



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Thursday 6 November 2014

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**EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE**  
**17<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2014, Session 4**

**CONVENER**

\*Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP)

\*John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

\*Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)

\*John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Clare Fraser (West College Scotland)

Jim Gray (Glasgow City Council)

Dr Kate Hannah (Education Scotland)

Fraser McCowan (Scottish Training Federation/Support Training Action Group)

Mike O'Donnell (Skills Development Scotland)

Scott Read (Scottish Transitions Forum)

Sandy Stark (Station House Media Unit)

Lorna Trainer (Scottish Training Federation/Support Training Action Group)

Brian Webb (Station House Media Unit)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Ruth McGill

**LOCATION**

The James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)



# Scottish Parliament

## Equal Opportunities Committee

Thursday 6 November 2014

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:01]*

### Draft Budget Scrutiny 2015-16

**The Convener (Margaret McCulloch):** I welcome everybody to the Equal Opportunities Committee's 17th meeting in 2014. I ask everyone to set any electronic devices to flight mode or to switch them off, please.

I would like to start with introductions. We are supported at the table by the clerking and research team, official reporters and broadcasting services. Around the room, we are supported by security officers. I welcome the observers in the public gallery, too.

I am the convener of the committee. Members will now introduce themselves in turn. I also ask the witnesses to give a short introduction and say who they are and where they are from.

**Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP):** I am the MSP for Edinburgh Central and the deputy convener of the committee.

**John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):** Madainn mhath—good morning. I am an MSP for the Highlands and Islands.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** I am the MSP for Glasgow Shettleston.

**Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):** Good morning. I am an MSP for North East Scotland.

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** I am a member for North East Scotland.

**Mike O'Donnell (Skills Development Scotland):** I am from Skills Development Scotland. My role has two distinct parts. I lead the opportunities for all remit in Skills Development Scotland, which includes the guarantee of a positive destination for 16 to 19-year-olds. The second part relates to the national training programmes. I head our partnership work with stakeholders across Scotland, which include local authorities, the third sector and other partners.

**Scott Read (Scottish Transitions Forum):** I am from the Scottish transitions forum, which is supported by the Association for Real Change Scotland. We are a membership organisation that represents the voices of 500 organisations and individuals across Scotland with an interest in

transitions across education, health, social care and the allied health professions.

**Dr Kate Hannah (Education Scotland):** I am sector lead officer for additional support needs and special schools in Her Majesty's inspectorate at Education Scotland. My role is to manage the inspection programmes for the special school sector, which includes grant-aided schools and secure care services and units.

**Clare Fraser (West College Scotland):** Good morning. I am the equality, diversity and inclusion manager at West College Scotland.

**Jim Gray (Glasgow City Council):** Good morning. I work for Glasgow City Council. I am in charge of support to community planning in Glasgow.

**The Convener:** Agenda item 1 is on witness expenses. In keeping with usual practice, do members agree to delegate to me as convener of the committee responsibility for arranging for the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body to pay, under rule 12.4.3 of standing orders, any witness expenses in our scrutiny of the 2015-16 draft budget?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** Agenda item 2 is an evidence session for our scrutiny of the 2015-16 draft budget. Two panels of witnesses will give evidence today. I welcome our first panel and thank the witnesses for introducing themselves.

When the witnesses wish to speak during the discussion, they should indicate to me or to the clerk on my left that they wish to do so. We will now ask questions about the draft budget.

**Marco Biagi:** Committee members will ask about different subsets of the issue, and I will ask in particular about young people with additional needs. How well are they being supported in making transitions? What are the barriers and how are we trying to overcome them?

**The Convener:** Who would like to go first?

**Scott Read:** Perhaps I can set the scene. You might be aware that, since 2010, the additional needs figures have doubled—an increase of 100 per cent—and school pupils with additional support needs now represent one fifth of the pupil population. I should add that the figures have increased not because there are more people with additional support needs but because we are better at identifying them.

As for our experience in the Scottish transitions forum, the report that was put before Parliament last year shows that a range of young people are not being fully supported into what are called positive destinations, such as employment, education and training. Only 8 per cent of those

without additional support needs fail to achieve a positive destination but, across the range of additional support needs, we see that those at the top of the failure rate for achieving positive destinations are looked-after children, those whose learning has been interrupted, those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and those with learning disabilities. For those groups, the rate of 40 per cent is almost five times that of those without additional support needs.

The Scottish transitions forum has suggested that a pure focus on pre to post-16 educational destinations to increase the rate for positive destinations will not meet the needs of those with additional support needs, who are going through health, social care and educational transitions at the same time. For those with more complex needs, we need a joint approach that involves all the different universal services, to ensure that we get transitions right. The figures show that the picture is very mixed, and I wonder whether the other witnesses can comment on that.

**The Convener:** Dr Hannah?

**Dr Hannah:** Can you repeat the question, Mr Biagi?

**Marco Biagi:** I think that the subject was quite well covered in the previous answer. What are the obstacles to transition in whatever field for young people with additional support needs, and how can we overcome them?

**Dr Hannah:** In this year's ministerial report to Parliament, Education Scotland identified several key indicators that make a positive transition more likely for young people, including a whole-school or whole-service approach to transitions at all stages; schools and services having coherent policy and practice; positive relationships with and early involvement of parents and carers; effective partnership working; well-established, clear and transparent communication; ensuring that families are aware of the communication systems and know what the transition process will entail; and effective—by which I mean rigorous and systematic—planning and organisation at an early stage. Those are just some of the areas that we have highlighted as prerequisites for successful transitions for young people with additional support needs in schools.

**Marco Biagi:** The next question is for the whole panel. What should we be looking for in the central Government budget as signs of action on or support for this area of work?

**Clare Fraser:** To answer that, I will highlight a successful project that we have put in place to provide third sector support. I can tell you about what is happening at the ground level. Students who are in transition and are moving on can be a wee bit anxious about their travel plans, managing

their emotions in a different environment and even finding the right classroom. We need to have the additional support in place to assist them. We can provide support while they are learning, but the issue is getting them there in the first place. We have worked with a project called the moving on transition service, which offers the softer support that students need. That has been a successful partnership.

**Marco Biagi:** How is that funded?

**Clare Fraser:** It is funded through a range of bodies, including the Big Lottery Fund, Share Scotland and Cornerstone.

**The Convener:** You talked about transitions for young people from primary school to secondary school. I saw a documentary about young people with Asperger's that showed that moving from primary to secondary is a difficult period, because in primary school the routine is regular and young people know what is happening, whereas in secondary school they have to move from classroom to classroom, which is really upsetting for them. What support is there for people with that sort of background and support needs?

**Dr Hannah:** First, I remind everyone that there are specific provisions in the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009 on transitions. Authorities have a duty to plan and prepare for transitions for young people from primary to secondary school and from secondary school to post placement. That is all considered extensively as part of ASL legislation.

Evidence from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education inspections in 2013 and 2014 shows that enhanced transition programmes across primary and secondary schools—including programmes for people with autistic spectrum disorder—which tackle vulnerable children from primary 6 who are at risk of not fulfilling their potential, of disengaging from school and of not making a successful transfer, are resulting in better outcomes for children and young people. Those programmes involve community planning partnerships and secondary schools in targeting from primary 6 youngsters who are identified as being at risk and their families. They provide additional support, such as summer programmes, frequent visits to the secondary school, close monitoring of the young person's progress once they have made the transition to secondary school, nurturing approaches and transition passports, which help teachers to understand better the young person's needs and provide support strategies to enable them to meet those needs.

We find that when enhanced transition programmes are in place—we provided examples in this year's report—children and their families tell

us that children form positive relationships, feel more included and are more likely to attend and engage with secondary school. Basically, they are more likely to make a successful transition.

**Scott Read:** We are experiencing cuts in education budgets. The key staff who work with young people with additional support needs are on the whole classroom assistants. Our members worry that, if resources are reduced in the education environment, people with additional support needs will be less supported in the classroom. It is basically the classroom assistants' job to provide that support.

On budget considerations, we need to look hard at the job that classroom assistants do and how well they support people with additional support needs in the classroom. We fear that, if we lose them, we will lose what has been touted in *The Times Educational Supplement* as a generation of children with additional support needs.

**Mike O'Donnell:** Skills Development Scotland is anxious to ensure that young people with additional support needs are given the same type of support as they need to make successful transitions into other forms of education or work. We see this as partnership territory. In school, if somebody is identified as having additional support needs, people need to work with others in that setting to support them. Post school, we need to look at a range of other partnership agreements with third sector organisations that have expertise.

09:15

I will give an illustration. We have recently done a lot of work with Enable Scotland to tailor some of our products, such as the certificate of work readiness, and to look at how that can be delivered for young people who have learning disabilities so that they can progress in the same way as people who traditionally progress under that programme do. That was part of a risk assessment that we did on the certificate. Enable Scotland worked with us to ensure that the method of delivery and the documentation facilitated the engagement of people who have learning disabilities.

That holds good across our range of products. We do risk assessments on them all. A risk assessment is not a bland thing. It sets out actions that we require to take and looks at potential partners who have the expertise to allow us to tailor the products for individuals.

**Alex Johnstone:** We are beginning to look at the budget figures for this year. I notice that an additional £16.6 million is allocated to the training, youth and women's employment portfolio. How will that contribute to achievement of your broader aims?

**Mike O'Donnell:** As I understand it, Skills Development Scotland has been allocated some of the resource. The commission for developing Scotland's young workforce asked us to look at increasing the number of modern apprenticeships that we deliver. We are keen to look at supply and demand and to use this opportunity to do some research that will begin to tell us what some of the traditional and non-traditional barriers are for young people, so that we can attract mainly young people who might not hitherto have had the opportunity to do a modern apprenticeship.

We are also keen to look at the employer's side, or the demand side, to see how we can up the ante with employers' communications and knowledge and so on, and how we can break down some of the additional barriers that employers perceive there are to taking on young people who want to progress into modern apprenticeships. We are doing that in conjunction with looking at enhanced access programmes for young people who might not traditionally have gone into modern apprenticeships, to see whether we can develop a defined pathway into apprenticeship opportunities.

As members will be aware, a lot is happening within apprenticeships just now, including the increase to 30,000 apprenticeships a year, changes to the types of apprenticeship, and examination of positive role models—Alex Johnstone mentioned women—to see where we can break down more barriers. For example, women have not traditionally gone into engineering, but that is beginning to change. We are looking at how we use role models and the ambassador programme for apprenticeships to help young women in particular, in school and post-school settings, to think about a wider range of opportunities.

**Scott Read:** It is great that that money has been put in. My concern is about how it will support people with additional support needs to get into the work environment. Has there been an impact assessment of how that would be dealt with, and how people with disabilities would access that tranche of money?

**Alex Johnstone:** I am afraid that that is a question for the minister.

**Scott Read:** Okay. Fair enough.

**John Mason:** We will ask him.

**Scott Read:** There are projects such as project search—I do not know whether members are aware of it—which helps to support people with autism, primarily, into the workplace. It is a kind of intern project. The people work as interns in different organisations throughout a year and, I believe, are guaranteed a job from their last placement. To learn to navigate the workplace

successfully, people with autism need to learn a lot of soft skills that we have mentioned. That project could benefit from the funding that we are discussing. If the committee is not aware of it, I can send information about it after the meeting, if that would be helpful.

**The Convener:** Will you ask your question again so that we have it on the record and can ask the cabinet secretary it for you?

**Scott Read:** Okay. I wonder whether an impact assessment has been done on people with disabilities accessing the £16.6 million that Alex Johnstone talked about.

**The Convener:** We will ask that question for you.

**Jim Gray:** In Glasgow, we have recognised that there is an issue with underrepresentation of certain disadvantaged groups. Although we have made significant progress in addressing youth unemployment in the city, we are conscious that there are segments of the population of young people who are not doing as well as others. That could be for some of the reasons that have been mentioned but it could also be to do with geographic spread. It appears to be harder to get employment in some parts of the city than it is in others. For example, for those furthest away from the city centre in particular, travel seems to be an issue. We are considering that matter in the round.

We welcome the £16.6 million and the approach to modern apprenticeships, but endorse what has been said about them. Those interventions have to be tailored and perhaps we need to become more granular in our approach. Without being trite about it in any way, it is really important that we develop effective partnerships, joint working and an integrated approach, and that we improve the ability of agencies and organisations in the third sector and private sector to make referrals. We need a more person-centred approach that is tailored to the needs of the individual. We hope that some of the £16.6 million can assist in progressing that.

**Clare Fraser:** I welcome the proposal to work with the third sector to offer supported employment opportunities to groups that face barriers to employment. At our college and in all colleges, the problems that we have are in finding work placements for students with additional needs and what they do after college. It is not just about getting a job; we have to address life skills and independence. Those students want to be able to contribute—they want to be involved and do something after college—so I am interested to see that point in the budget change.

**Dr Hannah:** Alex Johnstone mentioned women. We have found that earlier targeting of pregnant teenagers and young parents has been successful

in keeping mothers in education and enhancing their parenting skills and long-term work prospects. There is evidence that that is leading to better outcomes for children. We have a project in Glasgow called the young parents support base, in Smithycroft secondary school, which is an authority-wide initiative to keep pregnant teenagers in education that leads to better employment prospects for them.

**Mike O'Donnell:** I endorse the supportive comments that have been made about the third sector. Of course, one of the things that bedevils that sector is short-term funding. I argue that many of the services that we are talking about are not discretionary services; they are key to any community in Scotland.

I welcome the focus. Skills Development Scotland has been asked to lead the development of a third sector employability fund for European challenge funding. I am currently working with colleagues from the third sector to shape the fund. It will be strongly focused on young people who find it difficult to find their way into mainstream services and on doing more in relation to integration and bespoke services for people who have additional support needs.

**Alex Johnstone:** Scott Read may have pre-empted my next question. As priorities change, some budgets have been allocated greater funding and other budgets are squeezed. How will the reduction in other budgets affect your current activities?

**Scott Read:** As I said, we consider transitions as a whole process that happens in the round. As other budgets are reduced the impact on young people with additional support needs will be greater. Our concern is that they will be squeezed out and will not be able to reach a positive destination.

In terms of budgetary constraints and changes, transitions is a concern not just in relation to education, but also for healthcare and social care budgets. The Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014 and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 contain duties for things such as continuing care for looked-after children; I believe that there is a limited budget for that already.

**Alex Johnstone:** Is that the balance that you would like to see addressed in an impact assessment?

**Scott Read:** Yes. We would like to know the impact, not just from an education point of view, but in the round. If there are deficits being built up in other budget areas, we need to see how that works out when we look at joint services between education, employment, healthcare, social care and the third sector.



**John Finnie:** You made a point about health and social care and the fact that health and social care are integrated, although the process is at different stages across Scotland. Are you seeing any early evidence of improvement in outcomes as a result of that?

**Scott Read:** That is a good question. It is quite early days, so there is a very mixed picture across Scotland. I can talk only about the idea of transitions and how some joint working between health and social care and the third sector have brought improvements in some areas. There are other areas where the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014 has brought with it not just administrative changes, but also work practice changes. For example, the Highlands and Islands has taken an interesting approach, but we are yet to see how that will play out in relation to transitions and the budget constraints between children and young people's services and adult services being controlled by local authorities or health. We are still in the early days, so we are not sure how that will work.

If we link it into the self-directed support legislation and the principles behind that, the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014 should help with the idea of personalisation of support and focusing on outcomes. It is interesting that, in terms of transitions, education sits alongside that agenda. How do we then raise the question about personalising education outcomes for people, or employment options? I see it all tying together, but it is very early days to comment on the situation.

**The Convener:** I have a question for Mike O'Donnell. You said that you had received additional funding for Skills Development Scotland, but the figures show that your budget has been cut by 1.8 per cent, which equates to £400,000. What impact will that have on Skills Development Scotland and training? You mentioned that there will be 30,000 modern apprentices in the forthcoming year; does that come under the same budget as the 25,000 apprenticeships last year, or is there extra funding built into that?

09:30

**Mike O'Donnell:** I will clarify that. By 2020, there will be 30,000 modern apprentices; currently, there are 25,000. There is a 5,000 increase over the period—it is not an additional 30,000.

Any budget cut means that we have to consider the service that we offer. Like other public sector organisations, we need continually to refine what we are doing. We need to get smarter with regard to how we deliver services, while protecting front-

line service delivery across the school community and other communities throughout Scotland.

No budget cut is welcome, but we know the world that we are living in. We need to be able to provide the range of services that we are asked to provide in our letter of guidance from the Scottish Government.

The additional funding that I mentioned was from the developing Scotland's young workforce initiative. I gather that that is probably one-off funding to allow us to do some additional research and communications and so on in order to progress the work that we are doing, particularly on modern apprenticeships.

The other funding that I mentioned is not owned by Skills Development Scotland; it is European funding, and we have been asked to facilitate its delivery, along with third sector organisations from throughout Scotland.

**The Convener:** What about the not in education, employment or training group? Excuse the terminology—I know that it has changed now. What is the NEET group called now? That is the group of people who are not ready to go into modern apprenticeships, and who need a lot of help and support. What extra help and support will you be able to give them?

**Mike O'Donnell:** There are two parts to my response to that. First, as regards some of the additional resource that we have been given, we will be doing a deep dive, with research to be carried out within SDS and by our partners. It is called NEET access to modern apprenticeships, and it sits within the zone of what you are asking about. We want to examine what the transitions are, and what additional support we need to put in to create a pathway for young people who might be doing employability fund programmes, for instance, before going on to modern apprenticeships.

Crucially, we are also doing work through foundation apprenticeships in schools on encouraging young people to think about the apprenticeship offer, along with other career options. They might wish to move into further education or higher education, but they could be considering apprenticeships as an opportunity, too.

The second part of my response is about what we have learned through the opportunities for all scheme and the work that we do with young people who are perhaps struggling to progress. There is a need to provide strong and effective support to those young people, who are often not looking for a skills intervention. There will be other barriers to overcome before they are ready to progress. Through opportunities for all, we have forged many partnerships with local authorities

and third sector and other agencies that can provide support for those young people.

Along with our colleagues in local authorities, Skills Development Scotland is an opportunities for all co-ordinator. We have developed youth employment activity plans. Basically, those relate to the services that are available locally to support young people through making a smart referral. So, it is a no-wrong-door approach. For a young person coming through our door we can use the activity plan to identify the appropriate intervention for them, monitor progress and identify when, from our perspective, the young person will be ready for a skills intervention in order to progress. It is a partnership activity that is owned by all the services in the local area.

I will give you a quick update on the activity plans. This year we have been migrating a lot of the information from non-traditional employability services locally, on services that are available for young people with additional support needs or on other interventions for equal opportunity groups, in order to ensure that they are all seen as part of the employability landscape and that they can benefit from the wider range of offers that are available in any local community planning area.

**The Convener:** How well are the partnerships working with local authorities and other organisations?

**Mike O'Donnell:** There are 32 local employability partnerships. They are called different things, but in the context of community planning they are charged with taking a coherent approach to employability locally. As you would expect, there is a mixed picture because some areas have progressed more quickly than other areas. However, the direction of travel across Scotland from where we started seven or eight years ago is certainly very encouraging. That does not mean that we could not say "Yes, but—" and give instances, because of course we could, but I think that there is now a better and broader understanding of the range of activities underpinning employability.

From our perspective in Skills Development Scotland, we are one of the partners but we deliver particular programmes whereby we form subsets of the main partnership. For example, we have provider forums to give providers the opportunity to come together to look at the range of activities that are being delivered by the provider network locally, which can be quite wide ranging, and to engage with the Department for Work and Pensions and other localised services.

**Jim Gray:** In Glasgow, through our single outcome agreement and the priority attached to youth employment, we very much emphasise that there is growing evidence that the employment

problem is no longer unique to 16 to 19-year-olds and that we are looking at the issue for those up to the age of 25. As such, we have encouraged our partners to look again at how effectively we are working to address the needs of the older age group within that category.

We have undertaken quite an extensive review or mapping exercise in relation to youth employment provision in the city. In fact, we will have a major event about that this afternoon back in Glasgow. We hope to produce an action plan with our partners that will be the successor to the youth employment partnership in Glasgow. In a sense, we are looking to re-engineer our structures and processes to adapt them to the emerging trends.

We also recognise that there is a demand problem in Glasgow. Although we have seen improvements in youth employment in the city, the statistics show that there are now fewer jobs available for young people than there were before the recession. That is a real challenge, but we are starting to look at what we can do to address the demand side.

**Scott Read:** Our concern is for our members across Scotland as we cut resources for things such as opportunities for all in Skills Development Scotland. The spectre of eligibility criteria for services will raise its head, because—as you may be aware—as budgets are cut in local authorities, the eligibility criteria for services become tighter and tighter for young people.

We are concerned that, with there being fewer resources, the eligibility criteria for children who have more complex additional support needs might mean that they will be pushed out of the support that they require in order to get jobs. If people from particular projects are not working with them and helping to support them into employment, who will be doing that? We are at risk of having a lost generation of young people with additional support needs.

**The Convener:** You have experience of working with young people with additional support needs. What needs to be done to help the young people who have those needs to encourage employers to employ them, and what encouragement and support do employers need to make the whole thing work?

**Scott Read:** That is the million dollar question—if I could answer that, I would be a rich man.

From my experience of working directly with young people with additional support needs, I think that, if the focus is on what I would call a hotel model of support—in which things such as housing and job application support are provided—and if a young person is not ready to move into the positive destination, within two

months the situation will break down, even if the metrics looked positive, because no one has actually focused on the wellbeing of the young person. That responds to part A of the question.

As for part B of the question, there is so much discrimination towards and stigma attached to disability, across not just Scotland but the United Kingdom, that they would need to be tackled to manage the issue of supporting people into employment effectively. It is outwith my remit to answer how that might be done, but it is what I see as the way forward.

**Christian Allard:** I would keep on asking the million dollar question, because it is important, specifically with regard to the modern apprenticeship scheme. We know the figures and we know that there is low representation of women, people from ethnic minority groups and people with disabilities. The million dollar question is deciding what the budget should concentrate on. Where is the priority? Is it helping companies to employ those people? Is it the soft transitional part and helping the third sector? What should the budget concentrate on? What has it not yet addressed, and what should it address now?

**Jim Gray:** One area where we feel that not enough emphasis has been placed is in helping young people who are already in employment to sustain their employment, through in-work support and in-job progression. A significant number of young people are failing due to a lack of in-work support. At best they are getting trapped in entry-level, low-skills, low-wage, zero-hours-contract jobs, and in a sense they are also blocking the pipeline for other young people. The ones who should be progressing are not able to progress.

There are mixed views on wage subsidies. Some funding packages emphasise wage subsidies, and some employers are reacting to that by saying that wage subsidies on their own are not enough and are not necessarily what they are looking for. In Glasgow City Council, we think that we need to work with the DWP—with which we have had discussions—and private sector employers in particular to encourage them to recognise the economic benefit to them from helping their young employees, as well as their employees generally, to access training through colleges. There needs to be flexibility to do that.

We would like to see more flexibility in the funding in general, so that we can look at how to be more creative. I do not know whether it is a Scotland-wide phenomenon, but the reaction we are getting is certainly that wage subsidies, although valuable and important, are not the only mechanism that is needed to engage effectively with employers to encourage them to recruit more young Glaswegians, retain them, and allow them to progress up the employment ladder.

**Mike O'Donnell:** It also has to be recognised that the individuals in question often cost a bit more. Their journey can take longer. The resource needs to match the needs of the young person.

Scott Read mentioned project search, which I know well. It does a really good job in supporting people into employment. Much of that is delivered through the national health service.

I sense that the public sector could do more in helping people get back into employment. A lot is being done, but we can always do more and, in this particular space, there is scope to do more as regards the public sector's role as an employer and the provision of support to people who need it.

Sometimes it is difficult for a small business to provide that support; employers certainly perceive that to be difficult. It can be an unknown for a business, which can be quite off-putting. We need to put more resource into breaking down some of those barriers and doing case studies of situations where it is apparent that things are working.

09:45

**Christian Allard:** Should that work be done by sector? I know that energy skills Scotland up in Aberdeen has targeted former service personnel and women to take up engineering. Is that working? Should we put more money into Government agencies, or should we give more priority to the third sector?

**Mike O'Donnell:** It is not an either/or scenario. Any citizen in Scotland would expect to be able to access an opportunity where it best suits them. If some people face additional barriers, surely we should aspire for them to have the same range of opportunities that others get, so I think that we should do both. Work in and support through the third and public sectors—and, indeed, the private sector—should be on the table.

**Scott Read:** I agree with Mike O'Donnell that it is not an either/or scenario. To use the language of outcomes, young people have their own outcomes, wants and desires, and to say that there is one answer to everyone's problem would not be the right answer to give.

For me, there is a question about the metrics of positive destinations and how they gel with the principles behind young people's wellbeing. Do the two match? Are we looking to get people into employment without considering what their wellbeing needs might be, or are we looking at employment as part of their wellbeing? That is the question that I would raise in answer to Christian Allard's million dollar question.

I do not think that one size fits all. We need to personalise the support so that it meets individuals' needs.

**John Mason:** Opportunities for all has been mentioned. I confess that I am not an expert on it, but I understand that one of the suggestions is that there should be a post-16 transition team in every school and, potentially, a post-16 transition lead. I am interested to find out whether that is happening in schools. Do we know whether that is the case across the country?

**Dr Hannah:** We are certainly aware of the potential of the senior phase in Scottish secondary schools through curriculum for excellence. We would encourage all young people to stay in learning post 16, as that is the best way of ensuring that they will be employable and able to make a contribution to society in the long term.

Education Scotland is involved in a number of tasks in transition planning. We are looking at how our community learning and development inspectors work with secondary schools to support young people to have high-quality work experience placements and college placements.

At the moment, that work is at an early stage—a report is due in 2015—but we hope to have clearer information about how well schools are delivering on that agenda. However, as far as transitions teams are concerned, that sort of thing tends to lie with pastoral care and support for learning teams and their partnerships with local employers. I am not aware of any specific examples of that kind of approach, but it sounds like a very interesting idea.

**John Mason:** Quality jobs were mentioned. There tends to be one figure for what are called positive destinations, but I presume that, within that figure, a youngster could go into a quality job or, as has been suggested, a pretty grim job. Is that figure being broken down enough, or are we putting too much of an emphasis on the phrase “positive destinations”?

**Dr Hannah:** To be honest, I do not think that we are putting enough emphasis on positive destinations. We are still at an early stage in collecting data about positive destinations, but I am sure that Skills Development Scotland will be able to say a bit more about that.

We feel that certain key elements are important. For a start, the right learning must be in place. The paper “Building the Curriculum 4” is about skills for learning, life and work; we are still working our way through the senior phase just now, but we hope that in future it will provide young people with appropriate information and skills on, for example, financial support and managing budgets and advice and guidance about what is available and how employment opportunities can be matched to their needs.

**Jim Gray:** The approach that we are developing is based on the view that there is no one transition

and that the process itself is not linear. Young people can go backwards and forwards and as a community planning partnership we need to work with our colleagues on constructing models of intervention for young people that are appropriate at different stages in that cycle.

It is also important that we improve the data and the intelligence that agencies can share. We still need to tackle certain big issues in data sharing, particularly with regard to the older age group. Things have become a bit easier for the under-19s, but we are still struggling—that is partly to do with data protection legislation, which is only right.

We need an approach that emphasises the quality of jobs, which Mr Mason has rightly referred to, as well as the quality of life for the young person. A lot of evidence suggests that we need to help people succeed in making a transition, and sometimes that will require more than one intervention.

**John Mason:** Interestingly, you have mentioned the issue of age a few times now, and you have said that in Glasgow you are going beyond the 19-year-olds. Is the Parliament or the Government putting too much emphasis on 16 to 19-year-olds and not providing enough flexibility for the individual approach that, as you have said, is needed at times?

**Jim Gray:** We think that there needs to be more flexibility. There is still an issue with school leavers, but there is also an issue with college leavers and university graduates. Sometimes the positive destination for a young person is a college place, but we do not always know what happens to them after they leave college.

The Glasgow economy has a very significant underemployment problem with regard to young people, many of whom are on part-time or zero-hours contracts. People have different views on how positive a destination that is for some of those young people.

Underemployment can also cause great problems. Those who are on zero-hours contracts with fluctuating hours can have horrendous problems with housing benefit. At an event that I recently attended, a care support worker described a case he is working on that involves a young chap who—against all odds, to be frank—has managed to get a job. Unfortunately, it is a zero-hours or fluctuating-hours contract, which makes it extremely difficult for his housing benefit to be calculated. The support worker has been engaging with the housing provider to resolve a rent arrears problem and keep the young person accessing the relevant services.

When I was that age, I would not particularly have wanted to spend a large amount of my spare time trying to work out my housing benefit and

who I had to tell what. Basically, we do not make life easy for people, and we need to change that.

**John Mason:** That is possibly getting into a wider area.

Mr Read, do you want to say something?

**Scott Read:** I want to go back to your comment about transitions co-ordinator teams. Under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, there is a duty on the education system to call a transition meeting one year before a pupil is due to leave school, with what are called “appropriate agencies” round the table. That could include the opportunities for all co-ordinator or Skills Development Scotland. Currently, people are looking at how that fits with the named person or lead professional role in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, who will be responsible for calling that transition meeting.

Some local authorities already have dedicated transitions teams. For people with additional support needs, there is a real difference between the pull and push in the marrying of children and young people’s services to adult services. For instance, there is a real difference between paediatrics and adult healthcare, between children and young people’s social care and adult social care and between school and college. It can be a very mixed picture, but the duty resides in education.

**John Mason:** Is the system settling down? Is it just because schools are getting used to it?

**Scott Read:** The legislation has been on the statute book since 2004, but we still see a mixed picture. That is because teachers are overstretched, are not aware of the legislation or take a tokenistic approach to transition meetings.

There is legislation that provides for a very long planning process for young people, which should provide the platform for them to step into further education, university or the jobs market. However, I have problems with the concept of positive destinations, which are said to be employment, education or training. For some people a positive destination is supported housing with volunteering, for example, and we are not measuring those things with the positive destination metrics.

To mirror Jim Gray’s point about taking a longitudinal look at transitions, it is quite scary how many in the looked-after children figures do not have a positive destination—

**John Mason:** Is that in any way tied to the rigid age limit? Some looked-after children might take a bit longer to get to the same place as other young people.

**Scott Read:** I was going to say that people who are looked after—excuse me if this seems inappropriate—can have a bit of a knee-jerk reaction and push away the services that supported them, because they view them in a particular way. It takes them a certain amount of time to get back on their feet. It would be interesting to know how many children who were looked after go to university at 25, for instance. Is it just that they need time? At age 18, the statistics look awful, but if we look longitudinally, that might show an improvement.

**The Convener:** I ask Mr O’Donnell to answer briefly, because John Finnie still has a number of questions and we really should finish the session shortly.

**Mike O’Donnell:** It is just a point of information for Mr Mason. The opportunities for all commitment for young people with additional support needs goes up to their 25th birthday.

**John Finnie:** I will perhaps wrap a number of questions into one. Figures can tell us only so much and, as we know, there are challenges associated with poverty and deprivation. What particular challenges do you face as a result of the higher levels of unemployment that are associated with poverty and deprivation? Does the budget reflect any of the additional challenges that there may be?

**The Convener:** Mr Read, do you want to answer that?

**Scott Read:** I will give it a shot.

As the committee will know, many people with additional support needs have parents who have disabilities or additional support needs, and those parents and families are already in poverty. We have a lot of case studies of families who are able to speak about their experience and transitions in this particular area. My concern is about those who are not able to speak and who are not represented in any way or form, because they do not know what their rights are, what they can ask for and what support is available. Even with the great work that goes on, there are people who see their future as being on benefits and living with their parents.

10:00

I also have concerns about situations in which hopes have been built up for young people with learning disabilities or additional support needs. Recently, I asked a family who came to me how their transition was going and what the service provision was like, and they said, “What service provision?” The eligibility criteria were set so high that they did not meet them, which meant that that young person with an additional support need was

sitting at home, not doing anything, after having been fully supported through the school system, which cost a considerable amount of money. For them then to fail and not go any further seems a travesty.

That would be my two cents.

**Mike O'Donnell:** Of course, any additional resource is welcome. What I see across employability and skills in Scotland is that we should squeeze as much as we can out of what we have in terms of frontline service delivery.

I have been doing this long enough to see that, whenever we are subject to cuts, one benefit that arises is that we form smarter partnerships and make alliances with others to provide services in a more collegiate way. A lot of the partnership activity that we see in Scotland is beginning to maximise the resource that is available through the third, public and private sectors.

There is a bit of a benefit from that, as I say, but it would be nice to have the resource.

**Dr Hannah:** Special schools are telling us that they are concerned about difficulties in accessing appropriate work experience placements and, in particular, the fact that there are fewer college places for young people with complex additional support needs. I know that we have spoken quite a bit about that.

Although we have come across some good virtual college models in some of the independent schools, complex needs transitions funding and any additional funding that might be available to help colleges provide courses for those young people and help them to access college courses would be welcome.

**John Finnie:** I am sure that it would be, although I do not know whether that is in the gift of the committee.

Mike O'Donnell touched on the issue of partnership working. It is all very well that there are partnerships, but how effective are they, particularly with regard to some of the objectives of the action for jobs youth employment strategy? Also, how effective are they in relation to—we have had a lot of clichés this morning, but I will add another one—the hard-to-reach group who are marginalised as a result of, for example, deprivation or poverty?

**Mike O'Donnell:** Are you talking about the action for jobs programme that is delivered through the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations?

**John Finnie:** Yes.

**Mike O'Donnell:** I do not know the detail of delivery. Colleagues in SCVO feel that it has an

impact in terms of getting to young people who are harder to reach.

In my sphere, we deliver employer recruitment initiatives that are targeted at specific young people. We do that in partnership with a range of third sector organisations. That is a programme that involves people with disabilities, ex-offenders and people from black and ethnic minority communities. It encourages employers to support young people who are harder to reach. The programme is growing in terms of employer ask.

It is worth noting that the groups are sometimes quite difficult to identify and, sometimes, to find in local areas. Targeted programmes can work if they are given time to embed locally and to become known by young people, service providers and—crucially—employers. Unless we engage employers, we are not going to move this forward.

**Clare Fraser:** Mr Finnie asked how the partnership is working out. To be honest, there is a wee bit of buck passing going on. There is no definitive responsibility between, say, a local authority, the social support, the health and care services and the further education sector. Different practices are going on in different colleges, and the system sometimes does not work so well.

**Jim Gray:** I understand that it is an on-going challenge.

**Scott Read:** The Scottish transitions forum deliberately sets out to bring together all the people I have mentioned in the context of transitions. We are starting to get really good at attendance across the board by the different professions such as education, health and social work, and we are looking at local models of supportive transitions forums in local authorities to allow bespoke solutions to work within those authorities. I can send you information about that on-going work, if that would be of interest.

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

I would like to finish this evidence session. Thank you for coming along and sharing your knowledge with us. We really appreciate it.

I suspend the meeting briefly to allow the second panel to take their seats.

10:06

*Meeting suspended.*

10:12

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** I welcome our second panel of witnesses. When you wish to speak, please indicate that to me or to the clerk on my left.

I am Margaret McCulloch, the committee's convener. Members will introduce themselves in turn, starting on my right, followed by the witnesses. I ask witnesses to give an overview of where they are from and the organisation that they represent.

**Marco Biagi:** Good morning. I am the member of the Scottish Parliament for Edinburgh Central and deputy convener of the committee.

**John Finnie:** Madainn mhath—good morning. I am an MSP for the Highlands and Islands.

**John Mason:** I am the MSP for Glasgow Shettleston.

**Christian Allard:** Good morning. I am an MSP for North East Scotland.

**Lorna Trainer (Scottish Training Federation/Support Training Action Group):** I am director of L & G Learning (Scotland) and also represent the Scottish Training Federation and STAG.

**Fraser McCowan (Scottish Training Federation/Support Training Action Group):** Good morning. I am the managing director of Argyll Training and am also a member of the Scottish Training Federation and STAG.

**Sandy Stark (Station House Media Unit):** Good morning. I am from shmuFM at the Station House Media Unit and VSA—Voluntary Service Aberdeen.

**Brian Webb (Station House Media Unit):** I work for the Station House Media Unit and look after all our employability work.

**The Convener:** Before we ask our questions, I ask Lorna Trainer or Fraser McCowan to explain what STAG is.

**Fraser McCowan:** STAG is the Support Training Action Group. We represent providers who work with young people and adults with additional support needs.

**The Convener:** Marco Biagi will ask the first question.

**Marco Biagi:** We will all ask about a range of different subjects. My opening question is about the particular difficulties that face young people with additional support needs when they are making transitions in their lives. What are the chief

obstacles? How well are we supporting people to overcome them?

**The Convener:** Who would like to answer first?

10:15

**Sandy Stark:** The transition from school is definitely a great big thing. I treated school like my second home, having been there since the age of five. It was fun starting school and I really learnt a lot. Once I left school, the school progressed me on to college, which opened many doors for me and showed me what learning opportunities were on offer. It is a big achievement for someone who has learning difficulties and support needs, and we need that sort of help and support because it is a great big wide world that you are going into once you leave school.

**Lorna Trainer:** A lot of youngsters experience huge barriers, whether that is because of learning disabilities, physical disabilities or mental health problems, which are often unrecognised. Poverty often leads to difficulties too, and youngsters can be excluded from classes and activities. We have a number of youngsters who have left school and still do not know how to work a computer. That is inexplicable in today's society, but we support youngsters like that on a daily basis.

Under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 and the amended Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009, we support youngsters who are looked after and accommodated. My programme delivers the employability fund, and 33 per cent of the youngsters who benefit from that are looked after and accommodated. That is higher than the average. I recognise, as Fraser McCowan does, that the youngsters who go through the national training programmes probably include a higher than average number of people with disabilities, exclusions and disadvantage in society.

Under the additional support legislation, youngsters in school have an individual learning plan that follows them through, but often it is dropped and left once they leave school, and I am slightly worried about the transition from school to post-16 learning and development. We support a lot of youngsters who have no information and no support plan, and we are left to work around that and somehow or other support their additional needs without the infrastructure that they may have had at school.

That is where we fall down, because one of the other questions is about how we work with other agencies. We are failing in terms of multi-organisational working. I have concerns about that, because we are often left to pick up the pieces. National training programmes support a

higher than average number of youngsters who are disadvantaged, for the reasons that I have mentioned.

**Fraser McCowan:** The information is not always available or passed on. Many of the young people have not engaged in education, so when they present themselves to the providers that becomes apparent, and it can be difficult at times to get the support that they need to continue to engage in the national programmes and move on into employment or into further or higher education. We find that that is quite often a challenge. From our point of view, there is also a rural aspect to the issue, because there can be huge distances between where the young person is and where support can be found, and there is not always funding or flexibility in the programmes to match things up.

**The Convener:** How do the young people present themselves to your organisations? What route do they follow before they appear at your door, so to speak?

**Lorna Trainer:** They often come to us through careers advisers, if they have come through school or have just left school, and some of the older people who come on to the programme come to us through the DWP. Some refer themselves because their friends have been on the course and liked it, but it is predominantly through careers guidance that people come to us.

**Brian Webb:** I echo some of those comments—we have the same situation up in Aberdeen. There is a disconnect between where young people are in school and where they are when the services pick them up.

There is always some information missing, so we are playing catch-up as soon as we take a young person. We need to find out what their learning difficulties are, whether they have dyslexia, what their learning style is, and what the best way is for them to learn about information technology. We ask whether they have an email address and can access the internet, and nine times out of 10 the answer is no.

Our projects are playing catch-up, and we have to try to figure out the best way to address a young person's needs. If they came in with a learning plan that addressed those issues, we still might not be 100 per cent ready to work with them, but we would have a good starting block from which to begin that work.

**Marco Biagi:** I take from those comments that a positive destination is not necessarily a success. If it involves going into employment and the young person falls out of employment a little bit later, that is an issue.

However, working with what we have at the moment—the positive destinations measure—there is a 10 per cent gap, generally speaking, between young people with additional support needs and the population at large in getting to positive destinations. Could that gap be closed to zero, so that young people with additional support needs would be just as likely to go into positive destinations? If so, what would it take to do that?

**Brian Webb:** I think that the gap could go down to zero if there was more investment in the third sector and in various projects. I mean no disrespect to Skills Development Scotland or Jobcentre Plus, but we are the ones that are doing the groundwork; we are taking the young person and moving them on. If we were given more resources and money to do the work that we could do, I reckon that we could take the gap down to zero quite easily.

**The Convener:** What resources would you need?

**Brian Webb:** We need to have the information on the young person. Gatekeepers such as Jobcentre Plus and Skills Development Scotland have the information and should be giving third sector organisations the information that they need on the young person. They could then put together a real action plan for that young person. If we were able to work with young people for whom we have the right information, we could take any young person and get them into a positive destination.

**The Convener:** Am I right in understanding that, throughout the whole school process, there is an action plan that identifies each person's particular needs, but as soon as they leave school, that stops and the information is not passed on?

I see that you are all nodding.

**Brian Webb:** That is correct.

**Lorna Trainer:** That is exactly right.

**The Convener:** I have a simple question. Why is that not happening?

**Lorna Trainer:** I have no idea.

**The Convener:** Has anybody asked the schools for that information?

**Lorna Trainer:** Yes.

**Brian Webb:** Yes, we ask regularly.

**The Convener:** What is the response?

**Lorna Trainer:** Some are slightly confused with regard to data protection, and they think that the information should not be going to us. There are trust issues around working with other agencies and not being entirely sure what it is that other agencies do.



**Brian Webb:** We have the GIRFEC—getting it right for every child—agenda. That seems to work at school, but it does not seem to work once the young person leaves school.

**The Convener:** How does not having that information put you at a disadvantage? What problems does that cause for you, and what do you have to do to overcome them?

**Brian Webb:** We need to build up the right profile for a young person. For us to be successful, we need to know a young person's learning style. As the committee will know, everybody is an individual, so we need to set an individual learning plan for a young person. It sometimes takes us two or three months just to get to know the young person, and to get to know where they are and where their learning barriers are.

If we had a starting block, with the information already in front of us, we could cut down the two or three months' lead-in time in which we try to get to know the young person, and they could physically get on with the work. The valuable time between getting a young person and getting them moved on could be halved, if not quartered, if we had the right information.

**Sandy Stark:** A young person should be allowed to take away the personal support plan that they get from school, because it is their plan and nobody else will gain anything from it. When we left school we had a book called a record of achievement. The personal plan should be on the first page of that book. A young person can take it to an employer and say, "Look—this is what I have gained from school, and this is what I can offer you." It is then up to the employer to say, "I think you're more than capable of progressing." A young person's support plan should never really stop, because everyone is learning is every single day.

**The Convener:** So, when you left school and went to college, your information did not go with you.

**Sandy Stark:** No.

**The Convener:** How did that affect you? What problems did it cause you?

**Sandy Stark:** When I was at college, I had to start all over again on things that I had already learned at school. I told the college that I had already learned about IT, cooking and things like that, but it did the basic stuff again that I had already learned at school. I did not learn anything new. I was told that I had to do things, because the college did not have a record of what I had done. If people's support plans went along with them, I would not have sat there wasting my time redoing things that I had already done at school.

**The Convener:** How did you feel, having to do things again?

**Sandy Stark:** I was upset and really annoyed, because I knew that I had done them. However, because the college did not have that on paper, I had to sit and do them again.

**The Convener:** Thank you.

**Marco Biagi:** Does the information pass on automatically between primary and secondary school? Is post secondary school the problem, or is any kind of transition the problem?

**Lorna Trainer:** It is predominantly a post-secondary problem. I am not entirely sure whether there is a problem between primary and secondary, but there certainly is a problem post secondary.

**Marco Biagi:** Can anybody comment on whether the primary to secondary transition is an issue, as well?

**Brian Webb:** I could not honestly tell you.

**Marco Biagi:** I return to my earlier question on what it would look like if we could close the gap entirely. How is each organisation funded? What is the balance of sources between local and SDS funding and anything else?

**Lorna Trainer:** I mentioned that our organisation works with the employability fund. Some 30 per cent of the people are looked after and accommodated, and 29 per cent of that number have additional learning needs. We also support 6 per cent from ethnic minority backgrounds and, on top of that, 35 per cent with additional needs, such as people with disabilities, learning disabilities and mental health problems. The statistics are therefore fairly high in terms of the average population. I am not pushing our organisation—I am not viewing things in that way—but we managed to achieve 53 per cent positive outcomes.

The only funding is the employability fund, and the funding that we get is £55 per person per week. Therefore, there is a shoestring budget.

I go back to Brian Webb's point about what else we need. I am not saying that we need tons of money to be thrown at us, but we need to recognise exactly what the needs of the young people are. They are not recognised.

Yesterday, I supported a homeless young person who self-harms and has severe dyslexia and eczema. She had self-harmed the day before. I fixed her arm by putting a bandage on it, and tried to work with her with other agencies—the Self Harm Organisation, for example. I recognise that we need a lot of support from mental health services. I refer to what Brian Webb mentioned earlier. We need a lot of support from not just the traditional NHS services to which people go and get tablets, but from other types of services, which

I would like to call the softer services. I would like to see more of that and all of us working together and communicating with one another. I absolutely get the multi-agency approach. We could do much more in that context; we are failing there.

It is not just about the transition from the learning plan from secondary to post secondary school. That is just one example of where things just stop. We are not doing what GIRFEC and the curriculum for excellence want us to do. We are left to pick up a lot of the pieces and to try to do that as well as we can.

**Fraser McCowan:** As Lorna Trainer said, it is really the employability fund that supports those young people. As Sandy Stark said, people present to us and their information is not available, so we ask them the same things. They will already have given the information perhaps two or three times, and they switch off. They disengage from the programme, or we spend a lot of time trying to get support.

The funding has changed quite markedly from what it was in the previous programme for young people, which allowed time. We used to engage with many other services that could provide support, but the programme now is quite short. If people are not ready to hit the ground running, things are more difficult. We find that quite challenging.

**Lorna Trainer:** The average is eight weeks on employability funding.

**Marco Biagi:** Do you use the employability fund as well?

10:30

**Brian Webb:** We use the employability fund, but SHMU has several funders, including Inspiring Scotland and BBC Children in Need, and we have money that comes from the fairer Aberdeen fund and Aberdeen City Council. We have a multitude of pots for bringing money in so that we can do our work.

**The Convener:** The Parliament photographer has come in to take photographs. Are all the witnesses okay with that? I see from their nods that they are.

I have a couple of questions for all the witnesses. Do your organisations work closely with other voluntary organisations? Because the young people can have special needs and require a lot of help, is there a lot of intensive one-to-one support from your staff?

**Fraser McCowan:** There is an awful lot of one-to-one work. We have had additional training for staff to identify needs.

We are looking to do more through Skills Development Scotland and other agencies. We are a social enterprise as well and we are active in the social enterprise arena. We rely on partner organisations for support and informal sharing of information. We try to get round some of the problems in that way.

**Brian Webb:** We work closely with loads of organisations, because we cannot do the work on our own. We need to build up good working relationships and get to know what other projects can do. We have to know people's names as well, so that we can pick up the phone and ask someone for help and advice.

We use a lot of the activity agreement money to focus on one-to-one work with young people that takes them to the point where they are ready to access some of the courses that we offer. If they are not quite ready, we use the activity agreement money to bring them to the point where they can access some of our full-time programmes.

**The Convener:** Will you explain what the activity agreement programme is?

**Brian Webb:** Activity agreement money is money that Aberdeen City Council has—I think that other councils have it as well—for young people who have left school with no positive destination. They are not quite at the point where they can access an employability fund course; they are at the stage before that. The approach is about grabbing young people who are leaving school without a positive destination and who are not ready for a full-time course. We work with them to get them to the point where they are ready to access a course that will get them to a positive destination. If that is stage 2, we work with them at stage 1.

**Christian Allard:** Good morning. We have talked about positive destinations. To what extent can we evaluate how positive a positive destination is? We heard from the earlier panel that there is no follow-up after someone reaches a positive destination.

**Brian Webb:** I am happy to answer that. In SHMU, we monitor our young people for as long as they stay in contact with us. We use a Facebook group to monitor young people. We tried to set up our own Facebook page to get young people to stay in touch with us, but it failed because the young people did not want to access another Facebook page, so we set up a closed group. Having been with SHMU for five years, I now have five years' worth of young people on that Facebook group. We need to report to Inspiring Scotland every six months, and I can say every six months exactly where the 500-odd young people we have worked with are every day, because they stay in contact with us all the time.

We have information on the young people's positive destinations that we can access regularly, and we can feed back to any funder where the young people are. If they fall out of a positive destination, they always put it up on Facebook—if, for example, they have lost their job or fallen out with their boss. That allows us to pick up the phone and get them in for a meeting so that we can offer advice and information to try to save their positive destination if it is about to crash and burn. We are in quite a fortunate position in that sense, but I know that a lot of projects are not. We have quite up-to-date statistics on where the young people are and where they stay.

**Fraser McCowan:** We do follow-up. In many cases, the funding stream has a sustainability payment, so that is an incentive to do follow-up. Because of the areas that we work in and the support that we give young people, we build a bond with them that means that they keep in touch informally. If they have an issue, they come to us, because they trust the staff member who supported them. We track people informally, but there is nothing formal beyond the statutory requirements for programmes.

**Lorna Trainer:** We do pretty much what others do. We have a Facebook page and a Twitter account and we keep track of everyone in a database, so that we know what the short and longer-term outcomes are for young people.

I am aware from a meeting that I was at recently in Glasgow that there is a lack of consideration of follow-up and longer-term sustainability. Some youngsters who went to college, according to the school leaver destination figures, stayed on just because they did not know where else to go. When they left college, they got lost. Nobody knew where a significant number of people in Glasgow between the ages of 18 and 24 were or what they were doing when they were not employed.

Generally there is a lack of knowledge about what happens in the longer term. We have short-term statistics. We recognise that there is a gap and we try to fill it for our local services, but there is no cohesive longer-term statistical analysis.

**Sandy Stark:** That is where the college comes in. The school supports people to get into college. The idea that I got from college was that the college wanted me in, then it wanted me to complete my course, then it wanted me out again. That was all that it wanted. I have special needs and I was not getting enough support. The college did not say, "This is where we think you are. What do you think?"

I volunteered with VSA for five years to prove to it that I could be a candidate for it and that I could be employed by it. I showed it the skills that I had learned in school, so at least I had something to

fall back on from college. I got help from SHMU and VSA, which worked together. SHMU gave me some helpful tips.

It is a shame for young people who have worked so hard all through their school life and who get pushed on to college. Colleges do not do enough on additional support needs.

**The Convener:** Did you have to find out about those organisations yourself when you were at college, or did somebody tell you about them?

**Sandy Stark:** I found out about VSA myself. I went to its holiday fun clubs at Easter and in the summer. I found out that it was a voluntary organisation. When I was at one of its fun clubs, I was told that I could no longer attend because I was 16, but the people there took me aside and said that if VSA took me on as a volunteer I could stay on. When they asked me what I thought of that I could not say no, because volunteering is a great opportunity for somebody to build up their confidence with an employer. If it is something that a person wants to do, it is great.

**The Convener:** Where do you volunteer?

**Sandy Stark:** I am now a trainee support worker in a nursery called Maisie Munro children's centre, in Aberdeen.

**The Convener:** That is excellent—congratulations. Are you enjoying it?

**Sandy Stark:** Yes—I really enjoy it. I get the children ready to go off to school. I teach children the skills that I learned from school. I break down the skills that I have learned so that they get the understanding through learning through play, learning through speaking, taking turns and things like that. If the skills are broken down, it is much easier for children to understand them. We communicate with parents and we cover the background really well.

**The Convener:** That is excellent.

**Christian Allard:** To go back to the budget line, is there any way in which the budget is failing the transition process? For example, is funding not getting to where it needs to be? I am not talking about extra funding—we all want more money at every level—but is there anything lacking in the budget, especially on the transition period not only from school and between programmes but, given what we have just discussed, afterwards? Where is the budget not targeting funding in the right way?

**Sandy Stark:** Funding should be targeted at transport. When a person leaves school and goes to college, the college turns round and says, "We do not have any funding for transport." However, people with learning needs rely on taxis to get back and forth, because they might find public

transport too stressful and might not be able to cope with great crowds of people. That just depends on the young person's needs. There needs to be more funding for transport to ensure that they can get from A to B—from home to college, work or whatever.

**Lorna Trainer:** I will go back to a number of points that have been mentioned. First, I think that it is great that Sandy Stark has been able to volunteer. Our organisation's commercial activities include training and education with social services organisations, and I have quite a bit of experience of supporting people with disabilities who have been denied access to voluntary work because they do not fit the picture of a volunteer. He has been very lucky.

What that tells me—this is backed up by a lot of evidence and is not just my experience—is something about attitudes to people with disabilities, attitudes to gender and streamlining people into gender-specific jobs, and attitudes to young people. We still see such attitudes from employers, and I would like promotion work to be carried out to shift attitudes.

How can we do that? For a start, we need positive examples of how such approaches work, and we certainly have lots of examples of employers taking on people with a disability, putting people into non-traditional or previously gender-specific roles or employing someone with additional needs and of such an approach working. It would be good if funding could be used to promote those things and to support employers in taking on youngsters or taking risks or chances, because such promotion can help to change and shift attitudes.

On the earlier question about the value of knowing the learning plan for the transition from secondary school, if we have a short eight-week programme and if we can find that information, we can tell the employer, "This young person has autism. Here's what that means, and here's what you need to do to support them." We often find that, if employers know that information, it turns what might have been a failed placement into a placement that works and in which the young person learns how to work in a workplace and the employer learns how to support, understand and get to know someone with a disability. That is the beauty of it. However, when we are denied that information, we have to work really hard and scramble about to do something about the situation in a short period.

I am sorry that I have digressed a bit. I would certainly like to see something that promotes positive attitudes towards people with disabilities.

**The Convener:** On the back of that, what is your main recommendation for improving the transition process?

**Lorna Trainer:** Schools should certainly work much more closely with not just colleges but post-education agencies such as ours and social work services. To come back to the spirit of GIRFEC, I am very much aware that things are not working. For example, a young person who is involved with social work services—who has perhaps been through the offending system or who is looked after and accommodated—does not really want to engage with us, but the fact is that all of us, not just us as the experts but the young person in question, need to be talking. That does not happen, so we have not quite got the nice little smooth links in the transition, which worries me.

10:45

**Fraser McCowan:** There is a gap between stage 1 and stage 2 of the pipeline for a young person coming out of school who is not quite ready for stage 2. Activity agreements will meet some of their needs, but that is for a short time and those young people can be left languishing. Even when they have engaged in one of the strands of the employability fund, if they have been on the programme and have not achieved a positive destination, they are not picked up again until they are 18. That gap for youngsters needs to be addressed.

**The Convener:** What do you mean when you say that people are not picked up until they are 18?

**Fraser McCowan:** They cannot re-engage, but they can perhaps have two bites of the cherry if they go forward. For example, if they do the certificate of work readiness, that is one of the outcomes under the employability fund but, once they have achieved that, there might be nothing else for them to do—they might not move on to further or higher education or employment, and they are not picked up by the DWP until they are 18.

Those young people can be left and can go back the way. They might have been on a programme and might have hit all the targets for the programme, achieved all the outcomes in their learning plan and got their qualification but still be unemployed. Because they are under 18, they have no other way of engaging to gain any financial support. In addition, most of the mainstream programmes are now knocking on employers' doors to look for voluntary places, so there is even more pressure on a young person who is trying to engage through a voluntary route, because some places are being taken by adults. The situation is difficult.

**The Convener:** The young people you have managed to get re-engaged in the system learn all the core skills and the skills that they need to make them employable, but the funding stops and they are left in limbo for six months, a year or two years.

**Fraser McCowan:** It could be as long as that.

**The Convener:** When they are 18, the whole process has to start again, because they will probably have lost all those skills.

**Fraser McCowan:** Yes—absolutely.

**The Convener:** They get stuck in a rut again and are caught up in the system where daytime turns into night-time, and there is absolutely nothing there for them.

**Fraser McCowan:** There is certainly nothing in our area. We are now getting young people engaging with adult programmes who we had maybe four years previously, because there is nothing for them in the gap.

**The Convener:** What percentage of the young people who go through your programmes does that apply to?

**Fraser McCowan:** We have a fairly successful conversion rate, but probably more than 40 per cent do not go on to a positive destination. If they are under 18 and do not engage, what happens to them?

**Brian Webb:** Our success rate is sitting at 85 per cent, so 15 per cent are probably moving on to a negative destination.

**The Convener:** Is that not quite worrying? All that money is being invested in those young people to give them the opportunity to build their life up but, although they want to do something, there is nothing for them to do.

**Sandy Stark:** They are not getting the opportunity to work.

**The Convener:** Unlike you, they are not getting the opportunity to work.

**Fraser McCowan:** Lorna Trainer made a point about schools. Because we are not part of the education system, it is quite difficult for us to engage with schools. For the past 26 years, I have delivered a voluntary industrial awareness day with our local grammar school. A lot of the young people who get the most from that are those who are not engaging academically. They are motivated to go back into the school, but there is nothing for them to pick up on. We need to look at that, because we could do an awful lot more.

**Lorna Trainer:** Someone mentioned earlier that progress can still be a positive outcome for a person, although it might not be perceived as a

positive outcome such as a job, a modern apprenticeship or an FE place. There can still be a positive outcome for a person, although it might not be statistically monitored.

Often, our programmes are rigid and provide a framework around employability. However, somebody who has been looked after and accommodated might have in-depth problems and a history of nobody in their family working or might not know what internal disciplines are needed to work. They might not have the behavioural attitude to work or understand it, not because they are bad kids who will be criminals in the future but because they just do not know how to work. They have probably been failed in school—we have a number of youngsters in that situation—and we cannot resolve that in eight weeks.

Employability is perhaps not the only issue. The young people might need more time and might need other resources and facilities to support them. We can engage the young person, who desperately wants to do the programme, but they might not have the internal resilience, emotional intelligence, attitude or internal discipline to achieve it. They might feel as if they have failed. That is not what we are about—we do not want that—but there is a positive outcome in that they have been engaged.

We would want them to go on and do something else, but what else do they do in a framework where the message is, “This is all we have. This is all we are thinking about”? We are not thinking about or understanding what the young person’s additional needs are or how to address them within the framework.

**The Convener:** Am I right in saying that you work within a tight timescale of eight weeks for each person?

**Lorna Trainer:** Yes—although it can be extended.

**Brian Webb:** Our arrangements are different. We do a 12-week employability course, and we have just added six weeks for young people. We have realised that not everybody gets to a positive destination in 12 weeks, so we have added an extension of six weeks for any young person who does not reach a destination in 12 weeks. In effect, we offer an 18-week programme for young people.

If the young people do not go on to a positive destination, we keep them engaged with SHMU. We have a radio station and a film department, and we can get people involved in doing voluntary work with us. At the same time, we still deliver employability clubs once a week to keep young people engaged. We do that stuff off our own bat and not because we have to. We have invested time and effort in the young person, and we want

to keep them engaged with us while trying to move them on to a positive destination. We realise that that might take quite a bit of time.

**The Convener:** So that is not funded through the normal Skills Development Scotland—

**Brian Webb:** No—we have to fund that through others.

**The Convener:** And through other processes?

**Brian Webb:** Yes.

**Lorna Trainer:** Through our organisations—STF and STAG—we have found that there is no consistency in the number of weeks. We might put in a submission for a contract that says that we need 16 weeks, for instance, but the contract that comes out tells us what we are getting. There does not seem to be any discussion about reducing the programme to eight weeks instead of the 16 that we asked for. In effect, the contract says, “That’s what you’re getting.” That worries me slightly.

When I started the get ready for work programme—I have been doing it for only the past three years—we had 26 weeks in which to work with the youngsters. That was a wonderful length of time for doing all sorts of rich work with them. The following year, the programme was reduced to 16 weeks. The next year—this year—it went down to eight weeks. There is no rationale for that reduction.

There is some flexibility, but not an awful lot, because we are tightly tied into forecasting, which is based on being given a contract for eight weeks. If we need to go over that time, we need to justify and rationalise that. Somehow or other, we have created rigid systems, and we have not allowed for the lovely work that can be done over a longer period.

**The Convener:** The eight-week programme is for young people who could have dropped out of school with, for instance, behavioural, literacy, numeracy or health problems. Within eight weeks, you have to get them up to speed so that they can move on to a mainstream programme—possibly a modern apprenticeship.

**Lorna Trainer:** Yes.

**Brian Webb:** Or a job or college.

**Sandy Stark:** Sometimes the young person has eight weeks to complete things, but they might not fully engage during that time. They might need a wee bit more time, with some work on a one-to-one basis, in order to get up to speed.

A young person needs their own time to achieve things, and they are getting rushed too much over the eight weeks. We need to think about whether the young person is engaging enough. Are they

learning the skills, or do we need to work a wee bit more on a one-to-one basis to ensure that they can get those skills? The system is kind of discriminating against young people who need a wee bit of extra help and support.

The young person might not be confident about saying that they need a wee bit of extra support. That is where the employer should come in, tell them what their weaknesses and strengths are and say, “We need to try to fix your weaknesses and get your skills up to your level of ability.”

**John Finnie:** I spoke to the previous witnesses about what might be regarded as hard-to-reach groups, the challenges that are associated with areas of deprivation and the relationship between poverty, deprivation and some of the work. However, I would like to go a little bit off that tack.

I thank Fraser McCowan for his submission. It would be good to have on the record from you a comment about the one-size-fits-all approach to funding that clearly does not work for rural areas. I declare an interest in that I represent such an area. Will you expand on that? In particular, what were the previous arrangements and what has changed?

**Fraser McCowan:** What has changed dramatically are the funding package and the length of time that is available.

In the past, providers were paid a weekly allowance to support young people. It was all about the quality of provision and the idea was that the outcomes would come from that, but now everything seems to be about chasing the outcome. There is a start fee and, from that fee, providers have to work out the viability and length of their programmes. On average, ours last for 12 weeks.

We operate in Argyll and Bute but we also operate in Inverclyde. In Inverclyde, we are fortunate that groups of four to six young people at a time are referred to us. In Argyll, it can be one at a time, or it can be one in Campbeltown and one in Oban. I have colleagues who are going to Islay today for a three-hour meeting. They left at 7 o'clock this morning and they have an overnight stay, with just the possibility that they might engage.

We have been established in the area for 23 years and have always supported the rural and remote areas, but that is becoming more difficult in the new funding regime. The difficulty was recognised when Highlands and Islands Enterprise had the skills remit and an allowance was made for additional milestone payments for modern apprenticeships to offset some of the additional costs of being in such areas. In the get ready for work programme, £120 a week rather than £75 was available in order to offset some of

those costs, but now there is a one-size-fits-all approach, which is proving to be difficult.

We now need to take some tough decisions. Even though we are a charitable organisation, we still have to cover our costs, so we are probably coming to the point at which we will not be able to support some of the young people in such areas because it is no longer viable to do so. It is very difficult.

**John Finnie:** For the avoidance of doubt, are we talking exclusively about Scottish Government money or is DWP money involved as well?

**Fraser McCowan:** There is a difficulty in that, often, the rules do not allow different funding to come in. If somebody gets employability fund money, they are not able to subsidise that with other funds; they are disqualified from doing so. It is similar with DWP funds: if somebody is funded from one particular strand, programme or initiative, they cannot get support from another. If the funds were joined up, particularly in rural areas, we could do more and prolong the period of support.

**John Finnie:** Did that change happen when training was removed from Highlands and Islands Enterprise to Skills Development Scotland?

**Fraser McCowan:** Yes. Initially, there was recognition of the issue and there was an enhanced rate but, when the employability fund was launched, it became one size fits all, which is difficult.

As I said in my submission, I was involved in consultation after the pilot of the certificate of work readiness, and one of the colleges that was involved in that work publicly said at one of the meetings for the providers that it had a cohort of maybe 20 students who had already signed up for a course and it picked 12 to do the certificate. It would be great to be able to do that. As a charity, we will take a person on regardless of their barriers or needs and will do the best for them, so it can be challenging.

**John Finnie:** You suggest in your submission that the difficulty is compounded by a change in the hospitality industry. Can you expand on that?

11:00

**Fraser McCowan:** Yes. Some, if not all, of the funding frameworks are being reviewed at the moment, with the result that some of them have been reduced. In our area, tourism is the biggest sector. That makes it difficult to go out and fund places. We are denying people the opportunity to get quality training and we are denying employers the opportunity to get good quality staff or to retain them.

**John Finnie:** Is it your understanding that such decisions would be subject—whether at Scottish Government level or, more likely, at agency level—to an equality impact assessment?

**Fraser McCowan:** I am not sure how the decision came about and whether that was a consideration or not.

**John Finnie:** Clearly, the decision has a disproportionate impact on remote and rural areas.

**Fraser McCowan:** Yes.

**John Finnie:** Mr Webb, we know that deprivation is not restricted to urban areas and that rural deprivation can compound many problems, but are there particular issues in Aberdeen regarding your work?

**Brian Webb:** We are funded to work specifically in the seven areas of deprivation in Aberdeen. All the work that we do targets the regeneration areas. There is a perception that because Aberdeen is the oil and gas capital there is very little deprivation, but in fact I would compare it to places like London where there are big differences between the haves and have nots.

There are areas of extreme deprivation in Aberdeen. We go in and allow those areas to reclaim their voice, as we say. We work with them to get access to media, to projects and to the employability fund to help them address issues and move on. It is not about looking at what we can and cannot do. We specifically get money in and consider what we will do within that regeneration area.

**John Finnie:** My next question is for all the panel. Collaborative working has been mentioned, particularly with regard to action for jobs and Scotland's youth employment strategy. How effective is the engagement between the different statutory agencies, the third sector and so on?

**Fraser McCowan:** Our area is rural, so out of necessity engagement happens by default. Wherever possible, we work together. A lot of that work is informal, because of data protection issues. We support each other.

**Brian Webb:** It is hard. In our work, we have to engage and work with third sector and statutory organisations. We need to collaborate and work together, because if we do not, we will fail the young people.

**Sandy Stark:** In my experience, that is where the young person's report would come in, as they go on from school. Instead of having the young person's report shut down once they leave school, the young person could take their report to an employer or a training organisation and say "Look, these are the skills I've got". They could then ask whether there is an opportunity for them to

volunteer to demonstrate the skills that they learned in school, college or in other organisations.

**John Finnie:** Do you see that document as yours, rather than belonging to the education system?

**Sandy Stark:** Yes.

**John Finnie:** Was it made clear to you that that document was not shared with, for instance, the college? I know that it became apparent.

**Sandy Stark:** I put in my report of my needs to the college and I do not think that the college even bothered to look at my application properly in order to support me with the needs that I have. I had to go back and re-do everything that I had learned in school. If the school had let me take my support plan with me, instead of shutting it down, I could have taken it to the college and said, "I don't think you've looked at this properly, this is what I have done". Then I could have moved on to new challenges.

**Lorna Trainer:** You are right to say that we have to make connections with other organisations, but such organisations do not often think outside of their own organisation. They just see what they are doing rather than thinking about who else could be involved, what role they could play and how they could work together to improve the outcome for a person. Organisations tend to see their service delivery only, and not the journey of the young person or the adult. An example of that might be schools not fully understanding what training providers do and what national training programmes are about, although colleges would be aware of that.

Service providers do not necessarily know about what else is out there, so there is a bit of a disconnect. They scramble about trying to do the best that they can, but I am not sure that that is good enough. There should be more of a connection, an understanding and an acceptance that it is not just about the general terms of partnerships—people do not always understand what partnership working means—but about the learner's journey, first and foremost. As services and resources, we should be working around, with and for the learner, but I am not sure that that message is out there yet.

**Sandy Stark:** Half the time it is up to the young person to go to their employer with the information and ask whether it would be helpful for the organisation that they work or volunteer in if they were to get more information and training, or if it were to put in place more help and support for a young person. That is what we are missing. We need to work closely with every organisation.

Every organisation that people need to get help to access should be on a piece of paper or on some sort of website so that every organisation that wants to offer help and access can make a bond with others and say what it can offer and see what other organisations offer. If someone who has learning support needs comes through the door, the organisation can decide what that person needs and whether it has in place everything that it needs for that person. It could then pick up the phone to call other organisations to ask whether the right type of equipment, or a little bit of help and support, can be put in place so that that young person can engage and be helped to show what they have to offer.

**Christian Allard:** It is quite interesting to see a variety of organisations working in partnership and getting different strands of funding. I know SHMU quite well, and you alluded to having multiple services for young people and how they have different types of funding. What would be a better approach for the future? Should we concentrate on putting funding into different organisations and push them towards forming partnerships, or should we go with organisations that offer multiple services and have multiple sources of funding? What would be the best approach, especially in rural areas?

**Fraser McCowan:** The funding should be all about the individual and not about fitting into a programme. It should be demand led and needs led. If a young person or an older person has needs, there should be support for them, regardless of money, so that they can achieve a positive destination and be supported along their journey. We do not do that. We use a one-size-fits-all approach and are trying to fit people into a rigid programme that does not always work. If the funding was to follow the person, the support might be more flexible and have better results.

**Lorna Trainer:** Some organisations do that. They do lots of different things, but their outcomes are no better than those of other organisations, so that does not necessarily work either.

We have to look for real strengths. We have been doing the employability fund only for the past couple of years, so we have not really evaluated it, although we do have the recent modern apprenticeship evaluation, which was really helpful because it showed the programme's strength. We do not have such an evaluation of the employability fund, which is one step further on in that it tries to get people into even more positive destinations.

I am not entirely sure that putting resources into a service that would do all those things would succeed. Such a service might be located in one part of Glasgow, but people from all over Glasgow



might need all the services that it provides, so a single location would not necessarily be desirable.

Within STF and STAG, we are aware that there are some wonderful small organisations that do fantastic work. We would not want to take away from that. Scotland is lovely for that—some amazing work is done by small organisations. My colleagues' organisations probably started from very little. I would not want to lose that by pushing funding into a one-stop shop, because I am not entirely convinced that that would work.

**Brian Webb:** We also create brands. SHMU is a brand that young people come to because they know that they will get support. If that was watered down in a multi-agency organisation with a new name, the years of history, the belief in SHMU that young people have and the fact that they know exactly what service they will get would be lost.

I like the idea that the money should follow the young person. In addition, I like group work—I think that it works. Young people need to learn how to work in groups; it is not all about one-to-one work.

**Lorna Trainer:** That is not what I am saying.

**Brian Webb:** I know that it is not, but I quite like the SDS system, which involves outcomes and being accountable. It is okay to be accountable; the issue is how that is addressed within organisations.

**The Convener:** It is coming through clearly that we should be looking at the individual. When people come from school and make the transition to college, further education or training, the action plan should go with them. If that were to happen, training providers would be able to look at the individual and make a judgment about whether they needed 26 weeks of help and support or only four weeks of help and support. Do you think that that would work?

**Fraser McCowan:** If we had that information, we would be able to see what support was already there. The contact would already have been made, which would make it much easier for us to follow up. I think that that would work. Each of the statutory agencies has information on individuals, but they do not share it, which is frustrating.

**Lorna Trainer:** That would mean that we could start to consider what else we need to put in place, along with all the other organisations, to support the person in reaching their destination.

**Brian Webb:** Lorna Trainer's organisation does an eight-week programme and we do a 12-week programme, so if we find a young person who needs 26 weeks of support, there needs to be flexibility in the employability fund, so that the goal posts can be moved and 26 weeks of support can be provided.

**Lorna Trainer:** There is justification for doing that, in such cases.

**Brian Webb:** At the moment, the system is quite rigid. It is okay to get six people who need 26 weeks of support, but if an organisation has a 12-week programme and is funded for 12 weeks, how can it fund the extra work that needs to be done? Work needs to be done on how the funding works.

**The Convener:** We need, therefore, to consider changing the model of the funding package. I will give a hypothetical example. A training provider could be given, say, 3,000 training weeks, which it could self-manage for the individuals who came along to the programme.

**Fraser McCowan:** We previously had in place a system whereby we would decide at the start how long a person's period of training would be. We would go back and agree that with the careers service, and that would go into the person's training plan. At that point, the training could vary from 12 weeks to a maximum of 22 weeks. The period was reducing, but at least we had flexibility. The way the system works now, we run a 12-week programme and, beyond that, it is not viable to continue.

**The Convener:** You say that it is the careers service that refers young people to you for the employability programme. How good is the flow? Are there people who have to wait for the careers service to refer them to you, or is there a constant flow of people who can access the programme?

**Brian Webb:** We have to chase SDS. We know that the young people are there—the statistics say that—but, every 12 weeks, we feel that we have to chase SDS to give us the names of the young people so that we can get them in to offer them a taster. It is not the case that there is a flow of young people who are sent out to the various projects. I do not know what the situation is like in other areas, but we have to chase SDS to get the names.

**The Convener:** Why is that?

**Brian Webb:** I do not know. We have been working on that for the past couple of years. It seems that, every time we do a course, up to the last minute—a day or two before the course starts—we are still phoning advisers asking for young people's details. We thought that that would disappear as a result of the employability fund, but it has not. It has been an uphill battle for us.

11:15

**The Convener:** Is that the same for other organisations?

**Lorna Trainer:** No—we have the opposite problem, in that we do not have enough places to meet the demand.

I am glad that you asked that question, because it leads me on to part of the problem, which is that the local economic partnerships do not always work—there is no consistency throughout Scotland. In Glasgow, we have not had any meetings with the local economic partnership, which makes those decisions. In the meantime, we have waiting lists of youngsters who want to join the programme but who cannot, because I do not have any more places. I do not know when the partnership will next meet and make a decision on that. The situation is not consistent throughout Scotland.

**The Convener:** Did you say that the local economic partnership in Glasgow has not met at all?

**Lorna Trainer:** No—it has met, but not with training providers. There was an expectation that it would meet with training providers once a month, for example, to look at demand and where it is being met, but that has not happened. The economic partnership meets, but it does not include us.

**The Convener:** What does the local economic partnership actually do in its role of linking to you?

**Lorna Trainer:** As far as I am aware, its job is to look at employment needs in Glasgow and match the employability fund programme to those needs. It might decide that we need hospitality jobs, care jobs and construction jobs, and so issue X number of employability fund places for those areas. It will anticipate a certain demand. However, demand needs to be reviewed regularly because, as you know, the situation changes all the time. That is where the system falls down in relation to our services. We know from careers guidance that there is demand among youngsters for programmes in specific areas, but we are getting stuck at that point because the economic partnership is not quite keeping up to date with the changes and the demand.

That is my understanding of the partnerships. Is that yours, too, Fraser?

**Fraser McCowan:** Yes. We work in a couple of areas. In Argyll and Bute, the local economic partnership meets physically, and involves the DWP, the careers service and Skills Development Scotland. As Lorna Trainer said, it looks at the number of starts used and available, and reissues them to meet local need. Sensibly, we bust our contract very early on. We needed a decision, because we had young people waiting, but we had no starts in the contract. Because there was somebody in Inverness, somebody in Argyll and somebody in Inverclyde, they came together in a

telephone meeting. There has been some flexibility there, which is encouraging.

On intake from the careers service, we run a rolling programme. Because we run it with individuals rather than groups, we take young people whenever they are ready to engage. We quite often identify a young person, or they present to us because of our track record of working with friends or siblings. However, we always refer them back to the careers service so that they are part of the system, which is important.

**The Convener:** What part of the funding for your organisations is most problematic or needs to be enhanced? I will pick on Brian Webb first.

**Brian Webb:** To be truthful, we need money for it all but, if we were to enhance anything, it would be about work to engage young people who are not yet part of the system because they are not involved with SDS and have maybe dropped out of school. They are a name in the book, but they have not engaged with any projects. Certainly, we would like to tackle those unknowns.

Marco Biagi asked about how we get the number to zero. We do that by targeting the ones out there in communities who nobody wants to target. We know that they are there and we know their addresses—we know where they are—but there is no funding to engage them, because that is long-term, not short-term, work. It could take a year or even two to engage those young people.

If we want to get the number down to zero, we need to physically target those young people, and we need to do that long-term work. We are funded for work at stage 2 and stage 3, but there is no money for stage 1 work—no one wants to touch it. We could get the number to zero by targeting those unknown young people. They are in everybody's stats and reports, which always talk about 90, 80 or 70 per cent, with the rest "unknown". They are the ones we need to target if the system is to work.

**Fraser McCowan:** As I said, given the available funding, we are limited in what we can do, particularly in taking services out to rural areas. There are travel budgets for young people to go to work placements, but perhaps there could be some compensation for providers taking a service into more rural areas. In the past, we have been funded to run programmes on Islay and Arran for a small cohort of young people. That funding is no longer available, but there are young people in such places, so we have to look at that. If young people attracted a package and you could pull all of that together, you could do an awful lot more for them.

There is less flexibility now in the programmes. We do stages 2, 3, and 4—stage 2 with the

different age categories. If you bust one part of that, but have demand, you cannot transfer across within your own contract; everything has to go back into a central pot. I fear that areas such as ours will miss out because there will be pressure for more places for some of the big providers in the central belt.

**Sandy Stark:** Everybody should have an equal opportunity to do what they want; otherwise, areas are being discriminated against. Every young person has skills. We want to show off our skills and what we can bring, but young people are not getting that opportunity because the money is not in place to take them on. It is really disappointing that that gets taken away and the young people get forgotten about. I do not think that that should happen to a young person. Every young person has their own set of skills; they know how to use their own skills in their own way. If they go to an employer and the employer asks them to do something, it is okay for them to say, "Look. I can't do it that way, but what about if I adapt it to my needs?" It is about employers working together and adapting their approach to a young person. I know that everything comes down to money, but if a young person is eager enough and wants to show off their skills to an employer, why not let them? It is a shame.

**The Convener:** It definitely is a shame—well said on behalf of everybody else in the background who is not getting the opportunity that you have managed to create for yourself.

**Lorna Trainer:** On funding, we first have to understand what the needs are in relation to equalities. SDS is beginning to collect data on equalities and the needs of youngsters only this year. In relation to the equalities impact assessment, it seems a shame that this is the first year that we are starting to collect that interesting data.

I have a background in further education, in four colleges. I am aware that colleges have sums—and additional sums—for those with additional learning needs. In the national training programmes there are no additional funds—or recognition of the need for additional funds—for people with additional needs. There is a disparity within the service and its delivery. People are allowed that money in colleges and in higher education, but not in national training programmes, which we all agree are as important as formal further and higher education. That is one of my concerns. If it were available, it would certainly help. It is not the only answer, but it would provide a bit of parity.

We certainly must understand what the needs are, so the collection of data is a first step.

**Sandy Stark:** If a young person wants to move on to further education, why does it have to come down to money? A young person might have skills that they have learnt through volunteering for an organisation, or they might know that they do not have the skills to offer yet, but they know that there is a course out there that would allow them to gain those skills.

I asked to go on the childcare course at college, but I was turned down because I needed a scribe at college. I went to VSA and said, "I want to work here," but it could not take me on because I did not have the qualification under my belt. I thought that, by going to Aberdeen College, that barrier would be lifted because I would have been able to go on the childcare course but, as I said, I was told that I could not do so because there was no money for a scribe. However, if a young person wants to do something, why not let them?

**The Convener:** Thanks for that information. We might do some further investigation into the matter.

**John Mason:** Volunteering has been mentioned. Is it possible that, sometimes, volunteering can become exploitation by an employer?

**Lorna Trainer:** We certainly monitor that, and we have withdrawn from arrangements with a couple of employers because we felt that that was happening and that they were taking advantage of the young person. By and large, we have found that employers do not do that and that they use the person positively, as a potential employee. Of course, some of them do not have jobs to give those people, but they realise what they are giving to the young people in terms of experience, employability skills and references.

We are aware of the issue that you raise, but that is not what it is about.

**Fraser McCowan:** I agree. We carefully guard against the issue that John Mason raised. There are organisations that are good at giving young people work experience, but have no jobs to give people. We might use those organisations to get people used to a routine before sending them to an employer where there is the potential for a job.

**John Mason:** I am also on the Finance Committee, and the issues that we are discussing today are also being addressed by that committee in the context of the budget process. The reality is that we are not going to get more money, so it is a question of moving money around. Given that that is the case, I have a question about emphasis in the way in which the money is being spent. Is too much going on mainstream services, with not enough being targeted at young people with additional needs?

**Lorna Trainer:** Personally, I think so.

**Sandy Stark:** Yes. People with learning difficulties get pushed aside, but we are all human beings and, in this day and age, we should all be working together. We should not be discriminated against because we have a disability. We should all have the right to equal opportunities, whether or not we have an additional support need. At the end of the day, we all have skills and we all have something that we can offer an employer.

**John Mason:** I agree, but we have limited funds and there will always be more needs than we can meet.

**Sandy Stark:** Yes, but we should not be pushed aside. I feel that there are many barriers placed in front of us, but there should be no barriers at all, because we are all human beings. We should be able to walk into a place of employment and say, "These are the skills that I have. Is there an equal opportunity for me to work here?" It should not all come down to money. If somebody wants to work, we should give them the opportunity to work. It is upsetting for a young person if they are turned down and told that they cannot work for an employer because they have not managed to show off their skills to that employer. There are ways in which an employer can adapt the job to a person's needs.

**John Mason:** My final point is also on the financial side. With regard to preventative spending and early years spending, there is a big push at the moment for us to spend more money on three and four-year-olds and less money on people in their teens and 20s and on pensioners. That would mean disinvesting in your services. How would you react to that?

**Fraser McCowan:** A lot of the organisations that are involved in this area could have a lot to offer those younger people. We do not get the opportunity to engage with schools because we are not part of the education system, but I think that we have skills and experience that could benefit them.

**Lorna Trainer:** The hope is that the preventative work will save money in the longer term. I absolutely agree with early intervention. However, we are not yet where we want to be, so you have to watch who you take money from in order to invest in the early years. I recognise that that is an uncomfortable decision, but it is yours to make.

I agree with early intervention, but I am not entirely sure how to balance the budget. I would not take funding away from our area, because we are just beginning to move forward with the new employability fund. I am very much a supporter of the national training programmes and the new employability fund. I can see progress being made

in that regard, and I certainly would not want that to stop. There are difficult balancing decisions to be made.

**The Convener:** That concludes today's meeting. I thank everyone for coming along. Our next meeting will take place on 13 November.

*Meeting closed at 11:31.*

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