



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Education and Skills Committee

**Wednesday 22 May 2019**

**Session 5**



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**Wednesday 22 May 2019**

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**EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE**

**17<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2019, Session 5**

**CONVENER**

\*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
\*Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
\*Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab)  
\*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)  
\*Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
\*Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
\*Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Dr Janet Brown (Scottish Qualifications Authority)  
Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con) (Committee Substitute)  
James Morgan (Scottish Qualifications Authority)  
Dr Gill Stewart (Scottish Qualifications Authority)  
Maree Todd (Minister for Children and Young People)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Roz Thomson

**LOCATION**

The Mary Fairfax Somerville Room (CR2)



## Scottish Parliament

### Education and Skills Committee

*Wednesday 22 May 2019*

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]*

#### Decision on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Clare Adamson):** Welcome to the 17th meeting of the Education and Skills Committee in 2019. I remind everyone to please turn their mobile phones and other devices to silent during the meeting. Apologies have been received from Tavish Scott and Oliver Mundell, and we welcome to the meeting Alison Harris, who is substituting for Oliver Mundell.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on whether to take in private item 8, which is consideration of our work programme. Are members content to take item 8 in private?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## Subordinate Legislation

### St Mary's Music School (Aided Places) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2019 (SSI 2019/144)

09:30

**The Convener:** Item 2 is consideration of SSI 2019/144. It is a negative Scottish statutory instrument and details are provided in paper 1. Do members have any comments on the instrument?

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** My question is not on this instrument, because it makes relatively minor changes, but it would be useful if the committee could write to the Government to ask when the next full SSI on St Mary's will come. They come relatively infrequently before the Parliament and, from the bits that I have seen, they have historically not been particularly scrutinised. It would be useful to get an indication of when the next full SSI will come.

**The Convener:** I think that we would be content to do that.

### Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) (No 1) Order 2019 [Draft]

### Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) (No 2) Order 2019 [Draft]

**The Convener:** Item 3 is evidence on two affirmative instruments that amend the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 with regard to funded childcare. These pieces of draft subordinate legislation are subject to the affirmative process. Information about the instruments is provided in papers 2 and 3.

The affirmative instruments will be covered under three agenda items, the first of which provides an opportunity for the minister to talk to the two instruments and for members to ask her and her officials questions for clarification. We will then turn to agenda items 4 and 5 under which we will debate the two motions on the instruments.

I welcome Maree Todd, the Minister for Children and Young People. Accompanying her are Alison Cumming, the deputy director for early learning and childcare, and Nico McKenzie-Juetten, who is a lawyer in the legal directorate. They are both with the Scottish Government. I invite the minister to make an opening statement to explain the two instruments.

**Maree Todd (Minister for Children and Young People):** Good morning. In partnership with local government, we have made an ambitious commitment to almost double the funded early learning and childcare entitlement for all three and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds from August 2020. The package of orders will provide the necessary legislative basis to underpin the work that local authorities are already doing to deliver, from August 2020, an expanded ELC offer that is of a high quality, flexible and responsive to parental demand.

The first order provides for changes to the maximum and minimum session lengths for the delivery of funded ELC, which are currently set at a minimum session length of 2.5 hours and a maximum session length of eight hours. The changes in the order will extend the maximum session length to 10 hours and will remove the minimum session length.

The changes will support our efforts to ensure that Scotland's ELC offer is sufficiently flexible for families. Extending the maximum session length means that families can have the option of a full 10-hour session of funded ELC that is more closely tied to the working day. We understand that 10-hour sessions are commonplace for many families and that those who can do so purchase the additional two hours of ELC as wraparound care. We would like to ensure that parents can access the entirety of 10-hour sessions through their funded entitlement.

The order removes the minimum session length, because we consider that to be unnecessary in the context of the expanded entitlement. Care Inspectorate registration requirements will continue to ensure that a high-quality service is delivered, regardless of the session length.

It is intended that the changes to session length will come into force on 1 August 2019. Introducing the changes ahead of the full roll-out of 1,140 hours will support local authorities to provide more flexibility in session lengths and to test new models of delivery during the phase-in period. The order will not place an obligation on settings to provide 10-hour sessions where they are not already offered. Local authorities should continue to ensure that funded ELC is delivered through an appropriate mix of providers and patterns of delivery within their authority areas.

The second order proposes that the mandatory amount of funded ELC to which eligible children are entitled be changed in legislation from 600 hours to 1,140 hours. Subject to parliamentary approval, that will come into force from 1 August 2020.

We are 15 months away from the national roll-out of 1,140 hours. I am proud that more than

11,000 children are already benefiting from early phasing of the expanded hours. Laying the orders now signals our continued commitment to deliver the expanded offer from August 2020 and our confidence in the readiness of local authorities to fulfil their duty. We have robust joint governance arrangements to ensure that local authorities have the required capacity and capability in place and are well supported as they prepare for August 2020. We want every one of Scotland's children to grow up in a country where they feel loved, safe, respected and able to reach their full potential. I have been heartened by the shared commitment across Parliament to our transformative policy ambition to expand ELC entitlement to 1,140 hours by 2020. I am determined and confident that, together, we will deliver for Scotland's children and their families.

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** I welcome the orders, including the increase from 600 funded hours to 1,140 funded hours. For the avoidance of doubt, I am not arguing against that, but I want to explore something around it.

We are providing a universal entitlement to funded hours of early years education for every child in Scotland in the two years running up to their entry into formal education. However, children whose parents have chosen to defer their entry into primary 1 but whose birthdays fall before the end of the year are excluded from that. In those cases, local authorities have the discretion to refuse that entitlement. I want to understand why the Scottish Government is not taking this opportunity to correct that anomaly.

**Maree Todd:** Children with September to December birthdays will continue to have an automatic right to school deferral. Whether they are entitled to additional childcare funding will remain at the local authority's discretion. I expect local authorities to make that decision based on assessment of the child's wellbeing and parental input. Parents must be provided with accurate information and should be fully involved in the decision-making process. I do not intend to change that.

**Iain Gray:** The anomaly is that the right of parents to defer their child's entry to primary 1 is not based on any judgment about the child's readiness for going into primary 1 apart from the parental judgment. However, their access to that other entitlement to early years education in a nursery is based on a judgment that is at the discretion of the local authority. In many local authority areas, by asserting one entitlement to defer, the parent loses the other entitlement, which we do not think should be at the local authority's discretion. That is why you are introducing this statutory instrument. There is an inconsistency and an anomaly that could be readily corrected. I

do not understand why the Government is not prepared to correct it.

**Maree Todd:** I am comfortable with the flexibility that the legislation offers. We have been very clear that parents, should they choose to, have the right to defer. In conjunction with the parents, local authorities will make the decision based on the child's wellbeing and interests. I am comfortable with that.

**Iain Gray:** That means, however, that, having chosen to defer, a family's ability to continue with the early years education of their child depends first, on where they live and secondly, on how much money they have. Some families will not be able to afford to self-fund. Are you really saying that you are comfortable with that?

**Maree Todd:** Are you really saying that local authorities do not make the decision, in conjunction with the parents, with the child's wellbeing at heart?

**Iain Gray:** My question is not for local authorities; it is for you, minister. Are you comfortable that, for this group of children and their families, their ability to get the entitlement that we are legislating for—

**Maree Todd:** Their ability to get the entitlement—

**Iain Gray:** Excuse me. Let me finish. Their ability to get their entitlement depends on how much money the family has and whether they can afford to pay for nursery education.

**Maree Todd:** No, it does not.

**Iain Gray:** Yes it does.

**Maree Todd:** No, it does not. That entitlement depends on the discretion of the local authority, which will make the decision, in conjunction with the parents, on the basis of the wellbeing of the child.

**Iain Gray:** Should children whose parents have decided to defer continue to have access to funded early years education?

**Maree Todd:** That decision is for local authorities, which will make it on the basis of the wellbeing of the child and in conjunction with the parents.

**Iain Gray:** Why are we considering a statutory instrument that provides a universal entitlement at the hand of the Government and Parliament for all children except these? Why are they different? Why should their entitlement be at the local authorities' discretion when other children's is not?

**Maree Todd:** I can only reiterate what I have said. We have built in sufficient flexibility. The majority of children will start school at the age that

they are due to start school. Those children who have a January birthday will be entitled to automatic further funding. Funding for those who have a birthday between August and December will be at the discretion of the local authority, which will base its decision on the welfare of the child and make it in conjunction with the parent.

**Iain Gray:** Why are you picking on and excluding that group of children?

**Maree Todd:** I am confident that local authorities all over Scotland can discharge that duty appropriately. I am confident that my local authority colleagues can do that.

**Iain Gray:** You are comfortable with a situation in which some families will be able to make that decision because they can afford to begin to self-fund nursery education while other families will have to either send their child to school before they think they are ready or withdraw their child from early years education for a year. You are comfortable with that.

**Maree Todd:** Let me reiterate—

**Iain Gray:** No, I am not asking you to reiterate. I am asking whether you are comfortable with that position.

**Maree Todd:** I am comfortable with the local authorities discharging their duties towards the children in their area. I am comfortable that we can clarify the basis for exercising discretion in a refresh of statutory guidance. The system will work appropriately.

**Iain Gray:** Why are we imposing the 1,140 hours on local authorities? Why not give them the discretion to decide whether that is appropriate for the children? It is anomalous.

**Maree Todd:** You call it anomalous; I call it flexible.

**The Convener:** I think we will move on from there. Ms Smith?

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I associate myself with Iain Gray's questions. There is an anomaly and I hope that the Government will consider its response to Mr Gray.

Minister, you will recall that, two years ago, Audit Scotland was pretty critical of the Scottish Government's arithmetic around the funding that is required. I draw your attention to the second instrument that we have today. You say that you have

"identified an additional recurring revenue cost of £567 million per annum from 2021-22 and an additional £476 million capital cost for the four financial years from 2017-18 to 2020-21 inclusive."

What makes you comfortable about those particular statistics, given that the previous ones were so heavily criticised by Audit Scotland?

**Maree Todd:** You will remember that we made a shared decision with local authorities on the appropriate costs that will be required to deliver the funded entitlement. Audit Scotland conducted its audit before those negotiations were completed. By the time the negotiations were completed, we had interrogated the data on both sides and we were comfortable with the decision that we made. That is what gives me the confidence that the figures that we have agreed on with local authorities are appropriate.

09:45

**Liz Smith:** One of Audit Scotland's criticisms was that the stakeholders that are due to provide the service had not been consulted fully, and that some of their arithmetic was very different from that of the Scottish Government. Have you got assurance—not just from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities but from private sector providers, who will need to deliver additional care—that the statistics that are in our papers are accurate?

**Maree Todd:** The funding agreement was between the Government and COSLA. I think that you are referring to partner provider funding rates.

**Liz Smith:** I am.

**Maree Todd:** You will be aware that we are working all over Scotland to improve partnership and that partner provider rates are increasing, in some cases by more than 50 per cent, which will ensure that partner providers are paid a sustainable rate. That has been adequately funded.

**Liz Smith:** You can produce evidence from those involved in the public-private partnership deals that the statistics that you have produced are correct.

**Maree Todd:** Yes.

**Liz Smith:** Would it be possible for the committee to have that evidence?

**Maree Todd:** Yes.

**Liz Smith:** Thank you. That would be helpful.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab):** I will return briefly to the points that Iain Gray raised. Has the Government done an equality impact assessment on a decision that might mean that some young people who ought to defer—everyone might agree that they should defer—will decide not to defer because their parents will not be able to afford early years provision?

**Maree Todd:** I reiterate that the local authority will make the decision—

**Johann Lamont:** I understand that. I am asking why the local authority should make the decision.

**Maree Todd:** You are presuming that a local authority would decide not to apply discretion in a case in which everyone agrees that a child should defer.

**Johann Lamont:** Why will you not give families certainty? Have you done an equality impact assessment? How many young people might be affected? Why are you choosing to give discretion in one element and not in others? Do you accept the argument that some families with a child who defers will not be able to access their entitlement to early years education, even if there is agreement that the child should defer? As a consequence, even though everybody agrees that it is the right thing to do, families might decide that the child should not defer. It might not be that it is just that the family feels that the child is not ready; there might be issues with disability and development. Everyone might agree that the child should defer, but the family is not guaranteed the same entitlement that is provided to the child's peers.

**Maree Todd:** Again, I put the point to you: in what situation would a local authority make a decision that was against the best interests of a child? If everybody is agreed—

**Johann Lamont:** Why not provide certainty? We might as well ask why a local authority would provide only 600 hours of funded care when it could provide 1,140 hours. Everybody welcomes the certainty that you have provided on that point, so why not provide certainty on this point? We are not talking about a huge group of young people, but, if you did an equality impact assessment, you might discover that the issue is quite significant.

**Maree Todd:** I agree that we are not talking about a huge group of young people. Let me reiterate: I am fully confident that my local authority colleagues will make the decisions appropriately.

**Johann Lamont:** Is it reasonable for families to expect more than your confidence? Should they not expect the same entitlement as other young people receive?

**Maree Todd:** The system provides sufficient flexibility and discretion. Local authorities make decisions on the basis of the best interests of the child and in conjunction with the parents.

**Johann Lamont:** What do you mean by "flexibility"? What is there the flexibility to do?

**Maree Todd:** Let me reiterate: as with many decisions, local authorities make such decisions

on the basis of on the best interests of the child, using the getting it right for every child principles. Local authorities make decisions on the provision of entitlement to children in their areas with parental input. In the way that you are framing this, you are saying that, routinely—

**Johann Lamont:** I did not use the word, “routinely”.

**Maree Todd:** —local authorities make poor decisions that are not based on the best interests of children. I have confidence that my local authority colleagues are making good decisions that are based on the best interests of the child and that they are working with the parents. I cannot say any more than that.

**Johann Lamont:** Would you be willing to do an analysis of how many young people are involved, how many defer and, of them, how many then get support for early years? Would you be willing to do some sort of survey or equality impact assessment of those who may be—

**Maree Todd:** Certainly.

**Johann Lamont:** Would you be willing to do an equality impact assessment in those cases in which everyone is in agreement that the child should defer but a decision is made to send them to school anyway?

**Maree Todd:** Absolutely. I am more than happy to work with colleagues in the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to explore that.

**Johann Lamont:** Will you report back to the committee on that?

**Maree Todd:** Yes.

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** As others have done, I welcome the extension of the rights that are covered in the instruments. How does that fit in with the wider question of workforce planning? Obviously, the rights, in themselves, are meaningful only if local authorities have planned to have in place the workforce to put them into practice. Is anything being done to encourage such workforce planning in local authorities?

**Maree Todd:** A great deal of work has been done to ensure that we will have an adequate workforce in August 2020, when the policy is due to be implemented. There has been an increase in the availability of apprenticeships and an increase in college and university courses. We are confident that we will have an adequate workforce.

We have a joint delivery board that is co-chaired by me and Councillor Stephen McCabe from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Around that table there are representatives of various groups: the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, the Society of Local Authority Chief

Executives and Senior Managers, finance personnel from local authorities and so on. We monitor data and intelligence from every local authority on issues including workforce in order to ensure that we are on target and are achieving the workforce level that we expected to achieve by this phase of delivery.

**Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con) (Committee Substitute):** I have listened with interest to what has been said, and I appreciate that you are absolutely confident that things will work out. However, I have a genuine question. Do you feel that the children who do not receive the extra year are getting the best outcome?

**Maree Todd:** I am confident that local authority colleagues will make decisions on deferral based on the best interests of the child, working with the parents. The entitlement that we are discussing entitles children from the age of three to two years of 1,140 hours of childcare a year.

We know that quality is vital to delivery of the outcomes that we want for children, so we have built in a number of quality characteristics. Early entrance to that level of childcare from the age of two is possible for children from families who are entitled to certain benefits. I am confident that the package will meet children’s needs and improve outcomes for them.

**Alison Harris:** I appreciate your confidence, but can you envisage a situation in which parents’ outlook is different to the local authority’s, and in which, ultimately, they will not get their entitlement, because the parental choice differs from the view of the local authority?

**Maree Todd:** Again, you are saying to me that you do not believe that local authorities can, along with parents, act in the interests of children. I do not share that view.

**Alison Harris:** I am saying that I have confidence in the parents, to be perfectly honest. I cannot understand how you cannot hear what the committee is saying to you and take it on board. There are not a lot of children in the category—

**Maree Todd:** I have said that I am willing to look at the numbers with COSLA; we will certainly explore the issue with it. I am willing to strengthen statutory guidance so that the factors that ought to be taken into account when a decision is being made are clearer. I am happy to consider the matter further, but I am confident that local authorities act in the best interests of children.

**Alison Harris:** I still think that there is an anomaly and that you should consider that, but thank you.

**The Convener:** That concludes the committee’s questions. Thank you, minister.

The next agenda item is consideration of motion S5M-17294, which is in the name of the minister. Neither the minister nor committee members have any comments.

*Motion moved,*

That the Education and Skills Committee recommends that the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) (No 1) Order 2019 (SSI 2019/draft) be approved.—[*Maree Todd*]

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Convener:** The next agenda item is consideration of motion S5M-17295, in the name of the minister. Neither the minister nor committee members have any comments.

*Motion moved,*

That the Education and Skills Committee recommends that the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) (No 2) Order 2019 (SSI 2019/draft) be approved.—[*Maree Todd*]

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Convener:** The committee will report to Parliament on the instruments. Are members content for me, as the convener, to sign off a report to Parliament on the instruments?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** That concludes the committee's consideration of subordinate legislation. I thank the minister and her officials for their attendance this morning.

09:56

*Meeting suspended.*

09:57

*On resuming—*

## **Subject Choices Inquiry**

**The Convener:** The next agenda item is the committee's inquiry into subject choices. This is the sixth evidence session in the inquiry.

I welcome from the Scottish Qualifications Authority Dr Janet Brown, who is its chief executive; Dr Gill Stewart, who is the director of qualifications; and James Morgan, who is the head of research, policy, standards and statistics.

Members of the panel should indicate to me when they wish to answer questions that are posed by committee members. I understand that Dr Brown will make a brief introductory statement.

**Dr Janet Brown (Scottish Qualifications Authority):** Thank you, and good morning to members of the committee.

I will give a bit of background on where we are. The SQA has been a member of the curriculum for excellence management board throughout the development and delivery of the programme, and it is also now part of the Scottish education council, which is chaired by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, and which discusses education matters.

The SQA's role in CFE was to develop for the senior phase new qualifications that would reflect the principles of CFE and build on the experiences and outcomes of the broad general education that was introduced for the early years through to secondary school until the end of secondary 3. The courses have been designed to develop knowledge, and they have a clear focus on understanding and skills development and their application in different contexts.

In addition to the nationals, highers, and advanced highers, the SQA has a wide range of other qualifications and awards at all Scottish credit and qualifications framework levels, many of which can support the diverse interests and needs of young people in the senior phase. The courses range from skills for work courses to vocational and personal development, higher nationals and foundation apprenticeships. Teachers and learners have a wide range of pathway options that can be tailored to the needs of individual learners.

As you know, I am joined today by Dr Gill Stewart, who is the director of qualifications development and has been present throughout the curriculum for excellence period, and James Morgan, who is responsible for research, policy, statistics and standards. We look forward to

answering questions and contributing to the committee's study of subject choice.

**The Convener:** Thank you. We will move to questions.

10:00

**Liz Smith:** Previous witnesses have expressed concern that, although curriculum for excellence covers ages three to 18, the structure of the broad general education was designed by different people from those who designed the senior phase. That was possibly done with good intentions. With hindsight, and given that your role was to design the qualifications, was that wise? Is there a disconnect between the broad general education and the senior phase?

**Dr Brown:** One of the original decisions in the process was to ensure that the broad general education was in place before qualifications were started on, so that assessment did not lead learning. That was the fundamental premise.

Over the past few years, the SQA has done a couple of research programmes in which we have interviewed headteachers, senior management teams, teachers, pupils and parents, asking how they feel about the broad general education and the senior phase. The first study that we undertook indicated that there was not a smooth pathway from BGE into the senior phase, but the research in the second year found that a lot of progress had obviously been made. With any programme, we can learn lessons from going back and looking at how we could do it better. There is obviously much better understanding now of pupils' progress through the broad general education, in order to ensure that they are ready to enter courses in the senior phase.

The courses were, at the request of the curriculum for excellence management team, developed to build on the experiences and outcomes of the BGE. For instance, national 4 was built on the assumption that, in order for them to be successful, candidates for national 4 would have reached curriculum level 3 at the end of the BGE. Similarly, candidates for national 5 would have achieved curriculum level 4 if they were to be successful. Everyone is much more familiar with what is happening in the broad general education and with the requirements for the entry point for the national qualifications. I think that it is getting better.

**Liz Smith:** Are you comfortable with the three-plus-three model? We have heard criticism from some witnesses, who feel that that model has not been as satisfactory as was envisaged.

**Dr Brown:** We should be talking about what is best for the individual child, although I recognise

that that is dependent on how a school can deliver. The philosophy behind the broad general education going through to the end of S3 was articulated in "Building the Curriculum 3: A framework for learning and teaching", which was produced by the curriculum for excellence management board. It is important to think about what is best for the individual child. Curriculum for excellence aims not only to ensure that more students reach a specific level but to give them a broader education for longer. That is where the three-plus-three model came from. Different schools do different things for different children: that is how curriculum for excellence should be.

**Liz Smith:** You have put your finger right on the issue. If we accept that flexibility is one of the key principles underpinning curriculum for excellence, we can argue that schools should have the option to do things differently and to use a three-plus-three model, a three-plus-two-plus-one model, or a two-plus-two-plus-two model. The problem is that, in the evidence that has been presented to the committee over the six meetings that we have had in the inquiry, the subject choice issue has been a major concern, particularly given the statistics on the considerable drop-off in the numbers of pupils who are taking modern languages, especially German and French, and in the numbers taking science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

The real issue for a lot of parents is that, although the broad general education might give greater breadth than was possible before and—as you said in your opening statement—there are new subjects, when it comes to the core curriculum, there is a problem with subject choice. Do you accept the concern that there is a problem with subject choice?

**Dr Brown:** It would be good if we could broaden the discussion of subject choice beyond national qualifications. Some children benefited a lot from the old system, in which they went through standard grades and then straight on to highers and advanced highers. However, not all children benefited. It is important to understand that there is now a wider range of options. These days, schools have the opportunity to provide a range of options through partnerships with other schools. It is a question of thinking about the outcome of all education, not just about S4. It is about the outcome at the end of the senior phase and whether that is better for children than it was under the old system.

**Liz Smith:** Given what you have said about flexibility, would you be comfortable with a local authority that had a one-size-fits-all policy on subject choice and the number of subjects to be taken in S4? There is such a blanket policy in some—not all—local authorities.

**Dr Brown:** That is not the responsibility of the SQA.

**Liz Smith:** Are you comfortable with it?

**Dr Brown:** I like to see flexibility, which is the fundamental philosophy of CFE. The education should be tailored to the child and be child centred.

**Liz Smith:** Okay.

**Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP):** We know that roughly 50 per cent of schools offer six subjects in S4, 40 per cent offer seven subjects and 10 per cent offer eight subjects. There is national variation. There was some variation under the standard grades model, too. William Hardie from the Royal Society of Edinburgh told the committee that such variation is because of the 160 hours allocation, which is driven by the SQA. Is he right?

**Dr Brown:** I will say a little bit on that and then ask James Morgan to give more detail.

We make an assumption about the entry point of learners, and then we consider where we are trying to take them in any given course. We then consider how long it would take the average child to undertake that. That is no different from how things used to be. We have broadened the broad general education to enable young people to take more subjects for longer, which is why it now continues into S3.

**James Morgan (Scottish Qualifications Authority):** The 160 hours allocation for national 4, national 5 and higher is not new. It was part of the previous qualifications—intermediate 1, intermediate 2 and higher. Those qualifications are the DNA of the current national 4, national 5 and higher. The allocation of 160 hours was specified, although the real measure that the SQA uses as part of the Scottish credit and qualifications framework is SCQF credit points and levels. The qualifications are the same size—they require 240 hours of learning. The allocation of 160 hours is for directed learning in the classroom and similar environments, and there is 80 hours of self-directed learning. At standard grade, the subjects also attracted 24 SCQF credit points.

**Jenny Gilruth:** How many hours were given for standard grades?

**James Morgan:** They required 240 hours in total and attracted 24 SCQF credit points. The difference is that there was no specification for standard grade of the 160 hours, which came out of higher still, which was unit based and so was very clearly structured.

**Jenny Gilruth:** Standard grades were not unit based in the way that higher still was, so what was

the hours allocation of teaching in school for standard grades, excluding self-directed study?

**James Morgan:** That is a good question. I do not have the answer, because it was a decision that was made a long time ago. Those were the previous qualifications that predated the SCQF.

**Dr Gill Stewart (Scottish Qualifications Authority):** I think that the allocation for standard grade was 160 hours but, in reality, some schools gave a bit longer for maths and English; that was at the discretion of individual schools and local authorities. Standard grade dates from the 1980s—SCQF is a more recent development—and there was not so much specification of the number of hours of learning for standard grade as there is for the current qualifications. The SCQF has brought about greater standardisation.

I will add to the comments about the 160 hours and one-year courses by saying that part of the ethos and philosophy of CFE is a three-year senior phase that builds on the broad general education. Some of the criticism of the previous qualifications was about the so-called two-term dash—trying to fit a higher into a very short time. One of the things that curriculum for excellence tries to do is give young people the opportunity for more depth in learning.

The senior phase was originally envisaged as a three-year phase with young people doing a mixture of courses that would each take one or two years. It was never envisaged that everybody would do one set of qualifications in one year and another set in the next. A much more mixed economy was envisaged. I know of some schools that do subjects such as English and maths over two years because they feel that the depth of learning helps young people to consolidate, which is much better, because maths and English are fundamental to all the other learning that young people do.

The ethos and philosophy are all about addressing weaknesses in the previous system, such as a lack of depth of learning. It was about giving schools the flexibility and empowerment to offer different approaches that they feel meet the needs of their young people, which might be different for different subjects or year groups.

**Jenny Gilruth:** I understand the ethos but, given that pupils at 50 per cent of schools are still studying seven or eight subjects, perhaps the ethos has not moved on. It is impossible, I think, to timetable more than five subjects in one school year, so pupils have to start studying the qualifications earlier, which goes against what the BGE was meant to be about. Do you accept that there is a tension when schools are trying to fit 160 hours of course content into the school year?

I am interested in the relationship between the SQA and Education Scotland. I should probably say that I was formerly seconded to Education Scotland. Are you still based in the Optima building in Glasgow?

**Dr Brown:** Yes.

**Jenny Gilruth:** Education Scotland is just up the stairs from you, in the same building—you do not sit very far apart. Do you meet regularly and talk about these things? Do you have input, for example, into what timetabling should look like, perhaps not in a directive way but just through conversations about how people can timetable 160-hour qualifications into the school year?

**Dr Brown:** We engage a lot with Education Scotland, particularly around individual subjects, and we have spent a lot of time looking at the interface between the BGE and the senior phase. However, timetabling is not something that the SQA gets involved in; it is very much a matter for schools. The challenge, which you probably heard about from Larry Flanagan, is the whole issue of when a national qualification starts. When does a national 5 start, and should it be done over two years? If people want to fit in eight subjects, they should do that over two years. Does every child need to do eight subjects? The flexibility of timetabling is the issue, and that is best decided at school level. We do not have any engagement at all in the timetabling discussions.

**Jenny Gilruth:** However, you do tell schools the number of hours for which they should teach subjects.

**Dr Brown:** We give them an indication of how long the average child is likely to need to get from one level of learning to another, based on the courses that they undertake.

**Jenny Gilruth:** Okay. Dr Stewart, I read an article in *The Times Educational Supplement* that reported an interview with you in 2011, in which you said:

“The idea for the Curriculum for Excellence development programme was that curriculum development came first and qualifications followed ... The qualifications will build on the outcomes, so there shouldn't be any shocks.”

Removing the outcome and assessment standards was meant to reduce teacher workload. As a former teacher, I have a concern about how people can be assured that pupils are being presented at the right levels if that continuous assessment is no longer in place.

**Dr Stewart:** Teachers are very good at understanding where their young people are in their learning. The most tangible way in which the SQA sees that is through asking teachers to submit estimates of the grades that they think each young person will achieve. That tells us that

there is a reasonable degree of congruence between teacher and SQA judgments, so they do have a good understanding. The courses that we have now are the same courses with the same learning outcomes as we had previously. The content has not changed with the revisions that have happened—the removal of units.

**Jenny Gilruth:** As I understand it, teachers no longer have to record whether a pupil has achieved the outcomes, whereas previously they had to do that.

**Dr Stewart:** We expect teachers to do that as a matter of course.

**Jenny Gilruth:** But they do not have to do it any more.

**Dr Brown:** They do not have to provide that information to the SQA any more.

**Dr Stewart:** They will have to do it within their schools.

**Dr Brown:** Most teachers will do that during the teaching process.

10:15

**Jenny Gilruth:** I know that, but my concern is that, because we have removed the outcome assessment standards, a pupil could drift along all year at higher level, for example, and present for that qualification but not actually be ready to sit an examination at that level.

**Dr Brown:** Most teachers will monitor the progress of all students during their teaching year.

**Jenny Gilruth:** Okay. Thank you.

**Iain Gray:** I have a couple of points for clarification, following on from Jenny Gilruth's questions. I am interested in the notion of deeper learning, which has come up in evidence when we have asked other stakeholders or witnesses about the reduced number of subjects that are being studied. I think that Dr Stewart has talked about that, too. If the credit points and the notional 160 hours are the same for the new national course as they were for the previous course, the study is not any deeper, is it?

**Dr Stewart:** As you say, the number of hours is the same.

**Iain Gray:** So, is the depth the same?

**Dr Stewart:** Can I continue?

**Iain Gray:** Sorry.

**Dr Stewart:** Learning is a continuum. When we developed curriculum for excellence, it was meant to be a three-to-18 continuum of learning. If a pupil does fewer subjects in S4, they will have the opportunity for deeper learning, which is

fundamental in helping them to move on to the next stage.

I am a scientist, but James is not a scientist. He might study a national 5 biology course, get a C and have a very sketchy or not very deep understanding of some of the biological concepts in that course. However, if I studied that course, having a deep understanding, I might get an A, although the grade is not important. What is important is that, because of the depth of my understanding of the biological concepts and my ability to apply those, I would be very well placed to do better when I moved on to higher. That is where the depth of learning comes in. It is about learners having a stronger foundation from which to move on.

We see that in data that the Scottish Government publishes about the outcomes for young people by the time that they get to the end of the senior phase. The levels of qualification that young people are achieving have gone up over the period of curriculum for excellence. That tells us that something is working and that young people are getting a greater depth of learning, leading to more of them achieving a higher level of qualification.

**Iain Gray:** I do not really understand how the point that you are making relates to subject choice in the curriculum. You and James might attain different levels of understanding—of biology in that case—but that would not be because you studied for more hours. You would both have studied for the same number of hours.

**Dr Stewart:** If James had studied eight subjects and I had studied six subjects, he would not have had 160 hours for each subject, whereas I would have had 160 hours of learning in each subject.

**Iain Gray:** But he would have had 160 hours in each subject if the school understands curriculum for excellence and has taught that biology course across two years.

**Dr Stewart:** He would, but we know, from speaking to teachers, that that does not happen in every case.

**Iain Gray:** Okay. Jenny Gilruth asked about the SQA's relationship with Education Scotland and your proximity to each other. When Education Scotland gave evidence, she asked the witnesses about the 160 hours and they said—I do not have the quote in front of me—that the 160 hours was not all contact teaching time. However, your submission explicitly says that the 160 hours is contact teaching time. Is Education Scotland wrong?

**Dr Brown:** There is always a debate about when learning for a particular course starts. Our understanding and expectation is that, to cover the

course content, the average child has to have around 160 hours of teaching time. How much of that learning can be undertaken during the course of the broad general education by a child who is very advanced is down to the discretion of the teacher. For instance, some people will start the learning—not necessarily the assessment—of a national 5 course earlier than S4.

We believe that teachers impart a lot of the knowledge, but we also believe that some students work very well on their own, so learning is tailored to the individual. However, our expectation is that it takes approximately 160 hours for the average student to be taught the content that we have in national 5 courses.

**Iain Gray:** So, Education Scotland is wrong, or there is a misinterpretation of your approach.

**Dr Brown:** I think that there can be misinterpretations of what we are trying to do.

**Iain Gray:** Thank you.

**Liz Smith:** This is a simple point. Dr Stewart, you argued that, if you were in a school that was offering six subjects in S4 and you took English, maths and three sciences—biology, physics and chemistry—you would have deeper learning. Are you at all concerned that that would not be a very broad curriculum and that such a curriculum would not give you the same opportunity to study a social science and a language as you would have had previously? In other words, you would be jumping from a much broader BGE into quite a narrow senior phase. Are you worried about that?

**Dr Stewart:** Such decisions have to be made for individual young people. For a young person who was very clear that they wanted to study medicine, become a vet or become a physicist—heaven forbid—such a course of study would be okay. We must remember that that young person would have had the broad general education prior to S4.

**Liz Smith:** Dr Stewart, in a school that has just six subject options in S4, the young person is constrained more than they would be if they were in a school that used a seven or eight-column structure, which would enable them to take the three sciences as well as picking up a social science and a language. Do you accept that?

**Dr Stewart:** Yes, I accept that. The other point to make is that, if a young person was not sure about what they wanted to do—as parents, we know that many young people who are at school are not clear about their future career path—the school would not advise them to narrow their options. The school might advise the student to make a broader choice in S4.

**Dr Brown:** Another thing that we think about—many of the committee's witnesses have

mentioned it—is the whole point of having the two-year qualification as opposed to an approach in which we try to do everything in S4: the ladder issue. The conversation about that needs to be disseminated a lot more widely across Scotland.

For students who are potentially very interested in doing sciences and are judged by their teachers to be competent learners who will be successful in the subjects that they are thinking about taking, not doing a national 5 but going straight on to a higher allows them to keep their curriculum broader for longer.

That whole movement, which was envisaged with CFE, has not happened as quickly or as much as people felt that it should happen. That is what we should be talking about. How do we ensure that there is not a treadmill from national 5 to higher to advanced higher and that, if a child is going to be successful at higher, we allow them to have a broader curriculum during the two-year period and present them for some national 5s and some higher? That would keep the breadth of subjects, and we would then have a three-year senior phase as opposed to an individual national 4 phase. That is not happening throughout the country, which is one of the reasons why we are having this debate about the number of subjects.

**Johann Lamont:** Dr Stewart, I want to clarify a point that you made when you gave the analogy of your being much better at biology than your colleague—

**Iain Gray:** And very poor at physics.

**Johann Lamont:** You said that it is because you took only six subjects whereas he took eight. Is it your view that young people should take only six subjects in fourth year?

**Dr Stewart:** I am not sure that it is appropriate for me to express a view about whether taking six subjects in S4 is a good option. It is the role of schools to work with young people, their parents and carers and their local community to agree on an appropriate curriculum model. My son followed six courses in S4. I must admit that I had some personal concerns about that, but I was confident that the school knew what it was doing. I placed my confidence in the school—as parents, many of us do that. We rely on the school to make good choices or to advise us, as parents, to make good choices.

**Johann Lamont:** I accept that, and I have experienced it myself. Schools talk about flexibility, but, as I have mentioned in the past, flexibility can be largely theoretical if a young person is presented with six columns of choices and one of the columns does not have anything that they want to do in it.

You made the point that the issue is the depth of learning, and you said that you were able to achieve a greater depth of learning because you were taking six subjects rather than eight. The logic of that argument is that schools should be offering six subjects.

If the whole premise of the argument is that we prefer depth to breadth in fourth year, you should be saying that, in your view, as a qualifications agency, young people should be studying six subjects. Is that, in fact, policy? If it is, what conversations have you had with Education Scotland, the Scottish Government, COSLA and local authorities about whether what is happening is different from what you are advocating?

**Dr Brown:** The critical factor is the amount of time that should be given to learning a subject to the right depth. If schools are trying to get that number of subjects into one year, they are limiting the amount of time that is available for good learning and teaching, to allow that depth. The question is, how do we ensure that any student gets the right amount of support, learning and assessment to allow them to be confident in the subject?

If we are trying to get—

**Johann Lamont:** With respect, it is not sustainable for young people to do eight subjects in fourth year.

**Dr Brown:** If the assumption is that they are starting from scratch in S4, it is a real challenge for them to do eight subjects.

**Johann Lamont:** So, you think that it is acceptable for them to start in third year. Given that some of the calculation covers what they do when they are not in the classroom, would it be acceptable to count the hours from third year?

**Dr Brown:** That is a matter for schools. If schools decide to do that, it can be an important component. However, the philosophy of CFE is that the breadth is maintained in S3. That is part of the tension.

**Johann Lamont:** Should the schools not be doing that, then?

**Dr Brown:** That is part of the tension. Some schools are choosing to do some specialisation—though not complete specialisation—in S3 and other schools are not. There is a tension between maintaining the breadth and aspects of depth across the sixteen curriculum areas and moving into more specialisation in S3, though not the complete specialisation that we see in S4.

**Johann Lamont:** How is that tension going to be resolved? Whose responsibility is it? It is one thing to say that there is a tension—you could almost argue that it is a conflict—but how is that

going to be resolved, and who has the authority to resolve it?

**Dr Brown:** That goes back to the whole issue of whether we believe that young people should be taking qualifications in S4, S5 and S6. That debate is going on, as you have heard from witnesses in previous evidence sessions. We should be talking about the whole senior phase and two-year courses, and we should be measuring the outcomes, achievements and attainment of learners at the end of S6, whether they are in school, in college or in work. At the SQA, we present our data annually. The data that is used is our data; therefore we talk about annual statistics. What we should be looking at is the outcome at the end of the senior phase.

10:30

**Dr Allan:** I was interested in the remark that was made about the number of subjects being what is appropriate. Can you clarify whether you are talking about what is appropriate for a school or what is appropriate for an individual? In the evidence that the committee has received, some have come down on one side and some on the other.

**Dr Brown:** It should be what is appropriate for individuals, but, in practical terms, that will always be constrained by what a school is able to deliver either itself or through its partnerships. That is the key thing.

We also need to recognise that some of these courses will not be nationals. Instead, they will be national certificates, development awards, early-stage foundation apprenticeships and so on that might well be delivered in other areas. However, you have to balance the focus on the individual with the deliverability of anything at a particular centre.

**Dr Stewart:** Each school will have an average number of subjects that it delivers to its S4 pupils, but, within that, there will still be some variation to meet individual needs. Indeed, that is what we see in the data. In any case, young people in schools have always done different numbers of standard grades as well as other programmes that sit alongside them.

**Dr Allan:** Another interesting comment was about the continuum of learning, which is something that I absolutely buy, see and accept. However, we have had a lot of evidence about the situation with languages, and it has been put to us that there is no continuum in that respect, given the huge drop-off in the number of languages being taken and the fact that there is not much evidence of their being taken up later in schools. Does the continuum that you have talked about work for languages, too?

**Dr Brown:** As I think you have heard from previous witnesses, the major drop-off in languages probably occurred when they were no longer compulsory. You are right to say that there has been a fall in languages, but we have some really good language qualifications that we are proud of and that we really want students to be taking. Moreover, we are also seeing continued strength in language higherers. National 4 and 5 subject levels might have declined, but people who really want to do languages continue to do the higher.

We have introduced the languages for life and work qualification, which allows students to explore languages in a different space. After all, it is possible to pick up a language later, which is partly why the numbers at higher level rather than the numbers at national 5 are being maintained.

**Dr Allan:** Are you talking about what people call crash higherers? In other words, are people going into those higherers having had little contact with the language in question since they were in third year?

**Dr Brown:** Yes, but we would refer to that as “no previous attainment”. It could be that someone had taken the language for two years but did not do the national 5, or they just did it in one year at a later point—say, in S6.

I am not a languages person, but my understanding is that, if you have one language, it is easier to pick up a second. As a result, it is feasible to add a higher at a later stage even if you have taken the subject only to the end of BGE.

**Dr Allan:** I did Latin at school, and I enjoyed it, but I would have hesitated to do a crash higher in German on that basis. Never mind.

I am really interested in hearing the rationale behind the three-plus-three structure. As you have quite rightly said, there is a mixed economy out there, with schools taking a mixture of approaches. Interestingly, when we met teachers, we found that there was a very mixed economy indeed in respect of teachers’ responses or reactions to the three-plus-three approach. Some embraced it very enthusiastically, while others seemed to be dying in a ditch in their opposition to it. Did you expect that there would be quite such a variety of approaches to and views on that structure?

**Dr Brown:** We would participate in those kinds of conversations through the CFE management board; it is not a responsibility for SQA, but we are absolutely involved in the discussions and have been for a long time.

There was an obvious tension between people wanting to broaden out the curriculum and bring in different subjects and others being wedded to the

idea of ensuring that we got eight subjects in S4 and S5 and then however many in S6. As with anything in education, there is never a consensus. There is always a wide variety of views. We saw that, and it continues today.

**Ross Greer:** I would like to go back to something that Janet Brown said in her opening remarks. At one end of the spectrum, we have some quite positive outcomes in the numbers of young people who are leaving school with five highers. At the other end of the spectrum, however, we have seen an increase in the number of young people who are leaving with no qualifications at all. Why is that?

**Dr Brown:** We have seen a drop-off in the numbers who are undertaking national 1 through national 3, and we are still trying to understand the detail of that. Some of it is structural, given the way that they are operated, but we really need to ensure that candidates are entered for the levels of qualification that their teachers believe they can achieve.

Qualifications should not just be bars to jump over; they should recognise people's learning. If a teacher believes that an individual might make a national 5 and puts them in for that, but they do not get good learning and they get a national 4, that is a real challenge in the current system. Similarly, it is a challenge if somebody should be doing a national 3 but they are doing a national 4 and they do not achieve it.

Scotland is one of the few places with such a wide variety of levels of qualification that students may get, as well as such broad qualifications in terms of the nature of the learning. We need to ensure that people recognise the value of the lower SCQF level qualifications. National 3 is a valuable qualification for those individuals who get it.

**Ross Greer:** As you say, we have a qualification structure that means that any young person should be able to leave school with qualifications. You seem to be indicating that part of the issue is that young people—not all of them, but some—are being put forward for qualifications that they are unlikely to achieve. Where is that problem coming from? Does it come down to misunderstanding at school level? Is the pressure coming from local authorities?

The issue is arising systematically enough for us to have seen an increase in the number of young people leaving with no qualifications. In Dumfries and Galloway, the figure is 4.5 per cent, which is a significant increase from the previous figure of, I think, 1 per cent. Why is that occurring? Where is the problem beginning? Is it in local authorities or in schools? Is it something structural that we can address nationally?

**Dr Brown:** We do not fully understand why that is happening. We are working with partners to try to understand the causes behind it.

It is important that we, as a society, overtly recognise the value of the lower-level qualifications. There is concern that, if all that we talk about is national 5s and highers, nothing else will be valued. Collectively, we have a responsibility to recognise the value of a national 1, and I would challenge anyone who meets a parent whose very challenged child has achieved an SQA certification in national 1 not to say that they should feel incredibly proud of the fact that their child has achieved that recognition. We need to recognise that as a society.

**Ross Greer:** You said that you are “working with partners” to find out what is happening. Will you go into a bit more detail on that process? What research are you undertaking to figure out exactly why the increase has occurred?

**James Morgan:** I think that one of the challenges for the SQA is data and the limitations of it. We must be clear that we see learners only when they are entered for SQA qualifications, so we do not really have an overview of the whole cohort in Scotland at any one time. It is when a learner is entered for an SQA qualification that we gain visibility of the individual. That is one of the absolute limitations of what we can comment on and try to understand.

Once certification has taken place, we see different things in terms of data, but it is challenging for us to find out real causality as to what is happening, because we see learners only once they are entered. We do not know the richness of the system, the richness of those individuals' lives and their learning or how they have come to the SQA.

**Ross Greer:** I accept that, but you said that there is a process and you are working with others. Will you lay out some more detail of that?

**Dr Brown:** We have met statistics people in the Scottish Government, who have the cohort information, and people from Education Scotland to discuss the results. That is important.

**Dr Stewart:** The Scottish Government can look nationally at what the data tells it, but what is more important is that schools can use the Scottish Government's insight tool to look at how their young people are performing locally. Schools can split the data in lots of ways—for example, they can look at it by Scottish index of multiple deprivation quintiles—and they can try different approaches.

Ross Greer mentioned that 4 per cent of young people in Dumfries and Galloway achieve no qualifications; I presume that schools there are

trying different approaches to find a type of learning that will get back such young people's engagement in their education and help them to achieve a positive destination.

A lot of work must happen locally. The insight tool provides a broader set of measures for schools to look at, such as the positive destination measure for school leavers; measures on literacy and numeracy, which have improved; and measures on the highest SCQF level achieved, which relate not just to SQA qualifications but to other qualifications, such as those from ASDAN, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the Prince's Trust.

The Scottish Government has all that data at the national level, and schools have it locally. Schools can try different approaches for different groups of young people to see what their impact is. Schools must look at what works for young people.

One thing that underpinned "Building the Curriculum 3: A framework for learning and teaching" was an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report about equity and quality in Scottish education. The OECD talked eloquently about the Scottish system's strengths, but it also talked about inequity in schools. A primary focus through the CFE work that we are all engaged in is to bring up young people who are at the lower end.

I do not have an answer, but schools can use local measurement tools to address the situation and try different approaches. The OECD said that many young people—particularly high achievers—are motivated by where they want to get to. If they want to get to university, they are motivated to work hard and achieve.

Way back in 2009, the OECD said that Scotland had not got quite right the support for young people who do not have an external motivation—who are not clear about what they want to do or who have not yet found anything at school that they are really good at. The OECD said that the curriculum must motivate those young people; we must find something that engages them again in education—whether that is a vocational course, a Duke of Edinburgh award or an ASDAN qualification. If they succeed in something, that will motivate them to move on to the next level.

The OECD challenged Scotland to address that situation. Collectively, across all our schools and local authorities, people are trying to do that in lots of ways.

**Ross Greer:** I accept that. We see from the data that the trend is not uniform, so issues need to be identified locally. However, the national trend is that the number who leave with no qualifications has increased.

I accept that you do not have an answer this morning. You have said that you are working with the Government and with partners such as Education Scotland and local authorities. When will you be able to tell us why you, as the SQA, believe that more young people are leaving with no qualifications?

**Dr Brown:** The question is how the SQA's data can help to give an answer. I agree that the responsibility for understanding what is happening in the system is collective, and we should be part of that, but the SQA's responsibility is to add our data to the data that others have, to help people to understand the answer to the question. Collectively, as a group of stakeholders, we should be working together to get that answer for you.

10:45

**Ross Greer:** When will you make your contribution to that? I accept that there is collective responsibility. On a number of occasions, this committee has tried to figure out where the responsibility lies for curriculum for excellence, in its many forms. The reality is that you are the Scottish Qualifications Authority. More young people in Scotland are leaving school with no qualifications and you have a significant amount of responsibility in this area. I am not necessarily saying that the fault lies with decisions that the SQA has taken, but you have clear responsibility in the realm of qualifications. When will you make your contribution to figuring out what is causing this problem?

**Dr Brown:** We need to do that over the next year or so. Another set of data will come in about what happens this summer and we need to understand that first. As I said earlier, over the past few years, there has been a change in the approach to the broad general education, and we should see the impact of that change come through in the summer. We need to monitor that and make sure that we understand what is happening at a cohort level and not just at an entries level. That is a key piece.

You might have noticed, a couple of days ago, reports in the press that, down south, there is a pattern of children not being entered for qualifications in order to maintain attainment levels. We do not believe that that is happening in Scotland—and we do not want it to happen in Scotland—but we need to understand the cohort measure as well as the entries measure.

**Ross Greer:** That might not be happening as commonly in Scotland as it is down south, but it is happening in Scotland. I speak from my cousin's experience this year: his entire class was not put forward for a qualification. That decision was taken in February and it was reversed only towards the

end of March, after the intervention of parents and local elected members. There are schools in Scotland that are still trying to do that. I accept that it is not happening at the same level as it is in England, but it is happening.

**Dr Brown:** Given that data, it is especially important that we look at the cohort and not just the entries.

**Ross Greer:** Thank you.

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** I will follow up Ross Greer's questions about data. Our briefing tells us that the SQA holds a rich set of data. Dr Alan Britton told the committee:

"we have very little research evidence about the impact of the different models. Schools have been left to try things out".—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee*, 24 April 2019; c 10.]

Via your data—I understand that it is collective—have you been proactive enough in following up attainment levels and feeding back on how the models are performing? Have you been liaising with local authorities on a regular basis? You have a rich set of data. How does it work for you?

**Dr Brown:** Our data does not contain any information on the curriculum models that are undertaken in schools. As I mentioned earlier, in relation to Dr Allan's question, we do not have information about whether a pupil has taken a higher over one or two years.

**Rona Mackay:** I understand that. What data do you have?

**Dr Brown:** We have data on the attainment based on an entry at a particular time. We know the age and stage of the individual but we do not know the curriculum model that they have undertaken. Our data can be used by local authorities and individual schools that know what their curriculum model is. They can see whether a change in their curriculum model has had a positive or negative impact on their students' attainment. We do not have that curriculum model information, so we cannot do that analysis.

**Rona Mackay:** Should you not be requesting that data? Should it not be fed back to you so that you can see the bigger picture?

**Dr Brown:** This will sound like it is not our problem. It is our problem, because we are part of the system. Within the education system, the SQA's responsibility is to provide qualifications and, on an annual basis, to provide the data on attainment for those qualifications, which can be used by the system to understand how the system is working and how to improve it.

Our information should be used by people who understand what the curriculum models are in schools in order to understand whether there has been a positive or negative change in the level of attainment. We need to be part of that conversation, but the SQA does not have an overt remit to measure the difference in the attainment of a three-plus-three versus a two-plus-two-plus-two. That will also depend on individual children. One child might benefit from a three-plus-three, while another might benefit from a two-plus-two-plus-two.

**Iain Gray:** Dr Brown, I was delighted to hear you talking about the importance and value of lower-level qualifications. In my view, far too often in this debate we are told that young people who get five highers are still getting five highers and all is well with the world. That is not good enough.

Our inquiry was generated in part by data that was produced by people such as Professor Scott, which showed a reduction in the number of subjects being studied at S4 and a significant reduction in enrolment and attainment at levels 4 and 5 in the new exams compared with the previous standard grade exams. The data in your table rather tells the same story. The numbers might be marginally different, but there is a huge drop-off in enrolment and attainment at levels 4 and 5.

Given what you have just said, do you not think that your data shows a cohort of young people who are being failed by the system of which you are part?

**Dr Brown:** CFE did not just try to achieve people getting pieces of paper and qualifications; it tried to achieve people having the ability to apply learning in different contexts, and to have a comfort level with that learning that would enable them to be successful in the future and to be more successful in their future destinations. In order to do that, the philosophy was to measure their attainment at the end of S6, or when they are 18, whether they are in school, college or work.

On the total number of qualifications that someone achieves, when a student goes to university in Scotland, the university does not ask them how many national 5s they have; it asks about highers. Once someone has taken one level, they get to the next level, and that is what is important. It is rare for a company to go back and ask about the highers that somebody did; a company will be interested in the person's degree.

My question for the committee is: what level of attainment are we actually measuring in Scotland? Is it what learners have achieved at the age of 18 and does it matter whether they get a national 5 and a higher in French? Does it matter that they

have attained a deep understanding of higher French?

**Iain Gray:** We are back to talking about those young people who achieve highers. There is a group of young people for whom national 4 and 5, or indeed a lower level—you gave an example earlier—is what they achieve in school. Are we not failing that cohort of young people? They are leaving with fewer qualifications and a lower level of achievement than they would have had in 2011, 2012 or 2013.

**Dr Brown:** The issue there is that differentiation in the cohort. I made the mistake of mentioning highers, but if you look at the progression of learners who are coming out of S4 and moving into more vocational courses that are much more suitable for them, they might have attained a national 5 but the question is whether they actually learned at standard grade. Are we at the point at which, in that case, they are pursuing a more positive life path?

**Iain Gray:** Do we have the data that allows us to interrogate that? I do not think that we do.

**Dr Brown:** I do not think that we do either.

**Dr Stewart:** The Scottish Government's insight data would give a more complete picture because it includes SQA qualifications, national courses, vocational qualifications—

**Iain Gray:** Would it be able to demonstrate—

**Dr Brown:** I think that the Government will have more information.

**Dr Stewart:** Yes, it will have more information.

**Iain Gray:** Okay. I have one final and to-the-point question. We are talking about the value of lower-level qualifications. A number of submissions to the committee have said categorically that the national 4 qualification is considered to be “worthless”. I am not paraphrasing. I would like you to respond to that.

**Dr Brown:** We have just done a credibility survey. It was totally random and it was run by an external organisation that met people on the street and made random telephone calls. We have data for national 4 that shows that the percentage of young people, potential candidates and mature candidates who felt that it had a low credibility was about 18 per cent. Among those who felt that it had low credibility, the highest percentage—at 37 per cent—was for teachers; the percentage for employers was 15 per cent.

We need to address the credibility of national 4 because it is a very valuable qualification. There is no external examination, but there are no external examinations for higher national certificates or diplomas. The issues are about perception and ensuring that the learners who achieve

certification at national 4 have achieved the learning, knowledge and skills that are demonstrated at national 4.

National 4 was designed specifically for the students who would go on to courses that do not have examinations and for whom examinations are not best suited to capture their abilities. There is a huge challenge with regard to the credibility of national 4, but we need to make sure that we address it.

**Alison Harris:** I appreciate that multilevel teaching has always existed, but it is now commonplace—Larry Flanagan of the Educational Institute of Scotland described it as an “explosion”. Was that considered and planned for in the implementation of the curriculum for excellence senior phase? Evidence to the committee has suggested that it is an unintended consequence.

**Dr Brown:** There are two issues: multi-age teaching was understood for children in S4, S5 and S6 who are learning at the same level; multilevel teaching for national 4, 5 and higher in the same class was probably an unintended consequence, which has come about as a result of the environment in which curriculum for excellence was introduced.

**Alison Harris:** That is super, thank you. That is what I wanted to know.

**Johann Lamont:** I will go back to the question of equity and fairness. Dr Brown made the point that young people down south are not allowed to take exams or are taken off the roll. I suppose that that is in order to prevent them from affecting the status of the school.

What is your view on the equity of downgrading the qualification that some young people get in fourth year? In the past, kids at general—not just foundation—would have an external exam that established a level of attainment; now, national 4 is not assessed externally and is a pass or fail. Do you accept that that is a form of de-rolling? We are reducing the amount of time and attention that the system gives to those young people.

**Dr Stewart:** The original design of national 3 and 4 was done through an open consultation with the public and overseen by the curriculum for excellence management board. As I understand it, it was decided that they should be internally assessed and externally quality assured by the SQA because young people at that level often do not do particularly well in external exams; that could be seen quite clearly from an insider view in the SQA, looking at how young people performed at foundation and general and in external exams. The original rationale for internal assessment of national 3 and 4 was from an equity point of view and from the perspective that it was more

appropriate for those young people to have their qualifications assessed internally.

Two or three years ago, we did a piece of fieldwork with focus groups that specifically targeted young people who were doing national 4 or a mix of national 4 and 5. Young people did not have issues with national 4 being assessed internally; they saw it as a positive not a negative, and did not see it as having low credibility. We saw a much more mixed view from teachers and senior managers in schools.

The original rationale for the introduction of national 4 qualifications was to address issues of equity and to come up with a form of assessment—

11:00

**Johann Lamont:** It would be helpful if you could point us to that decision, because, thus far, the committee has been unable to get anybody to say that they were responsible for making it. It would be excellent if you could do that because, frankly, nobody has said that there was any rationale for the decision. Everyone has said that somebody else made the decision. I profoundly disagree with the decision, and it would be useful to find out who made it.

In relation to equity, the reality is that resource follows qualifications. From what you have said, I presume that you would not want there to be external examination of the uptake of national 4 courses, but we might want to look at that issue further.

I am conscious of the time, so I will make this my final point. The qualifications are taken over three years, but we know that 75 per cent of looked-after young people leave school in fourth year. We have built a curricular system that amplifies inequality for some young people. Do you accept that that is a problem?

**Dr Brown:** We need to ensure that young people who leave school at the end of S4 have what they need to be successful wherever they go, and that they continue their learning in those places. I recognise that a really high percentage of looked-after children leave school at the end of S4, but other young people leave school at that stage, too. We need to ensure that everyone who leaves school at the end of S4 has the right knowledge, skills and learning that will be recognised in the most appropriate way. That might be national qualifications or other qualifications and awards.

**Johann Lamont:** With respect, you have said that the system works over three years, but a disproportionate number of young people from a particular disadvantaged group leave school at the

end of fourth year, so the curricular system is not meeting their needs.

**Dr Stewart:** I presume that, locally, schools will know who the looked-after young people are, and that they will put in place appropriate learning arrangements for those young people. However, your data presents a different picture.

**Johann Lamont:** If schools are doing that, I presume that they could encourage such children to stay on in school. The issue is not about ability; it is about circumstance.

**Dr Stewart:** Yes.

**Johann Lamont:** Do you accept that there is an issue in that a disproportionate number of looked-after young people leave school at the end of fourth year—because of their circumstances, not their ability—in a system that is designed for pupils to stay on until sixth year? How do we address that problem?

**Dr Brown:** We should stop thinking about the senior phase as merely being in school. We need to think about where young people are going—whether it is college or a work environment—and about how we ensure that their learning continues in those places. As a society, we should take responsibility for such learning and plan for it. We think about the senior phase as taking place only in school, but that is not—and should not be—the case for everyone.

**The Convener:** That concludes the committee's questioning. I thank the panel members for their attendance. I pay particular tribute to Dr Brown, as this is likely to be her final appearance before the committee—certainly in her current role. We thank her for her service and wish her all the best for her retirement from July.

**Dr Brown:** Thank you.

**The Convener:** At next week's meeting, on 29 May, which will be the final session in our inquiry, we will take evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

11:03

*Meeting continued in private until 11:21.*



This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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