The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 4 December 2012

Session 4

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EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
32nd Meeting 2012, Session 4

CONVENER

*Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)
*Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP)
*Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
*Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)
*Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)
Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD)
*Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Kay Barnett (Educational Institute of Scotland)
Professor Donald Christie (University of Strathclyde)
Professor Graham Donaldson (University of Glasgow)
Tony Finn (General Teaching Council for Scotland)
Pam Nesbitt (Association of Headteachers and Deputes in Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Terry Shevlin

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

Education and Culture Committee

Tuesday 4 December 2012

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Stewart Maxwell): Good morning. I welcome members to the Education and Culture Committee's 32nd meeting in 2012. I remind members and people in the public gallery that electronic devices should be switched off at all times. Apologies have been received from Neil Findlay, who is in Brussels on committee business, and from Liam McArthur, whose plane has developed technical difficulties—I am glad to say that that happened on the ground, before the flight was to start.

Under item 1, does the committee agree to consider in private its approach to the scrutiny of the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill at stage 1?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Teacher Education and Career-long Professional Learning

10:01

The Convener: Item 2 is an evidence session on teacher education and career-long professional learning. The Scottish Government recently published the report of the national partnership group, which was set up to consider how to implement the recommendations of the Donaldson review of teacher education.

I welcome to the meeting Kay Barnett, who is convener of the Educational Institute of Scotland's education committee; Professor Donald Christie, who is head of the school of education at the University of Strathclyde; Professor Graham Donaldson, who is an honorary professor at the University of Glasgow and the author of the Donaldson report; and Pam Nesbitt, who is president of the Association of Headteachers and Deputes in Scotland. We hope to be joined shortly by Tony Finn, who is the General Teaching Council for Scotland's chief executive. I say to the panel members that, if they agree with an answer from another panel member, it is not necessary to repeat that answer, so not everybody has to answer every question.

We will have a broad session on a large piece of work that covers a wide range of areas. I will begin by asking all the panel members for a brief reaction to the national partnership group's report. How can its recommendations be best delivered?

Professor Donald Christie (University of Strathclyde): I am happy to comment in general terms. The national partnership group's report is to be welcomed and it provides a good road map for implementing Professor Donaldson's recommendations.

In my view, the report is warmly welcomed by all the stakeholders who are represented today. I hope that my colleagues will agree that the stakeholders with whom we engage nationally agree that we have an opportunity to move forward in ways that will be extremely beneficial to the teaching profession and ultimately, we hope, extremely beneficial to learners in our schools.

We have the mechanisms for implementation through a range of partnerships. Many features of the landscape that are in place will help, including the agenda that has been set by the GTC—our strong professional body, which has an important part to play in establishing the standards within which we operate. Another feature that is under development and is well along the road to implementation is the move towards professional

update, which creates conditions in which career-long professional learning will become a reality for Scottish teachers.

My general response is a warm welcome for the report, which is ripe for delivery and is timely in 2012.

Kay Barnett (Educational Institute of Scotland): We, too, welcome the cabinet secretary's statement and the report, for the key reason that the EIS as a professional association is committed to teacher professionalism and very high standards of professional learning and teacher development.

We particularly welcome the fact that teachers' organisations will be represented on the new implementation board. That definitely goes some way towards repairing some of the damage that was done by having a national partnership group that excluded teachers' organisations as partners. There is a recognition that the voice of teachers is important in taking forward the recommendations. Having said that, I think that it is important to point out that, as you drill down into the detail of the different plans and how the recommendations might be implemented, there are likely to be tensions and concerns. I hope that the implementation board, working in genuine partnership, will provide a positive way forward. I have a number of examples that I can give in relation to potential concerns—they will probably come out in the discussion.

Like Donald Christie, we think that the whole area of partnership and how you involve Scottish teachers across the sectors will be crucial. To give one example, we think that it is right and proper and fitting that there should be local partnerships that are pivotal in the delivery of teacher education and career-long continuing professional development. However, if you look at the document, you see that there are still question marks over what we mean by a partnership. We will have to be careful that we include teachers as partners at every stage. For example, there is no mention of LNCT in taking forward certain strategies for delivering appropriate CPD. That is happening already, and there is good practice in certain areas of Scotland involving our university colleagues and indeed our employers. There are areas of good practice that involve Scottish teachers being appropriately consulted—that is important.

The other thing that has to be considered at this point is the fact that teachers and lecturers are learners. If high-quality professional development for teachers is going to be provided that will in turn lead to a better educational experience for learners, we have to take cognisance of the economic situation and the professional situation. It is not an easy time for Scotland's teachers, so we have to be clear: the aspirations in the report are laudable and the EIS is committed to professional development, but we have to consider capacity issues. Are the time and the resources for learning and teaching there in practice? We broadly welcome the report, but we want to be open, honest and explicit about the fact that there are challenges ahead.

The Convener: We will no doubt get to the details, as you so rightly said, but I will just ask the daft-laddie question, as I do not want anyone else to be embarrassed. What does LNCT stand for?

Kay Barnett: The local negotiating committee for teachers.

The Convener: That is helpful—not only for me but, I am sure, for the official reporters as well.

Professor Graham Donaldson (University of Glasgow): I, too, welcome the publication of the national partnership group's report, for a variety of reasons. One reason is that, when I undertook my original review, it was clear to me that the key to realising the full potential of the ambitious agenda that we have for Scotland's young people—partly through the curriculum for excellence but also more widely in terms of our longer-term ambitions for young people—lies in the quality of our teachers. It was clear that we need to create the conditions to maximise the support that we provide to teachers so that they can rise to the undoubted challenges that there are—not just in terms of the curriculum for excellence but, as Kay Barnett said, in terms of the current environment. Real challenges face us all in maintaining quality in public services in general and in education in particular.

I welcome the fact that, nearly two years on from the publication of "Teaching Scotland's Future", we still have, right at the heart of the education agenda in Scotland, a focus on taking forward the process of supporting the professionalism of our teachers. Also, the fact that the NPG report has set some pretty tight timescales for the implementation board at first sight looks daunting, but the reality is that we need to maintain momentum—we need to move on this as quickly as we can. As Kay Barnett said, I do not have the slightest doubt that, when it comes to the nitty-gritty, lots of robust discussions will be had, but if we are all agreed on where we want to get to, I am pretty confident that the issues that will arise with implementation can be resolved.

Pam Nesbitt (Association of Headteachers and Deputes in Scotland): The AHDS very much welcomes the national partnership group's report and the cabinet secretary's response to it. We feel that, on the whole, the report is very positive. We are very pleased with the strong focus that has

been placed on the leadership agenda right across the board in education.

The report addresses many key areas for professional development and learning, which is crucial if we are to have the high-standard profession that we aim to have in Scotland. I agree with my colleagues who say that, at points, the report is aspirational; in particular, it will be interesting to see how well we can keep to the timescales that it proposes. There are areas that we welcome but on which the detail still requires to be teased out.

We appreciate the need for the implementation group to be small in number, to allow things to move forward, but we hope that there will be an awareness of the need for wider consultation when we get down to the finer detail of certain parts of the recommendations. Sub-groups might need to take forward specific points.

Our association also makes a plea for a joined-up approach by all partners, particularly Education Scotland, the General Teaching Council for Scotland, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland and the Scottish Government. We often hear of workstreams being done by all the various partners and organisations, so we make a plea for them to work together throughout the process.

As Kay Barnett pointed out, we should be mindful of the current landscape and the climate in education, which means that we must try to deliver what the report recommends with decreasing capacity, not just in schools and budgets but in local authorities and at the centre.

We are very comfortable with the proposals and we look forward to working with the implementation group to make progress. We urge that consultation and engagement continue to be undertaken with the whole profession in order to make the process a success.

The Convener: I welcome Tony Finn to the committee. What is your initial reaction to the national partnership group's report? Do you have any thoughts on its implementation?

Tony Finn (General Teaching Council for Scotland): Thank you for inviting me. I apologise for being late. In taking a risk to avoid a particular problem, the taxi driver put us into a worse situation. We should have left earlier.

I agree with my colleagues. You would probably be surprised if I did not, because I was a member of the national partnership group. In addition, I will be a member of the national implementation board. It is an important report that signals a way forward. It is a bit disappointing that it has taken two years to get to where we are now. There are some areas that we still need to work on, the most important of which is probably partnership. We need to think carefully about how we implement that partnership to ensure that those who will benefit from what is proposed—pupils—do benefit.

The report is principally about teachers. The GTCS is very comfortable in saying that the vast majority of teachers in Scotland already work to a high quality standard. However, it is important that they want to improve and that they are given encouragement and support to allow them to improve. The report does just that. It recognises that we have a system that starts from an assumption that the better our teachers are, the better the learning will be for pupils.

As a group, we have identified some differences within these islands. South of the border, it is not the case that all teachers have to have the same skills that are expected of teachers in Scotland. Increasingly, however, the pattern across the world is moving towards the model that Graham Donaldson has highlighted. Indeed, in the past few years, we have found that there has been significant interest in the work of the GTCS.

I suggest that the report gives us an opportunity to reflect on where we are, to consider where we should be and to identify ways in which we might reach the targets. At a time when we are trying to improve the curriculum for pupils, it is appropriate that we should try to improve the profession that delivers that curriculum to pupils.

Sometimes teachers believe that, once they are qualified, they are qualified; in fact, the profession needs to be dynamic, as society is dynamic. We need to have in place opportunities that allow teachers to increase and improve their skills as they go through their career, and I think that the report gives us opportunities to do that. The report is aspirational and challenging and it will take some time to deliver. There will be difficulties in the way that it is delivered, but we need to try to ensure that that is done consistently without insisting that everyone does things in exactly the same way. I think that it is a good report and I welcome it.

10:15

The Convener: I thank all of you for those comments. We will try to keep our questions to specific areas as we move through the various parts of the report, so I ask members to indicate if they want to contribute as we go along. We will begin with Liz Smith.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of interests, as I am a member of the GTCS.

I know that this is a very difficult question but, nonetheless, I think that it is an important one, given the vast array of recommendations in the report. If we are absolutely agreed that the most important thing is a qualitative improvement in the outcomes for young people, what is the most important focus of the policy area that you are developing?

The Convener: Who wants to begin?

Professor Donaldson: I am happy to attempt to answer that question, although I suspect that my answer will not answer the question.

In arriving at the recommendations in the original "Teaching Scotland's Future" report, I was very clear in advising against people cherry picking the recommendations. We have the opportunity, and it is very much the intention to look at the totality of teacher education. In a Scottish context, and indeed in a European or even a world context, this is a unique chance to stand back and look at the entirety of teacher education.

In policy terms, the message that runs through the entire report is about establishing the culture and principle of, and the support for, career-long learning. The recommendations are interlocking and are deliberately designed to provide a coherent overall approach to teacher education in Scotland. I have been pleased that so far, by and large, the need for that total agenda has held and people see the need to advance on a number of fronts simultaneously in order to take forward the agenda.

Interestingly, just last week the European Union published a statement on teacher education that specifies 10 actions that it believes member states ought to take. All 10 actions are already being undertaken through "Teaching Scotland's Future".

The Convener: We are ahead of the curve, then.

Professor Donaldson: We are.

Kay Barnett: Where I agree with Graham Donaldson is that high-quality professional development is obviously at the root or kernel of the issue. We need to develop structures and mechanisms that lead to a continuum of support for teachers. To do that, we need to break down the historical and inappropriate divisions between the development of high-quality initial teacher education for student teachers and professional development for early-phase teachers and others, such as me, who are at the other end of the spectrum. For that, we need mechanisms at school and establishment level that involve the universities, employers, teachers and, I believe, teachers' organisations. I know that the EIS, for example, wants to be proactive in taking part in ways of developing the skills and abilities of our members, who are Scottish teachers. At all levels, we need to provide the right resources to deliver that high-quality professional development.

Let me give a couple of examples based on what is in the report and based on what has been happening across the educational landscape so far. How do schools as communities actually work in partnership to support the students who are on placement? How do we do that at school level? There will be challenges there.

Some of the challenges that stem from the report might relate to a shift in emphasis away from university colleagues assessing students to a partnership approach. However, to do that, we will need discussion and agreement and resourcing of all partners, whether that means our colleagues from universities coming in and working in the school community or teachers in the school community having a professional responsibility or interest in supporting students or early-phase teachers. We need to consider how we facilitate that process and allow teachers to do that while they continue teaching and carrying out all the jobs and duties that they want to deliver in their everyday lives as teachers. We then need to consider how we support early-phase and other teachers in a joined-up way.

That might be a general answer, but the process has to be facilitated, because we want to break down the historical and false barriers between students, probationers and teachers. We need to work together in partnership, and that includes teachers working together.

Liz Smith: That is a helpful answer, but I want to come back in on the issue. Do you think that most progress needs to be made on the system of co-operation and the methodology, rather than on inculcating new skills in teachers? Do you think that the skills are there but we have not quite brought them out yet because the system is not right? Which of the two is more important?

Kay Barnett: In the past 10 years, progress has been made on supporting teacher professional development, particularly through the induction scheme for beginning teachers, which has been heralded not only in Europe, but internationally. There is a strong basis of knowledge and understanding and a professional commitment to professional development. However, we now need fit-for-purpose strategies and ways of working at school level that involve all partners. One of the basic points for the EIS and, I think, other teachers' professional associations, is that the process must be facilitated and resourced.

Liz Smith: Right. Sorry to be a bit pedantic, but I want to probe the issue a little further. Do you feel that the current teacher training system is

producing the right skills in our teachers and that the problem is that the skills cannot always be developed because the process and the co-operation between schools, colleges, universities and various other stakeholders is not right?

Kay Barnett: Great moves forward have been made on initial teacher education. For example, work has been done at the University of Aberdeen and other universities on inclusive practice as part of initial teacher education. That is an example of how initial teacher education has grown and developed and has introduced an important part of the necessary knowledge and understanding, which means that that is no longer a bolt-on once teachers get out into schools. Across the landscape of initial teacher education, there have been encouraging steps forward. That is also the case in relation to beginning teachers, who work to the professional standards, which are now more comprehensive and inclusive.

If we are to continue that positivity, we must deal with the major issues to do with how we facilitate and resource the process within school communities. Developing partnership working and strategies involves different people in the process having different responsibilities and remits. That must be facilitated without diluting the quality that we aspire to achieve.

Professor Christie: Just to follow on from that, Liz Smith asked whether the skills are there or what is missing. I agree with Kay Barnett that there are many ways in which things have progressed in the areas that are covered within initial teacher education. If Liz Smith is asking about the single most important change, which was her initial question, that would link to what Professor Donaldson said and is something to do with the culture of and the commitment to professional learning across the professional life course as something that is not compartmentalised and does not need to wait until teachers are established in their professional careers.

The commitment to continuing professional development can be seen and evidenced right from the beginning of initial teacher education. There are some strong examples of that, which we could offer as evidence that that is happening, whereby students are given the opportunity to exercise responsibility for their own learning right from the outset in a four-year undergraduate programme, as is the case at the University of Strathclyde. We have a student CPD society that is extremely lively and committed to the notion that students can initiate and take responsibility for their own learning right from the outset, as the beginning of a professional journey that will take them right through the professional life course. It has been extremely inspiring to see the extent to which, given that kind of opportunity, our students grasp it and run with it in imaginative ways, leading learning in their own right and creating a context for their own learning that is, frankly, inspiring and potentially very influential across the landscape.

It is about enhancing that culture of commitment to professional learning, which is widespread within the profession but can be enhanced through greater emphasis. There are ways in which we can focus specifically on career-long learning. In the second sub-group looking at career-long professional learning, a great deal of emphasis was placed on the idea of professional inquiry as a stance that can take things forward.

Coming back to the question of the impact on learners, I think that another potentially influential cultural change is in trying to foster a culture of evidence alongside the commitment to professional learning, so that the activities that are the focus of professional learning can themselves be directed towards school improvement and the kinds of curriculum development that our curriculum framework at the moment provides the opportunity for. Curriculum development is now an on-going process under the curriculum for excellence and provides a context for this kind of activity. That culture of evidence in which the activities that teachers are involved in are characterised by a stance of inquiry can be influential and will be guided by the evidence that is coming back from the learners themselves.

Tony Finn: I concur with what my colleagues have said. We are at a point when we have the opportunity to make a culture change in Scottish education. The traditional model of CPD has been that we do things to teachers because we expect them to learn to do the things that we want them to do. However, professionals take responsibility for their own learning. I remember—perhaps 20 years ago—being a member of the national staff development group that determined what teachers should be taught to do. I am not saying that that is the wrong approach, but it must be balanced with giving teachers the responsibility for their own professional growth.

In the past few years, we have seen a significant understanding among teachers of that professional requirement. Through the Donaldson report, the national partnership group and the work that we are doing in the General Teaching Council—indeed, we are building it into our new standards, which we have published and which will go to the council for approval tomorrow, I hope—we are giving teachers the expectation that they will take responsibility for their own professional growth and that they will be supported to meet those needs. Clearly, we cannot only have teachers determining wholly

what those needs might be; there must be a process of engagement with their managers. We hope to deliver that through our system of professional update.

10:30

This is a significant moment for us because, if we manage to make that culture change, those teachers who have been teaching for a very long time—like I was—will have the same enthusiasm about changing what happens in their classrooms as the young people to whom Donald Christie referred. I have been part of that movement, and I am hugely impressed by the work that the young teachers are doing. Some of them are out in schools this year, and I would quite like to go and see how well they are doing. I cannot believe that they will fail.

The charter teacher programme and the teacher induction scheme—at their best—and the growth in professional learning opportunities over the past 10 years have begun to change the culture. We are recognising systemically the importance of that change and putting things in place that will make that the norm and much more common, when once that was only an expectation.

Pam Nesbitt: I want to answer Liz Smith's question in a slightly different way. She asked about qualitative improvement and outcomes for young people. I agree with everybody round the table that it is not one outcome that will ensure or deliver qualitative improvement; what is crucial is measuring the impact of all the things that we implement.

There are a range of professional learning opportunities that have little impact on the learner unless they are applied consistently. Students who are going through initial teacher education may have placements with little impact because of the lack of consistency in how they are moderated and assessed. Professional learning is crucial, but there needs to be consistency in the opportunities that are available around the country and the types of professional learning that people can take part in, from initial teacher education to the initial phase, into career-long training, and right through to leadership development at the other end of the scale. We need a shared understanding of the approach—not just one route but a route that is moderated.

The commitment and the sign-up of professionals are crucial to the impact on learners. Although the report talks a lot about teachers and the professionals, it also mentions the impact that there will be on learners. We need to be able to show that there will be an impact through what we are doing as a profession. Leadership at all levels is important: if the profession can lead its own learning and know that it is having an impact on the learners, that will make the biggest difference.

The Convener: Before I bring in Clare Adamson, I must request—it is more of an instruction—that the witnesses make their answers a little briefer. We have a lot to do and there is a lot of detail, but if we carry on like this we will get through only a few questions in the time that we have available. The questions should also be kept brief, please.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): On the question of consistency, I get the feeling that mentoring almost needs to be formalised and standardised. The report says that there should be a Scotland-wide solution to a lot of things but, obviously, a lot is delivered in the microcosm of the school. My understanding is that not all schools take student teachers and, even if they do, not all departments take student teachers. How do you see that situation moving forward? Should or should we not go down a hub route? Where is the quality assurance of the process in the school at the microcosm level?

The Convener: That is quite a long question.

Tony Finn: The quality assurance will rest ultimately with the General Teaching Council for Scotland. We have always accredited teacher education courses; under the outcomes of the national partnership group, we must now accredit partnership as part of that, too. Therefore, we will need to have a closer look at what is happening.

Pam Nesbitt: Mentoring is very important. During discussions at professional update meetings with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, we have raised the capacity for mentoring because it does not come naturally to everybody. We have therefore talked at numerous meetings about the need for training and professional development in coaching and mentoring skills.

Another point is that schools are under pressure to take students because of the number of placements that universities need. As a headteacher, I would say that students are not always placed with the teachers who will give them the best mentoring and coaching experience—but that can happen if we are under pressure to provide as many placements as we possibly can.

There is a mixture, which includes providing the training for teachers, ensuring that they understand that the standards are applicable to them as teachers, and enabling them to reflect on their practice in the profession so that they can work with students. One of the age-old problems that we face is that teachers see the standard for full registration as something that they achieved when they first registered and not as being

applicable to them throughout their careers. The review of standards will help with that.

As I said, training in mentoring skills is crucial.

Kay Barnett: I will start by talking about mentoring in general, and I will try to be brief. Mentoring is crucial across the profession but there are times when structured, facilitated and resourced mentoring is absolutely crucial. Again, I would use the success of the induction scheme as an illustration of that. In 2002, when the first tranche of probationers went through the induction scheme, resourcing for mentoring was ring fenced. The EIS argues that there has to be a structured resource for mentoring in relation to certain aspects of developing the profession.

The issue of hub schools is crucial for the EIS. The term needs to be redefined. Initially we were against the concept of hub schools, especially if we are talking about them in the historical or traditional sense as schools that are treated in a special way with extra resources going into them. We believe that there should be equity of provision of mentoring and support for students, as there should be for any teacher. We need to build capacity right across the educational community and throughout educational establishments in Scotland so that teachers receive support and do everything possible to make sure that students get an appropriate experience when training.

If we are talking about the school community as a hub of appropriate activity where people work in partnership to support students, that is fine. An article in last week's *Times Educational Supplement Scotland* says:

"There has been a general move on the part of participating local authorities not to focus in future on specific 'hub' schools but to spread the programme across all schools, largely on grounds of equity."

That is very important.

Professor Donaldson: I have two or three very quick points to make. In the original report, I tried to outline the fact that part of the culture change that Tony Finn was talking about is that all teachers need to see themselves as teacher educators. We need to have a much more collegiate culture in which teachers learn from each other. We are moving in that direction in Scotland.

In the context of all teachers seeing themselves as teacher educators, it is simply not good enough for schools to think that, by taking students for teaching practice, they are doing universities a favour. We have to break that culture completely and move to one in which it is a professional obligation to be part of the process of renewing and growing the future of the profession.

We also need to ensure that students get the best possible experience at the starting point in their careers. It is not acceptable that students are going into situations in which they do not get proper mentoring, teachers do not fully understand the standards, and the process does not work well for the student. Equity works for students as well as for teachers, and we need to be sure that we are giving students the best possible platform for their future careers. We need to work to ensure that the entire system has the required capacity, so we have to develop the concept of hub schools to allow that to happen across the entire education system.

Professor Christie: I am uncomfortable with a narrow view of hub schools. We should think in terms of clusters of schools and learning communities that are working together, in an approach that is as widespread as possible. That is a much more conducive way forward for developments.

On how mentoring can be supported, we need to think about two things in addition to what has been said. First, the integration of initial teacher education with induction is part of the way forward. As Kay Barnett said, the mentoring processes in the induction scheme are well established, and we need such an approach to be extended. The initiatives and pilots that are going on around the country are looking at embedding and giving more substantial form to the relationship between university-based staff and school-based staff in the ITE and induction processes. Experiences of mentoring across that divide in the ITE and induction phase can be pooled and melded to support the processes. School-based roles for university staff, who work in conjunction with colleagues in schools, offer a way forward.

Secondly, there is a need for formal opportunities for training in mentoring. There are well-established programmes across a range of providers, but investment could be directed towards actively supporting people who have a particular interest in developing mentoring skills and advancing their formal training in that regard.

The Convener: We move on to the selection criteria. The issue has generated some interest.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): Professor Donaldson recommended more rigorous selection criteria for trainee teachers, including literacy and numeracy tests. What does that say about the quality of teachers that we have? Are we saying that there is a problem with literacy and numeracy? Non-compulsory literacy and numeracy tests were proposed. Why? I, for one, would like to know that any teacher who is teaching kids can read and write.

Professor Donaldson: We should remember where we are with curriculum for excellence. The notion is that all teachers should be responsible for literacy and numeracy; in secondary schools, the responsibility is not confined to English and maths departments.

I was not saying that we have a significant problem with literacy and numeracy among our teachers; I was saying that we have a right to expect that the teaching profession will exemplify the highest standards of literacy and numeracy and that we need therefore to be clear at the process of selection about what those high standards mean.

The question was more when tests should be compulsory than whether they should be compulsory. I recommended that prior to a person's embarking on a course of teacher education there should be a clear assessment of their existing literacy and numeracy skills, to determine how big the challenge will be to get them to the point of acceptability by the end of the course so that before they become a fully registered teacher they exemplify high standards of literacy and numeracy. If areas needed to be addressed, support for the development of their literacy and numeracy skills would be undertaken while they were at university.

Partly on grounds of equity across the profession, I was worried that to set too tight a threshold for entering teacher training might cut out potentially good teachers who would be perfectly capable of developing their skills during the course of their university careers. I was concerned that we should not lose those people to the profession. That is why I suggested that the decision should come at the end rather than the beginning of the course.

10:45

Colin Beattie: Notwithstanding what you have said, Professor Lindsay Paterson has commented:

> "we should be looking for students in the upper half of the distribution of attainment and we're not getting them".

That implies that there is a bigger problem than we understand.

Professor Donaldson: Some interesting work has been done at the University of Dundee. It shows that, in terms of numeracy as opposed to mathematics, people who have attained quite high mathematics skills do not always perform as well as they should in basic numeracy because that has not been reinforced and developed throughout their careers. It is perhaps surprising that, in diagnostic tests at the University of Dundee, students with higher mathematics do not sometimes do particularly well in numeracy tests. Therefore, it is not as simple as saying that a qualification can be used as a proxy for literacy and numeracy.

I am absolutely convinced that there is no reason at all why anyone who has the qualifications to enter teacher education should not, by the time that it is completed, have the literacy and numeracy skills that are required for curriculum for excellence expectations of literacy and numeracy in the teaching profession. I am very confident about that.

Colin Beattie: Is there a value in literacy and numeracy tests if they are not compulsory and not everybody is judged by the same yardstick?

Professor Donaldson: People are judged by the same yardstick, but specific areas in which people need to improve are diagnosed. We are not talking about people who are illiterate or innumerate; rather, we are talking about people who already have good literacy and numeracy standards. The question is which areas people need to develop and be aware of in order to exemplify the highest standards. For people who are already at a level to be able to enter university, those areas perfectly capable of being addressed in the course of their university education.

The Convener: Let us bring in some other people. We will start with Professor Christie.

Professor Christie: I want to respond to Lindsay Paterson's comments on the quality of entrants into the teacher education programmes. I simply disagree with him on the matter.

The profile of the qualifications of entrants into initial teacher education is very high, and initial teacher education is increasingly demanding to enter. I will take my own university's undergraduate programme as an example. Typically, there will be between eight and 10 applications per place. We are moving to our new undergraduate programme next year in the light of the implementation of Professor Donaldson's report. The tariff level for the current cycle of recruitment will be three As and a B in highers for entry direct from fifth year, and five highers at that sort of level for entry from sixth year.

We are talking about very well qualified individuals. The stipulation that higher English will be part of the profile of skills is an absolute sine qua non, of course. We are not talking about poor-quality entrants into the programmes. The same is also true for entry into one-year postgraduate diploma in education programmes for those who have already graduated from university. Entry into those programmes is very competitive.

I wanted to put the alternative view to the committee.

Tony Finn: It is important to note that there are entry requirements for all teacher education

courses, which the General Teaching Council for Scotland sets. We are currently reviewing those requirements, and we will produce revised ones in the spring.

It is also worth bearing in mind that a number of people who go into teacher education do not go directly from university. Some will have gained a degree and the necessary qualifications in mathematics and English, but they may not have used those qualifications in whatever career they have pursued. There will also be people who have done a course in university in which strength in literacy and numeracy was not a focus but was a prerequisite for them to enter university in the first place.

I think that Professor Donaldson is saying that we are not looking at a default situation in which there are a whole load of teachers who are not literate or numerate. The press has chosen to characterise the recommendation in that way. We are saying, "Let's make sure that teachers going into classrooms have an understanding of what they will face and, as literacy and numeracy are so important and are becoming the responsibility of every teacher, not just English and maths teachers, let's make sure that they understand the detail of what they might need to do." The diagnostic tests that Professor Donaldson has suggested have been helping teachers to top up those skills and ensure that they are ready when they go into classrooms.

Pam Nesbitt: The issue is more about raising the awareness of the importance of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum than about saying that our profession has a problem with literacy and numeracy. Many of those in the profession are degree qualified or indeed have taken master's-level qualifications, but if we are going to state in curriculum for excellence the importance of literacy and numeracy not only in health and wellbeing but across all areas we must ensure that those in the profession do the same and focus on keeping their literacy and numeracy skills up to date.

Kay Barnett: With regard to recommendation 1 in the Donaldson report, it was the context that was important to EIS. In that respect, Lindsay Paterson is quite wrong and Graham Donaldson is correct. We must ensure that we do not lose potentially very good teachers, that support is available and that there are specific ways of helping individuals develop their skills and become highly skilled teachers who can make a valid contribution to the education system. It is about the support element.

The Convener: Did you have a supplementary, Liz Smith?

Liz Smith: Yes, but before I ask it I should say that I believe that a huge amount of very good progress is being made on the literacy issue. However, given the problem that we have in Scotland, with one in five pupils leaving secondary school without adequate literacy skills, how long do we have to wait before we can prove to parents that we are making that good progress?

The Convener: Do you want to start, Kay?

Kay Barnett: First of all, I know that there are different shades of opinion on this question but I believe that there is a clear message that we have to get across to parents. The press and certain sections of the outside community have made play with the issue, and I simply do not think that it is the problem that they think it is.

The issue is connected to the previous question. If we can be absolutely clear about why recommendation 1 is so important and the ways in which the support for teachers is being addressed in relation to the literacy and numeracy elements of initial teacher education, it will take us part of the way towards showing that there is a solution to the issue. Nevertheless, as I have said, I think that the issue is being overplayed.

The Convener: I am sorry to interrupt, but if the figure that Liz Smith quoted of one in five leaving school without adequate literacy skills is accurate or accepted—I see people shaking their heads at that—how can you say that the issue has been overplayed? The number seems quite significant.

Kay Barnett: I cannot give you a detailed answer on the accuracy of the statistics.

Liz Smith: The figure was in the last programme for international student assessment report.

Kay Barnett: I cannot actually talk at great length about different opinions on those statistics, but I stand by my view that they are being overplayed. If we are seeking to open up the whole debate about the literacy and numeracy of learners in Scotland—and not just the teachers who are teaching those learners—I will have to respond by highlighting a host of things in relation to learning and teaching and conditions in educational communities and establishments.

Liz Smith: Although there is no question but that huge progress is being made, there remains a very difficult statistic that suggests that not nearly enough of our young people are sufficiently literate and numerate. Indeed, that point was made in evidence that the committee recently took from employment and business associations and the business community. What do we have to do to reduce that number and show that real improvement is taking place?

Kay Barnett: As I said, answering that would need an exploration of how we create the learning and teaching conditions to make an even greater impact. We would have to talk about early intervention; learning and teaching conditions for nursery and pre-school education; different aspects of early intervention that affect teachers' ability to do their job; and what happens right through a young person's experience in every sector. That is a huge question that needs to be addressed and explored, but it would take far longer than the five minutes that are left of the meeting.

The Convener: We have more than five minutes, but other people want to get in.

Professor Christie: I will try to be brief. Obviously, the question is hugely important. Given all the international assessments, we must acknowledge that we have a significant problem with the attainment gap in Scottish society and education. That gap largely—not wholly, but in significant ways—reflects social conditions. Despite major efforts, our society is still characterised by inequality. The Scottish Government is addressing that, but there is a long way to go before the gap is closed and social disadvantage is dealt with. A lot can be done and a lot of work is going on that can address some of the issues, including those that Kay Barnett has just mentioned.

I will give an example that perhaps explains some of the reasons why I am optimistic, given the current context in which closer partnership characterises what we are trying to do. Partnership needs to involve all stakeholders, including parents and communities as well as those who are involved in teacher education more formally. The example that I would cite is work that is going on in north Glasgow.

A colleague at the University of Strathclyde who is an expert in literacy, Sue Ellis, has been doing some international work, part of which took her into a sample of schools. In one primary school in north Glasgow, there were significant problems among certain children who had difficult circumstances to contend with. In consultation and discussion with the school, a literacy clinic was established, and 44 students who were following a special literacy option in their final year volunteered to go in on a regular basis to provide one-to-one support for the children. Typically, illiteracy is a factor in the children's families, and there might be drug problems or other substance abuse problems in the families. Those are the kinds of challenges that schools deal with. However, with additional support and a one-to-one relationship over a period, a major impact has been made on those young children's lives.

We have an opportunity to work more closely together. If the universities work more closely with local authorities and schools and with colleagues in schools, we have an opportunity to impact on children's lives. We can draw on and mobilise knowledge and research that show how to proceed. If we bring that together, we can have an impact on children's lives, but that requires commitment.

The Convener: Before we move on, I ask Clare Adamson whether her question is on the same issue.

Clare Adamson: Yes—well, it is on a slightly different point. I hesitated because I want to talk about the underpinning point in the Donaldson and McCormac reports and the national partnership group report that improving teacher quality is the most effective way of improving the pupil outcome. From what has just been said, the impression that I am getting—rightly or wrongly—is that the bar will be raised but, actually, the attainment gap will be bigger.

Professor Donaldson: In response to the general point, the number of young people who go through the school system and leave with standards of numeracy and literacy that do not equip them for adult life is clearly not acceptable. That is just a fact and we need to address it.

There are short-term things that can be done. They relate partly to every teacher taking responsibility for developing literacy and numeracy skills, which we talked about earlier, so that we do not get the problem whereby youngsters leave primary at a particular level and then regress in the course of their secondary education. We need to ensure that that is taken forward and that the good work by people such as Sue Ellis on what works in the development of literacy and numeracy skills is properly understood by the profession as a whole. We need to invest much more fully in early education, because that is where the problems begin to emerge and can take root. If we address matters in that way, we will raise the bar and close the gap. We must do both.

11:00

Pam Nesbitt: I will give members another statistic: children are in school for only 15 per cent of their lives. To say that school and education can make the biggest difference is to take quite a narrow perspective. We need to involve the whole community and the key players in children's lives—their parents and their wider family.

It is important that we are not drawn into making the mistake of attributing all our literacy and numeracy problems to the literacy and numeracy skills of teachers. Teachers can do so much with the children, but the issue is how those skills can

be transferred to the wider life of work. “Building the Curriculum 4” looks at skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work, which is an area that we need to address to a much greater extent. Instead of just looking at how we learn to be literate and numerate, we need to think about how literacy and numeracy skills can be used and transferred.

Liz Smith asked how long the process will take. Everything in education is cyclical. Curriculum for excellence has been brought in, we are progressing the responsibility of all approach, and the broad general education will spread right through to third year. Those are changes in the way in which we deliver education, and we will have to see them come through.

There are generational issues. Professor Christie mentioned the social culture and deprivation, but I think that technology has quite a lot to answer for, given the way in which children use it. We all know about the wonders of text language and what it has done to literacy skills. We must consider how we can use technological developments appropriately. In addition, it is extremely important that the additional support needs agenda is seen as a way of supporting the education of not just those with the most complex needs but all learners. That is a responsibility of all, too.

I concur with Professor Donaldson on the early years. Great progress is being made on the early years, but as children go through the education system the progress seems to tail off. We need to do more research into why that is the case and what we can do about it.

The Convener: Before we move on to another area, I would like to ask a short question. I very much agree with you on the importance of parents, the parental home, the wider family, the amount of reading that goes on, the importance that is attached to literacy in life outside school and how that relates to the level of literacy of children as they go through the system. I agree with your other comments on the subject, too.

However, do you have any comments on how the way in which we have taught basic reading and writing skills has changed over the years? We used to have a phonic system. We moved away from that, and I think that we are moving back to it. My daughter, like others in her cohort, was in that middle bit. I must be honest and say that I do not think that that was a particularly good way of teaching children to read and write. Did we lose our way in how we taught children to read and write? Is it the case that the phonic system produces more literate children?

Pam Nesbitt: I think that application is crucial. We cannot teach things in silos and then expect children to be able to apply them. I think that the more rounded approach of teaching phonics and applying that in reading and writing is a far more cohesive way of developing young people’s skills. There are many areas of good practice around the country where that is happening in the early years, and skills are being transferred into wider reading and writing activities.

I think that it is crucial that we deliver those skills in more creative ways. It is important that children are more involved and engaged in their learning, rather than having it delivered to them.

Professor Donaldson: Interestingly, although educational fashion swings back and forward, for most Scottish schools phonics has remained a significant part of how reading is taught. However, the convener’s point reinforces the point about having a profession that, rather than simply adopting the latest fashion, asks hard questions about what works and engages with research evidence, which means that it is discriminating about the methods that it uses and ensures that they will work for young people.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I want to go back to the integration of universities and schools, and the issue of hub schools and their impact on student places. I have a question for Professor Christie, with his University of Strathclyde hat on. How easy is it to find places for students under the current arrangements? Is it a mad scramble to find places at present? Will a move to hub schools ease the situation?

Professor Christie: The answer to your question is that we are clearly in a position of flux in terms of the numbers. We have seen great oscillation over the past 10 years in student numbers. Decisions made in the Parliament around class sizes and so on have impinged on that. We saw a great increase in numbers, then we saw a decrease. However, throughout all of that we have always managed to place our students in schools.

The technical issues around achieving that have varied over the years. Most recently, we have had some technical problems around the operation of the software system that was adopted to match up students who require a placement with placements in schools. That is being taken forward by colleagues at the GTC. Having had discussions with those colleagues, we are encouraged that steps are in place to maintain a smooth supply of places.

We have not experienced undue difficulty, and all of our students have been placed. As the placement models and new ways of working evolve, the supporting software system will have to be designed in such a way as to accommodate the different placement pattern that may develop. However, from the discussions that we have had,

we are not in any way concerned that somehow we will not be able to meet our requirements for placements in schools.

It is therefore not a mad scramble but a managed process in which staff engage significantly. The fact that we have 32 local authorities in Scotland means that, in a sense, there are 32 different mechanisms for mediating the process. It is interesting to see how things are developing. For example, Graham Donaldson and I will be at a meeting tomorrow involving all the local authorities in west central Scotland, together with the three universities that predominantly, but not exclusively, make use of that area for placements. Universities such as the University of Glasgow, the University of Strathclyde, the University of Edinburgh and even the University of Stirling, although it is small, have students placed all over the country. We are having discussions about how to manage the process as we move forward in closer partnership. I am optimistic that, in that spirit of collaboration and partnership, we will achieve our goal without difficulty.

Neil Bibby: Is there any difference between placements at primary schools and those at secondary schools? Are there any issues in that regard?

Professor Christie: Do you mean in terms of the availability of placements?

Neil Bibby: Yes.

Professor Christie: Obviously, there is a further consideration when placing students in secondary schools, which is that those who are engaging in a qualification for secondary teaching are following a particular subject, which means that we have to be mindful of the capacity in schools to support that. In primary schools, teachers are equipped across the whole curriculum, so that degree of specialism is not required. That is a difference, but it does not change the actual process. It means that we have to have knowledge of the availability of places within departments in secondary schools.

Kay Barnett: As I said earlier, we need to redefine what we mean when we talk about hub schools. There are two key areas that must be worked on in terms of future developments. The first area is, as Donald Christie said, placement issues and sustainability. The national student placement strategy group has worked on the practicalities of placing students across Scotland. The other area, of course, is the quality support agenda. As I said, it is important that we recognise that if the number of schools involved is restricted, that will lead to issues and difficulties. In certain secondary schools that have developed a faculty system instead of a system that has distinct subject departments, there can be issues with regard to supporting students.

Those are the two areas that must be worked on: the practicalities of placing students, and the quality support agenda.

Pam Nesbitt: I should just clarify that although training in the primary sector is not subject specific, it is often stage specific. We can be asked to take a certain number of students at the middle stages, the upper stages or the infant stages. Over the past few years, as a headteacher, I have found huge demand on the middle and upper stages and not so much demand on the infant stages. That can put additional pressure on schools.

I should also point out that we have to negotiate with not only 32 local authorities but a number of universities. In some areas, people are dealing with placements from two or three universities, which can have different placement programme schedules and different methods of assessment. We would make a plea for consistency and more partnership working. For example, we have just had a period when there were seven teaching students of different types and stages in one school at the one time. That is quite a lot for one school to have in a three or four-week block. There is a need for some consistency and partnership working.

Tony Finn: My colleagues have outlined the practical difficulties that can be faced and which can, in some situations, lead to schools being in some difficulties. However, I want to reiterate what Graham Donaldson said earlier because it seems to me that the placing of a student in a school, a stage or a department is invigorating not only for the student but for the teachers. Sometimes involvement in the process of support, mentoring and assisting helps the teacher to reflect on their own teaching strategy. That is part of the culture that we were talking about earlier.

All things being equal—accepting that, because of absences and other things that have been mentioned, things are not always equal—I do not think that we should allow schools to opt out. Schools that are able to take a student have a professional responsibility to do so.

11:15

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): My question is about content. I accept your points about the emphasis on breaking down any barriers between initial teacher education and continuing professional development. The initial teacher education courses need to be approved by the GTC and the guidelines will be drawn up in the spring. My questions relate to the content of those courses.

My first question is on additional support for learning—more specifically, teaching with regard to learning disability. I am sure that you are all aware of the report from Enable Scotland entitled "Bridging the Training Gap", which was published more than a year ago. It identified that in only three out of eight university courses were there mandatory courses on learning disability. I want to distinguish that from additional support for learning—the courses were specifically on learning disability. The report identified a lot of instances of teachers not having the training to deal with some of the complex—or even not-so-complex—problems associated with having children with learning disability in the classroom. What will be done to address that in the guidelines for the courses that the GTC is drawing up?

Tony Finn: First, the existing guidelines already cover a wide range of issues that we would expect to be covered. Secondly, when we accredit courses, we go in with colleagues from other universities as well as members of the profession and members of the teaching council. We look for a number of things and, as we develop the process, we add to those. As a result of the Donaldson report, we will be looking for a number of things that we perhaps were not looking for before. I mentioned one of them earlier when I spoke of the quality of the partnership.

In my teaching career, there has been a significant change in our understanding of the needs of individual children, and much of the training that we have been able to give to teachers has been in-service training. Some of that, as we have learned about the issues, has transferred to pre-service training. I am aware of the Enable report, but I would not want you to be concerned that what it highlights is a fault. Enable is helping us to identify weaknesses in systems, which we must then address. After Enable, other groups will come forward.

In the course of my teaching career, there have been a range of new symptoms that we have had to look for and new causes that we have had to identify. As teachers have moved on, we have become much better at handling that. However, I would not want you to think that teachers will be prepared for whatever is out there, because much of what is out there is still complicated and we cannot fit it into an initial teacher education programme. We will do our best, taking account of the points that have been made in recent reports as we revise our programmes in the spring.

Joan McAlpine: Does anyone else want to respond?

Professor Christie: We are committed to supporting teachers in the context of their being required to respond to the needs of individual children through an approach that emphasises inclusive pedagogy. I know that you are looking beyond additional support needs towards information and knowledge skills in relation to specific learning disabilities. We accommodate that within our existing programmes, which we want to continue to keep under review in the light of developments. We draw in as much as we can of the expertise that we have, and we are fortunate in having a programme with expertise in autism that is based at the University of Strathclyde, which feeds into the ITE programmes in a range of ways.

We need to see this as part of what we are talking about in more broad terms. Professional knowledge is never static. We must take forward the notion that we will always have more to learn, and particular areas of concern will be addressed and emphasised at different times. There is an important role for the national implementation board annually to take the opportunity to set the agenda for refreshing programmes with a focus on any particular areas that evidence suggests need to be addressed but which may have been overlooked by programmes hitherto. That important new role is being established for the national implementation board, and it will be interesting to see how it informs on-going development.

Courses should never stay still but should always be responsive to changes in the landscape and new issues that emerge. Guidance from the GTC does not stay still, either, as it is refreshed and renewed over a cycle. We will continue to do our best to maintain the focus on what matters. It is important that groups bring attention to areas in which there are concerns, but sometimes we need to look at the core issues that enable teachers to address a range of specific things in a range of ways, and some of the ideas around inclusive pedagogy can help in that regard.

Pam Nesbitt: On a practical level, it is about using the skills. We must be mindful that initial teacher education cannot be a catch-all for specific areas of pupil need. There are guiding principles on how to support all learners and the skills that teachers need to do that. If a teacher has a class for three or four years in which there are no children with a specific need, they will not continually practise those skills. The area is not just one for initial teacher education as there are opportunities for professional learning as teachers go through the profession.

In this area, professional review and development are really important. Teachers are continually reflecting on their current situation in context and asking what they need to learn or to pick up again from their initial teacher education to help them to take things forward with particular pupils or classes. I do not think that it is possible to

catch everything in initial teacher education, even in a four-year degree programme. It is important for the basic guiding principles to be covered, and then for teachers to have many opportunities to take those skills forward as they meet the context.

Joan McAlpine: I totally accept the point that you have all made that we cannot possibly teach people everything, but the specific point that is made in the Enable report is that the use of additional support for learning as a catch-all does not address the specific needs of children with learning disability and that only three out of eight courses have mandatory elements on learning disability.

My understanding is that the feedback that Professor Donaldson got from students was that they wanted more in this area, and I understood that his report would improve things. Perhaps I am picking you up wrongly, but the impression that I am getting from you is that there is not going to be a specific improvement in relation to learning disability in initial teacher training.

Tony Finn: You asked a specific question about learning disability. At present, none of us can say that that will be in the programme changes. What I am saying is that it will be one of the issues considered by the wide group of people—it is not just the GTC—that is looking at the guidelines. That group will interpret teachers' requirements and will look at existing provision. It may well be that there are such options in more than three out of eight courses, because some very complex learning takes place in universities about this general area. However, learning disability is a specific element, and the group needs to assess whether it needs to be stated specifically in the guidelines or heightened in the existing guidelines. When that task is complete, that point will have been taken into account, and I hope that you will be satisfied with the result.

Joan McAlpine: Does Professor Donaldson want to say anything about the issue?

Professor Donaldson: I echo the point that you made. I looked across the universities and talked to students, and learning disability was an area in which they felt inadequately prepared for what was to follow.

The point relates back to the need for a clearer understanding of what should be done and when. What should rightly be covered in initial teacher education and what should be taken forward through induction and subsequent career-long learning? The work that the GTCS is doing puts us in a better position to say that there is a requirement in all initial teacher education to get students to a certain point, but as Pam Nesbitt said, it may be that, as teachers, they will then not run up against youngsters with disabilities of the kind that we are discussing until much later in their careers.

We cannot rely on initial teacher education to deal with the matter, but I note that students who were leaving felt inadequately prepared for the whole area of additional support for learning, including learning disabilities.

Clare Adamson: On whether teaching should be a master's-level profession, I know that the cabinet secretary has said that his aspiration is to move in that direction. I have to say, however, that I am somewhat confused. Given everything that you have said about the difference that literacy and numeracy makes in an education context, are we saying that teachers should have a master's degree in education or that people who study for a teaching qualification should already have a master's degree in their chosen area of expertise? How might that fit in?

On professional development, we talked earlier about teachers taking more responsibility and being more active in self-selecting training opportunities. However, in her evidence on chartered teachers, Isabelle Boyd criticised the self-selection aspect as not meeting the aspirations of senior management teams. I am also unclear about how the chartered teachers whom we already have will progress through the master's process. In short, should we have accreditation and, if so, where does that leave us with regard to chartered teachers?

Professor Christie: I am happy to comment on that question. It is clear from "Teaching Scotland's Future" that, according to the evidence and the broader context of international comparisons, the strongest performing education systems expect a higher level of qualifications. That said, I stress that the report does not call for teacher education at master's level to be a requirement, but makes a very strong call for those in the profession to be engaged in master's-level activity in their professional learning. There is a distinct difference in that respect, and I think that there are lots of ways in which that can be developed alongside the things that we have been discussing and in a way that can help the overall system.

The issue links with the changes to the concept of CPD that have already been mentioned. CPD is not done to people and it is not about simply attending a short course. Instead, it is about embracing, owning and taking responsibility for learning. The opportunity to consider master's-level work gives teachers the option to be accredited for the kinds of activities that we want to happen in schools in any case, and we are moving much more in the direction of embedding professional learning in context in schools and finding ways in which that work can be recognised

and given master's-level credit within the current frameworks.

The NPG report places a responsibility on the universities, through the Scottish teacher education committee, to develop a framework for a Scottish master's degree in education, and to provide a mechanism by which transfers can be readily made across the system to ensure that people's work is recognised in as wide a range of ways as possible. That might entail finding ways in which our existing master's programmes can be enhanced to take account of the kinds of activities in which teachers will engage as part and parcel of the cycle of school improvement that is going on all the time in schools. For example, working groups are developing aspects of curriculum for excellence and some local initiatives have been introduced; we want that kind of activity to be recognised and given credit within a master's framework.

We have become very accustomed to dealing with accreditation of prior or experiential learning—or APEL—claims. In master's systems, we have had opportunities to get credit for workplace learning agreements, which are another concept. We have also had independent study modules in our master's degree frameworks. All that provides experience of flexible ways of accrediting activity in schools.

11:30

I return to the point that I made about professional inquiry as a stance and a mode of activity. We in the universities are working jointly on a mechanism for accrediting current learning. That relates to school improvement initiatives in which staff interests are brought together with expertise from universities or elsewhere to make an impact on learners in context. Such activity could be documented and subjected to assessment within our master's degree framework. We are looking at such a model. The opportunity exists to bring together a lot of the strands of what we have talked about today and to recognise teachers who commit themselves to such activity.

Tony Finn: The self-selection of chartered teachers was an initial feature of the chartered teacher programme and was perceived by some to be a great problem. However, that feature was changed in 2008, so it is no longer relevant and it was not relevant when the cabinet secretary took his decision about the programme.

Master's-level learning is important and goes to the heart of a suggestion in Graham Donaldson's report. I think that he said—he can correct me if I am wrong—that we need to increase opportunities for teachers to engage in master's-level learning. I agree with that.

Sometimes, the CPD opportunities that teachers have been given—in the model that Donald Christie described, things are done to teachers—have often been fairly mundane and not directly relevant to their needs. As a former headteacher and a member of a directorate, I am probably guilty as charged of that. However, it has been necessary at times to ensure that teachers are up to speed with what is happening.

Opportunities should be at an appropriate level to ensure teachers' understanding. Equally, opportunities should be made available to them to participate in programmes that will improve their learning, provided that that has an impact on pupils' learning—that is important.

Sometimes, we have engaged in master of education programmes that were interesting, relevant and valid but which were separated from teachers' experience in the classroom. I would like more work to be done on master's-level provision that would allow teachers to improve what they do in the classroom.

That brings me to the standard for career-long professional learning, which we seek to introduce. As some of my colleagues said, once teachers have completed their qualifications, some tend to believe that they are qualified. I have said for the past few years that we need teachers to attain, maintain and improve standards. However, when we ask them to do that, we do not give them opportunities for improvement to be recognised. By providing opportunities at master's level, we can say to teachers, "This is something that you have done and which has been of advantage to you and your pupils."

I will give a small illustration. The GTC for Scotland has a programme called professional recognition, which was introduced a number of years ago to try to meet the need that I have described. That does not provide an additional qualification at master's level—although we should perhaps think about that for the future—and it does not provide extra finance, but staff turn out for it. For example, on Saturday morning, I will be in Inverness to award the certificate of professional recognition to about 30 teachers from the Highland Council area, many of whom have done additional work on literacy and numeracy. Teachers undertake that programme because they want to, and they are pleased to have the recognition.

We are trying to achieve the culture shift that we have talked about, whereby more teachers do such activity because it is the right thing to do. If they are given master's accreditation as a result, a number of them will subsequently—through the

Scottish master's programme—gain a master's qualification that might otherwise not have been available to them.

Kay Barnett: The committee will appreciate that, for Scottish teachers, this is probably the thorniest political issue in the report, certainly from the EIS's perspective. We acknowledge the importance of making progress towards master's level an option. However, we do not think that a master's-level qualification should be mandatory—and I do not think that that is the intention. It should be an option.

We cannot ignore how Scottish teachers feel about the scrapping of the chartered teacher scheme; to say that they are unhappy would be an understatement. Teachers remain cynical about the scrapping of the scheme and regard it as a political cost-cutting decision rather than a professional decision.

I appreciate what Tony Finn and others said about progress to master's level and the importance of professional recognition, but chartered teachers receive professional recognition and financial recognition. Those issues are in the background. I am not sure what uptake will be, because teachers are operating against a backdrop of issues to do with their salaries and pensions, as well as their workload, in the context of curriculum for excellence. Those factors will affect people's attitudes and initial responses on whether to take up the option.

There is a degree of cynicism about one route towards master's level—the chartered teacher programme—being scrapped while there is a drive to encourage more people to take up routes to master's level. The situation is difficult. We will have to wait and see how things progress in the initial stages.

Professor Donaldson: As Kay Barnett said, there are a lot of cross-currents. In essence, I took the view not that we should seek to have all teachers having master's qualifications as a main policy driver—I make that quite clear—but that the learning that is taking place in the profession should be at Scottish credit and qualifications framework level. That is what we are talking about.

Education in the 21st century faces complex and difficult issues. Either we take the view that we have a teaching profession that is somehow patronised and that difficult issues are dealt with by a small number of people who are capable of dealing with them, or we take the view that we have a profession that is capable of engaging with difficult issues and taking ownership of and responsibility for them. I am firmly of the view that the latter route is the way we want to go; other jurisdictions might be taking the former route.

We want the teaching profession to be comfortable in dealing with complex issues and not to ask for complexity to be watered down in order to enable teachers to deal with issues. If we get that right, as Tony Finn said, the professional development work that we do will, by its nature, be at that latter level so, given that people will be working at that level, we will have to find mechanisms that facilitate accreditation. Practice-based accreditation of things that are the right things to do in any case will lead over time to many more teachers having master's qualifications. We need mechanisms in place that will encourage teachers in that regard.

Although it is not a reason for doing it, it should be noted that across Europe master's level is, increasingly, the qualification for teachers. We do not want Scottish teachers to move from being among the best-qualified teachers in Europe to being among the least best-qualified teachers in Europe.

Pam Nesbitt: We will need to work hard to ensure that there is equity and that opportunities are available for all staff. There will be a clear link with professional update and professional review and development. There is a leadership task to be done to support staff in that regard.

I make a plea that we acknowledge that the master's level that we envisage must be very much linked to practice; it must take account of theory being put into practice by reflecting and inquiring into current and changing practice and its impact on pupils. I went through a master's course and I did one of the first tranches of the qualification for headship. A lot of that was about theory, and there was not always a link for those who were trying to do the job in practice. We must be aware of the importance of what is done at master's level being put into practice.

The Convener: Thank you. I thank all the witnesses; your evidence has been helpful and informative. We have gone a bit over time, but it was well worth doing so, given the breadth of the Donaldson report and the review group's work on it. We did not cover everything, but we covered a substantial amount.

11:40

Meeting continued in private until 11:46.

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