

# **ENTERPRISE AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 5 December 2001  
*(Morning)*

Session 1

£5.00

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# CONTENTS

Wednesday 5 December 2001

Col.

LIFELONG LEARNING INQUIRY .....	2188
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## ENTERPRISE AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE 28<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2001, Session 1

### CONVENER

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP)

### DEPUTY CONVENER

\*Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con)

### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

\*Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
\*Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
\*Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
\*Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP)  
\*Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)  
\*David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con)  
\*Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD)  
\*Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab)

\*attended

### WITNESSES

David Bleiman (Association of University Teachers)  
Celia Carson (Voluntary Sector National Training Organisation)  
Bob Christie (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)  
Joyce Connon (Workers Educational Association)  
Jim Cunningham (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)  
Lesley Greenaway (Volunteer Development Scotland)  
Marian Healy (Educational Institute of Scotland)  
Carol Judge (Unison)  
Namasiku Liandu (Association of University Teachers)  
Charlie McConnell (Community Learning Scotland)  
Rory Macleod (Community Learning Scotland)  
Linda McTavish (Community Learning Scotland)  
Councillor Brian Oldrey (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)  
Jayne Stuart (Learning Link Scotland)  
Lee Whitehill (Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union)  
Howard Wollman (Educational Institute of Scotland)

### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Simon Watkins

### SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Judith Evans

### ASSISTANT CLERK

Linda Orton

### LOCATION

The Chamber



## Scottish Parliament

### Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee

*Wednesday 5 December 2001*

*(Morning)*

[THE DEPUTY CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:06*]

**The Deputy Convener (Miss Annabel Goldie):**

Good morning. This is the 28<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee in 2001.

I convey the apologies of Alex Neil, the convener, who cannot be with us this morning, so the coup has taken place.

I will come to our witnesses at item 2 on the agenda. I extend a general welcome to them now; it is good to see them all.

I also have apologies from Duncan Hamilton and from Ken Macintosh, who is at another committee and hopes to join us later, as does Bill Butler.

## Lifelong Learning Inquiry

**The Deputy Convener:** Item 1 on the agenda is the report to the committee on the case study visit to Dundee and Fife. Marilyn Livingstone will make that report.

**Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab):** Before I make the report, I should declare an interest. Before I was elected, I worked for 16 years at Fife College of Further and Higher Education. I am a member of Unison and the Educational Institute of Scotland.

I will report to the committee, as none of the other members who were on the visit is here. We visited the Dundee city partnership and Scottish Enterprise Fife on 5 November. One of the reasons for our visit was to examine integration of volume training and further and higher education. We met representatives from the Dundee city partnership and the FAST-TRAC project in Fife and members of the Scottish Executive opportunities and choices working group.

We were impressed by the partnership working in Dundee and Fife. Good practice in partnership working could be picked up from both projects.

The FAST-TRAC project has been in existence since 1995 and has seen thousands of people take an integrated approach to both the college and employer model. The issue that came up time and again on the FAST-TRAC project was that Scottish Enterprise has continued to restrict funding for employer-based skillseekers to Scottish vocational qualifications. Some young people were studying for national certificate or higher national certificate qualifications in addition to SVQs, in an integrated manner, to allow funding to be accessed, but young people's choice was still very restricted. Although the people involved in both the FAST-TRAC project and the Dundee city partnership would have liked funding to be extended to the full range of Scottish Qualifications Authority qualifications, that was still being restricted.

Among the issues raised was the inappropriateness of funding mechanisms. It came across strongly that funding was driving the training, instead of training and the needs of young people and of the economy driving the funding.

Employers in Fife claimed that bureaucracy had recently become much worse for them because of the new Scottish Enterprise requirements, and that they much preferred their previous working relationships with FAST-TRAC. Another criticism that we heard in relation to funding mechanisms was about the milestones—or millstones, as the employers called them. They felt that there was pressure on young people to achieve quickly in

order to access the funding, and that that reduced the value of the training and failed to promote sustainable employment. Instead of professionals deciding how training should be provided for young people and at what rate, having regard to the quality of teaching and learning, those millstones and the level of funding available appeared to be the driving force.

It emerged that people were keen for a learning entitlement to be established, not least in order to provide a level playing field for all young people. We also heard much about the reduction of the audit burden. Most people said that they would prefer a single audit system and a single funding system.

There is a need for increased choice and flexibility. The Scottish Enterprise funding is tied to Scottish vocational qualifications, and employers told us that SVQs were not always the best qualifications for their needs.

A variance in standards was highlighted. In Fife, and specifically in the FAST-TRAC model, the young people seem to have as much choice, guidance and counselling as required, and that seems to be high on the agenda. However, from the views of one or two of the young people involved in the Dundee city partnership, it seemed that their competence rather than their understanding had been assessed. We found that individuals had had very different experiences on the vocational training route, and the committee should address that.

We noted some good examples of access and credit transfer, and of actual reward for the training that had been undertaken by the young people. That depended very much on individual contacts and on relationships between colleges. It was not, however, the norm.

There seemed to be quite a bit of confusion about which non-traditional qualifications the higher education institutions would accept. We felt that the committee would need to address that point as well.

Our final session was with the opportunities and choices working group. We were disappointed at the lack of progress made, and would like work to continue. The three of us who went on the visit—Kenny MacAskill, Ken Macintosh and I—all felt that we now needed action. The FAST-TRAC project has been on the go for a number of years, and evaluations and pilot schemes have taken place, although they covered only 53 learners. We felt that it really was time to address the needs of young people. We encouraged the working group to report with haste.

Our visit was useful, because it reflected at local level what the national bodies had been telling us. We heard loud and clear from the young people

that advice and guidance was very necessary. We felt that that was being provided, particularly in the case of FAST-TRAC, which showed through in the young people's success and in the positive impact that training had had on them.

We were interested in the move away from a bums-on-seats philosophy to a more holistic social and economic approach to the training, and we were concerned that while local initiatives were driving good practice forward, central agendas were continuing to thwart flexibility and development.

10:15

**The Deputy Convener:** Thank you. We all found it an interesting report, which mirrors to some extent what other reports have indicated but brings up some new issues.

I am happy for committee members to ask questions on the report. I have a question on the variance of standards. You mentioned to me an interesting situation where a young person inquired of you and your colleagues what they were doing. It might be helpful for the committee if you were to illustrate that variance of standards.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** That was a young person who was unsure about whether they were a skillseeker. They did not seem to know what training programme they were on or what entitlements they had. That comes back to guidance, counselling and support. When we asked one young person about their training, they said, "Well, somebody has been to the shop twice and has followed me around." We found that incredible, which is why we said in the report that their competency to do the job was being assessed. One of the things we asked ourselves was where the development of the young person was happening. We wondered where the core skill building—the numeracy, literacy and personal and social development—was taking place and we ended up being asked by the young people what their entitlements were.

**Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab):** I apologise for my late arrival and for going over any areas that Marilyn Livingstone has already covered.

You mention that the engineering employers in particular felt that the funding mechanism was not appropriate to them. We have received evidence at various times that there are specific issues connected with training engineers. There is a real shortage of engineers, so any problems in that area are quite serious. Can you expand on the difficulties?

**Marilyn Livingstone:** It was felt that there were restrictions on training, and that a young person

might have to take one kind of qualification when an employer might have wanted them to take a different one. For example, the employer would have preferred it if the young person had done a higher national certificate rather than an SVQ level 3; however, the funding for that was not available. The milestones are structured such that a young person has to complete each learning outcome in order that the employer can draw down the funding. There cannot be integration. A young person cannot do elements out of four or five different learning outcomes. They can take only one chunk of the qualification at a time, but that was sometimes not appropriate to their learning needs or to what the employer needed in the workplace. Employers would like some flexibility. Workplace training should suit the workplace rather than the funding system.

**Elaine Thomson:** It is another example of the rigidity that we have found in other areas.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** Yes, it was rigidity, and there were restrictions on delivery.

**The Deputy Convener:** Thank you.

We will now continue our evidence taking for the lifelong learning inquiry. I welcome formally a formidable sextet of witnesses: David Bleiman, the assistant general secretary of the Association of University Teachers, Namasiku Liandu of the AUT, Marian Healy and Howard Wollman of the Educational Institute of Scotland, Lee Whitehill of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union, and Carol Judge of Unison.

We have representatives from four different bodies, and if they have cogent points for the committee to take into account, they may make them briefly. I suggest that each group take no more than two-and-a-half to three minutes and I ask the representatives not to repeat their submissions because everyone present has read them in great detail.

We will start with the Association of University Teachers and either Mr Bleiman or Mr Liandu.

**David Bleiman (Association of University Teachers):** I am assistant general secretary of the AUT, the full-time official of the union responsible for Scotland. My colleague, Namasiku Liandu, is an officer of AUT (Scotland). He is an accountancy lecturer at the University of Abertay Dundee. Prior to that, Namasiku worked in London with one of the large firms of consulting accountants. In common with many of our members, he did not enter a career in higher education for the money. However, in common with all of our members, he would like to be paid a professional salary for doing a professional job.

My opening remarks will be brief as I know that your remit is large. I am not sure whether

Namasiku and I will be able to answer all your questions, but we will do our best. We can follow up with supplementary written evidence if that would be helpful.

In my brief introduction, I suggest that there are two broad areas of interest to the AUT. First are the issues about the role of higher education in our economy and society—issues that are central to your inquiry. Secondly, there are issues that we face daily as a trade union—issues such as how the people in higher education are managed and rewarded. Inevitably, as you would expect, those issues are at the top of the agenda for any trade union. However, they also impact on the ability of higher education to deliver on the first set of issues that I mentioned—to deliver for the Scottish public and economy.

Our submission goes into detail about the distinctive role of higher education and the strategic advantage of investing in higher education, which provides graduates with transferable skills and an ability to adjust to a changing labour market throughout their lives.

The people of Scotland have a complex and ever-changing need for lifelong learning. The available provision therefore needs to be widely disseminated. Students need to be adequately supported and it is important that any course can be a building block for the future. It is right and necessary that there are many different offerings to suit what people want or need to study, and what is needed to meet employers' and society's demands.

There is no simpler way to illustrate that than by an anecdote about my immediate family. My wife is taking advantage of an individual learning account and is studying, on a flexible learning basis, at Edinburgh's Telford College for what is known as the European computer driving licence. It has nothing to do with her driving skills; it has everything to do with her perception that she needs a recognised qualification showing her skills across the range of common computer applications, such as word processing and databases. She can then re-enter the labour market after years of child care responsibilities. That might be a characteristic example of someone engaging in lifelong learning with a specific, employment-related goal and going for a technical qualification.

Some years ago, I undertook a part-time MBA at the University of Edinburgh. That course involved two evenings a week for two-and-a-half years and covered a wide range of topics, from psychology to accountancy. It provided me with some specific job-related skills—for example, an ability better to analyse university accounts. That is clearly helpful in countering arguments for job losses in universities. However, the course also provided a

range of transferable skills that have assisted me to move and operate with confidence in a wide context.

What is the point of my anecdote? We need a diversity of provision. Lifelong learning is not one simple thing. It is a variety of different offerings to suit different people at different points in their lives. We are committed to wider access and to social inclusion, and lifelong learning is one way of achieving both those goals. It is important, however, that no artificial cap is placed on people's aspirations. People need to be able to move up and around the system.

For example, my wife is a university graduate who went to university as a mature student, after obtaining the entrance qualifications at an FE college. Years later, she is back at an FE college for a specific vocational qualification. There should be no barriers to progression and to moving up and around the system. The distinctive offerings of further and higher education are needed as part of lifelong learning.

**The Deputy Convener:** In fairness to the other participants, please draw to a close, Mr Bleiman.

**David Bleiman:** I was informed that I could speak for up to five minutes and your indication that it was two-and-a-half to three minutes was the first I was aware of that. I will try to draw to a close.

**The Deputy Convener:** I apologise. I shall deal with Mr Watkins later.

**David Bleiman:** Higher education has a wide variety of offerings. The second set of issues is about how people are managed and rewarded in higher education. We suggested to the minister that good management of people is not only an operational matter, but a matter of strategic importance. Higher education is a people industry: everything that we do relies on the qualifications, experience and commitment of our people. However, the major shortfalls in the remuneration of higher education staff are well documented. There is the appalling failure to achieve equal pay and there is the insecurity of fixed-term contracts, which is widespread and unjustifiable and affects women and ethnic minorities disproportionately. The Parliament recently considered an example of that—during the members' business debate on contract research staff—which I will not go into in detail. A number of committee members were involved in the debate.

University education provides transferable skills. There are around 4,000 researchers and they are among the most highly qualified people in our society. It is extraordinary that people with those qualifications and transferable skills are viewed by their university employers as having only a narrow function for a short period. Researchers could

make more of a contribution across the range of university activities connected to teaching and research. They are part of Scotland's science and knowledge base and should be used more effectively to power the development of the knowledge economy. As with all university staff, they must be properly rewarded, retained and, above all, managed. Universities cannot be managed properly if the people are not managed properly and better than they are managed at present. My colleagues who are here today agree that the theme of good people management is of strategic importance.

**The Deputy Convener:** I apologise for trying to cut you off in your prime, Mr Bleiman. We have a lot of evidence to consider and the committee is anxious to question in some depth. I ask the other participants to try to keep their statements as tight as possible. The submissions contain a lot of information. If witnesses have anecdotal evidence from their experience that expands a point in the submissions, as Mr Bleiman did, we would be glad to hear it. However, we do not want them to repeat the submissions.

**Marian Healy (Educational Institute of Scotland):** I will try to be brief and focus on the concerns of the Educational Institute of Scotland that are not developed in our submission.

The EIS is delighted to be present today. This is the third time that we have given evidence to the committee. We all benefit from the experience. I am the further and higher education officer for the EIS and my brief is nationwide. With me today is Howard Wollman, who is an office bearer of the university lecturers association and is employed at Napier University.

The institute welcomes the committee's inquiry and has followed the evidence-giving sessions with interest. We look forward to a set of recommendations that will place Scotland's lifelong learning agenda at the heart of Government policy. However, the institute has a few concerns. We welcome the development of the UHI Millennium Institute and the value that it brings to the Highlands and Islands, but the EIS wants the university to be developed on a par with other universities in Scotland. At present, courses in the UHI Millennium Institute are developed and taught by FE academic staff, who also deal with student support and guidance. However, there is no common approach to quality, conditions of employment or rates of pay. Although the EIS recognises that approximately 30 per cent of higher education provision is delivered from FE colleges as higher national courses, it sees potential problems for staff and students if the anomaly of developing and providing degree courses from the UHI Millennium Institute's federal structure of FE colleges is not addressed.



Another area of concern for the institute is the lack of clarity in funding arrangements for the education of nurses and midwives and the instability that our members suffer as a result of having to bid to health boards—on a five-year basis—for the continuation of such provision. The institute believes that there is a role for the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council in stabilising provision. If SHEFC can ensure the quality of doctors and dentists in Scotland, why cannot it ensure the quality of nurses and midwives?

The institute would like the funding of penal education to be addressed. With penal education provision, the exercise that is carried out is similar to that used for nurse and midwife provision. The institute believes that the Scottish Further Education Funding Council is best placed to deliver that funding and to ensure quality for the teaching that is delivered in Scottish penal institutions.

10:30

The institute is also concerned at the unevenness of articulation agreements between Scotland's 46 FE colleges and its 20 or so higher education institutions. The institute looks to the committee to make strong recommendations on the need for all higher education institutions to have in place articulation agreements with local colleges, to maximise the number of students who progress seamlessly from FE to HE study.

Where the advancing students are from socioeconomic groups not previously involved in or attracted to higher education, the institute asks that resources follow those students to ensure that the expectations that are raised are realised. Drop-out rates among non-traditional learners are high and the institute believes that only with specific additional funding can HE institutions support those students and offer them the advice and guidance that is necessary for them to become graduates.

The institute supports workplace education and training. It applauds the Government's intention to legislate for learning representatives within workplaces and the Scottish Executive's support for the Scottish union learning fund. Those initiatives will ensure that the learning representatives are appropriately trained and best placed to raise awareness of lifelong learning among workplace colleagues and to provide them with advice and guidance on the types of educational opportunities that are available.

However, the institute suggests that all workplace training in Scotland should be delivered by dedicated, qualified and professional staff from FE and HE institutions. The institute asks the

committee to call for a review of the current funding methodology for FE. It is concerned at the cut in teaching hours that has been forced on colleges as they attempt to address the rising number of students with a standstill or falling budget.

Redundancies and early retirements are rife in the FE sector, as colleges cut staff to reduce costs, which in turn affects quality. Expecting all colleges to operate on the basis of the national average undermines diversity and fails to recognise the socioeconomic mix of the different communities within which our FE colleges are located. A new, more secure means of funding our FE colleges needs to be found.

Finally, we want to draw attention to the continuing lack of collective arrangements for determining pay and conditions of service for all staff in the FE sector, which allows a perception to be developed that staff in what was once called the cinderella sector are not as important as their colleagues in schools or HE colleges and universities.

The committee will be aware that the Scottish negotiating committee for teachers addresses those matters for all Scotland's teachers and that higher education matters are addressed in a new UK-wide joint negotiating committee for higher education staff. I am sure that I do not need to remind the committee of the 23 per cent salary increase that was agreed as part of the McCrone settlement, which accrues to Scottish teachers between 2001 and 2003. Although there has not been a similar settlement for staff in higher education, all staff in that sector can at least look forward to the continuation of national agreements on conditions, as well as the establishment of a single pay spine. We hope that that will address the 30 per cent shortfall in rates of pay that was highlighted in the Bett report.

The institute provided the committee with the 2000 salary levels in FE colleges, and I am sure that the committee shares our concern at the disparity across the sector. The institute looks to the committee to make strong recommendations on the value of collective determination of salaries and conditions of employment for staff in the FE sector, and to identify how cost-effective such a mechanism would be for that sector. It makes no sense at all that 46 individual salary negotiations take place in Scotland every year, when a single body could be more efficient and effective at delivering the same.

**The Deputy Convener:** Thank you.

The next witnesses are Lee Whitehill and Carol Judge. I see that your submissions are much shorter. Are your introductory remarks likely to be fairly brief?

**Lee Whitehill (Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union):** Yes.

**The Deputy Convener:** Thank you very much.

**Lee Whitehill:** The Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union represents technical grades in universities and further education. I want to talk briefly about our experience with the Scottish union learning fund and our university technical staff.

The MSF runs two distinct SULF projects. One of them is to create 50 learning representatives throughout the country. The bid that we have in for the second project is specifically for university technical grades, to allow technicians to reskill and multiskill themselves. Many technicians come from a discipline-specific background, and that project will enable them to cope with change in the university sector. We found that, of all the people who came along to our union learning fund project, university technical staff were the people who had the least access to training, even though they came from such an education-specific background.

We will become known as Amicus when the MSF merges with the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union. Amicus's message is that, whether we are dealing with the university sector or the private sector, individual learning accounts on their own are not enough to allow people to manage their own learning. The voluntarist approach to training has not worked. Although employment issues are a reserved matter, we think that there is a role for the Scottish Parliament, in tandem with Westminster, in that area. We also think that there should be a code of conduct or a forum for discussion and exchange of ideas between unions and employers, whether in industry, manufacturing, the finance sector, education or health, to agree on best practice for training and learning for the future of communities and of the economy.

**The Deputy Convener:** Thank you. You have brought up points that were not mentioned in the submission. That is most helpful.

**Carol Judge (Unison):** I am the Scottish organiser of Unison. All the comments that have been made by other witnesses are also relevant to Unison. Regrettably, we have found, as the MSF has found, that there are a number of staff in higher and further education who find that lifelong learning is not relevant to them, although they work in the sector. That is a view of many support staff, particularly manual staff.

In other sectors, we have been trying to target the relevance of lifelong learning on people working in those sectors, so that it can be used to build their job and to make them flexible and able to deal with change. That is relevant in higher

education, particularly for manual, janitorial and caretaking staff. There is a cultural issue to address in higher and further education if workers employed in that sector are to take up lifelong learning themselves. Higher and further education must be able to deliver flexible training to deal with change in the future.

I ask the committee to examine seriously the Scottish Executive's commitment to equal pay and the close-the-gap campaign, and to ask how that issue can be addressed in higher and further education. The Executive funds at least 50 per cent of the pay and salaries in higher and further education. That is a key issue for all the unions, not just Unison, although we are mindful of the role that we have taken in addressing equal pay and low pay in the sector.

All the witnesses' comments show that we have a serious point to make about how to staff higher and further education in the future. At the moment, there are loyal and committed staff in all occupations in the sector. They stay there year in, year out. Unless both salary and terms and conditions are addressed, quality and dedicated staff will not stay in higher and further education, let alone come into that sector.

In the future there will be a serious shortfall of staff who are prepared to put up with poor pay, poor conditions and poor industrial relations. It is not for a want of commitment or a recognition of that commitment, but we need to modernise how industrial relations and human resources are addressed in the sector.

I hope that the committee will consider those points as part of resourcing the future challenges for lifelong learning through higher and further education and the staff whom that sector employs.

**The Deputy Convener:** Thank you. I suggest that members direct their questions toward particular organisations, otherwise we will be all over the countryside. Let us be logical with our questioning.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** I want to ask two sets of questions: the first set will be to the AUT and the EIS and the second set will be to the MSF and Unison. The main issue that has come out from the evidence that we have heard is funding—Marian Healy mentioned that. We have heard about the various pots of money and the complexity of the funding system. What would be the best way in which to fund places, rather than individuals, within further and higher education?

The second issue that has been raised is the quality of teaching and learning and the portability of qualifications. We have been considering the portability of qualifications within the Scottish credit and qualifications framework. The EIS talked about the need for articulation

arrangements. The third issue is access, not just into further education by those who have been excluded, but access into higher education. Audit has also been mentioned.

Those are the major issues that have been raised with the committee. From your experience, can you give the committee any advice on them?

**Howard Wollman (Educational Institute of Scotland):** On articulation, we argue that there is much good practice but—as Marian Healy said—it is uneven. Some higher education institutions have very close links with particular colleges. In some cases there are smooth arrangements for people to move from higher national certificate or higher national diploma courses to degree courses in universities. However, even within institutions best practice is probably not consistent—there will be different arrangements for different subject areas. People are conscious of that unevenness.

There is a role for someone to take a more strategic direct lead in making the process smoother and more clear cut, in terms of local links and the qualifications framework. The framework must be implemented in such a way that people are clear that an HND will allow them to enter the third year of a degree course. We need strategic direction.

**Marian Healy:** On funding, we do not have an inspired template for the committee, but we know that we need a more secure base for funding. To continue to fund further education in particular on the basis of the student unit of measurement—the SUM—is unsatisfactory, because it is a very unstable funding basis. According to that criterion, the largest college gets the biggest slice of every fund that is announced by the Executive, which is inequitable. It is inequitable to base funding on the suggestion that a city such as Aberdeen has the same socioeconomic difficulties and areas of deprivation as inner Glasgow. That must be addressed. We have implored the minister to give guidance to the funding council to provide greater core funding to colleges. We have asked her to consider whether the student unit of measurement is an unstable way to fund our further education sector.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** A large chunk of money is spent on volume training—that is, the Government training programmes, including skillseekers. We have heard a suggestion that there should perhaps be joint funding for those programmes and further education. What do you think of that suggestion?

**Marian Healy:** We have seen the evidence that was given by the Association of Scottish Colleges; we, too, suggest that if colleges have the relevant expertise and are located within communities, they are best placed to deliver those types of initiatives.

The Executive's inquiry and the committee's inquiry should consider the benefits of calling on our further education colleges to deliver training in the sort of skills that Scotland will need in future.

10:45

**Howard Wollman:** There is a cost attached to articulation and to providing easier access from FE into HE and people must work hard at matching up the programmes in different institutions. However, there is also a cost attached to increased support. We provide, as I am sure other institutions do, bridging programmes not to add to the qualifications of the person coming in, but to help the transition from FE to HE. Such programmes cost money because they use resources; that needs to be reflected in funding.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** I ask the AUT to make a statement.

**Namasiku Liandu (Association of University Teachers):** I want to pick up on funding. It is difficult to sit here and come up with a specific mechanism to arrange or organise funding. However, whatever funding mechanism exists should be able to deal with issues such as widening access, which requires resources for dealing with individuals who come to universities from non-traditional sources. Such people need to be supported in achieving what they need to achieve to contribute to Scotland's economy.

As a country we must find out what is going on in similar countries. We must ensure that, whatever funding mechanism we come up with, Scotland is competing at a level with or doing better than our competitors in supporting our students, universities, and staff. Funds must be in place that will enable us to come out on top of our competitors.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** I have questions for the AUT on portability of qualifications. How will people be able to progress steadily through the Scottish qualifications framework? How do universities view people coming in from FE or from vocational training? How even is that throughout the country?

**Namasiku Liandu:** In my experience, every HE institution examines its courses and assesses individuals regardless of their source—school, FE college, or home—by examining their qualifications and allowing them entry at a particular level on a particular course. For example, I am directly involved in the accounting course in the University of Abertay Dundee and students coming in with HNDs in accounting from FE colleges can get entry into second or third year of the degree, depending on their individual achievements. Each institution looks at individual courses and assesses where to place individuals

within them. That is time consuming and resource intensive because admissions tutors must make a person-by-person assessment. I cannot see a quick way out of that. If we are to have a lifelong learning strategy, we need to allow individuals to go in and out at any level. They need to be able to do that at any point that they want.

**The Deputy Convener:** I will follow up on that with a question for Marian Healy. Is the EIS satisfied that the Scottish vocational qualification as a conferred qualification enjoys a stature that is acceptable to higher education?

**Marian Healy:** SVQs, HNCs and HNDs are certainly recognised by employers as valued qualifications for employment. More attention should be paid to articulation so that students who have demonstrated academic ability are encouraged to raise their standards a little higher and to progress to higher education and graduate with a degree. Perhaps the Scottish qualifications framework has the potential to be a valuable method of assessing student outcome, but the framework is not—let us say—closely adhered to by institutions.

We certainly support what Janet Lowe of the Association of Scottish Colleges said about institutions needing to have more generosity of spirit. I also support Namasiku Liandu's point that institutions must take an individual-by-individual look to ensure that people are placed appropriately within degree courses.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** On paper, people who achieve level 3 under the Scottish qualifications framework are entitled to get into second year at university. That does not happen across the board in universities nor does it happen across the board for different qualifications. Should strategic guidance be given for the Scottish qualifications framework? Is that the way forward?

**Marian Healy:** We look to the new convener of the Scottish qualifications framework to bring together some advice and guidance for the sector. You are right that both sectors need to appreciate how they are expected to deal with the Scottish qualifications framework and to accept students on to courses. There is a lack of understanding and lack of appreciation by institutions and the general public. The new convener has a particular style by which he will ensure that the general public appreciate and understand anything that he is involved in.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** I have been told to be brief with my next question, which is for the trade unions.

**The Deputy Convener:** That is not why you have been told to be brief.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** I have experience of the

trade union learning fund from the area that I represent in Fife. The fund has proved valuable in providing access to further and higher education to people who perhaps would not otherwise have had that access. The fund also helps lower-skilled employees. Marian Healy mentioned security of funding. How should the funding of the trade union learning fund be developed?

**Carol Judge:** We need equality with the additional funding that appears to have been made available in England and Wales. The message that I want to convey is that funding of the Scottish union learning fund needs to be addressed. I was advised at the weekend that the fund in England and Wales has been given a sizeable increase, which will probably not be offered in Scotland.

The initiatives that the unions are involved in show that we are all genuinely committed to the fund. All the witnesses here represent trade unions that have members in higher and further education. We need increased funding; I understand that to meet all the bids for this year's round of funding, the amount of funding that is available would need to be increased fivefold. Also, there is not enough funding for quality bids. We need equal treatment.

The work that unions are doing separately should also be recognised. For instance, Unison has a return-to-learn programme, which is a way of working in partnership with employers to consider learning opportunities in the workplace. We encourage people who have never done any formal training since leaving school at the age of 15 or 16 to get involved. Such people might be in their 40s or 50s, but have never had any additional training in the workplace. Their skills have developed because of their own competency.

Trying to encourage people to meet change can be hard work, but there is within the health service a successful return-to-learn programme. However, we are experiencing a couple of stumbling blocks in progressing such initiatives in local government. I am sure that the committee will want to give us its support in ensuring that the commitment on paper that we have been given is delivered; I was informed yesterday that there were a few difficulties in that respect. Such initiatives encourage employers to mainstream workplace-related training and personal development opportunities for staff. As a result, we must raise the profile of workplace training not only with large employers but with small to medium-sized enterprises, which must recognise the importance of being able to access such training formally and informally. On the union learning fund, the short answer is that it needs more money and has a long way to go yet.

**Lee Whitehill:** One of the best ways of

developing the matter is to ensure that employers take more seriously the concept of the union learning fund. So far, examples of best practice can be found at Rosyth, on which the committee heard evidence at its previous meeting, and at the Clyde task force. We met the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning and representatives of Scottish Enterprise Renfrewshire and PACE—the partnership action for continuing employment initiative—before last week's Rolls-Royce announcement. However, although that is all well and good—indeed, it is fantastic—the shipbuilding and manufacturing industries are, on the whole, powering down. That said, it could be argued that there were probably different reasons behind what has happened at Rolls-Royce.

After evaluation of all our learning fund initiatives, we have found that the main stumbling block is the perception that employers do not take the initiatives seriously. Getting rid of such a perception is the first and easiest step that we can take, after which we can perhaps discuss putting training and learning on the bargaining agenda for large and small companies as a means of securing funding and the future of those initiatives.

**The Deputy Convener:** I was urging Mrs Livingstone to a conclusion because—after a period of great shyness—five committee members want to ask questions. As we must finish this session at 11.15, I exhort members to keep their questions as focused as possible and to make it clear which organisation they wish to respond to their questions.

**Elaine Thomson:** I will try to make my question brief. I want to raise two issues that we have not touched on. The first is the general situation with science, engineering and technology. The number of students going into engineering is falling year by year; furthermore, there are only a few women in the subject. For example, when courses in information technology—a subject with which I am reasonably familiar—were first introduced, many women took them, but those numbers are falling year by year and the subject is becoming as segregated as engineering. How can we address that? Such subjects are vital to our economy, so we must be successful in them.

My other question is about the incorporation of further education colleges, to which both the AUT and the EIS have referred. What problems have arisen from incorporation? Moreover, if you are not happy with incorporation, how else can we address the situation in our colleges?

**The Convener:** I ask the AUT to respond to both questions.

**David Bleiman:** On the first question, it is true to say that most higher education institutions are

having a problem with recruiting students into subjects such as science and engineering. However, Sir Gareth Roberts recently published the findings of his UK-level review of the supply of scientists and engineers. The main finding is that, although the UK has a strong overall science base compared to other industrialised countries, more needs to be done to strengthen the future supply of scientists and engineers. The recommendations include examining financial barriers to the uptake of science and engineering study at undergraduate level, which would mean examining financial support to students, for example.

We know that that has been examined in Scotland and that it is coming under examination in England. The quality of the learning experience, including undergraduate teaching and laboratories in science and engineering, will also be examined. Another finding was that the funding and training that are available to postgraduate students and contract researchers should be addressed, as should recruitment, retention and remuneration of academic staff. That leads back to the point that I made about the lack of career structure for academics—in particular, those on short-term contracts—and the low remuneration of contract researchers. If it is perceived that scientists do not have any real career prospects, it might be difficult to persuade students to undertake science courses.

11:00

Work has been done in Scotland on the specific problem of encouraging women to go into science and engineering. The Scottish Higher Education Funding Council had an initiative on women in science, engineering and technology in which the AUT was actively involved. However, some difficulties exist that cannot be dealt with by the higher education sector alone, including whether children as young as primary school age are exposed enough to science and whether girls have science role models in school education. The work that SHEFC has done on that must continue.

We do not have specific expertise on the incorporation of the FE colleges. As spectators, we have watched with dismay the collapse of national bargaining and the obvious problems that have been experienced in FE colleges. It might be appropriate for the EIS to answer on that point.

**Marian Healy:** I will not go over all the examples of bad management and lack of appropriate governance in further education. The Audit Committee dealt with those issues on behalf of the Executive.

In answer to the question about the way forward, in my view we must have a tripartite arrangement, similar to the arrangement that exists for

schoolteachers. The engagement of employers, the Executive and staff representatives in the FE sector would, we believe, allow for more stability within the sector. We also believe that there is a need for a greater role for the Scottish Further Education Funding Council, so that when accusations or indications of bad practice and bad management arise, staff and students will be able to raise those issues directly with the funding council. SFEFC would have the remit and authority to go into the college and correct the bad practice or whatever had been brought to its attention.

**The Deputy Convener:** I am afraid that I must cut off Elaine Thomson at that point—we are running into serious problems with timing.

**David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):** I found a refreshing and robust comment in the EIS submission. That comment challenged the concept of the term “lifelong learning”, proposing that another term—post-compulsory education and training—be used instead. Some of the evidence that we have heard has told us that we cannot develop a lifelong learning strategy unless we know what lifelong learning is for and what we are trying to achieve. I would like each group of witnesses to say what the lifelong learning strategy for Scotland should be trying to achieve.

**The Deputy Convener:** I emphasise the need for brevity, because this session will finish at 6 minutes past 11. Who would like to answer first?

**David Bleiman:** I will be brief. That question raises issues across the inquiry, but my key point is that lifelong learning is important for the economy. It is therefore relevant to consider whether further and higher education are delivering what the economy needs, in relation to the qualifications that the work force requires and the wider contributions that the sector can make, such as the research contribution of the universities. It is right that that important point should be emphasised.

Lifelong learning—if that is a valid term that we would sign up to—must be about enhancement of individual life chances, development of a greater sense of self-worth and widening of horizons. Everybody who goes through education should experience those things. They are certainly experienced by those who are experiencing further and higher education for the first time and those who have as mature students had the opportunity to return to learning. It would be important not to confine or restrict the aspects of post-compulsory education that meet individual aspirations and needs rather than society's economic needs.

**Carol Judge:** For me, lifelong learning means educated and trained employees meeting the needs of the Scottish economy and employers.

Education does not stop when people leave school, college or university. The drive to learn continues throughout a person's lifetime and reaches into a person's work and personal life.

**Lee Whitehill:** Lifelong learning should mean jobs, purely and simply. I went to a further education college and a university and enjoyed all the things that David Bleiman mentioned, but I know that if one does not have a job, one does not have life chances.

**Howard Wollman:** Lifelong learning is obviously to do with jobs but it is also to do with wider matters such as personal and social development, which Marilyn Livingstone said might not always be evident in the project that the committee visited.

Many years ago, I had the privilege of teaching a 65-year-old retired Borders shepherd who was studying for a BSc in biological sciences. That sort of thing is part of lifelong learning and needs to be taken on board.

**Marian Healy:** I want to call the committee's attention to the 1997 report of the national advisory group on continuing education and lifelong learning, which identified a huge list of excluded groups. We are not talking only about young adults and their aspirations for education and training. We need to focus on the groups that are excluded, information on which is included in that report. I am sure that Jim Gallacher, who compiled the report, will be able to provide the committee with a copy.

**Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab):** I am also interested in the EIS's suggestion that we should adopt another approach. I am not persuaded by the fairly clunky formulation that is suggested. It strikes me that there is a danger that emphasis will be on the provider rather than on the learner. That is borne out in paragraph 2.3 of your submission, which states:

“the majority of such education should be delivered by professional teachers and lecturers in established and publicly funded institutions.”

That sounds well and good but does not acknowledge, for example, the reality of workplace learning that is advanced by the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union and by Unison. It strikes me that—

**The Convener:** Sorry, Brian. In deference to limited time, could we let the EIS comment on what you have said? I think that you make an important point.

**Brian Fitzpatrick:** Could I finish making it, then? It strikes me that there is a danger that the scope of what is suggested might narrow in relation to lifelong learning and life-wide learning.

**Marian Healy:** We did not intend to exclude workplace education and training. We are supportive of that; all the further education colleges try to engage in partnership arrangements with the enterprise networks in their areas. We are trying to promote partnership arrangements between employers, enterprise networks, further education colleges and universities in order that appropriate and, perhaps, accredited education and training that has been developed by academics and employers can be delivered in the workplace.

**Brian Fitzpatrick:** I am pleased to hear that, but it might require you to revisit your suggestion that the majority of post-compulsory education and training should be provided in the institutions by professional teachers and lecturers. That is not the reality now and it is not where some members of the committee would be happy for us to end up.

Paragraph 6.2 of the EIS submission talks about the education maintenance allowance. My children—who are aged 3, 7 and 11—come from the type of group that is inevitably bound for lifelong learning. Are their circumstances equally deserving of limited public resources as are those of children from under-represented groups who are assisted by educational maintenance allowances—children who came from backgrounds like my own? The fact that I got into lifelong learning means that my children do not come from the sort of background that I came from. Is that the point that the institute is making?

**Marian Healy:** The point is made in paragraph 6.2 of the submission. The institute suggests that the means-tested educational bursary system be extended across Scotland. We depend on the criteria that are set and the analysis that is undertaken of individual means.

**Brian Fitzpatrick:** Does that mean that your submission about the system being extended to all 16 to 18-year-olds should read as being extended on the basis of mean testing?

**Marian Healy:** Yes.

**Brian Fitzpatrick:** Before I turn to the MSF, I declare an interest. I am a member of the AEEU, which, from 1 January, is about to become Amicus.

I want to ask the witness from the MSF about removing the barriers to learning. I note what you said about ILAs—we are in aspic so far as payments are concerned. Do you see benefits for collective learning through stewardship of public resources that go into workplace learning?

**Lee Whitehill:** Absolutely. The collective ideal offers a way of taking ILAs forward, as they have their specific problems. It is important to negotiate that with companies. As I said earlier, the first step

is for both sides to get learning on to the bargaining table.

**Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP):** Given the points that have been made by all the witnesses—in particular the witnesses from the AUT and the EIS—I am curious about where we are heading. I can understand why witnesses are looking for collective negotiations—I can see the benefits of that. As we head towards globalisation, the competitor is not going to be at the other end of the M8 or down the M74, but in Tampere, Berlin or wherever. What effect will that have on negotiations on terms and conditions for lecturers in colleges and universities that will be competing with such distant competitor institutions?

I also have a question for the trade unions. We have failed as a nation if people do not see the benefits of lifelong learning. If you were to ask most people in Edinburgh what is the second largest employer in the city, they would be gobsmacked if you said that it was the University of Edinburgh. How do we manage to create a situation in which people feel closer to the universities? It may be that that is neither possible nor wanted, but can something be done to try to make the universities less of an ivory tower? Should people not feel that the universities are a key sector of our economy and that there is something in them for all of us, even if it is just that their Auntie Jeannie works there? Where do we go with that?

Given my support for Scandinavian as opposed to 51<sup>st</sup> state options, David Mundell said that it would be remiss of me not to ask the MSF whether it has any paid-leave comparators, in particular in the Scandinavian/nordic bloc?

**David Bleiman:** I will say something about international competition and I will ask Namasiku Liandu to say something about the universities' relationship with the local community.

**The Deputy Convener:** Let us take that issue first.

**Namasiku Liandu:** Universities are part of the community in which they are based. It is up to individual universities to make themselves known and relevant to the city in which they are located. At the University of Abertay Dundee—which I know a lot about—we go to local schools and talk to pupils about what Abertay does and how the pupils can benefit from what it offers. We hold events for local people in Dundee, so that they can take part and find out what the university is involved in and how that can be of benefit to them.

All universities in Scotland offer evening courses. That shows that the universities are relevant to people at any time of day. The universities must continue to do that to make themselves known to the community.

11:15

**David Bleiman:** Globalisation represents a potential threat to publicly funded higher education. The AUT is currently addressing major issues relating to that.

The concept that we would move rapidly from face-to-face delivery of higher education towards everyone studying on the internet has been punted for a few years. Although it may be happening, it is not happening as rapidly as some commentators suggested that it would. For the time being, the main implication of the international environment for higher education is that academic and research staff are in a global labour market and can and do move. The concept of a brain drain is perhaps a cliché, but we know that our members who are research staff on fixed-term contracts are moving to jobs in other countries. Two of our contract research staff representatives have moved recently. One went to a job in the States and another has been offered a job in Ireland on a much more favourable type of contract. The labour force is fairly mobile, so if higher education in Scotland does not offer reasonable rewards, security and career prospects, staff will move.

Scotland is a very attractive place for students from other parts of the world to study in. Higher education is one of the major export industries in the service sector in Scotland. Scotland is doing pretty well in that regard, although it will have to compete internationally to retain its advantage in years to come.

**Mr MacAskill:** Does the MSF have any comment about international comparators on paid leave?

**Lee Whitehill:** I am sure that there are comparisons with the Scandinavian countries, because there seem to be comparisons with the Scandinavian countries for everything.

**The Deputy Convener:** There are if your name is Kenny MacAskill.

**Lee Whitehill:** I am sure that they exist and that it will not be a problem to supply them to you.

I suggest that we should consider as comparators the 10 to 15 private Scottish companies that have agreed to get involved in union learning funds in our specific project. The comparators exist within Scotland.

**Carol Judge:** I will comment on how higher education institutions can become part of the community. As much as tradition has its place, some of the traditions in higher education maintain an elitist approach in certain areas. If the institutions shake that off and become more inclusive and valued by the community in which they reside, instead of being islands within it, the

community will start to value these institutions and see the role that they play. Much must be done to open the doors to higher education institutions and make them more accessible and valued by the community. Currently, they are islands within islands.

**Howard Wollman:** I would like to make a point.

**The Deputy Convener:** Time is very tight. I have one more witness. Is it a point that has not previously been covered?

**Howard Wollman:** It is important to say that in the modern new university sector, which most of our members—and my colleague Namasiku Liandu—come from, we are engaged with the community. We are not ivory-tower institutions. People from my institution are teaching in Craigmillar or are involved in projects in Wester Hailes. New advisory boards have been set up, on which there are representatives of local employers for every faculty. It is unfair to say that we are ivory-tower institutions. Our institutions are part of the communities in which they find themselves.

**The Deputy Convener:** Thank you. I should belatedly declare an interest as a member of the court of the University of Strathclyde.

**Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD):** I have a couple of questions for the AUT and one for one of the other bodies. Paragraph 7 of the AUT submission states:

"Universities have generally been more successful in filling places than further education colleges. Future expansion should therefore be geared towards the higher education level."

What is the evidence behind that contention?

**David Bleiman:** In general, student places in universities in Scotland have been heavily oversubscribed by applicants, although recently there have been difficulties in filling science and engineering places in some institutions, as I said. The current expansion is overwhelmingly weighted towards further education—40,000 out of the 42,000 new places are in further education.

There are dangers in that. Once students have progressed through further education, the natural aspiration of many—although not necessarily all—of them is to progress into higher education. As a number of people said, there are pathways to progress to higher education. No cap should be placed on such progress, but there is potential for more expansion in higher education.

We suggest that the strategic emphasis should be on higher education because most people nowadays face a number of career changes in the course of their working lives. The great advantage of higher education is that it gives the basic intellectual and study skills on which one can build more specific skills as and when required in the



course of one's working life. For that reason, the strategic emphasis needs to be on higher education in the future.

**Tavish Scott:** Would you—

**The Deputy Convener:** I am sorry, but I want to clarify something. I understand from previous evidence that around 30 per cent of higher education students are in further education colleges; is that bad?

**David Bleiman:** No—it is good. In most cases, higher education students within further education will not go to degree level. Within the further education sector, students who progress to degree level will do so by transferring to the appropriate level of a course and complete a degree in a higher education institution.

**The Deputy Convener:** But they might never get to a higher education institution unless they first go to a further education college.

**David Bleiman:** That is true. There is no doubt that local access to higher education in local further education colleges is an important pathway into higher education—it has been for many years in Scotland. We are not trying to do that down in any way. We are saying that, in the past few years, there has been more of a strategic emphasis by the UK Government and in Scotland on expansion in further education. We suggest that there should now be more of a strategic emphasis on growth in higher education.

**Tavish Scott:** I was cut off at the knees, convener. I am not clear what you are saying, Mr Bleiman. You seem to contradict yourself. I would be grateful if you would expand on what you mean by strategic emphasis. Do you mean that the funding councils should skew their funding away from the further education sector and that expansion should all be in the higher education sector or are you talking about collaboration? Paragraph 8.2 of the AUT submission states that

“better articulation with sub-degree provision in FE would be advantageous”.

What is the evidence to support the contention that

“Future expansion should therefore be geared towards the higher education level”?

**David Bleiman:** If you are asking for specific evidence on the ability of further and higher education institutions to recruit students, I do not have that at hand, but we will provide it. By strategic emphasis, I mean additional funding. I am not talking about a transfer of funds from further education to higher education—far from it. I am talking about the need for an overall expansion in lifelong learning. Within that expansion, there are advantages for Scotland in an emphasis on higher education.

**Tavish Scott:** How much additional funding would be required?

**David Bleiman:** The figures that have been used by the AUT and by Universities UK are in the billions at a UK level. If I remember correctly, Universities UK put the amount that is required at £15 billion. We are talking about a massive expansion. In Scotland, that sort of expansion will be possible only if something of that kind happens at a UK level and then, through the Barnett formula, funds become available to Scotland. However, in the chancellor's pre-budget statement, there is at least an indication of serious Treasury concern about the UK's needs for the development of higher education for economic reasons. If, as we hope, there is positive development at that level, we would look to the Scottish Parliament at least to match it.

**Tavish Scott:** That may be the case, but the committee needs specifics and your answer was very general. Could I move on to the—

**The Deputy Convener:** Tavish, we are very tight for time. Other witnesses are waiting.

**Tavish Scott:** I have one brief question for the unions. I concurred with what was said about workplace training, but I want to ask the MSF about its submission, which states:

“to date ... policy and resources have almost exclusively been devoted to the achievement of employability skills rather than those skills that enhance personal development and achieve improvements in the quality of life”.

I would be grateful if the witnesses could expand on that remark and give evidence to back it up.

**Lee Whitehill:** In a previous answer, I spoke about the priorities in lifelong learning. The view of the MSF is that employability is the priority. In our report, we have echoed the submission from the Scottish Trades Union Congress. We believe that people have a broader life if they have a job as a platform from which they can go out into different educational avenues.

When I was a university student, there were middle-aged men and women at the university who spent a lot of time developing themselves by doing a course in political science. I thought that that was wonderful, but I always found it sad that the number of them who used their new skills in a career was negligible.

We have to take one step at a time. Education for education's sake is a wonderful thing. However—and I am sure that some colleagues will disagree with me—education for education's sake will not benefit individuals, communities or the economy.

11:30

**The Deputy Convener:** I thank the witnesses for attending. I am sorry that the pace has sometimes been frenetic, but with so many witnesses and a lot of interest on the part of committee members, it has been a challenge to fit things in. We are very grateful for your evidence.

I am delighted to welcome to the committee witnesses from the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations. Present with us are Celia Carson, from the Voluntary Sector National Training Organisation; Joyce Connon, from the Workers Educational Association; Lesley Greenaway, from Volunteer Development Scotland; and Jayne Stuart, from Learning Link Scotland. On behalf of the committee, I welcome all of you here this morning. I am sorry that you are taking up position a little later than was intended but, as you will gather, we have had a fairly active evidence-taking session.

I understand that Celia Carson will make some opening remarks. I would be extremely grateful if she could keep those to three minutes.

**Celia Carson (Voluntary Sector National Training Organisation):** I am Celia Carson, head of training at the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations. SCVO implements the work of the Voluntary Sector National Training Organisation in Scotland. The Voluntary Sector National Training Organisation aims to have an effective, highly skilled voluntary sector that is capable of making a strong contribution to an inclusive and open society. It is a strategic, employer-led body that works in partnership with similar organisations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to support skill development for the sector.

The voluntary sector is diverse. In Scotland, it employs about 80,000 full-time equivalent staff and has the use of more than 300,000 regular volunteers. That provides us with a gateway to all the socially excluded groups in society.

The convener introduced my colleagues. Joyce Connon is the Scottish secretary of the Workers Educational Association. The WEA is one of the largest national voluntary organisations in Scotland providing adult education in the community and workplace. Lesley Greenaway is the head of training at Volunteer Development Scotland, which is a national centre for volunteering and community involvement throughout Scotland. Jayne Stuart is the director of Learning Link Scotland, which is an intermediary organisation with 80 member organisations that deliver adult education in a voluntary capacity throughout Scotland. Two of those organisations are members of the Scottish committee of the Voluntary Sector National Training Organisation.

We are very pleased to have been invited to give evidence to the committee today. We would like the committee to take a more holistic view of lifelong learning, to consider learning through volunteering, and to consider the benefits of learning for citizenship and the increased quality of life that lifelong learning can provide. We would also like the committee to value non-formal learning as a way in which to promote equality of access to community involvement and to create a learning culture in society and an informed democracy. I believe that the committee would be interested to know more about that.

We would like voluntary sector provision of adult education to be at the heart of any strategy that the committee recommends. We want the committee to recognise the specialist role that the voluntary sector plays in social inclusion, the way in which it takes account of diversity and the contribution that it can make to the general development of lifelong learning.

I do not want to say any more, because the issues that I have raised are dealt with in more detail in our written submissions. No doubt they will be elaborated on further in response to members' questions.

**The Deputy Convener:** I thank you for your submissions, which I found interesting, as I am sure that all other committee members did.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** I have two questions. The first is for Celia Carson. Like the convener, I found your submission useful and helpful. It talks about soft-measure indicators, in which the committee is quite interested. Will you expand on them? How would they work?

**Celia Carson:** Jayne Stuart from Learning Link Scotland might have more information. Our submission is a conglomeration.

**Jayne Stuart (Learning Link Scotland):** I was the daft person who mentioned soft-indicator pilots. Much of the work that our organisations do fits with the present Scottish credit and qualifications framework. However, our network has identified the fact that no accreditation system allows us to validate learning in community settings and to link social inclusion targets. We hope that we can work together to inform a strategy that might consider accreditation and validation of soft indicators that link to social justice targets in communities. We also hope that that strategy would merge with the work that has been done on the Scottish credit and qualifications framework.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** We have heard evidence that soft indicators are used to measure added value to the individual, and do not involve setting strict milestones or taking strict measurements. Is that what you are talking about?

**Jayne Stuart:** Yes. We are keen to examine the increased quality of life and its impacts through reduced crime, poverty and homelessness. Those issues all involve links to social inclusion targets. We also ask that a holistic view be taken of those matters, which recognises that those measurements are valid not only in those communities, but with policy makers, decision makers and funders. We can examine individuals' increased quality of life closely, but it is sometimes difficult to describe that or to have a broader understanding in different settings of what the benefit might be to individuals and, ultimately, communities.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** My second question is for Joyce Connon. I am interested in the job rotation scheme that your submission mentions, about which the committee has heard quite a bit. Will you expand on that? That would interest the committee.

**Joyce Connon (Workers Educational Association):** The job rotation model was developed in Denmark, in partnership with the WEA's sister organisation there, trade unions and employers. The model is simple. It deals with two major problems in employment policy: unemployment and the need to upskill people who are in work while maintaining companies' competitiveness and encouraging employers to engage in lifelong learning.

The model is flexible and can be applied in many ways, but a classic job rotation model would involve recruiting unemployed people and placing them on a training programme that has been designed around a job that has been identified with an employer. We find out what a company's training needs are and perform a training needs analysis with the company to identify who needs to be trained in the company. We train an unemployed person in the skills that are needed to allow them to join that company and release a worker.

While the substitute is in the company, they are paid as an employee. Workers are released on one-to-one substitution, or one previously unemployed person substitutes for a group of workers, who have a unique experience of paid educational leave. We have tried to negotiate for a broad learning opportunity, so learning covers personal development and basic skills, as well as vocational skills.

We have considered all angles of how to help a previously unemployed person to feel comfortable in the workplace. We have included in the programme workplace mentors. People who have been out of work for a long time can find the introduction back to the workplace difficult. They can feel threatened and uncomfortable—they might not know where to hang their coat and what

is important. We find that training the workplace mentors also increases a sense of lifelong learning in the workplace. The training that the mentors get is an important part of that.

The model has been part of the biggest trans-national partnership in Europe under the ADAPT programme. It started in Denmark and has been trialled in every country in Europe. Many countries in Europe are now legislating for the programme, the outcomes of which are very good indeed. A high percentage of unemployed people gain regular employment at the end of the programme.

The programme marries several different issues—unemployment, skills and competitiveness. It is flexible and can be adapted in many ways. We ran the first UK pilot in Glasgow with funding from the then Glasgow Development Agency, which continued to fund the pilot, although it has now stopped. We also ran a pilot in Ayr, which has been mainstreamed through funding from the European social fund and rolled out. After being piloted in one social inclusion partnership area, the programme is now working throughout Ayrshire.

We have a large strategic partnership in Lanarkshire with Scottish Enterprise Lanarkshire and both North Lanarkshire Council and South Lanarkshire Council.

David Coyne, the director for education in the European Commission, described the programme as the only innovation in lifelong learning in a decade. I really believe that it has something to offer in Scotland. We still have areas of intense long-term unemployment and the programme is a creative way of helping people out of the vicious circle of no experience, no job.

**David Mundell:** Community learning seems complicated for members of the community, who are looking out at the vast array of organisations that use the word "community" in some way. How could community learning be simplified or rationalised to make it simpler from the point of view of the prospective learner? All sorts of people appear to be dabbling in the community.

**Celia Carson:** Although the voluntary sector is diverse and provides a lot of the examples that the committee has been hearing about, it works naturally in partnership with other organisations and agencies in each community. We believe that the way to simplify the area is to provide people with a choice, working in partnership with organisations and agencies. Some of the evidence that the committee heard earlier from the further education sector talked about people providing the community with lifelong learning. There is potential for working in partnership. The witnesses that are here today represent networks of organisations. They talk to each other and work with each other

constantly. The way to avoid confusion in the public mind is to get consistency.

**Lesley Greenaway (Volunteer Development Scotland):** It is important to recognise that there are a number of guidance points for people to make choices. From a volunteering point of view, there is a national database of volunteering, which is about matching up people to opportunities. The same is true of learning. The Scottish university for industry has a database of learning opportunities. It is important to think about the starting point of the individual learner. Not every individual learner has a conscious expectation of entering learning at the outset; that is particularly true if we consider excluded groups.

For us in the mental health field, it is clear that the benefit that people gain from their first access to services moves them on. A number of organisations are developing quite progressive models that move people from being service users to being helpers with that service. If people shift their role and become a helper, they learn and move on, which might, in turn, move them into a more conscious choice about learning. Not all individuals have come into learning from informed positions and are making informed choices.

11:45

**David Mundell:** How do you find your working relationships with other organisations, such as Scottish Enterprise, the further and higher education sector and even SUFI and careers Scotland? How do you find their funding arrangements? Are their agendas the same as yours?

**The Deputy Convener:** I ask the witnesses to keep their answers fairly brief.

**Celia Carson:** As we stated in our submission, there is a problem with the local enterprise companies recognising and understanding that voluntary organisations are like small and medium-sized enterprises, which are their target group. We have recently suffered in trying to get LECs to recognise that voluntary organisations provide part of the economy. The size of the social economy and its contribution to society are only now being recognised.

We have had a problem in trying to negotiate with individual local enterprise companies, and colleges and universities, and in trying to work in partnership with a multiplicity of organisations. I think that we all feel that there is not much of a strategic lead from some of the bigger agencies, which we would like there to be.

**Elaine Thomson:** I want to ask about relationships with the local enterprise companies, but first I want to highlight the role of the local

economic forums, which involve various groups of people. Are you included in those forums? Have you built relationships with those enterprise agencies, and has that helped your situation?

**The Deputy Convener:** Perhaps each of the witnesses could answer that briefly.

**Joyce Connon:** The difficulty for organisations such as the WEA is that, although we are a national organisation, we have no access to national funds. We receive headquarters funding from the Scottish Executive, but get no funding whatever for teaching, and have to negotiate with 32 local authorities and however many enterprise companies. That is a major structural problem for an organisation that works in the post-16 sector and can—and does—make a recognised contribution.

We manage to tap in to a whole range of initiatives. A look at our accounts shows that only 21 per cent of our almost £2 million income comes from central resources; the rest is put together from other sources. Our funding is ad hoc because of the lack of a strategy, although we are probably in a better position than most organisations to access funding.

**Lesley Greenaway:** Volunteer Development Scotland has links with Scottish Enterprise, and we negotiate with it for funding. However, we have found it quite difficult to access funding that relates specifically to training and learning nationally. Locally, we find that organisations that wish to offer improved learning facilities or to engage in more formally recognised learning do not have a legitimate funding strand for accessing funding.

**Elaine Thomson:** I was trying to find out whether you have had any contact with, any representation on or any way into any of the local economic forums that have now been set up?

**The Deputy Convener:** That requires a simple yes or no answer. I will just run along the four witnesses.

**Celia Carson:** No.

**Joyce Connon:** It varies from area to area for us because we cover 20 sites.

**Lesley Greenaway:** No.

**Jayne Stuart:** It varies among our members. We do not have a mechanism for feeding it back to the wider network.

**Brian Fitzpatrick:** My question is for Joyce Connon of the WEA. I endorse what you say on the components of lifelong learning. It is helpful to have various submissions on what those components might be. It struck me that your submission is restrained. That is no bad thing; some submissions read more like bids from the bunker.

**The Deputy Convener:** Can we have a bid from the member; can we have a question?

**Brian Fitzpatrick:** I want to ask about the hints that you make about funding in your submission. You say, at the top of page 2:

"Elsewhere in the UK mechanisms do exist to enable such organisations to maximise their contribution to lifelong learning strategies."

What should we be doing that we are not doing in Scotland?

**Joyce Cannon:** We should recognise the Workers Educational Association as a serious player in post-16 education. Elsewhere in the UK, my organisation is funded through the same route as FE. That has brought problems; it needs to be reconsidered.

My organisation can deliver and has delivered throughout the UK. Consider our workplace learning programme, which was called return to learn. The programme was delivered in every national health service trust in Scotland. We have the potential to make a major impact. We cannot do that if we have to forage for every penny for teaching.

If we had access to funding for teaching, we would be equal partners at the table. We would be able to negotiate with the holders of funding. We would be able to match funding from Europe. That would highlight the value of our contribution—14,000 enrolments over 200 sites—which is significant. We would be able to go forward as more strategic players and to maximise the strength of our large voluntary organisation.

Voluntary organisations tend to get pigeonholed. Instead of being built in to wherever its strategic funding is, the voluntary sector tends to have separate roots. That is limiting.

**Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** I was going to follow up Brian Fitzpatrick's question, but you have answered it admirably.

I have a question for Lesley Greenaway from Volunteer Development Scotland. I welcome your comments on citizenship. That is always worth emphasising. Far too much of our inquiry concentrates on the economic agenda. We must emphasise time and again that education is also for citizenship.

In the paragraphs on the effectiveness and relevance of current funding mechanisms, you talked about the need to evaluate and monitor the impact of funding mechanisms on those with special needs. We have received submissions on that area, but we have not explored it in any great detail when taking evidence. We have talked much about widening access, but we have tended to talk about disadvantaged communities, rather than

specific groups. Will you expand on your comments and talk about how the wider and more formal statutory sector supports or does not support adults with special needs in learning opportunities?

**Lesley Greenaway:** To which point in the submission are you referring?

**Mr Macintosh:** Point 3. It is under the heading "Questions asked by the committee". I have no page numbers.

**The Deputy Convener:** Can you give a paragraph number? Are you talking about the submission from VDS?

**Mr Macintosh:** That is right: I am talking about the submission from VDS under the heading—

I am sorry—I have just realised that it is not in the submission from VDS; it is from the Voluntary Sector National Training Organisation. I am sorry, Lesley, to have completely confused you.

**The Deputy Convener:** That shifts things a bit. We are back to Celia Carson. Which page are you on, counting with your fingers?

**Mr Macintosh:** I am on the submission from the VSNT0; it is on page 5.

**The Deputy Convener:** Where on page 5?

**Mr Macintosh:** The second, third and fourth paragraphs. The submission says:

"At present learndirect Scotland does not monitor callers by disability ... Funding should also be provided to support special need training i.e. online learning should be "Bobby" compatible (ie accessible to people with visual impairments)".

The more general issue is that adults with special needs tend to miss out on learning opportunities. The committee must be careful not to overlook that important sector.

**The Deputy Convener:** Can Celia Carson comment on that?

**Celia Carson:** Yes. In general, because there is not such good recognition in Scotland of non-formal ways of lifelong learning, voluntary organisations have become used to offering different services of the kind that we have been hearing about to people who would not normally take part in lifelong learning or be able to choose those ways of including themselves. There are several good examples of voluntary organisations doing innovative work with individuals with special needs or health difficulties who have lifelong learning difficulties. We are asking the committee to recognise the diversity of the responses that the voluntary sector can give in meeting some of those needs.

**Mr Macintosh:** Do you think that there are specific problems with the funding mechanisms

that support lifelong learning opportunities?

**Celia Carson:** Yes. Perhaps Jayne Stuart can answer that question.

**Jayne Stuart:** I cite the example of a project in the Borders that deals with elderly people who are both rurally excluded and housebound. The project provides opportunities for people to use the community telephone network to participate in learning support and interaction with the community through their telephones. The pilot scheme for that project is being funded by the Scottish Executive's voluntary issues unit.

Good pockets of innovative work are being tested. We need to take the learning from those tested models and ensure that the models are mainstreamed and developed. We get funding for trying out and testing projects, but the difficulty for the voluntary sector lies in continuing the good practice and the good work.

**Joyce Connon:** Voluntary sector organisations are often unable to access the money for learner support that the statutory agencies can access, because of the way in which we are funded.

**The Deputy Convener:** I thank the four of you very much for attending this morning, for your written submissions and for the supplementary oral evidence, which has been extremely helpful. I am sorry that you were called to give evidence a little later than had first been anticipated.

Our next witnesses are from Community Learning Scotland. I extend a warm welcome to Mr Charlie McConnell, the chief executive, Mr Rory Macleod, the director of community learning, and Linda McTavish, the chairman and a former principal of Anniesland College. We had the pleasure of Linda's company at our away day. It would be helpful to the committee if one of you—Linda, perhaps—could give a brief introduction of about three minutes.

**Linda McTavish (Community Learning Scotland):** We believe that lifelong learning needs to support a social justice agenda too. You have received many submissions about vocational needs from universities, colleges and other agencies. We are here to speak about the social justice agenda for promoting access to lifelong learning for the most marginalised groups in society through appropriate support and guidance and funding systems that encourage providers to target disadvantaged groups.

We support what the voluntary organisations said in their submission. Lifelong learning opportunities need to be provided for people in relevant and accessible ways; those ways may be within institutions, but we believe passionately in community-based learning. Community Learning Scotland is the Government's national

development agency for community-based learning and is currently under review. The agency was set up in 1999 and advises government and local service providers, acts as a national resource centre in promoting best practice and is the professional training standards and qualifications endorsement agency. It acts as the NTO for the sector and publishes a wide range of journals, to try to share best practice in Scotland.

Community learning is an employment sector in Scotland; the term replaced community education in the 1999 review. There are several thousand specialist trained graduates in community education, who are employed primarily by local authorities and non-governmental organisations such as the WEA. I am the principal of a college and could not deliver my lifelong learning agenda without working in partnership with organisations such as community education and the voluntary sector.

12:00

The underlying rationale of the sector is our belief that, to help those who are most disadvantaged, services should often be provided locally. We wish to increase participation throughout Scotland. The majority of our learning programmes are not certificated. They encompass learning linked to community action and active citizenship, and to tackling issues that are of concern to local people, such as crime prevention, unemployment and drugs. There is a strong emphasis on social development programmes that strengthen communities.

Scots like participating in this form of education. The last Scottish Executive statistics show that about 1 million people, 50 per cent of whom are adults, participate. They trust their local areas to be the first steps in education. Since 1999, all 32 councils have had community planning partners. That involves colleges, universities and the voluntary sector. Community planning is new to us, but we are rolling out community learning plans to try to join up the issues in which we are all interested.

I apologise for the state of my voice—I have been ill, but I was so passionately involved in this that I wanted to come to the committee.

**The Deputy Convener:** The state of your voice has in no way diminished the quality of the content of your evidence, for which we are all extremely grateful. We particularly appreciate your coming here when you are obviously feeling a bit below par. It is very public-spirited of you. I thank you for that introductory evidence.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** I have two questions, one on guidance and one on funding. First, in your evidence you talk about a system of guidance—

particularly for more disadvantaged groups—that is much more flexible and works with people from a very early and basic stage. Will the new careers Scotland company be able to carry out that remit? Secondly, on existing funding systems, you talk about co-ordinating funding from different sources within a coherent strategic framework. Could you expand on that?

**Linda McTavish:** I invite Rory Macleod to comment. Rory has been seconded to Community Learning Scotland from Scottish Borders Council.

**Rory Macleod (Community Learning Scotland):** There is undoubtedly potential for careers Scotland to fulfil a role that has not been fulfilled until now. Of course, it remains to be seen whether it will do so. However, one of the challenges for careers Scotland, which was implied in part of our response and by the witnesses from the voluntary sector, is the need to be much more—I try to avoid using “joined-up”—cohesive in being able to consider individuals’ needs.

The funding structure prohibits cohesive participation to some extent, partly because the guidance system does not fully understand the funding structures. At the moment, the guidance system tends to label a person before they walk through the door, rather than assess their needs before they leave. That is one of the challenges for careers Scotland, which must not be left to stand alone. The institutions that currently offer higher and further education and the myriad organisations that offer community-based learning must be part of the structure and have absolute status within it. That is a significant challenge for careers Scotland to broker.

**Charlie McConnell (Community Learning Scotland):** May I add to that, convener?

**The Deputy Convener:** Before you do, I would like to make an explanatory announcement. Members of the Multiple Sclerosis Society are presenting a petition to the Public Petitions Committee this morning and our proceedings may be slightly interrupted as the only disabled access is via the chamber.

**Charlie McConnell:** On funding and more coherent funding mechanisms, the sector has had a 20 per cent cut in real terms since the mid-1990s. The state invests about £15 per person per annum in community learning. We are not a particularly cash-rich sector. As you heard from the voluntary sector witnesses, we raise much of our investment entrepreneurially. We have a cocktail of funding, most of which is short term. The most sustained funding element comes through local authorities. Community learning strategies are a component of community planning and a new element in the architecture of service

delivery, as Linda McTavish mentioned. Part of the objective is to have locality budgeting and pooled budgeting. We must encourage a range of diverse partners from local authorities, further education colleges and the voluntary sector to pool funding and more effectively target the investment in support.

Community learning is alone in the Scottish education system in having a completely non-statutory base. A plethora of acts underpins investment in further, higher and school education. No Scottish act underpins investment in community learning. That makes us vulnerable to cuts.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** Do you think that the committee should consider a statutory role for community-based learning?

**Charlie McConnell:** Yes. We would like that issue to be explored. It was raised in the 1998 Scottish Office review of community education, “Communities: Change Through Learning”, more commonly known as the Osler review. However, no action has been taken since then.

**David Mundell:** Your submission covers the topic of partnership. Is it not the case that we have many partnerships simply because people have access to the funding? A better approach might be to focus resources rather than to spread them into different pots. If the money were more focused, whose pot would you put it in?

**Charlie McConnell:** In terms of the social justice agenda, community learning providers—both statutory and voluntary—are aware of the need to target excluded groups, issues and geographies. Across all community learning strategies and local plans, there is clear targeting. In that sense, we are not a universal service—in contrast to schools, for example. The main criterion to date has been to target certain user groups or deprived geographies. As you know, some funding mechanisms, such as social inclusion partnership funding, encourage the targeting of certain groups in rural and in urban areas. Our sector often needs to raise short-term funding. Joyce Cannon mentioned the difficulty of sustaining funding and the fact that we often have to replicate mainline best practice in our field. However, most of that short-term funding is targeted funding for socially excluded groups.

**David Mundell:** A range of organisations provides funding—local authorities, Scottish Enterprise and the FE and HE sectors. Those organisations receive resources from central Government to provide that funding. Is there scope for those resources to be more focused to allow local authorities to take the lead? If not, do you support the rainbow approach of moneys being in a number of pots?

**Charlie McConnell:** Part of that funding position is a necessity, because community learning does not have a central funding council, as the HE and FE sectors do. The majority of state funding goes through local authorities, which spend between £80 million and £100 million—those figures are not entirely robust—on supporting community learning. We do not have sound statistics that could tell us, for example, the amount of investment in the FE, HE or voluntary sectors. The Executive has a dearth of information on that.

I am attracted to your proposal of having more coherence in order to target more effectively. We are also attracted to the notion, with which we are experimenting, of locality budgeting—pulling and working together in that way.

**David Mundell:** We hear a lot about duplication. How much duplication is there, or is there diversity? Sometimes we hear that there is duplication and sometimes we hear that there is diversity. Which side of that question do you come down on?

**Rory Macleod:** There is duplication, but it exists only when people feel that they are duplicating. I do not mean to be glib, but I suggest that there is not as much duplication as is perceived. We think that cohesive partnering is a solution to that problem. We need to work together more closely. People need to drop the barriers between their institutions—the groups that hold the purse-strings, as you suggested—to allow them to be more flexible. That is not just an action, but a state of being that needs a change in attitudes.

We also want to erase duplication to equalise provision for places where there is none at all or it is patchy, which includes rural areas as well as some inner-city areas. The issue of duplication is worth exploring further, because we feel that it is sometimes a perception rather than a reality. However, where a clear example of duplication exists, one cannot argue about it.

**Charlie McConnell:** To use the analogy of a pupil-teacher ratio, the ratio of professional community educators, irrespective of whether they are employed by a local authority or voluntary organisation, to members of the community is about one to several thousand. Therefore, the notion that there is a lot of duplication in the demand and supply equation does not stand up. There are huge needs out there.

We are the sector that primarily leads on adult basic education, for example. You will know from earlier evidence the appalling statistics on adult literacy and numeracy. Those adults form one of the groups on which our sector and community learning strategies focus. No doubt one can find housing schemes in which voluntary organisations and local authority community workers are

working. However, in most parts of Scotland—in Glasgow, for example—the ratio of a professional community educator to the population is one to 30,000 people. The demand far outstrips the supply-side capacity to provide locally based and community-based learning opportunities. In recent years, a number of those opportunities have been cut, even though they are critical for second-chance learning.

12:15

**Linda McTavish:** Collaboration and partnership are fundamental to the way of working in this area, whether we are talking about institutions working with community education or institutions working with industry and small businesses. No one sector can own or control the process. The sectors that have widened access have not done so on their own. Collaboration and partnership are vital for the development of further services in lifelong learning. No one has ownership of the process.

Earlier reference was made to “life-wide” and “lifelong” education. Please remember those words, as we see them as fundamental. In some communities, lifelong learning may have had a strong vocational emphasis. We are looking to increase employment opportunities, but we also have to deal with children who are being brought up in households where their grandparents are the main carers. Those people are outwith the age of employment.

We want the committee to consider the situation in the Scandinavian countries. I know that Kenny MacAskill does not like to think of Scotland as the 51<sup>st</sup> state of the United States, but the committee should also examine what states such as Wisconsin and the southern states are doing with disadvantaged communities. In ethnic minority communities in Glasgow, some women are hidden from all services. To reach such women, we need to work with partner organisations that are trusted by communities. That is the key.

**Tavish Scott:** This has been an interesting session. I have two brief questions, one of which is rather technical. Perhaps I have got the wrong end of the stick, but is there a distinction between community education and adult learning? I thought that your submission suggested such a distinction, but I may just have misunderstood it. My second, rather more meaningful, question relates to the barrier that you identify in your submission between vocational and community education. I am interested in positive suggestions about how to break down that barrier. Can you provide the committee with examples of where it is being broken down and the system is working particularly well?

**Charlie McConnell:** I will deal with the first



question before handing over to Rory Macleod, who will deal with the second.

The umbrella term "community education" came into the Scottish education lexicon following the publication in 1975 of a report by Sir Kenneth Alexander; it was used to bring together adult education and youth and community work services, which were recognised as the informal education services in Scotland. The scope of community education is broadened by the inclusion in it of youth work services—it is genuinely lifelong. We see post-16 education as the adult dimension of community education.

**Rory Macleod:** Sometimes the link between vocational training and learning and adult education disguises the richness of adult education opportunities. The WEA's submission contained a number of examples of the wide range of adult education opportunities that are on offer. We contribute to that range of opportunities.

On a scale of sexiness, vocational training is not as hot as so-called further education and higher education success. We suggest that the institutions that provide further and higher education opportunities and the agencies and institutions that offer vocational training need to revisit that issue. Vocational training, rather than academic success, is the way in which many young adults in particular get a sense of achievement and are able to progress. From that point, they are able to move on.

Tavish Scott asked for examples. We find that pre-access access—the confidence-building stage of getting people back into learning how to learn—is valuable but much undervalued. Pre-access access is crucial for many young adults and, increasingly, for the caches of older adults who are becoming deskilled in the areas in which they were qualified and who are having to retrain. They need that stage to get back into learning.

That is not a matter of throwing open the door to an existing opportunity and inviting someone to walk through it. The system is not always cohesive. We have heard about the opportunities that careers Scotland may provide for brokering such deals, but that needs to link up to giving people the confidence and wherewithal to learn how to learn. That brings us back to the challenge of what lifelong learning means.

I have just left Scottish Borders Council, so I can give you an example from my local authority. I hesitate to say that the example was based on a Danish model, but it was. It is called the "production school" and is based on something called the "produktions skole". It raises the idea that young adults need to train with a balance of vocational training and personal and social development skills. We think that the change

between leaving school and going on to further education or other training is perhaps not as cohesive as it needs to be. Gaps have been filled by projects that take people on and use soft indicators to show progress in personal development and confidence. People do not get a certificate for being more confident, but trainers who work with those young people day in, day out over a period of months can say how they have grown, adapted and worked towards 60 per cent employment potential. Such projects are growing all over the country.

**Linda McTavish:** When that sort of project and institutional learning are linked up, that will make a difference to our society. They have to come together.

**Tavish Scott:** Do you relate much of that back to what goes on in schools? The growth of the individual, self-confidence and the ability to present oneself are important. Where do you see schools playing a role in that process?

**Rory Macleod:** Schools undoubtedly have a role to play. In fact, I suggest that the process should start at pre-school. There should be a national initiative to consider citizenship for three and four-year-olds at pre-school level. That is not about anything bold and grand; it is about confidence and giving people the wherewithal to achieve success. Perhaps the definition of lifelong learning should include that whole continuum of schooling, as well as continuing education after school. It is all linked, but perhaps the existing structure tends to separate the stages.

**Brian Fitzpatrick:** My question is for Charlie McConnell and follows on from the answer that he gave to David Mundell. I think that you were just about to tell us that something was crucial when you were cut off. I just wondered what it was that you regarded as so crucial.

**Charlie McConnell:** You have caught me there, I am afraid. I was probably on a roll.

**Brian Fitzpatrick:** If it was not really important, it does not matter.

**Charlie McConnell:** Of course we are saying that our sector is crucial. In many ways, it is perceived as a poor cousin and is not always understood. The terminology is not rocket science; schoolteachers teach in schools, college lecturers lecture in colleges and community educators educate out in the community. We all know that, if we want to engage with many adults, we have to go to them in places that are convenient and where they feel confident. We have to develop our curriculum and learning programmes around real issues in people's lives.

We are as much concerned with vocational learning as we are with non-vocational learning.

Our sector is not just about table tennis or dressmaking. I do not want to put those things down; in many ways, they are important, too. We work with tenants groups, housing co-operatives, community enterprises and credit unions. We work in partnership with colleges on return-to-study programmes. We help people with their work as well as tackling critical social issues. If people do not tackle those issues and if we do not have a strong social economy and socially cohesive communities, companies will not consider those communities attractive places in which to invest. Communities are therefore part of the economic development imperative.

**The Deputy Convener:** That sounds crucial to me. That brings us to the end of this part of the evidence-taking session. I thank the three of you for your evidence this morning and for your submissions. I hope, Mrs McTavish, that you have a speedy recovery.

**Linda McTavish:** Thank you.

**The Deputy Convener:** On behalf of the committee, I have pleasure in welcoming representatives of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Bob Christie is the head of policy at COSLA. Councillor Brian Oldrey is chair of the lifelong learning and work policy board of COSLA and also deputy leader of Renfrewshire Council. Jim Cunningham is head of economic development at Renfrewshire Council. I hope that the council is still working while two of its pivotal members are here in Edinburgh.

It is good to have you here. Thank you for your submission. One of you may speak briefly by way of introduction.

**Councillor Brian Oldrey (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities):** Currently, we see lifelong learning as a multitude of initiatives. They are not always interrelated and they are often based on challenge funding, which means that it takes time and resources just to get to the starting line, let alone to get funding.

That leads us to be concerned that, if there is too much central control, there will be a one-size-fits-all approach to dealing with the issues that we face. A more local approach would match needs to disparate local communities. That does not mean that we seek an unplanned approach—it is exactly the opposite. We consider the establishment of community planning and community learning strategies to be an ideal vehicle through which local needs and their funding can be met. That would have to be monitored, which would lead to outcome agreements between people based on the locality's definition of their needs.

We have a concern about what we see as a concentration on formal education and educational establishments, and on qualifications. I will expand

on that a little. One example is VQs. We are concerned about whether today's employers take vocational qualifications as seriously as they should be taken.

We also consider that the concentration on formal education is putting people off education rather than getting them into it. Qualifications and formal establishments seem to us to be the second part of the pattern for helping the people whom we seek to help most. The aim must be to provide people with confidence in themselves. Often, we are talking about people who see formal education as having failed them. To suggest that the way forward is to return to that experience must sound like we are presenting them with a hurdle instead of providing them with a stepping stone.

There is considerable benefit in community-based learning that helps individuals recognise their existing skills and interests and helps them to develop confidence. There are examples throughout Scotland. In Renfrewshire, we have tried to encourage young people back into learning through the things that interest them—pop music, theatre and drama—rather than by asking them to attend courses. We tried inviting every young person in Renfrewshire to a conference. Community education workers managed to chivvy 30 people along to it. We then turned that into what we called Paisley in the park, which is a concert for local bands. Hundreds of young people were there and we had the opportunity to mix with them, talk to them and get them involved in a range of activities.

There needs to be a coherent approach. We also need to be able to expect longer-term stability. I am bound to get myself into trouble by saying this, but we have had a minister tell us what is expected of us, that minister has changed and now we find that what was said is not happening and something else is happening. That is not the best way to achieve results. We have considered the Irish experience. There, there is a 10-year plan that goes beyond the immediate and looks to the future. Such a plan would provide stability.

I echo Charlie McConnell's comments about authorities' funding problem—the fact that community education is non-statutory. He gave an example from Glasgow, which results from Glasgow City Council's trying to balance its books. When an authority tries to do that, it looks to non-statutory provision; it does not look to its statutory responsibilities first. In comparison with other countries' central funding that is designed to deal with lifelong learning issues, Scotland's funding is woefully inadequate. The amount of funding has declined rather than increased over the years.

12:30

**Marilyn Livingstone:** I have two questions. I am interested in some of what COSLA said about funding, especially the restriction of local enterprise company funding to VQs, because I am interested in those qualifications. Quite a few witnesses have suggested providing an entitlement, such as a smart card or—I am reluctant to suggest it—an individual learning account. What are your views on that?

My second question—you will be glad to hear that I have only two—relates to your evidence about adults with learning difficulties. Your submission refers to dyslexia. I am interested in that issue, because I visited a local college and met students who were considering learning support. They asked how we can pick up better on people who have a learning disability such as dyslexia. Will you share your experience with the committee?

**Councillor Oldrey:** I can deal with the first question only, because I have no direct experience of dealing with dyslexia.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** I used dyslexia as an example. Sometimes, people with special learning needs are well into their careers before their needs are spotted. How can we detect and support better people with learning needs? How do we identify them more quickly?

**Councillor Oldrey:** Marilyn Livingstone's question about funding relates more to what authorities do with funding when they have it. I am more concerned about obtaining funding in the first place than about how I distribute it. If we aim for more local provision that is designed initially to meet the needs of individuals, we may not necessarily need to give individuals money. The funding that authorities receive should be directed to meet needs. Individuals would receive funding in that way.

Like Marilyn Livingstone, I do not want to mention individual learning accounts if I can avoid it, but they demonstrate the inherent problems of going in that direction. We should have funding to meet an individual's needs instead of giving individuals money directly or through a scheme.

**Jim Cunningham (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities):** I will not talk specifically about dyslexia or special learning needs, but my area has projects that have been developed to help people with more severe disabilities to re-enter the labour market. Those projects have involved job coaching, mentoring and people working alongside the individual involved, who then proceeds to more learning or to a work environment. We have used funding from the social inclusion partnership and other sources to fund such models.

That highlights one of the issues that the committee may consider further. A plethora of initiatives exists and people are bidding for funding. In lifelong learning, there do not seem to be sufficient mechanisms to allow us to learn from other areas' or from other initiatives' experiences. If Fife Council wins funding to run an initiative, COSLA has a role in disseminating some of what is learned, but if an initiative goes beyond a local authority, it is difficult to grasp and learn from that practice.

**David Mundell:** I have two separate questions. Your submission alludes to the first issue, but does not really expand on it. It relates to a concern that I have about the public sector as a whole. In a large part of the area that I represent, 40 to 50 per cent of people are employed in the public sector. There has been a lot of talk about upskilling the work force, but I am concerned about the lack of direct involvement that the agencies that were tasked with such responsibilities seem to have with the public sector. They do not even seem to see public sector employees as existing as part of the overall work force. That is a matter of great concern. If we intend to upskill our work force, we must upskill the whole work force.

**Bob Christie (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities):** We recapped some of the current local government national training organisation's experience in an annex to our submission. At the leaders' meeting on Friday this week, we will probably support a bid for that NTO to become one of the new sectoral skills councils.

We take the issue of upskilling our employees in the public sector seriously. At the committee's meeting last week, I think, Scottish Enterprise was requested to consider how it may contribute to upskilling in the public sector. It may flag up an issue to which we would certainly wish to return—the barrier to double funding. We understand that Scottish Enterprise is able to fund other NTOs to provide upskilling in their sectors but is unable to provide funding to the local government NTO because it is a public sector organisation and receives its funding from the Executive.

**David Mundell:** I wanted to understand Scottish Enterprise's position because the issue is extremely serious and must be addressed. Public sector employees are not invisible and must benefit from the process as much as anyone else.

What is local authorities' strategic role in the overall lifelong learning process rather than in relation to their own employees? Are you satisfied that there is a holistic, joined-up approach to lifelong learning in most local authorities?

**Councillor Oldrey:** The answer to the final question is no—I am certainly not satisfied that there is a holistic approach. In that area and in a

number of other areas we are going through a learning process as much as anybody else is.

I refer you back to where we started—community learning strategies and community planning. An issue in community planning may be being addressed, which relates back to funding—as everything does. People are being urged strongly to release their grip on money that they have spent a long time getting together so that it is used in a holistic way for everybody.

Unless Scottish Enterprise's rigid control of how to access its courses and continue in them changes, it is difficult to see how it can intervene in local authorities' training, apart from in respect of public money. If a person must be unemployed for six months, that will not help people in employment. There must be firm assurances from local authorities that they are prepared and able to release people for the upskilling that we are discussing.

I do not mean that that does not happen. For example, my authority is one of the 12 pilot areas dealing with additional funding for adult literacy. One of our first approaches was to our majority trade union—Unison—to find out how it saw such funding being an advantage to our employees.

We attempted to get home helps who relate well to elderly people to help with benefit forms and so on. Despite our offer to upgrade the home helps' posts and give them additional pay, we found resistance, which we could not understand initially. Eventually, we discovered that it came down to the home helps' lack of confidence in literacy and numeracy. As a result, we will direct funding at the situation, but people must be willing to come together in such circumstances.

**Bob Christie:** It is worth reflecting on an important point about the strategic role. Local authorities are mandated to bring partners together to prepare community learning strategies. They would welcome the development of a national lifelong learning strategy. That strategy should be applied throughout the Scottish Executive and guidance should be issued to all agencies and non-departmental public bodies that are funded through the Scottish Executive. At the local level, the local authority and some of its partners may feel that a particular issue is important, but unless other partners, such as health boards, have received guidance and know that they should value that issue, things are unlikely to happen in a joined-up way.

**Mr Macintosh:** I will continue on the same point. The proposal has been made in evidence that a national funding body should be established to bring together SFEFC, SHEFC and responsibility for other areas of learning, including community learning. What are your views on that proposal,

particularly in the light of the lack of a statutory base for community education?

**Councillor Oldrey:** It is always difficult to strike the right balance. As I said earlier, I am not in favour of a totally laissez-faire attitude—I believe that there must be central control. I am in favour of anything that provides a statutory basis for non-formal education, whatever form that may take, as that would provide considerable support, not just for local authorities but for voluntary organisations. The point was well made that local authorities have cut back on their funding for voluntary organisations, which have suffered from reductions in grant. That has made them unable to buy into initiatives. Our ability to buy in services from voluntary organisations has also suffered. The voluntary sector is always one of the first areas that we consider—we defend formal education to death, but we tend to allow other forms of education to drift away. We are talking about the mechanics and—I am sorry to repeat myself—I am more concerned about the funding than about who has central control of the money. We could argue for ever about how the money is distributed, but members will have gathered that I tend to believe that the closer one gets to people's needs, the more likely one is to meet those needs. It would be difficult to meet them if a national perspective were taken.

**Mr MacAskil:** I will follow on from that—I think David Mundell raised a similar point. Let us say that we go for an overarching funding council that involves both the voluntary sector and lifelong learning as well as the further and higher education provision that already exists. What would be the role of COSLA in that structure? Would COSLA be the conduit for organisations in local areas or would individual organisations submit separate bids? I ask that question because there is some sympathy for a national funding body. Furthermore, you highlight in your submission the difficulties and the losses that can arise when organisations bid against one another. What would be the downward impact of the pyramid structure if we were to establish a national funding body?

**Councillor Oldrey:** I do not envisage that COSLA, as an entity, would be able to fulfil that role. COSLA is a representative body—it does not act on people's behalf—and I do not think that it could be the body through which bids would go. COSLA's role should be to make certain that people are given advice so that they do not have to compete; it should not have a controlling function.

**Mr MacAskil:** Do you think that local authorities, as opposed to COSLA, should be the conduit? Should Renfrewshire Council behave like a university? I am thinking of the way in which

universities apply to SHEFC, which distributes the money, while the individual departments are allowed to get on with their work. Should individual organisations within Renfrewshire bid separately, or should the bids be collated?

12:45

**Councillor Oldrey:** The logic of the original position that I explained is that bidding should be done by community planning organisations or through community learning strategies rather than by the local authority. I am perhaps straying into areas on which I am not sure that COSLA has a policy. I am here to represent COSLA, but I am drifting into talking about my view of life. Unless real status is given to community learning strategies and community planning, we will not be successful in getting the partners to relinquish money.

For example, Renfrewshire Council is a pilot authority for adult literacy. We decided, as most authorities did, to use the funds to employ a co-ordinator. We are currently discussing who should be the co-ordinator's line manager, but we must bear in mind the fact that if that person's line manager is someone in the local authority, our partners might reasonably suspect that we are doing that to get most of the money that is on offer. Therefore, we must be brave and say that we will not do that. We may provide pay and rations for that individual, but day-to-day line management will be handled by a sub-group of the community learning strategy group that is dealing with the money.

I believe that by going down that route we can encourage people to believe that we want partnerships and that we want to share. Our social inclusion partnership used to be called Paisley partnership board and was run by the local authority, mainly because we wanted to keep an eye on the 25 per cent of the funding that we provided in those days. It is difficult for local authorities to move from that position and accept that the activity is shared. In my view, if COSLA or local authorities were to be the conduit through which bids for money were made, the element of partnership would rapidly be lost. However, I must say that that is my personal view. I do not think that COSLA has even addressed the issue.

**Bob Christie:** As Councillor Oldrey rightly points out, we have not developed a policy on that issue. It is worth reflecting on the fact that, although local authorities are mandated to bring together partners to prepare community learning strategies, there is now a move towards considering whether there is a necessity for lifelong learning strategies and partnerships at a local authority level. Any local gate keeping—or any local conduit for bidding to a national body—would be done most

coherently through a form of local lifelong learning partnership. However, that is a new issue for the agenda; we do not have a policy on that.

**Jim Cunningham:** Structures and funding mechanisms are important, but the key issue is how to engage the disengaged in lifelong learning and in the labour market. Such engagement must come through activities on the ground.

**The Deputy Convener:** As there are no further questions, I thank our witnesses for coming and I thank Councillor Oldrey for the candour of his evidence. It has been very illuminating.

That brings matters to a conclusion. I thank members for attending.

*Meeting closed at 12:48.*



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