



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 4 March 2014

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EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

6th Meeting 2014, Session 4

CONVENER

*Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)

*Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

*Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)

*Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD)

*Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP) (Committee Substitute)

James Corry (Unison Scotland)

Rob Doyle (Skills Development Scotland)

Dr Cathy Howieson (University of Edinburgh)

Danny Logue (Skills Development Scotland)

Kate Lynch (Unison Scotland)

Sheila Semple (University of Edinburgh)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Terry Shevlin

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Education and Culture Committee

Tuesday 4 March 2014

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 10:03*]

Interests

The Convener (Stewart Maxwell): Good morning. I welcome members to the sixth meeting in 2014 of the Education and Culture Committee. I remind all who are present to ensure that all electronic devices are switched off because they interfere with the broadcasting system—as we and Colin Beattie will remember from last week.

Our first item today is to invite Mary Scanlon to declare any relevant registrable interests.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): This is probably the only committee of the Parliament for which I have a registrable interest. I started teaching a further education night class in 1973—41 years ago—and for the 20 years before coming in to Parliament in 1999 I was a part-time and full-time lecturer in further and higher education in economics and business studies. I have a small pension, which I have declared in the register of interests. I hope that that is enough.

The Convener: Thank you for that, Mary, and welcome to the committee.

Decision on Taking Business in Private

10:04

The Convener: Our second agenda item is to decide whether to take agenda items 4 and 5 in private at this meeting and future meetings. Do members agree to do so?

Members *indicated agreement.*

My World of Work

10:04

The Convener: We move on to the substantive item on the agenda. Agenda item 3 is to take evidence on the Skills Development Scotland career support service that is known as My World of Work. I welcome to the meeting James Corry and Kate Lynch from Unison Scotland; Dr Cathy Howieson and Sheila Semple from the University of Edinburgh; and Danny Logue and Rob Doyle from Skills Development Scotland. Good morning to you all. I thank you for your attendance today and for your written submissions, which have been very helpful.

Dr Howieson and Sheila Semple have conducted research on the issue and in their written evidence have helpfully highlighted eight topics that have arisen from the research. Before I move on to my first question, I say to all six panel members that in order that we get through as much as possible today you need not all answer every question—certainly both representatives of each organisation do not have to answer each question.

Dr Howieson and Sheila Semple have had the opportunity to look at the other written evidence that has been submitted, in particular that from SDS. Do you have any comments on the eight topics that you think are relevant areas of interest for discussion?

Dr Cathy Howieson (University of Edinburgh): The other evidence does not change the eight implications that we have drawn. The SDS submission does not address those points, in particular the need for hard evidence as opposed to opinion. Much of the SDS submission refers to client evaluation, which is about opinion as opposed to hard evidence of impacts. The submission does not address issues to do with the criteria for seeing a careers adviser. There are also a number of places in the SDS submission where our findings are misinterpreted or misrepresented. I can give examples of that, if required.

The Convener: I am sure that we will come on to that.

Dr Howieson: Generally, we feel that our research evidence, other research evidence and evidence from the field really has potential. We have the basis or potential in Scotland for world-class careers provision, but that potential will be realised only if the variety of evidence about what is happening in practice is taken on board.

The Convener: Thank you. What are the SDS representatives' views of the comments that Dr Howieson has just made?

Danny Logue (Skills Development Scotland): Thank you, convener, and thank you to Dr Howieson for her comments.

First, as we said in our submission, we welcome the research of our colleagues Dr Howieson and Sheila Semple. In fact, it very much directly reflects our experiences and the feedback that we have heard to date from the customers to whom we have spoken: young people who are in school and who have left school, headteachers, et cetera. It also reinforces our approach, which is a multichannel approach to delivering careers information and advice and guidance services. There is the web service My World of Work, but there are also important face-to-face services that both young people and adults can access. We also have a customer contact centre.

Again, the research reflects the importance of all that; it is what is delivered through SDS's blended approach.

The Convener: Okay. Thank you for that. I wanted to get some general points on the record first. I move on to questions from members now. I ask members to indicate when they want to come in, but I will start with Jayne Baxter.

Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Good morning, everybody. I am interested in how agencies engage with young people, and how they ensure that they are reaching out to the young people who most need their services. It is clear from reading the paper from Dr Howieson and Sheila Semple that everyone is trying very hard, but could do better. It is obvious that there are gaps in engagement and that we need to try harder to reach out to particular sectors of school pupils. What steps is SDS taking to ensure better engagement?

Danny Logue: Thank you for the question. I have a couple points to make. First, I referred earlier to the feedback that we have heard from young people. In fact, we got 30,000 questionnaires back from young people who are in school and who have left school on their views and understanding of our services and how they can access them. In fact, 89 per cent of the secondary 4 students to whom we talked knew and understood how to access our services within schools.

The second issue concerns the rapidly changing behaviours and expectations of young people with regard to how they access services. Face-to-face contact is very important, but so is the growth of technology—for example, the web service that we provide through My World of Work. I want to draw a distinction in that respect, because we provide

an interactive web service rather than a website, as we did previously.

Another key issue is the important role that influencers play in working with young people. We need to look at how we build capacity and support teachers in schools, and at how we work with parents and with industry, and we need to reflect on how they can help.

Another issue with regard to young people accessing our services concerns the fact that, although our staff play a key role in schools, teachers and parents also play important roles in supporting children. The key with My World of Work, particularly with regard to linking up with partners—perhaps we will come back to that—is to ensure that young people acquire the career management skills that we, with teachers, are trying to encourage in them. The question is how they develop their own specific career management skills, and how that fits in with the core skills element of curriculum for excellence.

Another important point relates to what we call the skills planning model. We are looking at the current and future needs of the labour market, and at how young people can access our services and find out more about what is available. We have introduced that model with industry and staff in order to support teachers, parents and young people with regard to their particular needs.

I will make two final points in response to the question on universal access to our services for young people who are in schools and post school. We have a universal service that anyone can access through face-to-face contact, My World of Work or whatever. We also have targeted services as part of our work with schools to identify the young people who are most at risk of not securing positive destinations. That underpins my comment about the blended channel approach: face-to-face contact is a cornerstone of what we do and what we offer young people, as are our My World of Work web service and our contact service.

Jayne Baxter: You have said a great deal about people being able to access systems, but you have not mentioned effectiveness or whether access benefits them. Have you evaluated how beneficial people find that access? Does it get them to where they want to go?

Danny Logue: We recently did a couple of surveys. We carried out a survey of school leavers last year, and found that 70 per cent of respondents had accessed our face-to-face services in school. We also did a survey—it resulted in 30,000 feedback responses from young people who were in school and post school—on how they have found the services that we provide through our group work programme.

We also do important work in looking at school leaver destinations. Last year we recorded the highest number of positive destinations in our history—the figure was 91.4 per cent, which was an improvement on the year before.

We have—to go back to the earlier point—committed to a research and evaluation programme in schools over the next three years to find out from young people how they have found our services and group-work sessions.

We are also working closely with Education Scotland on our business excellence approach, which involves working with, and getting direct feedback from, teachers, pupils and parents in order to understand the impact of the services that we provide.

The Convener: I will push you on that issue, as Jayne Baxter was right to ask you about the difference—which Dr Howieson mentioned—between accessing, enjoying and giving positive feedback on something and assessing its effectiveness.

If I have a great day out on a training course, it does not mean that the course was particularly effective. I might have had a good day, but that would not tell you anything about whether the training course had helped me to learn new skills.

Can you explain a bit more about how you understand the difference between the impact of your work on young people and the positive feedback that you get? The two things are not necessarily the same.

Danny Logue: No, they are not. The service delivery model that we introduced has now been in schools for two years, and in phase 1 of the evaluation we have received direct feedback from young people, headteachers and our other partners on their satisfaction with what they have experienced in using the service in school.

The next stage will involve looking at the whole impact of the service; I mentioned earlier our three-year research and evaluation programme. How do we measure the impact of what we are doing? To date, our evaluation is very much about getting direct feedback from clients of all ages, including parents and teachers. We will have to look at doing further research on the impact of our work.

10:15

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I will just follow that up. I listened with interest to what Dr Howieson said at the start about hard evidence. Many people would think that a questionnaire that had covered 30,000 people would provide quantitative feedback on how a service was performing, but it would not necessarily give

feedback on the qualitative impact. I am interested to know how Dr Howieson and Sheila Semple think SDS might better bridge the gap that they clearly believe exists.

In his summary of the work that is done, Mr Logue did not mention feedback from members of staff. I think that that gives our Unison colleagues an opportunity to voice their opinion. It would be helpful to hear about the staff feedback on the qualitative effect that the changes within SDS have had.

The Convener: Can we start with Unison?

James Corry (Unison Scotland): At issue here is how we know whether we are ensuring that young people get the required, and right, support. Currently, SDS has a system in which there is a risk matrix, which identifies the blended service that is needed for the level of support that a young person requires. Our members have some concerns about young people perhaps falling through the net in terms of the level of support. Young people who are capable of managing their own careers and of finding opportunities by confidently accessing My World of Work are viewed as minimum-risk customers. However, our members are concerned about that. One of them has stated:

"We continue to miss out on a large group of minimum risk pupils who are not advised about the services a careers adviser can provide and therefore do not know the benefits of requesting a careers guidance interview."

That is one of the nubs of the recommendations from the academics who produced the report. There is no research that says that the more clever a person is, the less he or she needs to see a careers adviser or the better their career plan will be.

Some of us might remember the decisions that we made—perhaps not so long ago—and we might have sons or daughters who are making such decisions just now. There are many complex decisions to be made. However, the assumption that a person who is more academic does not need the crucial face-to-face intervention would be of concern to careers guidance professionals. That is why we concur with some of the recommendations from the academics' report. For example, it is suggested that young people who are vocationally uncommitted or unsure, irrespective of their academic prowess, should have access to face-to-face advice and guidance.

Our written submission has a quote from the research report in which a pupil says:

"I didn't even know my school has a careers adviser till about a week ago, and we aren't told about what he/she can do for us so I'm reluctant to go."

So, ultimately, would a pupil feel that there was merit in going to see a careers adviser if they did

not know the role that the adviser could perform and the support that they could offer? I think that that should be a concern for all of us in terms of the profile of the school careers adviser.

Liam McArthur: I was going to come on to the issue that is flagged up in the advice from Dr Howieson and Sheila Semple in relation to the pupils who are missing out on careers information, advice and guidance. That seems to encompass a fairly broad range of young people, despite the universal provision and the targeted aspect of the provision. The report states that pupils

"in the lowest attaining group ... were most likely to miss out".

It also states that

"girls were less likely ... than boys"

to have accessed career support. There is also the point that Mr Corry made, which is that unfocused pupils are not currently given any priority within SDS policy. As he said, that could refer to pupils with a wide range of academic abilities.

I wonder whether from the work that you have done, Dr Howieson, you see a way in which, given what Mr Logue said about universal provision and a targeted approach, the blended approach can be more effective in preventing young people from falling into the gaps because they are not in the right category, the right school, or whatever.

Dr Howieson: We very much support the idea of a blended service, because not everyone needs the same thing. However, it is about identification of need. I think that it would be helpful if SDS could develop a better system for identifying need. James Corry referred to the criteria that are used. Those criteria need to be extended to include clear guidance needs with regard to the extent of pupils' career thinking. There has to be a mechanism to identify that need for guidance in order to enable provision to be targeted at those clients, as well.

Clearly something else is required when we consider the percentage of pupils who do not get any careers information, advice and guidance. I took on board what SDS said in its submission that our original figures did not include introductory talks or introductory sessions, so I extended the analysis. In fact, it makes very little difference—basically, about 2 percentage points. The overall figure goes down from 17 per cent to 15 per cent of pupils who did not get any careers information, advice and guidance. However, when we look at the revised figures broken down by attainment, 20 per cent of low-attaining young people are still receiving no inputs, so something else is required. One has to acknowledge the efforts that both SDS and the schools have put into identifying young people at risk, but what is being done is still not sufficient.

Liam McArthur: You talk about identification processes not necessarily being as effective as they might be. However, if we are overly reliant on a process and we remove the level of autonomy of individuals in the careers service to act with common sense in responding to circumstances as they see them, are we not always going to have a problem with a certain cohort falling through the gap?

Dr Howieson: Yes—you raise a very important point about the role of professional judgment. It is unfortunate that, in efforts to try to get at least a minimum standard of provision, careers advisers' ability to exercise their professional judgment and use their professional expertise has perhaps been somewhat curtailed.

Also, on the point that James Corry made about the clients being able to exercise their ability to seek help—they need to be very clear about what help is available and how to access it. Certainly, our research found that young people were very confused on that point. Sheila Semple can say more about this, but the level of uncertainty and confusion about the role of a careers adviser was greater among young people in 2013 than it was among the young people we researched in 2009.

Sheila Semple (University of Edinburgh): That shows up when we ask young people the extent to which they expect to speak to a careers adviser in the future. The fact that they do not seems to be not because they have particularly great faith in the other parts of provision but because they do not understand why they might speak to an adviser. That also feeds back into what the SDS evaluation strategy is. It is good to do something over a three-year period, but if you ask young people, "Did the service meet your expectations? Did it help you in the way you wanted?" and they do not know what to expect or what might have been there, they may well say, "Yes, it was great," even though another measure might show that the service does not actually meet the needs of young people.

We know that targeting and getting to the right people is a very tricky task—it is not easy. However, just to recap, we believe that there is a flaw in the matrix itself. It misses out on a key group that professional career guidance organisations should be looking at and supporting. I think that that would be of interest to the committee because it is a big decision for young people heading for higher education. Nobody can afford dropout. There is evidence that involvement in career guidance helps to reduce the amount of dropout from different kinds of opportunities. We as a country cannot afford that dropout.

There is getting the right targeting and then there is trying to make that targeting happen and knowing that you cannot ever get it quite right.

Underneath that, young people need to have an understanding that there is a person who can help them and who will be available. I was particularly surprised, having worked in the same three schools twice—we worked in 14 schools the second time but they included the three schools that we had worked in intensively before—that young people really did not understand, as Cathy Howieson has said, how to speak to a careers adviser or what a careers adviser was. That was despite the fact that all three schools had an increased allocation of a careers adviser, which was a good thing. Some things are not quite working in the interests of young people.

Liam McArthur: I am interested in Unison's and SDS's perspectives on the extent to which professional judgment may be constrained at the moment and—probably more important—whether there are ways in which it can be extended to capture some of what we have just heard is not being captured.

Kate Lynch (Unison Scotland): When we go into schools now, we give career management skills talks and My World of Work talks, which are delivered to everybody. At the end of those talks, we show a slide that tells the pupils that they can access a skills development adviser through the clinics. However, in those talks, we do not tell the pupils what to expect when they see a careers adviser. I think that they might understand more if we spoke about having a careers adviser in school and told them about how they could benefit from speaking to a careers adviser who would look individually at their skills and strengths—not just giving them information but helping them to explore their options. We do not tell them that we can do that; we tell them, "If you want to see a skills development adviser, drop into the clinic." That does not give them any information about why they might want to do that, and that might be one of the problems. I have worked in schools for a long time, and in the past we gave classes a lot of information and really encouraged them to come and see us. Now, we show them one slide and the minimum-risk pupils may not understand why they might want to come and see us.

Liam McArthur: I will come to SDS in a second. To what extent, rather than adults explaining to young people what is available, do you use peer exemplars to explain the benefits that they have got out of that process in a way that seems more relevant and accessible to the young people?

Kate Lynch: That happens informally. A young person will say, "I've come to see you because my friend was here." That happens informally but not on a formal basis.

The Convener: I ask SDS to answer those questions. After that, I will turn to the members who want to come in.

Danny Logue: I will start off with the issue of the role model, which Kate Lynch has just mentioned. We have an ambassadors programme for My World of Work and we are identifying champions—young people in schools—to help us to get the messages over to young people about the value of My World of Work and how they can use it. That ambassadors programme is just kicking off.

We have talked about targeted services. I have been in the careers service, in its various forms, for 30 years and there has never been a time when everybody has had an interview with a careers adviser. We have had targeted and universal services—those have always been on offer—but not everyone has needed a careers guidance interview. That is going back 30 years. Targeting is very important.

In the year in which we introduced the risk matrix, we felt that it was too cumbersome in how it identified young people. Last year, in response to feedback from teachers, we introduced a more flexible system, in which the career coach in the school works with the school to identify and work with pupils who need targeted resources. We have also built into the risk matrix lack of vocational maturity as a factor that is used to identify young people who are at risk. I checked yesterday to make sure that that is in there, and it is. So far, we have seen more pupils this year than we saw last year, and there are now more coaches in schools than there were two years ago. As Sheila Semple mentioned, we now have more staff working in schools.

As Kate Lynch said, we have also just undertaken a whole series of groupwork sessions across all the schools. The feedback from those groups was that, as I have mentioned, 89 per cent of S4 pupils knew how to access SDS services within schools. The clinic session that Kate Lynch talked about is a lunchtime facility that young people can drop into. Even if a young person is at minimum risk—if they look as though they are sorted because of the number of highers they are studying for—they can still have a face-to-face interview with a career coach in school. They have always been able to do that, and they will still be able to do that. The risk matrix that has been agreed by the school must, at some point, change and evolve, given young people's individual needs, ambitions and circumstances. There must be a degree of flexibility built into it to enable young people of all abilities and needs to access a career coach when needed.

We have talked a lot about S4, but the majority of young people in S4 do not leave school—they stay on. A lot of the young people who may not have had a face-to-face engagement with a career

coach in S4 can and will do so in S5 or S6 if that is required.

The Convener: Four members wish to ask supplementaries.

10:30

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): Do we overestimate the computer skills of young people? That seems a simple question. There are references in the documents before us to the complexity of some of the websites that young people go to. Do we have an assumption that all young people have a reasonably high level of skills, and is that perhaps a false thought?

Rob Doyle (Skills Development Scotland): There are people in our community, of whatever age, who do not have good information technology skills, and there are people who do not have access to IT. That is one of the reasons why the blended service is so important.

The reality is that lots of people live their lives online, albeit not everyone—absolutely not. Sectors such as retail, banking and holidays all have a blended service, and they all provide services online. The Scottish Government's digital strategy demands that public sector organisations take a digital first approach. By that, we mean that the services that can be delivered online should be delivered online. That is not to say that we would ever ignore or underestimate the challenges for those people who do not have the digital skills.

We should recognise the benefits of blended services. The work that the career coaches do in schools together with teachers helps us to identify those who might struggle with those skills. It is really important to recognise that not everyone can avail themselves of online services.

One of the other reasons why the digital service is so important to SDS is that it increases our reach. It is 24/7. People who are in geographically remote locations or who cannot get to an SDS or partner office can avail themselves of the service. If they choose to, they can follow that up. It is a matter of considering the range of needs of different people and understanding which types of services they should pull down when it is appropriate to them.

Colin Beattie: I can understand, from a cost point of view, why providing a computer-based service is good for delivery. It gets to more people at a lower price. However, 36 per cent of houses in the United Kingdom apparently do not have access to the internet. In my constituency, the percentage is 39 per cent. That is an awful lot of households that do not have access. How do you target those people? I know that they can go to

facilities in schools and so on, but if the capability is not available at home, people are less likely to have developed the skills with which to navigate the sites properly. How do we deal with that?

Rob Doyle: SDS works with a range of partners across the country, including colleges, libraries and training providers. We do a lot of engagement with staff in those organisations to ensure that they are increasingly aware of My World of Work and that they are increasingly able to see where it fits with their service delivery and the needs of their customers. For us, that is an important aspect that we need to build on with our partners, ensuring that we jointly consider the range of services that we have and how we can make them more easily accessible to our customers.

There are realities. We can see just from looking at the web service that there are challenges across the UK and elsewhere in relation to access to IT. We recognise that there is no one solution that fits everyone, and we do what we can. That aspect of our multichannel service is digital, so there will be constraints on who can access it and how.

Dr Howieson: I very much agree that we tend to overestimate young people's ability. There are two different points to make. First, there is the point about access to provision. The second point is about people's ability to use websites effectively. Both are an issue.

To focus on the ability to use websites effectively, as older adults we have the perception that young people are on websites all the time and are very knowledgeable. Although they might be on websites a lot, that does not mean to say that they have the skills to use them effectively, particularly in the context of their own career development.

A growing body of research, in general about digital literacy and specifically about people using websites and other services for their career development, shows that there really is a lack. Digital literacy skills for careers need to be developed. What is required is a big ask—young people must be able to formulate the right questions, to judge the information that they download and see and to relate that to their career requirements. A number of professionals suggest that digital literacy for careers packages need to be developed; they could be on My World of Work and could be part of careers education in schools to develop digital literacy skills for careers.

Danny Logue: In response to Mr Beattie's question, I have a point about access. We have talked about web services, face-to-face contact and schools, but we have a network of more than 50 centres across Scotland where young people and adults—it is an all-age service—can use

services and talk to staff. We work with partners such as the Department for Work and Pensions, local authorities and colleges and we are working increasingly closely with the third sector and people of all ages on how they can access services outwith the digital side, which is important for us.

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): A lot of reference has been made to the risk matrix, on which a lot of claims seem to hinge. Does any witness by any chance have to hand the complete list of variables that it uses? Is the list lengthy?

Danny Logue: I can provide the information to the committee, if it would be useful.

Marco Biagi: Yes, please.

Danny Logue: I will do that.

Sheila Semple: I was pleased to hear Danny Logue say that being unfocused on a career is part of the risk matrix, because I have seen no evidence of that. Schools have no knowledge about that; they think that they are to encourage pupils to come forward only if they have social, educational or economic needs. Many schools are concerned about pupils who are unfocused. I, too, would like to see precisely what the risk matrix says. What I have heard is an encouraging surprise.

Danny Logue is right to say that we should not talk about the website all the time, because there are services around it. However, we found a low level of usage of the other services—10 per cent used email, 9 per cent used texts, 7 per cent used Facebook and 7 per cent chatted online.

We found that young people can discriminate between what web-enabled services can and cannot do. They were bemused at the idea of using the other services; they asked how they could ask about their career if they did not know who was at the other end—could they trust that person? Would that person pay attention to them? Could they be listening or talking to someone else while responding? A critical issue was that questions could not be asked.

In Scotland, we have a policy on career information, advice and guidance. The web-enabled services are described as being for career information and advice. What happens to guidance, which is the process whereby, if young people's ideas are stereotypical, they are challenged? Someone who uses a website has reflected back to them what they asked about. A website cannot pick up on contradictions, raise aspirations or suggest alternatives. It cannot support and encourage individuals who are anxious about transitions. It cannot check understanding and change the tone and language level. A person can do all those things. It is

encouraging that SDS still says that face-to-face contact is available, but young people need to understand that.

Rob Doyle: My World of Work is an online service. It is difficult for any online service to pick up on the mood that someone happens to have on a day. However, we have looked long and hard at the resources that we have. We moved to concise three and four-minute video clips, for example, in which real people talk about their situations—about what they do and why they do it. The feedback is that that is engaging. That is complemented by text descriptions of careers and occupations and so on. That brings to life career management information and opportunities in a way that did not happen before.

I will also comment on the way in which we approach engagement with our customers. As part of the web service there is a web chat facility, so people can go online and engage with a careers adviser through our contact centre, but we accept that that is not for everyone. Some young people look at things such as Twitter and Facebook as a personal thing, but the resources and tools that they get from My World of Work reflect a career management skills environment. The resources are focused on self, strengths, horizons and networks, and the service is there to support people to build those skills.

The service is about who the person is, what they want to do, what their strengths are, how they can build on that understanding to look at course and job opportunities that are open to them, and then how they can take advantage of those. A mature adult who is thinking about changing their career might go online and use the resources and have a perfectly satisfactory experience given their maturity and the context, whereas somebody else, including somebody of the same age, might need face-to-face support. The benefit of having the blended service is that people can pull down the type of service that they need, and if they want face-to-face support, they can walk into a SDS office and have a conversation with one of our staff.

James Corry: That is—

The Convener: I was just about to move on and call Neil Bibby. You will have plenty of opportunity to speak in a moment, Mr Corry.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I want to follow up on some of the points that have been made. We heard that the research that Dr Howieson and Ms Semple conducted suggests that just under a fifth of S4 pupils have received no careers provision. Mr Logue mentioned that many of those pupils would be staying on after S4, but it appears from the research that they come from different attainment groups—they come from low,

middle and high-attaining groups. What do SDS's statistics say about the number of S4 pupils who have received no careers provision?

Danny Logue: I do not have that information with me today, but I can provide the committee with statistics on the levels of engagement of S4, S5 and S6 pupils in the previous and current academic years. The key point is that, as I mentioned earlier, everybody in S4 will have at least two group work sessions on career management skills and My World of Work, and some will have a third session on labour market information. Over and above that, they can access the face-to-face, targeted service if required.

The key point that I was making earlier is that, when young people move into S5 and then S6, they will again have group work interactions with our staff in school and the opportunity to access face-to-face services. It is not a one-and-done process in S4. Even young people who have seen one of our staff in S4 can see them again in S5 and S6 if our staff and teachers identify that need.

Neil Bibby: The information that you mentioned would be helpful.

You state in your submission that there have been

"339,236 engagements ... through a mix of group and individual appointments with 162,099 individual people".

Can you provide a breakdown that identifies the number of individual, face-to-face interviews and the number of group sessions in those 339,236 engagements?

Danny Logue: Yes. I will provide the number of people who have attended group sessions and the number of individual engagements.

Neil Bibby: That would be helpful.

Universal access to face-to-face interviews has been mentioned. Does SDS have a target for the number of pupils whom it deems minimum risk who will have face-to-face interviews in any year?

Danny Logue: We would look at previous years and identify roughly how many pupils fall into that cohort. About 60,000 young people would be supported in that particular group but, as I said, I will provide you with the figures for the academic year 2012-13 and to the end of February this year so that you can see the volumes.

The issue for us is that we work with the schools and we do not want to say that there is a maximum number of pupils we can see. What we are saying is that anybody who needs that service in the school will get it, whether face to face or via the universal service. That is why it is important to sit down with teachers and guidance staff in schools to identify who needs the face-to-face service. As I mentioned, there needs to be

flexibility throughout the year so that a young person who is deemed to have a need to see someone can get the opportunity to do so.

10:45

Neil Bibby: What is the maximum number of pupils that you could see if they requested a face-to-face meeting?

Danny Logue: There are roughly 55,000 school leavers every year, and we see many of them face to face. As I mentioned earlier, we have 255 full-time equivalent staff who work in schools, and with the risk matrix we can work out that they will probably do about five face-to-face interviews in a day. That is based on the current staff numbers and the potential number of interviews that they would undertake.

Neil Bibby: You mentioned the 255 full-time equivalent school career coaches and 20 full-time work coaches. You have also said that SDS has increased the number of careers advisers in schools. I understand from a 2011 freedom of information request that there were previously 502 full-time equivalent careers advisers. Where in the organisation has the reduction in staffing taken place, if there is an increase in the number of careers advisers in schools?

Danny Logue: I am not quite sure about the freedom of information answer that you have. We have a total of 255 staff working in schools, but we are an all-age service so we provide staff post school to work in the 50 centres that I mentioned earlier in response to Mr Beattie's question.

We also have a work coach service, so as well as career coaches in schools we have career coaches working post school with 16 to 19-year-olds and with people aged 20 plus; a work coach service that provides a much more intensive support for young people; and personal advisers who resource all the centres. If it is useful, I can provide a breakdown of the total number of staff and the various job roles.

Neil Bibby: That would be helpful.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I want to ask about the balance of the service. Obviously, there are the needs of an individual young person and the positive destination for them at the end of the journey, but there are also the needs of the country, as Ms Semple said.

I am from a technology background, and I noticed at the weekend another article about IT shortages in the financial sector. The engineering sector has also commented on the demographic challenges. I therefore wonder whether we are matching the aspirations of young people with the realistic job opportunities and expectations at the end of the process: are those two parts joined up?

Furthermore, what part does industry play? I am thinking of the example of Creative Skillset, which is an industry-funded body that also gets Government money to work to identify the needs of that industry.

Rob Doyle: We have looked at the information in My World of Work. Since the launch, there have been quite a number of enhancements, one of which is the inclusion of information about industry sectors. Initially, it was the six key Government sectors, but we have added others such as IT. We also have a range of occupation descriptions, video clips and so on, all around IT skills, because we recognise how critical they are.

That approach is linked to course opportunities and to jobs, so one of the strengths of My World of Work is that, if someone gives a little more information than the basic registration requires, the system will then do a search and pull up all the relevant information. Therefore, if someone is looking at their strengths report or interests report and trying to match themselves to occupations that might suit them, such as IT, the system will give them a degree of personalisation so that they have all the job descriptions and course information and can see in the round what courses they need to do if they want to enter the job market at a particular level. That is helpful because it gives people a call to action and enables them to see what they need to do next.

We are increasingly looking at ways of engaging with other sectors. We are doing some work with the Glasgow Science Centre to develop a series of events called your science futures. One of the days focused on energy, and we invited partners from energy industries across Scotland to come and talk about what they do, why they do it and why it is challenging and great to do. Over a couple of days, we had about 1,000 young people in the science centre, and there was a great buzz about their being able to engage directly with people who work in that sector.

We have just done the same thing with health. In fact, we are going to have a physical space in the science centre that will be dedicated to careers and which will allow young people to start to think about occupations in science, technology, engineering and maths. There will be a number of large screens where they will be able to explore information from My World of Work, and events at which careers advisers will be available to give contextualised information about those key sectors.

Danny Logue: Convener—

The Convener: If you do not mind, Mr Logue, I will bring in others first.

James Corry: Mr Doyle's interesting comment follows on from Mr Beattie's point about information.

Many assumptions are made about young people—for example, I have heard them called the Google generation—and they are certainly very used to using information in a social context. However, our members are concerned that online services do not allow people to discuss and reflect on some of the issues that are raised. Furthermore, not everyone can make sense of the deluge of information that they get from some of these services.

That is why our members, who are the front-line career practitioners, think that the important thing about the skilled careers guidance practitioner is that they can interpret the information and support the young people in applying it to their own circumstances, and why they are concerned that, without such support, some young people might make ill-informed career decisions.

An important aspect of careers advice and guidance is the challenging of stereotypical thinking and encouraging individuals to consider alternatives and raise their aspirations. We look to, for example, the Wood commission's interim report, and some of the concerns that relate to the negative view of certain vocational opportunities as an alternative to higher education.

We need to ensure that young people get face-to-face interaction with a skilled practitioner and that we promote vocational opportunities as an alternative to higher education, and our members would argue that such an approach would be assisted by the skilled practitioner. It is okay having all this information, but the issue is how it is interpreted and applied and how we ensure that it can be considered as providing suitable opportunities or alternatives for young people. That is important as we support young people who are moving into the world of work.

The Convener: As I said at the start of the session, I do not want everyone to answer every question. Please be brief, Ms Lynch.

Kate Lynch: Mr Corry makes a really good point, but I think that it is also important to challenge young people much earlier in the process. After all, by the time they reach fourth year, they have already picked the subjects that they want to do. Perhaps those considering science as a career, for example, should be challenged in second year or even earlier and the opportunities discussed at that point. There is an excitement when they see what this or that subject can lead to, and they will feel encouraged to pursue science, engineering and other such subjects.

Dr Howieson: In the interests of brevity, I will not say what I was going to say. James Corry and Kate Lynch have already made the point that we need earlier intervention and challenge. It is fine to get information on something that you are already interested in, but a young person might well not have thought about pursuing a career in, say, technology.

Rob Doyle: I want to make three points, the first of which, I suppose, relates to Mr Beattie's earlier comment. In a survey of users, 40 per cent of whom were aged 16 to 24, 89 per cent found My World of Work easy to understand and 84 per cent found it easy to use.

James Corry has made some very interesting points. If you look, say, at the skills for learning, life and work under the curriculum for excellence, you will see quite an overlap with the generic skills with which we would want to equip our young people. We have co-created with teachers a new area of My World of Work called partner zone, which at the moment contains 10 resources. That takes us back to the point about challenging stereotypes and considering different routes to employment: with teachers, we have created two resources to address those very issues.

The first resource is about understanding stereotypes and various viewpoints: for example, you do not have to be a bloke to be an engineer. The second resource focuses on different routes to employment and the fact that if you want to be involved in medicine, for example, you can choose from a whole raft of avenues to get into such a career.

We are working with teachers to jointly support young people in schools and to widen their understanding of the issues. We are carrying out joint work on curriculum for excellence and we are working with Education Scotland on school profiles so that we can start to link some of the information and services in My World of Work and see how that maps directly into the service and support that teachers are giving young people through curriculum for excellence.

It is also worth pointing out that Skills Development Scotland has been working with industry sectors on developing skills investment plans to understand the needs of those industries so that our economy can compete effectively and to find out what the skills needs are in that respect. That is helping to inform both the delivery from university and colleges and the resources and support that we have in My World of Work, which our careers advisers, young people and partners such as teachers can draw on.

The Convener: Four members have supplementary questions in the same area. I ask them to be brief.

Liam McArthur: My question follows on from a question from Neil Bibby on resources. We are aware of budget reductions and the staffing pressures that they inevitably create.

Mr Doyle, you mentioned an assumption in the Scottish Government's digital strategy of a digital-first approach in public services. That is understandable, but it leads me to think that face-to-face engagement is not being promoted as well as it might be. Its availability is certainly being made clear to people, but they are made to feel that it is otherly and that face-to-face meetings are more appropriate for those who are unfocused, in a particular economic bracket or academically not performing at the highest level. It is presented as almost an admission of failure if someone feels that they need face-to-face engagement, which is likely to be a turn-off. Is that a fair reflection of where we are?

Danny Logue: Absolutely not. We provide a universal service, as we have always done since the start of the careers service in the 1970s. There have also been targeted services since the 1970s, so it is not a new concept.

The key message for pupils, teachers, parents and staff is that if anybody needs a face-to-face intervention in school they will get one, irrespective of their background, need, academic ability or whatever. The risk matrix is not a concept that SDS created—local authorities use risk matrices within schools to identify learning needs—but it ensures that we identify those who are most at risk of not securing a positive destination. Equally important, anyone who needs a face-to-face intervention will get one.

I was a careers adviser, and work that I did many years ago highlighted that about 25 per cent of young people who looked academically sorted were actually all over the place—they did not know what they wanted to do and they needed the kind of challenge that Cathy Howieson has spoken about. That is why we make sure that, as well as the targeted service for young people who have been identified in schools, there is the facility for anybody to access the services in schools.

Liam McArthur: You mention the risk matrices that local authorities use to identify learning needs, but Government figures indicate a vast discrepancy between the approaches that local authorities take in that identification. If you are using similar risk matrices, is there not a danger that, although they are operating fine in certain areas or schools, in other areas or schools, because of the way in which they are being applied, they are not operating fine at all?

Danny Logue: That is why we have our own SDS risk matrix, which sits alongside the other matrices. There is a local authority matrix but there

is also an SDS matrix, which I will provide to the committee. It contains the factors that we use.

If I was a teacher or a member of guidance staff, I would use what I call the CS factor—the common sense factor. If a young person had been identified as being at maximum risk because of their career immaturity for example, I would want to ensure that they had been identified as needing support from a career coach in school. That is why we need interaction between ourselves and the schools to identify those who need support. During their years in the school, that young person could access that service whenever he or she needed it.

Dr Howieson: I want to make two different points. First, I draw the committee's attention to table 2 in our written submission, which shows the difference in pupils' career-related activities between the study that we undertook in 2009 and the one that we undertook in 2013, which was the most recent.

Over that period, there was a drop in the face-to-face contact that young people in S4 were receiving. Most dramatically, the percentage of those who were getting an appointment on their own with the school careers adviser was down from 43 to 29 per cent. There was also a slight decrease in the proportion calling in at the drop-in clinic sessions. There was an increase in the proportion using the website from 2009 to the current one, but it was not an enormous increase. In that period, therefore, there was a decrease in the amount of face-to-face contact.

11:00

The other issue that I want to draw to the committee's attention is the variation across schools. Liam McArthur referred to the variation across authorities in terms of the risk matrix. We were very surprised to find in the research the extent of variation across schools in whether young people had received any careers advice. The figure varied from zero in one school to about 27 per cent in another school, which is indicated in the charts in our submission. That basically means that in some schools only 15 per cent of young people are having an interview and in other schools 40 per cent are having an interview.

Critically, we found that that variation was not related to the profile of the school or the pupils. It was not related to whether a school was in an area of deprivation, the attainment profile of the school or the catchment area—there was no obvious explanation. We would expect some variation according to the nature of the school and its roll, but there was no explanation.

The Convener: I will ask a question that I was going to ask earlier, because the issue has come up again. Mr Logue, I think you said that

everybody in S4 is offered careers guidance. I presume that you were talking about the universal service. If everybody receives it, why are some schools recording that, in effect, a quarter of pupils received no careers help?

Danny Logue: I said that S4 pupils will have access to at least two group sessions. That is part of the universal service that they get within the school. Over and above that, they can have the focused, face-to-face session. To go back to Mr Bibby's question, I can provide the breakdown of the figures for S4, S5 and S6 pupils across each of the schools.

The other issue for us goes back to the resits—

The Convener: Before you move on, I want to clarify this, because it is still not clear. Are you saying that all S4 pupils receive the universal service?

Danny Logue: Yes. That is the group sessions.

The Convener: Why then do the tables in the research show that in one school more than a quarter received nothing?

Danny Logue: Because that is talking about face-to-face sessions.

Dr Howieson: No, it is not.

The Convener: My understanding from what Dr Howieson said was that it referred to any service.

Danny Logue: In every secondary school in Scotland, all the S4 pupils will attend at least two group sessions within the school.

The Convener: Dr Howieson, if every pupil receives at least two group sessions, how can you have statistics that show that in one case 29 per cent of pupils did not receive anything?

Dr Howieson: We asked the young people and that is what they said. We were not allowed to talk to the careers advisers in the schools, so we have no way of explaining that figure. It included introductory talks, clinic sessions, one-to-one interviews, talking to teachers, using the careers library, using My World of Work and using PlanIT Plus—it was an extremely wide definition, which was not even restricted to SDS services. There are young people who have not even talked to their teachers about their career ideas.

The Convener: Are you really suggesting that in a school in Scotland, 29 per cent of pupils received absolutely nothing?

Dr Howieson: Yes we are.

The Convener: That absolutely contradicts what SDS is saying. The two things cannot both be correct—one of them is wrong.

Dr Howieson: As I said, it would have helped if, as in the earlier study from 2009, we had been able to go into the schools and interview the school careers adviser to find out what provision was being put in place in reality, as opposed to what the policy says.

The Convener: You criticised the response from SDS because it is recording what pupils report, but, given what you just said, your figures are based on what pupils report.

Dr Howieson: Yes.

The Convener: I do not want to criticise S4 pupils but, when I was a pupil of that age, if someone asked me if I had received something like career guidance, I am not sure that I would have been particularly great at answering with any degree of accuracy.

Dr Howieson: Having worked as a careers adviser, I know that pupils sometimes do not necessarily recognise it as such, in which case it certainly has not had any impact. However, that is why it would have been important to go and talk to the school careers adviser, because we could have explored the issue.

Also, I do not think that there is any contradiction in what I said at the beginning about the difference between client satisfaction measures, which are about asking the person, and effectiveness. They are two different things.

The Convener: I accepted that earlier. I will bring in Mr Corry.

James Corry: When we viewed the research finding, it was a concern to us, too. To be fair, while the point is well made that our members would have appreciated the opportunity to participate in the research because there might have been a perfectly logical explanation for the figure that came out, I go back to the concern about the profile of the careers adviser in the school.

We are concerned about the profile of the adviser in the school and I fully appreciate that, as an organisation, we need to ensure that young people are aware of the My World of Work website and the merits of career management skills. However, the talk might have happened in August or September so I can understand that if you ask a pupil, several months down the line, whether they have had any careers input, they might say, "No, I don't recall that," or, "Oh was that that woman who came to see us a couple of months ago?"

While the figure is of concern to us all here, there might be a perfectly logical explanation for pupils not remembering that they spoke to a careers adviser. That might not reduce the figure drastically, but the adviser's profile, whether the pupils recall the careers adviser coming in, or

whether they recall someone coming in several months before and giving them a talk on My World of Work, could have something to do with it. Do they associate that with careers input?

Danny Logue: One of the issues for us is that we have to programme the S4 and S5 talks throughout the year. I do not know whether timing has been an issue but I assure the committee that young people get access to those universal group work sessions and then, if required, a face-to-face meeting.

The second important thing to note is that it is not SDS's responsibility to deliver careers education programmes in schools. That is the responsibility of the school, with SDS playing a role in supporting how we work with young people, parents, and teachers. That responsibility is recognised through the curriculum for excellence and the core skills that it seeks to develop.

We are all probably violently agreeing here. We are saying that it is really important for career management skills to be core skills within curriculum for excellence and that we recognise that schools and others have responsibility for delivering that, while we provide the supporting role.

Jayne Baxter: That leads quite nicely to my question. How is all this monitored, where is it reported, and who is accountable for it? Does SDS have any targets? Does the Scottish Government have any expectations or requirements of SDS to meet targets and, if so, in what topics?

Danny Logue: The targets for SDS relate more to the services that are provided on behalf of the Scottish Government around modern apprenticeships and the employability fund. The 25,000 modern apprenticeships, for example, would be included.

Within careers information, advice and guidance services, there is no particular target. We will identify and work with pupils in schools. We have a risk matrix and, roughly speaking, we work with about 60,000 young people in schools. We identify those profiles internally; there are no targets given to us by the Scottish Government, as for the modern apprenticeships and the employability fund. To link to Mr Bibby's earlier point, I can provide a breakdown of the profiles.

Jayne Baxter: This question is for everyone. Are there enough careers advisers in schools, given what we have heard this morning about the need for early intervention and to challenge pupils on their aspirations? Are there enough people on the ground to do that effectively?

James Corry: I can give a trade union comment. Mr Bibby asked a question about a 2011 freedom of information request. Skills

Development Scotland, like most public bodies, has faced budgetary challenges. Since 2011, we have had two rounds of voluntary severance. I cannot dispute the allegation that there are more careers advisers on the ground in schools, but clearly there has been a reduction in the number of individuals who deliver a face-to-face service to people in Scotland, not necessarily in the school environment, but across school and post-school provision.

I appreciate that there are budgetary concerns for all organisations, but I would also argue that the academic research clearly shows that such face-to-face intervention has a positive effect on young people's career management skills. I am sure that all public bodies could come to the Parliament and make a plea for additional individuals in their service, but I do so because, ultimately, that interaction with a skilled, professional careers adviser in a face-to-face intervention is what works. If we are all about ensuring that public resources are directed effectively, we must at the very least look at refocusing that service.

If the committee has any influence on increasing the number of face-to-face practitioners, it will have the full support of Unison, which represents the careers advisers.

The Convener: That is probably the least surprising answer that we have heard this morning, Mr Corry. Thank you.

Does SDS want to respond?

Danny Logue: Yes. The resources that we have to deliver our current service model are sufficient, but we are focused on S4, S5 and S6, and there is some work undertaken at S3, particularly with people who have a co-ordinated support plan, and other work with parents. If there were additional asks, particularly for earlier intervention or for a service in which all pupils from S1 to S6 had complete access to resources, there would obviously be a resource question. As it is, we have sufficient resources for what we are currently doing, but additional asks for early intervention programmes, perhaps as early as P6 and P7, would present resource challenges. As James Corry said, the Government would have to look at funding for that.

Clare Adamson: I understand that all S4 pupils do a week's work placement as part of the curriculum. I find it hard to understand how, in the organisation of that week's placement, there could be no career discussion at all between the young person and a teacher or some other adviser.

Sheila Semple: We have to think about the purpose of work experience. Largely, it is not about career choice; it is not generally intended to be a match or a job trial of something that you are

interested in. The only career element that tends to come into it is the job application bit, preparing yourself for going, learning about a new work environment, presenting yourself in writing and being interviewed.

I agree that there ought to be much more emphasis on asking, "Now that you've done your work experience, what does it tell you about how you might find a place for yourself in work or training?" However, that tends not to happen.

While I have the microphone, I would like to say a couple of things. One is to pick up on Clare Adamson's earlier point about stereotyping in industry and new ideas. It is important that we look at how stereotypes can be challenged, because we know that it is not sufficient to put a group of girls in front of some female engineers or to ask them to look at something on a website. Stereotypical ideas change, but some people say, "Yes girls can do that, but I'm not going to." Evidence shows that the only way in which to get a change in thinking is if the challenge happens in the context of someone's personal decision making. That is why the challenge of guidance is important.

It is the same with technology: it can open eyes and aims, but it might not change the direction of the young person.

It sounds like a no-brainer that if you put young people in front of something it will change their ideas, but there are big question marks around whether that is sufficient, without giving them the chance to integrate it into their own personal thinking.

A second point—

11:15

The Convener: I just want to challenge you on some of those comments before you continue. You gave a very black-and-white description of what happens in work experience week. My experience as a parent of a girl who is in that category is very different. My daughter and her friends chose their work experience based on the subject choices that they were about to make and the areas of work or the further or higher education courses that they thought they were interested in doing when they left school. It seems to me that the decision to try to get work experience in those areas was a career choice-type decision. You said that that did not happen, which I find slightly odd.

Sheila Semple: Are you talking about work experience, work shadowing or work trials?

The Convener: Work experience. You were asked about work experience.

Sheila Semple: I am not disagreeing that it can happen that way. However, certain occupations are closed off to young people, so they cannot try out their career ideas in that way. There is quite a bit of evidence that young people try something and get a skewed view of it, which perhaps changes their career ideas inappropriately. A lot of schools do deliver work experience in that way, but the basic aim of it is not primarily to provide a job taster but to provide an introduction to the world of work and the demands that employers might have. It is often part of a programme in that way, but in my view it is not as appropriate as a more general introduction.

The Convener: Okay. Thank you. Sorry if I interrupted you.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Mr Logue talked about people who have left school in the past 30 years. It will probably shock a few people to learn that I am one of them—that is possibly because of my irregular career choices, to which Mr Corry referred. Careers advice was targeted then as well, because I never saw a careers adviser. My wife, who is a similar age, never saw anyone either. She went to university and I went into the working world—those were positive destinations.

Mr Logue talked about the positive destinations that we had last year. Is that not the important thing? The stuff from SDS talks about interaction with young people from S1 to S6. There is more interaction than I remember having from a careers point of view. Self, strengths, horizons and networks are a great basis for giving young people the opportunity to build the kind of career that they want.

We have talked about My World of Work. What I am getting from the discussion is that although there are things that need to be sorted and maybe tweaked, we are talking about a basket of measures. It is about not just My World of Work but everything else that is involved, whether face-to-face communication or advice from the teacher, who is very important in the process. The whole basket of measures is aimed at getting positive destinations.

Danny Logue: It goes back to the point that I made at the very beginning about the importance of having a blended channel in terms of how we deliver services, which, as you correctly identify, includes the web service, face-to-face contact and the work that we do with partners. It is important that what we do suits the various needs that exist.

Dr Deirdre Hughes is one of the commissioners on the UK Commission for Employment and Skills and chair of the National Careers Council for England. She was up here working with us fairly recently. She said:

"Compared to other UK, EU and international careers policy frameworks, Scotland has adopted a pioneering approach underpinned by robust theoretical and practice-based models of career management skills."

That is a recognition of our approach. I think it was Cathy Howieson who mentioned the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the potential that we have for delivering our careers services at a very high level.

My final point is about the importance of self, strengths, horizons and networks. Dr Hughes mentioned the model of career management skills that we have introduced. The key issue is how that articulates with the core skills that are being developed through curriculum for excellence. The key point is to ensure that we join that up, so that career management skills are included among the core skills that we are trying to engender and develop among young people.

How do we join up all those approaches? It is not the responsibility of one organisation such as SDS; a whole-partnership approach is being taken among everybody involved, including all the influencers and others who deliver services in this area.

Dr Howieson: We would entirely support the idea of a blended service. I said earlier that we have the potential to be world leading, and that is partly because of the blended service. The issue is access to that blended service—not everyone is currently able to access the different elements of it. People do not necessarily even know about it, and they do not necessarily know how to access the different elements. That is the critical thing. Some of the building blocks are in place, but there need to be other developments to enable the full potential to be reached.

I do not think that SDS would claim full credit for positive destinations; you should give some credit to the schools for that.

On the drop-out rates for modern apprenticeships and for further and higher education, we cannot be complacent about the fact that some young people are still not getting much in the way of career guidance.

Neil Bibby: Mr Doyle has mentioned the My World of Work users survey, and there are 350,000 registrants for the web service. In addition to the information requested from Mr Logue, could SDS provide the committee with details of how many surveys have been issued and how many have been returned?

The SDS submission mentions support in schools. In S1 and S2,

"Weekly drop-in clinics for pupils nervous about their long-term prospects"

are provided. In S3,

"Intensive one-to-one Career Coach support is provided for those who need it, as well as a formal introduction to MyWoW for all pupils and parents."

From S3 onwards,

"Pupils are actively encouraged to attend drop-in clinics"

and

In-depth coaching is available (up to 30 sessions per student)".

How do S1 and S2 pupils access and know about that support if you have not spoken to them about it? Given what we have heard about S4, S5 and S6, what is there for pupils in S3 onwards? What is actually happening for them in our schools just now?

Danny Logue: In S1 and S2, we promote the clinic sessions within schools to let people know that they can come along. That is linked to when pupils make subject choices in S2 and increasingly, under the new curriculum, in S3. Young people are aware that they can come along to a clinic and speak to a career coach within the school.

You asked about S3 in particular. We have had feedback from headteachers that the best time to deliver some of the group talks that we have been doing with S4 is at an earlier stage—in S3—because of the tie-in with when pupils make subject choices. That is why reference has been made to moving those talks back into S3.

As I mentioned with regard to coaching, a lot of the S3 individual work has tended to be even more targeted, because it involves consideration of the co-ordinated support plan, additional support needs and the needs of young people in the school for that support. That has been the focus as far as S3 is concerned.

There is much wider access to face-to-face services in S4, S5 and S6.

Neil Bibby: In your submission, you say:

"SDS would argue that wider research has not shown a single careers interview, regardless of the quality of the professional involved, has any significant impact on a young person."

What is the point of offering access to single careers interviews if they do not have any significant impact on a young person? What is the "wider research", and how many interviews does it take to have any significant impact? Is it two, three, four or five? I was surprised by that comment. Perhaps you can expand on what you said.

Danny Logue: We are now delivering a much more targeted service in schools instead of offering everybody, or the majority of pupils, a 45-minute career interview. If you think back to your interaction with the careers adviser when you were

at school, you will recall that you got a 45-minute interview—as if that single intervention was, by some miracle, going to change you as an individual. The service that we now provide is much more targeted, which means that we can have a longer engagement with a young person. Rather than being a one-off, it can be much more intensive and there can be multiple engagements, reflecting the difficulties, issues and needs that the young person has. We have estimated that young people can need up to 30 sessions, although some of the information in our submission relates to post-school work. In school, it will depend on the individual's needs, what they want to do, their capabilities and their aspirations. We have, therefore, built into the model the flexibility to respond to the number of engagements that a young person needs, depending on their issues.

Neil Bibby: I understand what you are saying about targeted support, but you state in your submission that

“a single careers interview, regardless of the quality of the professional involved,”

does not have

“any significant impact on a young person.”

Later on, you state that

“SDS would dispute the claim that MyWoW has a limited impact upon pupils career management skills.”

You defend the input that My World of Work can have, but you seem to be suggesting that a single careers interview will not have “any significant impact”. I understand what you say about targeting support, but surely such interactions have an impact, otherwise why do you offer them? What is the point in offering single careers interviews—as you do to minimum-risk students—if they do not have “any significant impact”?

Danny Logue: It goes back to the issue that Cathy Howieson mentioned earlier. That is why we are undertaking further research on the impact, rather than—

Neil Bibby: Excuse me, but you state in your written submission that

“SDS would argue that wider research has not shown”

that single careers interviews have “any significant impact”. You are now saying that further research is going to be undertaken.

Danny Logue: Over the years, a number of pieces of research have been done on interventions for young people, including by the OECD and the World Bank. I am saying that we are going to conduct more of that research and evaluation, particularly around the impact of measures.

For certain young people, a one-off intervention will be sufficient, but in the model that we have now it is really important that we provide the resources and flexibility for young people to have the number of engagements that they require in school. That is why we say that the focus is not just on one-off engagements, but on multiple engagements with young people.

Dr Howieson: The research that we did in 2009 for Careers Scotland, Skills Development Scotland's predecessor, found that an interview with a careers adviser improved pupils' career management skills. That is one source of evidence—which SDS accepted and published—that shows that a one-off careers interview does have an impact. Indeed, there is a body of such research. For example, Susan Whiston produced a meta-analysis of a number of studies and her conclusion was that the face-to-face interview is among the most effective interventions.

Nevertheless, I agree with Danny Logue that one single, long interview is not necessarily the best solution for everyone. For some people—particularly adults—a series of shorter interviews, in which they go off in the interim and do some tasks, think and then come back, might be the answer. We are certainly not arguing for a return to the blanket approach in which everyone was sat down in front of a careers adviser and given a 45-minute interview, whether they wanted it or not. There is robust evidence to show that interviews are effective, but I agree that we should be more flexible in our approach.

I would like SDS to provide details on how it is going to look at and measure impact. Will there be hard evidence?

James Corry: From a careers guidance professional's point of view, I think that we need to be careful about making such statements in the public domain. I understand the assertion that continual interaction may have a more positive impact, but for Skills Development Scotland to put that statement out there implies that the Government's skills body is not promoting the value and merit of careers advice and guidance. We also need to be acutely aware that, in many of the services that we offer, there is often a one-off interaction—for example, in the partnership action for continuing employment service and the integrated employment service; even some of the minimum-risk interactions are one-offs. The statement in the submission could have been worded better.

I am also concerned that our members, who are front-line careers guidance professionals and who in many instances offer a one-off interaction, could read the statement and ask whether it asserts that the effort that they put in does not have a positive impact. The statement could have been worded

better, although I understand that it suggests that more on-going interaction and regular contact would have a positive effect.

11:30

The Convener: I accept what you are saying, but the statement is part of a paragraph, and I am looking at it in context. The second sentence states:

"There is much stronger evidence to support targeted interventions".

The wording might not be the best, but it is not helpful to take a statement out of context.

We have run out of time, but I still have three members who want to come in. I will not accept supplementary questions, but I would like to allow them to ask their questions quickly.

Mary Scanlon: I have three brief questions. As member of the Public Audit Committee, I read a report by Audit Scotland on the public sector workforce. From memory, I think that the reduction in the SDS workforce was 200 or 400, but that was about two years ago. Can you remind me what it was?

Danny Logue: I am sorry, but I do not have that detail. I can provide it to you later.

Mary Scanlon: It was an Audit Scotland report on Skills Development Scotland, and you do not know how many people you lost. Do you remember that it was in the hundreds?

Danny Logue: Yes, it was. I cannot remember the figure off the top of my head, although I can supply the information.

Mary Scanlon: I think that James Corry can remember.

James Corry: When Skills Development Scotland was created, we had some 1,530 staff. To be fair, that was at the time of the co-joining of learndirect Scotland, the skills side of Scottish Enterprise and the Careers Scotland legacy body. Since then, there have been two rounds of voluntary severance. I think that, at that time, the agency perceived a need for a staffing complement of some 1,350 full-time equivalents. I do not know what the current situation is, because we need to bear in mind such things as the modern apprenticeship recruitment programme and the taking on of interns to support Scottish Government policy.

Mary Scanlon: I appreciate that, but the reduction was in the hundreds, was it not?

James Corry: Yes, it was several hundred.

Mary Scanlon: I appreciate that there were mergers, but there was a significant reduction in staff numbers.

Forgive me, convener: this is my first day on the committee, so I have less background information than other members have. However, I do not understand why, in a modern, democratic Scotland, the researchers from the university were banned from talking to careers advisers. Can someone tell me why they were not allowed to speak to careers advisers?

Dr Howieson: We had several meetings with Danny Logue in which we said that such discussions would be helpful because they would help us to better understand our findings, provide feedback and have a dialogue. The SDS view, as I am sure Danny Logue will confirm, was that it was too early to evaluate the new system, as it was just bedding in.

Mary Scanlon: So Danny Logue did not allow you to speak to careers advisers.

Dr Howieson: That is right. However, our view was that, if the system was such that it was ready to be the offer to pupils, it was well enough established to be looked at, and that, if it was not well enough established to be evaluated by researchers, it was not well enough established to be the offer to young people.

Mary Scanlon: I am concerned that most of the problems have arisen because the researchers could not talk to the careers advisers. The issue has taken up a lot of our time today.

The Convener: Let us bring in Mr Logue and Mr Doyle.

Danny Logue: I would not agree with the claim that a lot of the issues have arisen because people were not speaking to staff. We have the research that Cathy Howieson and Sheila Semple did and the evaluation feedback that we did. As I mentioned, we have a rolling programme of research and evaluation.

We were not involved in that discussion because we had introduced career management skills into schools only the month before. It was a new service offer and was literally weeks old, and we felt that it was far too early for that kind of evaluation. However, the service has now been up and running for two years, so we are in a much better position to get a feel for how it is going. As I mentioned earlier, we have been flexing and adapting it over the past two years based on feedback from staff and from teachers and pupils.

Mary Scanlon: If it had been possible to get a decent piece of research, that could all have been covered.

The main talking point seems to be the conclusion that My World of Work has a limited impact on pupils' careers management skills. I notice that SDS says that its web service is

"responsive and intuitive to the needs of its customers."

If the web service has a "limited impact", why are there 4 per cent fewer drop-in sessions, 14 per cent fewer appointments with careers advisers and 17 per cent fewer pupils getting leaflets and books? There is a drop-off in everything, and there is a 7 per cent increase in the use of the website—which apparently has a "limited impact".

Rob Doyle: On the usage and responsiveness of My World of Work, SDS has invested in the capability of service designers. Their job is to engage with colleagues and customers so that we get a better understanding of what it is that they need from an organisation such as SDS and the services that we offer, and how we can best present those services.

We have spoken about the system being intuitive and responding to people's needs. We have given ourselves the opportunity to talk to customers and hear from them what they want, and to speak to teachers and careers advisers up and down the country. We hope that what we have created is a world-class web service—and we are confident that that is what we have done. The resources and tools within it provide an added dimension to what is a blended service.

Colin Beattie: I refer to tables 1 and 2 in the submission from Cathy Howieson and Sheila Semple. Percentages are good indicators, but what was the sample size?

Dr Howieson: It was about 1,300 pupils. The sample involved about 90 per cent of the S4 year group in each of the 14 schools, and the schools were broadly representative of the range of schools in Scotland.

Colin Beattie: I understand that SDS has other feedback. Do the other evaluations have similar results? The results shown in those tables are very significant. What can we interpret from that?

Danny Logue: We have done a number of pieces of evaluation of the feedback from pupils in S4, S5 and S6, and we have just finished a series of feedback sessions with all headteachers in Scotland with regard to the service model and how we are delivering the services that we provide. That feedback was very positive, and we will shortly report on the headteachers evaluation and the group work sessions.

A number of schools were involved in 2009. Cathy Howieson and Sheila Semple looked at 14 schools in 2012-13, the academic year in which our model was introduced. We are now a further academic year into the model. It would be

interesting to see what feedback we would get if we conducted that kind of research again. I think that it would be quite different, because all young people have now had exposure to at least two group work sessions at school.

A lot of work is going on at parents evenings. Rob Doyle spoke earlier about the work that we are doing with teachers and partners, and about the development of resources for teachers to use. Further issues were highlighted in the report by Cathy Howieson and Sheila Semple, including that of careers support. That is not just about SDS—it is much broader than that. That takes me back to the point that I mentioned about the important role of the school and how it supports careers education and provision within the curriculum.

Colin Beattie: As regards the figures that have been produced—the percentages that are before us—are you saying that we should wait? Are they too early, or are they valid? Should we be interpreting and learning from them?

Danny Logue: They reflect what was happening at the time when that particular piece of research was done. A lot of the research, as well as the findings from Cathy Howieson and Sheila Semple, reflect a lot of what we experienced from feedback, too. We have been listening to and learning from feedback on how we have been delivering the service over the past two years.

Some of the tables reflect the broader school offer. How are schools learning in relation to how they provide careers support? How do we join up the work that SDS does with what is actually happening in schools?

Colin Beattie: Does your interpretation broadly agree with the figures that are before us?

Danny Logue: Yes—for that particular point in time.

Going back to the point that Cathy Howieson made, a particular S4 cohort was involved. As I said, the majority of pupils do not leave school after S4 but stay on into S5 and S6. That gives us different times in different academic years when young people can access the service.

The Convener: I will allow a brief final question from Clare Adamson.

Clare Adamson: I would like to look at the implications of point 3 in the University of Edinburgh's submission, which is entitled "Focusing on 'what works': a mixed system of careers provision". In the context of what you have said about this covering a particular time, I am interested in two of the bullet points. They say that there is a case for developing "careers libraries in schools" and for supporting

"teachers in their career development role with pupils."

Given that, in my region, school library services and librarians have been cut, how might those objectives be achieved?

Sheila Semple: There has already been some reaction. As part of our research, we gave individual feedback to each of our schools and to the local authorities that they belonged to, and there is already some indication that they are trying to support and develop the careers libraries in those schools and make a case for extra funding. We were a bit surprised by the finding that such a traditional approach to getting careers information impacts so strongly on young people. There are already some signs of change in that respect in the schools and authorities that we worked with.

Clare Adamson: You are saying that we should “develop careers libraries”, but libraries are not in exactly the same position as My World of Work—if the support and guidance are not there, the information just sits on the shelf and is not used.

Sheila Semple: We found that young people use careers libraries even if they also use My World of Work. That, too, was perhaps a surprise.

Dr Howieson: We found that there is a group of young people who are proactive. They use My World of Work and careers libraries, they talk to their parents and teachers and they access the provision. However, there is also a group that is not really doing anything.

I wish to correct something in the SDS submission. Our research does not show that using My World of Work leads people to access other provision. We were not able to say in which order people accessed provision, so that is a misinterpretation.

The Convener: I thank everyone on the panel for coming along this morning. Your evidence has been most informative and useful.

11:43

Meeting continued in private until 12:53.

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e-format first available
ISBN 978-1-78392-878-1

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-1-78392-895-8