



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 24 March 2015

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EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

7th Meeting 2015, Session 4

CONVENER

*Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)
*Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
*Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP)
*Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab)
*Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
*Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD)
*Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Angela Constance (Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning)
Susan Hunter (YouthLink Scotland)
Graham McGlashan (Scottish Government)
Fiona McLeod (Minister for Children and Young People)
Angela Morgan (Includem)
Susan Quinn (Educational Institute of Scotland)
Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Allan Watt (Prince's Trust Scotland)
David Watt (Institute of Directors)
Carolyn Younie (Scottish Government)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Terry Shevlin

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Education and Culture Committee

Tuesday 24 March 2015

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:03]

Subordinate Legislation

Teachers' Pension Scheme (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2015 (SSI 2015/97)

Teachers' Superannuation (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2015 (SSI 2015/98)

The Convener (Stewart Maxwell): Good morning and welcome to the Education and Culture Committee's seventh meeting in 2015. I remind everybody present to ensure that all electronic devices are switched off.

Agenda item 1 is to consider two negative Scottish statutory instruments. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning is here and is in place but, for clarity, she is not here for this item. Do members have any comments on either instrument?

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I place on record my disappointment that the Government says that no equality impact assessment has been done of SSI 2015/97 because that will happen in a wider context. An impact assessment of SSI 2015/98 has been done, but it has not yet been published. We are being asked to agree to regulations on which we have not been given the full information. I do not think that that is the right practice.

The Convener: I know that the cabinet secretary is not officially here for this item, but I am sure that she heard those comments.

As there are no other comments, does the committee agree to make no recommendations to the Parliament on the regulations?

Members indicated agreement.

Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013 (Modification of Legislation) Order 2015 [Draft]

The Convener: Our next agenda item is evidence on a draft order. I welcome Angela Constance, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, and her supporting officials

from the Scottish Government. After we have taken evidence on the order, we will at agenda item 3 debate the motion in the cabinet secretary's name. Officials are not permitted to contribute to that formal debate.

I invite the cabinet secretary to make opening remarks.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): I intend to make a brief statement about the draft order before taking questions. Then, as arranged, Ms McLeod will offer a statement on the draft Aftercare (Eligible Needs) (Scotland) Order 2015 and the draft Continuing Care (Scotland) Order 2015. We will take members' questions accordingly.

The order that I am speaking to is modest in its ambition. Essentially, it would tidy up legislation, largely as part of the implementation of the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013. However, it is important, in that it supports our reforms of the post-16 education sector.

In summary, the order would do four things. First, it would change references in legislation to ensure that they continue to apply to publicly funded colleges and universities—by that I simply mean colleges and universities that receive funding under the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005.

Secondly, the order would align the financial year of a regional board with that of an incorporated college. The change is prompted by a late but nevertheless welcome derogation by Her Majesty's Treasury that enables an incorporated college and a regional board to have a financial year that matches the college academic year of August to July.

Thirdly, the order would update two orders—the Protection of Charities Assets (Exemption) (Scotland) Order 2006 and the Charity Test (Specified Bodies) (Scotland) Order 2008—so that they list the governing bodies of relevant colleges and universities. The first is relevant to publicly funded colleges and universities that are charities and the second is relevant to incorporated colleges.

Fourthly, the order would fix a few snags in the drafting of provisions in the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 and the 2005 act, as amended by the 2013 act. I will take those in turn. The order would insert a definition of the term "recognised"—in relation to unions that are recognised by a college for collective bargaining purposes—and variations of the word. It would also remove a potentially confusing reference to "principal" in the list of people who are not eligible to be chair of a regional college. A specific exclusion is unnecessary, as the legislation lists

the chair and the principal as separate members of the board, which means that they cannot be the same person.

The order would also give ministers the power to appoint a person in place of an assigned incorporated college chair when ministers are required to remove that chair from office. That is relevant when such a person is also a member of another college sector board and they are removed from that other board because of a board failure on it. In such circumstances, if the person was a non-executive member rather than the chair of the assigned college board, ministers could appoint someone in their place. The current lack of provision is therefore anomalous.

The order would also remove any doubt that a regional strategic body cannot give directions in relation to the transfer of

“any staff, property, rights, liabilities or obligations”.

That is what section 23N(7)(a) of the 2005 act sought to do. The order would ensure that directions under section 23N(3) of that act could not be given to a college to transfer, or receive from a transfer, any staff, et cetera.

I or my officials will be glad to answer any questions.

The Convener: Thank you, cabinet secretary. As members have no questions or comments, we will move on to agenda item 3, which is the formal debate on motion S4M-12539.

Motion moved,

That the Education and Culture Committee recommends that the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013 (Modification of Legislation) Order 2015 [draft] be approved.—[*Angela Constance.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Convener: I thank the cabinet secretary and her officials for attending. I suspend the meeting briefly to allow for a changeover of witnesses.

10:09

Meeting suspended.

10:11

On resuming—

Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2015 (SSI 2015/62)

Continuing Care (Scotland) Order 2015 [Draft]

Aftercare (Eligible Needs) (Scotland) Order 2015 [Draft]

The Convener: Item 4 is to take evidence on one negative instrument and two affirmative instruments, as noted on the agenda. I welcome Fiona McLeod, the acting Minister for Children and Young People, and her supporting officials from the Scottish Government. After we have taken evidence on the instruments, we will debate the motions on the affirmative instruments at item 5 and consider the negative instrument at item 6. Officials are not permitted to contribute to the formal debate on the affirmative instruments.

I invite the minister to make opening remarks.

The Minister for Children and Young People (Fiona McLeod): I am happy to make what I have to say will be a detailed statement, given the importance of and concern relating to the draft Aftercare (Eligible Needs) (Scotland) Order 2015, the related Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2015 and the draft Continuing Care (Scotland) Order 2015, before taking any questions.

As the committee is aware, our overall policy objective behind all the instruments is to offer appropriate support to eligible care leavers in order to achieve a more measured transition out of care that encourages preventative measures rather than crisis responses. I seek the committee's support for all three instruments.

I turn first to the draft Aftercare (Eligible Needs) (Scotland) Order 2015. Under changes made to section 29 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 by section 66 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, a local authority must assess a young care leaver to establish whether they have eligible needs that cannot be met elsewhere. If the local authority is so satisfied, new section 29(5A)(a) of the 1995 act places it under a duty to provide such advice, guidance and assistance as it considers appropriate to meet those needs. Crucially, the order specifies the types of support that constitute eligible needs.

During the consultation on the order, a range of insightful views were offered by the sector and by care leavers on what categories of care and

support were most desirable. As a result, the committee will see that the order specifies eligible needs in such a way as to allow local authorities to offer an appropriate level of support to meet individual care leavers' needs and that it defines that support in such a way as to be clear and meaningful to the young people.

The committee will be aware that, during the consultation, we proposed that the new ministerial powers in section 29(1)(b) of the 1995 act, as inserted by section 66(2)(a)(ii) of the 2014 act, could be used to extend eligibility for aftercare support to a further category of young care leavers—those who are between their 11th and 16th birthdays and who had been looked after for at least two years. That reflected unfinished policy discussions during the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill process and was included to illustrate one of many categories of people who could be made eligible for aftercare services.

After we considered the consultation responses, it was clear that the proposed provision needed a lot more work with partners, providers and stakeholders, so it was removed. That removal should not be seen as representing anything other than a desire to achieve a realistic extension of support.

10:15

I understand that the committee has concerns and I will try to reassure members, but I must be clear about what will happen without the order. If we do not have the order in place, there will be no provision for the types of support that constitute eligible needs for the purposes of new section 29(5A)(a) of the 1995 act. That definition is a crucial part of the jigsaw to enable the amendments that section 66 of the 2014 act made to section 29 of the 1995 act to work effectively. Without that definition of eligible needs, we would not be able to properly implement and give full effect, as Parliament intended, to the amendments that section 66 of the 2014 act made to section 29 of the 1995 act. The issues are quite technical, but we need to record why the statutory instruments are important.

If we did not agree to today's order, commencement of the provisions would need to be delayed, because we would have to amend the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Commencement No 7) Order 2015 to remove the provision in it that brings section 66 into force on 1 April. That would mean, for example, that the increase to 26 in the upper age limit for support to care leavers would not commence on 1 April as planned.

I appreciate that no one who has been involved in any part of the development of the policies

wants that to happen, so let me offer some reassurance about the order-making powers in section 66 of the 2014 act. On 14 January last year, Aileen Campbell reiterated her announcement of 6 January and described the Scottish Government's commitment to

"a number of measures to support care leavers".

At the same time, she sought

"order-making powers to extend those types of support to further cohorts of formerly looked-after children, through secondary legislation."—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 14 January 2014; c 3319-20.]

Being a librarian, I refer members to column 3319 of the *Official Report* of the stage 2 debate.

I assure members that that commitment still stands. In fact, the committee may be aware that those powers are already in force and available to me to exercise by virtue of provision made in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Commencement No 1 and Transitory Provisions) Order 2014.

I commit to beginning the expert working group next month. It will look at defining additional cohorts of young people who are eligible for aftercare. It will also bring together all stakeholders, to map the resource and operational requirements of any extensions, and it will look at the return-to-care commitment. Developing those policies will be a massive undertaking, as they require flexibility and consideration of capacity in the system, as well as of the financial climate, but we are all aiming for the same positive outcomes for our care leavers.

The Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2015 are a negative instrument that relates to aftercare support. The regulations make a number of necessary technical consequential amendments to the Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care (Scotland) Regulations 2003 in light of the amendments made to section 29 of the 1995 act by section 66 of the 2014 act. I understand that the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee made no comment on the instrument.

Convener, would you like me to take questions on the aftercare order, or shall I continue and talk about the continuing care order?

The Convener: We would rather that you continued, after which we will have a discussion. Although the orders are different, they cover roughly the same area of policy.

Fiona McLeod: Okay, convener.

Under the Continuing Care (Scotland) Order 2015, the right to continuing care will apply to all young people in foster, kinship or residential care

born after 1 April 1999 who cease to be looked after by a local authority after 1 April 2015, subject to certain statutory exceptions. At that point, those young people will already have developed to a stage where the children's hearing is satisfied that compulsory measures can safely be lifted, and we have to respect the panel members' role in that regard.

The default assumption is therefore that continuing care will be a good thing for the young person and that their day-to-day experience in continuing care ought to reflect what was in place while they were looked after. The overall aim is to help to normalise the experience for young care leavers, and future orders will extend the upper age limit annually to guarantee that people in the initial cohort are eligible for such care until their 21st birthday.

As part of our essential need to evidence decision making and inform future policy making, the order describes an assessment process that complements existing regulations on aftercare support—the Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care (Scotland) Regulations 2003—and which is therefore familiar to young care leavers and local authorities. The order was redrafted following the consultation to ensure that the assessment better reflects issues of importance to young people, including their relationships, their personal identity and their life story.

I am aware of concerns that the sector has expressed about the threshold under the order, but I do not accept that the threshold has been lowered in the order. The threshold that all local authorities will have to consider in determining whether continuing care should either not be provided or cease to be provided is set out in new section 26A(5)(c) and (7)(c) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 as inserted by section 67 of the 2014 act. It is that the care would

“significantly adversely affect the welfare of the person”,

and the order does nothing to change that. The list of matters that is set out in the schedule and which the local authority is to consider is designed to build up a detailed picture of the young person and their life which, together with the other views gathered by virtue of article 7 of the order—not least those of the young person—will assist the local authority in considering whether providing or continuing to provide continuing care would

“significantly adversely affect the welfare of the person”.

As I have said, that is the high threshold that is set down in new section 26A of the 1995 act.

I strongly believe that only in exceptional circumstances could anything described or offered as continuing care

“significantly adversely affect the welfare of”

the young person. We will make that expectation clear in the guidance that is being consulted on and which will supplement the provisions. Again, I point out that, if the draft order is not commenced, people will have no right to continuing care from 1 April.

Many care leavers understandably require support for a prolonged period, and I do not believe that anywhere else in the world seeks the views and prioritises the needs of children and young people as we do in Scotland. I have absolute confidence in our care sector and wider workforce, which played a crucial role in developing these outstanding policies, and I am confident that they will continue to have a truly positive impact on the lives of our children and young people.

The Convener: Thank you, minister. I am sure that the committee appreciates why your opening remarks had to be so detailed. I invite questions or comments from members.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): First, I must put on record my welcome that a compromise has been reached. Having received the email on this matter only at 12 minutes past 9 this morning, I think that this could justifiably be termed an 11th-hour compromise.

However, it is only fair to point out that I am not at all happy with the initial proposal, nor with the way in which these proposals have been made. The minister is right to point out the implications of not passing the instruments, given the commencement date of 1 April, but those of us who had concerns about what was presented would be justified in thinking that we have just had a gun put to our heads. There was not necessarily uniform agreement across the board on the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, but we were absolutely in lockstep with the Scottish Government on the need for improvements in the treatment of and support for those going through the care system.

That was built upon with compelling evidence from the coalition of Who Cares? Scotland, Barnardo's and the Aberlour Child Care Trust—and in particular with evidence from young care leavers themselves. We have rightly been congratulating ourselves ever since on that aspect of the 2014 act. We had assumed that the letter, and indeed the spirit, of that legislation would be honoured.

I appreciate that you are new to the role, minister. Ultimately, the buck stops with you, but I do not think that you have been well served by those advising you. That is why we are in this situation and it is why we have gone through contortions in recent days.

Turning to the specifics, the negative instrument—the Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2015—seems fairly straightforward.

On the draft Continuing Care (Scotland) Order 2015, I hear what you are saying about the threshold not having effectively been lowered. I find that difficult to understand. Under new section 26A(7) of the 1995 act, which was inserted by section 67 of the 2014 act,

“The duty to provide continuing care ceases if—

(a) the person leaves the accommodation of the person’s own volition,

(b) the accommodation ceases to be available, or

(c) the local authority considers that continuing to provide the care would significantly adversely affect the welfare of the person.”

There seems to be a range of options there. I heard what you said but, at the very least, the schedule that is attached to the draft order muddies the waters somewhat. It seems to talk about issues that, while they certainly concern wellbeing, are not strictly about welfare. Issues that are covered in the schedule include

“The eligible person’s future plans for study, training or work”

and

“The eligible person’s general health (including any mental health needs)”.

To my mind, those factors concern wellbeing rather than welfare. Aberlour, Barnardo’s and Who Cares? state in their briefing:

“The Order should in fact make very clear that the threshold for removing a care leaver from a placement that they want to stay in must be, for example that their health and emotional and mental welfare is being significantly adversely affected; not simply that they have health and emotional and mental wellbeing issues that are not being met.”

I look forward to the work that is being done to clarify that. At the very least, the schedule has muddled the waters.

Turning to the—

The Convener: I am sorry, but I will let the minister respond. You have covered a lot of stuff already. I will bring you back in later, but let us hear from the minister now.

Fiona McLeod: In my opening remarks, I tracked us back through all the different stages of legislation. This concerns the phrase “significantly adversely affect”, and that has not changed. That goes through absolutely everything. Whenever any decision comes to be made, it has to show that staying in care has significantly adversely affected the young person. I cannot think of many situations where that would be the case, but that

phrase runs through to today from back when it was first used. The proposed measures set out to ensure that that provision is always there.

Liam McArthur: That is a helpful clarification. What you are able to put on the record today, in addition to the papers before us, will be helpful, as a combination, in interpreting the legislation.

However, I think that there was a problem in how the draft order was presented, which gave rise to concerns that we were seeing a dilution; that we were not dealing with situations in which, for example, there might be a manipulative relationship between the eligible person and whoever was providing the care; and that we needed local authorities to have the power to intervene. What seemed to be being created as a result of the draft order was less than that. Given the advances in the continuation of care that are being delivered through the 2014 act, the perverse incentive on local authorities potentially to exploit that gave rise to legitimate concern.

I turn to the—

The Convener: I am sorry but, before you move on, other members want to comment on this specific point.

Liam McArthur: Are we bundling it all together? Right—that is fine.

The Convener: I will come back to you, but others wish to comment on the specific point that you raised.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Thank you, convener—my question is very much on that specific point. When the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill was going through the Parliament, we debated in great detail the definitions of the terms “welfare” and “wellbeing”. At the time, some witnesses presented a case to us that it was very much easier to define welfare, because it is embedded in a lot of other legislation. Wellbeing was slightly less well defined.

I agree entirely with Mr McArthur’s point that, if we do not have a specific definition of wellbeing, a misinterpretation of that is very easy. The genuine concern that has been given to us is that, because of the slightly amorphous definition, local authorities are not entirely sure what they are doing and might use that as an excuse not to provide the care that everybody believes was intended. Do you accept that defining welfare and wellbeing is a problem that has got the Scottish Government into difficulty?

10:30

Fiona McLeod: I have two responses to that. Can we look at welfare and wellbeing under getting it right for every child, which the legislation

embeds? Local authorities and all of us have to think about everything that we are doing under that.

We are working on non-statutory guidance to go with the instruments, and it will be absolutely clear in the guidance what is meant by the difference, if there is a difference, between welfare and wellbeing.

Liz Smith: Forgive me, minister, but there is a difference between guidance and the statutory responsibilities. The concern is that the local authorities are obviously interested in what they can do on a statutory basis, and they are up against significant financial difficulties. The real concern that has quite properly been raised by the continuing care coalition is that, unless the definitions are tight, it is too easy for local authorities to slip out of their responsibilities. I think that that is the main issue.

Fiona McLeod: Okay. I take us back to their statutory responsibility. They can remove a child from care only if continuing in care would "significantly adversely affect" the young person. That is the statutory position that is tracked through all the legislation that I have mentioned. There will be guidance to ensure that local authorities understand what we mean by wellbeing. That is all within the context of GIRFEC.

The Convener: I want to follow that up, as the issue is clearly a concern of the committee and it has been raised with us by the continuing care coalition. I am sure that those of us who were on the committee remember in great detail the discussions that we had.

Section 26A(6) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 says:

"A local authority's duty to provide continuing care lasts, subject to subsection (7) below".

Subsection (7) says:

"The duty to provide continuing care ceases if".

Paragraphs (a), (b) and (c) follow. We have just been talking about paragraph (c), which says:

"the local authority considers that continuing to provide the care would significantly adversely affect the welfare of the person."

I think that we all thought that we understood what that meant when we passed the legislation that inserted that into the 1995 act. The concern is not what the act says, but the interpretation of it.

Can you give us a real-life example of what that means? I think that our concern—I do not want to speak for other members of the committee—is whether it would be possible for a young person to be removed from a continuing care placement on the basis of an interpretation by, for example, a

local authority of section 26A(7)(c) of the 1995 act in particular, and what

"significantly adversely affect the welfare"

actually means.

Fiona McLeod: You need to turn to the schedule to the Continuing Care (Scotland) Order 2015, on

"Matters to be considered in the welfare assessment".

We are talking about the young person's

"emotional state, day to day activities, personal safety".

It is all there in the schedule at the end of that order.

The Convener: Can you point to exactly where in the schedule you are talking about? Are you referring to all of it?

Fiona McLeod: Yes. The schedule refers to

"1. The eligible person's emotional state...

2. The ... person's family relationships...

3. ...general health...

4. ...schooling...

5. ...future plans...

6. ...accommodation...

7. ...sources of income".

The Convener: I am trying to understand the relationship between that schedule and the act, minister. Those are the matters to be considered in a welfare assessment in the schedule to the order. Is that for entrants into care?

Fiona McLeod: No. They are

"Matters to be considered in the welfare assessment".

The Convener: Does Liam McArthur want to come in on that?

Liam McArthur: I thought that I was being reassured there, but on the back of the convener's question, I am concerned anew about the matters that will be taken into consideration when a welfare assessment is being made. One of those matters is:

"The eligible person's future plans for study, training or work."

Everybody knows that teenagers go through a bit of a funk from time to time. Will a welfare assessment and the provision in section 26A(7)(c) of the 1995 act be triggered on the basis that a young person's

"future plans for study, training or work"

might not be all that local authority officials would have them aspire to? That is the real concern.

We understand and are clear about the provision in the 1995 act and I think that we

appreciated that secondary legislation would flow from that to detail the way in which the welfare assessment would be implemented, but at the very least—I return to my earlier point—there appears to be scope for a dilution of the assessment and the trigger for section 26A(7)(c) through the provisions in the schedule to the order.

As Ms Smith rightly pointed out, with local authorities being under some financial pressure, the last thing that we want to do is to create incentives for them to make a decision that could have long-term life-changing ramifications for the individuals whom we are trying to serve through the act.

Fiona McLeod: I am sorry, but what am I being asked?

The Convener: Sorry, minister. Liam, can you clarify that for the minister?

Liam McArthur: As I said, I thought that I was reassured earlier, given the statements about the provision in section 26A(7)(c) regarding a significant adverse effect on welfare. However, what the minister described has brought in the provisions that are set out in the schedule to the order, which include:

“The eligible person’s future plans for study, training or work ... The eligible person’s schooling, skills and experience”,

and a series of things that, frankly, look as though they are taking the threshold for intervention down to one of wellbeing rather than one of welfare.

Fiona McLeod: No, because it always goes back to whether care would “significantly adversely affect” the person. A young person would continue in care unless that would “significantly adversely affect” their welfare. That is the bottom line. In the schedule, we are trying to make that clear enough in language that a young person can understand, so that they can get involved in their welfare assessment.

Liam McArthur: As I said, the problem is that the order is secondary legislation that is intended to help and amplify, but which has ended up raising concerns because of the way in which it could be interpreted. That is the concern.

Siobhan McMahon: I agree with every comment that committee members have made, especially those about the timing of the order. We are being given a week, and if the order is not passed, people will not get what they require. Frankly, it is in poor taste to bring the order to the committee at this stage.

I think that the order dilutes the welfare assessment. The confusion arises from the fact

that no examples are given, so that what is meant, for example, by a young person’s

“future plans for study, training or work”

is open to interpretation. Is it just about going to college? Is it about the course that they take or how long they are at college? How detailed do their plans have to be? If each local authority interprets the provision in a different way, of course the wellbeing of the young person or child will be adversely affected.

At no point are we given any examples of what is meant or a clear framework. Liz Smith made the point that we cannot have that in guidelines that will come into force after 1 April. The order will come into effect—if the committee votes to pass it—on 1 April and will affect young people’s lives from that very day. However, guidelines will not be issued because the minister is still consulting on them.

That is unacceptable, and the confusion arises because there are no examples whatsoever to show what provisions 1 to 8 in the schedule mean. Provision 8 is:

“The eligible person’s knowledge of their rights and legal entitlements, any previous or current involvement in legal proceedings, including criminal proceedings as a victim, witness, or alleged perpetrator.”

I do not know what that means. Does it mean that they understand what court is or what legal responsibilities that entails? That is not clear to me, and I do not understand why that would be clear to a young person. You have said numerous times in your evidence that it is about the young person knowing their rights and responsibilities, but I do not think that that clears it up for us, never mind the young person.

Fiona McLeod: I do not think that legislation is the place to give examples. That is not how legislation works, but I shall turn to our legal officer for that. The examples will be worked through in the guidelines, which everyone is involved in working on. Off the top of my head, I think that I am right in saying that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, individual local authorities, young people themselves and the Care Inspectorate are all involved in working on those guidelines. Mr McGlashan can say more about what we can and cannot put in legislation.

Graham McGlashan (Scottish Government): I can clarify the minister’s points about the matters in the schedule. They are quite similar to existing 2003 regulations related to aftercare and they are part of the picture that forms the welfare assessment. Article 7 of the order provides that the local authority must

“seek and have regard to the views of the eligible person”

and that it may also seek the views of other people, including

“the parents of the eligible person”,

and those who have

“parental responsibilities for an eligible person”,

as well as education professionals and the young person’s carer.

The matters in the schedule are part of the general picture that is built up around the young person so that the local authority can assess whether the high thresholds that are set down in the 2014 act are met or not. It is all part of an assessment process to allow the local authority to consider whether providing continuing care or continuing to provide it will significantly adversely affect the young person.

Siobhan McMahon: We understand that. Our concern is about what is put in the order. I accept that you cannot put everything in legislation, but as you are still working on the guidelines and you wish the order to be passed so that it can be in effect next Wednesday, that is a real concern for all of us around this table.

Fiona McLeod: Having explained the order-making powers, and given the fact that we are going to set up the expert working groups, I am confident that that is the right thing to do. Once we put the orders into practice, if there is any suggestion that they are not working in the way that I think they will work, I have the power to review an order and to bring back amendments to the committee. I give you the commitment that I will do that if it is necessary. However, I am convinced that what we are looking at today is the right thing to do.

The Convener: That is helpful. Before I bring in Liz Smith, I would like to clarify one thing. You mentioned that you were currently consulting on guidelines. Which guidelines are you consulting on and who are you consulting?

Fiona McLeod: We are consulting on guidelines for both the orders that are before us today. I mentioned some of the people we are consulting, off the top of my head, but I turn to my officials to ensure that I have got the list of consultees right.

Carolyn Younie (Scottish Government): There is non-statutory guidance on the aftercare order and the continuing care order. At the moment, they are two separate documents, but they are closely linked. They are going through an active consultation, not in the way that the statutory guidance on corporate parenting did, which was online for responses. We are doing it as a live, iterative drafting process. It is much

more important for us to get the guidance right, and I accept that it will not be in place on 1 April.

The Convener: I was asking who you were consulting.

Carolyn Younie: I am sorry. We are consulting the sector and the service providers. We have had a series of events, and we have another series of events planned, to bring in local authorities, COSLA and the Care Inspectorate, as the minister mentioned. We also have a series of events for young people and care leavers. If they have not already been issued, invitations are due to be issued for events in May, including the Scottish throughcare and aftercare forum. Who Cares? Scotland is a key contact.

The Convener: Now I am slightly concerned. Let me clarify this. The minister said that you were currently carrying out consultation on non-statutory guidelines. I just asked you who you are currently consulting and, right at the very end of your answer, you said that you will be inviting—in the future tense—members of the continuing care coalition, which has been involved in the bill all the way through, including very active members such as Barnardo’s. Are you saying that you have met and have been consulting Barnardo’s and the other members of the coalition or that you intend to do that in the future?

10:45

Carolyn Younie: It is a combination of both. We have not met the members formally around a table to discuss all aspects of the guidance, but we have received quite a lot of feedback on the content of the guidance as part of the consultation on the draft instruments. Therefore we have used the evidence—

The Convener: Sorry. The draft instrument is one consultation; the consultation on non-statutory guidelines is something else. I am not trying to be difficult, but I am trying to make sure that we are all clear about this. Have the members of the continuing care coalition been involved in the consultation on non-statutory guidelines that was mentioned by the minister?

Carolyn Younie: No, not yet.

The Convener: They have not been involved.

Carolyn Younie: They have not seen the document, no. It is an on-going consultation.

The Convener: I am sorry, but that opens up more questions.

Fiona McLeod: We should perhaps put it on the record that one of the groups that we have consulted is the centre for excellence for looked after children in Scotland.

Carolyn Younie: CELCIS is a crucial part of drafting the guidance. In fact I am meeting it this afternoon to go through both documents.

The Convener: When did the consultation start, when does it end and at what point do the coalition members get involved in it?

Carolyn Younie: The consultation has been ongoing since last autumn. It has not been a formal consultation because it is on guidance that is non-statutory—both sets of guidance are non-statutory. We have been doing them much more as an iterative development process because, particularly on continuing care, we were effectively starting with a blank canvas and building on existing processes for aftercare.

The Convener: The other part of my question was, when does it conclude and when do they get involved?

Carolyn Younie: We would like it to be concluded in April so that we can publish the papers, but it is more important for us to make sure, with the group that we are talking to, that the guidance is absolutely perfect.

Fiona McLeod: At this stage, I am quite happy to be able to say to the committee that I will make sure that all the relevant bodies are brought in within the next few weeks and that we sit down and work on this with urgency.

The Convener: I very much welcome what you have just said, but I am genuinely now concerned that what I have just heard is that a consultation on non-statutory guidelines that was started in the autumn is due to finish in April, which is about a week away—even if it is the end of April, that is only a month away—and the continuing care coalition, which has been heavily involved in the committee's work and in the process of the bill, has not yet been spoken to as part of the consultation.

Fiona McLeod: I am more—

The Convener: Can you understand the concern that we have?

Fiona McLeod: Yes, absolutely, convener, and I reiterate that I will leave here and make something happen.

The Convener: Thank you very much.

Liz Smith: To set it in context, there is nobody in the room who is not aware of the crucial need to ensure that we are doing the best for the young people and the carers involved—that goes without saying. I do not think that anybody in any way has a problem with the intentions of the 2014 act—let me be clear about that.

Where I think that there is a significant problem, which has been amplified this morning, is that,

although the definition of welfare is an easier one to pick up, because it has a long-established definition in other legislation, the definition of wellbeing is not nearly so easy. The schedule, which intimates some of the matters to be considered in welfare assessments, is woolly. It does not give the specific guidance that is required to make sure that local authorities and any other bodies involved understand what the interpretation is. That is the point that the convener was making earlier. There is an interpretation issue here.

The questioning over the past few minutes has amplified the fact that the consultation process has been, at best, rather spasmodic. You are asking the committee this morning to vote on something on which complete information is not available. That is quite a serious issue.

Fiona McLeod: I must emphasise that I am confident that the two orders do what they say they do. I am absolutely certain that they go ahead on 1 April. I am certain that, for instance, the “significantly adversely affects” condition runs through everything that we do, which means that, as of 1 April, local authorities cannot suddenly have a different way of looking at whether a child should continue in care, because their consideration must be about whether something would significantly adversely affect the young person. I am confident that that will happen and that these are the right things to do on 1 April, but I am also happy to make a commitment to the committee that, when I go away from here today, I will speed things up by bringing everybody together to ensure that the guidelines are understandable to everybody.

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): Given the previous question and regardless of the commitment that you have given us, which is welcome, the fact is that something is going to be put together quickly. How are you going to ensure that there is consistent application of the guidance across all local authorities? What happens if there is not?

Fiona McLeod: There has to be consistent application of the orders, because they are legal orders. The statute tracks back through different acts—the 2014 act, the 1995 act and so on—and regulations. The orders that we are discussing today do not exist in isolation; they grow out of previous legislation, guidelines and guidance. There should be consistent application, because that is what the law is. What I am saying today is that we will ensure that the guidelines make clear what that means.

Chic Brodie: I welcome that and I accept that there should be consistent application of the orders. Given your commitment today, which, as I said, is welcome—

Fiona McLeod: Can I just pick up on one point? You suggested that my commitment today will mean that we will put something together quickly. As the official said, we have been working on the issue for many months. It is not about putting something together quickly; it is about ensuring quickly that everything that we are working on comes together in one place.

Chic Brodie: Perhaps I misunderstood. I know that you have been working on it, but we are talking about 10 days—no, not even 10 days; eight days. You have talked to the coalition for continuing care. Are the guidelines explicit enough to ensure that local authorities will clearly understand what is expected of them?

Fiona McLeod: I do not think that I said that I could do that within eight days; I said that I will ensure that everything that we have been working on comes together and that everybody who needs to be involved is involved.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am grateful to my colleague Liz Smith, because she sat on the committee when the evidence was being heard and I came on the committee after that. However, I have been around this place for quite a long time and I am sitting here with a heavy heart. I feel that, as Liam McArthur said, we are having a gun put to our head today. I do not feel confident about taking this forward. I had hoped that we would get clarity today. However, having listened carefully to all the questions and, more importantly, the answers, instead of clarity, I have got more confusion.

In relation to the continuing care order, the Government tells us that it has consulted COSLA, all the local authorities, the Aberlour Child Care Trust, Barnardo's, Who Cares? Scotland and so on. However, at 9.12 this morning, we received a letter from the continuing care coalition—representatives of two of its members, Aberlour and Barnardo's, are in the audience today—saying that it is still concerned about the matter. It is concerned, and we have no opportunity to go back to its members and say that we know that they have not been asked for their opinions or consulted. I am sorry convener, but I am uncomfortable about that.

The legislation might be good, but the implementation is rubbish. I point out that it has taken a year—a whole 12 months—for us to get into this muddle and confusion. We are told that the minister is going to go away and talk to people. Well, that is great, because not a lot of that has gone on in the past year. We are going to get more meetings and more guidelines. People remain concerned. They are asking for secondary legislation and are submitting papers at 10 past 9 in the morning.

I am sorry, but I want to put this on the record. I have put legislation through this Parliament and this is cross-party—this is not party political. My colleague Liz Smith and I support every single piece of this legislation. However, what we have seen this morning is poor by all standards and I wanted clarity. I have an open mind on this and I want to be supportive, but I want the third sector, which cares about this, to have a voice and it does not have a voice. I put it on the record that I will probably abstain. It is the best that I can do. Whatever happens, the majority in this committee is the majority but, hand on heart, this is not a good morning for legislation.

Fiona McLeod: Ms Scanlon is saying that we have not involved the third sector, but we have. We consulted on the schedule to the order, "Matters to be considered in the welfare assessment", and the members of the continuing care coalition were part of that consultation.

The Convener: Thank you. That was kicked off by Liam McArthur's question about the significantly adverse impact on welfare to which the act refers. I interrupted Liam at that point, but I know that he has other points that he wishes to make.

Liam McArthur: I will move on to the aftercare order. There are some similarities with the points that a number of colleagues have made about the continuing care order in that the aftercare order, which radically improves provision for those going through the care system—which all members have confirmed their unswerving commitment towards—could create perverse incentives for local authorities.

For those of us who considered the bill, the concern then in relation to aftercare was that when we pick a point in time—the 16th birthday in this instance—we create the potential for a cliff edge. I think that that was acknowledged by the minister in the exchanges with us. At the time, the coalition illustrated that by saying that, if we were not careful, we could have individuals who had been in the care system for 15 and a half years going out of the care system and not being eligible for aftercare simply because they were not in care on their 16th birthday. However, as we all know, the support that individuals need waxes and wanes. That is why the provisions were seen as so important. At the same time, somebody who found themselves going into care three months ahead of their 16th birthday, for example, would be eligible under the act for significant aftercare up to their 26th birthday.

There was a recognition that there was a problem to resolve, but it was a problem that could not be resolved in the act; it had to be resolved in the orders. I note that the policy note that comes with the order suggests that

"in light of consultation responses, that draft provision, which would have extended eligibility for aftercare support to a further category of formerly looked after young people, is not being taken forward at this point in time until further evidence is gathered from the sector to ensure its deliverability."

I do not think that any of us wants to put in place something that is not deliverable. It may make us feel good in the short term, but over the medium term and longer term, it is in no one's interests. What I am struggling with in this order—which looks very different from the initial order that was consulted on, which very much reflected the spirit as well as the letter of what we passed in the 2014 act—is that there does not even seem to be an intimation of direction of travel.

The coalition of Aberlour, Barnardo's, and Who Cares? Scotland has even suggested the idea of tapering, such that we build it back from the 16th birthday to start off with those who are 15, 14, 13, 12 or 11. In that way, over time, we would allow the new provisions, which are, as I think everybody would expect, a bit of a radical departure from what was there before, to settle down.

However, without even any sign of that tapering—although I know that assurances have been given in the exchange of letters with the coalition about the work that will be done over the coming months—it would have been more helpful had there been a signal in the order that at least the Government was moving in that direction, rather than what appears to be the case, which is that it has been left in the "too difficult" box. I am sure that you will appreciate the position that that puts the committee in.

11:00

Like others, including Mary Scanlon, I am hugely supportive of the 2014 act; indeed, one of the committee's crowning achievements is the way in which we worked with stakeholders and the Government to deliver something that will make a massive improvement for some of the most vulnerable people in our society. However, I am concerned that, at the point of implementation, the Government seems to be stumbling in its approach. I cannot in all good conscience vote for this order; I certainly will not stop it coming into being, because you have articulated very well the consequences of that happening. We therefore propose to abstain on it, but again I put on record my concern about what we have been presented with and how things have happened. We have managed to snatch from a victory of the legislative process if not a defeat then something that taints the sense of achievement that we all felt.

Fiona McLeod: I hope that we can come out of this not feeling like that. Even though I was not

involved in it, I, like you and the rest of the committee, thought that the 2014 act was a fantastic piece of legislation. What it does now and what it gives us the ability to do in future for young people, especially care-experienced young people, is phenomenal, and I hope that we can move beyond this situation.

I have already quoted from the *Official Report* of the evidence that the minister gave to the committee. She made it absolutely clear that we would look at extending aftercare and continuing care to "further cohorts" of young people, but over an extended period of time. This morning, I have given the commitment that the expert working group will start meeting in April to look at and work on this issue. The instruments before the committee will extend continuing care and aftercare perhaps to the age of 26, if the young person needs it, and we are also extending provision backwards to 11 to 16-year-olds who have been but who are no longer in care on their 16th birthday. We are acting on the responses to our consultation that we received from stakeholders, providers and, indeed, everyone else, who, like you, were asking, "How do we approach this?" I have made the commitment that the expert working group will meet in April and begin a mapping exercise that will involve everyone. There is nothing worse than promising to do something and not delivering it, so we have to get this right.

Liam McArthur: I appreciate that and I think that the order's original draft might have been an ask too far in terms of deliverability. Indeed, the minister Aileen Campbell put on record that she was looking to do this over a certain period.

However, although I do not dispute that, I am concerned that this draft order does not appear to contain the beginnings of the step in that direction. You have set out a process whereby, I hope, we will reach the point at which that aim can be achieved, but, given that the committee is being left in the position of passing these orders or not, I seek a commitment on the timeframe for delivering that and on the committee having sight of that. If the idea is to put this in place, we will, working back from that, need to see the text of that agreement in good time, instead of being told, "Well, it's now the end of the year, so things might lapse into the new year. There's no great difficulty with that." Frankly, there is difficulty with that and, although next year's election will not bring things entirely to a halt, it would be more than unfortunate if, given the position that we are in at the moment, we were to find ourselves scrambling around desperately, trying to sign off things that one would have hoped to have been dealt with by now. In short, minister, it would be useful to get a commitment from you today on a timeframe for coming back to the committee with revised

wording for an order that gives us confidence that feet will be kept to the fire once this evidence session has ended.

Fiona McLeod: I am quite happy to do that. As minister, I will want to be involved in and kept up to date on all the work that the expert working group is carrying out. If the committee has room in its timetable, I am more than happy to make a commitment to come back fairly regularly to update the committee on where we are and how things are going.

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Commencement No 1 and Transitory Provisions) Order 2014, which is already on the statute book, will allow the minister to lay orders when we have worked out exactly how implementation is feasible, practical and doable to everybody's satisfaction.

Liam McArthur: Indeed. I do not doubt that there will be people who resist implementation, but I am concerned that some will argue that it is still too difficult and always will be. However, the policy intent of the 2014 act needs to be honoured and, therefore, people who raise those objections need to recognise at some point that the Parliament's will was not only to pass the act but to ensure that its implementation was in keeping with the letter and spirit of the act.

Fiona McLeod: The spirit of the act is that the expert working group will get everybody round the table working together so that we all come to an agreement.

The Convener: What is the timeframe for laying additional orders to extend eligibility? When do we expect to see them?

Fiona McLeod: The expert working group will convene in April. We have to go through a huge mapping exercise, but I am happy to say that, if everything works out, Aileen Campbell or I will be able to come and talk to you about it by the end of the year.

The Convener: So the intention is to lay the orders by the end of the calendar year.

Fiona McLeod: It would not be right for me to say that before the expert working group has started the mapping exercise but, under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Commencement No 1 and Transitory Provisions) Order 2014, we can lay the orders whenever we are able to do so.

The Convener: However, the end of the year is your hope.

Fiona McLeod: Yes, I hope so.

Liz Smith: When we debated the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, COSLA expressed concerns about whether sufficient funding and

resources were in place to allow implementation of the aftercare policy. Will the Scottish Government give a commitment that the resources are in place?

Fiona McLeod: We are just at the beginning of the process with the expert working group, so we need to map and work out the requirement. I think that about 900 young people would be eligible for aftercare, but the question is how many will take it up. That will be part of the mapping exercise to ensure that finance is available.

Liz Smith: At what stage might we get a commitment on that?

Fiona McLeod: As soon as we know the figures and I am able to sit down and work out the requirement.

The Convener: I will take other questions but I want to wrap the discussion up.

Liam McArthur: I have a question that arises from the answers that the convener got about the timeframe. I do not doubt your commitment, minister. I think that part of the problem is that we have had a change of minister between the passage of the 2014 act and the laying of the implementing orders.

Any working group will have a set framework for what it is expected to deliver. I would be more comfortable if we could get something more than just a hope that the orders will be in place by the end of the year. We all know that, once we get into 2016, with an election coming, minds will start to get focus on other things.

The working group needs to begin its deliberations in the knowledge that a set of orders is expected by the end of the calendar year, and, by the end of the year, orders need to be presented to Parliament that command the group's agreement. If the timeframe is remotely vague going into the process, sure as eggs is eggs, somebody will find a way of running down the clock if they believe that it is too difficult to implement the policy.

Fiona McLeod: The expert working group will begin its work in April. I will set it a deadline of reporting to me timeously, and definitely by the end of the calendar year. I commit myself to keeping in touch with it regularly and bringing updates to the committee as and when the committee requires.

The Convener: I thank you for your time on the matter, minister. You will understand why we have spent so much time on it, given the background. I also thank you for your offer to come back to the committee and provide us with regular updates. On behalf of the committee, I invite you to return to the committee before the end of April to update us on the progress of the guidance.

Mary Scanlon: Hear, hear.

The Convener: I have concerns about that progress and I am sure that other members do, too. If you do not mind, I think that it would be appropriate for you to come back before the end of April to discuss the guidance.

Fiona McLeod: I am happy to do that.

The Convener: Thank you.

We move to agenda item 5, which is the formal debate on the two affirmative instruments that we have just discussed. I invite the minister to speak to and move motion S4M-12540, on the draft Continuing Care (Scotland) Order 2015.

Motion moved,

That the Education and Culture Committee recommends that the Continuing Care (Scotland) Order 2015 [draft] be approved.—[*Fiona McLeod.*]

The Convener: I do not want to go back over what we have just covered but, if anyone wants to make a very short comment, I am happy to take it.

Liam McArthur: I simply want to say that we all felt genuinely proud of the aspect of the 2014 act that we are discussing, because of the way in which it came about. It was prompted by an award-winning campaign by the continuing care coalition. I hope that we can still achieve what all of us hoped we could achieve through the legislation.

I hope, too, that the process has been a lesson to the minister and her officials about the way in which they engage with the committee. We understand the deadlines to which they are working in relation to commencement orders, but the assumption that we will simply vote things through because we are right up against a deadline has not been helpful to the committee's relationship with the Scottish Government.

I fully appreciate the position that we are in. I will not be able to support the orders, but nor do I wish them to fall.

Mary Scanlon: I just want to put on record that my party and I are supportive of the 2014 act. I do not wish to repeat what I said previously, but I am disappointed with the lack of clarity that we have received today. The phrase "kicking into the long grass" comes to mind, and I do not like that. The phrase "could do better" also comes to mind. Doing something by the end of the year is not good enough. The Government has already had 12 months, and it had the years of consulting, preparing for and looking forward to the legislation. We are now a few years down the line, but we still have another nine months to wait.

I thank the convener for suggesting that the minister should come back to the committee by

the end of April, which I support. I just wanted to explain why I will abstain on the motions. That is not in any way an illustration that I do not favour the legislation. My party is supportive of it. It is only because of the lack of clarity in the information that we have received today that I will abstain on behalf of my party.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): To follow on from what Mary Scanlon and Liam McArthur have said, the 2014 act is an important part of the work that the committee has done. I think that I am on record as saying that it is a perfect example of how committees can deal with and influence legislation. I can see that there is work that still needs to be done. I am happy with the idea that the minister will come back to the committee with information and will work with third sector groups.

The continuing care coalition has raised issues, but we have got to the stage at which, although it is not exactly ecstatic, it feels that it can work with the legislation. That is important, because we do not want to be in a situation in which we lose the important parts of the 2014 act. It is literally life-changing legislation. We have to ensure that we take on board everything that has happened, but we are where we are and we have to deal with the situation. We cannot lose the important parts of the legislation, and we need to bear that in mind in deciding how to go forward.

I will support the motions. I look forward to working with the minister and others to ensure that we make the legislation work, because that is the most important thing. We cannot often say that legislation will change people's lives to the extent that we are talking about, but that is exactly what the 2014 act will do, and we have to remember that.

The Convener: I will make a short comment. I thank members who have spoken under the previous agenda item and this one. The minister will understand the committee's concerns, given the work that we have done since 2011 on looked-after children, moving through our inquiries to our work on the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, which eventually became the 2014 act. As I am sure the minister understands, we treat the matter very seriously, as I am sure the Government does.

Obviously, we all have concerns, but I very much welcome the minister's commitment to do the work that still has to be done and to come back to the committee and keep us in the loop and engaged in the process.

I accept that, in a sense, the implications of not approving the orders are far greater than the implications of approving them. Therefore, I will vote in favour of the motions. However, I leave a caveat, in that I am concerned about the process

that we have undertaken and the position that we have been left in. I still have those concerns, although I fully accept the commitments that the minister has given and the necessity to approve the orders.

Minister, do you want to make any comments?

Fiona McLeod: Further to what was said earlier, I want to clarify that, in producing the secondary legislation that is before the committee today, we have consulted widely and taken into consideration views from stakeholders. That is why the instruments are in the shape that they are in.

The Convener: The question is, that motion S4M-12540 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Convener: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)

Abstentions

McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

The Convener: The result of the division is: For 5, Against 0, Abstentions 4.

Motion agreed to,

That the Education and Culture Committee recommends that the Continuing Care (Scotland) Order 2015 [draft] be approved.

The Convener: We now come to consideration of motion S4M-12541.

Motion moved,

That the Education and Culture Committee recommends that the Aftercare (Eligible Needs) (Scotland) Order 2015 [draft] be approved.—[*Fiona McLeod.*]

The Convener: The question is, that motion S4M-12541 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Convener: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)

Abstentions

McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

The Convener: The result of the division is: For 5, Against 0, Abstentions 4.

Motion agreed to.

The Convener: I thank the minister and her officials for their attendance.

Agenda item 6 is consideration of the Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2015, which is the negative instrument on which we took evidence at item 4. As members have no comments, does the committee agree to make no recommendation on the regulations?

Members indicated agreement.

11:17

Meeting suspended.

11:21

On resuming—

Educational Attainment

The Convener: Under item 7, we will continue our work on educational attainment, and discuss the third and private sectors' roles in improving attainment and achievement for all school pupils—in particular, for those whose attainment is at the lowest level.

I thank all those who have provided us with written submissions, which were very interesting.

I welcome to the committee Susan Quinn from the Educational Institute of Scotland; Angela Morgan from Includem; David Watt from the Institute of Directors; Allan Watt from the Prince's Trust Scotland; and Susan Hunter from YouthLink Scotland.

We have a reasonably big panel, so I hope that we can keep our questions and answers fairly brief. I apologise to panel members for keeping them waiting because the previous item overran. If they saw any of that, they will have perhaps caught a flavour of why they have been kept waiting a little bit longer than they expected.

We have about an hour. I will go straight to members' questions.

Mary Scanlon: I have permission from the convener to refer to Audit Scotland's report.

The Convener: No, you have not. [*Laughter.*]

Mary Scanlon: Yes, I do. We agreed that privately, and the report is mentioned in the committee papers.

The "School education" report, prepared by Audit Scotland, focuses on attainment. I am sure that all panel members are familiar with it. It says:

"Some schools have achieved better attainment results than their levels of deprivation would indicate, suggesting that the gap between the lowest and highest performing schools cannot be wholly attributed to different levels of deprivation."

We all know that attainment is linked to deprivation, but deprivation is not the only matter that affects attainment. What else affects it?

I have a second point, which is my main concern. The report says:

"there has been no independent evaluation of how much councils spend on education and what this delivers in terms of improved attainment and wider achievement".

We are about to spend another £100 million of taxpayers' money but, according to Audit Scotland, we do not know the link between spending and attainment. What is the panel's response to that?

The Convener: Who wants to kick off? If someone does not volunteer, I will pick one of you. [*Laughter.*]

Mary Scanlon: I could always move on to the next question.

Allan Watt (Prince's Trust Scotland): It was interesting to note that attainment is not always linked to deprivation. When I talk to young people through the Prince's Trust Scotland, what strikes me most is the lack of aspiration and hope. There is often a belief that if a person has missed out the first time round, the chance will not come back.

That is very much brought home when you meet, for example, a 24-year-old who has moved on to an apprenticeship through one of our programmes and who thought when they left school at 16 with no qualifications that that was it. For me, it is about an environment, whether school, home, college or wherever, that keeps saying to the young person, "You can progress. You can move on."

To answer Mary Scanlon's question, it is about having teachers, youth workers and organisations such as the Prince's Trust who are able to give people the desire to move on to the next level. We see that happening in all sorts of schools.

On the independent evaluation, it is obviously hard for me to comment on the specifics of the latest proposal as I have not looked at it in detail. However, we need to look at things in the round; it is about not just the education spend, but the wraparound support. That point was made in a number of the written submissions. We should look at the investment in young people in total. We could think about it sometimes as an investment, which would mean that we were investing in young people for a long-term future, although it will sometimes cost more money to get the right results.

Mary Scanlon: You say that it is not all about deprivation. The education budget is huge across the 32 councils and £100 million over three years could very easily be absorbed. We have no way of measuring the spend and relating it to attainment. It would be helpful, convener, if the panel members could give us some indication of where they feel the money would be best invested.

The Convener: Okay. I will let Allan Watt think about that for a second. Susan Quinn can give us the EIS's point of view.

Susan Quinn (Educational Institute of Scotland): From our point of view, the key is spending the money on long-term projects. As I am sure my colleagues here will agree, the difficulty is often that projects start and we see some improvement from them but then the spend

goes elsewhere or is prioritised elsewhere. That is one of the challenges that we face.

When I started teaching 20-something years ago, home-school link workers were key in areas of the city that I worked in. However, they were an easy target when it came to budget cuts in the 1980s and they were lost to the system. We are now beginning to consider that great improvements can be made through home-school links. The challenge is to maintain projects over an extended period of time rather than look for quick fixes.

On what else it is about if it is not all about deprivation, it is about how aspects of deprivation are addressed and raising both the aspirations of communities and those of young people in schools. If a young person cannot see a way out of the poverty in their community, then all angles of that deprivation must be considered. It is about all young people being able to access a wide range of opportunities and, as we heard in the previous debate, being able to target appropriate support for them rather than have a one-size-fits-all approach. Not every community will require to have particular projects in their area, but projects need to be able to be sustained beyond their areas.

On being able to track the spend on education against attainment, it is for treasuries and financial departments to consider how that might be done. However, like Allan Watt, I suggest that more than the education spend for a school is involved in raising attainment in the context of deprivation and the barriers that it creates.

11:30

Angela Morgan (Includem): I will build on what colleagues have already talked about. I can speak only from Includem's experience, which is of course partial. We have seen that each school that we work alongside is different. The difference is created mainly by the leadership of the school. We have found that the most successful approach has been to adapt our flexible service to fit with what the school has already created to recognise the barriers to attainment for their pupils.

One of the key areas has been in helping to address the barriers for the child, and it has been equally important to address the barriers for the parents in their role in supporting the child and communicating effectively with the school, which is often one of the areas that causes most difficulty for teachers. Through doing that, we are able to help the teachers to do the best job that they possibly can. The limits of their role are of course within the school day and the school environment.

Two different scenarios emerge. One is when it is known that there are problems at home,

perhaps because there has been an older sibling, although the school might have no control over how those problems are worked through. It is equally likely that we will be asked to work with the family and the child in cases where the staff know that there is something wrong but nobody has been able to get behind closed doors to find out what it is. Often, it is in cases of that sort that we have been able to make the most impact. We might find that the problems are not really to do with the child; they are often to do with the family. There could be mental health problems with the mum, for instance, or debt or a housing problem. Very commonly, there are core problems with family relationships and with how family members communicate with one another.

By addressing those issues, which are not education issues as such, we are able to stabilise things and we can help the child to re-engage and to attend. It can be as basic as ensuring that the child actually gets to school every day, at the right time, in clean clothes, hopefully having had some breakfast, and then supporting the parents with appropriate communication. That builds their confidence. Often, the parents have themselves had a very poor experience of education. They lack confidence and they are resistant, and that is communicated to the child, who does not get the support that they need in what is the most important aspect of their life.

David Watt (Institute of Directors): I have a number of perhaps disjointed thoughts. I welcome the points that have been made. There is a tendency in this country to say that we have an educational problem, so we should spend more money. That simply does not bring the result—it does not actually work. In a variety of places around the world, that does not actually happen.

I have recently listened at length to Graham Donaldson, the former senior chief inspector at Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education. There have been a lot of very sage words coming from him. I am sure that you have spoken to him, and I certainly recommend speaking to him on a number of matters.

To some extent, it is still true to say that what goes into school comes out of it. There is no question that, where we have managed to change that model, we should be following the examples of good practice.

Going back further, the work that Susan Deacon and others did on early years is still to be commended. There is no question but that that is the place to invest. Even we in the industry would say that. We recognise that that is a bit of a problem, because a number of young people in this generation are missing out, but early years is still the way to make the longer-term changes, and

it is the single-biggest determinant factor in whether or not somebody goes to university.

There is an issue around what we consider to be attainment. In my view, it should very much focus on positive outcomes; it should not be focused on qualifications. We should stop measuring schools on qualifications. On the question of positive outcomes for young people, education is about life and work, not qualifications—it is really not about that.

I very much agree—as I suppose I would, coming from the Institute of Directors—with the point that leadership is crucial. There are a lot of examples of good schools all across the UK. We are all aware that there are a lot of good examples in London. In every single one that I have seen identified, that I have any association with or that I have seen any coverage of, there has always been an erudite, focused headteacher who has driven that forward. That is an important point.

To go back to what Graham Donaldson discusses quite a lot, we tend to talk about class sizes and numbers of teachers. There is an awful lot of evidence to say that it is the quality of the teacher, not the quantity of teachers, that makes the difference—[*Interruption.*]

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): Sorry, convener.

The Convener: Could you put your phone off, please, Mr Beattie?

David Watt: My final point is that we need to focus our spending on what actually works. From reports such as “School education” we know some of the things that work. Let us focus on them. We fundamentally believe—I will probably repeat this several times—that we should not have the number of young people who leave schools without basic life skills that we do have. It is all our responsibility to do something about that. We will talk later about how we can do that.

Susan Hunter (YouthLink Scotland): YouthLink Scotland thinks that the education system goes beyond schools and includes learning that takes place in other settings, such as youth work.

Mary Scanlon asked what factors other than deprivation affected attainment, and colleagues mentioned leadership. The issue is about leadership’s ability to seek an opportunity. That opportunity may be for youth work or for business work. It is about doing things differently and being brave in our aspirations, so that young people can see that there is a different route for them to develop, and so that they can look at themselves as whole people.

We need to ensure that we consider young people as not just pupils but young people in all

aspects of their lives, wherever learning can take place. All those factors will contribute towards their attainment.

Mary Scanlon: I am pleased that David Watt mentioned the London challenge. The EIS is not impressed with the London challenge. It says:

“the London Challenge model ... must be treated with caution.”

It goes on to say that elements of the private and third sectors

“do not fit with the structures or values ... at the heart of ... Scottish Education”.

It also says:

“Any proposal for private sector involvement in Scottish Education must be very carefully evaluated.”

I am keen to hear your views on that. The First Minister seems to welcome many aspects of the London challenge.

The “School education” report says that

“some councils test pupils in P1, P3, P5, P7 and S2”

and that others test less frequently. However,

“At a council level, there is no consistent approach to tracking and monitoring the progress of pupils from P1 to S3.”

That is a concern. It is also a concern that

“only 0.2 per cent of P4 pupils and two per cent of P7 pupils”

are not working at their expected level in numeracy, which means that 98 per cent of P7 pupils are working at their expected level, when, two years later, in secondary 2, only 65 per cent are working at their expected level. What happens between primary and secondary schools to cause such a dip?

The Convener: Can I start with you, Susan Quinn?

Susan Quinn: Do you want me to answer all those questions? The EIS is not against any of the proposals in the London challenge, but, as with everything, we are cautious. The London challenge was a four-year project that focused on secondary pupils. It has now finished in London, and there has been significant spend to take it forward. When it was transported wholesale to other cities, it did not have the same impact.

We are cautious about bringing in wholesale to Scotland anything that was designed and worked in another particular setting, but aspects of such things are worth consideration. Last week we met the cabinet secretary to consider some of the things in the London challenge. We do not dismiss outright private sector involvement in the Scottish system; there are great examples of work that goes on in our schools. However, such work must

be managed by schools and the operations of local authorities. We do not want to dismiss things outright, but one size does not fit all and just because something worked in London does not mean that it will work if it is transported to a totally different area in Scotland, where we are looking at early intervention. It will not necessarily work if we just mirror what was in London. That is where our caution comes from.

Mary Scanlon: You say:

"The elements ... do not fit with the structures or values which are at the heart of the Scottish Education system."

Which elements do not fit with Scottish education?

Susan Quinn: The move to academies and free schools in the English system is one that we would find difficult as an option.

Mary Scanlon: I am talking about the private and third sector input.

Susan Quinn: That is the private and third sector input into academies and free schools. The consortiums of academies are funded and run by private companies, and there are options and difficulties around that in terms of what sits within the Scottish system. We have a system that allows a Scottish curriculum to be delivered at local level, so that it can meet the needs of the young people who are there.

There are difficulties around the tracking systems, as people say that there is no consistent approach. As far as I can see, some local authorities have taken account of the new proposals around assessment and moderation within the curriculum as it has been developed, and have moved away from considering attainment as simply the scores on the doors. That is where there are differences in how they track attainment in their local areas.

Some areas still have use of a standardised test. However, if that is the only aspect that they are using, I suggest that they are doing exactly what we do not want them to do, because they are setting out a system that looks at attainment only in narrow areas, without looking at the achievement of their schools or taking into account the wider options that show what the curriculum was designed to do.

David Watt: Everyone in this room is fiercely proud of Scottish education, but that does not mean that we should become myopic. We gave it to the world, but sometimes the world can teach us other lessons as well, and we should look at London and at other examples for options that we can use. There are already examples in Scotland of the private sector and the third sector creating significant opportunity in education and in supporting young people both within and outside school, and it is important to remember that.

However, we should look for evidence from other places. Sweden, for example, has a system that I would probably have advocated until I heard about its effects. It devolves full-scale management to the headteachers, and as a result Sweden has dropped in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development rankings from fifth to 20th over a 20-year period of doing that. We need to be cautious about what we adopt and do not adopt. Nevertheless, if there is evidence of other things that are going on, we should certainly be looking at it.

My final point is that we are fiercely enthusiastic about curriculum for excellence. I have some reservations, but as a general principle I think that it is fantastic. I support it so strongly because it has, I hope, turned secondary education away from teaching subjects and towards teaching young people. I hope that we will be able to develop young people through that, and that everybody, whatever their level of attainment, will improve as a result. There is a lot to be done to make that happen, but as a former teacher myself—it was a long time ago, I have to say—I know that we used to focus too much in secondary education on learning French as opposed to developing young people. We have moved away from that, and that is welcome. There will be positive outcomes, but we all need to keep focusing, and my plea to you is to keep looking at the evidence. My dogma would have been the Swedish model, as I said, but I now accept that that was probably not a good idea.

Angela Morgan: I want to pick up on an earlier point that David Watt made about investment in early years, which we absolutely support. The evidence also shows that it is essential to do early intervention at all stages, and we think that the transition between primary and secondary schools is one opportunity to focus on what is happening at home and to work with parents and children to prepare and gear them up for that major shift. That is one of the points at which vulnerable children and young people tend to fall off the edge, so it demonstrates that it is worth making that effort. An early intervention can be made at any point, both to improve individual outcomes and to prevent worse things from happening.

11:45

Mary Scanlon: We can make an early intervention only if we know that there is an issue that needs to be addressed. There is a need for continual assessment of children, starting from nursery. In fact, nurseries are doing good work on that, and they are probably better than other parts of the system, but they do not always get the support that they need. If we do not continually and consistently assess, we do not know where

there is a problem until the young people leave school.

It is all very well saying that we will put in measures, but the Public Audit Committee heard that many councils are buying expensive private tests from England and that there is no way to evaluate those or to make peer comparisons. My point is that, unless we know that there is a problem, we cannot address it. That is what I am looking for—it has to be the first step. We have to identify who needs support, such as a home-school link worker or whatever.

Susan Quinn: I am sorry, but you are incorrect to suggest that there is no assessment going on. There is continual—

Mary Scanlon: I read out the point that the assessment is inconsistent. That is the point.

Susan Quinn: No. Across local authorities, different systems are used for assessing attainment but, within every single establishment and classroom, there is continuous assessment. If you were to ask any teacher—

Mary Scanlon: There is no consistent approach—that is what I am reading in the Audit Scotland report.

Susan Quinn: That is about how local authorities are measuring.

Mary Scanlon: It is from P1 to S3.

The Convener: Mary—let Ms Quinn answer.

Susan Quinn: Every local authority has its own policy on that. In every classroom and early years establishment, a range of assessments go on. Every teacher would be able to tell you about any child who they felt was having difficulties.

The Audit Scotland report talks about the local authorities' approaches to measuring. They have always had a range of strategies. When we had national assessments, some local authorities spent thousands and thousands of pounds on standardised tests, because they were part of a toolkit for assessing everything. There is a range of ways of assessing what is needed and what is there. That is how schools know whether they need to look for other approaches. As David Watt rightly said, we use the third and private sectors in a range of ways.

It is sometimes difficult within an establishment to know what is available and what is appropriate in the area, but work can be done on that. Work is being done through the getting it right for every child approach to ensure that local solutions are available for children. However, schools have knowledge and understanding of each individual child and they know where early intervention is needed. They just need to know where they can access the solutions.

I should mention one of the pluses of working alongside the third sector, where schools know how to access it. Often, a family will engage positively with a third sector organisation because there is no threat of formality. Families worry about that. If we go through social work and say that we are going to use a third sector group, there will be resistance from the family because the social worker says that they have to do that. However, if through the partnership between the school and the home, there is a proposal to use the third sector, that is often received much more positively, because the family does not feel threatened by it.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): The panel members have touched on the issues of measuring achievement rather than attainment, and of taking into account young people's lives and the work experience and skills that they gain outside school and the education system. A lot of the evidence that we have heard points towards local authorities having difficulty in recognising those skills and the achievements of young people outside school. How can local authorities start to recognise that achievement? How likely is it that schools, employers, colleges and universities will start to add greater weight to that achievement when it comes to offering young people positions?

Susan Hunter: Thank you for asking that question. We are particularly interested in that, because many of our member organisations are part of the awards network, which is a forum for supporting achievement awards. Some awards are credit rated on to the Scottish credit and qualifications framework and others are not. As a sector, we are concerned that the insight benchmarking tool can cope only with awards that are SCQF credit rated. Things such as the Duke of Edinburgh's award and the highest award in scouting are not credit rated in that way, but they are recognised by business, employers and universities as having real currency as an indicator of young people's skills.

We are particularly interested in empowering young people to be able to articulate their skills in their learning so that they are their own best advocates. Whether young people undertake learning in the classroom or in youth work, we want them to understand what they have achieved and how they can translate for different audiences—such as an employer, their parent or their class teacher—what they have learned and what they can do.

Susan Quinn: That young person's voice is very much being developed in classrooms. It is a high priority in the curriculum for young people to be able to articulate what they are learning, and that is considered by the inspection teams when schools are inspected. They are now less interested in the bits of paper on which schools

say what they are doing and more interested in whether the young people can articulate—in exactly the same way, we hope, as their teachers can—what is going on, both within and outwith their classrooms, that is having an impact on their learning.

Susan Hunter is right. It is about finding ways of including those wider achievements within the insight benchmarking tool, for example, and giving them broader recognition. Recently, universities have begun to look for and give weight to not just the qualifications that young people get, such as highers and advanced highers, but the wider conversation of what they have achieved. Some work is beginning to happen there, but there is an awful lot to be done around the focus on qualifications.

There is also a lot to be done on how we promote wider achievement to the wider Scottish society. We can compare the high profile of the introduction and first year of the new qualifications with what the media were interested in during the 10-plus years of the introduction of the broad general education.

Allan Watt: Two weeks ago, we had 350 young people with us at Hampden at an event that we called welcome to your future. We had about 40 different employers and young people from the 100 or so XI clubs that we run in schools throughout Scotland. That event gave young people access to information about the jobs that are out there and what they will need to do them. Most of the employers were not starting from the point of requiring particular qualifications. They were looking for an attitude, and there was a certain range of experiences that they might want to see.

That approach helps young people to ask the right questions. At the moment, it is often just framed around people putting down their qualifications. We have all written a CV, thinking, “What sort of person am I?” and trying to capture that. We need to give people belief in themselves and the activities that they have undertaken with youth organisations such as the Prince’s Trust or in schools. If they can present that in a way that is attractive to employers, it is very helpful. However, they need to understand what employers are looking for, and that understanding will start to close the gap between people’s perception that they have no skills and nothing to offer and what employers are actually looking for.

It is unfair just to expect teachers or parents to know what the jobs are. The jobs of the future will be very different. One of the positive things about bringing together the third sector and groups of employers is that it shows people that there are choices and opportunities for them.

Colin Beattie: I want to expand on some of the points that have just been raised. Various submissions seem to indicate a discrepancy between what schools and parents see as valuable and what employers see as valuable. They suggest that schools, further education institutions and parents seem to value academic qualifications much more highly, while employers are looking for social skills, attitude and a much wider approach. How can that gap be bridged?

David Watt: I will make a few comments, some of which relate to the previous point.

First of all, it would be lovely if politicians and in particular the media did not focus on academic league tables as a way of rating schools. I suggest that we introduce a literacy league table to ensure that schools do not let young people leave until they can read, write and spell appropriately—well, perhaps not spell, but at least read. This is a serious matter. Employers genuinely tell me all the time that the issue is basic literacy. Most employers do not want or expect anyone, whether they come from school, college, university or wherever, to be ready to do the job, but they expect them to be ready to work. That is quite a different thing, and I will expand on that in a minute.

As I have said, this is all about positive destinations. Schools, like colleges and universities, should be made to record quite clearly over a period of time what young people’s destinations are to ensure that they can be tracked. Somewhat unbelievably—to me, too—I have been with the Institute of Directors for 12 years now, and in those 12 years, no one has ever knocked on my door and said, “I can’t find a graduate.” It has never happened. However, people have said, “I can’t find a mass spectrometry technician”, “I can’t find an apprentice engineer” or, indeed, “I can’t find engineers of any sort.” I could go on about the whole variety of trades and skills that people want. During the recession, we were particularly concerned about the construction trade, and there are still some challenges to face in that respect.

If I am honest, I think that we focus far too much in this country on going to university. It is not necessarily the be-all and end-all, and it is not necessarily the career for everybody. Many bright young people—indeed, many of the country’s best and most successful people—did not go to university at all or went later in life; I can think of Jim McColl and other such examples. We need to change some of our traditional ways of thinking. Education is not just about going to university; it is a lifelong experience that everyone can keep doing, and employers can help with it once people are employed with them.

I absolutely take your basic point: employers want someone who can literally read, write and count, who will get up in the morning and attend their workplace, and who understands what work is like. That is why the Wood commission report and other such reports are so important. At the moment, young people can leave school in Scotland having done a week of work experience. That is just madness. How does one week's experience teach them anything about anything? It also depends on where and how they get that work experience. There is a massive job for everyone, including us in the private sector, to engage with schools and perhaps colleges and universities and to change the model of education to engage young people, to ensure that they understand what work is all about and to open their eyes to the opportunities that are out there. Those opportunities are not all about academic achievement, but they are about achieving and doing things.

Finally—and, to be fair, I think that this is happening—schools need to realise that what matters is a pupil's personal record of achievement, not the number of qualifications that they have when they leave school. The questions that matter are: how many days have they been off school? Are they timeous? Do they turn up on time? Are they consistent? Are they enthusiastic about the things they do, even if they are not good at them? We want all those things in the people who work beside us. Kids do not need to be brain of Britain; what really counts is that they deliver consistently. Schools can and need to record that kind of achievement and attainment, not academic achievement.

Angela Morgan: I have said already that family relationship problems often lie at the root of many of the situations that we work with. Although every situation is different, family relationship issues and difficulties always come up, and I think that the features that are desirable to employers are the same features that help functional families stay together.

In effect, therefore, by working with families around their social skills, their communication abilities, the boundaries between parents and children and self-management—by which I mean not only the child but the parent—we can set a bit of a grounding around that one thing that the child or young person might believe that they are good at. That has to be the stepping stone; we need to find the talent or interest, whether it concerns sport, the arts or whatever, that allows them to get some praise and recognition.

12:00

From that, a virtuous circle can be built up. Unsurprisingly, certain children develop a

reputation in school for not being good. Teachers have other children in their classes to look after and the children who are presenting difficulties reinforce that view of them. We have found that, if we can break into that, there can be a real shift in relationships between children and their teachers, which means that teachers feel more confident about their skills when responding to the children with difficulties. We have found some interesting feedback around that in schools that we are working with.

I absolutely agree that it is essential that the outcomes need to be recognised as being far greater than attainment. The GIRFEC framework provides a fantastic opportunity for that, as does the use of the safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included—SHANARRI—indicators and the methodology around the wellbeing web, which helps a young person track their progress and see how well they have developed in important areas such as anger management. That lays the bedrock in terms of the personal skills that are required for living in communities, working in workplaces and, hopefully, going on to create functional families.

Susan Quinn: I will start by saying that schools focus on qualifications because, sadly, that is what they are measured on by pretty much everyone else. A whole lot of other things go on in schools that people do not hear about in the same way. Although we hear that business wants particular things, the work that is done in schools in that regard is not seen as being sexy by the media.

We certainly aspire to ensure that there is a balance in relation to formal qualifications. The historical formal qualifications are important because, as I said, that is what the school is measured on, but we need to move forward on the range of opportunities that our young people have. The developments around Scotland's young workforce provide us with a framework to engage in conversations about striking a balance between formal traditional academic qualifications and vocational qualifications. We do not want people to be in the position of having to make an either/or choice. Students should be able to come and go within the range that is available and have something that is tailored to them.

The education of wider society on what the new qualifications are about is also important. We still focus on spelling, handwriting and such things, but in modern times we have to ask where those skills sit in relation to everything else. When I was at school, they were 75 per cent of the priorities. Is that still the case or, given that other things are important now, is there a different balance to be struck?

Within that, we must consider the wider range of opportunities for formal academic qualifications

that young people are being offered. They can do life-skills maths, but we hear that it is not being given the same credibility as a traditional maths qualification.

There is some education to be done around the new aspects and the developing aspects of qualifications that need to be taken account of, because those are the qualifications that the young people whom we are discussing this morning will be engaging with.

Life-skills maths and literacy are about day-to-day life and are exactly what business is looking for, but we do not give them the same status as traditional maths and literacy. People are told, "Oh you've not got higher maths", when they might have something that is equivalent but with different content. The academic levels are the same, but we do not give them the same credence.

Colin Beattie: By extension, there is a division between employers' expectations and what parents and schools might be looking for. Are schools likely to have the infrastructure or time to deliver the non-academic skills that employers are looking for?

Susan Quinn: Schools do what they do within existing structures. That is why we work alongside third sector organisations and others to support that.

We have heard that class size is not the answer to everything, but the EIS argues that class size and the number of teachers makes a difference when engaging with smaller groups. Opportunities for that to happen are needed. Schools are timetabling and we hope that as the senior phase of curriculum for excellence is fully rolled out and the intended principles are seen, space can be provided in timetables to engage in wider achievement and the necessary wider life-skills projects.

At the moment, in lots of places there is just duplication of the old system of qualifications. As we move forward, the reflections group's recommendations on the qualifications and the work that is being done by the CFE management board should, if properly resourced, mean that time is freed up to do those things because we will be taking a different approach to qualifications.

Colin Beattie: In its evidence, Universities Scotland said that pupils from private schools are good at producing carefully crafted statements with high status and relevant content, whereas pupils from state schools seem to receive a lot less assistance in composing their statements and struggle to draw on suitable work and life experience. That comes back to what we were talking about earlier. Their statements also contain a lot of writing errors, I believe. How can schools

best present pupils' skills and abilities to employers, colleges and universities?

Allan Watt: We need to give young people access to opportunities so that they can see what the jobs might be. There are whole sectors that young people do not understand, including the ones that they think they understand—for example, retail and hospitality; we have all been to a shop, hotel or restaurant. They do not understand what the careers involve and how they can be structured, so they need to reflect what they have done at school, in their youth organisation or in other third sector organisations. That is one element.

Many schools and other environments could give so much more support; mentors who have been to the particular university and understand exactly what is required, for example. The Prince's Trust and other organisations have access to a large number of people who are willing to give up their time to support young people; with the assistance of schools, we can find ways of bringing that extra support into schools, especially when someone needs to make that university or job application. There are resources out there that we do not tap into as well as we could. The central point is that if we show young people the chances and opportunities, they will respond.

When I was with a group of young people last week, I asked them what would really motivate them. One thing that they said was that the alphabet of qualifications is very confusing. If you ask what they studied at school, they sometimes struggle to tell you what qualifications they got. Was it a standard grade or a national certificate, for example? They find that difficult to cope with.

The second thing that they talked about was headteachers: they said that it would be interesting if headteachers were performance-managed on the basis of how many pupils got jobs. [*Laughter.*] I would hate to put in another layer of performance measurement, but if young people feel that the school's leadership is genuinely interested in their long-term future, that will turn them on.

Chic Brodie: I will come back to the business of qualifications. I have said before that I abhor targets and that improved performance outcomes are the way to go. On achieving that, we mentioned earlier the role of parents and said that, for attainment, resources need to be invested in parent-school relationships. Those relationships are not good in general, are they? We know that there are children who need help, but what about the parent-school relationships?

Susan Quinn: That depends on the area and the parents. There are pockets of schools where—

Chic Brodie: Why does it just depend on the parents?

Susan Quinn: Sometimes it will depend on the parents' attitude to school. If they have had a bad experience of school and do not have a positive approach to school, they stay away and do not want to engage with the school. As I said, there are great opportunities for working with the third sector to build relationships between parents and schools. Schools work really hard to try to develop links with parents, but there is a range of difficulties.

To return to Colin Beattie's question, parental involvement with schools and their level of engagement with them is a factor in why private sector schools produce better outcomes. There is definitely a link with how much of that is done through the school and how much is done through work with the families.

There is a lot of work to be done on parent-school relationships, some of which will be generational in terms of parents who say "Ah dinna like school so Ah'm no gonnae go back tae the school" or who believe that parents get called to the school only if "the wean's in trouble." It is about breaking down those barriers. We see loads of opportunities for sharing and celebrating success, which gets parents into schools now and gives them a much more positive experience of them.

Chic Brodie: Does that not come back to the situation that we talked about in relation to qualifications? Parents who are interested are driven by qualifications and not by the wider societal outcome that we expect.

I will ask about the wider outcomes in terms of the role of YouthLink. At a meeting here with the Boys' Brigade I was surprised to find out how many members it has, which is also the case for the scouts and girl guides. Who drives that? How do we encourage parents to get involved in those types of organisations, which can have a wider outcome?

Susan Hunter: Many of the uniformed organisations' volunteers were participants in their programmes when they were young, which then evolved into their contributing their time to help other young people, so they have a better understanding of the wider skills, attributes and values that young people can develop beyond the school gates.

On Friday evening, I attended a ceremony for the Scottish Borders saltire inspire awards, which are about recognition of volunteering. A total of 18,000 hours of volunteering was undertaken by young people in the Scottish Borders. The audience included parents; it was really important for them to see not only the opportunities that their

children had participated in but those that other children had participated in and what is available outwith school. Some of that work is done in partnership with schools, which is equally important.

The Convener: I will bring in George Adam at this stage, because I know that there is a bit of an overlap between his question and what Chic Brodie asked about.

George Adam: Thank you, convener, and thank you, Mr Brodie, for nicking my question. *[Laughter.]*

I want to expand on the role of the third sector. We mentioned earlier that it is not just about what happens in school. The uniformed organisations—girl guides, scouts, the Girl's Brigade and the BB—have all done good work in the past, but things have now been repackaged and a lot of good work seems to be happening out there that is attainment based but which uses sport, drama and the arts as ways of getting to the harder-to-reach children. The third sector is doing that work, so what is the role for it in working with schools to try to get to the harder-to-reach children in order to ensure that we can get them on the right career paths?

12:15

Susan Hunter: Those opportunities require effective local partnerships among all the education providers—the schools, arts organisations and youth organisations—so that there is an understanding of the needs of the cohort of young people or of the community, and so that what the third sector offers responds to identified need. There is also a need to ensure that programmes are delivered in partnership, and that all the learning is recognised and valued by all the partners.

Susan Quinn's very first comment was that we need long-term funding to make such programmes and opportunities a success. For schools to commit to working in alternative ways, the funding must go beyond the financial year. In the first place, the school year is different from the financial year, so there may be a programme only for half of the school year. We also need to be able to timetable for the year ahead.

We know that there will be a cohort of young people who may benefit from an alternative curriculum or an expanded curriculum for excellence delivered by a partner organisation. There are conditions, which members can see in our written submission, around what it would take for such partnerships to be effective over the longer term.

Allan Watt: I heartily agree. I was struck by the description that was given by a council chief executive of his visit to one of our schools that run xl clubs, which is a Prince's Trust programme. The school makes space in the curriculum for when a pupil drops a subject, such as French, from which they are not seeing much benefit, and the xl club's programme is built into the curriculum in its place. The pupil will do community work, personal development and work experience. The chief executive visited two xl clubs. The one that he visited in the morning was chaotic—it was quite difficult for the teacher and the xl adviser. The people in the xl club that he visited in the afternoon performed brilliantly as a team, and there was a sense of cohesion, enjoyment and aspiration. The difference was that one was the year 1 club and the other was the year 2 club. That takes us back to the point that such programmes much be run consistently over a period and—most important—they must have proper follow-on.

Following the Wood commission, we are looking at how we take young people from some of the programmes into our employer-based programmes with Marks and Spencer or Arnold Clark, to give them job opportunities that they can grab. The danger is that unless we can keep them moving on the journey, people will drop through the cracks at some point and we might not see them again for three or four years; they might come to us from the job centre when they are 20.

We must have long-term commitments in school. We must also ensure that the next steps, when they are not along the traditional linear academic route, are thought through and that there are opportunities in the third and private sectors for young people to move on to.

Angela Morgan: On the behind-the-scenes work with parents, we are conscious not only of the importance of being effective when we are supporting parents to support their children into other opportunities; our aspiration must also be for a sustainable solution. That is why we might do separate work with the parents, away from their child, on their skills in supporting their child with homework, for example. Otherwise, if a service such as ours moves away from the home—that might not be visible because we are not as visible to the schools as services that are physically located in them—then all the work that has been done by the school alongside other partners can collapse quickly. We need a sustainable approach. The investment in the family and in the parents' skills supports a young person in the longer term, and, I would hope, supports any siblings following after.

Susan Quinn: There are two issues. The first is around schools' knowledge of what is out there,

which will depend in part on the local authority having a comprehensive list of what is available in its area. That sharing of information—that catalogue, if you like—of what is available allows schools to target, approach and build the opportunities into what they are planning for, and for them to look at that long term.

The other issue, especially in secondary schools, is about how to create time for such activity in the school day. As I said, part of that will happen with the move to the qualification stage and the three-year senior phase, which will give people more time to focus on everything. Instead of pupils doing their highs quickly in nine months or a year, they will do them over two years, which will allow them not only to get more in-depth knowledge and understanding of the subjects, but to engage in wider achievement programmes that will have different impacts on their life chances. There are different elements.

George Adam: I was interested to hear Susan Hunter's comments about working in partnership. Renfrewshire Council has its street stuff programme, which involves the local football club—St Mirren—the police and fire and rescue services and Engage Renfrewshire, which represents the third sector. The programme, which has been very successful with street football—it also has a bus with a gym and so on—is able to deal with a lot of hard-to-reach children that schools and everyone else find it difficult to engage with. That is because of the credibility that comes with the stripes of the St Mirren tracksuit—although I suppose that if the programme was in another area, it would have to be its local football team's tracksuit.

On partnership working, am I being too sensible and practical in thinking that there must be a way of getting all the groups together and taking the idea to the next level? I know that funding is available and that we already fund various initiatives, but can we not get all the organisations to work together and act as an access point to ensure that we reach the young people? A witness who gave evidence a couple of weeks ago told us about a boy whose school had found him difficult to engage with, but the minute they found out that he was a boxer and started dealing with him on those terms, they discovered that he was very disciplined and knew about health and nutrition and so on. In that way, they got him back on the right track.

Susan Hunter said that partnership working is extremely important. Is there no way we can take programmes such as street stuff, which are happening all over the country, and make them larger—or am I being far too sensible?

Susan Hunter: That approach could be taken, but I think that we have to respond to local and

even individual needs. On the example that George Adam highlighted, if you were to develop a boxing programme and put it into every local authority, that probably would not work. The point is that such things hook into and connect with each other and lead to a dialogue between a professional and a young person based on a specific interest. There is no shortage of creativity; whatever that hook is, it will be there.

Susan Quinn talked about a catalogue of offers. Quite often, though, the offer has not been created, so it is not in the catalogue. It is all about knowing the professionals who have something to offer young people in their community and creating something with them that is really going to make a difference.

As for funding of programmes, in the example that George Adam highlighted there has probably been no devolution of funding from the school resource to work with the young people in question. That funding will have come from external funders, from charitable sources, directly from the Scottish Government or from elsewhere. Although working in partnership with schools might be great, the challenge for the third sector is that it will have sought funding first and then chapped on the door of the school, saying that it has the money and a great idea that it would like to run with young people in the school or shared community. We need to consider the value of such offers and to look at them as preventative spending. Allan Watt talked about investing in young people; that is exactly what youth work does.

David Watt: First of all, as a Kilmarnock supporter, I have to say that I do not see the connection between St Mirren and football.

Speaking as someone whose background is in sport and recreation, I think that we could solve a lot of the problems that we are talking about if we put some of our health spending into schools between years 3 and 5, or years 4 and 6, and if we had voluntary activities. As for St Mirren—God bless them.

George Adam: Thank you. I am hurting enough this season.

David Watt: I do sympathise.

I am on the board of Scottish Sports Futures, which does a lot of good work across the country and, in fact, has a basketball programme that is similar to the programme that George Adam described. Cash for crime has also been really helpful. We need to think differently, and such an approach can make a significant difference outwith and within school. If young people are exposed to such schemes, the experience will stay with them for the rest of their lives. Sport can do that, but so can the arts, culture and other things; indeed, I am

sure that there are science clubs outside and inside schools that have received funding.

Liam McArthur: Just in case the wrong message goes out from the committee, we are talking about cashback for communities and not cash for crime—that would send out altogether the wrong message. [*Laughter.*] I was listening very hard and noticed that Susan Hunter did not answer the question as to whether George Adam was being sensible.

I will move on from the role of the third sector to ask about its status—in doing so, I may exploit the fact that the two Susans are sitting at opposite ends of the panel. There is a divergence of opinion in the written evidence that we have received about the youth work sector. For example, Youth Scotland states:

“What is becoming very clear to the Youth Work sector is the need for youth workers to be seen, in the spirit of curriculum for excellence, as equals amongst education providers.”

In contrast, Renfrewshire Council states:

“although the third and private sectors can, and do, play an important part in the joint effort to raise attainment/achievement, it is done so by complementing the excellent work of teachers.”

The council also makes the point that teachers are accountable for educational outcomes. Is there any likelihood of our seeing more parity of esteem between those in the youth sector and those in the teaching profession once the senior phase of curriculum for excellence is fully bedded down, or is that either not desirable or not practical to expect?

Susan Hunter: The workforce that delivers youth work is diverse and ranges from people who have masters-level qualifications to those who volunteer one hour a week in their local youth group. Through our partnership with the Standards Council for Community Learning and Development for Scotland, there is now a code of ethics for youth workers and professional registration on a voluntary basis. Compared with the situation in the teaching profession, that is still in its infancy, but it is about investing in those initiatives so that our workforce can feel empowered and be confident that it is of equal value in terms of contributing to the education and life of a young person.

The quote about youth workers or the third sector complementing others' work describes exactly what we want to be doing. We want to be adding value to the experiences that a young person has in their life. It is not about competition but about knowing that what youth work does has not only a monetary but a social value, and about ensuring that professionals, whether teachers, social workers or others, recognise that youth work has a place.

Liam McArthur: Is the answer then the point that Susan Quinn made about sustaining partnerships over time and parity of esteem coming from the fact that they are seen as genuine partnerships rather than something that is reached for on an ad hoc basis as resources allow?

Susan Quinn: Yes. Sustainable partnerships grow and strengthen. Just parachuting somebody into a school for an afternoon a week for six weeks because that is only what the funding allows and for them to then disappear from the life of the school creates a body of work that means that the impact of that person's work may be limited in the longer term. If we create sustainable partnerships, people begin to work together in ways that complement each other and build in best practice.

What we do not want is a situation whereby young people will engage with youth work colleagues but then go into a class and not engage with the teacher. It has to be a situation in which education professionals are able to work alongside other professionals rather than separately from them. Some of that is about sustaining projects. For example, sense over sectarianism projects in Glasgow have been going on for a number of years now, with the same workers going into schools on an annual basis and getting to know the young people who are coming through, who then have an expectation that those workers will continue to come. However, where the work is about quick hits by someone who then vanishes, there is nothing to be sustained. As I said, that kind of work can mean the school having a workload issue that outweighs any positives that might occur. It is about sustaining projects.

Liam McArthur: To go back to the line of questioning pursued by others, presumably there is another benefit, which is that it is easier for the private sector to recognise the wider attainment that is being achieved if it can see what the partnership is delivering over a period.

12:30

David Watt: That is true. The point was well made earlier. Some kids struggle to write their attainment stories. What they do outside school, and perhaps in projects in school with others, is important, and it is important to articulate that. In the past year in Scotland, we have seen the impact of volunteering at a very high level. That profile is quite good—I hope that that legacy lasts and that young people understand how important it is to do things like that. A massive international worldwide project depended on the volunteers.

Life depends a bit on volunteer effort. If you show a bit of extra effort, and can reflect it in your personal statements, employers buy into that. I am

involved in reserve forces. It is the same type of thing. You are a special person if you take that commitment on as well as your day job. It is the same for young people. They all have challenging lives through puberty but if they volunteer, and do other things, it is recognised by employers. It distinguishes you from the crowd and makes you much more employable.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): What I have got from the panel is that there has to be a move away from a complete focus on academic qualifications. What should the role of the private sector be in respect of vocational education in our schools? How would that help to address the low level of school leaver employment, given that only 27 per cent of employers take on a young person straight from school and only 13 per cent of employers take on an apprentice?

David Watt: Those figures reflect a number of issues, one of which is that there is still not enough engagement by the private sector in many aspects of Scottish civic life, one of which is education. We need significant engagement of employers at a local level in all schools, colleges and universities.

It is a two-way thing. Employees—ideally younger employees—can go into schools and talk about work experience, about what work is really like and about what they do. The point was well made earlier about the complexities of work, particularly in relation to technology, the changing patterns of work and the fact that most of us will not have a career for life. There are massive changes, which are quite complex for all of us to understand, and certainly for young people to understand before they get into the workplace. There is need to educate young people, if you like.

There is also a need to educate the employers, which is why work placements are fantastic. At a higher age, an astonishing number of young people do an engineering placement at college or university and end up working in that factory. Employers do not see enough of how good young people are. They tend to believe some of the stuff they read in the media, which tends to be pretty negative about young people. There is bit of that going on.

There are challenges out there with some youngsters. We talked earlier about employability, job readiness and understanding workplaces. I heard about a young person falling asleep during a job interview, which is not the way to get a job. There is something fundamentally wrong at the moment. We need to improve the exchange. It is interesting to look through the Government's response to the Wood commission. We have this fantastic group about implementing curriculum for excellence, but no one from the private sector is

represented on it. I know that it is largely happening in schools, but what about work placements? Who engages with that? There is no connection.

I could go through hordes of committees that we have in Scotland in a variety of sectors. Private sector employers are not engaged. They are largely not engaged in schools and we expect them to know about young people. Not all employers have children, or they might have older children. We need to get that engagement. If we did that both ways—by getting employers into schools and getting young people out of schools and into workplaces—and had a much wider work placement scheme, it would be beneficial for both parties. Employers would see some gems and start employing them in larger numbers than we have talked about today. The numbers do not reflect well—I accept that completely.

Allan Watt: I spoke to a large employer that said that it had forgotten how to employ young people. It had recently engaged with us to start bringing young people back into the workforce. Its own employees had loved it because they had become buddies and mentors to young people. Perhaps 20 or 30 years ago, everyone expected to have a young person join their company and to look after them through the early stage of their career. The company saw a huge level of engagement on the part of its employees.

Often, you only need to give young people a chance, and one of the roles of the third sector can be to de-risk things for the employer. Last Wednesday, the Marks and Spencer's store in Argyle Street in Glasgow took on 15 young people who probably would not have made it through the standard Marks and Spencer's entry process. We had taken them through a four-week programme that we developed with the employer that gave them some work experience and provided them with some life-skills training and an opportunity to work on polishing up the skills that they had. Marks and Spencer's was happy to take every one of them, although they would not have been obvious choices for the company previously.

For a lot of employers, there is a need to look under the bonnet a bit more. In cities such as Glasgow, where something like a third of young people are not working, we need to go into those pools of talent—because that is what those young people represent: talent, not problems. A lot of those young people can be brought into the workforce with the right support.

It is tough for employers. It is a big ask to get them to take someone who does not fit their standard criteria. They have all developed some fantastic apprenticeship schemes, but the issue that we are concerned with involves bolting the front end on. How do we bring in people who do

not come from the background from which a company's employees traditionally come? That is where the third sector, schools and a range of other people can help.

Gordon MacDonald: You are referring to large companies that bring youngsters on board and have employees who mentor them. However, the vast majority of Scottish enterprises are very small. How do you engage the small employer?

Allan Watt: In a number of our programmes, a large employer is the host for the programme and might take 50 or 60 per cent of the young people, and we will work with the rest of the young people to find them opportunities. The Glasgow restaurateurs have been fantastic in relation to our get into cooking programme, which we run through the City of Glasgow College. A range of restaurants employ one or two people and give the young people a chance because they can see where they come from, they understand the background of the course and they can look in on the young people during the four or five weeks that the course runs, which means that it is not a case of having a quick interview and taking a chance. That is how you engage the small employers. You need to find a way to de-risk the proposal.

Susan Quinn: Getting the employers involved at that level provides a third part with regard to what David Watt was saying, which is that it demystifies the new qualifications. Often, when you get a taxi home at night, you are asked, "What do you do?" and you say, "I'm a teacher," and the driver says, "Oh, I got no O grades," and you say, "Well, that's one or two qualification systems back," and you wonder whether there is an understanding of that. Unless people are engaging in schools, there might not be.

We see a lot of those sorts of projects going on in communities, and there needs to be consistency around that. We should promote that as a way forward, particularly in the senior phase, when you are looking at leaving points and destinations. If I may say it for a third time, it would be helpful to move to a senior phase that takes place over three years, which would create space for young people to do that within their timetable rather than bolting it on at the end of the school day, when they want to go and do what young people do.

We also see lots of projects that are going on in primary schools that involve classes going out to visit local shops and so on as part of other projects. That gets the children known in the area and starts to build those community links. Those kinds of projects need to be promoted more widely.

Gordon MacDonald: How do we get more businesses involved in mentoring, acting as role models or providing work experience, in order to

highlight the importance of social skills, attitude, life skills and so on, in such a way that it complements the work of teachers and does not create friction?

Susan Quinn: Do it locally. Allow for local discussions on it. Let learning communities and schools consider what their local needs are and look to the work of the third sector and the private sector communities in their areas to see what is being done and what the likely destinations for young people are, rather than imposing projects that say that every school has to engage with Marks and Spencer's—there is no Marks and Spencer's in Stranraer, so young people will not be working there. It is about local solutions.

David Watt: I agree that it is about local solutions. I would say this, but I think that schools should be engaging actively with local business organisations, or with the Federation of Small Businesses. Your point is absolutely valid, Mr MacDonald, because we are talking about very small enterprises in many parts of Scotland. That is something that we tend to miss.

I take Allan Watt's point that there are some good ways of doing that, but it tends to be focused on the larger areas of population. When we get down to places such as Stranraer, there is a challenge. When we get the headteachers sitting around the table and getting involved with businesspeople, they can then call on those people to come into schools and engage with young people, advise them and give them work placements. That exchange is very important. I know that teachers have a lot on their plate, but it is vital.

In all my time with the IOD I have never once asked anybody to engage with young people who has said no. People are genuinely interested in the next generation—if they said no, you would not want them anyway—so it just does not happen.

Siobhan McMahon: The Wood commission's report has come up a few times in your evidence this morning, but there are only two specific recommendations in it regarding the role played by the third sector, and one statement about employers and their role in education. That seems to be it. Do you think that the Wood report has given enough prominence to the third sector and employers?

Susan Hunter: The Wood commission sets out an aspiration for the whole education system. In the third sector, particularly youth work—we see ourselves as part of the education system—we would recognise ourselves as being included more widely in some of the other recommendations.

I am sorry, but I have lost my train of thought.

David Watt: I will jump in then. I have already had significant discussions with the Government about employers getting involved on a wider scale. A national group on employer engagement has already been established and is looking to facilitate that across the country. That is very welcome and follows up on what we have been talking about. Hopefully, there will be a private sector-led group of employers, working with college and local authorities to implement the Wood commission recommendations in a real way, so that the strong link, particularly around work placement and building independence—as we have just been talking about—is built in from day 1.

I am optimistic. You are right to say that we did not get as many mentions as we might have, but we are already discussing with Government and others how to get it implemented, and that is the most important thing.

Allan Watt: As you will see from our evidence, we have been funded by the Government, but also by the Wood Foundation, to put together a joint package to help us engage with more schools and give them some of the employment options and opportunities. We will start that programme over the next few weeks and months. We hope to engage with more and more local authorities to show them a way to do it. How we will do that in the Borders and the Western Isles will be very different from how we will do it in Glasgow, Edinburgh or Dundee. We will explore how we can customise it to the needs of specific local authorities.

Angela Morgan: We work with young people into their late teens and early twenties and we support them in looking at training and employment options, but because they have had difficult lives and difficult relationships, they continue to need support around those issues and many of them are also becoming parents themselves. I want to reinforce the point that what is happening around the young person, in terms of their whole system and community supports, also needs to be considered for successful involvement in employment.

The Convener: Thank you. That concludes the questions from members of the committee. I apologise again that we started a bit later than you had expected. We appreciate your attendance this morning and your written submissions—and those of other organisations—to our inquiry on educational attainment.

Meeting closed at 12:44.

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