource with the potential of glow, which is a massive resource. Huge investment has also been made in the schools estate, and we now have buildings that are fit for purpose. In many of our schools, we have modern management structures that reflect the need to drive forward a different type of curriculum development. There have been significant changes, which the curriculum for excellence will capitalise on. There will be a resource and a support there.

What we need to do, as much as provide support, is ensure that we minimise the workload. We should honour the commitments that were made in the national agreement on freeing up teachers and educators to teach. We should take away from them tasks that are essentially administrative and reduce the burdens of reporting and assessment. The potential to do that within the curriculum for excellence is significant.

We have a national assessment bank and the Scottish survey of achievement; yet, a number of schools are still buying in commercial standardised tests to use. We need to address the burden of assessment and reduce the workload. It is as much about allowing teachers the opportunity and the freedom to have control over teaching. In my view, teachers are enthused when they are working with a curriculum that excites them, that they feel part of, over which they have a significant element of control and that—essentially—they see as addressing the needs of the children who are in front of them, rather than when they are working with something that has been bought pre-packed from somewhere else for them to deliver.

Jane Liddell: There are dangers in that, too, of which we must be cautious. We require to ensure continuity and progression in learning. We must ensure that whatever we are doing is purposeful and is moving the child on in his or her educational

development and learning. That is a point that we must make. We cannot have a free-for-all in which people are developing what they consider to be good ideas without considering the bigger picture. That is where the local authority has a critical role in supporting schools and nurseries and ensuring that the programmes that they are developing—the content that David Cameron talked about—are appropriate and that there is genuine progression at a steady pace.

According to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and the inspection regime, there is excellence in Scotland already. We have sound building blocks and should be confident. However, there are a number of unknowns that really need to be addressed to make us feel more confident in relation to the exam structures that still burden us in so many ways.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): You have talked eloquently and succinctly about the leap of faith that is required. Last week's panel of witnesses also said that the curriculum for excellence involves different thinking, and many of us around the table are convinced by that thinking both in principle and because of the benefits that can be gained socially and economically.

I want to ask about assessment of what one might call the subjective values in education. As far as I am concerned, the curriculum for excellence—the principles of which I thoroughly approve—is really about the things that are almost immeasurable. It is about producing responsible citizens and some of the things that will not come down to objective testing, exam results or whatever. I note what Mr Cameron said about the need for solutions at a local level. Will you say a little more about how some of those things could be evaluated, as opposed to being measured? If there is good practice, how will you go about saying, "Look, this has worked really well. These children have got a greater sense of social responsibility than some others"?

David Cameron: In simple terms, one of the ways of considering and assessing confident individuals is to get to a position of being able to test young people's skills in an unfamiliar context. There has been a reluctance to do that. We can evaluate confidence by looking at the ways in which young people adapt to and adopt such challenges.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority has introduced some really exciting practice in programmes such as skills for work, which uses methods such as video and observation to assess pupil contribution. We have the most exciting and innovative assessment techniques in the subject areas where the stakes are perceived to be the lowest. Some of the assessment in the skills for work programme offers a way forward for assessment. We can observe young people engaging in group activity and we can come to a judgment. If the terms that we have set are helpful and appropriate, we are then in a position to evaluate that activity, describe it and make a statement, although we may not be able to calibrate it against any kind of normative scale.

It is interesting to note that early years education in Scotland functions on the basis of exactly that kind of assessment. We observe young people at a particular stage to see how they are progressing, and that progress is then documented and reported. One of the great strengths of the work that Linda Kinney has led for Stirling Council is a system of early years assessment—if one can describe it as such—that is based on documentation. Children are observed, their activities are recorded and their work is preserved. The element that is measured is progress. That assessment allows us to get at how young people interact, how they engage with learning, how they meet challenges and demonstrate confidence and how they support others and link with them. However, that means that we are talking about a different form of assessment; one that involves placing greater trust in teachers.

I will show my age by suggesting a return to the recommendations of the Bullock report of the early 1970s. One of Bullock's comments—and I am paraphrasing—was that if he was convinced that every teacher was in a position to make an accurate assessment of the young people in their charge, he saw no further role for standardised assessment. In the years since that report, we have spent far too much time investing in standardised assessment and far too little time developing the capacity of teachers to make judgments. We should afford teachers the trust to use their judgment to plan young people's learning so that they can help, advise and support them in their future movement through the system.

Elizabeth Smith: The logical deduction from that is that a problem will emerge in later years if national assessment dominates the timetable both in terms of teaching commitment and examinations. Given what you said about the importance of flexibility in the education system and the need for the values that you described—values that cannot be measured by exam results—what are your recommendations for changing the examination structure?

David Cameron: My point on assessment was that we should ensure that we assess what we teach. One cannot get as good a correlation between a young person's performance in standard grade English and higher grade English as one can get between their performance in all their standard grade subjects and higher English. That is interesting to note. It seems to indicate that

somewhere along the line one of those exams is not necessarily assessing the right things.

Elizabeth Smith: Is that not testing two different things—ability on a continuum in one subject area and the broad range of skills that a pupil—

David Cameron: It indicates that standard grade tends to measure general and not specific ability whereas highers are a bit more focused. If we want—genuinely—to consider progression and development in a subject, we should expect a correlation between performance and assessment at the different stages.

The point that I am trying to make is that we often use assessments that are narrow in nature. We can coach young people through assessments on the basis of exam technique, knowledge and understanding, and yet they do not necessarily acquire the broader learning to obtain the qualification.

Elizabeth Smith: I accept that. You are right, but does that mean that we have to make changes to national certification? If so, what changes would you suggest?

David Cameron: A number of elements of national certification would need to change. My point of view remains the same, as I think does that of the ADES: there is validity in young people obtaining qualifications in English, mathematics, physics and chemistry, but the assessments themselves need to change so that we know that people are successful learners, in the context of English, or can demonstrate their capacity as confident individuals, in English. The subject would set the context. The qualifications framework does not necessarily need to change but, within that, we need to change the means of assessment that are used so that we reward good approaches to learning and encourage young people to develop the capacities.

Elizabeth Smith: That is an interesting point. You have highlighted basic skills in English, and possibly maths and so on. Does not that suggest that there should be a change to how we examine some of the key issues, to bring out some of the skills that you are talking about?

David Cameron: Yes.

Elizabeth Smith: There is no question but that the teaching profession is largely of the opinion that the examination syllabus is extremely cluttered and does not articulate particularly well. There are various concerns about certain levels being dropped, and budgetary pressures are adding to that. There is a very specific point about where the curriculum at the top end of the school is going.

David Cameron: Yes, and if we do not make that change, the curriculum for excellence will lose momentum. If the three to 15 curriculum becomes a replacement for the five to 14, we will not achieve the ambitious programme that we set out to achieve.

Linda Kinney: David Cameron made an important point about being able to widen the assessment model. The assessment-is-for-learning model can be widened so that it can take in the bigger element and go beyond the individual focus that we have at the moment. My authority, along with some others, has some models in primary and early years education that are examples of good practice. The assessment-is-for-learning model can allow for expansion.

Elizabeth Smith: Would that involve something like an international baccalaureate, an element of which would be some of the skills that we are talking about?

Linda Kinney: I suppose that I am talking about something slightly different, although I know that that is one of the major current debates and that there are various views about that taking place at the end of schooling. I am talking about an approach to assessment that allows us to define the learning that is going on and how we want to assess it. That means having flexibility about what we want to define.

Some of our primary schools are taking cross-curriculum approaches to learning. They bring in people from outside as part of peer assessment. For example, the health people will come in and give feedback to children and young people about something that they have been learning in health. It goes beyond the classroom, and sometimes beyond what is going on in the school. My point in response to your question was that we have a framework that could be used.

Jane Liddell: We have to find mechanisms to recognise, as well as their achievements in the traditional academic subjects, what are termed the wider achievements of young people: the valid activities that they are involved in, such as vocational education, sports leadership, ASDAN—award scheme development and accreditation network—awards, Duke of Edinburgh awards and so on. Many authorities have developed mechanisms for recording those achievements, alongside achievements in external examinations, in a diploma that goes with the youngster as they leave school.

We need to consider what we are doing and ensure that we acknowledge the breadth of activity and experience, not just achievement in the traditional academic subjects. David Cameron is absolutely right: the skills for work courses offer a genuine opportunity to examine what we are doing more broadly, and they could be more helpful by directing us in what we teach, how we engage with

young people and how we ascertain that they have learned what they set out to learn.

The curriculum for excellence allows us to have a depth of learning that five to 14 did not, because we had to jump a series of hurdles to get to certain places and that narrowed down the range of what we could do. The curriculum for excellence offers an opportunity to enrich learning in a way that good practitioners could do in the past, before they were frustrated by five to 14 and its time constraints.

We all have to take measured risks and we must be brave—there is significant exemplification of that across Scotland. We must make courageous decisions, but that must be done within a national framework, because we cannot have local authorities doing their own thing. Ministers want to be assured about the standards in Scotland's schools and directors of education need similar assurance. We are at a crucial point and must not lose the momentum or, as David Cameron said, restrict curriculum for excellence after the end of S3 and say that after that it is business as usual for the real work of academic attainment to enter into higher or further education. We are at a turning point.

10:30

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Your comments have been helpful, but I would like to translate them into what you think curriculum for excellence will mean in practice. Mr Cameron said that he can see the examination framework retaining its shape, but the content of exams might change. Can you expand on that? Let us take as examples intermediate 1, intermediate 2 and highers. Would pupils still have a sit-down exam in which they were asked a series of questions that address content, comprehension and so on, or are we talking about assessment throughout the year? Can you develop your comments about that so I know what it will look like in practice?

David Cameron: The assessment is for learning initiative has been one of the most successful initiatives in Scotland's schools in recent years. Nobody is talking about its scale and scope or about how we support teachers through it because so many staff have shown such enthusiasm for it. The principles of assessment is for learning and the improvement that we have seen through it are significant.

I would be comfortable if, up to level 3, we trusted the judgment of teachers and did more to ensure that they have the opportunity to discuss and standardise arrangements. A wonderful phrase that Carolyn Hutchison used yesterday is that "people just need to know what a good one looks like". We must have that discussion. We talk about a confident individual, but what do we expect the characteristics of such an individual to be by the time a young person has reached level 3? What do we expect their skills as a successful learner to be by the time that they reach level 2? The outcomes go some way towards describing that, but we need to give teachers more time to talk to one another to ensure that there is consistency around standards.

A wonderful phrase that is used to describe the situation is that teachers have been frustrated in recent years by the bureaucratic demands and burdens that have been placed on them. What that means is that they have spent more time ticking boxes than discussing how to establish concepts and understandings. We must take a risk and minimise the amount of national external assessment—certainly up to level 3. Beyond that, we need to have a system of market currency. There needs to be something that young people can gather and successfully trade in for a university place, a pathway to employment, further education or whatever.

In the short term, I do not envisage that we would move away from the kind of exam structure that has been developed through higher still. By being modular—this comes back to Ken Macintosh's point about the different levels such as intermediate 1 and intermediate 2—it offers a range of levels and flexibility. If we could combine that with more flexible programming of assessment, so that there is not only one chance for someone to get their qualification in the months of May and June, we would give people more flexible routes through the level 4 period. Within that framework, we need to give people the reassurance of what looks like continuity and progress. I think that external assessment is required at that stage and that it will play a significant part for a considerable period of time.

Linda Kinney: I will add a couple of points to what David Cameron said. In our schools—particularly in the primary sector—teachers are beginning to moderate and evaluate one another's practice. That is a core element of the assessment is for learning model. The opportunity for teachers to get into dialogue with one another about standards and expectations and to feed back to one another is interesting.

We could consider applying aspects of the modular system in further education to how we moderate assessment. Those of us who have been involved in that system will know that it has had bureaucratic elements, but it has core aspects—particularly the moderation element—that we could consider further.

Ken Macintosh: I can see how the examinable curriculum could change. How would the assessment stages that are in place through

primary school change? Parents are very aware of the stages that their children progress through.

Jane Liddell: I echo what David Cameron and Linda Kinney said about observational assessment in the early years, whereby a child is observed participating in and successfully completing a piece of work, which is followed by an "I can" statement—"I can cut" or "I can do." We are talking about moving that on to the first stage in early primary years, with a view to refining it a bit more. The role of formative assessment needs to be emphasised, because it is critical to moving from A to B in a way in which the teacher interacts with the pupil's work to the pupil's betterment.

In relation to five to 14, understanding levels has taken a long time. Maintaining the current system would be a massive challenge, but that cannot continue as we move the curriculum on. The issue is how we convince parents that their children are progressing and continuing to progress as they move from stage to stage. That involves a lot of unanswerables. Embedding the assessment is for learning principles in practice and having interaction between schools and our parent groups, as we did with five to 14, to give parents a clear understanding of what the curriculum is about and how we assess how their children are progressing through the curriculum remain challenges that we all face.

Ken Macintosh: I—and, I am sure, many committee members—do not need to be convinced about the weaknesses of an exam-based system in which a person is assessed on how they perform on one paper at one time. That system measures a particular aptitude; it does not even measure the ability to learn. It measures what I think Jane Liddell called "the" curriculum, as opposed to the process of learning, but I have no feeling that parents are even aware of that—they have not bought into that at all. How on earth do you reassure parents that you can replace an externally moderated and standardised system of assessment or exams with just the professional judgment of individual teachers? With the best will in the world, some teachers are better than others. We all know that, as our children go through school, they have good and bad teachers. Well, all teachers are good, but some are better than others.

Elizabeth Smith: Just say it.

Ken Macintosh: Most parents understand the current system, in which they can see progression, judge their child's progress against children not just in their class, but across the country, and judge their school against the rest of the country. Whether or not we wish that to happen, that is what parents do. Are you suggesting that we should replace that? If so, how? If parents do not buy into the new system, the weaknesses will be huge. It is all very well to talk about brave and radical decisions, but I would like to see practical reassurance that what is proposed can happen.

David Cameron: First, we have conditioned parents. Most parents—particularly when their children are in primary school and in the early stages of secondary—want to know that their child is happy, settled in school and achieving all that they are capable of and whether their achievement is in line with or better than what would be expected of a child at that stage. Instead of telling them those things, we tend to give them reports that say, "Your child is at level A". We give them some Sanskrit based on the five to 14 attainment targets. Parents read through those reports and for years they were confused. They did not think that their child was that bright, but they still got an A, or they could not understand why their child got an E when they had been doing so well.

There has been all sorts of confusion. People do not know, for example, that after national examinations have been set, the pass marks are scaled. People are not aware of the gerrymandering that goes on so that the exam results tell us that which we should know. We have a system that appears to work and, in a sense, we have sold it to parents, but we need to bear it in mind that the curriculum for excellence is the outcome of the curriculum review, which was a response to the national debate. We allowed so much time to elapse between the national debate and the progress that we are now making that nobody sees the connection.

Kenneth Macintosh is correct: it is okay to take brave decisions provided that they are collective decisions. The responsibility for children and young people in Scotland is the collective responsibility of parents, carers, teachers, educators and everyone else who works with children and young people. We need to engage all those people in the debate, because to a large extent we are trying to respond to what people told us in the national debate. They said that the curriculum was overcrowded and that they did not get the information they wanted for their children. Employers told us that the system did not give young people the information they needed for the world of work, and that kids were coming out with standard grade English but could not read and write or could not spell properly.

People do not believe that the current system works, and we just accept that. There is a line in "Little Big Man" when the Indian chief goes up into the hills to die but then walks back down. When somebody asks him what happened, he says, "Some days the magic works; some days it doesn't." That is true of our current system.

Jane Liddell: David Cameron talked eloquently about the five to 14 levels and was a headteacher

at the time of the implementation. There was significant confusion because A was always regarded as top of the class and anything below that was a spiral downwards. As we state in our submission, we need much more genuine engagement with parents at the school and nursery levels. We need to interact with them because it is their children whom we have a joint responsibility to educate.

Kenneth Macintosh asked how parents would know about the new system. The evidence is there as they come to school, look at their children's work and discuss with teachers what their children are doing. Perhaps we interact with parents in a different way now. They get 10 minutes to come in, and interaction is done in a timetabled way. There is a vulgarity about that approach. If we are serious about children's learning and development, we need to acknowledge that parents and carers are critically important to young people's success. We need to engage with parents and carers in a different way.

The new system will be there for them to see. They will listen to their children. They will look at the work that goes home. They will see their children moving on from A to B to C. They will examine their work in a much more comprehensive way. They will be confident that their child is moving on. The relationship between the school and the home should be further bonded by the implementation of the curriculum for excellence. As David Cameron said, it was a response to what people said. How will we know whether it works? We should ask the people—the children and their parents. If we are really interested in self-evaluation, what matters is not our delusions about where we are but what the people think of the service we provide.

The engagement with the professionals is fine, but the big stakeholders are the children, the parents and the community. We are the service providers. Linda Kinney has been interacting with the parents. So have we, but we must get more serious about doing that. We need to provide a real understanding of our intentions so that parents and carers are confident about the education and development that is on offer in our schools and nurseries.

The education service is in a good place in Scotland because people trust it, by and large, and think highly of it, but there is still much to be done. It is an enormous challenge that we should not underestimate.

10:45

Linda Kinney: We should not forget that we have a well-established improvement agenda in Scotland for standards in schools in early years. We have developed rigorous quality assurance systems that include external moderation by HMIE. We can gather from a number of layers, therefore, if people feel a need to be reassured about the national element.

Ken Macintosh: I have a final question for Jane Liddell, who said that the fact that the examination framework remains intact is an obstacle. That implies that the framework must change. You do not have to convince any of us about the change philosophy, but we want to know what it means in practice. What examination framework needs to change? Does the SQA or the Government need to change the national assessment framework or the examination framework? If so, how can it be done and when?

Jane Liddell: We do need to change. To reflect what David Cameron said, young people need to leave at the end of formal schooling with a portfolio that makes it clear what they can do and where they excel. It should also indicate gaps for which they need to further their development and learning.

In North Lanarkshire, we benchmark with other authorities. I admit that we retain the five to 14 testing regime, but it is coming to the end of its life. Linda Kinney spoke about quality assurance and a local authority's responsibility to ensure high standards and quality in its domain. We can wait for something to come from a national level or replace five to 14 testing in the meantime. We are in a kind of interim place as we go through the transition from the world that we are in and move into what we might call the brave new world, so we still need assurances.

I can speak only for my council, but the quality assurance framework in North Lanarkshire is rigorous. The senior managers and quality improvement officers work tirelessly to support and challenge schools and nurseries, but we still need to be assured that children are progressing and that they are literate and numerate. Processes need to be put in place to give us those assurances. We are working on that.

The 32 local authorities should not be struggling with this on their own. We need a national driver that supports us as we move from the old to the new. I believe that we need to give teaching and learning back to the professionals. Not every teacher, early years worker and classroom assistant is excellent, and neither is each individual in the other services who work in schools, about which we have not talked, who are critical to the delivery of services: our campus police, public health nurses and sure start home link workers. They are all important people; this is not just about teachers.

Teachers drive forward the professional aspects of teaching and learning, but there all those other key players. As children's services begins to dominate the agenda, what we do in schools will be part of that bigger picture. We need to keep our eyes wide open when we think about how we want to do business. We are in a kind of limbo land between the old and the new. There is anxiety about what we want to do. It will take time to decide what we want to do, but in the meantime a movement is taking place across curricular themes and more effective transitions are being made from early years, through the primary stage and into secondary education. We are tinkering with things to achieve positive results, but perhaps we are not being brave enough because we are not sure what we will face as regards standards, assessment and testing. That is probably why you are hearing anxiety being expressed by local authorities and all the other important contributors to the discussion.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): As a former guidance teacher, I am delighted to hear that, especially in secondary school, we are thinking about teaching children rather than about teaching subjects.

I am afraid that it is time to return to the worksheets. Every classroom teacher must be assured that what we are talking about will be translated into practice. That is the cement that will make the curriculum work. Given the materials that have been provided so far, how easy or difficult will it be to create a practical curriculum in which there is a broader range of choice?

David Cameron: One thing that is impressive is the different levels of experience that young people have with the same materials. As I said, against the background of glow we do not need to reinvent or redesign materials; we need to reduce the burden on the worksheet and the sterile exercise whereby pupils extract pieces of information from a source and record them for future learning. We need to move away from that.

The tools exist. Assessment is for learning is well established in the overwhelming majority of primary schools and the techniques that are associated with it are having a significant impact in secondary schools. North Lanarkshire Council has made a huge investment in co-operative learning as an approach. A number of schools in our authority area have proceeded in the same way. There is huge excitement among teachers as a result of a better understanding of how children learn and how their brains work. A number of tools are already available, which the best of our teachers are deploying regularly and which most of our teachers are deploying to a significant extent.

The difficulty is to do with thinking backwards. An assessment system that is based on regurgitating content is driven by the need to amass content, which involves the use of worksheets and textbooks. In such a system, recording is the key skill. When we move to a curriculum that is about developing learning, the key skills are investigation, analysis and reporting. That is a significant change, but I genuinely believe that pupils have the skills to embrace it.

We need to prune out the content and the demand for coverage. I was a history and modern studies teacher by trade. As a result of the pressure to get through content, a lot of the time it was necessary to short-circuit the process of learning rather than to develop it. As Jane Liddell said, we want to encourage breadth. As you said, we want to teach the whole child and allow them to develop rather than to impose on them a detailed curriculum framework that involves acquiring a significant amount of knowledge. Virtually every SQA course that I am familiar with would be unteachable if one attempted to cover the conditions and arrangements documents within the time span available. Every teacher prunes and gets through the work as best they can, on the basis of what they know will be assessed. We need to move away from that approach, so that we give teachers the time to be innovative and creative.

Rob Gibson: In practical terms, how do we do that? I will give an example. The decision has been taken to make Scottish history a compulsory element of the higher history course—we had a parliamentary debate about that a few weeks ago. That will require the provision of specific content. How do we match the need for children to acquire specific content with the development of the skills of investigation, analysis and reporting?

David Cameron: My first practical issue is that we need to start defining how to do that. My understanding is that the Scottish history element is to be included to provide young people with a sense of identity, heritage and belonging. On that basis, the teaching of Scottish history cannot simply be a tokenistic brush with the Scottish wars of independence or Mary, Queen of Scots—it needs to be meaningful and address young people's understanding of what they are learning. We need to think about it not simply as the delivery of content, but the delivery of the key concepts of heritage and wellbeing. There is a lot of material around on Scottish history, but history teaching must be driven by original source material rather than secondary texts if it is to have any value.

The material exists, but the key pressure on us is to begin to define the essential building blocks in the curriculum. What is the commitment that we

are making to Scottish history? What commitment are we making to knowledge and understanding of science? Once we have that definition, we can talk about how we deliver it. At the moment, we have a set of outcomes and no clarity about what the essential building blocks of content are, apart from some broad statements about commitment. Give us the definition of the new curriculum and we can begin to address the practical and pragmatic issues associated with delivering it.

Rob Gibson: So who should provide that definition? Should not a structure have definitions as one of its key features so that people can apply practically the ideas that we are talking about?

David Cameron: One would need to look at the history of the development of the curriculum for excellence. There is a difficulty in determining—to use a colloquial phrase—who is het for providing leadership. The work described in Linda Kinney's and Jane Liddell's submissions is the way forward—it is about engaging with teachers and allowing them the opportunity, in consultation with the wider stakeholder body, to define what we want.

At the moment, we have neither a top-down nor a bottom-up model; we have something that sits uncomfortably between the two. There needs at least to be some leadership that sets up a position around which people can quickly debate and draw conclusions. Something has to be put in the pot that gives people the opportunity to respond, discuss and debate. A point in my submission chimes well with the comments that you are making about practicality and pragmatism. How do you timetable delivery of the new curriculum? How do you deliver it in a secondary context in a school of 800 pupils with a restricted curriculum choice? How do you move from that to the situation that we want to be in? We need people with timetabling expertise working on it, but we need to tell them what it is they are working with empirically and get that moving forwards.

I am a member of the management board of ADES and have to take some responsibility for a new approach, but there must be more clarity, decisiveness and leadership around the curriculum for excellence than we have seen so far.

Rob Gibson: Will the approach that you describe be the glue whereby lots of differing approaches in local authorities, schools, classes and at the level of individual pupils, begin to develop coherence?

David Cameron: That is exactly my view and Jane Liddell made the point very well. I apologise for offering yet another analogy. This situation is like jazz: it can be freeform but there has to be a theme and people must have the capacity to improvise and be creative around that theme. However, the theme has to be the entitlement of children and young people in Scotland and it has to address the social needs of the nation.

We must make sure that we have the vocational and the skills bases of learning; that we are geared up for the knowledge economy; that we have people who have a sense of themselves, a sense of place, a sense of heritage, a feeling for who they are; and a framework of values that accords with the values that you as a group of MSPs have endorsed on the mace. When we put those together, that is the kind of curriculum architecture that we should be beginning to build from.

A lot of that work is being done on the ground, but it needs to be drawn together and the theme that I described needs to be clearly established. The curriculum for excellence cannot be a free for all; children cannot be put at risk in some form of catchment lottery. We need more of a framework, but we also need to allow the system to deliver its best as often as possible.

11:00

Rob Gibson: I will make a final point. You talked about being on the management group. Would any of the panel suggest that the next stage in the management process is to provide a definition?

David Cameron: I have been suggesting that.

Rob Gibson: I know you have, but I wonder whether any of the others are. The point is, is that built into the work programme?

David Cameron: There is a difficulty, because the management group is made up of civil servants who need to be aware of the position that is likely to be adopted by ministers. There is a difficulty because of the role of civil servants.

HMIE is represented on the group, but there is a difficulty for it because it should not be inspecting its own advice. HMIE's representatives are therefore reluctant to provide clarity, because their role in relation to the initiative is different.

When it comes to Learning and Teaching Scotland, there is a lack of clarity, which is presumably one of the reasons why it is up for review about whether it is the body that should speak nationally about the development of the curriculum and learning in Scotland or whether it is an executive arm that carries out tasks and functions on behalf of the Scottish Government.

I am on the group as a representative of local authorities, so I am there to reflect the views of others and respond to what is coming forward.

The SQA is also represented. That is the extent of the management board.

We must think seriously about the structure of the board and we must think differently about the framework that underpins the structure.

Rob Gibson: That is very interesting.

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): Your submissions mention the national education debate, which took place in 2002 and highlighted the need to reduce overcrowding in the curriculum, make learning more enjoyable, make better connections between the stages of the curriculum, achieve a better balance, equip young people with core skills, broaden the range of learning experiences, ensure that approaches to assessment and certification support learning and offer more choices to meet the needs of individual young people. I can see that that is not an exhaustive list. To what extent is the development of curriculum for excellence addressing those issues?

Linda Kinney: That is exactly what the framework for curriculum for excellence attempts to do. I was a member of the original review group and that is the brief that we worked on.

From my perspective and from a Stirling Council perspective, I feel that that original core framework from the review group has the potential to address all the elements you mentioned. It frees us up from the five to 14 aspect and reduces overcrowding. It potentially dilutes the idea of there being three stages in education: early years, which is separate from primary, which in turn is separate from secondary. I do not have the list in front of me, but the framework provides the basis of the capacities, the purposes, the values and some of the principles of curriculum design. From my perspective, the framework gives us the opportunity to build on those. The discussions that we have had today have been about the detail of what that looks like in practice.

David Cameron: The curriculum for excellence provides us with the opportunity to address that set of challenges from the national debate. The challenge for us is to capitalise on that work. We indicated in our submissions what we see as being some of the essential elements in capitalising on it. Jane Liddell's submission majored on the point about wider engagement and meeting the entitlement that young people have. Linda Kinney's submission majored on active and proactive engagement with educators to try to move forward on a collective and consensual basis. On behalf of ADES, I have asked for a greater degree of clarity about the requirements and the specifications, so that we can explore the challenges that Mr Gibson mentioned in respect of the practicalities and pragmatic issues that surround the curriculum for excellence. The springboard exists, but we must ensure that we take full advantage of it.

Christina McKelvie: I have picked up the positive theme that education is continuous. There is not nursery education, primary education, secondary education then lifelong learning; there is a seamless transition from cradle to grave in education. What communication is taking place between those separate sectors to bring things together?

Jane Liddell: In North Lanarkshire, we engage with the sectors collectively. In the past, we engaged with discrete groups of early years heads, primary heads and secondary heads, because there was a range of agendas, but we no longer do that. We now have a shared three-to-18 agenda—or I should say zero to 18, because we have children in under-three services.

As well as engaging with the sectors collectively, we engage with them in their localities, because we have to fit in with the new structures for community planning and locality planning. There are different issues in different areas of North Lanarkshire. That is where we are finding the most success.

Linda Kinney said earlier that what early years services do is the bread and butter of the curriculum for excellence. They are involved in observational assessment and child-centred learning, which move seamlessly into the early years of primary. We are now in a position to do that, because we are not constrained by the five-to-14 curriculum. Learning through play is back on the agenda for wee children in primaries 1 and 2. It is wonderful that they can discover things and look at them in depth without our saying, "It's time to move on to mathematics."

The local collaboration in clusters involving early years, primary and secondary has been tremendous. Primary-trained transition teachers are working in S1 and S2 to take their methodologies and approaches into the early stages of secondary and engage with professionals there. Those learning experiences are essential if we are to drive the continuum forward. We must ensure that teachers can engage within their establishments, between establishments and in clusters.

That is how we have been driving matters forward in North Lanarkshire. I am sure that such work is happening throughout Scotland, because there is a requirement for it. We can no longer sit in silos. We have to speak to other professionals and deliver for all our children all the time.

David Cameron: I compliment Jane Liddell on the work that has been done, but the answer to the question at a national level is that not nearly

enough is being done. There has not been enough engagement with those who are in higher education. We need to ask them, "What will you make of a pupil's capacities profile that is based on these elements? How much importance will you attribute to it?" Also, there has not been enough engagement with further education or with community education and learning. Jane Liddell's point highlights the extent to which we have been dependent on individual local authorities and groups taking forward engagement. We are trying to organise an evening with Stirling University to have a broad, general discussion of the type that I mentioned. At present, not nearly enough is happening.

I repeat the phrase that I used earlier: we have had a cloistered debate since the curriculum review emerged. That is understandable, given that initially the view was taken that, because we depend on teachers to deliver the curriculum, we need to secure their support and understanding before we can move elsewhere with it.

We now recognise a point that Jane Liddell made earlier: we cannot make all the difference for all children. Think of the challenges that some children in Scotland face—poverty of aspiration and lack of self-confidence and self-esteem, which means that they cannot adapt to new situations and cannot move from one context to another. Looked-after and accommodated children experience some of the worst educational outcomes of any young people in Scotland, despite the fact that we have a corporate parenting responsibility for them. There are young people who have difficulty forming attachments, whom one cannot intimidate, move over or emotionally move forward, because they are disengaged from the system.

We cannot address those challenges on our own as schools, teachers or education services. Preparing young people for a future that we do not know and do not understand and for a present that we are struggling to adapt to ourselves will not be achieved by the efforts of schools and teachers alone. We need to honour the lifelong learning in the title of this committee, and the commitment throughout Scotland to moving towards a focus on children and children's services, rather than on specific delivery elements. We have not done enough on that.

Christina McKelvie: You do not have to convince me—you are preaching to the converted. My background is in social work and lifelong learning, so I understand the real advantages of all of that. I am delighted that up to higher and further education—I hope that we can address that, too—the historical silo thinking has gone and we are making the child the centre. To allow a child to develop, it is important that we do not separate social work from education establishments and whatever else is in the circle of the child's life. I completely agree with everything that you said.

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I want to follow on from Christina McKelvie's points. Last week, we heard from the curriculum division of the Scottish Government that the next phase of its engagement will be with the FE colleges, the universities and a wider range of the people who are involved in educating our children. Are you heartened by that or do you think that it has come too late? Were you aware of it anyway?

David Cameron: As long as it comes it can never come too late. Despite our efforts, we cannot reinvent the past; we can only change the future. We cannot bring that engagement any further forward. It is good that it is happening now. We need to ensure that it does not re-emphasise the silos that Christina McKelvie talked about: "Oh, we're talking to further education people now. We'll have a debate about what the issues are for them."

These are not the young people of further education any more than they are the children of schools. We have a collective responsibility, and we need to expand the debate beyond the institutions. Children spend only 1,500 hours a year at school. They spend the rest of the time with their carers, their parents, their friends, their peers, their social workers and whoever else engages with them. It is not enough just to talk to the other partners about education delivery. Linda Kinney's point was that it is critical that we quickly engage young people in the debate, and ask them whether the curriculum will give them the education that they feel they need for the 21st century.

Aileen Campbell: There was a line of questioning last week about engaging young people. Has that been done enough?

David Cameron: It needs to be done more.

Aileen Campbell: How would you see that happening?

Linda Kinney: In my submission, I refer to our initiative called "Let's talk learning", which specifically uses the curriculum for excellence to provide impetus to make learning much more visible. I am struck by how much learning in the education system is hidden in classrooms, behind closed doors, which inhibits the opportunity for professional dialogue or reflection. As was said earlier, the issue is being able to moderate and give feedback.

In Stirling, we are trying to make learning itself much more visible. We have designed an initiative in which children, parents, young people and senior managers—we have also offered it to

elected members—come to talk about what learning is: what it means, what it looks like and what it feels like. As well as making learning more open and visible to children, young people and families, one of the aims of that engagement is to inform the building blocks that we will use to support the implementation of the curriculum for excellence. We are building the foundations of a learning policy framework, which will give confidence to parents, children and families, because there will be an agreed understanding and agreed statements about what we are doing and how and when we are doing it. We are using similar language. That is one example of what is happening, certainly in my authority.

Aileen Campbell: How about parents who might fall through the net or who might not have good links with schools? Jane Liddell talked about ensuring that there is a link between home and school, but some families will not have such a link and will not actively engage. It is the children in those families who we are trying to help with the curriculum for excellence, to ensure that they reach their capacity, aspire to learn and are confident individuals. Is any extra work being done to engage with them?

11:15

Jane Liddell: Very vulnerable youngsters with dysfunctional backgrounds and youngsters who are looked after and accommodated are perhaps the most disenfranchised young people. I am reassured by work that North Lanarkshire Council is doing to turn those young people's lives around. We have tripled their performance by personalising programmes in our flexible learning initiative. That has been done through a partnership approach with careers people, health people and others. By discussing with young people what they need, their learning opportunities can be expanded.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report on education in Scotland considered work that the council has done. The discussion about the most disenfranchised and disadvantaged young people is interesting. When young people attend school and talk enthusiastically about what they are doing, parents and carers see the success and start to engage, because they know that they will not face the embarrassment of being rapped on the knuckles for the child's lack of attendance and poor performance. We see them coming back slowly with support. That has been a big advantage of personalised vocational education and extended work experience programmes. Young people's attendance is remarkable, because they are focused, they enjoy what they do and they achieve success.

We should make no bones about the fact that the model of developing individual programmes to meet the needs of the most disenfranchised young people is costly. However, local authorities' investment in such models in schools reaps benefits in the longer term if young people go to positive school leaver destinations.

We talk about measuring school success in relation to attainment, but we must consider more seriously where young people go after school and how well they do when their formal schooling is finished. We must consider whether they go into the world and make a positive impact on it as a result of further or higher education, go into work or go into skillseekers or young apprenticeship programmes. Such information is critical.

We also need to ask young people more questions, such as what they are good at and why they do not go to school. We have not asked the simple questions, although children and young people are good at giving straight answers. I have just been involved in the big debate in North Lanarkshire, and my colleagues and I got a real ticking off for many things, which was fair enough, because we do not ask enough questions. We have a lot to learn from business and industry about engaging with the people for whom we provide services. We must engage much more seriously. Most of us are engaging, but we can do much more.

Linda Kinney: I return to the question of engaging parents who find it difficult to engage. We need to consider the roles and responsibilities of parent councils. In the Stirling Council area, we are discussing with parent councils their duty and responsibility to engage with other parents. That is not only about those of us who are in senior management roles or are teachers—it is about parents engaging with parents. There is a role in that respect for parent councils.

David Cameron: I have a straightforward point to make. We are not talking about a magic bullet. The curriculum for excellence will not address the entrenched and endemic problems that we as a society with significant inequalities face, but it will create a much better opportunity than our current structures provide to address some issues. Engaging with parents who are affected by drug, health or mental health problems is a massive challenge. The curriculum for excellence will not wave a magic wand over that, but it will overcome some of the static friction in the system and help us to move forward, because we will be able to give positive messages to parents, carers, children and young people. We are trying to address the whole child rather than measure children against an external curricular standard in the way that we have done until now.

The Convener: I am conscious that we have still to hear from our second panel and that several issues for this panel remain outstanding, so I ask committee members to keep their questions short and panel members to be as succinct as possible. Perhaps only one person on the panel should answer each question, unless others wish to mention additional points.

I think that Mr Purvis has a question.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Convener, all the issues that I wanted to raise have been addressed.

The Convener: I want to ask about vocational education, which we have skirted round in some answers. Although the OECD report highlighted some positive vocational education experiences in North Lanarkshire, it strikes me that young people and parents face real challenges in seeing vocational education as an entitlement that all young people should have a right to take advantage of. There are cultural challenges not just for young people and their parents but for our tertiary education establishments. FE colleges seem willing to engage in that debate, but we need to take our higher education establishments along with us as well, so that we have a continuum in the discussion and so that vocational education is seen as being for everybody. For example, although the principal of the University of Strathclyde—who was at the dinner that Mr Purvis and I attended last night—might say that his university is all about vocational education, I am not sure that all universities are engaged in the debate about vocational education in our schools. What does the panel think are the main challenges for vocational education in Scotland?

Jane Liddell: We face not challenges but tremendous opportunities. In North Lanarkshire, we have well-established school-college relationships and we have embarked on discussions with the University of the West of Scotland on how youngsters who wish to take elements of forensic science or sports development might do so at the Hamilton campus, where those specialisms are available. We are delighted that, at long last, we have a university campus in Lanarkshire. That presents huge opportunities.

As the committee knows, our model is very different. Because we believe that the comprehensive school is where young people should be, we believe that the in-house delivery of vocational education as part of the school timetable enhances opportunities. Vocational education becomes part of mainstream education. We are delighted that many of our young people—although not as many as we would like—who are going for three, four or five highers are also entering into elements of the vocational programmes.

As David Cameron's submission says, we should not be too thirled to the idea that we need to state that vocational subjects should have parity with traditional academic subjects. I think that, the more that vocational education is seen to lead to successful destinations, such as continuing college studies or entry into the world of work, the more that people will be attracted to it. In today's world, plumbers, electricians and construction workers are doing pretty well. Indeed, we need those traditional trades in Scotland, because we are currently dependent on labour imported from elsewhere in Europe to build the new buildings of which we are all so proud. Genuine work opportunities are available. We need to be aware that an economically vibrant Scotland needs a workforce that is fit for purpose.

Many of our young people see vocational education not just as leading to an apprenticeship as a construction worker, for example, but as providing an opportunity to continue with lifelong learning by taking a subject to university degree course level. The universities are becoming more aware of the importance of those opportunities and are designing courses accordingly.

We have some 2,000 youngsters in vocational education in third and fourth year, which militates against us, because they are opting out of some of the academic subjects that gather SQA points. We are thrashed about for not attaining, but I argue strongly that we are meeting the needs of young people. When it comes to successful outcomes for young people, we are outboxing some comparable authorities. Most of those young people have somewhere good to go when they leave school; very few indeed have nowhere to go and are stuck without a positive outcome.

Vocational education offers significant opportunities. There are challenges, but we in North Lanarkshire have overcome a lot of them. As the convener knows, we are proud of that work. It has been commended internationally.

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): I have listened to the witnesses' comments, and a number of them have been very positive about the national agreement. Did I detect a slight sense of frustration about the time that is given to teachers to develop their skills? Teachers will have criticisms about the delivery of the curriculum for excellence. They will need time to develop the new way in which they will be asked to teach. How will professional development proceed? Have we given that enough thought?

David Cameron: A number of teachers are frustrated by the clutter in the curriculum. As I suggested earlier, comparing the experience of some young people in third year in secondary school with their experience in fourth year is often like comparing night and day.

There have been real benefits in five to 14 in providing continuity and consistency between schools, and young people's entitlement has been promoted. However, some creativity has bled from the system. If you went back and saw some of the materials that were used around the primary memorandum, you would think that they had been developed specifically to meet the demands of the curriculum for excellence. We are not talking about a deficit model.

There is as much need to build the confidence of teachers as there is to build the skills of teachers. A significant number of teachers have the skills, but not the confidence to deploy them. We need to address risk and reassurance. We have to give people time to talk about learning, as Linda Kinney suggested.

We are at a stage where educational requirements are so complex that they cannot be addressed by any individual or guru. The answers need to come collectively from the people who deal directly with children. That will mean taking a different approach to curriculum development—one that allows people to talk about what happens in classrooms, what works well and what does not, and then to plan judiciously. Jane Liddell has already said that identified needs can be addressed through school improvement plans.

We need to get away from the hegemony around school development planning. That model was designed to address a situation in which there was a lot of change and innovation. For many schools, the development plan was about choosing which part of the inedible menu of initiatives they would attempt to nibble at. We now have the getting it right for every child agenda, the curriculum for excellence, developments in the determined to succeed agenda, and developments in enterprise and education. We have a restricted number of big and holistic developments that are founded on addressing the practice of teachers.

To pick up on Mr Gibson's point, we have to avoid the burden of redesigning materials and recreating the curriculum. There is a lot of material. We have tools from, for example, co-operative learning, assessment is for learning and some of the work of the Tapestry Partnership and Learning Unlimited. We have to give teachers the opportunity to talk about learning and about outcomes for children. Teachers have to plan for that, rather than be driven by the need to meet a requirement that is imposed from outwith the school.

11:30

Mary Mulligan: Is there an issue with teachers being able to manage their time to provide the space for that?

David Cameron: Time will always be an issue. One of the commitments that local authorities need to make—and one of the commitments that we need to make nationally—is to reduce some of the distracting burdens. We have made some good progress. I was interested to hear Jane Liddell speak about the involvement of campus police and others in and around schools. We need to consider the broader palette of professionals who engage with teachers. Early years education is a good example of team work. There is some excellent practice in that area, which we need to draw on and develop.

There will always be pressure on teachers' time, because the overwhelming majority of them take responsibility for children and want to do their best for each and every youngster, which means that they are driven to work hard, well and long. We need to remove some of the barriers. We need to reduce the burden of external assessment, particularly up to level 3. We need less distraction from that. We need less compulsory detailed marking of assessments, which does nothing more than confirm teachers' judgments. We need less burdensome reporting and greater clarity in reports that provide information for parents. We need less emphasis on the changing of materials and more emphasis on how they are used. We need less emphasis on the teacher as the designer of materials and more clarity about the teacher and educator as the broker between the curriculum and the needs of young people. If we can begin to move towards that focus and take some of those burdens away from teachers, we will find that the capacity exists.

Mary Mulligan: My final question concerns the critical position of headteachers. As we develop the curriculum for excellence, are we providing them with enough support to give the leadership that is required?

David Cameron: At the moment, I suspect that we are not. There is a simple answer to your question. Our headteachers in Stirling are frustrated, and I do not think that they are atypical. They genuinely want to be leaders of learning. They genuinely want to take the initiative, be curricular leaders and exemplify the model of leadership that we espouse nationally. However, the management of fire safety, health and safety and risk assessment tends to get in the road of that. Those things are all important, but we place an awful lot of demands on headteachers to manage them, which often draws them away from their central purpose.

The key to the problem is to begin to consider the issues around resources and detailed operational management. That is particularly necessary in smaller schools, where all the burden falls on individuals. I am involved in the

implementation of "Looked after children and young people: we can and must do better". We talk about the designated senior manager for looked-after and accommodated children. In most primary schools, that will be the same designated manager who is responsible for child protection and fire safety, because there is only one manager in the school. We need to grapple with that if we are to free up headteachers to engage with the learning process.

Mary Mulligan: Do you have one suggestion as to how we could do that?

David Cameron: We could do it through sharing risk assessments, delivering more stuff electronically and providing more support. We also need greater clarity about ownership and we need to think about whether we ask our headteachers to split their roles too much. For example, in Stirling, we have tried to put an end to the role of teaching head, because it is impossible for a responsible and motivated professional to fulfil all the demands on a modern head teacher and to function effectively as a class teacher as well. We really need to examine those matters.

The Convener: That concludes our questions to you. Thank you for attending the meeting and for engaging with us so fully.

The meeting will be suspended briefly to allow for the changeover of witnesses.

11:34

Meeting suspended.

11:39

On resuming—

The Convener: I welcome our second and final panel of the morning. They have been sitting patiently in the public gallery, listening to the first panel's evidence. We have been joined by Larry Flanagan, the education committee convener of the Educational Institute of Scotland; Brian Cooklin, president of the Headteachers Association of Scotland; and Gordon Smith, past president of the Association of Headteachers and Deputes in Scotland. Thank you for attending. The committee is grateful to you for your papers, which were circulated in advance of today's meeting. I understand that you might wish to make some brief opening comments before we move to questions.

Larry Flanagan (Educational Institute of Scotland): I am principal teacher of English at Hillhead high school in Glasgow. As time is probably pressing, I will keep my opening remarks fairly brief. I hope, however, that we will revisit many issues that came up with the previous panel. This panel might have a slightly different perspective on some topics.

I should make it clear that we welcome the curriculum for excellence, which we view as being a valid initiative for schools. Most teachers welcome the ideals and aspirations of the programme, but for most teachers, that is all there is at the moment—there are very few practical implications for what is happening in schools. Previous witnesses from two local authorities indicated that they have been quite proactive, but many other local authorities are well behind.

One of our major concerns is the perceived lack of engagement with the profession in developing the initiative. By the time we have finished, you will probably have spent five or six hours in detailed discussions about the curriculum for excellence. That is probably more than many teachers—perhaps even most teachers—have spent looking at it in detail. There is a huge gap between implementing the curriculum for excellence and the aspirational aims that were stated a number of years ago.

A key factor that came up in our consultation prior to today's meeting was that there is a certain lack of confidence among teachers that the various partners will do what they have said they will do in rethinking the philosophy of how we teach in schools. A major aspect of that is to do with the agenda of target setting, attainment and benchmarking. If we ask what has created the difficulties that people talk about with the five-to-14 curriculum—whether it is its content or the way in which schools have been made to implement it, so that it has become a prescribed curriculum—we find that some elements of five to 14 could have allowed for a lot of flexibility. That would be the case if local government, national Government and HMIE had not focused on assessment achievements or attainment—the five-to-14 levels—during every inspection and quality assurance visit.

Although the Scottish Executive stopped collecting national assessment data and we stopped the Scotland-wide league table approach, local authorities are still doing that. We heard about a robust quality assurance system from the witness from North Lanarkshire Council. That basically means that, when the quality inspection officers—the QIOs—come into a school, the first thing they want to see is the five to 14 levels.

Teachers have a real difficulty: they are thinking that we are going to move away from that sort of agenda to a curriculum for excellence, which will bring flexibility, creativity and innovation, but the same people who are saying that they want them to do that are still measuring the performance of schools using basic attainment figures. In secondary schools, the first thing that HMIE

inspectors focus on is not the school's ethos, its successful learners or how it is developing the whole pupil; rather, they focus on standard grade and national qualification attainment figures. That is a real concern for teachers.

If you want to signal that you mean what you say with curriculum for excellence, you should first demob the national assessment bank. Indeed, that would be a nice wee saving for the Government's budget lines. That would signal to teachers that there actually has been a step change in thinking. At the moment, the biggest fear is about that. The most common point in the feedback that we got was that, if the Government means to allow us creativity, space and flexibility, it should do away with the national assessment bank, which would signal that it is looking at things differently.

11:45

The other big area is assessment in the secondary sector. It is probably true to say that primary schools are more ready to run with the curriculum for excellence than are secondary schools. There are huge issues about subject specialisms and how flexibility and personal choice is timetabled, and there are basic staffing issues in relation to the range of courses that have to be offered. There are also huge issues with regard to the national assessment arrangements that will be put in place. We remain essentially unconvinced of the need to do away with standard grade. That is not to say that we cannot be convinced, but standard grade represents a point of stability in the system, so we will need to be persuaded about the need for a replacement.

I noticed that the Scottish Parliament information centre briefing referred to the assessment arrangements. It contained the idea that intermediate 2 and intermediate 1 courses are largely done in S3 and S4—that is simply incorrect. Those courses are largely done in S5, by pupils who have done a standard grade and cannot immediately go for a higher. Some authorities pull the intermediate 1 and intermediate 2 down, but the vast majority of intermediate 1 and 2 presentations are post-16, in the fifth year.

There is huge concern about what assessment range might be put in place, and a huge underestimation of the level of resource that is required to introduce a fundamental change to assessment post-16. There are a lot of concerns in classrooms about what that will mean in practice, and some worries that all the fine words will, when it comes to what actually happens in schools, quickly disappear. Five to 14 levels will be replaced by curriculum for excellence outcomes, and a robust quality assurance system will be put in place for those outcomes, which will kill off innovation and creativity and take us back, more or less, to where we are now, in terms of current practice. I hope that I am wrong, but that is a note of caution.

The Convener: We will come back to those issues in the course of questioning.

Brian Cooklin (Headteachers Association of Scotland): I thank the committee for the invitation. I want to make it clear that the Headteachers Association of Scotland fully supports the development of a curriculum for excellence. There are some outstanding examples of innovative practice going on around Scotland in secondary schools, some of which we showcased during our training for senior managers so they can see what is happening. However, those are individual examples, and that is our major concern. When I travel the country, I am frequently asked, "What is a curriculum for excellence?" and the answer is that, frankly, it is anything you like. I have made other references to how people feel about the development, but I will not repeat them here.

It is important to ask the question, in the context of what we have said so far today, of when the engagement ends and the marriage begins. We would like the strands of a curriculum for excellence married together into a coherent and holistic approach across the board. I want to reinforce a point about leadership that was raised earlier: we need national leadership, because historically—nationally—we have been outstandingly poor at explaining to the country anything that has happened in education.

I say that because of references that were made earlier, for example, to five to 14. A parent who spoke to me at a parents evening said, "Mr Cooklin, why are levels A to F, in which F was the top, used through primary and into secondary school, but now that my child is doing standard grade and intermediate, 1 is the top and 7 is the bottom? It is A to C and a near miss, and then they go into highers. What is all that about? What is ASDAN, what is COPE and all the rest of it?" That might be one simple conversation, but it encapsulates the problem.

I want to avoid using the word "engagement", partly because it is used so much and partly because—as in the favourite phrase "engagement in a debate"—it suggests that everyone is fully informed and involved. That is simply not the case. People in the profession feel very frustrated that, even though they want to buy into this very positive development, they are unable to do so—or at least have been unable to do so up to now.

There is definitely a vacuum, with a lack of national leadership and communication with all users. It was suggested earlier that teachers were having a "cloistered" discussion, but that is not the case: this discussion has not even made it out of

the monastic cell. A small group might have been involved in developing outcomes and experiences in a particular area, but for the vast majority of teachers the full extent of their involvement is to have gone on-line and look at the outcomes and experiences.

The major obstacle is that people are not being given enough time. No resources have been provided for this development; apparently, it comes out of the ether and you are expected to feel it by osmosis through your pores. People in every sphere need time to think through the consequences of the changes that we want to make. In fact, the issue is not about the curriculum, but about changes in teaching and learning and the culture in schools. Members will know perfectly well from their previous careers how hard it is to change the culture of an organisation, agency or whatever, but this is what we have been expected to do. However, we have not been allocated the time or resources.

Because of certain practical issues, things are going to become increasingly difficult. For example, the current round of what have euphemistically been termed "efficiency savings" is simply going to damage the delivery of curriculum for excellence. With fewer staff, fewer resources, less management time and cuts in management structures, people will not have the capacity to do what they want to do.

If that happens, it will be an opportunity missed. We very much value the direction that is being taken in the curriculum for excellence, and members will be able to hear from our tone our frustration at not being able to take it further. We are not opposing, putting up obstacles or causing difficulty. We are in the business of delivering and implementing this educational change, and we simply want the tools to get on with the job.

The Convener: Thank you. I am sure that members will want to pursue the points that you have raised.

You have certainly made your views clear on use of the term "engagement"—[*Interruption.*] Mr Smith, do you want to add something?

Gordon Smith (Association of Headteachers and Deputes in Scotland): Yes. I would like to make some very brief comments, if that is all right.

The Convener: That is fine. However, I ask you to be brief so that we can move to questions.

Gordon Smith: Absolutely.

I thank the committee for the invitation to give evidence. Since we made our submission, there has been a national council meeting of head teachers and deputes of primary schools, nurseries and special schools from all over Scotland and the main issue that emerged—and which I was urged to raise this morning—was the lack of clarity in schools. I realise, however, that the point has already been made.

Although, as our submission makes clear, we back the initiative absolutely, we are worried about that particular problem. The situation might be best explained through the children's tale of the emperor's new clothes—which could be retitled "Scottish Education's New Clothes". Despite the fantastic philosophy, the colourful curriculum and marvellous methodology, what are we actually wearing at the end of the day? At the moment, schools simply do not know.

For example, given that the curriculum for excellence is for children from three to 18, we are forced by this lack of clarity to wonder why the various stages are called "early", "stage 1", "stage 2" and so on. Why is the stage for the pre-fives not called "stage 1"? Do those children have access to the curriculum for excellence? Is it available to them every day?

For all its faults, the five-to-14 curriculum at least provided a common language for primaries, nurseries and our secondary colleagues. I have to say that the witness from North Lanarkshire reinforced our concerns on this matter when she said, "This is all very well, but we will still maintain our five to 14 levels so that we can satisfy the demands of the inspectorate and others who inspect us." That just cannot happen. If we take on the philosophy of the curriculum for excellence, with its different outcomes and stages, we cannot then tack the five to 14 attainment policy on the end. I am worried about clarity.

The Convener: It is safe to say that none of your organisations believes that sufficient engagement has taken place. Rather than comment on what has gone wrong, will you say what could be done now to ensure that the people whom you represent, who deliver teaching and learning in schools throughout Scotland, have a sense of ownership of and involvement in the process of curriculum modernisation?

Gordon Smith: I would like to move on. I agreed with 95 per cent of what I heard from the earlier witnesses, but I heard it in 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007, and—from listening to Alison Coull—I will probably hear it in 2011. Schools are responsible to parents, education authorities and politicians. We need to move on and establish how we teach—so far, most of the advice has been on that—and what we teach. We need to achieve continuity in the curriculum on how we report to parents. We must engage parents in the process sooner rather than later.

Larry Flanagan: The issue of developing engagement takes us back to Brian Cooklin's point about resources. I have been through the

development of standard grades, the five to 14 curriculum and higher still. The present process is the least resourced curriculum development that I have experienced, yet we are told that it is the most fundamental change in decades. Even with higher still, conferences were held right, left and centre for principal teachers to engage in discussion about arrangements and the details of assessment. That is not happening now. I am not saying that such work is not happening at all, because some local authorities have taken initiatives, but the work is very uneven. Much of that comes down to the basic need for resources, not just to facilitate meetings but to carve out time in improvement plans in schools.

Since the teachers agreement, which has been mentioned, the average working week for teachers has increased, despite the notional 35-hour week. If we want teachers to spend time engaging in the curriculum for excellence, we must tell them what they do not have to do, so that they can make space for the engagement. That is difficult. The process has not been given sufficient priority. The publication of the draft outcomes will lead to more engagement, because people will look at them and start to comment on the detail. However, even with that, it is ludicrous that the draft outcomes have been made available on the LTS website, rather than through distribution of the information.

At last week's meeting, mention was made of glow and how wonderful it is going to be. I do not know how many times glow has been launched in the past few years. Maybe some day, glow will be a marvellous resource, but it is a non-entity for most teachers, given the level of access to it through current information technology in schools. The outcomes provide a focus for engagement, but even with them, simple practical steps are required. We must ensure that teachers who are involved have copies of the outcomes and that time can be set aside to consider them and respond.

There will be a big engagement when the assessment framework comes out, because people will be keen to have a say on that.

Brian Cooklin: First and foremost, we need clear leadership, because nobody knows who is in charge of the development. We have several agencies doing different jobs—which we hope will come together—but we do not have national direction or leadership. We require a communication strategy for how the development will be rolled out throughout the country, what kind of events will be used and how we will publicise the changes and explain to the public what the development is about and what it means for their children. That is missing. In the vacuum, local authorities and individual schools have been allowed to develop their own thing. As I said, that is often excellent practice, but it is extremely varied.

As I also said in my submission, I do not think that there is enough recognition of the number of children who move around the country—the number is into the thousands. If a child moves from a school where they had five academic options and three vocational options to a school that does not have the same pattern, the situation is difficult and could disadvantage their education. They have immediately to adjust and try to catch up in subject areas that they have no experience of or background in because it is not what they were studying before.

12:00

That is the danger of saying that the curriculum is a free-for-all. It is not that anyone has said that it is a free-for-all, but people are keen to get on with the development and are trying to do their own thing. It is a question of balance and how we deliver the four capacities to suit the individual child coming through the door. That is increasingly the emphasis that we want; the question is how we do that successfully in the circumstances.

The Convener: In response to questions on leadership to the first panel of witnesses, Mr Cameron suggested that serious constraints were being placed on teachers and that the time had come to allow them to move on. He also suggested that some of the people on the working group, whose membership includes HMIE and LTS, were not the right people to give leadership for the next phase. Are you looking for the Executive and the cabinet secretary in particular to take some ownership, show some leadership and drive the curriculum for excellence forward?

Brian Cooklin: That is one aspect, but I am not talking about political leadership, except in so far as it is necessary to back the curriculum for excellence and ensure that it is moving in the right direction. I am talking about the educational sphere and the people who are not part of agencies.

I am in a similar situation to David Cameron. I am on the assessment and qualifications task group, but the other members of it are from SQA, HMIE and Learning and Teaching Scotland. At the first meeting, there were two representatives of each agency, 12 civil servants and me. With my sense of humour, I asked, "Am I the only person here with a real job?" My point in saying that was to ask who will explain the work to the profession. That is not the role of any of those organisations, which have distinct roles.

There are plenty of people in education—leading thinkers—who could be asked to take a roadshow, if that is what you want to call it, around Scotland

to explain the thinking behind the curriculum for excellence, give examples of what is happening and discuss how it could be developed. We need a fully fleshed-out approach. We cannot use just bland assertions and statements because people are past that stage. They want to know what the curriculum will look like, how they are going to timetable it and how they will afford the flexibility.

The opportunities are fantastic, and this is the time to ask questions such as, "Do we need year groups at all?" When a child arrives at secondary school, we get an idea of their level in a subject area. Could they do an advanced higher unit in music in first year if they are talented? If they are outstanding at football, could they play at a much higher level than would normally be expected of a child their age? At the moment, we do not have the tools to do that and we cannot set up the flexibility that would be needed to meet such a child's needs. We need the curriculum for excellence explained and sold around the country: "This is how you can do it. This is the way you might use it. This is the possibility that is open to you."

The Convener: If teachers do not know what to expect, there is little chance of parents and children understanding what to expect from the modernisation of the curriculum and how things in school might improve. If our teaching staff do not know how it will affect them, it is difficult to get parents and young people to be enthusiastic.

Gordon Smith: Young people in primaries and nurseries will be enthusiastic. They are enjoying their learning and school experiences much more through the activities that we are presenting with our curriculum for excellence. It is more difficult with teachers and parents.

Brian Cooklin: You have only to consider the responses from the focus groups and engagement sessions that have been run around the country with relatively small numbers of teachers, parents, pupils and representatives of further education. The feedback is extremely positive and clear. As was said by the previous panel, children have clear ideas about what the curriculum for excellence means for them and the possibilities that it provides because they are following it at the moment.

If you look at the extra-curricular activities that are going on in our schools throughout the country, the grass-roots growth of things such as fair-trade groups has, to a large extent, come from the children themselves. They feel strongly about such issues. You cannot quantify the learning that goes on, but it has a clear benefit because it meets the needs of pupils holistically, and they grow in confidence and ability in those areas because of such experiences.

Elizabeth Smith: Thank you for your comments. I hear what you are saying and agree with a lot of it. The fundamental issue—it comes back to the questions that Mr Gibson asked the previous panel—is that there needs to be a national debate about where all this is going. That needs to be articulated at every level of education. As Mr Smith says, it does not matter whether we are talking about FE, HE or schools. The process is on-going. It is abundantly clear from what you have all said this morning that teachers do not feel confident that that process has been engaged in. That is extremely worrying. There must be political leadership, but Mr Cooklin is right to say that in the educational sphere the professionals must also take responsibility for the debate.

I am conscious of what you have said about the need for resourcing and time allocation. My understanding is that many people are frightened of the fact that they are being asked to go through the existing educational structure, particularly preparing for examinations, as they are now. Mr Cooklin's submission stated that some advanced highers were being cut as a result of staffing restraints and people having to do other things. Is that a severe problem? Are people making cutbacks and adjustments to the existing structure because of what they will have to take on board for curriculum for excellence?

Larry Flanagan: No. I do not think that they are doing that because of the demands of curriculum for excellence; they are doing it because of budget cuts. There is pressure on the advanced higher in any school, because by definition a fairly small cohort of pupils seek to do it, but a class teacher has to be committed for five or six periods to deliver it. In my school, the various science subjects operate on rotation—if a pupil wants to do biology in 6th year but it is chemistry's turn, they do not get to do biology. The advanced higher is seen by most schools as a bit of a luxury in respect of staffing, and there has been a reduction in the number of advanced higher presentations. Financial pressure already exists in relation to staffing.

Curriculum for excellence, by definition, suggests that there will be an increase in staffing to create flexibility, because flexibility comes only at the cost of additional resources. That raises the question of how will that be achieved. Will we get more staff to run smaller classes? As soon as pupils start to choose what they want to do, we will not be running classes of 30 for standard grade English, People will make different choices. There is a big question mark over the resourcing implications of the principles of curriculum for excellence, particularly in secondary schools, because of timetable arrangements. The fear is that if the resources are not there, the principle will not become practice; schools will not be able to

timetable classes in accordance with the principle because they do not have the staff to support such a timetable.

Gordon Smith: I would move away from my colleagues on resourcing. In primaries and nurseries, we are at the stage of saying, "Let's just do it. Let's get on with it—as long as somebody doesn't move the goalposts halfway through the process." If we are still in a serious debate about the end product that worries me, because we want to get on with it. The only resourcing impact on us is the one to which David Cameron alluded earlier: headteachers and deputes need to be, and are expected to be, curriculum leaders. To do that, they need the management time to perform that function. However, many of our colleagues do not have that time.

Larry Flanagan: I think we recognise that primaries are probably more able to go with it now. However, there is a small danger in that, because one of the stages ends at P7, we could end up with a sharp divide. A lot of work has been done on five to 14 to get P7-S1 liaison, but that might disappear quickly if we start saying that P7 could be the end of one of the phases. We could end up with a curriculum for excellence for primary and something totally different for secondary.

Brian Cooklin: I would hate that to happen. One of the major issues is the lack of equity in the system. There can be a wide variation in staffing and resource in average-sized secondary schools throughout the 32 local authority areas. Let us say that the average secondary school has a teaching staff of about 80. A school in one local authority area could have 10 fewer teachers and a school in another area could have 90 teachers. The school with 90 teachers might also have 33 classroom assistants and the school with fewer teachers might have none. There is no recognition of the fact that the schools should not be inspected using the same method and criteria because they are not resourced in the same way.

The issue of the time for teaching is fundamental. That has not been delivered for staff in many parts of the country because the resources are not there, but it has been delivered in other parts of the country. It very much depends on the priorities that have been set in each area and the decisions that have been made in the past. You have to know that before you make judgments about how particular developments are proceeding nationally.

Rob Gibson: We had a useful discussion with the previous panel about the practicalities of implementation. I asked about the ability to create a practical curriculum given the range of choice. We have heard that it is possibly easier to achieve that in primaries. The EIS evidence is that it will be much more difficult to do in secondaries. Will you develop the themes that David Cameron explored? Is the definition to which he referred a kind of silver bullet, or does much more have to be done? We have heard that it is all about time, management and ability.

Larry Flanagan: We have been pushing for schools to have time to engage in discussion on the curriculum before we start considering assessment arrangements. As you know, given your background, as soon as the assessment arrangements are set, people work back from that. There is a lot of discussion about having a different mix of assessment tools. However, the bottom line is that society demands that pupils leave with some kind of benchmark assessment. Universities would not be happy if the gold standard of the higher was moderated in such a way that they did not regard it as functional for the purpose of assessing students' capability for university.

There is a lot of debate about what we want our assessment system to do. We have to consider whether there is general sympathy for the idea that if we can reduce the burden of assessment for pupils and teachers, that will free up space in the curriculum. I am not saying that it would lead to people reinventing the wheel, because in secondary schools most people have become adept at using IT and sharing information in a way that the old worksheet did not allow, unless the banda machine was going 10 to the dozen in the corner. There are opportunities for sharing good practice, but there is an issue of whether teachers genuinely have the freedom to be innovative in the early years of schooling. Political leadership is needed on the assessment arrangements and what we expect assessment to do.

Bear in mind that we are less than a decade on from the introduction of higher still, which was introduced by the same partners who are introducing the curriculum for excellence. Higher still has barely had time to bed in and yet we are already talking about fairly major changes. On the interface between intermediate 2 and standard grade, we are concerned that as soon as one starts to unpick one part, the whole thing starts to unravel. National qualifications were designed as post-16 assessments. They presuppose a body of knowledge from standard grade.

In some cases—in the sciences, in particular—intermediate 1 and 2 have replaced entire standard grade courses. Higher English was mentioned. The higher English assessment focuses on close reading and critical essay, which represents a third of what the standard grade assesses—standard grade English assesses talking and listening and writing, as well. Higher English exists in its present form only because there is an assumption that pupils will have done

the standard grade and so will have a broader skills base. If we take away the standard grade, we cannot keep the higher English exam in its present form. It will have to be totally reshaped.

My concern is that people are looking at intermediate 1 and 2 and standard grade as an area in which we can tinker a bit and create a hybrid system, but that will not work. It is all or nothing. We must have a coherent system rather than attempt to marry bits from different systems, because that would lead to confusion among students and in society in general.

12:15

Rob Gibson: So we are not just talking about an extension of certain teaching methods. Your view is that we are talking about altering them fundamentally.

Larry Flanagan: When higher still came in, we were quite supportive of the idea of using different methods of assessment, including internal assessment, which is used a lot at standard grade. However, that led to meltdown because the burden of assessment was huge. Teachers had no time to teach because of the burden of assessment. If we can create time for teaching by allowing the senior phase to run from S4 to S6, we will be able to look at the balance of internal assessment or folio assessment of coursework in a different way.

Further down the school, if we remove the five-to-14 curriculum, S1 to S3 will become an area in which people can be innovative and deliver a curriculum that suits their school's specific cohort. People would be enthusiastic about the potential of such a set of arrangements, but at the moment they are saying, "I'm getting hammered by a QIO on my five to 14 work and the SQA is coming in next week to see what percentage we've got at level 5." That is the big concern. There is a quality assurance agenda that dictates teaching practice in many schools because it is the benchmark that is used to measure teacher performance and school performance. The same agenda hammers headteachers because it is what the leadership of their school is measured against.

A big shift of mind will have to take place among the leading players in curriculum for excellence before people feel confident that they will get the freedom to do what is being asked of them.

Rob Gibson: Does Mr Cooklin want to add to that?

Brian Cooklin: I agree totally with what Larry Flanagan has said. There is a credibility gap between the talk about high-sounding principles and what happens on the ground. For us, the issue is bridging that gap.

To answer your original question about how we can develop a practical curriculum that benefits children, cross-curricular and interdisciplinary working is a rich vein to explore. Teachers are coming up with many extremely innovative ideas. They are realising that their subject could contribute one aspect, another subject could contribute a different aspect and the various aspects could be integrated. We are talking about the holy grail of learning—synthesising the learning that a child does.

Traditionally, the problem has always been that children are taught one thing in one class but see no relation to it in what they are taught in the next class or in another subject. The potential is there, but for such synthesis to happen properly, sufficient time will be necessary. We are talking about a major change in attitude and in preparation so that people's work in different disciplines and different situations can be integrated effectively. That process would be enhanced if the assessment, too, were integrated. For example, a piece of writing in English could count towards someone's qualification in drama. What they had done elsewhere could be taken into account, too. That is quite a complicated and difficult piece of work, which could be delivered only in the long term.

We have to bear in mind the intention that the year group that enters in August 2009 will be the first to experience curriculum for excellence, with a view to their sitting national qualifications in 2012. That is a pretty short timescale. When I explain that to my colleagues, they often say, "It's all right. I'll be retired by then." However, the children will not be, so we need to ensure that whatever system we have in place delivers.

Rob Gibson: So the order of development that is required to translate curriculum for excellence into practice is such that discussions between departments about integration have to come first and assessment should follow. That is the clear message that you are giving us.

Brian Cooklin: Yes.

Gordon Smith: I work in an establishment that covers five to 18, so we have children who leave primary 7 to go to S1 within the same school. We have always had the silver bullet—we have always been able to do topic work and other cross-curricular work, but the practicality is that I still have 66 children moving from that approach to 12 different subject teachers. That is the reality. I am still waiting for an answer on how we address that.

Ken Macintosh: I will focus on the practicalities of the assessment and exam structure that will be put in place, starting with a question for Mr Flanagan.

I was surprised and intrigued by your suggestion that we should get rid of national assessment in primary schools but retain standard grades. Everything that I have heard so far suggests that standard grades are a typical example of a paper-based test that assesses content and that teachers teach to the test, whereas the assessments at the primary level are far more flexible, or are certainly more able to be adapted to the new curriculum for excellence. Will you comment on that?

Larry Flanagan: The national assessment bank material is not flexible. That replaced the national tests, which had slight flexibility in that teachers could choose from a range of materials the ones that they wanted to use and integrate them into a unit. Now, when teachers need national assessments, they log on and the system generates an assessment for them, but it might be decontextualised in relation to what they have been doing. It is just a test.

The key point about the national assessments is that they are used only to confirm professional judgment. They do not represent an achievement in themselves. No pupil should be presented for a national assessment at any level unless the teacher feels that the pupil is already working at the appropriate level. It is as if the teacher's professional judgment is not trusted and we need something to confirm that they have got it right. Also, the assessments apply only in English and maths. In every other area of the curriculum, the teacher's professional judgment is accepted. Our colleagues who teach history, geography and science in secondary schools report on pupils in the five to 14 levels. If they say that a pupil is working at level E, that is fine, but if I say that he is working at level E in English, I have to confirm that I have got that right with a national test.

My point is not that we should not have assessments, but that we should not have an external qualification of our judgment. That is the key. I am not saying, "Let's do away with assessments." Assessments are crucial in determining the next steps. We are saying that we should try to break the link between the teacher's performance and the external looking over their shoulder and double checking that they are doing things right. We heard from the earlier panel that it is important to trust teachers and give them room and flexibility. There are some obvious things that we can do to say, "This is what is actually happening." That was the point about the national assessments.

Ken Macintosh: I do not detect that there is agreement that we should get rid of externally moderated, standardised tests. The witnesses on the previous panel said that there would have to be a rigorous quality assurance framework, and you have already said that the framework—

Larry Flanagan: They also said—and this is part of the confusion—that the national assessments will have to go because they do not fit in with the philosophy of the curriculum for excellence. They do not fit in with the phases because they are geared towards the five to 14 levels.

We can have rigorous quality assurance without having national assessments.

Ken Macintosh: Would there be local assessments?

Larry Flanagan: Teachers' professional judgment can be moderated, so coursework that pupils are producing can be cross-marked. The idea behind formative assessment is that colleagues work together to ensure that a standard is being applied across the board. We do not need external certification to say that it is being done right. It is all geared towards professionals working together in a collegiate way to ensure standards.

Standard grade has changed, because it is a two-year, S3 to S4 course; if we accept curriculum for excellence, and introduce the senior phase of S4 to S6, standard grade will have to go or be modified in some way. Teachers have a strong loyalty to standard grade because it is a stable part of the system and it provides a benchmark. The OECD report talks about it being just a gateway to the higher or to intermediate 1 or 2, but it can be useful for a pupil who is moving into S5 or S6 to be assigned to the right kind of course so that they can achieve. Intermediate 1 and 2 exist so that we do not end up with a core of pupils sitting in higher classes and failing; they provide access to achievable results.

The immediate notion that the standard grade must go is a knee-jerk reaction. There ought to be a big discussion about the assessment arrangements that we will have.

When I came into teaching in 1979, the majority of boys in Glasgow schools left without any certification. Now, 95 per cent of them leave with at least a standard grade qualification. Standard grade has achieved the aim of certification for all. In the authority where I teach, a lot of people leave school at the age of 16, and standard grade is their one and only external exam. Some authorities have a 95 per cent staying-on rate, and they might see the standard grade in a different light.

There has to be something for the pupils who leave at 16. They cannot just be left behind. Unlike intermediate 1 and 2, which are 100 per cent external assessment, standard grade allows for coursework, which usually allows for some sense of attainment and achievement.

Ken Macintosh: What are the other witnesses' views on that idea? What will the exams or the curriculum look like? If the current lack of progress is preventing us from implementing curriculum for excellence, what decisions have to be taken, and have we got there yet? The standard grade satisfies a specific need, which will not go away, for a set of skills. No matter whether we want to examine the quality of the learning experience and assess good learners, others want an exam that measures a set of skills. That will not go away. Who will take the decision—the minister or the SQA? How soon will it have to be taken?

Brian Cooklin: A great deal of work has gone on in the background to meet the remit of the task group that I am involved with. That remit, which is quite narrow, is to consider the standard grade and intermediate interface and what will have to change in light of the curriculum for excellence, and to consider how to recognise wider achievement. Those assumptions are quite testing because, as Larry Flanagan rightly said, any decision about those issues will have ramifications all the way through the system.

Proposals from the task group are due to go to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning. A decision will then be made about the consultation to be rolled out on the different options to give the profession a chance to discuss what it thinks will work.

In the first instance, we need to be clear about the purpose of assessment. The fundamental issue is the friction that exists. We want to advance down the route of the development of the four capacities, but at the same time we need a way of assessing how the four capacities have manifested themselves in each child.

12:30

At the other end, however, there is pressure from parents, employers and FE and HE institutions for people to have certain passes. Basically, people are told that, if they do not get certain passes, they will not get certain jobs and that the other stuff is not important. I have often argued with admissions officers, saying, "Why would a doctor be a better doctor if he had five As in his highers rather than four As and a C? What would the difference be? I can show you a person with four As and a C who can communicate, which is an important skill for doctors to have, and who has human empathy."

It is difficult to match the aspiration that you talk about with the demands of assessment. That friction is causing us the greatest concern.

Gordon Smith: Our concern would be that we might repeat the mistakes of the five to 14 curriculum, which led to the foundations of what was quite an acceptable and achievable curricular initiative being taken away by the silliness surrounding the assessment package that went with it.

We are pleased about the open-ended learning outcomes that have been published as part of the curriculum for excellence. Our job is to ensure that teaching staff have exciting activities for the children to complete that will eventually lead to the learning outcomes. Assessment will be based on a mixture of formative assessment, of the assessment-is-for-learning type, and summative assessment. We have to get the balance right between those two methodologies and ensure that we report the results of the assessment in the right way, not only to parents but to our secondary colleagues. As I said, people used to say, "He's a B, she's a C" and so on, but now we say that someone has completed level 2 or is a little bit of the way along level 3, and talk about the activities that they have completed to get there.

I was speaking to Chris McIlroy, to whom you spoke last week, and he told me that national benchmarking was the answer. However, I have not got a clue what that means, and I do not think that any school in Scotland knows what that means. My evidence is that we are no further down that road.

Brian Cooklin: The other major worry is about adding to the assessment burden. One part of the remit of the task group was to reduce the assessment burden. However, everywhere we turn, we see that it is being added to. The danger is that there might be a demand for national testing to be replaced by literacy and numeracy testing right through school. You can understand why that might be seen to be a good suggestion. By the same token, however, if the profession decides that the correct route is to use a unit-based approach, similar to that which is used in the higher still courses, those units will need to be assessed internally and examined at the end, which will, again, add to the assessment burden.

As Gordon Smith said, people now talk about a child having finished level 2 and so on. What will happen in secondary school is that a child will arrive having completed level 2 in one area, started level 3 in another area and done part of level 1 in something else and being capable of senior phase in yet another area. How do we timetable that? How do we organise some sort of meaningful curricular development or progression for each child on that basis? The aim that we are discussing is a wonderful one to work towards, but the question is how it can be made to happen.

Christina McKelvie: Earlier, we heard about the national education debate in 2002 and I read out the objectives that came out of it. What is your view on the extent to which the development of the

curriculum for excellence is addressing those objectives?

Larry Flanagan: It depends on whether initiatives that address the objectives in theory will deliver them in practice. The list that we heard this morning was impressive. There are a lot of lists connected to the curriculum for excellence. The HMIE document, "How Good is Our School?—The Journey to Excellence" has a list of 10 dimensions of excellence and so on. After a while, your head starts to spin with all the various quality indicators that you should be achieving.

Most teachers are interested in the core issue, which involves increased freedom to innovate in the curriculum. If you give them that freedom, you will start to tick off a number of those targets. Brian Cooklin spoke about how we validate wider achievement, which his task group is looking at. I am on the national qualifications steering group, which has also discussed that matter. Some people want wider achievement to be assessed almost as if it is not wider achievement unless you have your Duke of Edinburgh award. I have been pushing the argument that we must ensure that we facilitate wider achievement and create space in the timetable for pupils to engage in various activities. In my school, we do seven standard grades instead of eight. In the space that we have created, pupils can do short courses in music, art, physical education, voluntary work, sport qualifications or private study. Pupils can do a range of things that do not lead to certification, but they allow them to do something that they might not do otherwise.

When HMIE inspectors came to the school and we told them, "We do only seven standard grades so when you look at our figures you need to extrapolate the percentage we would get compared with a school that does eight," they said, "No, we just look at the figures." That is not a hypothetical situation; it happened just weeks ago. The school has to be robust enough to say, "Okay, we'll take the hit: our percentages are a bit lower than they are in Brian Cooklin's school, but we think we're delivering a good curriculum in terms of developing the ethos of the school."

Not many teachers would be able to quote from the national debate list of objectives that you read out. The principle that lies behind the new curriculum is that you teach the whole child and one of the ideas that have come up in people's discussions is getting a bit of fun back into the classroom so that education is enjoyable. That would be good for teachers as well. I enjoy my job in the classroom, but I enjoy it more if the pupils enjoy what is going on. We need to get away from the tyranny of attainment.

Do not get me wrong—attainment is important. Most principal teachers are in school during the holidays to see how kids got on in their highers and standard grades. They check those results. Nobody is saying that attainment is not important, but it is only one element of the four capacities and we need to ensure there is a balance so that the other areas have equal importance in the way that schools operate. I kind of wandered away from your question a bit.

Christina McKelvie: No, it is okay.

Gordon Smith: I am optimistic. As you might be able to tell, I started teaching in 1970, in Easterhouse, with a class of 51, and I really enjoyed my job.

Christina McKelvie: I might have been in that class.

Gordon Smith: I am sure that you were not.

I am sure that the kids enjoyed themselves as well. At least, that was the feedback that I got. I could have done anything in that classroom; no one was checking up on me and no one in the class next door was saying, "If he's done that, I should be doing it." That was what was missing.

I am optimistic that we are going back to child-centred learning, but with the necessary rigour—I always hate using that word, but it is the best one—to get continuity and some form of control of pupils' learning progression. I see that happening in the curriculum for excellence. I see co-operative learning as the best way for children to learn. I see that we are at last building into the curriculum the relevance of subject matter so that children want to learn rather than being told to learn.

There has been such wastage in our education system. The vast majority of our consumers do not want to buy what we are selling. Unless we move away from that we will just be reinventing a wheel that does not work. The curriculum for excellence is an innovation—we are taking the best of education and putting it forward. It is up to us to get a strong lead on the practical issues that we have been describing for the past short while.

Brian Cooklin: In answer to your question about whether the curriculum for excellence addresses the national education debate objectives, a realistic assessment is that it will be patchy. We can provide good examples of parental involvement, pupil democracy and developments in lots of areas, but in all honesty I do not think that anyone can say that that is the universal experience for every child and parent. It will probably never be possible, but it is what we aim for.

I say to people that I should put up a big sign at the front door of my school that says, "Welcome to the land of opportunity." I am interested in giving children as many opportunities as possible to succeed. By opportunities I mean not only

traditional academic opportunities, but the more than 50 clubs and activities that we have in the school. Pupils would be hard put not to find something that they can join and contribute to. Those activities are provided on a voluntary basis, as a result of a commitment from teachers. They happen because people know what such activities are worth and give of their own time, and because children volunteer and get involved.

What about those who do not make use of the opportunities that are available? There are examples of great success in involving those children and their parents in a variety of activities that go a considerable way towards improving relationships. Relationships are key; everything is determined by the quality of the relationship between the pupil and the teacher, and the quality of the teaching and learning that take place. We can dress up activities however we like and call them any name we like, but if the relationships work, everything else will fall into place.

Mary Mulligan: You heard my earlier questions about the teacher development and support that will be needed to introduce the curriculum for excellence. How can we provide teachers with the right support?

Larry Flanagan: The continuous professional development agenda is one marvellous result of the agreement that was reached with teachers. By and large, teachers enjoy the CPD element of their work. The issue will take care of itself if the curriculum for excellence is sold as something practical that will happen, as teachers will then engage with it.

It may be easier to make progress in the primary sector. If we want to declutter the five-to-14 curriculum, we must identify the clutter that we want to remove. If we tell teachers that the current curriculum is not the benchmark and that they should go with what they know is effective and what pupils enjoy, teachers will move their CPD focus on to developing the areas in which they now have more freedom. It is about teachers having enough time, but it is also about their being willing to prioritise certain activities. No one is sitting around doing nothing—a range of agendas are on the go. Assessment for learning is an on-going CPD commitment. The issue is not whether the curriculum for excellence will become a focus of CPD, but whether individual teachers can be persuaded to make it a focus of CPD because they see it as something practical that will happen. Once that argument is won, many other issues will fall into place.

Gordon Smith: I reiterate that confidence is an important issue at primary school level. The five to 14 curriculum deskilled much of our teaching profession. Primary teachers became people who wanted me just to tell them what resource to use and what to do, instead of people who put their professionalism and imagination into educating children. We need to rebuild teachers' confidence.

I mentioned the pre-five sector. We need to ensure that not only teachers—if there are any teachers left in the sector—but all the workers who are involved at pre-five level are part of the curriculum for excellence.

We also need to ensure that schools retain CPD budgets and that CPD is not seen as a soft option when education budgets are cut. Some of our members' schools have next to nothing in their CPD budgets. The point has been made that if we want to embed the curriculum properly, with strong roots and foundations, we cannot expect it to happen by osmosis.

12:45

Brian Cooklin: I could not agree more with Gordon Smith's point about confidence, which is fundamental. The curriculum for excellence was welcomed because it would free up teachers and provide the opportunity to be creative. However, that is also frightening for many people in the profession. What we had before provided stability and certainty and had been developed. The textbook could be taken off the shelf—although I am sure that some entrepreneurial company will produce "Curriculum for Excellence for English" or whatever by next week. There will not be that definite approach or support, which is a departure for many teachers, so confidence is an issue.

Confidence is an issue in other respects, too. The curriculum for excellence expects teachers to take an interdisciplinary approach in every instance—they are all to be teachers of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing and they will contribute readily to projects throughout a school. That is a big if and a big confidence-raising issue. We must bear it in mind that many teachers have come through a system that did not place such emphasis on literacy and numeracy, so they do not feel confident about correcting somebody's spelling or syntax. They might not be sure about a calculation or approach, let alone able to imbue others with a sense of it. Building people's confidence that they can operate in that way is a major issue.

As I said at the beginning, we are talking about a culture change that will not happen overnight. We must be in it for the long term. International comparisons are frequently made and we talk about places such as Ireland and Finland. It is interesting that they embarked on their present programmes 20 to 25 years ago and that they are coming to fruition now. We have been guilty of looking for the quick fix and a panacea and of saying, "If we just make this change, attainment

will increase." I say in passing that Finland has no inspection system and that Ireland has a light-touch inspection system with no grading. In Ireland, the education system is delivered centrally. I am not advocating either of those systems; I just leave those comments.

Mary Mulligan: I acknowledge that although the curriculum for excellence's flexibility is one of its exciting elements, it could also present challenges. You suggest that it removes a safety blanket. We need to think about how we deliver time for teachers to develop the skills to which you have referred.

I will push you on my other point, which is about headteachers. Is how they will lead on the curriculum for excellence in their school communities an issue for them?

Brian Cooklin: There is of course tremendous pressure. Larry Flanagan talked about the impact of the national agreement on the teacher's working week. It has been recognised that it increased the working week of senior managers in schools even more, because of the shift of responsibilities in schools, the removal of levels of responsibility from the system and the slimming of management structures. The tasks still have to be done and responsibility for them still has to be taken, and they go to whoever is left behind.

Headteachers are under considerable pressure to deliver a curriculum for excellence and to meet local authority and national requirements. That is easy for me to say, but senior managers face huge pressures daily and huge stresses from people within and outwith schools. The question is how to manage and balance the enormous list.

When a pupil interviewed me for an article in the school magazine, he asked me to say in one sentence what a headteacher's job is, because nobody knows what it is. I described it as being a decision-making machine. From the minute I walk through the door in the morning until I leave at night, everyone is looking for me to make a decision, which must be informed and in the school's best interests. A headteacher has that responsibility.

I said earlier that my colleagues are looking for reassurance about curriculum for excellence. They want to know whether they are doing the right thing and going down the right route, but they are not working in a culture in which they will be rewarded, appreciated and supported for taking risks. However, curriculum for excellence could be the most innovative development in the lifetime of everybody here. Our education system has great strengths that we can build on, and we now have great opportunities to take enormous strides.

Gordon Smith: David Cameron gave a good answer to Mary Mulligan's question. I have been a spinning head for more than 20 years now and what I look for is confidence and clarity. I want my local education authority to be speaking exactly the same language to me as parents and HMIE. If I am making a big commitment with staff to make progress on something as important as curriculum for excellence, I want to be clear about the direction and to be sure that everybody is singing from the same hymn sheet when they are judging my performance, my teachers' performance and the school's performance. We should not be using different measures. The best measure is whether the kids are happy to come to school, but that is not what appears in enough detail at the end of an inspection report.

I want to be confident that I can take the curriculum for excellence forward and be clear about where I am going. I repeat that we are still not quite clear about where we are going.

Larry Flanagan: A key point about the role of headteachers, deputes or principal teachers is that the establishments have to have collegiate practice. Curriculum for excellence demands that. One headteacher alone will not deliver curriculum for excellence. They can give a lead, but the philosophy of collegiate practice is at the core of curriculum for excellence, as is professional trust and professional freedom.

Local authorities have to make less of an attempt to micromanage schools. They have to allow headteachers freedom. In some areas, almost every decision is second-guessed by the local authority. More respect has to be given to the headteacher and to the school community. I am not suggesting that we should abandon liaison between local government and schools or quality assurance, but micromanagement is the bane of good curriculum development in schools.

Mary Mulligan: It has been suggested that, in recent years, fewer people have come forward to become headteachers. Will curriculum for excellence encourage more people to come forward, or does it contain challenges that might discourage them?

Gordon Smith: To be frank, it will not encourage people. The Association of Headteachers and Deputes in Scotland has done some research. The first people we asked were the deputes. They find the conditions of service of the job of headteacher unattractive. They find the job unattractive financially but, most of all, they regard the job as undoable. Until we build in serious management time to make headteachers the curricular leaders, collegiately or in any other way; until we stop headteachers having to firefight, which David Cameron spoke about earlier; and until we have more clarity about a headteacher's role and about what society wants from its headteachers, it will not be an attractive job. I do

not see curriculum for excellence making it more attractive.

Brian Cooklin: We could not claim that curriculum for excellence will make the job more attractive, but curriculum for excellence affects the whole profession, not only senior managers.

Committee members have to appreciate our situation. The work-life balance is a large disincentive, and of course we also have to consider salary differentials. The iniquities of the job-sizing toolkit have not helped in that respect.

I manage a school that has 1,200 pupils, a budget of £4.7 million, 83 teaching staff and 40 other staff. We deal with, on average, 100-plus visitors a week—parents and so on—who come for appointments in the school. That is a major operation in itself.

When I first started the job, people were keen to tell me that I should remember that I was responsible for everything. Even if I did not know about it, I was responsible for it. When I am lying in bed at night doing the risk assessment of the ski trip to Italy, for example, and waiting for the call, it is not a great experience. The work-life balance issues are critically important and they must be addressed if we want to make a difference to the number who apply for senior posts.

Our organisation's evidence, both internal and external, is that there has been a vast reduction in the number who apply for senior management posts because they see the strain and expectations that go with the job. At the same time—it is that strange characteristic—I love my job and advocate to other people that they should think of planning their career to become a headteacher because they could make a difference to children's lives, which is why we are in education.

There is no doubt, however, that the job is a strain. To some extent, the curriculum for excellence may only make that worse because we are trying to bridge gaps in the areas that I described earlier and to deliver for the children in our schools while supporting staff to the best of our ability. Those are laudable aims, but they happen in the midst of all our other responsibilities.

Larry Flanagan: Any difference that the curriculum for excellence makes to encouraging more applications to headteacher posts may be marginal. One thing that should happen because of the curriculum for excellence is that headteachers' accountability should reduce somewhat, so there should be increased autonomy for headteachers in leading their school community. That is one of the pressures to which Brian Cooklin referred when he talked about work-life balance: you not only do the job in your school, you also have all your liaison with the local authority, which can be a huge time demand because of the constant demand for information and so forth. There are complex reasons for any drop in the number who apply for headteacher posts, some of which are to do with age profile, and some of which are to do with the alternative of chartered teacher status.

It is generally positive for the curriculum for excellence that, over the past few years, a huge number of excellent probationer teachers have come into the system. Many of them, as they work through it, will regard management as a possibility. There is also a large group of people in the system who might have moved into management, but who took the accredited route to chartered teacher status. They chose to go for chartered teacher status because of how accreditation was offered, and for a variety of other reasons. I hope that the current drop in headteacher applications will prove to be just a temporary dip rather than a constant problem.

As of next Monday, I will be doing an acting depute job and my head is birling already because nothing will come off while I do that—I will still have my other work.

Brian Cooklin: We will give you support, Larry.

Larry Flanagan: You still have your teaching and other commitments, but you are supposed to do all this other stuff as well. Some of it is to do with the bureaucracy that comes from the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004. However, that is a different agenda and nothing to do with the curriculum for excellence, so I will not indulge myself on it.

Mary Mulligan: I realise that I widened out the discussion, but I thought that I would take the opportunity to do that, given that you are here.

The Convener: That concludes members' questioning, but I have a final question. If your organisations could make one suggestion about how the implementation of the curriculum for excellence could be improved, what would it be? I do not think for one minute, though, that one suggestion from each of you will solve the complex problems that exist.

Larry Flanagan: This is like one of the questions you get at the end of an interview, which you know will decide who gets the job. My suggestion would be to have greater engagement with the profession. That would be the single biggest step that could be taken.

Brian Cooklin: Mine would be to provide the resourcing to give people time to implement.

Gordon Smith: I will be greedy and go for two. First, we should get the curriculum for excellence implemented. I would hate to think of the number

of headteachers and deputes who have retired since 2004 and who will have retired by 2011. We should get it implemented and sort out assessment.

The Convener: Thank you for your attendance and for sitting through both panel sessions. I will suspend the meeting briefly, to allow our witnesses to leave.

12:59

Meeting suspended.

13:00

On resuming—

Panjabi Language Examination

The Convener: The second and final item on our agenda is to consider correspondence that was sent to me, as the committee convener, by the Guru Nanak Sikh Temple in Glasgow with regard to the assessment of Panjabi language learning. It is not currently possible for students in Scotland to sit an examination in Panjabi as the funding that has enabled such examinations to take place for the past three years is no longer available.

Members will see from the briefing paper that we are asked to consider whether the committee should write to the SQA to seek its comments on the possible inclusion of Panjabi and other minority ethnic languages in the examination diet. I seek members' views on the matter.

Rob Gibson: I am happy for us to enter into dialogue on the matter because it is clear that many more languages are becoming prevalent. We need to get some sort of benchmark for the examination aspect.

The Convener: In that case, we will write to the SQA. In light of our consideration of foreign languages a few weeks ago, and given the point that the deputy convener has just made about considering all languages, we could consider this issue again when we consider the other petition that was passed to the committee. However, we will write to the SQA about Panjabi language learning because that is what the organisation in question wants us to do.

Meeting closed at 13:02.

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