EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Wednesday 10 September 2008

Session 3

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EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
20th Meeting 2008, Session 3

CONVENER

*Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP)
Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Brian Cooklin (School Leaders Scotland)
Tom Hamilton (General Teaching Council for Scotland)
Frances Jack (Currie Primary School)
Drew Morrice (Educational Institute of 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 10 September 2008

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

Interests

The Convener (Karen Whitefield): Good morning. I open the 20th meeting in 2008 of the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee. I remind all members and visitors that mobile phones and BlackBerrys should be switched off.

The first item on our revised agenda is a declaration of interests. I am pleased to welcome Margaret Smith to the committee, and I invite her to declare any relevant interests.

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): Thank you for your welcome, convener. I have two children in the school system at secondary level, one at primary school and two at university. I also have a partner who is a speech and language therapist working with children with special needs in special schools and in the community.

The Convener: Thank you. I hope that you will enjoy your time on the committee.

Margaret Smith: I am sure that I will. Thank you.

Decision on Taking Business in Private

10:06

The Convener: Item 2 is a decision on whether to take item 4 in private. Members will be aware that item 4 is consideration of an approach paper on the committee's scrutiny of the draft budget for 2009-10. Are members content to consider the matter in private?

Members *indicated agreement*.

Employment of Probationary Teachers

10:06

The Convener: Item 3, which is the substantive item on our agenda today, is on the employment of probationary teachers. I am delighted that we have been joined by Brian Cooklin, who is president of School Leaders Scotland; Tom Hamilton, who is director of education policy at the General Teaching Council for Scotland; Drew Morrice, who is assistant secretary of the Educational Institute of Scotland; and last but by no means least, Frances Jack, who is a teacher at Currie primary school.

I thank the EIS, the General Teaching Council for Scotland and School Leaders Scotland for the written submissions that they provided before today's meeting. Ms Jack is here in a personal capacity, and I ask her to introduce herself so that the committee knows who she is. We will then move on to questions.

Frances Jack (Currie Primary School): Thank you, convener. I work as a teacher at Currie primary school in Edinburgh, where I teach primary 2. I completed my probationary year last year and met the requirements for full registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland in June this year. If I wind the clock back, I did postgraduate teacher training for a year at Moray House, which is just up the road from the Parliament, and before that I worked part time for two years as a learning assistant in a school in Edinburgh.

The Convener: Thank you.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Good morning. My first question is directed to the General Teaching Council for Scotland, which has researched the employment of probationers for the past three years. Its survey found that, by April 2008, 93 per cent of the 2007 probationers were working in Scottish schools. However, it would be interesting to know whether the GTC is aware of any bias in the pattern of results and whether it believes that responses are more likely to come from some groups of probationers than from others.

Tom Hamilton (General Teaching Council for Scotland): That is a sensible question and a good one to begin with. The GTC survey is anonymous and it goes out to every single person who completed their probationary year in the previous year. Because it is anonymous, we cannot track the surveys and determine from which areas people return them or anything like that. The other aspect is that we do not know whether the survey

is liable to encourage people to respond in a certain way. Do they respond because they have got a job and they want to celebrate it and share the news, or do they respond because they have not got a job and they want to raise the matter and complain? I cannot answer the question, because we do not know.

Kenneth Gibson: I note that 3,388 questionnaires were sent out in 2007. Exactly the same number was sent out in spring 2008, yet the number of responses reduced by about a quarter. Do you have anecdotal evidence for why the response was lower in spring than it was in autumn?

Tom Hamilton: The response was lower in the follow-up survey, which I think is often the case. People are interested and keen to take part in a first survey; they are less keen the second time round—it might be as simple as that. The response rate of 30 per cent or so in spring was quite impressive, but it was not as good as the response rate in the October survey.

Kenneth Gibson: However, you think that the sample is robust, given its size, although you have no depth of knowledge about whether there was any bias in the sample and you said that you do not know whether people responded because they were happy or because they were unhappy. I also take on board what you said about geography. There is no way of knowing whether 90 per cent of your responses came from Shetland and 10 per cent from Glasgow.

Tom Hamilton: No, but the three October surveys enable us to consider trends. The trend in overall employment might not be terribly significant, but the trend in the number of people who have permanent contracts is interesting. In the figures for secondary schools there was a dip after the first year of the survey, but the figures for primary schools show a definite trend over the three surveys, which was not contradicted by the follow-up survey. The number of people who got a permanent job has fallen each year.

Kenneth Gibson: Do you or the other witnesses want to say why you think that that has happened?

Tom Hamilton: There might be all sorts of reasons. It is certainly a matter of concern.

Brian Cooklin (School Leaders Scotland): The issue is of great concern to everyone in the profession. We can make a number of statements about trends if we link them to other factors and what is happening elsewhere. The impact of efficiency savings has been a major issue for a number of years. Vacancies that in the past might have been filled by probationers are no longer available, because surplus teachers are being deployed in other schools to meet efficiency savings. Teachers who already have a permanent contract are being transferred to fill vacancies, which cuts off the supply.

The anecdotal evidence—it is purely anecdotal, because we would have to undertake a proper, separate research project to ascertain what is going on—is that a number of people who cannot get a full-time job give up and go and do something else, because they are fed up applying for jobs and not getting anywhere. It is demoralising for people who have gone through the excellent teacher training and probationer system to find that there is no possibility of a permanent job.

The GTC survey and the *Times Educational Supplement Scotland* survey indicate people who are in employment but include people who are in temporary employment, which has a major impact on people's lives. Many people have to give up teaching because they cannot make ends meet. They cannot afford to pay the rent and they cannot get a mortgage unless they have a permanent contract. That is what underlies the surveys. As Tom Hamilton said, it is difficult to pin down the detail in the surveys, but we are talking about human beings and it is clear that people are experiencing difficulties daily.

Frances Jack: There were 17 full-time, permanent posts for which I could apply before I was fully registered. That should give the committee a clear picture. When hundreds of people are going for only 17 posts, the odds are stacked against us. That is not to say that no other, temporary posts were available—I am currently in such a post. However, from March to the end of June, only 17 full-time, permanent posts were advertised by the City of Edinburgh Council. For personal reasons, I was restricted to applying for jobs with the CEC. I was not willing to sell up and move my family to the north of Scotland, for example, where more jobs might have been available.

10:15

Drew Morrice (Educational Institute of Scotland): I echo the point about the pressures that councils feel as a result of efficiency savings. Teacher workforce planning can help to predict the global number of teachers who are needed in the system, but that can be undermined quite dramatically by short-term decisions that are taken by councils. Around March, councils set a staffing standard and build in cuts. In the current financial year, two thirds of councils in Scotland are making cuts in education services, many of which involve reductions in the number of teachers who are employed, reductions in staffing standards, reductions in time for management in schools, the break-up of peripatetic teams and the removal of learning support and behaviour support teachers

from schools. All of those cuts have an impact on employment opportunities for probationers in the system. That is the effect of short-term council decisions that impact on teacher workforce planning that is set at Government level.

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): Mr Hamilton, on the methodology, which Mr Gibson asked about, have you given any thought to adding a question to your survey to ask whether someone is in employment and which local authority area they are in?

Tom Hamilton: We have thought about that, but there is a contradiction between having an anonymous survey and asking for that sort of information. If it is decided that we should be asking that sort of question, that is fair enough, but it means being unable to reassure people about their anonymity.

Brian Cooklin: The paper on the *TESS* survey shows that every local authority had an allocation of probationary teachers but that only a small percentage of those people got permanent posts. In Glasgow, for example, only 14 people were made permanent out of 254 probationers. The areas in which there are difficulties had the probationers in front of them last year but were not in a position to employ them.

It beggars belief that there can be difficulty filling vacancies in certain parts of the country when the excellent probationer scheme provides a pool of talent. I would have willingly employed any of the 10 outstanding probationers that I had last year. However, because of efficiency savings, only four of them could be employed, and it was difficult for them to get jobs elsewhere. That is the situation in one school, but it can be replicated across the country. There is an absolutely tragic waste of talent and skill at the very time when our system is crying out for more people, given the demographic situation that we know perfectly well we will have to contend with. We are saying that it is difficult to fill vacancies, but there are probationers who could fill them if the finance were available. That does not quite add up, does it?

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Your analysis is absolutely right. Is the problem exacerbated by the fact that the probationers who are finding it difficult to get jobs are in subject areas in which there is not a good geographical distribution across the country?

Brian Cooklin: That is definitely one of the factors, but the position is far worse in the primary sector than in the secondary sector. As you will know from press coverage, there can be 100 applicants for each job in a primary school. In the famous case in East Renfrewshire, there were more than 300 applicants for one primary teaching job.

The situation is worse in the primary sector, but in the secondary sector the problem is exacerbated by subject and departmental needs. In parts of the country, it can be difficult to get a match—that has always been the problem with workforce planning. The total number of registered and available teachers might not match up with the needs on the ground. Some authorities have simply had to take radical decisions and say that certain schools will no longer offer certain subjects, such as home economics, because not enough people are being trained in those subjects.

Elizabeth Smith: If you are right about that—which I think you are—is it a question of identifying the mismatch of skills just as much as the numbers involved? Although there is a problem with not enough people being able to get a job, we need to consider what specific jobs are available in the marketplace, not just next year but four or five years down the line. Does the panel have any suggestions as to what we can do to improve networks so that people know exactly where their jobs are going to be and have a better chance of finding long-term solutions, rather than just short-term ones?

Brian Cooklin: I hope that the workforce planning group meeting that the cabinet secretary has set up will allow better, more detailed information to be made available, although many factors affect that. It is not simply a question of having an academic exercise to identify the answers. Of course, the planning group's remit does not include finance. If people are told that they have to do a statistical exercise to work out the numbers that are required, they might do it in an arcane way that is removed from the actual situation. In addition, it will not be possible to implement the group's findings if the finance is not available or if other factors militate against it. For instance, none of the developments in recent years, including the increase in staff's entitlement to non-contact time and the reduction in class sizes for English and maths—we will probably hit the same situation with the class size reductions in primary schools—has been fully funded or fully staffed, except in some parts of the country. As a result, within the staffing complement we are trying all the time to absorb needs to meet people's requirements.

Of course, there is a mismatch between the policies that are introduced and their implementation. We are all in favour of legislation on additional support for learning but, as the committee heard earlier from Drew Morrice, support for learning posts and behaviour support posts are being cut, which makes it difficult to be fully inclusive. All those factors militate against accurately assessing what will be needed and how it will be delivered.

Elizabeth Smith: You have given a substantial list of factors that militate against getting the system right. Is the class size policy a big factor in that, or is it just one of many?

Brian Cooklin: It is a large factor. We should bear it in mind that all the policies that we are discussing are designed to benefit children. I find it offensive to talk about efficiency savings in an education setting. We are not a factory producing widgets; we are dealing with individual children. It cannot be said to be more efficient to teach 30 children as opposed to 20, except if we are only counting heads. Such an approach cannot deliver education for the individual child, although that is what we all want. We all agree on that policy. I have not encountered any division about that in any quarter. The question is how we make the system work. That is the fundamental issue.

Drew Morrice: I have two points. First, if we are to workforce plan to put teachers into the system, taking account of reductions in class sizes, how can we decide when to put them into the system without knowing when changes are going to be made? We have moved away from using workforce planning to manage requirements that stem from changes in conditions of service and class sizes. We would know when changes were required, and the number of teachers who would be needed to come into the system would be costed. If, as we are led to believe, all councils will, in this parliamentary session, make some move to reduce class sizes—whatever that move is—I do not see how workforce planning will adequately capture that. The consequence of that imprecision is that it is harder, rather than easier, to plan effectively.

Secondly, councils are confused about the previous Administration's decision on having maximum class sizes of 20 in English and maths. A lot of councils are still working within those parameters, but some councils have abandoned them. There seems to be no direction from the Scottish Government to say that councils should honour that commitment. Decisions that are taken at council level in such areas can have a serious impact on teachers' opportunities to find work in English and maths.

Tom Hamilton: In addition, and to return to Elizabeth Smith's point, the workforce planning exercise that has been carried out for many years is robust and produces quite a good global figure. However, as Drew Morrice said, the picture is more complicated these days than it has been in the past. That is an argument for individual local authorities to give better intelligence to the workforce planning exercise to help with local variations.

There are two other elements. There is an annual census of teachers in schools, which records numbers quite accurately, but it does not cover teachers who are not in schools, so that is one area in which the GTC might be able to supplement its current work. There is a legal requirement on teachers to keep us up to date with their address, but that is the only thing that they must contact us about.

We have also considered an electronic system to make it easier to record an annual update from everybody who is on the register. A lot of people who are on the register are not in schools—I am still a registered teacher, for example—so we want to gather some data on what they are doing and their intentions.

Elizabeth Smith: You said that local authorities should give better information. Do you mean a greater quantity of information about where teachers have been and are likely to be in the future, over a longer period of time, or is there something else that we can do at local authority level to improve the information that is given to the GTC?

Tom Hamilton: The information would be given to the Government, in that case. Not just the quantity but the quality of information is vital. Local authorities should examine their policies and consider how they impact on teacher employment.

Elizabeth Smith: Can you give an example of where the quality of the information is not good enough?

Tom Hamilton: The Government's workforce planning probably takes more factors into account and thinks about the wider picture better than do some local authorities. That is only my impression, but some local authorities perhaps need to examine what they are producing for the Government's figures.

Drew Morrice: Workforce planning will, for example, try to predict the number of teachers who will retire, which will include premature retirement compensation and will be a global assumption. If a council plans to introduce a specific scheme—for example, alongside a school closure programme—it will be able to anticipate that some way ahead of the event. Feeding such information into workforce planning at an earlier stage in the process might assist planners by letting them know if there are peaks or troughs in areas such as premature retirement.

The Convener: I have a question about differences between primary and secondary education. The GTC survey of post-probationers that was carried out in April 2008 highlighted different pictures for those who were employed in primary education and those who were employed in secondary education, particularly with regard to the differences between those who were in permanent posts and those who were in

temporary or supply posts. Why is there a difference between those post-probationary teachers, and why are primary teachers in particular much more likely to end up in temporary posts or supply positions? I would not think that those teachers are any less qualified or are not as good at teaching.

Tom Hamilton: I genuinely do not know the answer to that. There might be all sorts of factors. For example, the subject specification in secondary teaching might attract people because, for example, they are maths teachers, whereas primary teachers are generalists, so they can go anywhere and everywhere.

Frances Jack: To shed some light on that, a teacher who is trained for secondary school can teach in primary school, so they have, so to speak, two bites at the cherry, whereas a primary teacher can work only in the primary sector. I have no evidence or experience of anyone who is a secondary teacher working in a primary school, but it could alter the figures.

Tom Hamilton: It is possible, using the framework for professional recognition, for people to change sector these days in a way that they could not do a few years ago, but only a small number of people have changed sector from secondary to primary, due to the complexity of the primary curriculum and of primary pedagogy compared with many secondary teachers' practices. Real difficulties face anyone who moves from secondary into primary, so not many people have made that move.

10:30

Brian Cooklin: In fact, the movement has been in the other direction. In some authorities, such as North Lanarkshire Council, primary teachers who were involved in primary-secondary liaison—they are sometimes called P6-S2 co-ordinators, but they are called different things in different parts of the country—were given the opportunity to become permanent contract holders in the secondary sector. A large number of primary teachers who started off in those posts have transferred. However, that has happened only at the margins, so we are not talking about huge numbers one way or the other throughout Scotland. Different factors are at work.

I should highlight that permanent-contract holders include permanent-contract, area-cover supply teachers, which is a different and relatively new element. Some authorities offer permanent contracts to supply teachers who must travel to whichever primary or secondary school requires them. That is suitable for some people. Some see it as a stepping stone that should put them in a good position whenever a permanent vacancy in a particular school becomes available. Increasingly, however, such contracts are a source of discontent for individuals. They feel that they are stuck. They feel left out, because vacancies are more likely to be given to a new entrant to the profession rather than to someone who already has a permanent job. One can understand the human dilemma that confronts the person interviewing for a post. If the choice is between someone who already has a permanent contract and a good candidate who does not yet have a permanent contract, and both candidates perform roughly the same at interview, the tendency is for the job to be given to the person who does not yet have a permanent contract. I highlight that in case members are not aware of how that situation affects people.

On the question why fewer permanent contracts are available in primary school, I surmise—I use the word advisedly, as I have no proof of this—that it is largely due to the fact that less movement is taking place in the primary sector because of the way in which primary education is managed or handled. In other words, a number of primary schools across the country are the subject of merger proposals. Falling school rolls have hit primary schools quicker than has been the case for secondary schools. By shrinking the number of posts through increasing the number of composite classes in primary schools, the pool of vacancies that are available for probationers has been reduced. What we are seeing probably matches the demographic trend in the school population, but the situation is exacerbated in the primary setting because primary schools are smaller and employ fewer staff than do secondary schools. The issue is coming to the surface more quickly in primary because the compositing of classes reduces the number of opportunities.

The Convener: Does the EIS have a view on why such a difference exists between primary and secondary education?

Drew Morrice: I do not think that there is hard evidence on that point, so the issue should be pursued. There have been significant vacancies in the primary sector in places such as Aberdeenshire, where the authority has had to recruit primary teachers from outwith Scotland. That might tie in with where people take up initial placements and their reluctance thereafter to contemplate moving. However, I do not think that there is robust evidence one way or the other to explain why there should be such a noticeable difference between the primary sector and the secondary sector.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I want to go back to Frances Jack's comments about the impact of the trends that we have seen in recent years. Clearly, we have identified a serious

problem in the declining number of probationers who get permanent jobs. However, I have not quite got a feel for what that means for people such as Frances Jack and her colleagues who face that difficulty.

Frances Jack: Let me explain that a huge investment is required by anyone who decides to go into teacher training especially if, like me, they are a mature entrant. I have other considerations, such as my family and so on. With that, there is an emotional pressure to make it come good.

I was highly motivated. I had to take a loan from the Student Loans Company and I had to pay for child care. The cost of my training was so much that it negated my first year's salary. That was always a pressure on me. All that I can say is that it is soul destroying for anyone in any profession to make that investment financially and emotionally—it affects children, families and spouses. The investment is big all round.

For those who have come through the training, succeeded and met the standard, the situation is soul destroying. Such people might have interviewed well and been given feedback that they could have done nothing differently—the job just happened to go to someone else. I have been lucky to be interviewed. That reassured me that my application was at least a good blueprint to get a foot in the door, which was an achievement in itself. However, some authorities interview the whole lot of applicants. In some ways, that is not ideal, because of the cost and time that are involved. Applicants are on an emotional rollercoaster. They are excited to have an interview until they find out that everybody was interviewed.

Another aspect that other probationers and I have found hard is that interviews take place over several days. Someone who was lucky enough to be interviewed on the first day might think that their application was better than others. However, what would happen is that all the questions that were asked—they would be the same questions for people on days 2, 3, 4 and 5—would be unhelpfully posted on *The Times Educational Supplement* website, or people might phone someone interviewed on day 1 to ask for the questions. Straight away, a person who was to be interviewed on day 5 would have four more days to bone up and prepare than the person who was interviewed on day 1. That is a demoralising flaw in the system, which creates a sense of unfairness. On the other hand, I do not propose that everybody should be asked different questions—some common ground must exist.

People must believe in themselves when they get into Moray House school of education, the University of Dundee or Jordanhill. I was told that nobody succeeded the first time that they applied, but I did. Sometimes, we dig deep. We tell ourselves that someone must get the jobs that will come up. Children continue to come into the system. We have to put our best foot forward.

I have done a lot to put my name about. Just a month ago, I talked to probationers who came through the system. I gave two presentations to probationers of my own cohort year. I am not just sitting back and waiting for an opportunity. The more I invest and do, the more my standards and expectations increase. I fully expect to have a permanent post by the end of this year. The contract that I am on has bought me time and I am really hopeful—I must be. Someone must get the jobs, although hundreds of us apply for the primary posts.

To return to the previous question, I wonder whether the difference is that there are hundreds of us. In my year alone, 300 people applied for a small number of posts, whereas the 30 or so people who were training to be geography teachers might have applied for six geography posts, so they had a one in five chance. There are not hundreds of geography posts about, but the odds are more in their favour. I need not do the maths for the committee: if 300 others and I are going after a handful of jobs—fewer than 20 at a time—the odds are against us. The smallest number that I was up against at an interview was 140. The situation is competitive and I have gone into it with my eyes wide open. I am not whimpering; I know the position, but it is not ideal.

Having said that, teaching gives people lots of transferable skills, so the option exists to go into something else. The situation is hard and people must dig deep. The impact on other people is another pressure, which should not be underestimated.

Brian Cooklin: I will give the view from the other side. Many local authorities have excellent probationer support and training programmes. For example, South Lanarkshire Council has an extensive preparation programme. In school, we do a great deal to support probationers. We train them in applications, interview skills and what comes next. However, the most soul-destroying aspect of my work—to borrow Frances Jack's words—is that I must interview many people in the full knowledge that there is no job for them. Some of them refer to the process as the cattle market, as they have to sit in a large hall, where they are sectioned off, before they are called forward. We interview 10, 15 or 20 people a day for two or three days. In my case, the interviews are for specific secondary subjects; other interviews are for primary vacancies. We have to give feedback afterwards. We tell people that they had a really good interview, that things went well and that we will be delighted to employ them whenever a

vacancy becomes available. Immediately they feel let down.

Local authorities are trying to do their best by people by guaranteeing them interviews, but that is all that they have. Currently, we cannot say that at the end of the process there will definitely be a vacancy for them to fill. That is a tragic loss and a betrayal—I know that that is an emotive word to use—of people who have committed themselves to the Scottish education system. That is especially true for mature entrants, who may have given up another job on the back of advertising and the message that we are sending out about the people whom we want to attract into education. They bring rich experience from which children could benefit, but we are unable to access that.

Tom Hamilton: Brian Cooklin makes a good point about maturity. Over the past few years, a genuine attempt has been made in Scottish teacher education to bring in people from wider society and a wider age range. Frances Jack will need to forgive me for calling her a mature entrant to the profession, but the reality is that many people who have done other things, such as having a family or working as a learning assistant, are coming into teaching. She spoke about the reluctance of probationers to up sticks and move somewhere else. If someone has gone straight from school to university and back to school, they are a free agent who may be able to move anywhere in the country. However, if people have a family and commitments in an area, it is very difficult for them to do that. Ken Macintosh was right to emphasise the difficulty that every individual in this situation faces. That is exacerbated for people who have particular commitments, such as a mortgage. As was mentioned earlier, some are unable to get a mortgage.

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): My question arises from Frances Jack's comments, which were very useful. She mentioned the transferable skills that teaching offers, which may enable her to try her hand at another job. Is there evidence that when people do that, they go back into teaching if a vacancy arises thereafter?

Tom Hamilton: Any such evidence is purely anecdotal. As Brian Cooklin said, there is a danger that the people who do not get jobs will drift away from the profession into other areas. I worked in teacher education for a number of years, so I know that that is a recurring problem. It happened in the 1990s as well as now. In the past, some of my students have gone to other countries, such as New Zealand, to teach or have gone into other areas of employment. Last year I attended a continuing professional development session in East Ayrshire, where I met one of my former students who had left teaching for a retail management post. I thought that she was still there, but when I met her last year I found that she had come back into the profession and was now a headteacher. However, not everyone who leaves teaching will come back; some will be lost to the profession. We are training very good-quality teachers, but we are not necessarily giving them every opportunity to become the best teachers that they could be.

Teacher attrition is a problem in many countries. The high quality of the teacher induction scheme has been mentioned. Interest in the scheme has been expressed from Australia and from the state of Georgia in America. Georgia's population is about twice the population of Scotland. At the moment, we train about 3,000 teachers a year. In 2005-06, Georgia employed 14,000 new teachers, for a population twice the size of ours. It did so because it will have lost 25 per cent of them after two years and 50 per cent after five years.

We do not have the problem of teacher attrition, which is huge in other parts of the world, although it might be developing here now, and we certainly want to stop that happening. The problem is so bad in Georgia because they put the new teachers into the worst schools in the worst areas and do not give them any support. Our teacher induction scheme is a model and we must not undermine it.

10:45

Drew Morrice: The difficulty that teachers face is that, if they do not get into schools pretty quickly, they become deskilled. The pace of educational change is pretty daunting, and someone who has been out of the system for a number of years is disadvantaged at the point at which they seek to get back in. At interview, someone who is straight out of college and has up-to-date skills in, for example, the curriculum for excellence has a head start on people who seek to return to the system. We need to support people who have been out of the system and provide some refresher or college training course to get them back up to speed.

There is a more substantial point. Frances Jack indicated the impact on her and the demotivation that she would have faced had she been unable to find work. That individual demovitation will affect the person who is left unemployed when there is a high rate of permanence, but when it happens to significant numbers of the workforce, it is an economic waste and a waste of human capital. We put people through an intensive period of training—teacher training in Scotland is very rigorous; in fact, some people would say that it is too rigorous and too demanding—and, at the end

of it, they are cast aside in significant numbers. That problem must be addressed.

Aileen Campbell: Do any of you do anything to keep motivation high among potential teachers and prevent them from drifting even though they might not get teaching jobs? Do you offer updates?

Drew Morrice: The difficulty is that, if they are out of the system, it loses track of them.

Aileen Campbell: What if they are EIS members?

Drew Morrice: EIS members tell us if they are unemployed, but they do not retain their membership and pay a union subscription if they are unable to depend on supply work and have to take a job where they can be guaranteed permanent status or regular work. It is demoralising for people to sit by the phone and depend on the vagaries of the supply market. They will not sit by the phone for ever; they have mortgages, family demands and family pressures, so they look elsewhere. The idea that they might find some work in the course of the coming session is not a reality for most of them. They will look elsewhere if they cannot find jobs in teaching, and are then lost—or potentially lost—to the teaching profession. At some point, they may seek to come back but, in the meantime, they will have to take short-term decisions about what is best for their financial circumstances.

Brian Cooklin: A number of things can be done in the school to encourage teachers when they are there. One advantage is that there has been an increased emphasis on continuous professional development, so the training that is available is of a much higher quality than it was in previous years. That, along with encouragement to take on responsibility, to take up leadership roles and to gain experience of different aspects of education, encourages teachers to stay in the system.

Drew Morrice is right—the problem is at the beginning. If we lose people then, it is difficult for them to get back in because employers ask why they did not get a job before and why they have a gap. When a new group of teachers comes through, they have the talents that employers are looking for and they are up to date. It is difficult for someone to keep up to date if they are not physically in the system.

At a community event at which I spoke, a business leader told me that they had set up a new business in the area and every person that they had employed—we are talking about 12 or 15 people—is a trained primary teacher. Those people are now working in customer services. It interests me that every person that the company chose at interview had been trained as a primary teacher. We might get those people back somewhere down the line, but certainly not at the moment. The further and longer they are away from teaching, the harder it is for them to get back, and to be motivated to do so, because they are honestly thinking, "What chance do I have of getting a job?"

Frances Jack: Further to Brian Cooklin's point, if I were seeking employment today, and if he was the headteacher member of the panel that was interviewing me, he would ask me to draw on initiatives that I had carried out in school not two or three years ago but within the past six months. If I were not employed in a school, I would have nothing to refer to.

It is not good enough just to be teaching in a school; a teacher has to be on a working group or running an after-school club. I am helping to run the school opening week in October. A teacher has to have a lot of fingers in a lot of pies. If I were not employed in a school, I would not have the chance to gain that experience.

We are on the cusp of the introduction of a new education policy, the curriculum for excellence. The training that I have had was second to none and right now—not in a year or so, but right now—I am in the best place that I can be because of that. I have an advantage over someone who trained only three years ago. Everything that I have been taught was specific to the curriculum for excellence. When I went into schools, teachers asked me what the curriculum for excellence was about.

I feel that I am ripe, so to speak. This is the right time for me to use my training, which is totally up to date. Over the next year, I will not have the same access to training and to keeping my knowledge current. I will have to use my career development time to ensure that I keep myself up to date with everything that is going on and with educational trends. As others have said, the short answer to the question is that if a graduate teacher does not get employed fairly shortly after they qualify, they easily get left behind.

On where people who do not get a job go and whether they make use of their transferable skills, students on my course had been lawyers, engineers, architects and doctors. For them, being a learning assistant was nothing. They came from good positions and were able to draw on their experience, as other witnesses have said, to give pupils really rounded education. However, although I do not know the numbers, I assume that they would go back to their old jobs rather than use the new skills that they gained in teaching to go on and do something entirely different.

Elizabeth Smith: My question is for Mr Hamilton. The GTC's programme for probationers and its continuing professional development

programme are recognised around the world as first class. What Frances Jack has just said is strong evidence of that.

That said, I have heard anecdotally that probationers and those who have just left their probationary period could increase their employment opportunities if they had other skills, such as skills in music and outdoor learning. Would the GTC consider offering such training? I have no proof of this, but people say that they could improve their chances if only they could get that little extra from their training. You spoke about the curriculum for excellence, which extends extracurricular programmes. Would having training in such areas enhance a teacher's chances?

Tom Hamilton: Every teacher has to meet the standard for initial teacher education by the end of their university career. Music is part of the primary curriculum and, interestingly, outdoor education was written into the last revision of the standard for initial teacher education and, indeed, the standard for full registration.

There is a place for teachers to have expertise in different areas of the primary curriculum. The one-year nature of the PG programme means that the timetable is very tight. It is further constrained by the format of 18 weeks in university and 18 weeks out in schools. Something would have to be added into the teacher induction scheme to supplement the existing programme.

However, there is a bit of space in the four-year undergraduate programme, which gives students the opportunity to develop specialisms in all sorts of areas. The universities do that quite well. Clearly, the University of Aberdeen has been in the vanguard with the Scottish teachers for a new era project. We need to think about keeping the contact between the university and their students once the students graduate, not only in the teacher induction scheme year but in the years beyond. Something that continues that contact, refreshment and personal professional learning would be a real plus; it is something that we should build on.

Brian Cooklin: From a teaching point of view, such specialisms are also assets in that they enhance a person's teaching, never mind improve their prospects for employment.

For example, within a fortnight, the next batch of student teachers will come into my school. As part of that programme, which I lead, we encourage them to go to the extracurricular clubs and activities and find out about things that they will not see elsewhere or which they will not have an opportunity to experience while they are at teacher training institutions. They will, for example, voluntarily join the Fairtrade group, take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's award group, or attend whatever else might be going on in the school. From doing so, they gain an insight into how such extracurricular activities benefit the child and how they benefit teaching and learning. There is a natural spin-off.

I am grateful for the fact that more than 50 clubs and activities are run in my school by teachers who volunteer to take those groups. That kind of activity is an asset to both the teacher and the child; therefore, it is a factor when we are considering whom to appoint.

Frances Jack: In our probationary year of training, we have one and a half days a week of non-contact time. That is a perfect time in which to develop one's own skill or talent. Mine happened to be art, and I now run an after-school art club. There would have been no point in my using that time to learn Japanese, as I would not have got there in time. However, someone else whom I know was employed—albeit in the private sector—on the basis that they knew Japanese and ran an after-school club for learning Japanese. Elizabeth Smith's point is valid, but the weekly one and a half days of non-contact time that student teachers get in their probationary year would be a good time for such development. That is especially true if they have gone through the postgrad programme, given that time is tight and there is no time to cultivate anything else.

Mary Mulligan: The policies that have been developing recently suggest that there will be increasing demand for teachers. However, I have heard from the witnesses this morning that that must be matched against budgetary restrictions, which will have an impact. Given those two competing factors, do you think that the number of students who are currently being trained to be teachers is right?

Drew Morrice: You make a sharp political point that must be considered by both central Government and local government. Part of the problem is the intention to maintain teacher numbers—to maintain the 53,000-plus teachers in the system—and to use the opportunity that is provided by falling school rolls to reduce class sizes. If councils take sharp budgetary decisions because they do not have money in the system, a political commitment that has been set at the centre will fall apart locally. The issue must be included in discussions around the concordat and the agreements between central Government and local government. There appears to be a mismatch at the moment between the different aspirations, which must be addressed.

The EIS would like the situation to be addressed by all councils in Scotland applying a uniform staffing formula, which would tie councils into the budget that was generated by that staffing formula. At the moment, staffing formulae seem to

be a soft target—as is the provision of time for managers in schools to carry out management tasks—in terms of council decisions that are made at a local level because of short-term budgetary pressures.

Mary Mulligan: Mr Cooklin, do you have a view on whether a formula should be agreed, beyond the headteachers, between local authorities and the centre?

11:00

Brian Cooklin: Of course. You have heard me speak on that point when the committee has discussed these issues previously, and I am grateful to have the opportunity to do so again.

The media's favourite phrase to use when talking about the health service is "postcode lottery". The same thing applies in education, because we do not have a national education system. I am not advocating such a system, because we have to be able to respond to local need. As I said earlier, we are not a production line; we are dealing with a dynamic, human situation that changes daily, never mind yearly. We need the capacity to respond to those pressures and needs. The problem is that, by making such a response, we immediately affect how we can deliver elsewhere. The formula that exists for staffing is byzantine—I cannot think of a better word for it; you would be hard pushed to work it out up and down the country. Although I agree with the sentiment that you expressed, I do not know how we would arrive at a national formula that would deliver what we all seek, because there are huge variations.

The picture will become simplified, but for bad reasons. It will become simplified because the budget situation for the next couple of years, on top of this year, is predicted to tighten and get worse. We know that the economic position generally is likely to do the same. Consequently, that gets rid of a lot of the add-ons. In some authorities there is the basic staffing formula, which is determined by the size of the roll, times a basic number, with a certain amount of time built in for management. Those figures are being cut. Management time is being cut, or the management team running a school is being cut.

Nationally, the assumption has been, "It's a falling-roll situation; you'll be able to cope with it." However, we do not have falling rolls nationally. A school in Edinburgh or the Lothians is likely to have a rising roll, not a falling roll. Staffing, management time, behaviour support and support for learning are being reduced in quite a large number of schools that have no reduction in their roll. It is difficult to adopt the same formula nationally.

The situation is hemmed in by other factors. Some of my headteacher colleagues have been told, "We're not touching the staffing formula, but you'll need to offer up savings of £150,000 next year." Headteachers cannot offer up savings of that size from a school's budget without affecting staffing. They get caught between a rock and a hard place, because they may well have agreements with the unions and local authorities that they should not staff below the complement for their school, but then they are forced to staff below the complement in order to make the efficiency savings.

You can see the difficulty of trying to set a national formula. However, there is a need for much greater consistency. Our worry is that children are being sold short or are not getting the full benefit of the education system in every part of the country in the same way, which, of course, is your concern, too.

Mary Mulligan: Absolutely. That was a full answer. The issues around funding are important, but my colleagues will pursue them, so, if you will forgive me, I will continue to ask about those who are training at the moment.

We have heard that there are some subject areas in which we have the right number of teachers coming through, but that there are others in which there are pressures or too many coming through. How do we establish how many teachers are training in individual subjects? Is that a formula that could be altered or would need to be altered?

Tom Hamilton: The Government uses the figures from the workforce planning exercise and sends recommendations to the Scottish funding council, which allocates the places to the universities. It tries to take into account the factors that you are thinking about in relation to secondary subjects, such as how many students are going into universities to train in a particular subject. The worry about teacher employment is undoubtedly beginning to have an impact on the attractiveness of teacher education programmes in universities. Teacher education has attracted extremely good-quality candidates. The number of people applying for primary programmes has traditionally been very high in comparison with the number of places.

Secondary is more difficult from a recruitment point of view, perhaps because there is a perception that it involves teaching teenagers and adolescents rather than children. The universities say that in this year's recruitment exercise they have had fewer applicants for places. The bad publicity surrounding the employment situation is beginning to impact on universities, to the extent that the pendulum could swing the other way, with the result that in a year or two we could be worried about not having enough people coming in.

Mary Mulligan: What information do we need to gather to feed into provision for the future to ensure that enough teachers come through training to meet policy demands?

Drew Morrice: The teacher employment group that the cabinet secretary set up is trying to wrestle with that question. It would be advisable to wait and see what emerges from that process. Some highly technical issues will have to be dealt with. When the results of those discussions come into the public domain, some of the issues around workforce planning will crystallise. It would be advisable to find out what comes out of the group's discussions.

Brian Cooklin: There are immediate practical issues, because in some subjects in the secondary sector the trend for a number of years has been that we have not been able to attract or recruit a sufficient number of students into teacher education institutions. Those subjects include home economics and physics. Worryingly, maths is an area in which there is a growing shortage. The situation is extremely difficult; what Tom Hamilton is alluding to might make it much worse.

We are worried that as it percolates through to people that they might have difficulty getting a job at the end of their probation, they might begin to ask themselves whether they should commit. More worryingly, for the curriculum for excellence to work properly, there needs to be feed-in to its development from all subjects. In our submission, I made the point that we have a golden opportunity. We have a group of extremely talented and skilled teachers who have been trained in the curriculum for excellence and in assessment is for learning strategies. They are up to date with everything that we want people to deliver for our children in school, but we are not able to give them a post. At the same time, existing teachers are trying to get their heads round a development—curriculum for excellence—that is not being resourced in any shape or form, and no time is available for them to work out how they must change and what they must do.

I realise that the issue is one of finance but, frankly, it is a no-brainer. We have the people to fill the gap. If we could appoint some of the probationers as curriculum for excellence teachers in primary and secondary schools, that would provide time for other staff to get up to speed—probationers could even help to train existing staff. All that would make a huge difference for children in the system. It depends on how much commitment we have to making the development work.

Tom Hamilton: The universities try to be flexible and to respond to national needs in what they provide, but they cannot do everything; they certainly cannot do everything overnight. They need consistency in the number of students coming in so that they can have appropriate staffing levels.

Brian Cooklin has mentioned the difficulty with home economics. The fact that the University of Dundee has a part-time secondary programme, through which it has developed—extremely quickly and at very short notice—a home economics route shows that the universities are trying to meet the demand. That is not plugging the gap entirely, but it is certainly helping to provide teachers in particular subject areas.

Mary Mulligan: That example has been given, but it is concerning to hear that an issue might be developing with maths teachers. I hope that the workforce planning group will pick up on that. Thank you for your answers.

Frances Jack: When I was at university, Moray House had an intake of 300, which represented a swell in the number. I decided that that was the year that I wanted to apply because I would have a better chance of getting in. I got in. For the following year, the university intake was to be cut to 150, initially. I do not know how such decisions are made, but the proposal sounded sensible, given that there had been a swell in the number in my year, school rolls were falling and there was a shortage of money.

However, the number changed to 300 again before I graduated, which means that 300 are being trained again. I wonder where the money comes from and who makes such decisions. If that decision had not been made, we would have ended up with a better match. Something happened somewhere and we on the ground did not know why—that was the reality at just one university.

Mary Mulligan: That relates to the mismatch that we discussed earlier, between demands created by policies and the ability to fund that to deliver the jobs. We will continue to come back to that.

Ken Macintosh: Does the employment of probationers in schools have an effect on vacancies for teaching posts?

Tom Hamilton: The cabinet secretary's teacher employment group has been considering that. The answer to your question is undoubtedly yes. We must address what can be done to ensure that that does not have a negative effect.

Brian Cooklin: It is a major management and organisational issue. It must be borne in mind that the system that operates in many local authorities is that the headteacher must plan for the year ahead by considering the timetable that is being offered, the available options and how matters are developing, then make the best estimate of where

staff will be needed. It is a juggling act every year to ensure that the right staff are in the right place for the number who come through.

In many instances, when a school declares its vacancies the local authority has three options: it can allow the school to advertise for interview; it can fill the vacancy with a teacher from another school, who has been declared surplus; or it can say that the vacancy will be offered to a probationer next year. Local authorities have entered into agreements with the Government and teacher training institutions about the number of probationers they are prepared to take. Of course, access to fully funded probationers is tied to that. If the full quota of probationers is not taken, no fully funded probationers will be provided. Local authorities must ensure that all those people are in place. That naturally has an impact on existing vacancies, because there is a danger of a vacancy being filled by a probationer for a number of years—it happens—because it is difficult to get a post for that probationer in their subject. It is great if there is a vacancy that can be matched with somebody who is coming into the area. How stable the whole situation is and how good it is for the children in the school is another matter.

If we can have a spread and get the vacancy filled permanently at the end of it, that is fine. We can then rotate, if you like, and different subjects benefit. It must be remembered that there is a big benefit for teachers in having a probationer in their department. As we have just said, probationers are bang up to date, enthusiastic, keen to see their subject develop and have new ideas. Teachers have come to me on countless occasions and made comments such as, “That was wonderful. That was great. Could we get somebody else like that? That was just a breath of fresh air and we are now trying this and doing that.”

There is a two-way learning process. It is not just about a probationer developing their skills and learning the trade, if you like; it is also about the payback that longer-serving members of staff gain from that. However, we do have a difficulty with vacancies. Mr Macintosh’s question is apposite because the employment of probationers definitely has an impact.

Ken Macintosh: I just want to check something. Perhaps Mr Morrice can help. I suppose a probationer teacher provides additional benefits for everyone—the probationer, the staff and the pupils—but we hear anecdotal reports of probationers being used as cheap teachers to replace permanent teaching posts. I regard that as an abuse of the system rather than as a benefit.

Mr Morrice’s paper referred to the fully funded probationers that Mr Cooklin mentioned, the preference waiver scheme and the impact on supply teaching. Perhaps he has suggestions for all those areas.

11:15

Drew Morrice: I will start on the preference waiver. It will be considered by the teacher employment working group. It requires to be looked at. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that if probationers are attracted to areas with vacancies for their probationary period, they stay there. We need to consider how effective the preference waiver scheme has been in managing where people end up, so that not everyone is concentrated in the central belt and some people can be attracted to the outlying areas, where there are still some shortages. The preference waiver scheme is a means of attraction that is worth considering.

Placing probationers in vacancies is in effect what we do at the moment. Brian Cooklin is correct: it is a question of councils balancing being able to advertise a number of vacancies and having a throughput of recruitment with still having places for people to be on the induction scheme. Tom Hamilton alluded to the discussion in the employment working group. We could make probationers supernumerary to the staffing complement of a school, which might address in the short term the question of their taking up perceived vacancies, but it would simply shift the question of future employment more dramatically to the end of that period because there would appear to be nowhere for them to go.

Part of our concern about the use of the fully funded probationers scheme is that probationers are placed where there are, in effect, no vacancies. The perception is that, at the end of the year, they are most remote from the possibility of permanent employment. That point should be picked up in the teacher employment working group. I do not know whether there are clear answers, but there are certainly things that could be done.

The final point is about supply. Brian Cooklin said that South Lanarkshire Council has a permanent supply pool. A number of councils have permanent supply pools, but this might be the time to reinvigorate the system of supply, and the Scottish Government is in a position to assist that process. If people have permanent supply posts, they are not lost to the system; they are retained and working in the system, and their skills are being utilised in some capacity. The EIS would particularly like councils to get back to considering what kind of permanent supply pool they might need. We need supply teachers in the system.

Ken Macintosh: My understanding is that another impact on supply is that probationers take

all the supply posts, meaning that registered teachers who used occasionally to work supply now no longer have that opportunity. Is that right?

Drew Morrice: There is anecdotal evidence for both sides of the argument. For example, some people would say that part of the supply market that might otherwise go to probationers is taken up by teachers who make themselves available for it after taking premature retirement or retiring on age grounds. They often become the first port of call for some schools because they are known to the school and to the pupils.

There are several issues about the availability of supply and how supply teachers are employed that require serious examination. I do not suggest that they will be covered by the teacher employment working group—it might flag up issues beyond its scope that need to be looked at—but supply is certainly an area that it is worth exploring further in discussing employment opportunities for probationers.

Ken Macintosh: Does it worry you that there seems to be such variation in how local authorities approach using probationers? There is huge variation between those that, for example, take up their full allocation and benefit from fully funded places and those that do not.

Drew Morrice: Yes. If there is a commitment to the induction system and it is the world-class scheme that we believe it to be, certain local authorities should be availing themselves of it. The current system puts too much pressure on central Government to persuade councils to take their allocation and then get fully funded beyond that. That requires a look.

Brian Cooklin: There is an issue of capacity—the capacity of schools and local authorities to cope. We have referred already to the intensity of the programme. Schools and local authorities need to put in a great deal of support, work and investment with probationers. The same applies to student teachers.

I am the first to encourage—that would be the euphemism—my colleagues to ensure that they take a full quota of student teachers, because take-up is variable. At any one time, we will have anything up to 20 student teachers coming, but that is exceptional. We do that because the school is committed to the idea, but other schools have taken practically no student teachers in the past, and they have had to be persuaded—again, a word I use advisedly—that they have to buy into the idea. The same thing happens with probationers.

When we try to sustain and deliver the programme satisfactorily, we have to understand the pressures that individual schools or authorities can be under. I can understand that they might be reluctant to commit every year. They might say, "I can't do it this year, but I'll do it next year." Or they might say that they are coping with a refurbishment or a new build and will take more students next time. There can be good, practical reasons for the reluctance.

Authorities and schools generally want to support the system of probation, but members are right to suggest that the response is variable.

Tom Hamilton: Finding placements for student teachers has become increasingly difficult for universities over the past few years because of the number coming in.

Brian Cooklin: It is all right—I have them all.

Tom Hamilton: A national development has been a system called practicum, which links the universities and the local authorities. In some ways, it has been really positive. Three consortia across the country are looking into student placements, but until the system developed, the links would often be between a particular member of staff and a particular headteacher who would take students. Brian Cooklin is right to suggest that some other headteachers would not take students.

Local authorities are now much more involved. They are in the loop when it comes to deciding how many students they can cope with, and they will liaise with schools about who will go where. Local authorities have an important part to play in the professional development of student teachers.

Drew Morrice: Tom Hamilton is right to say that that development is welcome, because the system is now managed more effectively. A difficulty that schools and individual teachers now face is that greater demands are being placed on schools to support student teachers. There is a greater requirement for class-committed teachers, principal teachers and headteachers to prepare reports for the teacher education institutions. Brian Cooklin covered the point earlier, but that is a counter-pressure that works against the type of positive planning development that Tom Hamilton has just described.

Tom Hamilton: A real partnership issue arises for the universities, to ensure that the system in the schools is managed appropriately.

Elizabeth Smith: Mr Cooklin, you said that you have three options when a vacancy arises: you can place an advertisement in the newspapers; you can take somebody from another school; or you can take a probationer next time. Is that a decision for you, as a headteacher, or for the local authority?

Brian Cooklin: The local authority decides, but the situation varies across the country.

Margaret Smith: Just under 50 per cent of the workforce is over the age of 50, so I would like to ask about retirement. Has the number of teachers retiring been as expected? Much of the discussion about workforce planning makes it sound like a black art rather than a science. Have we got things right? Is there a good balance between the number leaving the profession and the number entering? We have heard about some difficulties, so we know that it is not just a case of having the same figure in both columns.

Brian Cooklin: The situation is extremely difficult to manage. Trends seem to be changing. In the past, schemes have been available for premature retirement, but those have largely disappeared because they are costly to local authorities. As a result, the predicted number of leavers might have changed.

The issue has to be addressed. Retirements have saved some schools from cuts that would have been especially damaging. I had to lose two posts. I had two people retiring, but they did not happen to be in the right subjects. However, by what would be called management—or jiggery-pokery—we ended up meeting the staffing requirement.

In the past few years, I have had to come down from a staff of 95 to 81. In that time, we have made only one teacher surplus. From the point of view of managing people, that is significant. If I can possibly avoid it, I do not want to lose the talents and skills of individuals in the school. Further, losing them through retirement means losing a tremendous expertise that helps considerably in, for example, the training of other teachers. It is difficult to get a handle on the balance that you are asking about.

If we consider just the numbers, more or less the predicted number are retiring, but in the secondary sector there is always the issue of whether they are in the right places and subjects. Various authorities have had retirement schemes and offers, but it was made clear that they were not being offered in English or maths. If you happened to be an English or maths teacher you could not apply because at the time authorities were concerned that they would be unable to fill those vacancies. That is the situation on the ground.

It comes down to the human aspect: personal motivation when people feel that they are getting to the end of their career in an intensive, stressful and tiring job. Whether teachers stay depends on whether they feel they can still give it their all. I am over 50, but I can say that I have no intention of retiring for many years because I love my job and I am still able to do it. I think.

Margaret Smith: We are all delighted to hear that.

Brian Cooklin: I am being inspected next week, so I will tell you after that.

Margaret Smith: Does anybody else want to have a go at that?

Drew Morrice: On its website, the Scottish Public Pensions Agency publishes the details of retirement. Contrary to the point that Brian Cooklin made, premature retirement compensation varies among councils. In 2003-04, 592 teachers were allowed to take premature retirement. In 2007-08, the figure was 423. There is not a massive difference. In 2003-04, 1,063 teachers retired on age grounds; last year, the figure was 2,011.

Where there are trends, they tend to be in areas of smaller take-up, such as ill-health retirement. The number of people who have been granted ill-health retirement has halved, which might be due to changes in the categorisation of ill-health retirement applications, but the number of teachers who have left early by taking a reduction in their pensions has increased almost threefold over the same period.

The problem in workforce planning in relation to retirement is not that you do not see the bulge coming—that is picked up in the census—but that we have people like Brian Cooklin who, once they reach 60, can choose when they retire. With a fair wind he can go on until he is 65, but with a bad inspection from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, he might go in a couple of months' time. We know that people are going to retire between 60 and 65, but exactly when they choose to do so is an individual decision that is based on their circumstances.

Margaret Smith: Is the total number of teachers expected to increase, or is the increase in student teachers intended only to replace those who are leaving the profession? Is net growth being planned or budgeted for?

Drew Morrice: That is a question for workforce planning. The workforce planning exercise will commence once the teacher employment group has completed its work. Workforce planning will not anticipate future political decisions; it will respond to political decisions that have been taken. That relates to my previous point about class sizes. Does workforce planning try to build into the system the view that councils may move to reduce class sizes during this session of the Parliament and, if it is required to do that, when does it put the teachers into the system?

11:30

If teachers are put into the system too early, a pool of unemployed teachers is created, but if they are put in too late, councils will not find the teachers to reduce class sizes. That is the political

dimension. Workforce planning should not be a political exercise; it should respond to concrete political decisions. Such issues are therefore probably a matter for your side of the table rather than for this side of the table.

Brian Cooklin: One practical aspect is that, as the background papers for the meeting indicate, there is an intention to plan future growth to respond to the increasing birthrate—you will have seen figures showing that the birthrate in Scotland is increasing. The natural consequence of that is that there will be more children to teach in the primary sector and at some point that will feed through to the secondary sector. That is being factored in but, as Drew Morrice says, the difficulty is that we must do the practical job, taking into account the things that we know we can predict, while also responding to other situations.

Aside from the political decisions, there are stresses and strains such as those that we have experienced recently in certain parts of the country as a result of the sudden increase in the number of pupils from migrant families. Suddenly, local education authorities must deal with a huge increase in the number of children whose first language is not English in a particular school or area. Support for those children might not be available in the local authority because it did not expect to get such a flood. Inverness is a case in point, but other parts of the country have experienced the same thing. It is difficult for any workforce planning regime to cater for such an influx of people in a specific area and it is difficult for a local authority to manage the situation.

Margaret Smith: I have been made aware of that issue in my local schools—as I am sure have colleagues in theirs—and have asked questions about it. Could workforce issues with regard to migrant families be managed better through centralisation? We have hit a problem with a lack of specialists in all our schools. Is that one of the situations where workforce planning must be considered at a regional or city level rather than in an individual primary school?

Brian Cooklin: There is no doubt that it is easier to manage the situation and cope in the environment of a large area such as a city. Take the experience of Glasgow as an example. When it signed up for the asylum seeker scheme, the influx of people was programmed and organised. It was easier to manage because the authority knew that a certain number of people were coming.

In addition, in a city, it is often possible to tap into existing communities. If we are looking for language support, we know that there are Turkish and Kurdish communities living here and we can find out whether someone would be willing to come and translate, interpret or do other educational work with members of the community. It is possible to be creative. Glasgow has had a very good scheme, but all these schemes are under pressure because of finance—I hate to keep coming back to that but, although we may want to do these things, the money may not be available. Also, in rural areas and smaller towns, the people are not available because there is no pool to draw from.

It is not a matter of centralising the process, because it will always be a question of how we can respond to need. People were not able to predict the numbers involved and where people would come from. In one area, there might suddenly be a need for fluent Polish speakers to cope with the situation that has arisen because a huge number of Polish families have come to the area, whereas in another area there may be a new Roma community and we need people who know about the needs of that community and how we can respond to it. That is a difficult thing to do either centrally or locally, but cities certainly have a better chance of responding to such changes creatively.

Ken Macintosh: Mr Cooklin talked about always coming back to finance. I want to ask about the issue. Mr Morrice mentioned the mismatch between central policy and decisions that have to be made locally within a tight budget. What role do funding decisions and financial settlements play in the problems that we are experiencing with probationers?

Drew Morrice: I will provide some illustrations. Glasgow City Council cut staffing in both secondary and primary sectors, and therefore sent out a message that it was not in a position to recruit probationers. Frances Jack said earlier that some councils interviewed all probationers at the end of their probation period. Glasgow used to do that, but this year it discontinued the practice. Because of the cut in staffing standards, it could not proceed. Renfrewshire Council has also made cuts in staffing standards, as has Aberdeen City Council. In the past, you might have found that councils differed in terms of staffing: some would be contracting, but others would have areas of enhancement or growth. The trends that we are picking up now all lean towards cuts in staffing standards.

Earlier, Brian Cooklin referred to cuts in support for managers. That has an impact on staffing. The picture across Scotland's councils is pretty bleak and negative.

As I said earlier, our evidence is that education budgets have been cut in around two thirds of Scottish councils, while the others report relatively neutral budgets. Those cuts have an impact on the number of teachers required in the system. That is the reality of the mismatch.

I will use the example of Renfrewshire again. Last year, English class sizes were set at 20 in S1 and S2, but the council has now abandoned that policy, which has an impact on teacher staffing numbers.

Brian Cooklin: Obviously, there is a huge impact. I will not repeat points that I have already made, but Drew Morrice has just given you vivid illustrations. The problem has been brewing for a number of years, because we have been making efficiency savings for a number of years.

However, let us be balanced. We have also had investment because of those efficiency savings, which has helped to deliver new primary and secondary schools in various parts of the country, as well as new information technology infrastructure. All those things are extremely expensive and they soak up large parts of the budget. For example, the IT maintenance contract in my school is equivalent to one and a half teachers. Right away, that is a major budget commitment.

For many years, we have been asked to make management and efficiency savings. Clearly, we cannot keep doing that without there being an impact on every aspect of staffing. That means that schools are not offering vacancies. They are not filling vacancies, or they are filling them with surplus teachers from elsewhere. They cannot fill the vacancies with probationers, including those who have just completed their probation. That is the bottom line, and that is the case across most of Scotland. In only one or two authorities has that not happened, and that is simply because of particular budget situations.

The difficulty in managing such a situation in a school setting is that it fractures arrangements and hits what we are able to deliver. We might have put behaviour support in place, as part of the better behaviour, better learning policy, but that has now been withdrawn. We might have invested in expensive training in behaviour support, which we cannot now make use of because those teachers have been taken away from that role. They might still be able to fulfil the role in their own classroom, but they cannot give their colleagues the benefit of their training. Those are direct impacts on support for learning.

The kind of support that we are able to offer children with special needs or additional support needs may no longer be available because of cuts. Those are relatively easy reductions for schools to make. They can say, "We will not fill the vacancy for support for learning because we are committed to having front-line staff to deliver certificate classes every day."

All those things have an impact, and our big worry is that they will continue to have an impact. This is not a one-off; the problem will accelerate and become worse. That will clearly have an impact on people's perceptions of coming into the profession, as we said earlier.

I could go on long and wearyingly about the details of how such things are damaging education and affecting individual schools, but I think that I have probably made the point as forcibly as I can.

Ken Macintosh: I am interested in the removal of ring fencing and the protection that ring fencing may have given to education budgets in the past. I am thinking of funds such as the national priorities action fund. Has that had an impact at your school, or are you aware through the EIS that there has been an impact? Have education budgets been doubly squeezed in that way?

Brian Cooklin: Given that the removal of ring fencing happened in the middle of a financial year, it is too early to tell what the result is. We will have to wait for what some people are describing as the three-ring circus to work its way through. Some of my colleagues are concerned about how hard directors of education and education authorities will fight for budgets in their area.

The subject was raised when I was at committee on a previous occasion. Naturally, there are competing pressures on local authorities. If a local authority has a care or social work budget that is running away—if the authority has an above-average number of older people for whom it has to provide personal care or people who require social work support—it will say, "We need to meet that budget, so we will have to look at making cuts elsewhere and education will have to take some of the pressure." Does a battle then ensue in the authority with people saying, "I will fight for my share. I will shout the loudest and create the greatest pressure"? People are worried; they did not have those pressures in the past.

That said, on a practical and personal level, we are all grateful to be free from having to go through the hoops of filling out the forms and producing the same evidence to gain access to money that we thought should have been allocated to us in the first place to enable us to do our job. Local authorities welcome the fact that their personnel are no longer tied up in the marvellous exercise of finding out who can best access the funding. We still have to do that in applying for lottery funding and, if any member has had the misfortune of having to undertake a European funding application, they will know that Europe has invented whole new layers of form filling. It is good to be rid of all of that in the school setting, but we have major worries. Unfortunately, that has all come at a time when budgets are being squeezed and efficiency savings are having to be made. Schools are therefore not seeing the

benefit of the end of ring fencing that they might have seen in a different economic climate.

Ken Macintosh: I have a brief question for Mr Morrice. Is there a cost difference to a school or local authority between employing a probationer or newly qualified teacher and employing an experienced teacher? Is that making a difference in the current market?

Drew Morrice: No, I do not think that it is. The scheme of devolved school management that operates in virtually every council in Scotland means that central costs are met at council and not individual school level. We do not have the market that appears to be operating in England where the type of teacher that a school employs has a material effect on its budget. Long may the Scottish system continue. If we were to go down the road that England has taken and devolve staffing budgets to school level, we would create a market that it is in no one's interests to have.

Ken Macintosh: My next question is for Mr Hamilton. Earlier you said that the problem of employing probationer teachers was a recurring one and that we had experienced a similar problem back in the 1990s—

Tom Hamilton: And the 1970s and the 1980s.

Ken Macintosh: I am sure that we will live through it again in the next decade, after the noughties.

What was the root of the problem in previous years? Was it because of financial or policy issues or a mismatch between central leadership and local government?

Tom Hamilton: Perhaps I should not admit to having led a student sit-in the 1970s.

You are right that there are recurring issues. Policy and budgetary decisions are central to what went on in the past and what is going on today.

Ken Macintosh: The trend has worsened year on year. Over the past two years, ministers in the present and former Administrations have intervened to provide finance. Will that happen again? When the minister intervened last year, it was to provide £9 million for additional teachers—I think that she created 300 additional posts. As Frances Jack suggested, those additional numbers may have exacerbated the situation, albeit that the additional posts are part of the drive to reduce class sizes. Do you think that the minister will have to intervene soon with additional resources to solve this year's problem?

11:45

Tom Hamilton: We will repeat the survey later this month and we will have the results some time in October. It will be interesting to see the facts and figures that come out of this year's survey, so that we can see what the position is throughout the country. I do not know the answer to your question, but we will certainly add the information into the pot for discussion.

Brian Cooklin: I do not think that anyone can predict what is going to happen in that respect. It is not particularly helpful for education if it comes down to whether there is sufficient pressure or whether a problem has been identified, to which the Government now has to find a solution. The Government is in a difficult position economically in that, as we are told frequently, the concordat says that the money has been given to local authorities so it is a question of how the local authorities deliver on the ground. The practical problem is that, for whatever reason, there is not enough to deliver.

Although extra posts were created, I did not see any of them. You have to remember the size of the system. Although 300 posts sounds like a lot, it is not a great deal when it is spread across the primary school system. Would it meet and deal with the perceived problem that was identified politically and about which a decision had to be made?

It is not particularly healthy, in terms of planning or in terms of being able to manage and organise a school, to think that something might just appear, possibly at a late stage in one's plans. We try to get away from that financially. There was that quick-spend nonsense, when someone would say, "Wait a minute, we've found a bit in this budget—spend £70,000 by tomorrow," or, "Here's 300 TVs you didn't ask for—stick them somewhere." I hope that we have learned from that and that we are not doing such things now. Having been a teacher since the 1970s, I can remember people piling up computers in places because they did not have points to plug them into. I hope that we have learned the lessons of the past and that we are not going to get into such situations.

My concern about getting into a position in which any Government thinks that it needs to respond to a political situation is that what it does needs to be sustainable in the long term and effective in delivering policy.

Drew Morrice: The political reality is that there is a clear mismatch. The cabinet secretary has asked a group to look at teacher employment and at whether workforce planning has systemic faults. If workforce planning is doing the best that it can on variables that it cannot control or predict, that will raise a political issue. At that point, the cabinet secretary will have to decide whether a short-term fix can be applied or whether longer-term issues need to be addressed in relation to the interaction with local authorities, which raises fundamental

questions about the concordat. When the report of the working group comes out, sharp political issues will have to be addressed.

Ken Macintosh: I agree totally. I certainly would not recommend any short-term fixes. Mr Cooklin said that the Government claims that local government has the money, but Mr Morrice identified that two thirds of Scotland's councils are introducing education cuts. Do you think that local government has the money, or do you think that it has only some money?

Drew Morrice: It goes back to the point that Brian Cooklin made earlier. When councils are taking decisions, they are looking across the whole delivery of services at council level. From our perspective of representing teachers, we see cuts in the education service as a diminution, but it is for councils to answer whether they have a sufficiency to deliver across the board. In terms of a quality education service, we are facing bleak times.

Aileen Campbell: We have already touched on the distribution of vacancies. We have anecdotal evidence from John Stodter, who said:

"We are getting stories of hundreds of individuals applying for one job in some parts of Scotland, while other authorities can't fill vacancies."

Are there areas of the country where probationers are more likely to find permanent employment?

Frances Jack: When I applied to the teaching council when I was at Moray House, I had to choose five authorities in which to do my probationary year. I put the five in order of preference, with Edinburgh at the top. I got my top choice, but if I could choose again, I would choose West Lothian Council because it places its probationers in permanent teaching positions when they are fully registered and meet the standard.

As I was in a different authority, I was not able to apply for any West Lothian posts until there were surplus vacancies. However, probationers in West Lothian could apply for the vacancies in any other council in Scotland. There seems a degree of unfairness, but if I could do it again, I would apply first to West Lothian Council because it gives preference to those whom it has trained. I am not saying that that is right or wrong, but it is the reality.

The figures show that some councils give teachers who were probationers a permanent post in greater numbers than others. In Edinburgh, the number of those who graduated is very different from the number of those who are employed.

Tom Hamilton: I have been out of the university system for almost four years. However, in the early years of the teacher induction scheme, the universities organised recruitment fairs in the lead-up to new teachers filling in the local authority preference form. Some of the rural and island authorities were extremely good at coming to the fairs and selling themselves—both what they would do for teachers in their probation year and employment prospects beyond that. They tried hard to attract new teachers and then hang on to them. I thought that that was a positive move.

Drew Morrice: Our evidence echoes Tom Hamilton's point. Rural and island authorities have been better able to offer permanent employment to probationers. Aberdeenshire Council is a case in point. A year ago, it was recruiting primary teachers from Northern Ireland, which raises issues about initial placement in the teacher induction scheme and mobility thereafter when teachers have fully qualified.

Brian Cooklin: The *TESS* figures in the committee papers give a fairly clear picture of how the situation has developed throughout the country. Roughly speaking, we would be lucky if 20 to 25 per cent of probationers in an area ended up getting permanent jobs. A fair number can get supply or temporary jobs, but the situation varies enormously. We referred earlier to the situation in Glasgow where, having had 254 probationers, the council could offer only 14 of them a permanent job.

Much depends on the local situation but, as I mentioned earlier, if there is an issue with rural and Highland and Islands vacancies, that is not borne out by the situation for probationers. Generally speaking, there has been a higher uptake in rural areas: nine out of 15 probationers in Orkney and six out of 19 in Shetland were given permanent jobs. Aberdeenshire Council has been mentioned—29 out of 121 probationers were given permanent jobs, but 64 got supply jobs and 11 temporary jobs. In Angus, the situation was similar.

There is a pattern that such authorities can employ probationers. That would give us hope on the issue of rural vacancies not being filled, as there is a pool of people who are available. As the first president of my organisation who has managed to visit the Shetland branch, I know that it is keen on the fact that, once people get there, they buy into the lifestyle and want to commit to living there. If those areas can get teachers into them for probation, they are likely to keep them.

Aileen Campbell: Is enough done to ensure that probationers make informed choices about where they want to work? You referred to local authorities that are perhaps not as able to attract teachers to fill their vacancies. Do they do enough in their own local authorities to promote teaching as a profession and to say that people who go and

come back have a greater chance of a permanent position?

Frances Jack: There is a financial incentive to tick the box to go anywhere. In my year, people were paid £6,000 for that. That said, someone could end up working in an authority area that they had not chosen—in the Stirling Council area, for example, rather than the outer islands. Among people who are free agents, take-up of the option to tick the box seems to be successful. Going elsewhere is attractive to people who are on their own because they know that their future job prospects will be much healthier than if they stayed in the central belt. That option is taken up—good use is made of it. Personally, I would not like that to change.

However, when I was a probationer, no authority tried to sell itself to me. We had a wonderful—I am not just saying it—presentation from the General Teaching Council in the December before we graduated. The decision about where to apply seemed to come round very quickly. Probationers have only about five days in which to return their form or send it in electronically. It is a big decision. Having a careers fair would be useful, so that people could make a choice with their eyes open. I explained the position in West Lothian, but I did not know about it until after the event.

Brian Cooklin: To be fair, authorities do as much as they can in the circumstances but, again, practical issues abound. An authority could have held a careers fair last year and given the impression that it had vacancies, but it would have been leading people up the garden path because those vacancies would not have been there when the budgets came through.

We must consider the human situation of some people who make such a move. Someone who has gone to a rural location as a probationer might be told that there is no vacancy and that they will not get a job in the area, even though they might well have upped sticks and got a mortgage or rented a property there. They will be away from the central belt and out of the reckoning for a job in the part of the country in which the highest number of jobs are thought to come up. It is fine if there is a match between the number of probationers and the number of vacancies—in such a situation, an authority will be able to place all its probationers—but, increasingly, that might not happen if there is financial pressure, in which case someone who has decided to go anywhere will feel doubly let down.

Let me take the example of one probationer whom I supported. Unfortunately, she did not cope well with the mass interview—which I described earlier as a cattle market—was extremely nervous and did a poor interview. That was upsetting for her and for me because I knew that she was an extremely talented and skilled teacher. She got a bit more support and had a bit more practice. Once that extra work had been done, she applied all over the country and ended up getting offered jobs in places such as the Borders, Dundee and Angus. She took one in Dundee, has moved there and will, I am sure, be happy; she will certainly be an asset to the school that she has gone to. She was prepared to make that move and that is what happened further down the line. It was the right move for her and she was able to make it, but other people whom I supported at the same time were not able to make such a move.

Aileen Campbell: In which subjects is there an issue? You mentioned maths. Are there other subjects in which probationary places are more likely to lead to permanent jobs?

Brian Cooklin: I mentioned earlier that home economics, physics and maths are at the top of the list. University figures show that those are probably the three standouts at present, but we do not know where need might arise in the future.

Drew Morrice mentioned another big worry but, fortunately, we are not in the position that exists south of the border, where about 10 per cent of teachers in secondary schools are completely unqualified. That cannot happen in Scotland, because teachers here must be qualified and registered. It is also the case in the English system that a significant number of qualified teachers are not teaching their subject, which means that people end up teaching subjects in which they have no qualifications. That is particularly true of maths. It would be a big worry if that were the case in Scotland. Such a situation is okay for a temporary period if it is not possible to get a match of supply. A school might not be able to get a maths teacher to fill in for a maths teacher who is on maternity leave or off sick, for example, so an English teacher might end up teaching a maths class for a temporary period. That is never good, but the situation is not nearly as extreme as the one south of the border. We certainly do not want to end up in that position.

The most worrying question in the secondary sector concerns whether there will be an increase, because of financial pressures, in the number of subjects that are short of the people whom we need to come in.

12:00

Tom Hamilton: I was an English teacher in the past.

Brian Cooklin: Likewise.

Tom Hamilton: When supply was required to teach maths—to cover for an absent colleague, for example—you would expect to have the support of

the maths department to provide that the work could be taught. An English teacher would not be expected to teach higher maths, but the situation was undoubtedly difficult.

Drew Morrice: Workforce planning seeks to put secondary subjects into three broad categories, and English and maths would be fairly open-ended in terms of places at teacher education institutions. When subjects such as home economics experience difficulties, workforce planning will try to emphasise recruitment in that area. Whether that can satisfy demand is a different question. However, workforce planning tries to take account of trends and demands in the system. The difficulty with maths in particular has been that TEIs have not been able to fill all their places in maths teacher training. It remains to be seen whether that will be addressed.

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): Good afternoon—we are just a minute into the afternoon. I would like to ask about the teacher induction scheme and the comparison between the new and old systems—pre-McCrone and post-McCrone. Is the situation worse or better now than it was before, or the same?

Tom Hamilton: It is dramatically better. Looking back over my entire career—a generation—I would say that the development of the teacher induction scheme over the past half dozen years is one of the things of which Scottish education should be most proud. I started teaching in 1978 at a large secondary school. We had an assistant head who was in charge of the 11 probationers who started that year, and he did one thing for us—he came round and took orders for belts. We have moved on considerably. Later on in that first week, he proceeded to get rather merry at a staff cheese-and-wine and had to get carried out, and I thought, "Welcome to Scottish education."

What has happened in the past half dozen years has marked a dramatic difference. In the 1990s, people were graduating and going into what was still a two-year probation period, but they then had to find their own employment so that they could meet the standard required to gain full registration with the GTC. That could take years, and many schools in some cases—some people were in upwards of 60 schools to get through their probation period. That was no way to treat people coming into a profession.

The new teacher induction scheme, with the reduced contact time and with a guaranteed support person in the school, is a real jewel in the crown of Scottish education. We must not nullify or negate that. It is something to be very proud of.

Drew Morrice: I echo that strongly. The 2001 agreement is a landmark and should be sustained in all its aspects. The induction scheme, with its opportunity for probationers to go into a supported environment to complete their probationary period within one year—with support at both school and local authority levels during that year, and beyond if necessary—is a model of excellent practice. We recently had visitors from Japan who asked about the 2001 agreement; the aspect that most clearly attracted them was the induction scheme.

As Tom Hamilton said earlier, the scheme has been picked up in America as well. It is an excellent scheme that gives people the opportunity to develop skills. In Tom's generation and my generation, you sank or swam as a probationer. You had very little support, other than from principal teachers, who might look after you. Your merits as a teacher were not developed as well as they are now. The system is rigorous and intense, but the quality of teachers coming into the system has been greatly enhanced by the teacher induction scheme.

Tom Hamilton: One of the other things that we are concerned about in Scottish education is how we develop leadership for the future. The people who have come through the teacher induction scheme are really well placed, and some of them are already starting to move into leadership posts in schools.

Brian Cooklin: As another English teacher, I have to use a different word. Tom Hamilton described the situation as being "dramatically better"; I would describe it as infinitely better. I will say to him, however, that as a result of the financial situation there are no such things as staff cheese-and-wines nowadays.

I have the honour of representing Scotland in some international meetings and sectors. I was at one a few months ago at which more than 50 countries were represented. I was asked to speak about our developments and about curriculum for excellence—other countries are extremely interested in that. Without exception, however, what people wanted to talk to me about was the quality of our teacher training, of our probationer system and of our continuous professional development system. As Drew Morrice has already alluded to, those are the outstanding successes of the national agreement, which we want to ensure are not in peril. Part of the problem, however, is that they are time, energy and commitment intensive. The excellent programmes that local authorities have to support probationers, which I mentioned earlier, are costly, as are the programmes—in terms of time, at least—that run in schools. I would not like any diminution of the support for probationers and student teachers who are going through the system. That support is a tremendous asset for us, and we would not want it to be in any way undermined.

Frances Jack: I have been through only one system, but I can say that I would not have felt equipped to teach anyone or anything without the probationary year, which gave me the opportunity to put into practice all the theory that I learned at university. Forgive me if I am telling the committee what it already knows, but I had one and a half days in which I could have been boning up on my Japanese—I did not do that, but the opportunity existed—or visiting other schools, which is what I did. I was with the City of Edinburgh Council, and we had a fantastic set of CPD courses. We cursed them on Fridays, when we had to go yet again, but I was told that it cost £100,000. It was worth every penny. Big cutbacks have already been made for this year, although surely the content will stay the same.

There are lots of aspects to teaching. It is a big puzzle, and every part of the probation year is needed to give the teacher the bigger picture. That practical experience is vital—you hit the ground running. I could not have imagined graduating from Moray House and having a break, rather than being in a school straight away.

The support is a two-way thing: teachers are not nannied or held by the hand and it is partly up to the individual what they make of their probation year. There are lots of opportunities, and it is up the individual to knock on doors and make use of as many of them as possible. Those opportunities were not given to us on a silver plate. The induction year is like a silver cup that is given—you have to make of it what you will. I would not like any of that to change, other than to make it a year and a half perhaps. It is intense, and there is a lot to absorb. You start in October, then, from December, when you register with the GTC, not only are you learning to teach and so on, you are learning to apply for a job, which is a job in itself. There is huge pressure from that point on.

I had a positive experience and was treated with great respect as a probationer. That said, I gave respect as well, so I was treated as I treated others. There is normally a mentoring system, but if there is not, it is up to the individual to speak up for it. There is the EIS and the GTC and other authorities and people that one can turn to, such as the head teacher of the school. It is a fantastic programme. We are sitting here today probably because we think the programme is wonderful. We are churning out people who have been through the system, and we need to give them the chance of a job to use all that.

Given that so much time and money is being spent on that world-class system—I am proud to have done that part of my education in Scotland, having previously been educated in another country—it does not make sense not to have the opportunity to use what has been put in place.

Kenneth Gibson: A key sentence in paragraph 2.4 of the EIS submission states that

"Workforce planning can be significantly influenced if the assumptions do not match what actually happens."

That is the nub of what we are talking about today.

In my education, I remember entering Miss Hadden's primary 1 class in 1966, when there were 59 children in the class. When I was at secondary school, in the 1970s, I had no science for two years because of a chronic teacher shortage. The Scottish education system has been haunted for decades by the possibility, if not the reality in many instances, of chronic teacher shortages. Is one of the issues that we are considering today how we can fine tune workforce planning to the most significant degree? We must reflect on the process of workforce planning. People who finished their probation year in 2008 graduated in 2007. That means that they went to university in 2006, which means that they applied and were accepted in 2005. That means that the planning had to take place in 2004-05. I am talking only about postgraduate diplomas in education; the planning process no doubt goes back even further for bachelor of education degrees.

To be fair to the previous Executive, which obviously took many of the decisions, back in 2004-05 the number of people who were getting permanent full-time jobs at both primary and secondary level was very high. Given that there are imponderables such as the number of retirements, which has already been mentioned, and others that we have not touched on such as the drop-out rate for undergraduates in a given year, how can we get it right?

I will give another example. In 1985 everyone who applied to Jordanhill to be a business studies teacher was accepted. There was a chronic shortage, so provided that they had the minimum qualifications, 100 per cent of applicants were accepted. A year later nobody was accepted because they could not place in schools the people who had previously graduated. The issue of having to get it right has been rolling on for many years. How can we fine tune a system that has such a long lead time? Although I sympathise with Frances Jack, our society cannot go back to the situation in the 1960s and 1970s when there were chronic shortages of teachers. How do we get the balance right?

Drew Morrice: The teacher employment working group that the cabinet secretary established will have to wrestle with those issues.

Margaret Smith said that she thought that workforce planning was a dark art rather than a science. It will never be a science, because the minute that something has variables within it or assumptions built into it, those will solely be

assumptions—they will never be totally predictive of what will happen. Retirements, ill-health retirements and people resigning or leaving early will all have an influence. You are also correct to say that we cannot have a situation when in August there is a 100 per cent match between people and employment, because as the session unfolds there will need to be some slack in the system to pick up supply demand.

The problem is not workforce planning, which plans some time ahead and sets out a pattern. What has made the problem worse over the past few years, as Brian Cooklin said and as I have said, has been councils taking short-term budget decisions in March or April that are implemented in August. That can have a dramatic immediate effect.

Communication between councils and the workforce planning exercise could be improved, but the immediate problem that we now have is a consequence of the very difficult financial circumstances that councils face.

12:15

Kenneth Gibson: Earlier, Mr Morrice made the point that a universal staff formula might assist—a point that is in the EIS submission. Other panel members may take issue with that, however. If the formula were to be implemented, how would you deal with geographic differentials between local authority areas or those that relate to deprivation? For example, the population in West Lothian is rising whereas that in the Western Isles is declining. Putting to one side what you said about authorities' short-term decision making, would removing that issue from the control of authorities make the situation better or more complex and difficult?

Drew Morrice: A basic staffing formula was in place around the 1970s I assume that it was provided by the former Scottish Office. Since that time, a situation has developed that sees four different school staffing models in operation across councils in Scotland. Applying a uniform staffing model across all councils would bring greater certainty to the process. Kenneth Gibson is absolutely right in what he says.

We cannot micromanage, however; some staffing issues have to be picked up locally. A core staffing element needs to be set for all councils to accept. Thereafter, it would be open to councils to provide specific or enhanced support depending on schools' circumstances. In the absence of a core staffing element, the soft underbelly of staffing levels becomes a target for budget cuts. We are facing that problem at the moment.

Earlier, we heard different perceptions about the tight financial situation that councils face. If education staffing officers and not council leaders were to be asked about the removal of ring-fenced funding, I think they would say that they would prefer ring fencing to be retained because of the certainty that it brings to their jobs. A core national staffing standard would ensure that we would see no more of the short-term fluctuations that we are seeing at present.

Brian Cooklin: The key element of what is required in the system at all levels is what Drew Morrice has referred to as "certainty" and which I call stability. Stability would be achieved as a result of clear financial planning and the establishment of clear parameters for the long term. I talked earlier about international aspects of the debate. We are often told to look at how education authorities, internationally, cope with situations. Whenever I have asked people in other countries—I will take Finland and Ireland as examples—they almost always make the point that they are in it for the long term. People tell you that the decisions that they are taking are based on plans that were made 20 years ago; they say that their success comes down to having reached fruition point.

Our education system has been bedevilled by the opposite of that: we have suffered from short-termism. A new Government, Administration, civil servant or whomever comes into the system and says, "This is a good idea. Let's try this." If they do not say that, they say, "Let's try this out, pilot it and roll it out." We have not had the stability and certainty that the system needs. When it comes to political decisions, that lack of certainty is a factor in terms of financial planning. We need to know what we are going to budget with or what we are going to be working with.

Some schools receive budget information only in August, which is half way through the financial year. It is only then that they finally hear the extent of any cuts or what is about to hit them. That does not allow anyone to plan or respond. By the same token, decisions are made of which Parliament would rightly be proud. Earlier, I mentioned the additional support for learning legislation. That said, do members of the Scottish Parliament really think through what is required on the ground—how things will be delivered and staffed—when they consider legislation before passing it? Issues such as staffing are very important, as is whether budgets allow for any developments.

One need only to look at the existing pressures on many schools. For example, a school requires support assistants if it is to support a child with severe physical needs, but those posts tend to disappear in tight financial conditions. Even if authorities decide not to cut a post, they say that it can be funded in one school but not in another, or that they will have to remove support at primary

level because it will have to be provided when the pupil reaches the examinable stage of secondary school.

Stability and certainty are needed right across the board if we are to deliver what the committee wants, which is for us to be responsive enough in workforce planning to get the employment of probationers and other staff right in the future.

Tom Hamilton: The universities also deserve stability. The point was made that there will be £X one year and £Y the next year. That is difficult for the universities to cope with in considering their staffing.

The one-year programme can be turned on and off like a tap, and there is a much shorter lead-in time for planning for it, but the four-year programmes allow the universities greater staff stability. I know of no research that suggests that one route is a better route into teaching than the other. Both routes produce good teachers, but they have to be complementary, and the universities must have the staff to allow such routes to be developed.

Kenneth Gibson: With bachelor of education courses, the number of teachers who will be needed six or seven years ahead must be considered, which is extremely difficult, given that no one can predict what the local authority budget or even the Scottish Parliament's budget will be in that time period.

The Convener: That concludes the committee's questions. I thank the witnesses for attending the meeting and wish Mrs Jack in particular good luck. I hope that she finds a permanent position soon.

There will be a brief suspension to allow our witnesses to leave.

12:21

Meeting suspended.

12:22

On resuming—

The Convener: Before we conclude our consideration of employment of probationary teachers, we need to agree our next steps. Members will be aware that the paper on probationary teachers that the committee considered last week suggested that we hear from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning. Do members agree that we should take the necessary steps to ensure that we hear from them?

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Convener: Are members happy to wait until after the publication of the GTC's next survey in October until we do so?

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Convener: That makes sense, particularly as the minutes of the working group are not open to the public. We will not then take evidence in a vacuum, as the report will be in the public domain.

Social Work

12:23

The Convener: The next agenda item is consideration of an approach paper on social work, which the clerks have prepared and issued. It contains a draft programme. What are members' views on the paper?

Christina McKelvie: The paper is focused and serves the committee well.

I have five years' experience of the training section in Glasgow's social work department. It has been proposed that Universities Scotland should come in to consider qualifications issues: the majority of social care staff have qualified through their workplace rather than through the local university, so we should get someone to talk about that. The Scottish vocational qualifications centre in Glasgow is a good example in that context, but I am sure that there are others throughout the country who would give evidence.

One of the issues that I wanted to consider was how far down the line we have gone with the regulation of care and the requirement of staff to register with the Scottish Social Services Council five or six years after legislation was passed. I want to find out whether the needs of staff have been addressed in respect of their being able to register and aiming to be competent practitioners in their roles.

Aileen Campbell: I wonder whether we could broaden the number of folk from whom we want to take evidence. I have had some constituency casework on adolescent care in particular; perhaps other members have had the same. Is there any room for hearing from someone with a specialism in that?

The Convener: That is a valid point. However, the point of the approach paper is to offer a general overview. Then, if we think that there is a particular area within social work that we would like to consider, we will be able to do the more focused work. The suggestion that we might want to concentrate on adolescents might be perfectly valid, but we should take some general evidence first, then we might reach the conclusion that it is an area in which we might want to do further and more detailed scrutiny. You are right to suggest that just hearing from the witnesses, even if we tweak who we see, means that we could not possibly cover all the issues in great depth or detail.

Mary Mulligan: I appreciate that we are just trying to take an overview at the moment and that we will pick up on particular aspects. Aileen Campbell is right to say that adolescent care is one issue that comes back to us constantly. If we do not get a response from the suggested witnesses at this stage, we might want to come back to the issue. I support what Aileen Campbell said; many of us have been approached about the subject.

The "Changing Lives" report was very much about general concerns about social work and how the profession was developing. Staffing issues and how we address them were also a major concern, and certain procedures were put in place around, for example, fast-tracking in particular. I expect that to come up in general evidence, but we might want to return to it if we do not get evidence about how we are recruiting and retaining staff within social work.

Margaret Smith: Can I ask a daft lassie question? I think I am allowed to today.

Who on the list might be able to give us a perspective on the interface between social work and the voluntary sector?

The Convener: It would probably be Who Cares? Scotland, but that might be an issue if it was just from its specific viewpoint of working with children. That might be an area that is lacking in our approach; maybe we need to consider a specific witness who could talk to us about the voluntary sector and the role that it plays in delivery of social work services.

Margaret Smith: So it was not such a daft lassie question.

The Convener: It was not a daft lassie question at all. It was very perceptive and well spotted.

Christina McKelvie: We have the consideration of the legislation on, and the review of, the children's hearings system. Some of the evidence that we are seeking might run alongside that nicely. Some of the issues around services to adolescents are not so much about social work as the health care services to which they have access. There is a bit of an overlap with a few issues, and it is quite timely.

The Convener: With those comments being taken into account, are committee members content to go ahead with the approach as outlined?

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Convener: I now close the public part of the meeting.

12:30

Meeting continued in private until 12:35.

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