



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 10 May 2017

Session 5



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EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

14th Meeting 2017, Session 5

CONVENER

*James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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

*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

*Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP)

*Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)

*Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

*Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)

*Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)

*Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Carys Boyle

Dr Shaun Harley

Angela Kelly

Willie MacLeod

Isabel Marshall

Mark Melrose

Kimberley Miller-Drummond

Emma Newton

Críostóir Piondargás

Halla Price

Linda Robertson

Karen Vaughan

Judith Williams

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Roz Thomson

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 10 May 2017

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (James Dornan): Welcome, everyone, to the 14th meeting in 2017 of the Education and Skills Committee. I ask those naughty boys over there to behave themselves—thank you very much—and I remind everyone present to turn their mobile phones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

The first item of business is a decision on whether to take a number of items in private. Are members content to take items 3 and 4 of this meeting in private and, at future meetings, to review evidence on workforce planning in private?

Members indicated agreement.

Workforce Planning (Schools)

10:00

The Convener: Item 2 is our first evidence session for the committee's inquiry into workforce planning in Scotland's schools. The committee is starting with a session with trainee teachers and one previous trainee teacher, followed by a session with qualified teachers, to provide the context for its inquiry.

I welcome the first panel. Before we begin, I thank you for taking the time to respond to the committee's request for views, through its questionnaire, and for agreeing to give evidence. This is very much an information-gathering session to inform the committee's scrutiny. We appreciate that you are sharing personal experience, so please answer only those questions to which you are comfortable responding. Do not feel that you have to answer anything that you do not want to answer.

Given the number of people we are hearing from today and the size of the committee, members will try where possible to ask questions of specific attendees. Panel members do not have to answer every question, especially if someone else covers your point. You have the option of sending us written comments after your session, if there is anything that you do not get the chance to convey today.

I welcome Halla Price, Mark Melrose, Willie MacLeod and Carys Boyle, who are trainee teachers, and Kimberley Miller-Drummond, who is a previous trainee teacher. As is standard, I will kick off with the first question, which is quite simple: what are your motivations for becoming a teacher in the first place?

Halla Price: My motivations for becoming a teacher are mainly the fact that, by being a teacher, you have an amazing opportunity to be a positive influence in children's lives. I worked with children all the way through my own education, in younger years and in primary school, helping out with various clubs and younger classes. I just loved that, and it filled me with passion and the belief that you can make a difference and be a positive influence in so many people's lives.

Kimberley Miller-Drummond: My motivations were very similar. Probably my key motivation was being able to have an impact on children. I first trained in Stirling—I should be clear about that—and then I went to Strathclyde. I went to Stirling in 2001. I do not know whether you would still call it an area of deprivation, but that is what it was at the time. I felt that the impact that I could have on some children there would influence them to get themselves out of the pattern of unemployment—

leaving school and not doing anything—and things like that. That was my motivation—to show those children that they could change things. I came from a similar background to theirs.

Mark Melrose: My motivations are along similar lines. I come from an industrial background—I spent nine years as an engineer for a defence company—and I found that job stability was another key factor for me to consider.

Willie MacLeod: I agree. Job stability was a huge motivation. I had worked in a school for a number of years as a technician. I was assisting pupils in various ways in that role, and I felt that I could do more. I already had a degree, so becoming a teacher was a natural career progression.

Carys Boyle: This might sound clichéd, but I really wanted to be there for the light-bulb moment when a child who has been struggling just gets it. I remember that sometimes I was that child in primary school, especially when it came to things such as maths. I wanted to be there for the light-bulb moment and for the child to remember, “Oh, it was Ms Boyle who taught me that.”

The Convener: So really it is all about getting your name in lights.

Carys Boyle: It is about being remembered.

The Convener: That is great. You all seem to have similar motivations for going into teaching, but you are all coming from different places. That is really interesting.

Ruth Maguire will start our questions.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Before I ask my question, I declare an interest in that my child’s school is represented on the second panel of witnesses. I will therefore remain quiet for the second panel.

Good morning to you all. I am thinking about your motivations for becoming teachers. Some of the evidence that we have received reveals that there is a feeling of discomfort about how teachers are thought of. I would be interested in hearing your reflections on how we, as politicians, contribute to that feeling—how the debates and conversations that we have about education in Scotland influence that and how you feel about teaching as a profession.

Mark Melrose: I would say that teachers are generally seen as being quite moany. My wife says that people only ever hear about teachers complaining and, having gone into teaching, I have seen that myself and cannot say that I disagree. The reason for that is that, these days, the Government is making constant changes. We have moved to curriculum for excellence and to national qualifications, although the feeling on the

ground is that standard grades were not broken and people do not understand why they were changed when they merely needed to be updated. I think that the attitude that people have towards teachers stems from the constant changes that Parliament is making.

Halla Price: There is quite a lot of stigma about the perceived intelligence of teachers. In my experience, pupils who want to be teachers are not regarded as those who are going to get the best grades in school. At school, I was discouraged by my teachers from applying to be a primary school teacher. They suggested that I study for a degree first, followed by a one-year conversion course. There is definitely a stigma that teachers are not as intelligent as other members of society. To me, the idea that I was not going to be respected as much as those in other professions felt like a barrier to going into teaching.

Ruth Maguire: Mark, do you feel that we now need a period of stability in which to let teachers get on with teaching?

Mark Melrose: Yes. I am a technology teacher, and we have recently been handed updated benchmarks, as opposed to significant aspects of learning. The Scottish Qualifications Authority is changing national courses and assignments, and technology teachers are having to deal with new benchmarks for the broad general education as well. The feeling that I am getting from schools is that a period of stability would be really welcome.

Willie MacLeod: I understand exactly where Mark Melrose is coming from, and I agree that a period of stability is necessary.

I would not like to be too negative about the professionalism aspect. I believe that teachers are viewed as professionals. I know that there are issues with the SQA and Education Scotland, which may not treat them like professionals but, on the whole, the public perspective is very much that teachers are professionals.

The Convener: You say that the SQA and Education Scotland are not treating teachers as professionals. Would you like to expand on that?

Willie MacLeod: The documents that are produced are not ones that you would send to fellow professionals. That is quite a common theme. In the placement schools that I have been in, the documents that I have seen from those organisations do not reflect professional communications between equal partners.

The Convener: That is interesting. Thanks very much.

Let us move on to teacher training. Quite a number of members would like to ask questions about that.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): When I undertook teacher training many years ago, I felt strongly that the theoretical aspect of the training was not particularly helpful—our panel is nodding at that—but that the classroom placements were extremely helpful in allowing me to find out whether I could cope with being a teacher and what I did well and perhaps did not so well. I want to ask you about these two aspects of teacher training—do you feel that the school placements are working and that the people who are looking after you in the schools have sufficient time to look after you properly and are giving you all the right advice? On the other side, do you feel that what is happening with the theoretical aspect is good enough, or would you like to see some changes there?

Willie MacLeod: It is refreshing to hear that your experiences match my own perfectly with regard to the placements being the real benefit of the teacher training year. They are by far the highlight. I have been in two schools—one large and one small. In the small school, there were enough staff for my mentor to be able to spend a significant amount of time with me, and I benefited hugely from that. I can say only positive things about the large school; the one negative is that my mentor was a very busy head of department who could not spend the time with me that my mentor in the small school could, although I am not saying anything negative at all about him, because he tried his best.

On the university side of things, very little of what we work on at university seems to have any relevance to what happens in the classroom. For example, next to nothing on classroom behaviour management is looked at in university.

Liz Smith: Can you expand on some of the other aspects of the university and/or college training? I think that you are quite right to flag up the issue of classroom management. In the submissions, quite a few people make the point that they are not very sure about additional support needs training. People feel that the amount of time that is spent on learning how to teach literacy is not sufficient. Do you have any other comments on things that we could do better within the theoretical aspect of teacher training?

Willie MacLeod: The problem at the university that I attend is that there would be a single week when we focus on literacy and that would be it.

Liz Smith: Just one week?

Willie MacLeod: One week. Literacy would be the focus for that week.

I believe that additional support needs were covered very well at my university. We focused on ASN for a full week and a very good lecturer delivered the training. It helped that the lecturer

was physically in the same room as us, which is not always the case.

The Convener: Can we try to steer clear of talking about ASN at this stage? I know that Ross Greer will ask a number of questions on ASN later. Sorry for interrupting.

Willie MacLeod: That is fine.

Carys Boyle: I have had only one school-based placement. I was lucky with mine because my classroom teacher gave me so much help and the depute headteacher was very involved in my placement. It was nice that the school was so inclusive.

At university, our workshops in the second semester were very practical and they gave us lesson ideas, which was helpful. However, we were not taught much about things such as behaviour management and classroom management. I guess that you cannot really learn about such things until you see them. I was lucky with my class, and behaviour management was not really an issue—it was an issue with a couple of kids, but not many. I know that we said that we would talk about additional support needs later, but I would add that we are not taught that much about ASN at university.

Liz Smith: Can I clarify one thing? Willie MacLeod mentioned that there was just one week when he was asked to look at the literacy issue—was that just one week out of the whole training period?

Willie MacLeod: Yes, so far. The way the university runs is that there is a focus on a given area each week. To the best of my recollection, we had a single week on literacy.

Liz Smith: Did you feel that that was sufficient?

Willie MacLeod: I have less of an issue with the time that is spent on literacy because it has been worked on throughout, when we are doing essays and so on. I have more of an issue with the time that is spent on numeracy, because there are fewer chances for the university lecturers to see that we are numerate throughout the course. You can very quickly tell whether somebody is literate when you have read a couple of their essays, but numeracy is a different thing. For my own subject, I would maybe focus more on the numeracy side of things. However, going back to the basics on both literacy and numeracy would be helpful.

10:15

The Convener: Thank you very much. Kimberley, did you want to come in?

Kimberley Miller-Drummond: To break it down, a university course is generally 18 weeks of theory and 18 weeks on placement. Out of those

18-week periods there are some holidays, so you are not there all the time.

A week is quite a lot of time if the whole week is focused on one issue. You do not have just one class or one lecture on that issue—you have different classes on it. At the university that I went to, the time was split into policies and perspectives on the one hand, and principles and practice on the other. We also had subject-based classes, and every single one of those lectures and seminars focused on that particular week's issue. When a full week is given to an issue, that is actually quite a lot of time.

Halla Price: The structure of the BEd, which I understand is no longer being run, meant that in fourth year—my final year—there were options courses, which were invaluable. They were fantastic.

You got to choose two. They were on things such as additional support needs, outdoor learning and modern languages, which we had received no provision on during the first three years. That meant that I had a fantastic experience of cognitive, social and emotional development education and modern languages, but there are other aspects of teaching, such as outdoor learning and additional support needs, that, because I did not select them as my first options, I have had no experience in. The majority of the people on the education course are coming out not having experienced some of those courses, which are hugely valuable.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Some of the things that I wanted to talk about have been touched on. Before I say anything else, let me do the slightly glib politician's thing and say that, regardless of what debates happen in this place, everyone in the teaching profession should be under no illusion about how important we view your profession as being and about how fundamental, not just to education but to the whole of the country.

We have talked a bit about literacy and numeracy teaching in secondary education, but how well do you think that those aspects are covered in primary teacher training? Halla Price would probably be best placed to answer.

Halla Price: On literacy, what we got taught in first year—the fundamentals of reading and writing and how important they are—was very valuable, but what we were taught then was just reiterated thereafter. I was taught for the first three years that reading is very good for children because it makes them creative. That was very useful in first year, but it was unnecessary for that to be reinforced for another two years. As I had experience of schemes such as read, write, count and big writing adventures, it would have been more valuable to

have had some sort of input on how such schemes work and how they are beneficial.

On numeracy, we spent a lot of time going over ideas about activities that we could do. However, there was not enough focus on the teachers having the skills to teach numeracy, other than a maths audit that we completed in second year. That did very little, in all honesty, to improve our own mathematical knowledge and understanding. I do not believe that everyone who graduated from Moray House this year has sufficient skills in numeracy to be able to teach it to 11-year-olds at a reasonable standard.

Daniel Johnson: To paraphrase, there is a lot of focus on the importance of literacy and numeracy, but not necessarily on the practical techniques of how to deliver them. Would that be right?

Halla Price: Yes, that would be right.

Daniel Johnson: Do other members of the panel agree with that? I see that you are nodding.

I will pick up on some comments that Mark Melrose made when he touched on national qualifications and BGE. One thing that was raised in an informal session that we had is that there are challenges both with composite classes—teaching national 4 and 5 together, and indeed sometimes higher as well—and with secondary 3, just in terms of filling up the space. Are those the sorts of issues that you have found, Mark? Were you referring to other issues as well when you highlighted BGE and national qualifications?

Mark Melrose: At BGE level, we have had to face the recent change to benchmarks. In technology, we have six separate subjects that we have to cover, so BGE does not work for technology subjects, as we cannot cover sufficient course knowledge to then be able to move kids on to a national level. That is why some schools start to cover national subjects in third year, while others try to stick to the system and do them in fourth year. Kids who do those subjects over just one year are disadvantaged, as they do not get the same education specific to their course as others get.

Now that we have composite classes, with the removal of the units from national 5, it will become very difficult. For example, the school at which I am in placement just now finds it hard and feels that it is letting kids down because it has to make a call very early on about whether a child will be national 4 level—in which case it has to cover the added-value unit as well as the others—or at national 5 level. What should it do if a child is doing fine at national 5 and gets to the end, but then fails? With the old system, national 5s had a fallback, and in the standard grade system, there were the fallbacks of credit to general and general

to foundation. I think that the present system will end up failing pupils.

Daniel Johnson: My final question is on whether other panel members would reflect those insights on any other subject areas.

Willie MacLeod: I teach technical subjects as well, so I can agree fully with what Mark Melrose says, but I cannot add anything to what he has already said.

Daniel Johnson: That is very helpful. Thank you.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I want to come back to what Halla Price said about numeracy. What entry qualifications for your course do you need to have to prove that you are numerate? What is expected of you—is it higher maths?

Halla Price: No—I needed a grade 2 in standard grade maths. Trainees could have had grade A at intermediate 2, but an intermediate 2 course can carry on over four years if needed—it can be a very long process. If someone takes four years to get their intermediate 2 maths, we should ask whether they are in the best position to teach children and whether they have the requisite understanding to be able to convey—

Gillian Martin: There is a focus on getting more science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects into primary schools and teachers having the confidence to teach science and so on. What STEM qualifications are expected of you before you gain entry to the course?

Halla Price: None—I did not have any. My course only required students to have grade C in higher English and a grade 2 in credit maths.

Gillian Martin: As you undertake the course, is there any provision for you to pick up those science subjects as you go along?

Halla Price: No.

Gillian Martin: Okay.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I have one specific question and one general question. The general one follows on from Liz Smith's line of questioning. In what you are learning as teachers in our teaching colleges, is the balance between practice and theory right? How would you advise us to change it?

Willie MacLeod: I would significantly increase the time spent on placement in schools. I would also add variety in placement schools. I have been in only two placement schools, one of which I have worked in for years, so, effectively, I have experienced only one other school.

Tavish Scott: You said that the principal teacher who mentored you in the big school simply did not have time to give you. How would you tackle that?

Willie MacLeod: I would see whether there was some way in which the mentoring could be formalised so that his timetable could be amended and somehow time could be found. In some previous years, Government funding paid for teacher time to assist in mentoring students. I think that it could be done in that way.

Tavish Scott: Will you give me a sense of the balance that there is at the moment between school placements and the theory of the courses? How many weeks per year do you spend in schools, as opposed to being in the college classroom?

Mark Melrose: My current split is 50:50. It is a 36-week course, as Kimberley Miller-Drummond said, with 18 weeks in schools and 18 weeks in the university. As Willie MacLeod said, as teachers we do most of our learning on the job. It is fine getting the theory poured into us, but that is not preparing me to go into a classroom to teach 20 pupils—that is the number of pupils in technology classes. We need to spend more time on subject-specific work as opposed to general teaching theories.

Halla Price: The make-up of every course is very different, and perhaps more consistency is needed. For example, on my four-year course I had a five-week placement in the first and second years, followed by a 10-week placement in the third year and 12 weeks this year. I know other students who were on different courses at different universities who did not experience any time in school until their third year, when they had a whole year in a school. I do not know whether this is replicated across Scotland, but class teachers to whom I have spoken said that it was quite difficult to have a student for a whole year who had never previously experienced a school placement.

Tavish Scott: It varies from university to university.

Halla Price: Yes. My experience was that the balance in my course—having that build-up of smaller placements—was really good. However, if the course is only for a year it is impossible to have that build-up.

Kimberley Miller-Drummond: We started off university with a theory block. A lot of people on my course said that they could not relate to the theory at all until they went on placement. It might work better to have a week or two of introduction in uni, and then maybe a three-week placement during which we just observe, get to know things and actually see some of the theory in practice before we get into the bones of it.

The Convener: Is it the case just now that you are likely to have a sizeable block of theory before you have a placement?

Kimberley Miller-Drummond: Yes.

The Convener: Are you suggesting that that should be broken up somewhat?

Kimberley Miller-Drummond: Yes. I think that an earlier placement would benefit people's understanding of some of the theory.

Carys Boyle: I agree with Kimberley about having an earlier placement. In my first year we had a six-week placement, but that was in the second semester. I know from speaking to people on my course that in the first semester, when we did the psychology, sociology and philosophy of education, some people were almost put off because we were not in the classroom. Those are not necessarily things that you can apply, especially the philosophy, which I cannot even remember—was it Plato's cave?

Tavish Scott: It is very important to know that.

Carys Boyle: It is important to know, but it is not something that I taught in the classroom or that I really applied in the classroom when I got to my placement, and it discouraged people almost enough to leave.

The Convener: Plato will be most upset.

Tavish Scott: I think that we need a full committee session on Plato.

The Convener: No, no, no.

Tavish Scott: I will ask my specific question. There is a lot of focus on the online security of children and young people at school, and there are concerns about how much they use their mobile phones—my kids are absolutely standard; they use them all the time. In your training, has there been any focus on, options for or particular courses about online security or the use of digital media? I suspect that it is completely different from when I went to school, which was obviously a long time ago—we did not even have computers then.

Carys Boyle: Really early on, we were taught about professionalism online, and I guess that that is really important. When I went on my placement I did a lesson on internet safety. One of the pupils said to me that people should never add a teacher on Facebook, and I said that of course they should not, because we have lives outside school. However, I went home that day to find a friend request from her, which was a bit ironic. [Laughter.] My Facebook was really private, because I knew that it had to be, so that was fine, but teachers must keep in mind the need to be professional in our normal lives as well—in our lives outside school.

Tavish Scott: What about the children? I take the point about you as a teacher, but what about the children you will teach? Have you had discussions—

Carys Boyle: Not really at university.

Tavish Scott: Okay.

Carys Boyle: I decided to do my internet safety lesson because I heard the kids in my class talking about Snapchat, but none of them was old enough for Snapchat.

Tavish Scott: Exactly. Thank you.

Halla Price: I have now completed my training, and in that four years I have had a few talks about my own professionalism online, but there has been no provision for any form of information and communication technology, which is alarming.

Willie MacLeod: No specific training on internet safety lessons has been delivered through the PGDE.

Tavish Scott: Are we expecting teachers to go into a classroom and teach kids—all of whom are sitting with their smart phones—without any training on the subject?

Willie MacLeod: Yes. We are expected to know about it.

Daniel Johnson: I want to clarify what Halla Price said about there being no provision for information and communication technology. Do you mean that there is no provision for teaching children about it or that there is no provision whatsoever?

Halla Price: There is no provision whatsoever.

10:30

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I start with a general question. Do you think that the courses that you are on will equip you to support young people with additional support needs? One in four children in schools in Scotland has identified additional support needs and it is a challenge for teachers to flag up a support need. Do you feel equipped and supported to carry out that role?

Willie MacLeod: I have already covered that. I personally feel that my university delivered that aspect of training well.

Mark Melrose: I do not feel at all equipped to do that by my course at Moray House. In my first school, I was given a class with a young boy with quite severe autism and I was not prepared in the slightest for how to deal with it. Lack of support in schools means that many teachers do not feel prepared to deal with more severe additional support needs.

Kimberley Miller-Drummond: From a work perspective I feel quite well equipped to deal with additional support needs, but I do not feel well equipped by my university course. We did a couple of weeks of training on inclusion, and we were taught the medical model and the social model of disability. We had all these wonderful theories thrown at us, but there was no contextualisation and no specific training on autism, dyslexia or dyspraxia—there was absolutely nothing. We were told that we would probably come across two or three children in our class with an additional support need, but such needs are not included in the course unless you elect to study a professional specialism such as autism, additional support needs or dyslexia.

The Convener: Why is there such disparity between those responses? William MacLeod seems to think that support is good, but both Mark Melrose and Kimberley Miller-Drummond said that it is not.

Willie MacLeod: We are studying at different universities.

The Convener: Yes—that is why I asked.

Willie MacLeod: Mark Melrose and I are both studying for a PGDE.

Kimberley Miller-Drummond: I am studying for that, too.

Halla Price: My university gave me a really good course on social inclusion and barriers to learning. However, there are many specific additional support needs and each child is completely different. You cannot learn how to support everyone who has the same additional support need, because each child is different. The university did a good job on promoting inclusion and giving us a general understanding of additional support needs, but support has to be provided in schools, and it has to be child specific.

Ross Greer: You said earlier that the training on additional support needs was optional. You chose two optional courses in your fourth year. Does that mean that people taking your course will simply not have had that level of specific training on additional support needs if they did not choose to do that course in their final year?

Halla Price: Yes. The people who chose the course will have slightly more understanding of the issue and how to support the child. However, each child is completely different and has completely different needs. We need support within the school as opposed to at university, because that cannot be taught in a general way.

Ross Greer: Is there an expectation that you will have continuous professional development opportunities on the issue once you are in full-time teaching? Do those of you who believe that the

training was not adequate in your initial training expect that there will be such an opportunity?

Mark Melrose: I have already experienced that at my first placement. We had an in-service day when we had training on autism, and I believe that the issue will be covered more once we become qualified teachers.

Daniel Johnson: Given the prevalence of dyslexia, can you conceive of ever teaching a class in which you do not have at least one child who has dyslexia? That being the case, do you believe that it might be sensible to have training on dyslexia as a bare minimum as far as ASN is concerned?

Kimberley Miller-Drummond: A lot of children in schools come with a pupil support file that says, “Difficulties of a dyslexic nature”, but they do not have an official diagnosis of dyslexia. It is now common for five or six children in one class to have difficulties of that nature without a diagnosis.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I thank the witnesses for the information that they have provided this morning. It has been very interesting and I am sure that I speak for the rest of the committee when I say that we really value your input to the inquiry. I would like to go a step further. My question is based on some of the information that you have given us. Are there any opportunities for you to feedback to the university about your experience of the course, what you feel has not been covered and what you feel should be added to the experience of trainee teachers—both those on the one-year course and those on the four-year course?

Halla Price: There is a good focus at the University of Edinburgh on class representatives going to committee and other meetings with the course organisers. However, I have been on the last year of the BEd—there is to be no more BEd—so our feedback has been for the sake of it and we have seen no changes made. I have been a class rep in every single year, and every single year there has been no change and no difference based on our feedback—or at least no visible changes.

The Convener: You give the feedback. Do you get any feedback on the feedback that you give? Do you find out whether anything that you have said has been listened to in any way?

Halla Price: No.

The Convener: So you make comments and nothing happens.

Halla Price: We will go to a meeting and our comments will be listened to. They will say, “That’s very interesting—that’s a good point,” but there is no follow-up.

The Convener: I have done that many times.

Clare Haughey: Is going to meetings the only way that you are encouraged to provide feedback to the university?

Halla Price: There are other options. If you have a specific problem, there are various routes that you can go down to contact someone, but when it comes to general feedback from a class, every class in every course at the university has a class rep, and everyone in the class is invited to give feedback and comments to the class rep, who will get an opportunity twice a semester to meet the course organisers and share that feedback.

Clare Haughey: Is that other people's experience too?

Carys Boyle: I am at Dundee, and I would say that it is completely different for us. At the end of every semester, we do an evaluation. I have a friend who is in the year above me, and if his year has said something specific about a change that the students wanted, we always see the change. For example, the year before us had an assignment on maths and science, which was vague and was not easy for the class to do. Those students all commented on that and said that it was difficult. When we got that assignment last semester, it was specific and we were told exactly what we could write in our essay. The third years this year believed that the placement was not well timed because of assignments, so next year our placement will be at a different time. People's negative experiences in the year above benefit those in the following year.

Willie MacLeod: I agree with that. I am at a different university, but last week we were sent an online feedback form, which can be returned anonymously, to feedback on our university experience. Before I started my most recent placement, I had quite a long question-and-answer session with one of the course leaders regarding feedback, which was very helpful. She had already fed back her proposed changes and we agreed that all of them were sensible and made extra suggestions. The university has been open and ready to receive feedback.

Mark Melrose: We have student reps for our class at the University of Edinburgh and the feedback that they got at a meeting with the lead tutor was very dismissive—"Och, students always ask for that". They found that they were getting that quite a lot.

An interesting change that has been talked about at Moray House is for the postgraduate course to move from a one-year to a two-year course. There would be no additional time in the school—the additional time would be university based. I took a quick poll among my cohort and they agreed that not one of them would have

applied to that course because no one can afford two years without a wage or any sort of payment. That is a big concern in considering the future of Moray House.

Clare Haughey: Thank you for that. It is really valuable to hear about your different experiences of feeding back into the universities.

What has been your experience in the schools? Have you had an opportunity to feed back on the quality of the placement, how useful it was and whether you felt supported? We have heard a little bit about your experiences, but I am interested in the feedback for the schools and perhaps making life easier for other trainee teachers when they go into those establishments.

Mark Melrose: I have had nothing formal. However, the people in my school have been more than willing to sit down with me and discuss little problems or how they could help a bit more. The schools have to sign up to be placements, so the teachers are willing to take your advice about changing whatever it might be. I have found teachers to be generally quite interested in your feedback.

Clare Haughey: Do you know whether they take that feedback on board?

Mark Melrose: No. I know that other students go to those schools, but we have never talked about the nitty-gritty of whether certain aspects have changed.

Clare Haughey: You seem to be saying that the most valuable part of your training is being on placement in a school. That needs to be a high-quality, positive experience if you are to go on and replicate the skills that you learn there.

Kimberley Miller-Drummond: Placement experience in any school varies from department to department. I went to a Renfrewshire school and had a fantastic placement with really supportive staff—everyone in the department was very supportive. However, three other girls who were on placement in another department had a terrible time. They were not encouraged by their mentor to speak up and ask for work and feedback from staff, whereas I was. My mentor was part time and I did not meet her until my third day, but the principal teacher made herself available when the mentor was not there.

As I have said, the experience can vary in a school. I was in the English department, but the others were in modern studies and history.

Gillian Martin: I have done a teaching qualification and from my experience and that of other people in my family, I know that the crit at the end of your placement is an experience in itself—I see you nodding in recognition. Following on from Clare Haughey's question on feedback,

what are your feelings on the usefulness of the crit process and how much do you get out of it as you progress?

Halla Price: The process is fantastically useful, particularly because your tutor comes in midway through your placement. Any areas of concern can be flagged up at that point and you have the rest of your placement to improve on them and achieve the satisfactory grade.

My suggestion—and this comes not just from me, but from my peers and others in the final year BEd teaching cohort—is that it might be good to grade placements. At the moment, what determines how good you are as a teacher is how good you are at writing an essay, and all you have to do is pass your placement in school. You can either pass or fail your placement, but surely that it is the true recognition of how good you are at teaching.

10:45

Carys Boyle: During our six-week placement, we had a formative crit and a summative crit. In the formative crit, we were told where we could improve. I do not know whether the other guys here had the dreaded folders, but we did. The assessor looked at our folders while we were teaching, but she also observed our teaching, and we knew exactly what we needed to do at our summative crits. We were assessed against the standards for provisional registration, which I thought was quite good. The tutor filled those in, as did the classroom teacher, who saw us more than our university tutors did.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I am interested in your experience of your placements. Reflecting back a million years ago to when I did my teacher training, I remember that the most important thing was making sure that the urn did not burn dry so that we could keep in with the rest of the staff.

My understanding is that the process now is much more formalised. My very first teaching experience was going in, being told that the teacher who was supposed to be supporting me was off and then being asked whether I would just take the classes by myself. Now that things have been formalised, do you have an expectation when you go on your placement about how much of your time you will spend observing? What expectations does the school have of you and what do you expect of the school? How explicit is that?

Mark Melrose: At Moray House, each mentor is handed a pack at the start outlining the time—the number of periods per week—that you should spend teaching, and it states explicitly that you should not be treated as a cover teacher. That

happens sometimes, but it should be a case of someone saying to you, “Would you mind taking this class? There’ll be a cover teacher with you.” They are happy for you to say no—that is not a problem.

My main concern with the placement system is the allocation of placements. On two of the occasions when I have been on placement, I was told on the Thursday or Wednesday prior to starting on the Monday, and because I had assignments due in on the Friday on each occasion, I barely had the chance to go to the schools beforehand. You can imagine the stress that that adds for teachers. It is always nice to get into your school beforehand, meet the teachers and sort out your timetable so that you know what to expect when you go in on the Monday.

On my second placement, I was not able to visit the school beforehand and as a result, compared with my other two placements, it took me a lot longer to get up and running in the department. It ended up taking about four days for my timetable to be finalised, which, in effect, was a week wasted.

Johann Lamont: Did you get an explanation of why that happened? Did the school know that you were coming?

Mark Melrose: On my second placement, I was shunted from pillar to post. I was told that I would be going to four different schools before it was finally confirmed and settled—on the Thursday—that I would be going to the school that I went to. The school was only told on the Thursday, too.

I do not know how the rest of the universities do this, but I believe that Moray House pays to use the General Teaching Council for Scotland system. The main stakeholder in that should be the student teacher to ensure that they get a good start to their experience. However, in my opinion and in the opinion of a couple of other people from Moray House to whom I have spoken, the system is not serving student teachers well at all. Student teachers are being placed in schools a couple of hours’ drive away, so Edinburgh university is having to source accommodation or rental cars for people. It all results in additional stress that student teachers do not need during their five or six-week placement in schools.

Johann Lamont: Is there no reimbursement of your costs? That is a big change, certainly in my lifetime. A 90-minute commute seems quite a lot and, if you are getting told only on the Friday about a placement on the Monday, that will be a logistical challenge. Is there no reimbursement of travelling costs or expenses?

Mark Melrose: Moray House reimburses expenses such as mileage or, if you can get to your placement within 90 minutes, the cost of

public transport. However, you have to wait until the end of the placement—you cannot put in advance expense claims. I know students in my technologies class who have ended up being almost in debt as a result of having to spend money on transport that they do not have; after all, we go a year without any money coming in. At the end, we get a big lump sum, but we could do with being paid either up front or stage by stage as we use it.

Willie MacLeod: I can relate to what Mark Melrose has said—and, unfortunately, I can go one better. I knew where my placement schools were going to be, but there were others on my course who were not told and had gone into college on the first day of their placement.

I can also relate stories of student teachers who did not have a driving licence. They could still attend a good number of schools, but the fact that they had no licence did not seem to be taken into consideration. With suitable students who live in a rural area, as I do, it is critical to ensure that they can get to certain schools. For example, with regard to rural secondary schools, I live on the Isle of Lewis and I ended up going to a school in Ullapool. As for the costs and time involved in travelling, UHI students have no official method of claiming back any travel expenses—they get nothing for accommodation or travel.

Kimberley Miller-Drummond: The University of Strathclyde will pay the difference between the cost of travelling to the university and the extra that it costs to travel to a school. Again, that is done at the end of a placement, with nothing paid up front.

Johann Lamont: This is an issue that we should maybe ask other folk about. It seems to me that it is simply an administrative issue, and I cannot understand why it is so complex. It is also unhelpful for your professional development as it means that neither you nor the schools can plan ahead.

Tavish Scott: I have a supplementary question for Mark Melrose. With regard to the shambles of a situation that you have all described, did you have to arrange the placement directly with the GTCS? Who undertook—or was supposed to undertake—the practicalities of the exercise?

Mark Melrose: Moray House has an administrator who deals purely with the placement system. However, it seems from what we have been told that she has very little input into it and is there just to needle the GTCS, which is the body that runs the system. As has been said, it is pretty much an administrative system, but I cannot understand why it does not work.

The Convener: I believe that the education secretary is aware of the problem and is trying to

get the GTCS and the universities to sort it. The situation is utterly ludicrous.

Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con): In the North East Scotland region, which I represent, we are still struggling to recruit and retain teachers. In Aberdeen alone, we still have more than 200 vacancies in primary and secondary schools, which is a significant number. We have been struggling to recruit people—in particular, students who are looking for permanent places—to fill those vacancies, despite providing a financial incentive in the form of an up-front sum for those who take up a teaching post. What barriers are there for you to taking up a permanent teaching post—in the north-east, for example—after your studies? I know that we have struggled to recruit from the central belt, for example.

Willie MacLeod: The biggest barrier is probably for the people who are likely to be the stablest people because they have already experienced the corporate world and want to settle down—people who want to be teachers because they like working with kids, they like the holidays and they like stability. They are people who did not decide when they were younger to be a teacher, and who perhaps already have kids and a mortgage. How can they take time out and lose a year's salary to undertake teacher training? They cannot do that unless they have a partner who is willing to go out and work, but that means potentially huge childcare costs. How do people in such circumstances get into teaching? They need to be paid for doing it.

You may not be aware of this option; I work for Western Isles Council, which is paying for me to go through the professional graduate diploma in education—PGDE—year. That is the only way that I can do it. The council has also guaranteed me a probation and employment after that. Being a teacher is a nice idea for some people, but 90 per cent of them will take it no further because of the financial barriers.

Ross Thomson: Is that to do with the cost of living, as well? For example, the salary might not meet the costs of living in Aberdeen, given the cost of housing there.

The Convener: It took you a bit longer to mention Aberdeen that time.

Ross Thomson: Do you think that people are put off by costs of rent, mortgages and transport?

Willie MacLeod: Are you talking about students going to study for a PGDE?

Ross Thomson: No. I am talking about people looking for permanent places and a school to settle in.

Willie MacLeod: You need to focus on people before that point. The way Western Isles Council

is doing it is the way to go. Do not look for teachers; look for people who can become teachers and pay them to go through the training. There are not enough tech teachers out there, and there is no point in offering somebody a couple of thousand pounds in order to try to steal them away from somewhere else. The Christie principles of reform should apply. Build up by looking locally—find people who already live in the area and put them through the PGDE.

Halla Price: Along with the rest of my year group, I have just chosen my options courses and where I want to be next year. The majority of people have chosen Edinburgh and the Lothians, and either Falkirk or Fife, because they are close to Edinburgh. Because we have studied in Edinburgh, we have a network of friends and people whom we know here. To get up and move to the north-east, the Highlands or somewhere that is more in need of teachers is quite a terrifying prospect, because it would take us away from the way of life that we know. We have done all our teaching placements in Edinburgh, and Edinburgh is all that we know in terms of teaching.

If there was some sort of council fair at which local authorities showed people the benefits of living in their areas—the nice stuff—and gave an idea of what life there might be like, people might decide that it looks really nice and that they would not mind living there. When people are given a choice of where to go, everyone chooses the place that they know. We want to stay in Edinburgh because it is what we know—it is not so scary.

Ross Thomson: Do you think that it is more about selling the place?

Halla Price: Yes. I do not know anyone who has not selected somewhere nearby for their options courses; I think that four people out of about 100 have ticked the box to go anywhere in Scotland. The majority of people have chosen Edinburgh, Midlothian, East Lothian and West Lothian or either Falkirk or Fife in the hope that they will stay in Edinburgh. Some people who grew up in Glasgow have put Glasgow as an option, and people who grew up in Aberdeen might have selected Aberdeen as an option. It is about going somewhere that you know.

Gillian Martin: Now that you have mentioned it, I feel that I need to say that Aberdeenshire is beautiful at this time of year. We have humpback whales that you can see from our beaches, we have mountains and we have access to skiing.

Members: Aw.

Gillian Martin: Given what Halla Price has just said, I think that there is a case for having fast-track courses. It goes back to the issue that Willie MacLeod raised about the need to get people from

other sectors to enter teaching while recognising that they have family responsibilities. What other incentives could be provided? Some local authorities have offered supported housing for the first couple of years. Would it make a difference if local authorities offered help with accommodation, particularly in high-cost areas?

Carys Boyle: A lot of people on my course are my age—19. The thought of having to move far away from family might be nerve-wracking for a lot of people. I think that that has quite a big influence on where people choose to go. A lot of people might choose to go home, because they could live at home again and it would not be as expensive as renting in Aberdeen, for example.

Gillian Martin: If you are interested in humpback whales, though, we can speak about that later.

Carys Boyle: I will keep that in mind.

The Convener: Just ignore her.

Halla Price: Teach First sends people to a school—they do not get a choice. I have a few friends in England who have been sent to the schools that need them most. We all like having a choice, but perhaps having a choice is not really viable. Maybe students in their probation year need to be sent to schools that need teachers. It is a guaranteed job. Maybe we just need to be sent off somewhere for a year and enjoy it or make the best of it.

Gillian Martin: Be careful what you wish for.

The Convener: Funnily enough, as soon as you said that, two hands went up.

Willie MacLeod: I think that I see in that comment the difference between the older and younger generations. I fully understand that someone who is young wants to get out there and gain experience, but the system must take into account those who are not in that position, including anyone who has children, or it will lose half the workforce—maybe even more.

Mark Melrose: I would echo those points. I might be given a placement for a year up in Aberdeen—I am sure it is lovely, but I have beaches in Portobello.

Daniel Johnson: Portobello has much better beaches.

Mark Melrose: You are right. I would probably drop out and try to find a job. You have to look at where you recruit teachers. Who in Aberdeenshire is running postgraduate BEd courses? You need to take potential teachers who are already from that part of Scotland and train them there. We have seen that there is not a great chance that people from Edinburgh will go to Aberdeen. People need to be sourced there.

11:00

The Convener: Aberdeen is not really that far.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): I will pick up on retention of teachers. A phrase in Halla Price's submission that I do not understand properly says

"the stigma of teachers being 'not very academic' was a demotivating factor".

What do you mean by that?

Halla Price: I mentioned earlier that I was personally discouraged from doing a BEd and becoming a teacher because I was told, "You're too bright to be a teacher" by my own teachers, which was ironic. There is that perception, particularly among my peers. Edinburgh is a very academic university where the BEd primary teaching course is not regarded as a real course. When I meet people who ask what I study, I say "Primary teaching" and they say "Oh, right. Okay". The perception is that a primary school teacher cannot engage with political conversations or real-world issues. It is entirely stigmatised. The imbalance might be because the make-up of the University of Edinburgh has a very academic focus. Teaching is not acknowledged by the majority of my peers at Edinburgh university or by people older than me as the valuable profession that it is, and as an incredible and influential position of importance. I do not know why that has been lost, but teachers are not valued enough.

The Convener: This will be the last question for panellists—you will be delighted to know—so if you have any comments to make in response, this will be your opportunity.

Colin Beattie: Among the general public whom I mix with, I have not heard that concern about the qualification, nor have any teachers raised it, and I visit a lot of schools. I am interested to see where the concern comes from. Is the perception from the university, rather than from the public?

Halla Price: Yes—perhaps it is. For people in the year below me who do the master of arts degree—primary education with history or physics, for example—there does not seem to be collaboration with the primary education part of the degree. Moray House works in collaboration with other parts of the university, but the primary education part is not really recognised by the other houses in the university.

Perhaps the stigma is just among young people. At a party, if you say "I'm doing primary teaching", everyone looks down on you. Peers on my course say that there is definitely a feeling of detachment. There is a feeling that Moray House is not part of Edinburgh university—Moray House is Moray House and Edinburgh university is Edinburgh university.

Colin Beattie: Would the panel like to comment on pay levels?

Mark Melrose: I came from private industry and took a significant hit in my wages to move into teaching, which I will never recover unless I get up to department head level. Pay is not too bad at the higher end, about six years in, but it is a struggle at the lower end of the scale. There is no money in the PGDE year. Nurses get bursaries; there should be a bursary scheme for teachers. The probationary year pay is £22,000 to £23,000, which will not attract the "high flyers" who have top degrees—they will be headhunted by private companies that are able to offer significantly more money than the Scottish Government. I accept that a public servant will not earn as much as someone in the private sector, but it could be a bit higher than what is offered now.

The Convener: Yet we have in front of us a panel of people who are keen to be teachers, who are clearly very intelligent people who could get a career elsewhere.

Mark Melrose: Yes. A panel of five.

The Convener: That is because that is the panel that we selected. You are not the only five people in Scotland who have decided to become teachers.

Mark Melrose: You are right. The committee could look at how many people are coming out with degrees and could quite easily become teachers through postgraduate studies or through going on to do a BEd, but are choosing not to go down that route.

I was turned down for teaching physics by the University of Edinburgh purely because I did not have any units on optics within my degree, although I had worked for seven years in the laser centre of excellence. [*Laughter.*] That involved purely working with optics, but I was turned down because it was not part of my degree. People are coming out with degrees but being turned down for PGDE courses because they do not have higher English. It is time—

The Convener: To be fair, we are talking about two different things. You were talking about salaries, but now we are talking about some of the inconsistencies around the process. I could not agree with you more—it sounds ludicrous.

I am sorry, Colin. I did not mean to interrupt.

Colin Beattie: I was going to ask the rest of the panel whether they agree with Mark Melrose's comment that the problem is the salary in the early years of a teaching career and that, in the later period, after five or six years, the salaries are reasonably competitive.

Willie MacLeod: I will broaden it out a little, but will stick with pay. You have heard my view that people should be paid for the PGDE year. I will add that there should be an introduction to teaching year before that, in which people, in effect, work as classroom assistants while familiarising themselves with course content. They might even achieve qualifications. I believe that people should be paid in year 1 in a classroom assistant-type role, in year 2 as a PGDE student, and then in probation.

You should not go down the line of trying to compete with industry—you cannot do it. Industry will always pay more than teaching, but industry does not have the benefits. We have talked about the holidays, the opportunity to teach children and the potential for structured career progression and stable employment. It is those things and not high wages that attract us. Do not get me wrong—I am not arguing for lower wages.

I agree with Mark Melrose that the focus needs to be at the beginning. A middle-aged person who goes through a PGDE may have somebody supporting them. If they decide that teaching is not for them, they can walk, because whoever is supporting them through the PGDE will clearly be making enough money to support them to do something else.

Carys Boyle: I do not disagree, but I feel that we are quite lucky that we will graduate from university and go on to a salary. A lot of people who do degrees cannot find jobs afterwards. It is really good that we get a teaching salary from such a young age.

Halla Price: As a young person who is about to start a paid year of work, I think that the starting salary is quite good for people who are young and have no family and no commitments. I know that many people will be living at home next year as well. I am concerned about what happens when people reach the top of the pay scale. What is there then to motivate them to stay in the profession? As much as I love teaching, I do not think that I will teach for the rest of my life. There needs to be some opportunity for progression.

Colin Beattie: That leads me on to my next question. Promotion was mentioned in several submissions. What is the issue with that?

Willie MacLeod: I am not aware of any issues with promotion. I have seen people move up through schools.

The Convener: That question is probably more for the next panel.

Colin Beattie: Okay.

The Convener: On that note, I draw this session to a close. I sincerely thank you for that very interesting discussion. [*Applause.*] See—you

would not get that in industry. Seriously, I thank you very much for your time. We will take great cognisance of what you have told us today.

We will have a short break while we change panels.

11:09

Meeting suspended.

11:16

On resuming—

The Convener: I welcome the next panel, which is a group of teachers. The committee wanted to hear a range of perspectives, so we are pleased to have before us teachers with a wide range of experience, including a Gaelic-medium teacher, a headteacher, a supply teacher and teachers from primary and secondary schools. Thank you for taking the time to respond to the committee's request for views through our questionnaire, and for agreeing to give evidence.

As I said to the first panel, this is very much an information-gathering session to inform the committee's scrutiny, and we appreciate that you are sharing personal experiences, so please answer only those questions that you are comfortable responding to. In addition, given the number of people we are hearing from today and the size of the committee, members will try to ask questions of specific attendees where possible, so witnesses do not have to answer every question. Given how many of you there are, please do not try to answer every question, especially if someone else has covered the point. You also have the option of sending written comments after the meeting if there is anything that you do not get the chance to convey today.

I welcome Emma Newton, Judith Williams, Karen Vaughan, Angela Kelly, Linda Robertson, Dr Shaun Harley and Críostóir Piondargás, who are all teachers, and Isabel Marshall, a headteacher.

I will kick off with the first question, which is the same first question that I asked the impressive panel of trainee teachers we spoke to earlier. What was your motivation for becoming a teacher?

Judith Williams: It was the children. I always wanted to be a teacher from about the age of seven. Working with children, no two days are the same; no two hours are the same. You are never looking at your watch to see when the coffee break is; you are always trying to see how much more you can fit in before the coffee break comes. The great variety of work, the children and your colleagues are what motivate you.

Dr Shaun Harley: I was educated by the Marist Brothers of the Schools, and at one point I was following that line and saw the vocational element of that. Although I did not become a Marist brother myself, I eventually pursued that line because I thought that it was a worthwhile pathway to plan my life with. It was all about teaching young people, inspiring them and helping them to develop.

Linda Robertson: I was at a crossroads in my life and I decided that there was more to life than making money or working for somebody who makes money, so I decided to try something different. I am a newly qualified teacher.

Isabel Marshall: I became a teacher because I loved the headteacher I had when I was at primary school. I went to a small primary school and was very interested in what he did. He was enthusiastic about his job and he spoke about his jobs around the world, so I saw it as a great career. Coming from a background where nobody had that experience, he really inspired me, and I still keep in touch with that headteacher from primary school.

The Convener: It is amazing how often we hear that a teacher has inspired others to teach.

Karen Vaughan: I will be perfectly honest. I did a computing degree and, towards the end of it, I realised that I was not a true computing geek after all but more of a people person. I was at the point of thinking, “Where do I go from here?”, and of course the default or fallback was to become a teacher. I put up my hand and say that I did it because I did not have another clear direction. However, shortly into my career, I realised that there were a lot of kids who needed help and whom no one else was going to help. I have always been drawn to the more challenging areas of teaching, working with not the general masses but the ones for whom we do not get it right.

The Convener: At a personal level, were you delighted to find out that you are not a geek but a people person?

Karen Vaughan: Oh yes—absolutely.

Angela Kelly: I had a bit of a negative experience when I was in primary 5. My teacher was a friend of my parents outside work. I was a hesitant reader, and I was asked to read on to a tape every night at home. It would then be played in class the next day, and the children had to put their hands on their head whenever I hesitated. That was supposed to help me to become a less hesitant reader and speaker. Four years later, my younger brother, who had been diagnosed with dyslexia at band B, which is not terribly serious but serious enough, had a horrendous time with the same teacher. Although my parents went to the council and the headteacher and so on, nothing

really moved at that time. That was when I became interested in additional support needs and the children who are maybe not top of the class, who do not shine and who have not got confidence and self-worth. I became interested in how we bring them to the forefront and in who will be their advocate if they cannot speak for themselves. That was why I felt driven towards teaching.

The Convener: That is interesting. I am sure that Ross Greer will have some questions for you on that later.

Críostóir Piondargás: Similarly to others, my motivation is working with young people, which is fantastic. It is a real privilege to work with young people on a day-to-day basis. Their energy and their enthusiasm for life and their studies are really infectious. Like others, I had teachers who were a massive inspiration to me—in particular, my art teacher and my technical teacher. I am dyslexic, and for me it was a big thing to be successful at something and not to struggle. I was always quite slow at reading at school and I always felt a bit of pressure. When I was doing subjects where I did not struggle, a bit of weight was taken off my shoulders, so I enjoy being able to help young people with that, too.

As a Gaelic-medium teacher, the motivation to promote Gaelic and instil in young people the enthusiasm and pride that I have for the language is massively important.

The Convener: That is fantastic—we have heard a wide variety of reasons, but they all had children at the heart of them. That is great.

Colin Beattie: The first question really should be about retention of teachers. What factors make teachers decide to retire early or leave the service, and what would encourage them to stay?

Isabel Marshall: I have been teaching for 33 years and I have been a headteacher for the last 12. I have thoroughly loved my career, but I have resigned, and I will leave in six weeks. I have loved it and I would advise anybody to go into it as a career, but I am utterly exhausted. The breadth of social and emotional demands as well as the management demands on me have reached a point where I feel that I need to have a break.

Colin Beattie: Can you expand a little on what you mean by “social demands”?

Isabel Marshall: As well as interaction with teachers, there is interaction with families, who are often in extreme difficulties. That has a social and emotional impact on you. There are also social demands in education. Being part of a school nowadays calls on you to be involved in the wider community, and that can pull on you in different ways—examples of that are social events after

school and evening events. That is part and parcel of building the community, which is important, but it is also exhausting.

I feel guilty in many ways, but other teachers look at me and say, "I think that you do a good job, but I would not want your job." We need to try to redress that. I said that I became a teacher because I saw another teacher who influenced me, and I need to do that positively with others.

Generally, the work-life balance is out of kilter.

Colin Beattie: What would have made you take a different decision?

Isabel Marshall: A chance to stop, to refresh, to share the workload and to reduce the workload.

Colin Beattie: Have you had that discussion with the local education authority?

Isabel Marshall: Yes.

Colin Beattie: But you are still leaving.

Isabel Marshall: I am. I had considered a year's career break, but that would have left the school hanging and not really knowing where it was going. A few years ago, a career break would have been helpful, to allow me to refresh, go somewhere else and see other things that were happening.

The Convener: Why did you not take a career break then?

Isabel Marshall: Financially, it did not suit me, because I am the main wage earner in my house. I have children who have just gone to university, which obviously imposes demands, too.

The Convener: I have grandkids doing the same thing, so I know how expensive that is.

Angela Kelly: Having spoken to colleagues at middle-management level, I know that several of us feel that what is being asked of us is no longer sustainable. We feel that we are not seen as professionals and are not trusted as professionals. We are highly accountable for everything that we do.

If, for instance, we attend a twilight session—in my local authority, very few training courses now take place in the school day, so we have to attend them after our working day—we are expected to train staff in our workplace on what we have learned. We then have to go into our GTCS update and talk about action and impact of having benefited from that training through our council. Typing that up takes a lot of time. Then, in order to have the action and impact take place, we need to get a working party together. After that three or four-hour-long twilight session, we have to build on it. There are more and more demands, and we have got to the point where staff say to me that

they would actually rather not go on the course. They know that if they go on the course, not only will they have to organise childcare for them to be able to do that after work, but a continued pile-up of work and responsibilities will be put on them.

Some staff who have done that successfully have provided very good CAT—collective agreement time—training in-house to their staff. Other primary schools in the learning community have then asked them to deliver the training in their school. The work builds up continuously. There are no benefits. No one says, "Thank you very much. We value what you have done." Nobody comes back to say that to us. It is very much presumed that we have at our disposal an unlimited amount of time to do that—and that is well outwith the 35-hour week.

The Convener: You say that there are no benefits, but it is clear that there are benefits; it is just that they do not come back to you.

Angela Kelly: Absolutely.

Colin Beattie: You said that you are not seen as "professional". By whom are you not seen as such—the community or the authority?

Angela Kelly: The community in general. I started teaching 15 years ago, and I am now principal teacher in the same school that I started teaching in. Parents' approaches to teachers can vary from school to school, but there is a lack of respect for teachers, particularly those in middle and senior management. Some of my colleagues have said that nearly a decade ago, when headteachers had to begin introducing themselves and allowing their staff to call them by their first name, a lot of parents took that on. Parents now address headteachers by their first name across the playground.

Parents have every right to come in and ask questions about what is happening with their child's education and whether something has gone wrong. However, increasingly parents arrive on the doorstep expecting to have an appointment facilitated for them right then and there. Different schools have different processes for how that it is dealt with. Parents of children who have come to our school have said that the previous headteacher would always see them immediately. There is a lack of consistency in how issues are addressed in schools, and in whether headteachers should be providing appointments on the spot or whether they should be giving parents a timeframe in which to cool off, which may be necessary. We find that parents come in and are quite demanding of teachers' time or senior management's time. They forget that those teachers should be in class teaching and that the time for appointments should be out of school hours.

11:30

There is also the time that it takes to do the paperwork for ASN children. As Ross Greer quite rightly said, one in four children in every class have identified additional support needs. In my experience, there are slightly more children with additional support needs than that. The paperwork for identifying a child's needs and making sure that the teacher knows how to work with those needs and provide a learning programme for that child is an immense task. You can be trained on autism—you can go to a course on autism—but every child with autism has different needs and the spectrum of needs can be immense. Often, the needs of the parents are also immense. There is then the time that the teacher has to take to make sure that parents are fully informed on what the teacher hopes to achieve with the children and what parents can be doing at home to support their children. That involves hours and hours' worth of paperwork, discussion and feedback. That time is not taken into account.

Colin Beattie: What overall point would you like to make?

Angela Kelly: It is overwhelming, and many staff often feel that they are juggling. Trying to prioritise is becoming more and more difficult because there are so many high priorities; you do not know which one to tackle first and which one can be left for a few days.

The Convener: I know that Linda Robertson wants to come in. I am sorry to ask this, but can people try to keep their answers a bit shorter and not repeat answers that someone else has given, because we have a lot to get through?

Linda Robertson: I want to back up what others have said. I come from industry, and I have never worked as hard as I have in teaching. I cannot imagine working until I am 67 at that level. Some days, you cannot even go to the toilet or have lunch. It is that busy. I cannot imagine working at that level at 65. That is why you cannot keep teachers.

Emma Newton: I spoke to my colleagues before I came and they all said that none of them will work until they are 67. Most of them cannot see themselves working past the next five or 10 years, because of the workload and the stress. In my particular school, we have had changing management, which has resulted in changing curriculum models and changing planning methods—everything is changing. This year has been a bit of a flux year. The expectations are so huge. I could work 100 hours a week and I would not get everything done to a level that I would be happy with. You have to draw a line. I cannot see how I can continue working full time until I am 67. It just will not happen.

The Convener: Karen—you are a supply teacher, I believe.

Karen Vaughan: Yes, I am. I have worked full time at various points in my life and I have worked part time at various points in my life. I have had career breaks to work in industry as well. More recently, I have made the conscious decision to refuse to work full time because it is not sustainable from a health point of view or from a family point of view. It is not about the money; it is a case of wanting part-time, permanent work. Believe it or not, I am really struggling to find that, so I might not be able to stay in teaching. Working full time is not an option because of stress and burn-out, as everyone has said.

The Convener: So there is a struggle to get part-time, permanent work. What about a job share? Maybe I have said a bad word, but you know what I mean—an arrangement whereby one teacher is in for part of the week and another teacher is in for the other part.

Karen Vaughan: There are very few cases of that working but, again, it varies greatly from authority to authority. However, with a family, I cannot move to another authority, so I am limited by that.

Colin Beattie: What I am hearing is that the top issue is not salary—it is the workload. Do you think that the remuneration is adequate at your levels?

Judith Williams: On the previous point, my experience is very different from Angela Kelly's. I have been in the same job share for 17 years in primary and I think that that is why I am still teaching—I have been able to have that balance between my home life and my school life. The fact that I have been sharing the job with the same person makes a huge difference because we know each other very well.

The workload is a huge issue, and because the curriculum for excellence changes regularly there is no stability. There does not seem to be long-term, political, strategic planning; we seem to be reacting with short-term ideas—tonnes of money are thrown in and we are all expected to learn and embed the new approach, but the next one comes along before we have had a chance to catch our breath.

That is a huge issue in teacher retention. People say, "I'm just not sure that I can put up with another curriculum change and another new initiative—and oh look, here's an initiative that happened about 15 years ago coming around again."

The Convener: We will have the cabinet secretary before us in two weeks' time, and we will

certainly ask him about his plans for a stable programme.

Dr Harley: I echo Judith Williams's point. It is a problem to do with change, direction and perhaps leadership—I do not necessarily mean in the school; I am talking about beyond the school, I guess in SQA and with whoever is making decisions about curriculum for excellence.

It is not that teachers have a particular issue with change; they want change that makes sense. They are intelligent, rational, professional people, and they feel that the current changes are taking them away from all the things that the committee has heard about from this panel and the previous one. Teachers want to be in the classroom, but the changes are taking them away from the classroom.

By the way, even though there have been changes, there will be still more change, because the situation is still not right. Teachers see the prospect of further change and say, "I'm backing off from this." Someone who is at the point at which their pension plan is sitting nicely is able to leave, which might explain why people at the top end of the age range are thinking of leaving.

Another issue is salary and opportunities for promotion. When the McCrone arrangements came in, principal and assistant principal teachers were taken away and there was a move towards having faculties and faculty heads. That was a major change, and my school was one of the first to make it. There are implications for workload. For example, I am in charge of a technology faculty. I look after computing, what we call techie, and business. I am in charge of 17 to 20 different courses. It is my business to manage requisition, deal with teachers, including probationers and student teachers, and do all the things that go with that—but then a change is put in place, and it is followed by another, and on and on it goes.

As someone pointed out, there is no way that all the work can fit into our contractual hours. If teachers pulled out of doing most of the things that they are trying hard to keep up with because they trust that everything will come right, the changes would just fall flat on their faces. There is fantastic goodwill from teachers in trying to deal with workload. There is also the possibility that teachers will not be promoted, because the people are not there to do it. It is about money and workload.

The Convener: You have raised a number of issues. What mechanism is there for you to raise such issues with the education authority and further up the chain, so that people recognise your unhappiness and respond to it?

Linda Robertson: I have raised issues with my union representative. Huge changes have just

been made to national 5 computing science for 2017-18, and in my school the 2017-18 curriculum will start in three weeks' time. It is difficult because everyone is so busy—where do we go? Everyone is aware of the situation, but teachers are so used to change that they just cope and try to manage it themselves. As someone who comes from industry, I can see that that is not the right approach; the change should be getting project managed somewhere, but that is not happening.

Emma Newton: My union has a system on which we can record the hours that we work every week. The union takes that information, and every year we hear that we are working more and more hours. However, there is no shift from the top down—nobody is asking how they can reduce our workload. All they do is give us more changes, more workload and more expectations.

The Convener: If you are speaking to the union, what does the union do with the information that you give it? Who does the union speak to?

Emma Newton: The union comes to meetings like this with you.

The Convener: Would the immediate port of call not be the education authority?

Emma Newton: The situation is the same across Scotland—it is not unique to my school or to my colleagues' schools. The expectations on every teacher are huge, whether they are in primary or secondary schools. As Isabel Marshall said, we now have a social element to what we do. I am quite frequently in conversations with parents at 6 or 7 o'clock at night about issues that they have with their children that have nothing to do with me as a teacher, but the parents feel that, as the child's teacher, I should be able to solve those problems. There are methods for us to report such things, but it seems to get to a certain level and then nothing is done.

The Convener: Okay. We will hear briefly from Angela Kelly and then Críostóir Piondargás.

Angela Kelly: We have the Educational Institute of Scotland working time agreement. All the teaching staff meet once a year to agree what the 35-hour week will look like—or what a good one looks like. We often talk to the children—it is the same idea. However, that meeting is now very much a paper exercise. Often, the headteacher will already have pencilled in hours that he suggests that we should spend on forward planning, assessment or family engagement, but those hours are not doable. There is also the social aspect that Isabel Marshall brought up—things such as bag-packing at weekends to raise money for school funds. Those expectations have become the norm.

My final point is on the money. Good teachers do not tend to do things for the money. However, going back 10 years, if someone took responsibility for a curricular area or if they took children away on an excursion such as the primary 7 week away, there was a small increment in salary that they could apply to the local council for. That is no longer the case in my local authority—I do not know about the rest. There is no monetary incentive for people to run extracurricular clubs or lunchtime clubs or to be the co-ordinator of a curricular area.

Críostóir Piondargás: I agree with what Angela Kelly said about the working time agreement. We have just had our meeting and it was very much a paper exercise. That is part of the problem. It feels as though we are shuffling the deck chairs. When you asked that question about the immediate port of call, convener, my first reaction was that I do not actually know. I do not think that teachers have an outlet. Do things have to escalate to the point at which we talk to trade unions? Sometimes the only option is to run the risk of sending a ranting email—there is no opportunity to voice concerns at a low level, where they could maybe be sorted.

The Convener: That is probably the point that I was making. Is there some mechanism by which teachers in a local area can talk to the education authority? Some of the problem may be the result of Government changes that cause pressures and so on, but a teacher's immediate port of call is surely the education authority. Do you not have any method for communicating with the education authority, telling it what your problems are and trying to get a result?

Críostóir Piondargás: I do not know that we have, and I do not know what changes would happen if we took part in such a process.

Linda Robertson: I attended a web seminar with the SQA on the new national 5 changes for computing science. There must have been about 100 computing science teachers from throughout the country who attended that online seminar. Basically, we were just told what the changes were—there was no way of feeding back. The SQA is not interested in a dialogue.

The Convener: Okay. I will move on. Before Tavish Scott asks his question, I ask everybody to keep things as tight as possible. It is not necessary for everyone to respond.

Tavish Scott: The convener always says that before I ask a question, because he knows that I waffle on—he is quite right.

I want to ask one specific question of Isabel Marshall as a retiring head, and then a general question about teacher training and the evidence that we heard earlier.

As a retiring head, you can be wonderfully objective now. There are proposals to give headteachers more autonomy. Will that help or hinder in relation to all the issues that have been raised this morning?

Isabel Marshall: I am a resigning head rather than a retiring head.

Tavish Scott: I apologise. It is a very important distinction.

Isabel Marshall: It is, because I am going off to find a different career. I am in the fortunate position of being at the stage of my career where I can do that.

11:45

Tavish Scott: If you had more powers as a head right now, would you be able to address, for example, the point about the changes to national 5s? In the theoretical world, if your principal teacher came to you and said, "We cannot even get the SQA to listen," you, as a head, could phone the head of the SQA and say, "This is not acceptable. My school will not be able to do this unless you do X, Y and Z". Might that kind of change help the head, and therefore a school?

Isabel Marshall: I am at primary level, so I do not directly interact with the SQA, but I speak to the local authority. In the last year, the biggest issue that I have spoken about with the local authority, and with staff, is recruitment. We do not have enough people to do the job, which means pulling people away from the jobs that they should be doing to cover.

Our other difficulty is that, if something is devolved directly to the school, I do not have enough head space to deal with it. Pupil equity funding is a current example; we are trying to find the time to deal with it without it being overly bureaucratic. However, I think that the spirit of that approach—devolving extra money to the school—is the way ahead.

As a group, teachers need to get better at saying, "We are going to do this instead of that," because teachers are fixers. When you ask a teacher to do something, they will do it on top of what they are already doing, so we need to empower our teachers to say—and I say this frequently at staff meetings—"What are we doing this instead of?" We then need a culture, both at the wider level and at the school level, of saying, "This far and no further," or, "This is replacing that", rather than, "This as well as that."

Tavish Scott: So it could be beneficial, but only if something is instead of something else, rather than on top of it.

Isabel Marshall: Yes.

Tavish Scott: That is an important principle. Thank you.

My wider question is about the evidence that we took on teacher training, and particularly about placements. Our earlier, brilliant, panel all reflected the importance of teacher training and the placement part of the training, but they cited numerous problems with how it works in practice. What is this panel's professional take on that issue, and what could we do to make it a lot better?

Linda Robertson: I am a newly qualified teacher, and I had all the same problems that they had. I was quite lucky, in that I had a teacher with chartered teacher status in my probationer year who was amazing to be mentored by. Still, even those teachers do not have the time to mentor trainees properly.

The way that the GTCS runs placements—having people commute an hour or two hours, or even three hours—just adds to the stress, and so does not having any money to cope with it. I go with what the previous panel said on that point. Also, some schools are expecting you, but some are not.

Dr Harley: I will make a wider point. What the earlier panel said was very interesting. Some of the problems that they talked about involved classroom management and wanting to be in the classroom. They wanted to develop the art of the classroom teacher—that is what I heard them say this morning.

There is a problem with the way that we pull our teachers together. I shuddered a bit when fast track was mentioned. We get people who do a three or four-year degree in a subject area, and then they do the one year of teacher training. That is where the challenge is. They learn French, English or history at university level, but the scientific art of teaching is to be encapsulated in that one year's training. It is neither a good job of the science of the training—the professional body of knowledge that informs their practice—nor a good job of the art of practising. I feel that there is something disproportionate about that.

One person mentioned the idea of two years for training. I know that that has financial implications, but let us put those aside for the moment. The question is: what kind of teachers we would get at the end of it?

Tavish Scott: Would you favour two years?

Dr Harley: Actually, I would favour a BEd—a four-year professional degree to make someone into a teacher, because people have to mature into it. That way, when they come out the door at the other end, they are ready. All the little problems about classroom management, such as

how to do a register, supervise corridors and deal with additional support needs and change, will not come as surprises. They understand the theory of how learners learn and are able to apply the theory of how teachers teach. They are able to find their level and decide which is the right way to go with a certain pupil in a certain group. Teachers can take things from their toolkit, but trainee teachers do not get enough time to build up their toolkit in one year, and that is an issue.

I have one other concern. As a faculty principal, I have taught some outstanding people who have come in and done a fabulous job, despite what I have just said. However, I feel that, because of underrecruitment in many areas—I have seen that in the documentation that we have been given—universities are not selective enough. They have taken people into teaching who might be told by a more stringent filtering system, “You don't have what it takes to be a teacher and to stand up in front of these groups and be tuned into the individual needs of a collective classroom.” I know that that is a hard message to filter through, but there are fundamental problems.

Tavish Scott: Is your argument that the assessment of whether that person will make a teacher or not should be at the beginning and not the end of the course?

Dr Harley: The way it is just now with the one-year course at the end of a degree, they are getting bums on seats. Perhaps that is a bit unfair, but I have seen one or two trainees coming through of whom I would have said from the word go, “That is not somebody who is suitable for teaching.” That is not even within my own faculty.

The Convener: I very much doubt that that is the case only for teachers. In any field, one or two people will come through who are unfit for the job.

Dr Harley: That may be true.

Críostóir Piondargás: As someone who is in Gaelic-medium education, I come at this from a slightly different angle. You will probably be aware that there is a Gaelic immersion for teachers course, of which I have recent experience. I have spoken to quite a lot of students who are on it, and the feedback that I have heard and the results that I have seen have been quite mixed. There have been a few success stories, but I recently had a student on placement from that course and there was barely a word of Gaelic spoken. The feedback that I have heard from students suggested that there was nowhere near enough focus on the language. There seems to be a lot more focus on the achievement of a masters-level qualification in pedagogy and it does not seem to be fit for purpose.

I spoke to a friend of mine who had learned Basque and worked in the Basque country, which

is where the Gaelic model was adopted from, and he told me that the Basque course that it was based on was 12 months long and had 12 units, after each of which the teachers had to sit a test to prove that they met certain criteria, and only after they had passed all 12 units would they be deemed fit to work in Basque-medium education. I do not see the same standards being applied in Gaelic.

Ross Greer: Before I move on to ASN, I want to pick up on something that Shaun Harley said. You talked about the sheer amount that you have to manage. What is the balance between teaching time and the amount of time you spend simply managing your department?

Dr Harley: I am lucky because I have a lot of miles on my clock. I think that I have got the art of teaching and I understand my subject area, so I feel that my time standing in front of a class is not as demanding as it might be for a teacher at the beginning of their career.

I am also lucky because I have fantastic teachers who work with me as part of my faculty. I delegate and they willingly take on those responsibilities. That is one of the ways in which I manage, because my colleagues are highly motivated and very professional and they take on extra responsibilities, perhaps because of their innate joy in the subject area. They can see where taking on such responsibilities will go and that it might enhance their promotional chances, because they are building up their experience and their portfolio. That is how I manage, but there are times when things get a bit slack and I get caught on the hop. However, I am lucky because of the things that I have just mentioned. I have people who work with me, and I go and get advice and prioritise.

Ross Greer: My next question follows on from that slightly. I would be interested to hear Angela Kelly's thoughts on this, but anyone else is welcome to comment. In the past, we have had feedback from teachers—particularly newly qualified ones—about career progression and how it very quickly gets to a point where teachers have to go into management or they cannot progress any further. On the subject of ASN, what are your thoughts on ASN teaching being a promoted post in itself?

Angela Kelly: That would be fantastic; it is long overdue. The BEd degree course could easily be run in such a way that a particular emphasis could be placed on ASN throughout the four years.

As Shaun Harley said, and as the trainee teachers mentioned earlier, teachers come out with skills that they have honed through their own educational experiences. For example, a teacher might not be the most numerate person, but they

go out to teach numeracy. The universities definitely need to do more on that.

Over and above everything else, ASN needs to be taught more concisely, and it definitely needs to be taught in the colleges. We are seeing NQTs coming out who are really quite frightened by some of the behaviours that they see in classrooms and are very unclear about how to begin approaching that, never mind planning a personal learning programme.

Karen Vaughan: We have to make an important distinction here. Traditionally, teachers got an increment on their salaries if they had responsibility for additional support needs, which was attractive at the time. If we are going for more of a focused pupil support job, that makes sense. However, when we look at classrooms nowadays, pretty much every teacher in the school is an ASN teacher. Whereas previously a teacher might have had in a classroom one or two pupils with stated or very specific needs, a teacher will now have, in a class of 28, about 15 pupils with individual programmes, statements and records of needs that they must be aware of. If that is the line that we are going to go down, in theory, every teacher should be in a promoted post, just because of the sheer volume of those with additional needs and the mechanics of doing it all. Even though a teacher might not have responsibility for doing the individualised educational programmes, they might be asked to feed into them by the support department. To try to keep on top of all that—I am sorry; I have lost track of what I was going to say.

Being a support teacher is different from being a mainstream teacher who has 15 kids with ASN in their class and who does not have the first clue about how to cope with them. That is where a lot of people struggle. We have to go to our support colleagues and say, "I don't know how to deal with those 15 folk in the class. One says A and the other says B. They cannae be in the same room at the same time, but they are, so what am I supposed to do about it?" The support teachers say, "I haven't really got time to talk you through how to do that," so it all goes round in a vicious circle.

Ross Greer: To go back to the evidence that we heard from our previous panel, my impression was that NQTs are coming out with wildly inconsistent levels of knowledge of ASN, depending on where they went to university. Is that your experience as newly qualified teachers or as folk who work with them all the time?

Isabel Marshall: We need to be careful about the aggregation of children with additional support needs. There are social, educational and behavioural needs. A teacher might come out very well trained in dyslexia or autism but then be

thrown by a child who has behavioural or emotional needs. We have nurture bases in our schools to deal with emotional needs; teachers are highly skilled in addressing that. That is different from a teacher dealing with a child in their class who has a sight problem. When we talk about training for people in meeting ASN for pupils, we need to be well aware of the breadth of experience that is required.

Ross Greer: We need to find a balance between giving all newly qualified teachers that breadth of knowledge and addressing the points that have been brought up in this session and the previous one about the need for specialist staff. As we have just discussed, with the breadth of support needs that exists, even a specialist ASN teacher might struggle. We received evidence about a young person who was deaf who found out that the support staff knew everything that there was to know about autism, whereas their need was wildly different, in that they simply could not hear.

12:00

Isabel Marshall: I agree with what Shaun Harley said. Over a PG course, it is difficult to give teachers experience of all that. Over a four-year BEd, there is a greater chance of giving teachers a greater breadth of experience of children.

Angela Kelly: I would like to make a point about inclusion, if I may. The transition from inclusion in primary schools to inclusion in secondary schools is extremely difficult, and I do not think that enough money or time has been spent on dealing with the mental health issues that children with additional support needs have in moving from a primary school class to a secondary school class.

One of my pupils enters his high school every day through a canteen entrance. He cannot come in with the rest of the pupils because of his electric wheelchair, for which a ramp is needed to get in and out. Inclusion needs to be more doing and less talking about. We have decided that inclusion is for all and that we are going to have fully inclusive schools—mainstream schools in which children with additional support needs are included—but the money needs to be put in to support those pupils, either as individuals or as small groups.

The Convener: Okay. We will move on.

Liz Smith: Mrs Marshall, let me draw you back to a comment that you made about recruitment. That is obviously extremely important to you as a headteacher. You implied that there are some issues when you are recruiting staff. Why do you think that there are issues with the recruitment of sufficient staff?

Isabel Marshall: There is a perception that it is a very rewarding but difficult job—and it is a difficult job. I am concerned that the media portrayal of education is often extreme. We see television programmes on which children are very badly behaved, and the focus is generally on badly behaved children. It is important that we get the message out there that the majority of children are not so extreme.

Salaries were mentioned, and the salary in the early stages of somebody's career is important. I do not think that there should be a differential for somebody moving into a post on promotion. I would like a return of the chartered teacher, whereby teachers were rewarded for staying in their classrooms and being good role models. That was a very good idea. Teachers could come into teaching and stay in teaching without having to be promoted to management posts.

My two sons are at university, having just left secondary school, and neither of them wants to go back to school as a teacher, because they see teachers working very hard and being treated badly by members of their classes. Asking 18 and 19-year-olds to choose to become teachers is difficult if they have not had a good experience of school.

Liz Smith: Thank you for that. That is helpful.

In some of the evidence that has been presented to the committee, there are concerns that, at times, particularly when it comes to dealing with the shortage of teachers in specific areas, we are not very good at allowing teachers from other jurisdictions—who might be extremely well qualified and very successful—to come and teach in Scotland. We heard some interesting evidence this morning from Mark Melrose, who told us that he had had the skills but faced a major issue because he did not have one recognised unit. I find it extraordinary that somebody with very good skills can be debarred in that way. Has the issue come up with you or any of your headteacher colleagues when you have tried to recruit people? Do you get applications from elsewhere but find yourself constrained by the need for GTCS registration?

Isabel Marshall: I have had positive experiences with people who have done the conversion course or the return-to-teaching course. I have a teacher working with me at the moment who trained as a teacher, took a career break before she qualified and then came back into teaching. She has brought extra life experience with her, which has been very positive.

Liz Smith: Would you like to see that extended?

Isabel Marshall: Yes, I would like to see that extended, as I think that it is very positive. It is important to recruit people with skills from outside

school. My own career has gone from school to college to school, and I work with people who have entered teaching later in their career, who have brought huge benefits to the school from having worked outside education. They bring different perspectives into the classroom and into management roles.

Liz Smith: Do you have any specific recommendation as to how we could extend that and open it up a little bit?

Isabel Marshall: Offering people the opportunity to go into schools on some sort of secondment, to see whether teaching is for them, would be a good idea.

Liz Smith: Thank you very much.

Daniel Johnson: My line of questioning follows on from comments that Shaun Harley and Linda Robertson made about the structure of the course. I also have questions about the curriculum for excellence and its implications for teacher training.

The curriculum for excellence is very ambitious, but that places challenges on teachers, as it is open—it is not prescriptive. Does teacher training currently prepare teachers adequately to teach the curriculum for excellence? If there are gaps, what are they, and how could they be addressed?

Dr Harley: I suspect that, if you asked 100 teachers what the curriculum for excellence is, you would get 100 different answers. To me, it is about undoing the box of the classroom, which was driven towards the SQA exams, in the hope that, when people get out of school, they will see the connection between what they learned in school and what they are trying to do outwith it. The curriculum for excellence says that we should open up the school, the classroom and the pupils, and see that there is a whole gestalt of experience that pupils are moving forward with and that we are contributors to that, as well as the boy scouts, the girl guides, the skiing holidays and everything else that pupils do.

Could you tune me back into the specifics of your question again?

Daniel Johnson: Does teacher training adequately prepare teachers for the context and expectation that you have just described?

Dr Harley: I do not think that it does. However, to be honest, I do not think that it could, because it is part of the process of maturing into the profession. That will take time; those in the profession themselves are working to mature into it. Until the professional body that trainee teachers move into has a strong sense of its identity with regard to the curriculum for excellence, it is very hard to convey that to trainee teachers. The answer is therefore no, but I do not particularly see that as a fault of the training programmes.

Linda Robertson: I do not think that I could have done it at 22. I coped because I have a knowledge of industry and an understanding of my subject area, so I can cover all the areas that the curriculum for excellence covers in computing science.

Daniel Johnson: You made the interesting comment that, from your industry background, you felt that the curriculum for excellence needs a project manager, and Shaun Harley said that he is not quite sure who is in charge. Do either of you have a good feeling for who is in charge of the curriculum for excellence and who controls its implementation?

Linda Robertson: No, I do not.

Dr Harley: It is a bit like the internet. Who is in charge of the internet? It is one of those things—it is a hybrid of different perspectives, ideas, innovations and so on.

Daniel Johnson: Do you think that it is under control?

Dr Harley: Is the curriculum for excellence under control?

Daniel Johnson: The changes to it.

Dr Harley: I think that the schools are doing their absolute best to recognise what the curriculum for excellence is trying to do and to build pupils' experiences around its ideals. They are not freewheeling; they are looking to the reference points—the documentation, guidance and best practice—to try to pull together a programme that will move forward with the ideas and aspirations of the curriculum for excellence. It is therefore under control in that way, but I am not sure that we are all necessarily interpreting it in the same way.

Daniel Johnson: I take your point. I think that schools are doing a phenomenal job in managing that but, externally, the process does not feel under control. Is that how people feel?

Judith Williams: I wonder whether there is a case for a non-political body being in charge of education. Every time we get a new minister for education, they want to feel that they have had an effect, so they change things. Do they necessarily change things for the benefit of the pupils? The latest programme for international student assessment, or PISA, results suggest not. Is there therefore a case for having a non-political body in charge of education that does not change every time a minister changes?

Daniel Johnson: I have a final question. In the session with the previous panel, a specific point was made about the deliverability of national 4 and national 5 and whether what needed to be taught could be taught in a single year. Do you have any

reflections to make on that specific point? I think that most of you were in the room when it was made.

Linda Robertson: Changes have been made because there was too much in the national 5 in computing science. The changes are good, but they have not been planned; they have just been given to us to implement. As someone who was a project manager of big IT projects, I would have told my project manager that I could not implement changes in three weeks.

However, the changes in question are good ones, and it should be possible for the new national 5 in computing science to be done in a year.

Daniel Johnson: Would you concur with the point that was made about some kids being disadvantaged by the amount that needs to be taught in a year? It is an important point.

Linda Robertson: Yes. I think that most schools start their national 5 courses at this time of year.

Gillian Martin: You are not the first group of teachers that we have spoken to—we have held quite a few sessions after hours, when teachers have come to the Parliament. A couple of months ago, Colin Beattie and I had a discussion with a panel of teachers who stressed the importance of early years education and the need for children to be exposed to education before they go to primary school. Many of those teachers came from schools in quite deprived areas with high levels of poverty.

We do not know which schools you are from, so I do not know where you teach. Do you agree that getting children involved in education earlier might have an impact on many of the classroom management issues that primary teachers face? Angela Kelly mentioned pastoral issues. What are your thoughts on that?

Judith Williams: The earlier we get children involved in education, the better. There is a case for saying that we need to start earlier than the pre-school years. I do not know this for sure, but I think that many of the yearly checks that used to be carried out by health visitors before children start school are no longer happening, so health visitors are not able to flag up particular children. That means that, by the time a child comes into pre-school education at three, three years will already have gone by in which action could have been taken—for example, they could have been referred to a vulnerable twos group. If we are to close the attainment gap, the process needs to start earlier than school.

Gillian Martin: It would be interesting to hear other people's views on that. It came across

strongly from the teachers to whom Colin Beattie and I spoke that, when it comes to learning, a lot could be done before children go into nursery education, especially in areas where there is extreme poverty.

Emma Newton: I agree. I think that a lot could be done before children get to nursery. However, at the moment there is a shift to take teachers out of nursery. That is a huge issue. If we say that we need to have teachers in nurseries for children from the age of three, how can we do that if we are taking teachers out of nursery because the funding is not there, because we do not have enough teachers or because there is no longer a requirement for a teacher to have contact with a nursery child every day of the week?

The Convener: I think that we are talking about two different things; I think that Judith Williams is talking about the conditions in the home and the early rearing of the child before they get to the nursery stage.

Judith Williams: That would have been my next point.

Emma Newton: I think that it is part of the same question. The question was about the involvement of teachers in the early years environment, what impact that has and whether we can do it earlier.

We could do it earlier—we could have fully qualified teachers in nursery settings working with children from the age of six months if we wanted to. Some schools have nurseries attached to them.

Gillian Martin: Are you aware that the Government's focus is on putting more into early years education to address some of the issues that you have talked about?

Emma Newton: Yes, we are aware of that, but after the summer holidays each nursery in my council area will have only 0.5 of a teacher, so that teacher will have contact with children only half the time.

Isabel Marshall: Having a teacher in nursery was very good from the point of view of links with health visitors and speech therapists. There was backwards and forwards training—the speech therapist could train the teachers and learning assistants in how to help using their skills. Similarly, we could link that whole process into education. Such multi-agency working is vital. Unfortunately, I think that we have moved away from that, to the detriment of the children.

12:15

Angela Kelly: It is crucial to get parents involved as soon as possible in their children's early years education so that their involvement in

the children's school education can continue throughout the years. We have been trying very hard in our school to get that parental engagement. For example, we have play days, when parents come in and shadow what the nursery staff are doing, watching them to see how to read a story with expression, using props and puppets. We are taking that into primary school, as the group of three-year-old children we started with are now in primary 1. If parents are working, they send along a gran or an auntie, but for 20 minutes a week they are involved in storytelling with the children, using magnetic letter boards and so on. It means that parents are learning how to teach literacy at home.

Gillian Martin: Was the decision about that made by the local authority, or was it made at school level?

Angela Kelly: It was in our improvement plan three years ago. We have managed to sustain it and take it forward to have more of an impact. We hope to use some of the pupil equity funding to continue it and make it more sustainable.

Johann Lamont: I am very struck by what has been said. When I started teaching, it was the norm that at intervals and lunch times, we went down and talked to our colleagues. That was changing by the time I left teaching, but my sense is that the pressures on teachers now are even more massive than they were when I left.

A lot has been said to us about there not being enough support staff, classroom assistants and learning support, which puts more pressures on teachers. However, are there other areas where teachers could be supported in order to make a difference to the pressures that they are under? Has the level of administrative support changed, for example? We have heard anecdotally that teachers now are more likely to have to do their own photocopying than was the case for my generation of teachers—in fact, there was no photocopying for my generation. Would having somebody else to do those practical things allow you to focus more on teaching, or are the pressures almost all about the teaching, the curriculum and the lack of support for learning, as opposed to the managing of the process around the learning?

Emma Newton: I am lucky in that I have a full-time pupil support worker, because I have a child who needs one. However, if I need photocopying done, resources made up or forms completed for going on school trips, I have to do those tasks and they have to be done in the context of everything else that I have to do as a teacher. When I first started teaching, pupil support workers would cover boards and do wall displays and photocopying, but that does not happen any more—certainly not in my school.

Johann Lamont: Is that because pupil support workers have to do more and are stretched?

Emma Newton: It is because there are not enough pupil support workers and the ones we do have are allocated to children who have specific needs, which is what they should be used for.

Johann Lamont: Another thing that I was struck by when reading the evidence from you and others is the gap between the theory of what happens in schools and the reality. For example, Críostóir Piondargás mentioned that not much Gaelic was being spoken in one case. There are also issues around supply teachers that mean that subject specialists are teaching the top end of the school and supply teachers are teaching secondary 1 to secondary 3, which I presume has a consequence for subject choices. To what extent is it true that, although you theoretically have a learning support person, they are in fact used for cover and whatever in primary school? How is that impacting on the school's ability to deliver what it is supposed to deliver?

Emma Newton: The learning support teacher is covering my class today while I am here, which means that the children she should be working with today will not get support from her, because there are no supply teachers.

Judith Williams: We have the same issue with supply teaching staff. Our learning support teacher will be asked to cover classes when no other cover can be found. We find that the lack of supply teachers hits us particularly in terms of visiting specialists. Our visiting specialists provide our McCrone time, but we find that we are regularly teaching more than our classroom hours because the visiting support teacher is off ill and we cannot get a supply teacher. Quite often, staff will come to work when they are not well, which means that they get more unwell to the point where they are off ill for a week, whereas if they had gone off for a couple of days, that might not have happened. However, they do not want to go off, because they know that that will leave the school short of a teacher.

Johann Lamont: Is it logged anywhere that pupils further down the secondary school are not being taught by subject specialists or that, although in theory there is learning support provision, the learning support teachers are always being used for cover? Is that logged anywhere for the school so that the local authority knows about the gap between what should be the provision and what is the provision?

Angela Kelly: I have to fill in an appendix 1 form at the end of every week, outlining how much cover I have provided and how much cover the headteacher has provided. I am class committed two days a week, with management three days a

week, but I often spend a day or a day and a half a week on class cover, and I then do the management work in my own time at home. We also have staff awaiting cover because they have not had McCrone time—I have two members of staff who are owed 17.5 hours.

Isabel Marshall: My local authority gathers statistics. We are asked to phone in if we are short and let the local authority know who is not there and, if we can cover internally, who will be covering. The local authority logs that centrally.

Johann Lamont: What happens as a consequence? Is there a trigger point? For example, if a first-year class never gets a physics or science specialist because somebody is on long-term sick leave, does that trigger anything?

Isabel Marshall: At primary level, it means that heads and deputies are supplying class contact or daily cover for classes.

Johann Lamont: In effect, you have increased management responsibility but you have to do that outwith school.

Isabel Marshall: Yes.

Dr Harley: Yes, but I know that my school cannot get the cover. Schools will send emails saying, “Do you know anyone who has retired who would be willing to come in?” First, they will look for a French teacher to teach French, for example, but they will then try to get any teacher to cover the class. It is not that schools are not trying desperately to give pupils the quality experience that they should get even though a teacher is off—or as close to that as they can get—but they cannot get the cover, because it is just not there.

Linda Robertson: I echo that. Basically, schools cannot get teachers for computing science. In my school, a supply teacher who is not a computing science teacher will be covering first and second-year classes, and I will be putting resource in for that. I am a newly qualified teacher resourcing a supply teacher’s class and my class at the same time.

To come back to admin, I have not figured out how you buy stuff in schools yet, so if anybody can tell me how to do that, could they let me know? It is different in every school.

The Convener: I am sure that somebody will tell you.

Karen Vaughan: I am dual qualified in maths and computing. Supply is my main thing. Many times, I have been desperate for supply work and I have not been phoned. To the best of my knowledge, that is not because I am a rubbish teacher or anything like that. In my local authority, some computing teachers are on long-term sick leave. It has to be said that computing teachers

are a dying breed, so I am known in every school in my authority. As we have heard, people use the grapevine—somebody says, “Right, Karen is sitting at home doing nothing, so I texted her last night and she can come in and cover a double period of higher computing, so the kids will not miss out.” The general response is, “We’ve got to wait until somebody is off for three weeks before we can buy in cover.”

There are political things in the middle level that schools maybe have no idea about.

The Convener: Sorry to interrupt, but can I clarify something? Is that a decision that the school, the local authority or the Government would make? Where would such a decision come from?

Karen Vaughan: To be fair, that is unclear. From what I can piece together from what people tell me, it seems to come from the local authority. I interact with three local authorities, because I am smack bang in the middle of them, and all three have a similar approach—they will not buy in cover until somebody has been off for a certain amount of time. Alternatively, if they have a surplus in one area, they just use those teachers and they are not allowed to get in cover.

The supply rules have changed. I am at the top of my pay scale now, but most of the time I am juggled so that I am always paid at the entry point of my pay scale, even though schools regularly need my expertise and my experience of presenting students for exams in maths and computing to fill in the gaps.

There are a lot of supply teachers out there who are willing to do more and who would come back to teaching, but the issue is the politics and the support. The support that schools give supply teachers varies tremendously. A supply teacher is seen as the lowest of the low; we are not seen as real teachers. However, we are the ones that everyone is calling for just to help them to get through a school day.

Críostóir Piondargás: I am coming at the issue from the perspective of Gaelic-medium education, specifically in secondary. As we said, it is difficult to recruit Gaelic teachers, who are obviously drawn from a smaller pool, and sometimes that means that we hire good teachers who do not speak a lot of—or any—Gaelic, with the aspiration that they will learn. The issue is how they find the time to do that and how that learning is facilitated. Committee members can imagine how someone who must deal with all the challenges that you have heard about today, as well as kids and issues in their personal life, can try to learn a language on the fly on top of all that—it is really difficult.

We have to look to relief cover to facilitate something happening, or a joined-up approach nationally or across authorities to support teachers. A lot of my colleagues are going to nightclasses and striving to do stuff, but it is such a challenge. I do not think that there is an overarching strategy on which we can all draw—there is certainly no consistent approach across schools.

Clare Haughey: You have all, in various ways, raised concerns about stress, additional workload, the pressures on you and additional hours. I think that I am right in saying that you are all local authority employees. What support are your local authorities putting in? They have a duty of care, as your employers.

Karen Vaughan: We have a helpline and, if someone rings it, they are offered six counselling sessions.

Isabel Marshall: I regularly meet the schools group manager and discuss issues with her. I have found that very useful. She is an individual at local authority level who is available to talk about ways forward. However, what is available is very limited. It is recommended to us that we use the counselling hotline.

Dr Harley: I do not know about the authority in particular, but I know that there are lots of helplines out there. However, the first port of call for support is absolutely the headteacher and senior management of the school. If it is getting to the point at which someone has to go to the external agencies, something has been lost in terms of a person's ability to manage their role in the classroom. I have had various experiences but, in general, my school has been supportive and I have never had to call on external people in the authority.

The Convener: What about Isabel Marshall?

Isabel Marshall: The first port of call is always our colleagues, who are very supportive of each other—we have a good social group in the school and we support each other. Then there is the management team and the headteacher. There comes a kind of squeeze in the whole process—you are the jam in the sandwich.

Clare Haughey: I am quite taken aback that people are immediately talking about helplines outside the school. Is there a way for teachers and headteachers to feed issues up the management chain in local authorities and say, "This is a concern; you need to take action"?

Isabel Marshall: I have met the head of schools to discuss issues, with a group of headteachers and union representatives. We met to problem solve, but it was difficult to find easily accessible solutions.

Angela Kelly: My local authority has quality improvement officers, who come out to see us—when they manage to find time in their timetable, which might be several weeks after the person has raised a concern. At that point, the person expresses their concern, and that is it.

Clare Haughey: I asked the previous panel about feedback for student teachers. I am not getting the sense that your concerns are being listened to or addressed.

Isabel Marshall: Our concerns are listened to, but I do not know what resources are available to address them. We have certainly raised concerns and we have been listened to.

Daniel Johnson: Are you saying that the critical issue is for the resources to be available for local authorities to deal with the issues that have been raised?

Isabel Marshall: Yes. What resources are available to local authorities is a critical issue, but also, as a profession, we need to agree collectively on how we can go forward and what our needs are.

12:30

Clare Haughey: The point that I raised initially was that, as your employers, your local authorities have a duty of care to you. Do you feel that they are carrying out that duty of care to you as teachers?

The Convener: No—some of you are shaking your heads.

Emma Newton: There are processes that we can follow. We rely on colleagues and we speak to headteachers, but the fundamental problem is that the workload is so great that it does not matter. Even if the local authorities listen to us, there is not a lot that they can do because there are not enough teachers, resources or time. They may listen to us, but it comes down to the availability of resources.

Clare Haughey: But they have a duty of care to act on that.

Emma Newton: They have a duty of care—absolutely. However, to play devil's advocate, what are they going to do if they do not have the funding to put 10 more teachers into each school, or if they do not have 10 more teachers? It is a kind of vicious circle—until the money, teachers and funding are in place, our workload will continue to grow.

Isabel Marshall: In social work there is a supervision system. I have suggested that we should have some sort of supervision system for teachers, in which there is regular counselling.

Clare Haughey: I agree with you. I come from a nursing background, where clinical supervision is a very valuable tool for personal development and dealing with difficult issues with colleagues, but I think that this is a much bigger issue. There is an organisational failing here.

Dr Harley: I am nodding in agreement with everything that has been said. In my authority, there were two investigations into workload; the authority spoke to teachers and had panels and everything else, but that did not change the workload one bit—in fact it just got worse and worse. Perhaps the authority is trying to exercise its duty of care by finding out exactly what is going on in the schools, but no specific action is taking place and there is no feedback—it just gets lost.

The Convener: There is something that we need to make clear, some of which has been lost in that last wee discussion. Local authorities have a duty of care, as Clare Haughey said, but also it is local authorities that make the decisions about the number of teachers, classroom assistants and supply teachers. I accept that they work to a budget, but they have almost missed out on being held responsible for any of the issues. That is why I asked whether the problem was with the Government, the local authority or the school, because there are different levels of responsibility. We have to make sure that we hold to account those who are responsible for each different part of that.

I thank the witnesses very much. The session was very helpful, and it has given us a lot to digest. After the next few weeks, when we have had the other panels in, I am sure that our report will make for interesting reading. Thank you again, and I close the public session.

12:33

Meeting continued in private until 13:04.

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