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EDUCATION IN THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

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PREAMBLE

This paper follows on from the previous bulletin (Redford 2014), which covered the education remit of the Parliament's Education and Culture Committee between September 2013 and January 2014. The following bulletin covers the same remit of the Education and Culture Committee from February to June 2014.

FEBRUARY – JULY 2013

The Education and Culture Committee had the following members during this period: Stewart Maxwell (Convener), Neil Bibby (Deputy Convener), George Adam, Clare Adamson, Jayne Baxter, Colin Beattie, Joan McAlpine (to 01.04.14), Gordon MacDonald (from 22.04.14), Liam McArthur, Mary Scanlon (from 04.03.14) and Liz Smith (to 25.02.14). Full records of the Committee meetings, including minutes, official papers and transcripts of proceedings can be found on the Scottish Parliament website at:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s4/committees/ellc/meetings.htm>

In this period the committee returned to Curriculum for Excellence: national qualifications, taking evidence in February 2014 and planned further evidence sessions for September 2014. They held an evidence session with researchers and Skills Development Scotland to consider a published study called *My World of Work*, addressed cyber-bullying and spent some time on evidence related to Scotland's educational and cultural future. They returned to their inquiry into the decision making on whether to take children into care and took evidence following the introduction of the *Children and Young People (Scotland) (2014) Act*. The committee considered and closed two petitions: PE1487 and PE 1498 relating to religious observance in schools and religious representation on local authority education committees. They considered a range of subordinate legislation concerning regional colleges, vulnerable groups, early learning and childcare and a range of ancillary provision for the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. They considered their work programme in private at their meeting on 27 May 2014 and agreed to request an update on their inquiry on decision making on whether to take children into care and to receive an update on Curriculum for Excellence and the new national qualifications in September 2014.

CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE: NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

The committee took evidence on Curriculum for Excellence at their meeting on the 25th February 2014. The focus of the evidence sessions was on the preparations for the first group of qualifications to be awarded under the curriculum. Papers provided for the meeting were a SPICe briefing on Curriculum for Excellence (EC/S4/13/22/2) and written submissions from Education Scotland, the Educational Institute of Scotland, the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (EC/S4/14/5/3). Supplementary submissions from the EIS: survey results and a paper on the implementation of the new Higher qualifications are available online with the papers, minute and official report of the meeting. The committee returned to the topic, in private, at their meeting on 19 August 2014 when they considered their future approach to Curriculum for Excellence: national qualifications.

Date of Committee	Witnesses
25 February 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graeme Logan, <i>Education Scotland (ES)</i> • Larry Flanagan, <i>Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS)</i> • Richard Goring, <i>Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association (SSTA)</i> • Dr Janet Brown, <i>Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Alasdair Allan, <i>Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages, Scottish Government</i> • Alan Johnston, <i>Scottish Government</i> • Graeme Logan, <i>Education Scotland (ES)</i> • Dr Janet Brown, <i>Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)</i>

In his opening remarks the Convener explained that the evidence session on the 25th of February was in response to concerns about the new qualifications, to be introduced for the first time in 2014:

The aim is to seek assurances that the new qualifications will be delivered as intended and to the benefit of both pupils and their families and that parents and pupils are well prepared and reassured that everything and everybody is in place for the qualifications (Maxwell 25.02.14, Col 3608).

Neil Bibby first asked Larry Flanagan and Richard Goring about the concerns that both professional organisations had raised about the implementation of the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence. In reply Larry Flanagan emphasised the commitment of teachers to the success of the first diet of examinations but said that the new qualifications and SQA verification procedures had caused workload pressures for members. Richard Goring agreed with the comments from Larry Flanagan and said that in survey of SSTA members in early February workload was a key issue:

Many teachers said that they were working way in excess of their contractual hours: people often mentioned working 50 or 60 hours, and some were working even more than that. Probably 50 per cent of respondents—if not more—talked about workload being a major issue (Goring 25.02.14, Col 3609).

Graeme Logan said that ES had been in 92 secondary schools since September 2013, 'to support teachers, work directly alongside senior management teams, and provide as much tailored help as we can' (Logan 25.02.14, Col 3610). He then provided the committee with a detailed list of the materials available online for teachers to work with. Janet Brown then described the way in which the SQA had engaged directly with teachers to understand, 'the challenge associated with the introduction of new qualifications' (Brown 25.02.14, Col 3610). Neil Bibby followed this with a direct question to the professional associations about when they had recognised the level of the workload issues their members were experiencing. In reply Richard Goring gave an example of teachers in a business education department working with up to five different examination courses. Larry Flanagan added that the timescale for the work, 'has been grossly underestimated' (Flanagan 25.02.14, Col 3613) and referred back to the EIS proposal for a one year delay in the implementation of the new qualifications. Janet Brown then spoke about the ways in which the SQA had worked with teachers and Graeme Logan referred to emerging new practices with courses being delivered over two years. The meeting also discussed the support conferences provided by the SQA and the difficulties schools had in releasing staff to attend these events. Joan McAlpine then asked about the professional focus papers published by ES to support teachers. Larry Flanagan replied that the EIS had collaborated with ES and agreed the content and key messages, and that teachers had found them a useful. He followed this with examples of confusion amongst staff in schools about the assessment focus of units, because of the way in which they were issued and concluded:

We have not achieved the intended reduction in the number and level of assessments for S4 pupils. Given that that was a key aim of curriculum for excellence, we have to ask why we have not achieved it and get the key messages out there about how it can be achieved (Flanagan 25.02.14, Col 3621).

In reply to this Graeme Logan reminded the committee that broad national guidance was issued about assessment but did agree, 'that, in some cases, through teachers wanting to get it right, we see some degree of over assessment' (Logan 25.02.14, Col 3623). George Adam then asked the panel about the way in which the recent Government commitment of £4.75 million was being used to support teachers. In reply Janet Brown said that the SQA had added some additional documentation but that the website was the key way that they supported teachers. Graeme Logan echoed this for ES and said that it was important to provide a blend of online and face-to-face support, adding that ES would be visiting every secondary school in Scotland this year. Larry Flanagan identified the need for schools to have access to new higher materials and Richard Goring compared the documentation to that provided for previous changes to qualifications:

When new qualifications were introduced in the past, teachers were provided with curriculum notes, sample papers and national assessment bank items to start with, which provided a firm foundation on which to build. At the moment, a lot of teachers feel that there are no firm foundations that they understand. (Goring 25.02.14, Col 3628).

Liz Smith then asked about the unit assessments for national 5 provided in the national assessment bank (NAB). In reply Larry Flanagan acknowledged that there had been difficulties due to the different way in which subjects structured their assessments. Liz Smith then asked about the charges for a review of marking in the final exam. In reply to this Janet Brown said that it was up to each local authority to decide their approach to this. Colin Beattie followed this with a question to the panel about the recommendation to reduce bureaucracy, particularly in relation to the verification process. Both Larry Flanagan and Richard Goring replied that this would be discussed by members at school level and would then be part of each school's working time agreement for the next school year. The meeting with the first panel ended with a discussion about the timescale for the provision of new higher course materials, due to be published in March 2014.

The Convener invited Alasdair Allan to give an opening statement at the start of the next session of evidence. In that statement the Minister reassured the committee on the progress made with the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence and the support available to teachers. Neil Bibby followed this with a question about the concerns raised by the EIS and SSTA about workload and assessment. In response Alasdair Allan recognised the legitimacy of the surveys but added that he had announced a further package of support since the surveys were published. The meeting then discussed the time scale of the announcement and Neil Bibby asked a further question about teacher workload. In reply Alasdair Allan listed the support that the Government had provided in response to the issue. In response to a question from Liam McArthur he outlined the way in which the management board for Curriculum for Excellence had responded to teacher concerns but concluded:

We will learn, review and keep in touch with teachers, but there is no prospect of a change of course as we approach the exams (Allan 25.02.14, Col 3647).

Members of the committee then raised a series of questions about the material provided by the SQA, the verification process and the implementation of the new highs. The Minister deferred to Janet Brown to answer these questions on behalf of the SQA. The Convener concluded the session with a request for the Minister to reassure parents and pupils, 'that the examinations will go ahead as planned and that the new system will be implemented smoothly and successfully?' (Maxwell 25.02.14, Col 3661). The Minister replied, 'The firm intention – and my commitment – is to ensure that that happens' (Allan 25.02.14, Col 3661).

MY WORLD OF WORK

The committee discussed the implications of a study entitled My World of Work, carried out by the researchers from the Centre of Educational Sociology,

University of Edinburgh, at their meeting on 4th March 2014. This followed earlier reference to the study at a committee meeting on 27 November 2012. Written submissions for this meeting were placed by all three organisations giving oral evidence. Supplementary submissions from Skills Development Scotland and from the researchers are available online with the other records of the meeting.

Date of Committee	Witnesses
4 March 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • James Corry and Kate Lynch, <i>UNISON Scotland</i> • Dr Cathy Howieson and Sheila Semple, <i>Centre for Educational Sociology, University of Edinburgh</i> • Danny Logue and Rob Doyle, <i>Skills Development Scotland (SDS)</i>

The meeting on the 4 March 2014 began with a question from Jayne Baxter about engagement with young people. In reply Danny Logue described the interactive website, the support that SDS gave to teachers and parents to support young people and reminded the committee of the targeted services they offered through schools. The Convener then asked about evidence of the effectiveness of the support available. In response Danny Logue referred to the SDS evaluation programme, which led Liam McArthur to ask about the staff feedback on the qualitative effect of the changes in SDS. James Corry replied on behalf of UNISON Scotland that members were concerned that not all pupils were offered face-to-face interviews. This led Liam McArthur to comment on the issue highlighted in the research report, that a broad range of young people were, ‘missing out of careers information, advice and guidance’ (McArthur 04.03.14, Col 3676). In response Cathy Howieson supported the idea of a blended service but said that SDS needed to develop a better system of identifying pupil need. She went on to note that overall 15% of pupils did not get any careers information and in particular, that 20% of low-attaining young people received no careers input. In answer to a follow up question from Liam McArthur she said:

It is unfortunate that, in efforts to try to get at least a minimum standard of provision, careers advisers’ ability to exercise their professional judgment and use their professional expertise has perhaps been somewhat curtailed (Howieson 04.03.14, Col 3677).

Liam McArthur then asked UNISON Scotland about what happens when their members went into schools. In reply Kate Lynch described the talks they give and the invitations made to pupils to see a careers advisor. She concluded:

I think that they might understand more if we spoke about having a careers adviser in school and told them about how they could benefit from speaking to a careers adviser who would look individually at their skills and strengths—not just giving them information but helping them to explore their options (Lynch 04.03.14, Col 3678).

Danny Logue then described what SDS offered as targeted and universal services, highlighting that they had seen more pupils this year than last. Colin Beattie then asked about the group of young people who do not have internet access at home. In response Rob Doyle talked about the range of partners, including colleges and libraries that SDS worked with across Scotland to ensure access for all young people. Cathy Howieson referred to the growing body of research that young people lacked the digital literacy skills needed for careers and suggested that My World of Work could be used to develop that in schools. Neil Bibby followed this with a series of questions about the numbers using each part of the SDS service and Liam McArthur commented about the variety of ways that local authorities used the SDS risk matrix to identify pupils in need of support. Sheila Howieson commented on the difference between schools in the amount of careers advice that young people received. The committee then debated the outcome from the research that 29% of young people did not receive any careers guidance in schools. This was contradicted by SDS who said that all young people had access to a group presentation on careers, ‘and, if required a face-to-face meeting’ (Logue 04.03.14, col 3693). The meeting then debated the merits of work-experience for pupils before returning to the benefits of the blended provision available through SDS.

CYBER-BULLYING

The committee held an evidence session on cyber-bullying at their meeting on 11 March 2014. The papers submitted for this meeting were a SPICe briefing (EC/S4/14/7/2) and written submissions from Zero Tolerance and Respect Me (EC/S4/14/7/3). The committee had identified the following issues for discussion at this session: whether schools and education authorities should treat cyber-bullying differently from other forms of bullying;

- how schools can best respond to gender differences in cyber-bullying;
- the most effective means of reducing cyber-bullying;
- how schools should respond to cyber-bullying that takes place outwith school; and
- how schools work with parents and the wider community to tackle the problem of cyber-bullying (EC/S4/14/7/3).
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Date of Committee	Witnesses
11 March 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laura Tomson, <i>Zero Tolerance</i> • Brian Donnelly, <i>Respect Me</i> • Caroline Harris, <i>Anti-Bullying East Lothian</i> • Tony Rafferty, <i>National Parent Forum of Scotland</i>

The evidence session on the 11 March 2014 opened with a question from Neil Bibby about how to keep children safe from cyber bullying. The witnesses each gave a reply in respect of their own organisation. Laura Tomson said that their focus would be on gender based bullying and that, ‘We do not see cyber-bullying

as being particularly different from any other kind of bullying, although it presents slightly different challenges' (Tomson 11.03.14, Col 3765). Brian Donnelly echoed this in his reply, concluding, 'It is just how bullying looks in 2014' (Donnelly 11.03.14, col 3766). Tony Rafferty commented on the online behaviour of some parents, 'If parents are doing that, how can we expect the children not to follow?' (Rafferty 11.03.14, col 3766). The meeting then discussed the ways in which various support organisations worked with schools to address cyber-bullying. They followed this with a discussion about internet access in schools and training for teachers and parents that Respect Me was providing with Government funding. Tony Rafferty welcomed the development of the training materials, which would be available nationally following the pilot study. Clare Adamson then asked about bullying outwith school and the work of third sector organisations with young people. In response Laura Tomson talked about the work Zero Tolerance did with youth groups, to which Brian Donnelly added,

Practice is at its best in schools that are genuinely community schools. I am talking about schools whose doors do not close when school finishes and which are part of the community (Donnelly 11.03.14, Col 3776).

The session concluded with a discussion about the ways in which children and young people accessed help when they were being bullied.

INQUIRY ON SCOTLAND'S EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL FUTURE

The committee began their inquiry on Scotland's educational and cultural future at their meeting on 25 March 2014. The committee's call for evidence covered the following topics:

- How current immigration policies impact on Scottish universities' and colleges' ability to attract and retain international students;
- The social, cultural and financial contribution made by international students;
- How changing policy on visas for international students could affect: universities' and colleges' tuition fee income; the places available to Scottish, RUK and EU students; and public funding requirements for colleges and universities.
- The legal basis on which RUK students are currently charged tuition fees by Scottish institutions;
- Whether, and if so how, that legal basis would change in the event of Scotland becoming an independent country.
- Scottish universities' access to UK research funding;
- How a new funding formula for Scotland's contribution to the Research Councils could work in practice;
- Whether, in the event of Scotland becoming an independent country, research funding from other sources would be likely to alter significantly (EC/S4/14/9/2).

Papers provided for that meeting included a SPICe briefing (EC/S4/14/9/A) and written submissions from: NUS Scotland, UCU Scotland and Universities Scotland (EC/S4/14/9/2). The focus of the discussion with the first panel was on immigration, student visas and tuition fees; with the second panel focusing on research funding. The committee continued to take evidence at their next

meeting on the 1 April 2014. This meeting was supported by two SPICe briefings, on Childcare (EC/S4/14/10/1) and on employability (EC/S4/10/2). Written submissions were received from Parenting Across Scotland, UNISON Scotland, Women in Scotland's Economy, Scottish Chambers of Commerce and the Scottish Training Federation. A supplementary submission from Children in Scotland was received following the meeting on the 1 April 2014. The committee heard evidence from Angela Constance, Cabinet Secretary for Training, Youth and Women's Employment and Michael Russell, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning at their meeting on the 29 April 2014. The papers for this meeting included a supplementary submission from Lucy Hunter on student debt levels. The committee agreed at their meeting on the 22 April 2014 that they would not publish a report from the evidence gathered for this inquiry.

Date of Committee	Witnesses
25 March 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gordon Maloney, <i>NUS Scotland</i> • Mary Senior, <i>University and College Union Scotland (UCU)</i> • Professor Pete Downes, <i>Universities Scotland</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professor Paul Boyle, <i>Research Councils UK</i> • Professor Petra Wend, <i>Queen Margaret University</i> • Professor Ferdinand von Prondzynski, <i>Robert Gordon University</i>
1 April 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jackie Brock, <i>Children in Scotland</i> • Carol Ball, Glasgow City, <i>UNISON Scotland</i> • Clare Simpson, <i>Parenting Across Scotland</i> • Emily Thomson, <i>Women in Scotland's Economy (WiSE)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gary Clark, <i>Scottish Chambers of Commerce</i> • Iain McCaskey, <i>Federation for Industry Sector Skills and Standards</i> • Maggie Morrison, <i>CGI Scotland</i> • Jim Murphy, <i>Scottish Training Federation</i>
29 April 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angela Constance, <i>Cabinet Secretary for Training, Youth and Women's Employment, Scottish Government</i> • Michael Cross, Rona Sweeney and David Souter, <i>Scottish Government</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michael Russell, <i>Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Scottish Government</i> • Shirley Laing and Michael Cross, <i>Scottish Government</i>

The Convener opened the meeting on the 25 March with an invitation to Pete Downes to start the discussion with some points about the student visa system. In reply Pete Downes outlined the key reasons that Universities Scotland disliked the current system. In particular he referred to evidence of the impact that international students had on the wider student community and their role as 'ambassadors' for Scottish education across the world. Mary Senior supported those comments and added that the current UK immigration policies were limiting the work of universities in Scotland. Gordon Maloney concluded, 'it is one of the few issues on which the NUS and Universities Scotland agree with the UCU' (Maloney 25.03.14, Col 3858). The meeting then discussed the fluctuations in the number of international students from 2010 to 2012, which Pete Downes said:

. . . relates in part to the unwelcoming culture . . . and, critically, the competitiveness of our visa offer means that international students now have limited opportunities for post-study work (Downes 25.03.14, col 3859).

This was followed with a discussion about the need for a UK-wide travel area for students, should Scotland vote for independence in the 2014 Referendum. Other points discussed were the changes needed to the UK systems to support international students and the ways in which the UK embassies and British Council supported the work of Scottish Universities overseas. The meeting then moved on to discuss tuition fees for rest of UK (RUK) students in Scotland.

The questions for the second panel of witnesses on the 25 March 2014 began with a discussion about the collaborative and international focus of university research. Neil Bibby then asked about the UK research funding received in Scotland and the implications of a cut in that funding due to the country voting for independence. In response all witnesses talked of the need to consider the range of research money available to Scottish universities from Scotland, the UK and Europe. Colin Beattie then asked if the Scottish Referendum was, 'affecting whether people choose to come to Scotland' (Beattie 25.03.14, Col 3889). Both Petra Wend and Ferdinand von Prondzynski said that there was no evidence that the referendum was affecting the universities' ability to attract people from the UK or internationally. Liam McArthur then asked about the implications of independence for research funding. In response Paul Boyle said that the research councils, 'would strongly support Scotland retaining its position in a single research ecosystem' (Boyle 25.03.14, Col 3891). He then referred to the Haldane Principle, 'which protects research funding from political interference' (Boyle 25.03.14, Col 3893) and the importance of retaining that in any future changes to funding structures.

The committee meeting on the 1 April 2014 took evidence on early years and childcare in the first session, following this with a focus on employability in the second. The meeting opened with a question from the Convener about the importance of childcare in relation to children's welfare. In reply Clare Simpson talked about the evidence from the study Growing up in Scotland (GUS):

A lot of the information from the growing up in Scotland study shows that, when there is a gap at the age of three, by the age of five, when children get to school, they are far behind their peers in cognitive development. With good-quality

childcare, some of that inequality is ironed out and children have a better chance, and that benefit can still be shown at the age of 15 (Simpson 01.014.14, col 3912).

The meeting then discussed the costs of childcare, the range of provision and the particular challenges of finding childcare in rural areas. Joan McAlpine asked about the Government funding for Professor Imran Siraj to investigate staffing and staff training. Jackie Brock welcomed this and added:

It would be really exciting if the workforce review thought about how we can ensure that childcare becomes a high-quality area of work to which people aspire from a range of sectors—not only young people leaving school, but those leaving college and university. Childcare needs to become, as it is in other places, a highly desirable skill and career (Brock 01.04.12, Col 3922).

The meeting then considered the relative costs of childcare across the UK and the cost of the childcare policies proposed by the Scottish Government in the referendum white paper. The debate with the second panel of witnesses focused on employability, with reference to education in relation to access to workplace experience.

At their next meeting on the 29 April 2014 the committee took evidence from Angela Constance, Cabinet Secretary for Training, Youth and Female Employment. Liam McArthur and Gordon MacDonald asked a number of detailed questions about the Government's plans for future development of modern apprenticeships, other topics covered were access to the youth contract and the estimated cost of the youth guarantee proposal. The first questions for Michael Russell, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning addressed issues arising for Scotland from UK immigration policies and the implications of that for Scottish Universities. The meeting then moved on to consider, fees, research councils and the cost of proposed changes to childcare.

INQUIRY INTO DECISION MAKING ON WHETHER TO TAKE CHILDREN INTO CARE

The committee received an update on this inquiry at their committee meeting on 5 August 2014. Who cares? Scotland provided a written submission (EC/S4/14/19/2) and gave evidence at the meeting. David Blair gave evidence on behalf of the Scottish Government at the following meeting on 12 August 2014. The papers for this meeting included submissions from organisations 'mentioned in the some of the report's recommendations and/ or have a key role to play in delivering improvements for children in care' (EC/S4/14/20/5). Submissions were provided by:

- Scottish Government
- Centre for excellence for looked after children in Scotland
- Children's Hearings Scotland
- COSLA
- Includem
- Scottish Children's Reporter Administration
- Social Work Scotland
- Scottish Association of Social Work
- Scottish Social Services Council (EC/S4/14/20/5 pp. 2-32)

Date of Committee	Witnesses
5 August 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kevin Browne, Ashley Cameron, Duncan Dunlop, Caroline Richardson, and Thomas Timlin, <i>Who Cares? Scotland</i>
12 August 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> David Blair, <i>Scottish Government</i>

The meeting on the 5 August 2014 opened with a presentation from Who Cares? Scotland about the changes made following the committee report and the Children and Young People (Scotland) (2014) Act. This began with a personal reflection from Ashley Cameron about her personal journey since she gave evidence to the inquiry:

I would like to be sitting where members are in 10 years' time... When you bring us in and include us from the absolute start, we can make change together, with one another, by guiding each other and using each other. That is democracy. What we have seen in this inquiry is democracy in action, and I will do all that I can to ensure that it continues (Cameron 05.08.14, Col 4248).

The second speaker Thomas Timlin, supported Ashley Cameron's presentation and said that the work of the inquiry had, 'legitimised care identity' (Timlin 05.08.14, Col 4249). He went on to share his own care story, as did Caroline Richardson and Kevin Browne. The convener then thanked four witnesses and asked about the process the committee had used to gather evidence for the inquiry. Ashley Cameron replied that the important part of the process was that the committee, 'came into our space rather than our coming to you' (Cameron 05.08.14, col 4256). Mary Scanlon and Neil Bibby followed this with questions about advocacy and the work that an advocate can do to support young people in care. The meeting followed this with a discussion about the rising involvement of lawyers as parental representatives in children's hearings. Caroline Richardson also questioned the need for the number of adults attending hearings:

For example, must we have young people sitting at a children's hearing with someone from the education and health services and someone from their local club? Must we have all the adults there? What about reports? (Richardson 05.08.14, Col 4267).

Joan McAlpine and Jayne Baxter then asked further questions about advocacy. In reply Duncan Dunlop said that the Who Cares? Scotland felt that advocacy should be commissioned nationally but organised locally, 'Our vision is that when a young person enters care, they will be introduced to their advocacy worker' (Dunlop 05.08.14, Col 4271).

In response to a final question from the Convener about the 2014 Act, Thomas Timlin said, 'I perceive the 2014 act to be extremely empowering' (Timlin 05.08.14, Col 4274) and Duncan Dunlop talked of the passing of the bill as, 'a really positive moment' (Dunlop 05.08.14, Col 4274) but concluded: 'So, there is

great optimism about the 2014 act, but we are going to have to keep our eyes on it' (Dunlop 05.08.14, Col 4275).

David Blair provided an opening statement to the committee at the start of their next committee meeting on 12 August 2014. In the statement he highlighted the Scottish Government's priorities in relation to taking children into care:

. . . intervening earlier and more effectively, building on the assets within families to prevent children becoming looked-after where possible; securing earlier permanence by reducing long- term supervision; and enhancing the quality of care through corporate parenting for those who need it, including a planned and supported transition to independence at a time that is right for each young person (Blair 12.08.14, col 4290).

He followed that with a description of the child centred thinking and listening to young people which he said informed these priorities and then described in detail the Scottish Government proposals in relation to early intervention, early permanence, data monitoring and corporate parenting. Colin Beattie opened the questions by asking about legal representation at children's hearings. In response David Blair outlined the proposal for a national mentoring scheme which aimed to provide young people with a trusted adult to support them in that type of situation, and noted that due to changes brought through GIRFEC (Getting it right for every child) there would be a formal review of the hearing system in 2015. Colin Beattie questioned the ability of GIRFEC, to address issues when the child was left in the middle of an argument between two lawyers, each representing a parent. David Blair acknowledged that tension could exist, 'between the welfare-based principle and the rights-based agenda' (Blair 12.08.14, Col 4293) and suggested that the review was one way of addressing it. Liam McArthur followed this with a question about the role of social workers in the decisions that children's hearing panels made. In reply to this question David Blair suggested that there was a need, 'to have trust in the new system as it runs in' (Blair 12.08.14, Col 4294). Colin Beattie then turned to the lack of data collected by the Scottish Government. In reply to this David Blair gave a detailed account of the proposed changes to data collection for looked after children. There was a short discussion of the variation in statistical data relating the educational outcomes for looked after children before Gordon MacDonald asked about the commitment from the Scottish Government to, 'increase the quality, consistency and availability of advocacy support for all children and young people, including looked-after children' (MacDonald 12.08.14, col 4298). In response David Blair outlined discussions and scoping which had been undertaken with a range of partners. Gordon MacDonald then asked what proportion of looked-after children in Scotland currently had access to independent advocacy. In reply David Blair said he did not know but that, 'there is a legal duty to hear the voice of the young person' (Blair 12.08.14, Col 4300). Gordon MacDonald pushed for that information to be made available and asked how many training places would be needed to expand the national mentoring scheme. David Blair replied that this was an area that was still to be developed. 'The programme is very ambitious, but we are committed to doing that, and we are happy to keep the committee informed as we go' (Blair 12.08.14, Col 4301). The Convener then asked about concerns that some local authorities were not

able to ensure that a child's voice was heard, which David Blair said would be monitored through the inspection process. He went on to describe the work that was about to be taken forward by a professional advisor in designing the national mentoring scheme.

We want our adviser to link up with our colleagues in the children's hearings system, who are looking at implementation of section 122 of the 2011 act and other policy areas in relation to which advocacy is a concern, so that we bring together thinking on advocacy, mentoring and the whole spectrum of participation. One of the first things that the adviser will have to do will be to take stock of advocacy provision in the country (Blair 12.08.14, Col 4302).

The convener asked that the committee be kept informed of the findings and moved on to consider the representation of parents with learning disabilities; which had been identified as an issue during the inquiry. In reply David Blair reminded the committee of a ministerial working group on child protection and disability and the development of training and resource materials for professionals working with such children and their parents. George Adam then asked about the systems taken to retain social work staff and what steps the Scottish Government had taken to address the committee's concerns. David Blair agreed to locate the required information and write back to the committee. The final questions from Neil Bibby and Liam McArthur concerned resources and the strategic commissioning programme.

PETITONS

The committee considered two petitions: PE1487 on religious observance in schools and PE1498 on religious representatives on local authority education committees, at their committee meeting on 6 May 2014. PE1487 was lodged by Mark Gordon and the Scottish Secular Society and called for the Scottish Government, 'to amend the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 by making religious observance in public schools and opt-in rather than opt-out activity' (Maxwell 06.05.14, Col 4139). The Convener reminded the committee that the Scottish Government believed that the current legislation and guidance on religious education was up to date. The committee agreed that the Convener would write to the Scottish Government; asking it to encourage local authorities to remind parents/carers of their right to withdraw children from religious observance and to indicate the work they would undertake when withdrawn. The committee agreed to close the petition but to advise the petitioners to contact COSLA and local authorities to ask them to remind parents/carers of their right to withdraw.

PE1498 was lodged by Colin Emerson on behalf of the Edinburgh Secular Society and called on the Scottish Government to repeal the 1973 legislation, which provided for religious representation on local authority education committees. The Convener reminded the committee that John Finnie had a member's bill proposal addressing the same issues. The committee agreed to close the petition and that the Convener would write to the petitioner and say that the committee agreed that the members bill would provide a more appropriate route for all members of the Scottish parliament to contribute to the debate.

SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION

The committee took evidence, debated and approved the following subordinate legislation related to education during this period:

- Designation of Regional Colleges (Scotland) Order 2014 (SSI 2014/22)
- Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007 (Miscellaneous Provisions) Amendment Order 2014 (SSI 2014/33)

The Committee took evidence on the Teachers' Superannuation (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2014 (SSI 2014/44) at their meeting on 18 March 2014. After debate, the motion was disagreed to (by division: For 2, Against 7 Abstentions 0).

The Committee took evidence on the Young People's Involvement in Education and Training (Provision of Information) (Scotland) Order 2014 [draft] (S4M-09744) at their meeting on the 22 April 2014. After debate, the motion was agreed to (by division: For 7, Against 0, Abstentions 2). The committee took evidence on the Provision of Early Learning and Childcare (Specified Children) (Scotland) Order 2014 [draft] at their meeting on 24 June 2014. The draft was agreed to, following debate.

The committee considered the Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 (Treatment of the Convener of the School Closure Review Panels as Specified Authority) Order 2014 [draft] at their meeting on 12 August 2014. The draft was agreed to, following debate. At the same meeting they took evidence, debated and approved S4M-10645 - Lanarkshire Colleges Order 2014 [draft].

The committee considered and made no recommendations in relation to the following negative instruments during this period:

- Coatbridge College (Transfer and Closure) (Scotland) Order 2014 (SSI 2014/52)
- Teachers' Superannuation (Scotland) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2014 (SSI 2014/69)
- Assigned Colleges (Scotland) Order 2014 (SSI 2014/80)
- Additional Support for Learning (Sources of Information) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2014 (SSI 2014/103)
- Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 (Modification of Subordinate Legislation) Order 2014 (SSI 2014/112)
- Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 (Compulsory Supervision Order Reports in Applications for Permanence Orders) Regulations 2014 (SSI 2014/113)
- Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Ancillary Provision) Order 2014 (SSI 2014/132)
- Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 (Supplementary Provision) Order 2014 (SSI 2014/137)
- St Mary's Music School (Aided Places) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2014 (SSI 2014/143)
- Assigned Colleges (University of the Highlands and Islands) Order 2014 (SSI 2014/146)

ANNUAL REPORT

The committee considered and agreed a draft annual report for the parliamentary year 11 May 2013 to 10 May 2014 at their meeting on the 27 May 2014.

REFERENCES

Redford, M. (2014) Education in the Scottish Parliament, *Scottish Educational Review*, 46 (1), pp. 83-99.