



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 30 September 2014

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EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

22nd 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)

*Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD)

*Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Dr Janet Brown (Scottish Qualifications Authority)

Larry Flanagan (Educational Institute of Scotland)

Richard Goring (Scottish Secondary Teachers Association)

Terry Lanagan (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland)

Graeme Logan (Education Scotland)

Ken Muir (General Teaching Council for Scotland)

Jane Peckham (National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers)

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD) (Committee Substitute)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Terry Shevlin

LOCATION

The James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)

Scottish Parliament

Education and Culture Committee

Tuesday 30 September 2014

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Stewart Maxwell): Good morning, everybody. I welcome you all to the 22nd meeting of the Education and Culture Committee in 2014. We have received apologies from Liam McArthur. Tavish Scott will attend as a substitute; he is delayed but will be here shortly. I remind everybody to make sure that all electronic devices are switched off, because they interfere with the sound system.

Agenda item 1 is to decide whether to take in private item 3, which is to consider our approach to scrutinising the Scottish Government draft budget for 2015-16. Do members agree to take the item in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Curriculum for Excellence (National Qualifications)

10:01

The Convener: Under agenda item 2, we will hear evidence on the new national qualifications. Our aim is to assess the implementation of the new qualifications and to look forward as the roll-out continues. We will put key issues to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning when we hear from him next week.

Today I welcome a rather large panel. As we had hoped, we have got all of you in one room at the same time, and I hope that we will get a decent discussion going this morning. I welcome Terry Lanagan, who represents the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland; Graeme Logan, from Education Scotland; Larry Flanagan, from the Educational Institute of Scotland; Ken Muir, from the General Teaching Council for Scotland; Jane Peckham, from the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers; Dr Janet Brown, from the Scottish Qualifications Authority; and Richard Goring, from the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association.

I make the usual point that—especially as this is a large panel—not everybody has to answer every question. If they did, we would get in only about two questions. Some questions will be directed at particular individuals or groups; if others do not have anything particular to add to the discussion, I would prefer that they did not add it.

We will move straight to questions, and I will start with a general one for all the witnesses. Obviously there have been many issues and stresses in the last year arising from the implementation of curriculum for excellence and the new qualifications in secondary schools. Despite those issues, what is your assessment of where we are now? What is your assessment of the outcome of that difficult process, given that the first round of examinations has now been completed and pupils have done tremendously well in them?

Terry Lanagan (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland): It would have been very surprising if there had not been a number of issues with an initiative as large and ambitious as curriculum for excellence. Obviously, a key pressure point was going to be the first set of national qualifications. As I have said in my written submission, it is to the credit of everybody in the system that the first set of national qualifications—the first set of exams, the issuing of certificates and the post-result service—went so smoothly.

As I have also said in my submission, Scottish education is in a very strong position at the moment. We are well placed to move forward, but that is not to ignore the major challenges that are ahead. I am sure that we will get to issues such as assessment, for example, which is a genuine issue at the moment. We have the challenge of developing a truly progressive, coherent three-to-18 curriculum. I believe that we are some distance away from achieving that as yet, but everybody in the system is well placed to take forward that next challenge.

Graeme Logan (Education Scotland): We have been developing curriculum for excellence for 10 years. International experts such as Alma Harris, who we saw at the learning festival last week, have commented on how admirable it is that we have been steadily working towards transforming learning and teaching in Scotland, and on the fact that we have a consensus, although there have been challenges.

Looking at the inspection evidence, we see that we have seen a transformation in learning and teaching in Scottish schools. For example, 90 per cent of secondary schools inspected have been found to have young people's motivation and engagement in learning as a key strength. All the effort that teachers have been putting into transforming learning and teaching is having a very positive impact, and we can see that. The new national qualifications are one part of the story, but we must commend teachers in primary, secondary and early years education and so on for their collective effort.

As Terry says, there are a number of challenges moving forward. One is to learn lessons as we go and to adapt the support that we provide as national agents to schools and local authorities, which we are keen to continue to do. Another task is to look at reports such as "Education Working For All!", the final report of the commission for developing Scotland's young workforce, which sets out some next steps for us.

This is a point in time at which a huge amount of change has been implemented. The successful impact on children and young people's learning experiences in schools is clear to us through our independent evaluation. We look forward to continuing to work together and to holding the consensus that we are going in the right direction.

Larry Flanagan (Educational Institute of Scotland): I will make three points as briefly as I can.

I believe that the first point will be echoed by the other teacher unions. An assessment of last year must acknowledge that the workload burden that teachers in schools faced in that year is simply unsustainable. It is to the credit of the profession

that the qualifications were delivered and the diet was successful in terms of young people's outcomes. However, the health and wellbeing survey that the EIS carried out before the summer, with more than 7,000 respondents, showed that workload was an issue across all sectors but in particular in the secondary sector, in which over 80 per cent of teachers said that workload was a severe cause of stress and more than 80 per cent said that they were extremely stressed. In moving forward, we must recognise that it took an exceptional effort to deliver the qualifications. Workload needs to be addressed.

I will share with the committee one of the concerns raised by the results of another survey that we carried out, which closed just yesterday. We asked whether action had been taken in the respondents' workplace to address issues of workload around qualifications. Eighty per cent of respondents said that no action had been taken in their workplace. Some action has been taken nationally around verification and so forth, but not in terms of workplace. We therefore seem to be getting a repeat of last year, when, as I said, workload was unsustainable. Workload is an absolutely key concern for the profession.

The other issue that is important to highlight is that what was delivered last year was the first set of national 4 and national 5 qualifications. What was not delivered last year was the vision of the curriculum for excellence senior phase. We are still quite a way removed from having that bigger picture. I would agree with Terry Lanagan that, with the CFE framework, we could have an unbeatable education system. What we got last year, though, is a good bit removed from the bigger vision.

A lot of work will be required to make sure that we achieve some of the aims of CFE—simple aims such as to reduce the burden of assessment for pupils and for staff. That aim was clearly not achieved last year, as everyone is agreed that the burden of assessment increased for all concerned. Another aim is to ensure that we have breadth across the curriculum in the senior phase. Most importantly, the CFE aims to ensure that there is time for deeper learning, because that is the key objective of all of the changes: to move away from the idea that pupils simply pass exams and towards the idea that pupils take part in a process that engages them in a deeper learning experience that better prepares them for the world that young people will move into.

Curriculum for excellence has been a success in terms of the delivery of qualifications, but there are certainly issues around workload to address this year, and bigger issues to be addressed if we are to make sure that we achieve the ambition for the curriculum for excellence senior phase.

Ken Muir (General Teaching Council for Scotland): I am heartened to hear from my colleagues about the degree of consensus on where we are, which is reflected in the report that we produced on experiences of the first years of the nationals 4 and 5, "Curriculum for Excellence Management Board: Report of the Working Group of the First Year of the new National Qualifications".

The point has been made that we are trying to deliver, for the first time ever, an ambitious curriculum programme that covers ages three to 18. That has never been done before in the history of Scottish education. As Terry Lanagan suggested, it is no surprise that there were difficulties in implementing the first year of the new national qualifications. I would suggest that the same was probably true of all the major curriculum changes that have been introduced over the last generation in Scottish education.

We had a major review of the assessment arrangements at the end of the first year following introduction of standard grade. We learned lessons from that and we made changes. It was the same when we introduced higher still, with intermediates and revised higher. After that, we adjusted the assessment arrangements and we looked again at some of the courses to ensure that they were entirely deliverable.

We are very much over the hump in getting curriculum for excellence into place. That is not to say, however, that we have resolved all the issues and problems. The reflections report makes that point very clearly: there is still work to be done to achieve what are genuinely consensual aspirations for curriculum for excellence. As Larry Flanagan suggested, the curriculum is internationally recognised as being a way forward in providing the best for youngsters in Scottish education, now and in the future.

Jane Peckham (National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers): It will come as no surprise that I will echo quite a bit of what my EIS colleague has said.

Curriculum for excellence is an on-going process. I would not agree with Ken Muir that we are as far on and "over the hump" as we potentially could be but if we continue to work successfully in partnership, that will be the best way to deal with things.

The issue of workload is increasingly concerning for members across the profession. The messages about the change that is happening nationally are not necessarily feeding down to school level. Teachers still feel extremely anxious about the next phase. That is not to say that it should not be happening and that we should not be learning from our experiences, but it would be

foolish to think that we are over the worst at this point.

We need to continue to listen to the profession as well as to one another. We need to continue to work together to take the curriculum forward successfully.

Dr Janet Brown (Scottish Qualifications Authority): I echo everything that everyone has said in the context of our developing a new approach to three-to-18 learning. The approach is completely different. It involves new learning and new teaching, and it requires a change in approach to assessment. One of the fundamental principles of curriculum for excellence was that it should allow teachers to take back ownership and to use their professional judgment in creating a culture and a curriculum that is interesting and tailored to individuals. That flexibility has in itself been a real challenge for the entire system. From this year, we need to understand how we can support that continuing flexibility and also provide the infrastructure to allow teachers to continue down that path.

The critical achievement this year has not just been the qualifications—curriculum for excellence is not only about qualifications. We talk a lot about national 1 through national 5, highers and advanced highers, but there are a variety of other awards and qualifications that children in schools should be thinking about and getting. That is the fundamental breadth of curriculum for excellence. One measure of success is the ability of people within the school sector to provide that breadth of opportunity for different students, depending on their needs.

Ultimately the measure is whether we are giving every single student in Scotland a better life chance. We have taken a really important step on that journey but, as a system, we must all learn from what has happened this year. Each part of the system—every single member around the table—has things that need to be reflected on and examined, and that is part of what Ken Muir's reflections report has done. We need to do things differently this year to ensure that we can continue to fulfil the passion and ideals of what curriculum for excellence is all about.

10:15

Richard Goring (Scottish Secondary Teachers Association): This is a very exciting time in Scottish education, and I think that we have a very exciting future ahead of us, but there are many issues, as the various witnesses here have said.

One issue is that there is still not a full understanding in secondary schools of how broad general education matches in with the senior

phase, and that needs to be addressed. In the senior phase, teachers obviously have much more accountability for results and so on. The mindset that that is the most important factor for teachers must be addressed, and we must realise that we are talking about other issues as well. It is not just about results, but that is the mindset that teachers have had for many years and have been forced to acknowledge for many years—it is exams, exams, exams.

This year, we are obviously in a transition between national 4s and 5s and the new higher. According to the surveys that we have done, roughly two thirds of subjects are presenting at the new higher. There is a fear about what the new highers will be about and what support will come from Education Scotland and the SQA. Our surveys showed very little change in levels of confidence in both Education Scotland and the SQA in respect of the support that is available this year compared with last year. I am sure that we will come back to that later.

A lot of change is happening in schools, and of course the whole senior phase in particular is on top of all that. Many teachers feel totally submerged by the whole thing. Workload issues are huge, and working time agreements in schools are not being built up to accommodate the amount of work. Many of our teachers are talking about working 50 or 60 hours a week to keep up with what is expected of them. Things are not all positive by any means.

We were absolutely delighted that the national 4 and national 5 results were as positive as they were. This year, we are talking higher—we are talking about the gold standard. There is a lot of apprehension and anxiety about that and there is the fear of what will happen if things do not work out. Many teachers, who tend to be subject oriented in secondary schools, are thinking in the wider sense, as well, and considering whether we will let down pupils across the whole education system. The hope is that we will not. There is perhaps a bit more confidence about the highers than there was about the national 4s and 5s last year, probably partly because people have gone through the process and have a better understanding of what is being demanded of them, but there are still major problems with materials, resources, budgets and, obviously, time.

The Convener: I thank you all very much for those opening remarks.

I should have said at the beginning, on behalf of the committee, that this is the first opportunity that we have had to congratulate all the teachers, parents, local authorities and, of course, pupils on achieving the outstanding results that they achieved this year. There has been a remarkable effort on everybody's behalf to get us to where we

are today, despite all the issues that we are about to get into. We are certainly very proud of our pupils and teachers and everybody else who is involved in the system for getting us to this point.

A number of members want to come in.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Good morning, everyone.

Throughout the process, one of the big issues that was discussed was communication—or the perceived lack of it—with teachers. A number of submissions have been made. The SQA said that there was

“comprehensive communication of existing key documents and resources”,

but the Educational Institute of Scotland said that there was a failure to communicate key messages. Ken Cunningham, the general secretary of School Leaders Scotland, said:

“The preparation, consultation: there's been more than I can ever remember. The amount of effort that's gone into this knocks the others into the corner”.

There are quite a lot of different opinions on the process, which was discussed at length. For the future, as we look to what we will do, how can we communicate with teachers? How can we improve that further?

Larry Flanagan: Communications can perhaps be broken down into two areas. One area in which we think that there has been a failure around communication—this is partly to do with the timetable for implementation—relates to the big picture of what the changes to the senior phase represented.

The SSTA document, I think—it might be the document from the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers—refers to some of the confusion that exists in schools around the use of unit assessments.

The unit assessments have been designed to deliver a different type of assessment from the unit assessments that previously existed for intermediate 1 and intermediate 2, but when they arrived in schools, many teachers saw them as quite similar and approached them in a similar fashion. In fact, the whole point of the unit assessments was to move to the kind of holistic classroom, evidence-based assessment that would underpin the assessment arrangements, but which would not duplicate anything that would be in an external exam. That is one of the key changes to assessment under curriculum for excellence. However, that philosophy was not communicated effectively to schools, so there was a lack of understanding around the changes that were desired from CFE. That is what created a number of the issues that had to be dealt with.

A more direct communication issue that we looked at in the reflections group is the fact that there is a great deal of information out there and one of the challenges is finding the bit of information that you need. There is an issue in everything being available on the website but nobody tuning into the key messages that teachers need to get to take forward implementation. That was recognised and there were efforts over the course of the year to try to refine the message.

We have said consistently that putting something on a website is not the same as communicating to teachers. If I was speaking to Janet Brown about something and she said that it was on the website, my question would be how I would know that and how I would find it, and whether it was the answer to my question. That is one of the areas where the lesson to be learned is that sometimes less is more in terms of effective communication and focusing on the key issues.

We are probably in a stronger place now than we were a year ago. Of course, the final backdrop to all of this is the situation of a teacher who is teaching pupils and trying to implement the changes, because it will be difficult for them to find the time to find all the information that is out there. In the compressed implementation period—one of our criticisms is that it is too compressed—it is really important that the focus is on what is key to delivering the new qualifications.

Ken Cunningham was my old headteacher and he appointed me, so far be it from me to disagree with him, but although there is a lot of information out there, the issue is sometimes how information is accessed and communicating more directly with teachers.

The Convener: I want to bring in Jane Peckham and Richard Goring. You were nodding vigorously there, Jane. What is your view on this?

Jane Peckham: I was nodding because I think that it was our response that Larry Flanagan was referring to when he spoke about the confusion that exists. Larry is right that there is a huge amount of information out there, but it is about how you find what you need. The key issue is time. What has happened is that the working time agreements have not been revisited to build in enough time for teachers to go and access what they need. There are a finite number of hours in a day and, unless things are really clearly set out, teachers are just not going to be able to access what they need. Larry is right that we need some system to make that easier. It is not that the information is not there; it is just about how you find it and what suits your specific needs.

Richard Goring: An awful lot of what I would say has already been said. However, I think that

we need to have much clearer signposting on the SQA and the Education Scotland websites so that it is easier to access information in its final form. One of the problems is that there can be conflicting information on the same website, although I think that that situation has been improved and is still improving. A lot of the criticism that is coming from teachers who are members of our association is based on last year's experience. The hope is that there will be less of a problem this year. That is probably the key message.

Graeme Logan: Over the course of the year we listened to feedback from teachers, and we created a new key curriculum support website, which aimed to get people to what they need within three clicks or so. It sits above all the online content and its aim is to get teachers to the guidance and support that they need.

As you will know, the curriculum for excellence model is based on broad national guidance with a lot of development work at local level. A key issue is to support teachers to share their information and resources. Over the course of the year, we published 135 different packages of course materials from 22 authorities, and then through the key curriculum support website we tried to focus in and get teachers to what they need.

In addition, last year we brought all secondary headteachers together as a group for the first time. The opportunity enabled us to share key messages, showcase the senior phase models to which Larry Flanagan referred and talk about different approaches to meeting local needs. Because of the nature of curriculum for excellence, which is not a one-size-fits-all approach but is developed locally to meet local needs, there is a lot of variance, but that is intended—it is part of the process.

We have been focusing on sharpening up and sharing key messages through the key curriculum support website, new electronic bulletins to give people the information that they need and improved signposting. We recognise that it is important that when teachers have time they can quickly get to what they need.

We have also been doing a lot of work with our partners to tackle unnecessary bureaucracy, for example by producing case studies of schools that have reduced planning and assessment burdens to create more time. There is a lot more work to do on that. We are keen to push the examples of schools and local authorities that have successfully reduced unnecessary bureaucracy to create more time for teaching. We are commissioning independent research into the issue, which we expect to share with the working group on tackling bureaucracy in the next month or so. There is concerted effort in that regard. We

put out a joint statement with ADES on progress on reducing unnecessary bureaucracy. Inspectors, too, have been challenging unnecessary bureaucracy.

In our pre-inspection questionnaires from April 2012 to April 2014, we surveyed 8,470 secondary teachers—there was a 73 per cent return rate—and about 87 per cent of respondents said that they were getting time in school to discuss and shape the curriculum, through staff discussion and working groups. As Jane Peckham said, in the best examples working time agreements have been amended to create time. However, that is not universally the case. We need to showcase best practice, where bureaucracy has been reduced and the collegiate working hours agreement has been amended so that there is as much time as possible for professional dialogue and development.

Dr Brown: It has been said that the materials are out there and the challenge is how people access them and are signposted to them. Everyone has learned lessons this year—we definitely did so, and we have made changes in how we signpost on our website.

The website is not the only mechanism that we need to use for communication; communication is very much about people-to-people discussions. It is important that we get out and talk to people, so that we can try to address their questions. We run a series of events in that regard. Last year, we ran more than 390 events to support teachers in implementing the new qualifications. We will continue to do that next year, and we will apply the lessons that we have learned from last year's events.

In addition, during this year there was great demand from local authorities and teachers for continuous professional development in specific subject areas. We had not planned to do that, but we ran about 390 such sessions during the course of the year. We will run such sessions again, applying the lessons that we learned last year, for the new higher that are coming up.

There is face-to-face engagement—in the events, it is a one-to-many approach. We also think that it is helpful to have a dedicated curriculum for excellence liaison team, which works with individual schools and teachers and comes to parents nights and so on. The team undertakes about 200 visits a month, and we have positive feedback from schools on that. Again, it is about signposting and enabling people to give us feedback, so that we can modify how we communicate.

There are lots of documents out there, so how do we ensure that people have appropriate access to them? It ends up being done through the web,

which is an important tool, because we can keep the most current version of everything on the web for people to see.

10:30

We have been providing targeted updates to individual teachers. We send out updates to particular groups on specific changes to specific subjects. We also give special updates on changes to support materials. We know that sending out a blanket update is not helpful, so increasingly we target individuals who would find the updates important. We have used the magazine from the GTCS—Ken Muir's organisation—to highlight some of the changes.

The last step will be to make the web a lot clearer. We should give people one page to which they can go for one subject and through which they can go to the appropriate materials on the web. There is a significant amount of material—there needs to be a significant amount of material—and the challenge is to make sure that it is easy to track and easy to travel through, so that people get the right information.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): I am keen to understand how well you think that teachers were supported in the process. When I read through the evidence there seemed to be a range of views on the professional focus papers, web-based support materials and subject route maps. Janet Brown mentioned subject implementation events, which were attended by a substantial number of teachers. Was there concern that there was a lack of support across the piece? Was the lack of support down to individual local authorities or schools? Where was the best practice in supporting teachers and which areas could have been improved?

Larry Flanagan: In the feedback from our members, support was an issue, partly in relation to resources and materials, which is linked to Education Scotland. As we mentioned in our submission, there was an agreement with the cabinet secretary that fully fledged courses would be made available. That would allow people to focus on the previous year, secondary 3. Ken Muir was in charge of that when he was still with Education Scotland. In the early stages all the local authorities were on board for that, but in the end around a third of local authorities did not contribute to that kind of national bank.

Some very good resources were produced through that mechanism and some work was commissioned, but there were gaps. In some areas the core support materials were little more than advice notes, rather than units. There was a significant question about that.

We have quite a good working relationship with the SQA, so we will happily go to it with issues that members raise, and I acknowledge that resources constrain how it can respond to demands. However, the idea behind the verifiers—I think that the SQA touched on this—was that they were supposed to be a pool of experienced people who could go out to schools and support them in the different subject areas, but there was an issue with that because some of the verifiers were still acquiring confidence about the changes. Also, the verifiers were teachers who did that additional role, and another issue was that local authorities could not release them from their teaching duties to provide the support. There was a gap. The numbers look impressive when you say that there were 390 meetings and so forth, but think about the number of secondary schools and the number of departments. The question is how those meetings impact.

One of the difficulties with the qualifications is that we have seen in secondary schools over the past six, seven or eight years a move away from subject principal teachers to faculties, in which the faculty head is in charge of two or three different areas. When higher still came in, I attended four or five meetings with the SQA as a principal teacher of English. With the best will in the world, it is extremely difficult for the head of a faculty that covers art, music and drama to be on top of the detailed nuances of qualifications. In the past, the subject principal teachers were the key mechanism for getting messages from Education Scotland, Learning and Teaching Scotland, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education or the SQA and taking them back into the departments. That is one of the gaps that we have seen this time round.

I would like to finish by citing the responses to one of the questions that we asked about the new CFE higher this year. We asked people how they would rate the support on offer for the introduction of the new CFE higher. One per cent said that it was excellent, 4 per cent said that it was good, 30 per cent said that it was adequate and 65 per cent said that it was poor. Although there might be a slightly stronger sense of confidence around the new higher based on some experience from national 5, people are still questioning the lack of support. That echoes the earlier point that we should not rest on our laurels. There are still big challenges in the year ahead, especially with the higher qualification.

Terry Lanagan: Gordon MacDonald's question is closely linked to the previous question, because support and communication go hand in hand. As a member of the CFE management board, I know that there has been a huge emphasis on communication over the past three or four years. The problem with communication is that it relies on everybody in the system to be effective. I am quite

clear, having worked in education for 37 years, that there has been no initiative in Scottish education during that time about which there has been more communication or more support.

There may at times have been issues with signposting people towards the appropriate support but, as has been said, the material is definitely there. It is obviously the responsibility of the national organisations to ensure that that information and support is there. It is then the responsibility of local authorities to ensure that that information is disseminated effectively to schools. It then becomes the responsibility of headteachers, and then of principal teachers and faculty heads.

I do not think that we should use the issue to fight old battles about the merits—or not—of faculty heads, but in a school that operates an effective system of distributive leadership it is not necessary for the faculty heads to attend the support meetings on all subjects. They can delegate that to others, as long as they have overall management responsibility.

If there had been a major failure in communication and in the support available, we would not have seen the results that we saw from the first set of national qualifications.

Graeme Logan: Education Scotland has provided the course notes and materials written by teachers for other teachers, which Larry Flanagan described, and we welcome any feedback on ways in which they could be refined, changed or improved further. In fact, we are revising that suite of materials this year.

As agreed with the CFE management board and implementation group, we have published course materials for all the new higher courses. Having listened to feedback, we also produced route maps through the material, because teachers wanted to know which documents to look at and in which order, so those route maps indicate the sequence that teachers will need to follow to move towards the new courses.

In the paper that we have provided to the committee, we give an example of the sciences, and you can see the extent of the support that is available, as well as web-based materials, local meetings, and joint events with professional associations and the SQA. It outlines the huge range of national support that was provided, and it is worth remembering that that support is agreed by all the partners through the CFE management board and annually through the implementation plan, so there is discussion and agreement about what support is required in the year ahead, and that is then delivered as well as possible by all concerned.

We have learned in the past year or so, as colleagues have outlined, that some of the support that was most valuable was the dialogue, so we are extending our programme of visits to secondary schools, where inspectors and senior officers enter a dialogue about the curriculum, which is built at the level of individual schools. Between August and December, we are visiting another 50 secondary schools to have that discussion about where they have reached and what they need next so that we can provide tailored support. As well as all the generic support, we continue to offer tailored support to any secondary school or department that needs it.

There is a fine balance to be struck when it comes to the course and support materials, because teachers do not want a prescriptive approach—curriculum for excellence was supposed to give them more autonomy and professional freedom—but they do want practical support. We must strike a balance in the materials by providing practical support and examples from other schools and local authorities, without prescribing what teachers must do. We must hold on to the principles of curriculum for excellence, which we have all agreed and which are built on that idea.

Richard Goring: Teachers do not want prescription, but they want to know what they are doing. They want clear guidelines. The majority of secondary teachers have had the content, the syllabus and all that stuff there for them over the years, but suddenly they have to reinvent a lot of it themselves. That is not the experience that they had in the past and it will take time to change that. The situation came to a head last year and this year, and will possibly do so next year. An awful lot is having to be done for the first time and teachers do not have the clear hooks to hold on to, so there is anxiety.

We are talking about support. We had about 1,500 responses to our questionnaire—a high proportion of our membership—in which we looked at satisfaction with Education Scotland, the SQA, the local authority and the school. Although responses all improved slightly, the dissatisfaction rates were still very high, with 80 per cent and, in some cases, 90 per cent dissatisfaction.

Teachers are not happy with the way things are and feel that they need more support; they need more examples and things to look at on which they can model their own practice. They need more practice papers so that they can see what is likely to be asked of their pupils at the end of the day. They need to be assured that things will not change halfway through the session. Many people found that they had taught something and then the rules changed so they had to redo it. That is a

waste of time and is dispiriting. Teachers need examples of assessments.

The results that we got last year were commendable, but that is probably in spite of the lack of support. They are a tribute to the industry and sheer determination of teachers to get through the course and make the best of what they had.

Dr Brown: I want to develop Larry Flanagan's point about the verification process. That is one of the key changes in the approach to assessment in curriculum for excellence.

In partnership with the curriculum for excellence management board, we agreed that the SQA would train nominees from every local authority—more than we needed to deploy—to enable them to understand the nature of the assessments and the work that they would have to do. The nominees would come in to be trained and then be used as verifiers to verify the internal assessment that was going on in schools. The plan was for those nominees go back into the system and train their fellow teachers on the nature of the assessment and the changes.

As has been said, the first year is always hard and some of the people were not confident about going on to that next stage. We had very positive feedback on the training that we provided and people believed that they fully understood the nature of the change in the assessment methodology.

We need to take the best-practice examples from across Scotland, where some local authorities have used their nominees in a structured way. There is a mechanism to pull them together to talk among themselves in subject areas and to hold twilight sessions for teachers to share their understanding and knowledge. That is a mechanism that we all agreed would happen.

The first year is always difficult, and the second year will be better. The second year includes higher and I think that that will be more proactive.

10:45

On support, one of the things that we learned in the first year was that teachers were starting to understand the standards. They were getting more comfortable with them and they were able to demonstrate that they could assess to standard, so we changed the methods by which we undertook verification for the last round of last year, and we have changed how we are approaching verification this year. The first session of our quality assurance process, which is under way, includes understanding standards training for all the nominees so that they are fully confident about what the standards are and what the assessment methodology is, and they can then go

back and share that with their colleagues in the school sector. Taking advantage of that is very important.

The only other thing that I would add to what we have said before is that it is really important that teachers know what has changed and what is the same so that they can use what they have been doing historically. On the idea of publishing points of change for the new topics, whether that is for national 5, national 4 or the new higher, we have published the points of change and the points of stability from one set of qualifications to the new set. That gives the teachers a framework within which they can target those areas that they potentially need to understand a little more in relation to the big changes that are taking place, particularly for the new higher as they come in.

The Convener: Jayne Baxter has a supplementary question.

Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Given the number of financial and other commitments that were made on the implementation of the new qualifications, can Education Scotland or the SQA justify the fact that teachers are feeling so unsupported? Are you confident that there will be an improvement in the years to come?

The Convener: Can we come straight back to Janet Brown on that?

Dr Brown: I think that we have provided very good support—as has been said, more support has been provided than ever before for any change in education in Scotland. The challenge is to ensure that people can access that support and use it, that people can ask questions and that there is communication. I think that the support is there.

The first year of any change is always difficult for anyone, and especially so in education, because teachers care so passionately about their students' futures. It is very difficult, and I think that a lot of what we have seen this year has been a result of that passion that teachers hold. As they move forward, they become more confident, and I think that the support will be more easily accessible to them.

Graeme Logan: I agree with Janet Brown. There has been a continual process of listening, changing and providing further support. All the commitments to support that were agreed by all the partners through the management board and the implementation group were delivered, and a lot of further support was given. The route map through assessment that I referred to was part of the additional support package that was provided. It has been about signalling to teachers where there are examples of good practice and ensuring

that they can access support from both local and national materials.

On the new higher, again, the Government, agencies and so on listened to the voice of teachers, and there was therefore a phasing in of the new higher. We know that there will be a mixed picture of uptake this year. We have been analysing the subjects where there is less uptake of the new higher and providing additional support for those subject areas, which are computing science, physics, chemistry and biology. Again, we are providing tailored additional support for teachers in subject areas where there are the most changes in content.

A full package of support is available in subject areas, and there is also tailored support for those who need it. As I said, we have found that the most successful type of support, in addition to the materials, involves people going into individual schools and having dialogue. By February 2015, we will have been into about 177 secondary schools to offer that dialogue and discussion and to see where they are and what they need next.

Jayne Baxter: Graeme Logan referred to commitments being delivered in full. The following commitment was made:

"Course materials for the new National 4 and 5 qualifications will be developed nationally and distributed to schools well in advance of the commencement of the new qualifications in 2013/14."

However, the EIS is still saying that course materials are

"less than fully fleshed out".

There is obviously still a difference of opinion about what the commitments meant in practice.

Graeme Logan: We have a lot of dialogue with the EIS and have said to it that we are keen to know which specific materials in which specific subjects it thinks could be of better quality. As I said, the materials were commissioned from and written by teachers for other teachers. They have been one of the most successful aspects of our online service. That area of our website had 83,000 visits up to 14 August, and the secure area on the glow network has had more than 22,000 unique visits. The materials have been extensively accessed and used by secondary teachers. We have had a lot of positive feedback.

If individuals have concerns, we need to know which subjects they are talking about, what materials they have concerns about and what suggestions they have for improvements. We will continue to engage with the teachers who write the materials for us and will work with them to provide further improvements.

Larry Flanagan: I have two quick points on the issue of resource. I want to challenge Terry

Lanagan's and Janet Brown's notion that this has been the best-resourced curriculum development ever. I suppose that, technically, that might be true, given the scale of the curriculum for excellence. It is a three-to-18 programme, so it touches every aspect of education. In terms of scale, therefore, it probably tips the balance with regard to overall expenditure. However, if you look back at the resources that were devoted to other developments, such as standard grade, which concerned a two-year course in S3 and S4, and even higher still, which was about a fairly narrow range of qualifications, you can see that, proportionally, the resource allocation for curriculum for excellence does not deserve the accolade that it has been given.

Terry Lanagan was a teacher in the 1980s, as was I. At that point, we had standard grade units coming out of our ears. Just about everybody in the west of Scotland spent a week at Seamill, producing course materials. There was a much greater phase-in period for higher still and standard grade. That has been one of the challenges. The single biggest resource that has been missing is time for teachers to assimilate the material and have that professional dialogue around implementation. That time has been squeezed because we have been working to a timetable for implementation for this particular group of S4 pupils. We have always challenged that timetable. I realise that we are not going to get agreement on this point, but we would challenge the issue of resources, particularly with regard to time for people to have the dialogue in schools.

The Convener: Yes, but Graeme Logan wanted to know what specific materials are less than you would want them to be, and in which subjects. What is the answer to that question?

Larry Flanagan: I understand that we are sharing that information with Education Scotland already. There have certainly been some subject areas in which people have clearly expressed that they got a set of guidance notes rather than fleshed-out courses. Off the top of my head, computing was one—that rings a bell. In my subject, English, there were issues around some of the material. I am happy to go back and have a dialogue with Graeme Logan on specific issues.

Ken Muir: As Larry Flanagan said, I was in Education Scotland at the time and was responsible for creating the 95 sets of course materials for national 4 and national 5. There were a number of issues. One was that, in some of those courses, there was a range of options in relation to which it simply was not possible to produce materials, because individual schools or departments were not doing them. There were some areas where the options were not covered.

Another thing must be borne in mind. Larry Flanagan referred to the packages of fully fleshed-out materials that were available in relation to standard grade and higher still. However, in many schools, those were never used, because teachers already had resources that they wished to use or had used in previous courses and which they felt were more appropriate for their circumstances. The issue is twofold. First, there is a difference in expectation with regard to what fully fleshed-out materials look like. For some teachers, that would mean the sort of packages that they received in relation to higher still, which, as I said, remained packed in cellophane wrappers on their shelves until the end of higher still.

The second issue came out in discussions with teachers in relation to the reflections report and concerns the extent to which individual departments and local authorities were prepared to share materials and resources. In my previous existence, when I was responsible for creating those materials for national 4 and national 5, I was aware that courses were being developed in schools, some of which were of a high quality but which individual teachers were not prepared to put into a national pot. Indeed, as was said earlier, a number of local authorities chose not to participate in that exercise of trying to bring together a collation of resources, which in itself would have increased quite significantly the amount of material available to teachers. There is more behind that than resources simply being inadequate.

The Convener: I welcome Tavish Scott to the meeting, which I think is the first meeting of the Education and Culture Committee that he has attended. Do you have any relevant interests to declare, Tavish?

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Thank you, convener. First, I apologise for being late. I do not have any interests to declare, other than that I have children at school, which seems somewhat relevant to this subject.

I have a supplementary to Jayne Baxter's question. The Royal Society of Edinburgh's briefing, which I read on the plane from home this morning, states that

"the Management Board's short-life working group ... proposes many actions"

but

"there is little discernible priority among the long list of actions."

Do the panel members think that that matters moving forward?

Graeme Logan: Through the curriculum for excellence implementation group we have been working on an addendum to the implementation plan for this year to take account of the short-term

actions relating to what we need to learn this year. We have been collaborating with partners such as the SQA and the national parent forum of Scotland to populate that addendum with the actions that need to happen to meet the recommendations in the report, and with a timescale for the actions. That draft addendum was circulated yesterday to members of the implementation group and other stakeholders, including those who are here, and we hope that it will be published over the next week or so. There has been dialogue between national partners on how we prioritise those actions. As we said, quite a number of them are already in place and are being taken forward. One of the biggest issues, which is how we continue to support schools to reduce the amount of assessment that is taking place, is in there. As I said, the draft addendum to the implementation plan for this year will be published shortly, and it will outline exactly how we will work together to meet the recommendations.

Terry Lanagan: I want to return to the previous question and Larry Flanagan's reference to standard grade and higher still. I remember some of the support that was given at that time. Whether it was effective is open to question—as has been said, a lot of the material remained on the shelf.

Richard Goring made a point about the nature of support for developments in curriculum for excellence. Curriculum for excellence is partly about changing the culture in Scottish education. The whole system, including teachers, identified that, in five to 14, standard grade and higher still, there was far too much prescription. One of the issues for teachers is that in some cases they perhaps expected something that they did not get, but they did not get it for good reasons. The sort of support that people should be looking for is support that allows the teacher and the department to develop the course in a way that is appropriate for the young people whom they serve.

Teachers complained most about workload during the introduction of higher still, the introduction of standard grade and the first year of the national qualifications. One of the key things that is inevitably missing in the first year of any implementation is sample scripts from youngsters who have completed the course, which is one of the most powerful pieces of support for teachers. By definition, you cannot have those in the first year of a new set of qualifications. This year, we have them. That is one of the key things that will increase the profession's confidence and convince people that they understand the standard.

Ken Muir: Although the reflections report contains 36 specific actions for this academic session, and a further 19 longer-term actions, I chose to write them in sufficient detail so that there

would be no doubt as to what was required from the various national bodies to support the curriculum for excellence initiative going forward. It might look like there is a long list of things that still need to be done, but I echo what colleagues said earlier: the system itself has learnt a lot. If the short-term and longer-term actions are implemented, we will certainly be much more successful than we have been in some aspects of delivering national 4 and national 5 in year 1.

11:00

Larry Flanagan: The working group was clear that some of the immediate actions required would involve addressing workload concerns. For example, the verification changes directly address that issue.

Collectively, we did not wish to create any additional instability by making too many changes just as people were starting to get to grips with the system. Some changes are more urgent than others. We have long argued that there is a design flaw between higher and national 5, in that there is an insufficient fallback from higher to national 5 for students, and particularly for those who are bypassing lower-level qualifications and are not sitting exams in S4. That is one of the concepts that should develop as the education system becomes more comfortable with the bigger notions.

I do not think that there is an immediate concern about the fact that there is a timeline around some longer-timescale changes, as long as we are addressing the issues. It is important not just to include things as window-dressing; the actions are required to support the system, and they should be beneficial.

I am tempted to get into an argument with Terry Lanagan, but I will resist.

Terry Lanagan: I am disappointed.

The Convener: Well, I am pleased.

Tavish Scott: I take Mr Muir's and Mr Flanagan's points. I presume that you would concede that 36 actions are quite a lot of actions. Someone in some bit of the system must make a judgment about which of those 36 actions will be implemented first, second, third and all the way down. You cannot expect a head of faculty or a headteacher to judge all 36 of them equally important. I want to gauge how you expect the system to cope with so many recommendations.

Larry Flanagan: A lot of them are interlinked. Some of them cannot be discretely implemented, and they must go hand in hand with others.

The Convener: I invite Janet Brown to comment.

Dr Brown: The actions in the list are appropriately assigned to the different aspects of the system to which they apply. It is not that there are 36 actions that are all for one particular area of the system. That is why they are manageable. Ken Muir's reflections group identified the particular things that the SQA, Education Scotland, schools and local authorities needed to do as a high priority to ensure that this year is a successful year. I do not think that we should simply consider the total of 36; the issue is around what we, local authorities, schools and teachers need to focus on.

The actions are manageable, but it is very important that we co-ordinate across the different parts of the system, so that we do not just have individual sets of actions. The aim is to keep the partnership going, ensuring that we work together for the benefit of learners. Some of the things that we need to do require reflection by local authorities, teachers and school leadership. We need to ensure that the overall change is delivered, but it is not a matter of having a list of 36 actions for everyone.

Ken Muir: There are 36 specific bullet points, but I draw the committee's attention to what I think is the most significant one beyond those, which is realising the aspiration of curriculum for excellence. We still have some way to go with teachers' understanding—and headteachers' understanding, in some cases—of the basic philosophy of what curriculum for excellence is trying to achieve. That will be as demanding—more demanding, I would suggest—than some of the specific action points that have been allocated to individual national bodies.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Culture change has been mentioned, and tackling that is probably one of the biggest challenges in any organisation. Larry Flanagan mentioned that earlier. I take it from what Richard Goring said—correct me if I am wrong—that a lot of the stress that teachers are experiencing is to do with not having confidence.

I want to gauge from the witnesses where the responsibility for the culture change lies. Is there anything more that the SQA and Education Scotland can do? Is it now down to local authorities? How will it be fixed? Will that have to be done at school level?

Dr Brown: I think that the responsibility is everyone's. Scotland benefits from having an education system that is a partnership; each bit of the system is essential to ensuring that we do the right thing for learners. We all have a part to play in that. SQA has a part to play, as do local authorities and teachers.

The goal is to talk things through, understand where the pinch points—for want of a better expression—are, and give teachers the confidence that they need. Teachers are passionate about what they are trying to do, and we need to do as much as possible to give them confidence. I think that, as a result of going through national 1 to national 5, confidence has increased.

This year is a high-stakes year, because it is the highers year, and we need to ensure that each part of the system plays its part in supporting teachers and giving them confidence. One of the reasons why we are doing the understanding standards work, which started last week and will continue over the next few weeks, is so that we can enable a group of people who are more confident to share their confidence with fellow teachers and provide them with the information that they have been given, through the website.

Terry Lanagan: I echo what Janet Brown said about it being everyone's responsibility. Culture change cannot come solely from the top or from national bodies but must be bought into by everyone. Local authorities and schools have an important role to play.

As I said in my opening remarks, the challenge of creating a true three-to-18 curriculum is partly to do with how we structure and develop things in local authorities. We have largely abandoned the idea of the school cluster—the secondary school and the primary school—and we now meet and plan in learning communities that go all the way through from three to 18. That sort of approach can begin to change culture, by changing how people regard their colleagues and how they operate.

The Convener: I am conscious of the time and I want to move on, but if anyone wants to make a point that we have not covered they should email us. We will be grateful for that. We will hear from the cabinet secretary next week.

I have a question for the SQA on assessment. A number of criticisms were made in the run-up to the new qualifications, about, for example, late arrival of relevant guidance, the fact that the N4 added value unit was taken by not just borderline cases but, in some areas, almost all N5 students, and the number of candidates who took eight rather than the intended five or six subjects. Has the SQA taken those criticisms on board? How will you respond to them as you move into the second year of national qualifications and the first year of the new highers?

Dr Brown: There will be no more changes to documentation for this year. The final information for mandatory documents came at the end of the

last session. We took on the feedback from people who said, "Please don't change anything else."

Of course, we are trying to be responsive, so if people are saying that something is a challenge we want to be able to respond. There is a delicate balance to strike on how much we respond and how much we lock down. We have taken the view that the documentation and the nature of the courses must stay stable so that people understand them; we need to look forward in that way.

On the nature of the assessment, we need to ensure that over the next three years we communicate, as we are doing through the understanding standards work, a real understanding and engagement with the teaching profession, to ensure that teachers get the confidence that they need.

Course documentation for national 5 was finalised pretty early, but we took feedback. It is a matter of striking a balance: if people tell us that something needs to change, we need to be able to respond. We also need to make clear when we have made a change and whether the change is mandatory or is for information.

The Convener: Is the SQA promising greater stability and clarity for next year?

Dr Brown: Yes, that is part of our action—

Larry Flanagan: That is a bit of a leading question, convener.

Dr Brown: One of the actions arising from the reflections group is that the SQA should make documentation clearer, and if you look at the documentation that has come out recently, you will see that it is clear.

The Convener: I asked that question for a reason, Larry. Does the statement of intent for next year give EIS members and members of the other two unions represented here more confidence, given the survey results from all the organisations?

Larry Flanagan: We welcome the changes to verification, and I welcome Janet Brown's statement that there will be no further changes around the higher. That is absolutely crucial. We are almost in October, and the courses have been running since June and we cannot really anticipate being able to cope with any changes, so I think that that statement will increase confidence.

Richard Goring mentioned confidence levels around the higher, and one of the questions that we asked was about how confident people were about the implementation of the new higher. About 57 per cent indicated a degree of confidence and about 44 per cent indicated a lack of confidence. I know that that sounds quite negative, but that is

the best result that we have had around any of the qualifications.

The Convener: It is progress.

Larry Flanagan: It indicates that we are making progress, but the fact that there is still a lack of confidence about the higher among a significant cohort of teachers—some of which will be a nervous response, because people are well aware of the importance of the higher—shows that there are still challenges.

The Convener: Janet Brown wanted to come back in briefly on the issue, before we hear from Mary Scanlon.

Dr Brown: As was said earlier, until there is exemplification teachers will always be uncomfortable, and we will not have that for higher this year.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Tavish Scott will remember that Peter Peacock was talking about curriculum for excellence in the first session of Parliament, up to 2003. I was not on the education committee then, but I picked up on a lot of what was going on, so it is quite shocking to hear that 80 per cent of teachers are extremely stressed about the implementation and that their workload, according to Larry Flanagan, is unsustainable. I appreciate the points that have been made, but I think that it is quite shocking, given the lead-in time.

I may be wrong, but I understand that higher still and the standard grades were piloted. If that is the case, why was there no piloting of course notes and practice papers for the national 4 and 5?

The RSE paper mentions overassessment, saying at paragraph 17:

"it would appear that the widespread reduction in the number of subjects studied in S4 is not the result of any conscious policy decision but is the unintended consequence of national guidance."

Has the fact that there is so much focus on overassessment led to a reduction in subjects?

My final question is about the early years of the curriculum for excellence, and I am going back almost 14 years. My understanding is that it was not all about assessment but about interdisciplinary learning and taking a skill learned in one subject and applying it to another subject, yet all that we have heard from the minute we started at 10 o'clock this morning is exams, exams, exams and assessment, overassessment and practice papers. We have heard nothing of what I understood CFE to be about—learning one subject and applying it to another. Have we simply changed one form of assessment for another, with all its problems? Ken Muir talked about the principle of CFE, but in all the focus on

assessment has the whole ethos of CFE been lost? We are certainly not talking about it.

The Convener: Members are entitled to ask their questions, and there was a lot in there.

Terry Lanagan: Mary Scanlon has put her finger on an extremely important point, and one that ADES is certainly concerned about.

One of the aims of CFE was to look at the totality of a child's education and the totality of a young person's experience in school. I believe that there are some extremely exciting developments as far as that is concerned. I could take you into any school in West Dunbartonshire and show you practice that is going on that you would not have seen before the introduction of CFE.

11:15

There is always a risk when we introduce exams into the system that society as a whole obsesses about the exams, and I believe that there is a major risk here of us losing sight of the big picture and of what we have achieved in CFE overall, which I think is considerable.

The overassessment question is the responsibility of everybody in the system, including individual teachers. I believe that there are some structural points in the system, such as the requirement to do the added value unit for all national 5 pupils and the number of subjects that pupils study in S4, which are not in the spirit of the development. However, individuals also have responsibilities. Janet Brown's submission refers to the idea of teachers embracing a more holistic approach to assessment. Such an approach would, in itself, reduce the assessment burden.

There is no doubt that there has been stress on the system this year. However, I do not think that even Larry Flanagan would claim that his survey represents 80 per cent of all teachers. His statistics represent the percentage of people who responded to the survey. Perhaps, by definition, someone is more likely to respond to such a survey if they are unhappy or if they are feeling that level of stress. He has not said what percentage of his members responded to the survey.

We must respond to the idea that teachers are under stress. We must find ways within the system to reduce the workload. I think that everybody around the table acknowledges that that is a significant issue. Teachers themselves have a responsibility to take on board the lessons that the SQA is putting out about some of the stuff that is coming in to SQA, which is simply unnecessary and is leading to some of the stress.

Larry Flanagan: First, in relation to the timescale, secondary schools largely started to

engage with CFE when last year's S4 were in S1. A timetable was created around that group of pupils, who would be the first to sit the new qualifications. We argued against the notion of a timetable but that is how it developed over the past four or five years, which is not a particularly long run-in for such a major change to our qualifications system.

One reason that we argued for a delay to the qualifications timetable was so that the pedagogical changes around CFE would bed in across S1 to S3. One of the difficulties this year is that a number of pupils who sat their national 4 and national 5 last year theoretically came through CFE broad general education but did not in practice. In too many schools, they made subject choices in S2 and basically had an equivalent of a standard grade course towards national 4 and national 5.

That is one of the areas where I think that there will be changes this year and people will be more confident about moving towards the kind of models that see a broad general education as the starting point for their post-15 career path. The S3 profile—the prior attainment across S1 to S3—should be the reference point for pupils' senior phase and that is where they can look at things such as bypass. All of that will start to develop in the course of the system.

I do not accept the point that Terry Lanagan and Janet Brown have made that we cannot provide exemplification until we have live material. When I was a higher English examiner, every paper was trialled a couple of years before it came into use so we could generate models of pupils' answers through practice papers, which we could then feed into the system. Why did that not happen in this case? Because the timetable was too compressed.

There should be no difficulty in creating some pupil-led answers in relation to higher practice papers, which can then be used to create exemplification. That is one of the big areas to address. The timetable has squeezed out the pilot approach but, alongside that, more could be done to address that particular issue.

My last point is that I am concerned about a couple of things that Terry Lanagan said. Our health and wellbeing survey was answered by 7,500 teachers. It was carried out by an independent research company that said it had a validity rate of 99.1 per cent, which is probably higher than that of any of the recent polls that we have all been obsessing about. We found that the teacher stress levels documented in the secondary sector are clearly related to qualifications.

One good thing is that the cabinet secretary has allowed teachers in schools to make professional decisions about their readiness for the new higher. That has taken a bit of heat out of the situation, because it means that teachers who do not feel confident moving forward to the new higher can stick with the old higher—and a higher is a higher. However, the ADES submission bemoans the fact that we have not gone full tilt for implementation of the new higher this year. That position concerns me, because it does not seem to take on board the fact that we need to give teachers control of the process in order for it be delivered as effectively as possible.

There are a lot of issues related to the timescale and the compression that it has created. They bring us back to the issue that I mentioned before: the key resource is time for professional dialogue at school level.

The Convener: I have to say that everyone has to shorten their answers as we are rapidly running out of time and may not be able to get through all of the subjects that we want to do.

Ken Muir: I have two points to make.

One point, which I referred to earlier, is that this is the first time in Scottish educational history that we have tried to change the whole three-to-18 curriculum at one time. One reason why there was no piloting of CFE, unlike for standard grades and higher still, was simply the fact that those were bite-sized chunks of the three-to-18 curriculum, whereas with CFE we are trying to get a notion of seamless learning throughout the whole of primary and secondary education. That is why CFE has been around for a while. As Larry Flanagan has suggested, it is only in the last couple of years that it has come on to the radar of secondary teachers with the looming examinations.

Mary Scanlon also pointed to what I think is an issue, as I suggested in the reflections report: the fact that we still have a number of schools that have to think seriously about what an S1 to S3 broad general education is about, what an S4 to S6 senior phase is about, and what the articulation between those two actually is. One reason for the additional pressure in some schools was that they continued with eight subjects, as opposed to looking at how they could create a curriculum, particularly in the senior phase, that delivers the aspirations of curriculum for excellence and recognises the wider achievement that the curriculum can offer—as opposed to simply passing examinations, important as that is.

Graeme Logan: Going back to Ms Scanlon's point about whether we have lost the ethos behind CFE, I would say absolutely not. As I said at the start of this meeting, there has been a transformation in learning and teaching in Scottish

schools. The inspection evidence from secondary schools this year finds that their most common key strengths are young people who want to learn and achieve, a supportive learning environment, pride in the school, leadership of the headteacher, a broad range of achievements, and a greater range of opportunities for achievement than young people have had before.

It has been a challenging year, and there have been issues with assessment. However, our curriculum focuses on experiences and outcomes, and undoubtedly the experiences of young people in Scottish schools are being transformed, as that independent evidence shows.

We recognise that broad general education needs to be further developed. Most secondary schools are looking again this year at the nature of S1 to S3. Education Scotland has produced a toolkit for improving the curriculum by learning from the best practices in schools across Scotland. It is very clear and concise and has been well received.

We are doing the same at primary level—it is important to remember that CFE is not just about the senior phase. We have noted huge progress in the primary sector with CFE. At the moment, we are seeing lots of primary headteachers over a course of national events; we will have seen about 800 by next week. We are looking at progression within the primary curriculum, and again there is a new toolkit to learn from all the best practices we have seen to date, to take it to that next stage and to achieve what we all want to achieve, which is a seamless three-to-18 curriculum for Scottish young people.

Mary Scanlon: My question about the reason for the widespread reduction in the number of subjects that are studied has not been answered yet. Would the other witnesses mind addressing that?

Dr Brown: I will leave that for a little while, as I would like to address your question about interdisciplinary learning.

In defining and developing the new qualifications, we wanted to enable teachers to teach their subjects in different environments and take advantage of interdisciplinary learning. In the internal assessments and course assessments, we allow pupils to learn through projects, assignments, problem solving and even portfolio work. They can put together a wide variety of contexts in which they learn things, which allows the flexibility and interdisciplinary learning that are at the core of CFE. That is critical.

The overassessment issue was less about the number of subjects and more about the added value unit. Because we were in the first year and because teachers are concerned about doing the

right things for their students, the number of presentations for the national 4 added value unit varied hugely across the country. The system will learn from that. Teachers are saying this year that they have learned from last year, and I think that the number of presentations this year for the added value unit will be lower, as pupils who do not need to take it will not do so.

Terry Lanagan: I will deal with two points that Larry Flanagan made. I reassure the committee that I am not suggesting that stress levels and workload in the teaching profession are not an issue; I have acknowledged repeatedly that they are a significant issue that we must address.

The paragraph in the ADES submission that Larry Flanagan referred to does not bemoan the mixed economy of higher; it acknowledges that and the reasons for that, but it says that the profession needs a period of stability. We will achieve full stability, which will allow us to reflect on the situation, only when we operate to a single set of qualifications. I would have thought that the EIS would welcome the day when we can stand back and look at that.

Ms Scanlon asked about the number of courses that are being taken in S4. CFE re-emphasises one of the strengths of Scottish education—the broad general education—and redefines that from three to 15, but it also places a greater responsibility and emphasis on the depth of learning. Most schools and local authorities have taken the view that, if the depth of learning is to improve, the number of subjects in S4 must reduce. That allows schools to timetable S4 to S6 as a single entity, which has interesting consequences.

My local authority—West Dunbartonshire Council—has a couple of schools that have adopted that approach. If S4 to S6 are timetabled together, S4 to S6 pupils can be in the same classes. That meant that one school in an area of significant deprivation presented two S4 pupils for higher physics; they both got A passes. Under the previous system, allowing for that was not possible. Such timetabling allows flexibility and the depth of learning that feeds into post-school learning.

The Convener: I am keen to move on, because we do not have an awful lot of time.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I have a couple of questions on workload and support issues. Why was the verification process scheduled to be carried out so near to the end of courses? That caused teachers a great deal of anxiety. On support, why did the implementation go ahead without—according to teachers—an adequate number of practice papers? That caused parents and pupils concern, too.

Dr Brown: On verification taking place close to the end of courses, the verification was a course assessment verification and students had to have studied the entire course to be able to undertake the course assessment. The need for verification to take place at the end of the course determined the timing. That is a critical component.

We have looked at the sampling. Based on the information that we got from last year's verification and quality assurance process, we are able to adjust our sampling methodology, because we are seeing an increased number of schools operating at national standard, therefore we can reduce the sampling mechanism to try to address some of the workloads. However, the timing of the course assessment has to remain the same.

11:30

We have provided a practice paper for national 5 and we have committed to providing an additional higher practice paper this year. The writing of practice papers is extremely complex, because they must reflect exactly what the students would see when they sit down for an examination. In addition to the commitment to provide an additional practice paper, we have highlighted relevant questions from past papers that teachers can use. Again, those are components of the “points of change, areas of stability” approach, so that teachers have a suite of questions that they can use as part of their internal assessment to get pupils ready for examinations.

Neil Bibby: If there are no more comments on that, I have a question for the teaching unions. How easy or difficult has it been to get the voices of teachers heard during the implementation process, given the possible pressure from the Scottish Government and others to implement the promised timetable? The teaching unions have said that teachers need more time. Do we also need more teachers?

Richard Goring: The fact that we have a committee such as this one means that we are much closer to the Government and to decisions than is the case in many other parts of the United Kingdom. From that point of view, we have a platform and it is relatively easy for us to make our voice heard. Whether it is listened to is another matter.

As you know, schools operate with working time agreements; every year hours are allocated and divided up among various activities in a school. As a union, the SSTA has tried to encourage our school representatives to increase the time available within that for the introduction process, particularly in the senior phase of curriculum for excellence, but also in the broad general

education phase as well. There has been reluctance to make that time available, which has pushed an awful lot into teachers' own time.

Working time agreements must be much more realistic. Headteachers need to be given the authority and power not to put everything into them, but to create freedom—especially over the next two years, in order to allow development of the implementation.

It is not just about looking forward; it is also about looking back. This year, in almost all cases, teachers are focusing on presenting the new higher or getting ready for the new higher and the new advanced higher next year. There is very little time available to look back at what happened with national 4 and 5, and many teachers—in particular those who had difficulty with verification—feel that those need to be improved, modified and brought more into line with expectations. The need for such time is virtually being ignored at the moment; a huge amount of time is required but it is not being made available.

More teachers would always be good.

The Convener: If that was not a leading question, Larry, I do not know what would be.

Jane Peckham: In terms of getting the voices of the profession heard, being part of the management board has certainly allowed us to take forward the profession's views. That is where the bureaucracy working group came from: our unions brought forward physical examples of the ridiculous level of bureaucracy. Being part of the board is a positive step.

Like Richard Goring, I am not sure that the voices of people in the profession are always listened to. What concerns me is that although we are talking about all the levels of support that are available, a high percentage of teachers are still expressing concern, so attention must be paid to that. Irrespective of whether teachers are concerned because they do not know the support is there or because they feel unsupported, it is an important issue that must be focused on.

Where do we get time from? One group that we have not spoken about this morning is supply teachers and the gamut of issues around supply cover to allow teachers to get out. Supply teachers often feel that they are out of the loop, but they are the people who create the ability to release time to take things forward.

I do not want to be the voice of doom all the time, although I feel that I am, on these matters. I suppose that that is the union's role, sometimes. Right from the beginning we have supported the curriculum change; we think that it is a fantastic way for Scottish education to move forward.

However, it is not in a little bubble on its own. All the issues that have been mentioned impact on it.

The real concern about not listening to the voice of the profession is that the success of last year was largely due to teachers' commitment, as the committee has acknowledged, but they will not just keep on doing it; I cannot urge the committee enough to see that more clearly. They are underpaid, they do not have enough supply support, and the physical national support needs to be more clearly laid out for them. Things cannot continue in that way unless things move forward, and we move them forward together.

Larry Flanagan: When I speak furth of Scotland, I always make great play of the fact that we have around education in Scotland a social dialogue that is absent in other parts of these islands. We have a number of platforms on which we can express the profession's opinion and we have a number of robust partnerships.

There are two difficulties around that. We have national policy from the Scottish Parliament, but local authorities have responsibility for implementation, so sometimes there is a bit of a gap. We engage in national discussions, but often the issues that concern us are to do with individual education authorities' approaches. We do not have an effective working relationship with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities' education committee, for example, which in effect defaults to ADES in a lot of areas. We meet with ADES, but ADES does not control the individual local authorities; it is a professional network.

The other difficulty, which we have been fairly clear about, is that the SQA must be more accountable to the system. That was a big focus of discussion at the EIS's annual general meeting this year and we have written to the cabinet secretary with a number of suggestions. Although it is in one sense—in relation to its credibility as being custodian of standards—important that the SQA is independent, there should be greater direct links between the professional voice and the SQA's operations.

We have a body of evidence that we will take to the tackling bureaucracy working group, which will reconvene shortly under the convenership of Alasdair Allan, the schools minister, on how working time agreements and school improvement plans have to assess realistically the amount work that is required.

I have a short anecdote: I was speaking to my former headteacher—who is a good EIS member—in a Glasgow secondary school. He told me that on the first in-service day at the start of term he stood up with the school improvement plan on the projector and picked out four things and said, "These are suspended until further

notice, because this year we are focusing on delivering the new qualifications.” The school had a two-year qualification route, so nobody in S4 sat for qualifications. That was quite a dramatic move. I double-checked it with a couple of colleagues, in case he was spinning me a line, but he actually did that.

That is the sort of thing that needs to be done. There has to be a realistic assessment: if time is needed to deliver a programme, the time must be identified and other things must be put to the side. At our workload campaign meetings I have been saying that unless we stop doing something, we will never reduce the workload. We cannot keep on trying to do everything, because that is an endless piece of string.

When the tackling bureaucracy working group reconvenes it will have a number of issues to consider in addressing workload concerns.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): I want to explore workload a little more. There is clearly a general acceptance that the development of curriculum for excellence resulted in increased work for teachers. How confident are you that that workload will ease as curriculum for excellence settles in? I interpret some of what EIS is saying as meaning that some of the workload is perhaps now integral to the curriculum for excellence approach.

Terry Lanagan: I believe that the workload will ease. I said earlier that the first year in the introduction of any new set of national qualifications has been when teachers have experienced significant workloads. I was a teacher during the introduction of the first two of those new qualifications, and I do not think that there is anything inherent in CFE that means that the workload is greater.

The workload issues are to do with two things, the first of which is assessment. We have covered the number of different elements that mean that there is overassessment in the system at present—which is, incidentally, an issue in respect of the workload of young people as well as that of teachers. The second thing is lack of confidence in the standard. As confidence grows—as Janet Brown said, there are strong signs that the profession’s confidence in understanding the standard is growing—there is less need for people to do checks. They become more comfortable with the materials that they are using and it all becomes part of their daily work, so I believe that the workload will reduce.

To go back to a point that was made earlier, I also believe that, ultimately, one of the effects of CFE will be that teaching will become a much more rewarding job, because teachers will have greater flexibility and will be dealing with the whole

child. I agree with Ms Scanlon that it would be a big mistake if we obsessed solely about the exams. Let us not forget that half the profession are in primary schools; they are not in secondary schools.

Dr Brown: I believe that the workload will go down. When teachers understand the assessment methodology and the standards, and are more comfortable with them, they will stop using individual pieces of evidence to justify individual outcomes, and it will be much more about using the material that is generated through learning, and submitting that to us to prove the level of the learning. The purpose of verification is to ensure that teachers are assessing to standard. If they show us material that they are using regularly, that will add huge value, both because they will be using the material regularly within learning and because it will be useful for us in terms of verification.

Confidence in the assessment will improve, but I also think that the confidence of teachers and their willingness to share information with one another will increase; by increasing sharing, we can prevent each teacher’s having to do things individually. This year, we have been offering a prior verification process, which allows teachers to submit some of their assessments. We look at them and say, “Yes—this is at standard. You are allowed to use it.” We ask each of those teachers whether they will allow us to share that with others, but not all teachers allow us to do so. That is partly about a lack of confidence. Once teachers get confident—this is a bit like the point that Graeme Logan made—we will build up a much bigger bank of information in terms of both assessment and support materials, and that in itself will reduce the workload for teachers.

Larry Flanagan: The major report “Education at a Glance”, which the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development published a couple of weeks ago, highlights the fact that Scottish teachers are among the most class-committed teachers in western Europe. On average, their class-time figure is 150 hours more than their colleagues in England, where the situation is, in effect, deregulated. There is a bigger issue around workload than simply the workload that relates to the national qualifications that have been introduced.

11:45

I quoted earlier the figure of 84 per cent for the amount of secondary teacher EIS members who indicated dissatisfaction with workload levels. The comparable figure for primary school teachers is 76 per cent, that for nursery teachers is 65 per cent and that for special school teachers is 62 per cent. So, there were particular pressures around

workload in relation to last year's experience of national qualifications. However, workload is a much bigger issue than simply being about the qualifications. I agree that as people become more familiar with the qualifications, some of the introductory workload pressures will ease.

However, from our point of view, there is a much bigger concern around workload, part of which relates to a point that Terry Lanagan made earlier. The implementation of curriculum for excellence is supposed to create a working environment in which teachers can flourish as professionals. When Terry and I were on the CFE management board, some people there occasionally used the word "fun" in relation to education, and that is the big picture.

In our health and wellbeing survey, one of the last questions that we asked was whether members would recommend teaching as a career. Only one in two teachers who responded to the survey said that they would do so. That is hugely concerning to me because I think that teaching is a fabulous career and that we should aspire to having the best candidates going into the teaching profession. The best advert for that should be our current teachers, but if one in two is saying, because of a variety of different pressures, that they would not recommend teaching as a career, that should ring alarm bells.

Ken Muir: To respond briefly to Mr Beattie's question, we have two published reports in the system just now: the "Curriculum for Excellence Working Group on Tackling Bureaucracy" report and the reflections report. I suggest to the committee that it should have confidence in the future, because curriculum for excellence will be fully implemented and teachers' workload will reduce if the recommendations in both reports that I mentioned are taken seriously and taken forward.

Graeme Logan: We are actively monitoring progress with tackling bureaucracy. As I said, we are currently in the midst of showcasing to 800 primary heads how other headteachers have reduced the amount of planning, freed up time for teaching and reduced the amount of assessment. The inspection advice note this year talks about consolidating where we are and about what schools are actively doing to reduce bureaucracy. As my colleagues do, I think that the workload will go down.

If we look at any system in the world when a new curriculum or new qualifications are introduced, we see that teachers' workload increases. However, we must collectively continue to minimise the amount of time that teachers spend on tasks that take them away from teaching and learning.

We have commissioned independent research into what is in the tackling bureaucracy report. Our area lead officers are asking directors of education what is being done around the issue. We have also launched new progression frameworks in each curriculum area that look at the absolute steps of learning in each area. Again, that is an attempt to reduce the amount of time that is spent on planning and assessing; we do not want to see big bulky folders on planning that takes teachers away from improving learning and teaching. We will continue to work with partners to take forward that work, and we will continue to showcase examples of where bureaucracy has been actively tackled.

A final point to note is that we have agreed to set up new curriculum, learning and teaching assessment forums for each curriculum area. That will keep the curriculum under constant review. The forums include teachers' professional associations, specialist interest groups and others so that we have on-going dialogue about how we can refine and further improve the guidance on the curriculum and make content changes in a cumulative way in order to manage workload for teachers.

Jayne Baxter: I have a quick question about the process of compiling the "Report of the Working Group of the First Year of the new National Qualifications". The EIS said in its written evidence:

"Although the EIS supports most of the recommendations from this report we have a number of concerns based on our view that the analysis was neither deep nor critical enough to get to the core of the problems."

The NASUWT said in its written evidence that

"in order to reach a consensus, the myriad of concerns raised by the unions, including workload, were omitted from the final Report."

Can Larry Flanagan and Jane Peckham comment on where and how those concerns might be taken forward now?

Larry Flanagan: The key concern was that the analysis did not reflect what we thought were the problems. For example, there was agreement that there was an element of overassessment in the system last year—although people should not be blamed for that, because the overassessment was to ensure that no young person fell through the gap. We would have liked the report to contain an explanation of why that overassessment took place. Our analysis was that a good part of that was because of poor communication. There had been a lack of understanding. That leads us to the question whose responsibility it was to communicate the big messages. There simply was not agreement in the working group around that.

To some extent, we would point the finger at the SQA and the CFE management board. The SQA had its own view on the matter. The final reflections report was an attempt on Ken Muir's part to balance the books. We would have liked to see the teachers' perspective included in the report, even if it was rebutted. It might simply have said what the teaching unions' view was and how the SQA had responded. Given the schools readership of the report, that would at least have allowed people to see that their views had been represented in it. Interestingly—Ken Muir might not like this—the report was distributed through the General Teaching Council magazine. According to our survey, however, 65 per cent of people said that they had not seen the report. That tells us how many people open up their magazines. We thought that such an approach would have been useful, even if we could not agree on reflecting the two sides.

We absolutely accept that there was unanimous agreement around the recommendation moving forward—on the progressive agenda, in a sense. Given the pressures that teachers were under last year, the report could have reflected that a bit more thoroughly than it did, although I know that there has been some attempt to acknowledge it.

Jane Peckham: I echo that. Our concern was that some of the details of the issues that we had highlighted appeared, on first reading, to have been glossed over, rather than further explored in detail. Our initial concern was that teachers reading the reflections report would not have perceived just how much we were raising the concerns that they had raised. It was useful, however, to have the report agreed, and to have the recommendations brought out, so that we can move forward with getting them implemented.

As was the case for the EIS, many of our members had not had sight of the reflections report, nor had they seen the report on tackling bureaucracy. That is an issue for us when it comes to continuing to raise the matter, and that makes me wonder why, if each teacher was meant to receive a copy of the reflections report, they have not read it—particularly as we are revisiting the tackling bureaucracy report a year on. That is a concern.

The issue was not about the fact that the short-life working group had not addressed the issues; it was about the detail that finally appeared in its reflections report.

The Convener: Given that criticism of teachers not getting sight of the report, Ken Muir might wish to comment.

Ken Muir: The reason for using *Teaching Scotland* magazine as a vehicle for getting the report out to all teachers was that the GTCS is the

only organisation that can mail directly to all 75,000 registered teachers. There was a feeling that it was important that teachers got the report as early in the new term as possible, given that the short-term actions were required for the session that had just begun.

I made a number of points very clear at the working group's first meeting. In particular, I said that I was looking to produce a report that was akin to the tackling bureaucracy report, which was relatively short and sharp, and which would contain as much consensus as possible. As Larry Flanagan and Jane Peckham have suggested, it was very difficult to get a consensus around the reflections. To have portrayed that in the report would have led to a much lengthier report. I was keen—indeed, I was adamant—that there should be no blame apportioned through the reflections report.

It is worth reflecting on the fact that, while there is an attempt to do a synthesis of the reflections, the individual action points themselves tell a story about what some of the reflections in the report were. I took the view that we were more likely to arrive at actions leading to significant change and improvement through that vehicle than if we had dwelt on the reflections of the previous year. I was looking to produce a forward-looking report in order to move the system forward, as opposed to dwelling overly much on what had happened over the past year.

The Convener: That is helpful. For the sake of absolute clarity, will you say whether the report was emailed or posted to every teacher?

Ken Muir: It was posted to all 75 registered teachers—

The Convener: You mean 75,000—I think that 75 is a bit low.

Ken Muir: Sorry. It was posted to the 75,000 teachers who are registered with the GTCS.

Larry Flanagan: It was posted with the GTCS magazine, not separately. We also emailed all our secondary teacher members with a hyperlink to the report, which has not been activated by a significant number—we are willing to acknowledge that communication is a challenging business.

The Convener: I will leave it there. Thank you for that.

Neil Bibby: We have heard concerns about workload pressure and teachers' ability to develop and implement the new highs, as well as their capacity to make amendments to nationals 1 to 5. Has the need for development time been factored into working time agreements? I apologise if the committee has already covered the issue.

Jane Peckham: It was supposed to have been, but our evidence, which is anecdotal, because we have not surveyed teachers since the previous survey, is that very few working time agreements are being changed. That is causing problems.

Terry Lanagan: The answer is yes, in West Dunbartonshire. Time has been built in.

Larry Flanagan: That is interesting. I was about to say that working time agreements are school-based agreements. It is for the union representative in a school to negotiate with the school's senior management. Local negotiating committees for teachers usually carry out sampling to ensure that agreements are compliant, within the broad parameters.

Working time agreements are imperfect tools for controlling workload. The tackling bureaucracy working group said in its report that agreements need to reflect real-time demands. There is still a learning curve in that regard, because in a lot of schools agreements are just nodded through. There needs to be genuine negotiation and genuine evaluation of the time that is required. Only if we evaluate real-time demands can we create a programme that matches the time that is available; if everything is theoretical, we just get an endless agenda.

Richard Goring: As Larry Flanagan said, a working time agreement is between a school's management and its reps. I could name schools—none of them is in West Dunbartonshire—where a headteacher has come along and said, "There's your working time agreement for next year", with no further movement on that. The issue has gone to local groups in an attempt to resolve things.

Development time is included in the vast majority of cases, but probably nothing like enough development time is built in. Working time agreements should change year on year, but some are the same every year and are simply signed off—people are told, "Just sign this and get on with it." Life can be difficult for reps in a school if they have to challenge that approach every year.

Neil Bibby: Richard Goring said that SSTA surveys have found that two thirds of pupils will sit courses in new highs next year whereas a third will continue with the existing highs. What are the other witnesses' experiences on the extent to which teachers are proceeding with the new higher as opposed to maintaining the existing higher courses?

Terry Lanagan: I can speak for my authority and from the point of view of the curriculum assessment and qualifications network at ADES, which I chair, because the network has discussed the matter.

There are two issues. First, in certain curricular areas there has been such significant change in courses that a large number of departments are not proceeding to the new higher. In my authority, for example, none of the science departments—physics, chemistry, biology, human biology—are moving to the new higher, and there is an issue with computing science. That reflects how out of date the previous courses were and how radical the changes had to be to make courses relevant.

Secondly, there can be an issue if a particular department has experienced staffing problems, such as a series of staff changes or long-term absence of the principal teacher. In such cases, on a subject-by-subject basis, departments have requested, and have been granted, leave to postpone implementation for a year. The process that we undertook, which I think was reflected in most local authorities, was to do a thorough survey of the level of readiness. Where there was general consensus that they were not ready, people did not go ahead across the authority and other cases were dealt with on an individual basis. However, the majority of departments are going with the new higher.

12:00

Graeme Logan: Just to echo that, we have been engaged in discussion with every local authority on this issue to monitor levels of uptake. As we would expect, there is a mixed picture across the country, which is in line with what the cabinet secretary outlined with regard to the new higher being adopted this year or into next year. Of course, schools are discussing with parents and local authority officers the reasons for that, which are those that Terry Lanagan outlined.

It is important to say that the higher remains the gold standard. There will be no differentiation on certificates between the highs that an individual does. They will have the same currency and they are all—

The Convener: We appreciate that, Graeme, and it is fascinating. However, given the time that we have left, we want to deal with the specific points that Mr Bibby was quite right to ask about.

Graeme Logan: Okay.

The Convener: Mr Bibby asked whether the general proportion is that two thirds of pupils will do the new higher and one third will do the existing higher. What figures would you give for that?

Graeme Logan: It varies from local authority to local authority. The figures range from 100 per cent down to one third.

Neil Bibby: Do you have a national figure, taking all the authorities together?

Graeme Logan: We will know the exact levels of uptake around November time, when the SQA gets its exact data.

The Convener: Can Janet Brown help us with the figures?

Dr Brown: We will not know until November who has been entered for which higher. We can handle whichever way schools decide to go. The final entry figures will come out a little bit later than November, but we will get a clear indication at that time. However, at this point we do not know.

Terry Lanagan: The one third proportion will not be far away.

The Convener: Okay.

Larry Flanagan: It is important to recognise that it will not be local authority by local authority but subject by subject. There is only one local authority with which there is, from our point of view, an on-going issue. I will not name the authority, but it is a city that likes to say yes, so that narrows it down a bit.

The Convener: There were a few of them.

Larry Flanagan: There were.

By and large, we think that the agreement has worked well. It has been quite interesting to see the consistency across local authorities with regard to the subjects that people had concerns about—the sciences and computer science. The same subjects have come up in different areas. That begs the question a bit of the national 5 experience in those subject areas, but that is for another discussion.

Clare Adamson: Mary Scanlon asked about the original aspirations for CFE. I want to put my question on that in the context of the wider community, including parents and carers. Have the aspirations been effectively communicated to parents? Moving forward, will the two-plus-two model move to a three-plus-three model across the country? Given the paper by the RSE, is there still a perception that reducing the number of subjects studied will be a disadvantage to students? Because of pressures and perceptions from outside, do you think that we might end up with variations among local authorities in subject areas and therefore geographic variations in implementation?

Graeme Logan: With the broad general education model, all young people will have studied all the curriculum areas at the end of S3 to a higher level than ever before. The idea is that they can take subjects at different points, so there is greater flexibility than there has ever been before for young people to choose the right combination of qualifications and wider achievements so that by the time they leave the

senior phase, they will have a better overall package of skills, achievements and qualifications. As we said earlier, the reduction in the number of subjects in S4 allows that deeper learning. That also means that pupils can pick up subjects at other points. That is really important.

Secondly, we have been collaborating with the national parent forum of Scotland. We have produced leaflets and guidance for parents on the nationals, and the “Nutshell” series and Easter revision materials were well received. Parents’ biggest source of information, of course, is their own school and their own teachers, so it is important that we continue to work with schools and teachers to build their confidence and to ensure that the right messages are getting to parents. We want young people and parents to have a dialogue, so that each young person gets the most out of the senior phase, because there is greater scope for them to have more choice and flexibility than they have had in the past.

Larry Flanagan: The direction of travel is positive. As parents experience the new qualifications system, the comparison with what used to happen will disappear, although I still get people talking to me about their O grades.

A big area that can open up for us is the 15 to 18 journey of those pupils who previously would not have been engaged with the qualifications framework. That group of youngsters were supposed to be the main beneficiaries of the CFE senior phase, and that will be complemented by the work of the Wood commission, but that is also the area that has been least developed to date, because the focus has been on the qualification pathways.

When you start thinking about that group of pupils and about how to narrow the gap between vocational and academic qualifications to give them parity, you can start to look at senior phase models that are geared to the needs of local communities. I am not in the least bit concerned about there being a variety of post-15 experience, because schools serve different communities. It will not be a variety across authorities; within authorities there will be a variety of different models.

We have been a little bit fixated on eight standard grades as a benchmark. My old school only ever did seven, because we had an afternoon when we did activities, and that is now narrowing down to five or six. Narrowing is probably the wrong word to use, because the senior phase is intended to provide a breadth of experience beyond subjects and qualifications, so it could include community volunteering and other things that go into the mix. That is the big aspiration that we have all been talking about for the senior

phase. It is still a long way off, but the framework is there for us to move towards it.

Jane Peckham: I am aware of the changes to the curriculum through the work that I do, but as the parent of an 11-year-old who has just started high school I have had absolutely no information on what to expect, and that concerns me because I know that the information is there. I will not name the authority, but it concerns me, and I go to meetings at the school and to sessions for people to familiarise themselves with the high school.

I do not know whether there is already an assumption, because my daughter is in first year, that it will all be fine and that people are concentrating on those who are going through the qualifications now, but as a parent of a child who is going through the new system, as opposed to the ones who are now in their 20s and who went through the old system, I am concerned about the information not getting to parents.

The Convener: We would all share that concern.

Terry Lanagan: I agree entirely with Larry Flanagan's analysis of the current situation and of the challenges that we face moving forward.

Larry Flanagan: Is that being minuted?

The Convener: It is all on the record.

Terry Lanagan: Communication with parents is crucial and it is a difficult issue, and we may need to become more imaginative about that. One of the key reasons why it is so important is that parents have to see the advantages of the new curriculum for their child, and their child might not be academic in the traditional sense.

The Wood commission did Scottish society a great favour by shining bright light into some of the darker corners of both education and industry. I am on the programme board for the Wood commission and I think that it is a fantastic opportunity for Scottish society to really open up education so that a three-to-18 curriculum becomes meaningful for every child in Scotland, not just those who go on to do higher.

To answer the final part of the question, I think that we will have achieved the aims of curriculum for excellence when everybody sees it as a three-to-18 curriculum rather than a broad general education and then the senior phase. As far as the senior phase is concerned, you have to look at it as a single entity and look at the qualifications and experiences that young people pick up throughout that period, rather than fixating—as I think the Royal Society of Edinburgh did—on S4 as a single part of that.

Dr Brown: Communicating with parents is always a challenge. It is easy to communicate with

parents who are interested, but the challenge is to communicate with the parents who are not as engaged with their child's education as we would like them to be. They are the parents whom we really need to communicate to. We should not lose focus on that point.

We forget that we also need to engage with employers. Part of curriculum for excellence is changing the nature of what children leave school with, whether that is a different pattern of traditional, national qualifications, or the inclusion of vocational qualifications that children take in school, or in school-college partnerships, so that employers are engaged.

It is important that we focus on how to ensure that everyone values young people's achievements at Scottish credit and qualifications framework level, which is a given level, whether they are vocational qualifications or national, academic qualifications. There are some excellent examples of school-college partnerships in which pupils go from school to college and are starting on a vocational pathway now. They are getting SCQF level 5 and 6 qualifications and we need parents and employers to recognise the value of those things.

We are very proud to deliver all those qualifications. It is quite concerning that we talk about SQA qualifications only as nationals. A huge breadth of qualifications is available for all sorts of skills and knowledge. We need to take advantage of that and ensure that kids who are undertaking curriculum for excellence are able to do what they want to do and get credit for what they can do, and ensure that employers recognise that.

The Convener: We have two quick questions: one from Mary Scanlon and one from Tavish Scott.

Mary Scanlon: My question is very quick, because it has been touched on by Messrs Flanagan and Lanagan in the past few minutes. It is about the Wood commission. We have heard about exams and assessment all morning, and the people we are talking about are the ones who would benefit from developing Scotland's young workforce. I put on record that every party in the Parliament is signed up to that approach; we want to see it working.

I do not want to wait 10 years for things to develop. Janet Brown has just said, "We need to take advantage of" and I heard Terry Lanagan say, "There are opportunities there." My concern is that there is all this focus on assessment and so on but we are not quite there yet with dovetailing education and the Wood commission, and the focus next year seems to be all about the higher.

I focused earlier on interdisciplinary learning. My understanding from the early years is that that

would not just help pupils to get highers and national 4s and 5s but prepare them for the workplace. I think that we are losing that today. I appreciate that some have mentioned it, but I would like to know what is happening as we move forward.

Also, what is happening with colleges? This is a big change, and there are opportunities in colleges as well as in schools. I just wanted to put that point on the record.

Dr Brown: Last year we published not only national qualification results but also the awards that kids were getting for developing employability skills and doing skills-for-work courses. That work is already happening in the schools; the issue is to ramp up the pace.

The relationships between colleges and schools and the school-college partnerships that they have developed are things that we need to extend. That is a good basis for introducing the recommendations on developing Scotland's young workforce.

Terry Lanagan: Mary Scanlon is right to highlight the importance of moving the agenda forward. In fact, I have been extremely impressed by the pace of what has happened so far.

The Wood commission report was published on 6 June and the first meeting of the programme board was before the end of June. The board has met three times, and it has very broad representation from across Scottish society, not just the education system.

I have been very impressed by the fact that the people from industry who are on the programme board accept and understand the fact that it is part of CFE. They also accept that teachers cannot deliver it alone; it has to be a societal approach that involves employers.

12:15

The other point is that the aims—the goals—of the Wood commission final report are extremely ambitious. One aim is to reduce significantly the level of youth unemployment and another is for every secondary school to have a partnership with industry within three years, so there is an urgency around the agenda.

I have been impressed by how the Government appears to have taken forward that agenda urgently because I think that you are right that this is the agenda that will really deliver for all Scotland's young people, not just for those who go on to do highers.

Graeme Logan: I echo those comments. We are working with partners to develop detailed implementation plans because CFE is about skills

for learning, life and work and we want to really shine a light on the work element of that now. We have been raising awareness with all schools through the headteacher conferences. In our inspection advice note for this year, we are looking to see how schools are beginning to take that agenda forward. There is a real, strong sense of momentum with regard to realising the aspirations for all young people.

We are looking at that agenda not just in relation to the senior phase and the new pathways involving colleges; we are also looking at broad general education and asking, "How can we get that focus on careers, management skills and skills for work for younger children as well?" A strong national partnership is emerging around that and we are working on clear, detailed implementation plans, which I think will be launched shortly.

Larry Flanagan: It is important that we have a joined-up approach in relation to CFE and the Wood commission. When we met Sir Ian Wood, we spent a lot of our time urging him not to reinvent the wheel because the senior phase was already on the stocks; it was about how to complement that.

It is an exciting agenda but school-college liaison budgets have been slashed over the past three years, so the capacity of schools to work with colleges on the delivery of skills-based courses in schools has been undermined because of austerity measures across the country. There is a big agenda about getting business involved and getting resource through that, but the policy ambition and the practice of resourcing need to be aligned—otherwise, we will end up with unfulfilled potential.

Tavish Scott: I will continue on the same theme.

I still think that the focus is academic and not vocational. As Mary Scanlon mentioned, we were talking about parity of esteem in education committee meetings 14 years ago, yet here we are today: although you have all said very good things, we are a long way away from getting that right.

Is it the case that by August next year, when my child—who is currently an S3 pupil—is an S4 pupil, they will have clear routes into vocational, college and other options if they want to in their particular secondary school in Scotland? Will that be the case at the start of S4 in every school across Scotland by next August?

Graeme Logan: The detailed implementation plan is not yet finalised so I am not able to answer that question at this point. We are certainly developing a five-year plan—all the partners are—to take this agenda forward with a clear set of milestones and actions for each year. As I said,

we will have the response over the next couple of weeks.

There is an absolute consensus around this agenda, and there is a real determination to tackle both the equity issue and the different pathways issue. Within CFE, there is room for those pathways to be tailored to young people's needs as much as possible.

Interestingly, at the moment, secondary schools would say that they have links with employers but we want to see co-design, with employers being consumers of education, so that there is much greater engagement. We are working hard with everybody to develop that implementation plan, which will give dates around the kind of things that you are looking for.

Terry Lanagan: The answer to the specific question about the S3 pupil who is going into S4 is that it depends on which school that pupil is attending. One of the striking features of the Wood commission final report is that there are probably very few out of the 39 recommendations that you could not find being implemented somewhere in Scotland just now.

The challenge for Scottish education and Scottish society is to spread out the best practice across all schools, colleges and employers. That is not going to happen overnight, judging from the figure showing that only a very small minority of employers recruit directly from education—and a very small minority of employers currently have links to education. All of that is covered in the final report.

Some of the timescales that the final report sets out require immediate action. For example, the partnership agreement between secondary schools has a three-year timescale. However, the main timescales in the final report refer to 2020. That indicates that there is a lot of work to be done, but also that there is a lot of good practice on which to base that work.

Larry Flanagan: In theory, the option that Tavish Scott outlines should have been in place for the senior phase last year, and it should be there this year. At the risk of agreeing with him too often, I agree with Terry Lanagan: it will depend on what senior phase models schools have and what local resource they have by way of existing college or business links.

The answer is that there is unlikely to be universal provision across the board next year. I hope, however, that we will be moving towards having a critical mass, with that approach being seen as the type of pathway that schools should be considering.

The Convener: We have got through a lot this morning but, strangely, the pupils themselves

have not been discussed to any great extent. Could you tell the committee what actions you have taken to seek the opinion or feedback from the pupils who have just gone through the latest part of the development of curriculum for excellence?

Terry Lanagan: I am speaking for ADES today, but I can only give an example from my own local authority.

At the moment, we are doing two things in West Dunbartonshire. We have issued questionnaires to the current S5—to pupils and parents—asking them about their perception of the S4 experience and the first round of national qualifications. We are also convening focus groups of staff, pupils and parents to tease out some of the broad questions in the questionnaire in order to get a bit more depth. We want to learn from the first year's experience and to improve the experience for young people in future.

There is evidence that it is not just teachers who have suffered from assessment overload over the past year; some young people have also felt that. We have a duty to ensure that that is reduced in future.

Graeme Logan: Our inspection programme contains a pre-inspection questionnaire for young people. We are in the process of analysing the data for last year, and that will be available shortly. We ask whether our young people enjoy learning at school. In the previous year, nearly 90 per cent of them agreed or strongly agreed, and 92 per cent agreed that they were getting on well with their school work. We monitor young people's views on education very carefully through those questionnaires, which represent a sample of schools in different areas, of different sizes and so on. We monitor that very closely, and we will continue to do so.

Larry Flanagan: We have had two areas of feedback. In the course of last year, we had significant feedback from pastoral care staff, recording increased levels of stress among young people going through S4. There are always some young people who are stressed out by assessment processes. There was a significant workload burden and related stress, especially in schools that were trying to do seven or eight subjects across a one-year course.

The other feedback came from subject teachers. After Christmas, some young people were dealing with assessments almost on a daily basis. They were doing seven or eight subjects, and a number of subjects cannot do the unit assessments end-on—they have to do them holistically after a sufficient part of the course has been done.

We used to be concerned about a two-term dash to higher, but we now have a two-term dash

to national 5. I agree with Terry Lanagan that a significant issue for young people was the assessment regime and the pressures on them last year, although some of that might be addressed through the use of more holistic assessment.

Ken Muir: We canvassed pupils in producing the reflections report. A number of folk on the working group, including me, spoke to groups of youngsters. Two main messages emerged. As Larry Flanagan suggested, January to the Easter holidays was a period of continual assessment and reassessment in some cases. That was often for the best of reasons—that teachers want to give youngsters the best opportunity to pass the unit assessments and therefore the examination.

Like many teachers, pupils were still getting used to the wider range of assessment approaches, such as portfolios and projects. That has been a learning experience for pupils. I came across some youngsters who quite enjoyed the regular unit assessments and the regular feedback from that on-going assessment. Most pupils felt a burden from assessment and reassessment, but—perversely—a few quite enjoyed it.

Jane Peckham: When the reflections group began its work, we asked whether focus groups would be held. The approach was widened out through various organisations. That is as much as we have done, except for hearing messages from members about their year groups. We have not taken forward the assessment of pupils' opinions.

Dr Brown: We have MySQA, which allows web-based engagement with the SQA. Learners tend to like to engage with that. It facilitates us in getting fairly open on-going feedback from learners about courses. Around exam time, we get a significant number of pieces of feedback. We monitor the Student Room website and undertake other activities, particularly around the qualifications period and at results time. We also get feedback from the liaison team as it goes into schools and gets feedback from pupils.

What we need to do and will do between now and 2017 is monitor and evaluate how the new courses have gone. One component of that will be talking to pupils who undertook the courses. We need to take time to understand the detailed implications. We will initiate that work pretty soon so that we can understand not only what is happening this year and next year but what happened last year. We will get a full understanding from different groups, including students, of how they felt about the qualifications.

Richard Goring: As with Larry Flanagan, our experience comes through pupil support—guidance teachers—rather than through pupils. We are aware that, in spring last year, pupils

seemed to have an assessment overload, with the associated stress. The perception among some guidance staff is that the leap in some subjects between national 5 and higher can be difficult. The concern is that some pupils might not be able to make that step.

The Convener: I thank all the witnesses for attending. We will raise a number of the points that have come up with the cabinet secretary next Tuesday. The session has been long, but we cannot cover everything so, as I said earlier, if we did not cover any particular points, send us an email and we will try to include them in our discussions with the cabinet secretary.

12:28

Meeting continued in private until 12:41.

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