



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 30 October 2024

Session 6



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE

27th Meeting 2024, Session 6

CONVENER

*Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)

*Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con)

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)

*Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab)

*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

*Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)

*John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)

*Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Peter Bain (School Leaders Scotland)

Shona Barrie (University of Stirling)

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP) (Committee Substitute)

Professor Louise Hayward (University of Glasgow)

Dr Douglas Hutchison (Glasgow City Council)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Pauline McIntyre

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 30 October 2024

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Interests

The Deputy Convener (Evelyn Tweed): Good morning and welcome to the 27th meeting of the Education, Children and Young People Committee in 2024. We have apologies from Stephanie Callaghan and I welcome Jackie Dunbar, who is attending as a committee substitute.

I also welcome Douglas Ross and Miles Briggs, who are joining us for the first time and replacing our previous colleagues Sue Webber and Liam Kerr. On behalf of the committee, I thank Sue and Liam for their contributions to our work this session.

As Douglas and Miles are joining us for the first time today, our first item of business is to invite them to declare any relevant interests. I invite Douglas Ross to speak first.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I have nothing to declare.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I also have nothing to declare.

Convener

09:31

The Deputy Convener: Our next task is to choose a convener. Parliament has agreed that only members of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party are eligible for nomination as convener. I understand that Douglas Ross is the Conservative nominee for convener.

Douglas Ross was chosen as convener.

The Deputy Convener: I now hand over to Douglas, who will convene the rest of the meeting.

Senior Phase (Reform)

09:31

The Convener (Douglas Ross): Thank you for your duties, Evelyn, and good morning to everyone.

I echo what Evelyn said about Liam Kerr's contribution and sterling work as a committee member. Sue Webber has been an excellent convener for the past two and a half years and I look forward to continuing the good work that she did during that period with current and previous members.

Today's main item of business is an evidence session on the reform of the senior phase. The report on the independent review of qualifications and assessment was published in June 2023 and the committee heard evidence from Professor Louise Hayward, the chair of the review group, and her colleagues in September last year. Following the publication last month of the Scottish Government's response to that report, we have invited Professor Hayward and members of the independent review group to return for a further update.

I warmly welcome Professor Louise Hayward, professor of education assessment and innovation at the University of Glasgow and chair of the independent review of qualifications and assessment; Dr Douglas Hutchison, executive director of education services at Glasgow City Council, who led the review's local government group; Peter Bain, an executive headteacher and the president of School Leaders Scotland, who led the school leaders group; and Shona Barrie, director of admissions and access at the University of Stirling, who was a member of the university group.

I invite Professor Hayward to make an opening statement before we move to members' questions.

Professor Louise Hayward (University of Glasgow): Thank you for the opportunity to discuss how progress on qualification and assessment reform might be made. There is widespread recognition of the need for, and the importance of, change, because the current system is not getting it right for every child.

We welcome the next steps as identified by the cabinet secretary and outlined in the paper that we sent to you. We understand the caution in the current financial context and look forward to the statement later this year that will integrate qualifications and assessment reform into the wider improvement agenda. However, four things keep me awake at night.

First, young people are going through the system now. Young people who spoke about qualifications yesterday said the same things that we heard during the review and the same things that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development said. At a previous evidence session with the committee, Graham Hutton indicated that 20 per cent of young people in Scotland leave education without even one national 5.

We understand the caution caused by financial circumstances, but that means that we must be really creative about how to move things on. We have examples of reform that have worked well in the past and we should learn from those. We should agree what to stop doing, root out areas of overlap where different parts of the system are doing similar things and be clear about who is best placed to do what and how decisions are to be taken. We should draw on the wide range of groups and organisations that are part of the wider educational landscape and engage them in the process.

The second thing that keeps me awake is that we lose a sense of purpose—of why we undertook the review, what challenges it set out to face, and how the recommendations were identified as ways of addressing those challenges. If we separate the purpose—the vision—from the actions that we take, we end up with simply a list of things to do.

Vision is everything. It is why things matter. It drives what we do to design the system, how we put ideas into practice, how we track progress over time, and the actions that we would then take to alter policy and practice to make sure that we keep to that vision. If we lose that connection, then all the problems that we identified at the beginning of the paper that the committee has in front of it are likely to return. Like the myth of Sisyphus, we will be condemned forever to roll boulders uphill, only to have them roll back down again.

A third thing that keeps me awake is the fact that societal changes may outpace the system's ability to change. The report recommended a different approach to the change process, which was informed by leading international researchers on the collaborative community group led by Professor Chris Chapman. It linked the pace of change to capacity. The resource to support the change is essential.

However, since the review was initially commissioned, ChatGPT has come on the scene, along with the radical changes in society that have started as a result. In the past couple of weeks, o1 has appeared. It is open access AI that is one of the first of a series of reasoning models of artificial intelligence that have been trained to answer more complex questions faster than a human can. There is a danger of moving too quickly. There is

also a danger of moving too slowly. We need to get that right.

The last thing that keeps me awake is that we repeat the mistakes of the past; that we lose the opportunity to change the culture. The “It’s Our Future” report was designed to demonstrate what cultural change could look like, as advocated in the Muir report.

If ideas are not related to a model for change, they quickly separate off vision from practice, and we get into a system of repeating old mistakes. The independent review group was set up to build capacity for change through the process of change itself. It began by working with learners to develop the vision. It engaged all the communities that have to be involved in the process through the independent review and the collaborative community groups. It worked through problems together to get approaches that people across communities could live with.

All of those communities remain crucial and it is important that, as we look to the future, we hold that in mind and do not let it become simply an issue for schools to take on.

The Convener: Thank you very much. There are a number of areas that the committee wants to consider with you and your fellow witnesses.

I will begin by asking you a question, which others can come in on if they wish. What is your view of the Scottish Government’s response to your report?

Professor Hayward: We welcome the areas where the Scottish Government has already identified that changes will begin.

We worry a little about the decision to hold the national 5 examination, because it leaves the problem of what is often described as the “two-term dash” unaddressed. There are many ways to approach those challenges, but we need to see clearly what approach is going to be put in place to address the issue of the two-term dash.

In the paper, we listed the range of things that had to be done. Although I welcome what has been said in this respect, I think that, in my opening remarks, I identified the areas where further action needs to be taken to ensure that, this time, we get it right for every child.

The Convener: You talked about the next statement from the cabinet secretary. Did you expect more from the initial response? A couple of times in your opening statement, you mentioned the things that keep you awake at night. Are you still being kept awake at night because you do not believe that the Government has responded as fully or as quickly as it should have to your report?

Professor Hayward: It is difficult to answer that question, because I have not heard what is coming in December. I think that there is a misunderstanding here, in that people keep talking about the fact that there are so many different reviews. Actually, it is a bit like a jigsaw box; the reviews are the pieces of the jigsaw that, when put together, give you the overarching vision.

What I am hoping for in December is that overarching vision that brings in the vision from the national discussion and shows how that will be developed with regard to the curriculum, how it will link with qualifications and how skills and knowledge will be brought together as advocated in the Withers review. I am hoping that we see that big picture. At that point, I will be able to answer your question more directly.

The Convener: The Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland was quite critical of the initial Scottish Government response. Do you think that that was fair? The commissioner said that there was a failure to mention set timelines or the resources to be allocated and that the cabinet secretary’s statement showed a lack of commitment. Would you agree with her?

Professor Hayward: I think that, again, we will be better able to answer that question after the December statement. I do understand that we are living in very constrained financial circumstances, and that care has to be given when thinking about how best to make progress.

As I said in my opening remarks, I think that this requires a degree of creativity. It is not necessarily about simply allocating a new budget to particular tasks. I am hoping that, in the background, creative processes are under way to find ways of ensuring that these ideas can be taken forward. That is really important, and it is what we are looking for in the December statement. We are looking for a holistic vision, how qualifications and assessment will link to it and—this is really important—the practical steps that will be taken to turn ideas into reality.

The Convener: Was it always your understanding that there would be the initial response from the Government and then another response a few months later? A lot of what we are discussing today will depend on what the cabinet secretary eventually says in December. Could some of that not have been said in the initial response a couple of months ago?

Professor Hayward: At the beginning of the review, the very difficult financial circumstances simply were not there. It was during the review that the financial context changed. As someone who always sees a glass as being half full rather than half empty, I assume that, just now, a little more time is being taken to ensure that the

practical strategies are in place to take forward these ideas.

It is very important that we look at this holistically. It is not appropriate simply to cherry pick bits, because our past experience shows that doing so leads, often, to our ending up in a very different place from where we had intended to go.

The Convener: Given your reference to cherry picking, if in December the cabinet secretary accepts some but not all of your recommendations, will you be disappointed? Is that the type of cherry picking that you are not hoping for?

Professor Hayward: It will depend on whether the cabinet secretary identifies in her statement other ways of tackling the challenges. The independent review group came up with a set of proposals for how things might be taken forward and talked about why things need to change, what change might look like and, crucially, how change might happen.

It might well be that, through further discussion, some of the issues—for example, coping with the two-term dash and national 5—could be approached in a different way, and the cabinet secretary might come up with an alternative approach in December, but what this is really about is making that connection between the issues that we as a nation are facing in relation to qualifications and assessment, the action we will take to address them, and how we ensure that we move forward apace in a way that supports not only every learner in the country but Scotland as a nation and which protects our social, cultural and economic future.

09:45

The Convener: Before I bring in Pam Duncan-Glancy, do any of the other witnesses want to say anything about the Scottish Government's response to the review?

Dr Douglas Hutchison (Glasgow City Council): The response is facilitative, in the sense that the door is still open to anybody who wants to pilot or trial aspects of the recommendations. We are having conversations in Glasgow and the West Partnership about the diploma of achievement or something similar at a local level. The West Partnership covers 38 per cent of the population of Scotland, and the door is open for anyone to trial things. The Scottish Government has made it clear that there is not a pile of money for delivering a programme, but the door is open to anybody who is willing to look at aspects of the report, get what might almost be called proof of concept and begin to build a coalition or a consensus around those aspects. We are certainly discussing aspects of the recommendations

locally. The Scottish Government's response was facilitative in that sense—it left the door open to trial things at a local level.

Peter Bain (School Leaders Scotland): The view of school leaders who I meet regularly through School Leaders Scotland, groups such as the building on collaboration, supporting headteachers—or BOCOSH—group and, indeed, headteachers in my local authority is one of frustration at the pace of change. I have had the opportunity to discuss the fiscal challenges with the cabinet secretary on a number of occasions, and they seem to be the main driver for the lack of progress in taking forward the report's 26 recommendations. We understand that they are a crucial consideration.

However, I would just highlight Louise Hayward's point about the importance of vision. We have to go back to the OECD report in its first instance as well as the Muir report, both of which I was involved in individually and through groups. The current system does not work for the young people in our society. We need to make changes, and we need to make substantial change to education provision in relation to qualifications and assessment, because they are driving the curriculum and warping and changing it to one that is not best suited to 21st century society in Scotland.

We need to address the two-term dash, and we need to think about the three-year examination system that Professor Stobart referred to. We are the only country in the world that examines kids three years in a row. If we investigate such issues and make such changes, we will have more time to develop a wider range of courses and deliver them in a more appropriate manner that allows our children to learn subject material, knowledge and skills that put them in the best place for the workplace or for university or colleges thereafter.

We do not do that just now. We are teaching to the test, and have been for 100 years now. We need to stop it. We know that it is a problem. OECD and Muir said that; it has been picked up in the Hayward and Withers reports; and, indeed, elements of the Morgan report pick it up with regard to additional support needs, too. We know that it is a fault, and we need to address it now.

There was the report that was produced by the Scottish Government, in which the cabinet secretary carried out a survey of the education system. There were views that that was not necessarily a good thing, and I ask that we consider the sort of approach that we discovered through the independent review group and the collaborative community groups that we carried out. Whenever we have investigated a way forward and discussed the ideology and the practicalities of that way forward with a group of

people, whether it be kids, parents, businesses, school leaders or teachers, we have found that when we ask, “Should we change the examination system?”, the answer is a resounding yes, because the people involved have been party to that discussion of understanding. When you go out and carry out a survey without that quality of discussion, you create quite a different response.

Professor Hayward was very clear that the collaborative community groups, which covered businesses, parents, partners, universities and colleges and so on, carried out that function in that manner. What school leaders would like to see, through the groups that I am involved with, is a repeat of that type of exercise to develop the devil in the detail of each of the recommendations. There is not a significant financial commitment in going to the next stage and teasing out the devil in the detail by looking at which recommendations would or would not work. By not progressing with setting up implementation groups to investigate what would work, we are holding back the change process for a Scottish education system that we all know does not work. The recommendation of SLS, BOCSH and others is to move forward with implementation groups in the same format as in the independent review of qualifications and assessment so that we can get to the nitty-gritty of how to make the change that is so necessary.

Shona Barrie (University of Stirling): We recognise that not everybody who leaves school in Scotland wants to go on to university but, should they want to, they will enter a diverse learning environment with students from 140 different countries. Those students come from different education systems, some of which are really investing in different types of assessment and learning and some of which are moving away from examination assessment to have a different balance of internal, external, self and peer assessment. There is a real variety.

Universities are open to that. Learning is not necessarily about the knowledge that you gain for each subject-specific exam. We take a holistic view of skills, knowledge, abilities and competencies to identify who is going to be a successful student and who will come in, work well, succeed and have a good graduate outcome.

The higher education sector is concerned that there is a risk that Scottish entrants to that diverse learning environment will fall behind students coming from other countries. That is why we support reform of the senior phase.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Good morning to our witnesses. Thank you for your responses so far, and for the information that you submitted in advance.

Professor Hayward, I made a note of your saying that “vision is everything”, and that one thing that keeps you up at night is the risk of losing a sense of purpose without that vision. Your report sets out a vision for

“an inclusive and highly regarded Qualifications and Assessment system that inspires learning”

and

“values the diverse achievements of every learner”.

The vision includes a bit more than that, but that will do for the purpose of this meeting. In the absence of any vision from the Scottish Government at this point, do you get any sense from its response so far—without waiting until December—that it understands and shares that vision?

Professor Hayward: Other policies, such as getting it right for every child, have a sense of aspiration. That said, I keep returning to the point that we will have to wait until December to see the Government’s vision.

There is a need to think. I anticipate that, in December, there will be an overall vision statement about the future of Scottish education. Within that, there has to be an answer to the question of how assessment and qualifications contribute to that vision. What you just read out from the report must be front and centre in all discussions.

We have made mistakes with curriculum reform in the past. When we are reforming things, at the beginning, we talk about the purpose and about what we are trying to do, but then, like hamsters on a wheel, we get caught up in activity and in doing things but lose the sense of why we are doing them.

The vision has to stay in place right the way through, and we must keep coming back to that to ask whether our actions are serving the vision. Are the new approaches to assessment and qualifications inspiring learners? Do those projects give them a sense of purpose in what they are learning that they did not get previously? Is everyone involved in the process? Are young people who have severe and complex learning difficulties included in the process in the same way? Are the young people with the most abilities being challenged? We use that vision as the touchstone for every action that we take and the basis on which we judge the effectiveness of every action that we take.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: On that vision for inclusive qualifications assessment, inspiring learning and valuing achievement, does the Government response give the witnesses any confidence that there could be improvement in each of those three parts? For example, does its

response to the pathway and the exams—and whether it will retain them—give a sense that it will resolve any of the problems that we have heard about?

Peter Bain, you said that the curriculum was warped by the assessment process. Do you get any sense that what the cabinet secretary set out understands the scale of the challenge and will deliver on those parts of the vision?

Peter Bain: The cabinet secretary and the response have given a nod to the issue. I am led to believe that the December statement will have more detail and substance to it, but, at the current time, the answer to your question is no.

That vision has to be one in which we provide an education system for all pupils, not just those who are going to uni. The current qualifications and assessment system—and the way in which we measure it—is driven towards measuring what is referred to as five-plus. It is about how many kids can get five highers and how many kids we can get through five highers. The approach is to produce a curriculum in schools and local authorities that allows the highest percentage of pupils to get five-plus highers, so that we can show that we are going up and down artificial league tables. The Scottish Government does not publish the league tables—it publishes the information that the media use, but society uses the league tables.

By taking that approach, we are missing about 60 or 70 per cent of the population. What has not been picked up so far is the whole concept of parity of esteem in the qualifications and assessment framework. The assessment process absolutely warps our curricular delivery, because we are trying to hit five-plus or a percentage of A to C pass rates. Traditional courses such as history—which is my subject—English and maths have A to C pass rates, and schools are driven towards getting those traditional qualifications.

However, what is more important to a young person—a higher history or a national progression award in hospitality, construction or engineering? I would argue that a national progression award would serve them better in getting a job. Those types of qualifications do not pick up the same tariff points and they do not necessarily feature in other metrics that we use.

Parity of esteem has not been picked up as the central focus that it should be, in order to change the qualifications assessment system for the benefit of all pupils.

In her statement, Louise Hayward mentioned that Graham Hutton was before the committee a few weeks ago, talking about how 20 per cent of kids do not pick up one national qualification. That is true.

The convener mentioned the personal pathway, which is part of the Scottish diploma of achievement. Negative connotations are being bandied about in relation to that. People say that the middle classes will benefit from the promotion of the personal pathway because, if they have money, they can get their kids skiing trips or to undertake Duke of Edinburgh's gold awards.

However, the personal pathway was the one thing that the parents and pupils—who were involved in the extensive discussions towards putting together the Scottish diploma of achievement—were keenest on. At the moment, we do not recognise the successes of and the skills that are being developed by many young people who are not necessarily receiving a traditional education, such as higher history, in school. We are delivering work experience, interpersonal experience, information technology skills or whatever it is that they need to make their way in the world and that will best place them to go into the workplace. We are delivering that in schools now.

We are delivering personal pathways, but in no shape or form do we significantly say to society, “Here’s what wee Jimmy, or wee Bessie, has achieved through the experiences that we are putting on at school.” Nowhere does the review do that. That has been completely missed so far, and we need to address that right now.

10:00

Pam Duncan-Glancy: The cabinet secretary said that she would look at that part of the review and at some of its implications. I am struck by some of the evidence that we have had previously—it was possibly Professor Hayward who said that, once you lift the lid on the matter, you see that there could be a problem, and you either close the lid and move on or you leave it off and try to fix the situation. For the 20 per cent of young people who are leaving without nat 5s, not doing the latter would seem to be quite problematic. Is there anything at all in the Government response that can help that 20 per cent of people in the absence of that?

Peter Bain: We would have to await the more expansive reply in December, but, at the current time, no.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Do I have time for one more question?

The Convener: Yes.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I know that many local leaders and education leaders were brought into the delivery of the vision. Douglas Hutchison, what has been their reaction to the cabinet secretary's response?

Dr Hutchison: It is largely reflected in what I said earlier. How can we take forward the principles and the vision that are explicit in the review? The Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, as an organisation, is very committed to the principles of the Hayward review and to seeing them taken forward. However, we are all involved in the challenges of delivering public services in an extremely challenging fiscal context, and we can absolutely understand that, as I mentioned earlier, there is not a shedload of money to throw at a report.

Almost all directors were teachers previously, and I have to say that teachers are practical people, so the discussions are about how we can chart a way forward that picks up the vision and the principles. As Louise Hayward said, the vision is really important. I was saying in a conversation with her that people think that the vision and the principles are fluffy stuff, but, in fact, the vision is charting the way forward, as it describes the type of awards and qualification system that we want for our young people. I note that line about a

“Qualifications and Assessment system that inspires learning”.

Is that what we have just now?

A lot of the questions have been about the cabinet secretary’s or the Scottish Government’s response. Implicit in those questions is a view that responsibility lies entirely with the cabinet secretary or the Scottish Government, but a lot in the report speaks to the entire education system. It is largely teachers who are the appointees and markers for the Scottish Qualifications Authority; the SQA would not function without teachers. As teachers, we have had some responsibility in driving the system to where it now finds itself.

It is, therefore, for all of us equally to acknowledge our part in the high-stakes exam system that we have. It equally must be our responsibility to chart ways forward to get to the delivery of a

“Qualifications and Assessment system that inspires learning”.

I keep thinking of a Christopher Brookmyre quote. One of his characters, who hated school and the syllabus that was so exam focused, says that

“learning for its own sake seemed a decadent luxury.”

That sums up the thinking of a lot of people who have gone through the system: learning for its own sake is a decadent luxury. It is up to all of us in the system to dismantle that and to chart a way forward that delivers for the 21st century.

ADES and directors of education have been hugely positive about the vision and the principles, but we see that it is our collective responsibility to

deliver on them; that responsibility does not lie just with the cabinet secretary or the Scottish Government.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): I thank the witnesses for their answers so far, which have been very helpful. Professor Hayward made a few comments in her opening statement and in her answers about what we should agree to stop doing, such as having three years of exams, the two-term dash and—I am particularly interested in this aspect—national 5 qualifications. What are your views on the retention of those things? If anything was to change, what might an alternative approach look like?

Professor Hayward: As I indicated at the start of the meeting, the group’s decision to recommend that there would not be an external exam at national 5 was a response to a problem. For the past 20 years—and not just since OECD reporting—we have been hearing that having three sets of examinations leads to the two-term dash. That involves a lot of rehearsal for examinations, with past papers and preliminary exams. Our review found that some schools were having three sets of prelims in a year. It is very difficult to identify where the learning that Douglas Hutchinson described takes place.

The idea would be that, instead of there being an examination at the end of secondary 4, young people would build up credit as they progressed through a course during a two-year programme, which would mean that there would be no need for prelims in S4 and no need for past papers or the rehearsal of exams—all that would go. That two-year period could then allow for deeper learning—I hate the thought of that being an indulgence—which would help learners to learn more effectively and enjoy the process. It would also take some of the pressure off teachers, who are like hamsters on a wheel, constantly having to respond to the needs of an examination. The alternative, as with national 4 just now, is that young people would build up credit over time.

Most young people now stay on at school until the end of fifth year and sixth year—that is the reality. We no longer have a system in which, as in the past, many young people leave school at the end of S4. The idea is that, if pupils decide that they have taken a subject that they do not want to pursue in their second year, they could leave with the credit that they had accumulated, which could give them the equivalent of the qualification at national 5. That is a pragmatic way of dealing with the problem of the two-term dash.

Peter Bain: If you do not mind, I will come in with a practical illustration of the problem in S4. There are 39 school weeks. If you assume that in most schools—although it might not be the same in every school—there is low attendance during

the last week of Christmas and the last week of summer, we can knock off a couple of weeks straightaway, so it is down to 37 weeks.

Terms are split from the summer to the October holiday, and then to Christmas, Easter and the start of exams and, because of changes to the SQA timetable, this year, the SQA exams were going to start immediately after the holidays. There was a big argument about that as we felt that we needed to get the kids back into school for at least a week before the exams kicked off.

Most, although not all, courses in nat 5 are divided into three sections or units. You are aiming to start your course after the exams. You would do so in June, but that is when all the trips take place, so the start is fragmented—you tend to start properly as soon as you come back. Then, there are eight weeks until the October holidays to teach a course, but you will start doing your unit 1 assessments in the last week before school breaks up. Part of that is preparation for the prelims, which, depending on the school, will usually start in the last week of November or in the first week of December.

You have an assessment week. That means that you have taught the kids for seven weeks before that. However, part of that includes preparing for the assessment in week eight, so you might have had only six weeks of learning, followed by the prep for the assessment and then the assessment week. You are in October and you have had six weeks of learning so far.

When you come back from your week or two weeks' holiday in October, you have another eight or nine weeks—in our case, eight weeks—to Christmas, but you have only seven weeks because nothing happens attainment-wise in the final week because we are all doing Christmas shows or concerts. That is just part of society; it is a good thing—education is not just about exams.

Within those seven weeks, you have a two-week prelim period and, to ensure that the kids do well in their prelims, every department will take a week to prepare for them, so that is three weeks. In that eight-week block, you have taken out three weeks for assessment and one for worthy societal stuff, so you have taught only for four weeks.

Therefore, we have taught for six or seven weeks in the first block of the term and four in the second. We have now taught knowledge and had skills acquisition for only 10 weeks. We are at Christmas and have done only 10 weeks of learning.

When we come back after the Christmas holidays, we usually have higher prelims and the same thing is repeated. Most of the learning gets done in the period up to Easter, when we are into unit 2 or 3. We have to do unit assessments and

prelims too, because the exams now start as soon as we come back from Easter. They used to be delayed and there used to be time after Easter, but there is no time now.

That should be a 13 or 14-week block, but a February holiday is chucked in there as well, so we are down to 12 or 13 weeks—I will say 12. You need a week for unit assessments and another two weeks for prelims, because you've not taught the course so you cannae do the full prelim pre-Christmas and you have to do a third or half of the prelim after Christmas. Three weeks in that 12-week block are taken up by assessment, leaving nine weeks before you are into the exams.

In a 39-week school year, as I have just demonstrated, we are teaching for only half of that time. We are developing skills and knowledge for only half the time, much of which is taken out because we are teaching to tests or are making sure that pupils are ready for unit assessments or prelims. That must stop. The way to stop it is by moving to the solution that Louise Hayward outlined in her statement. That is what happens in almost every school in the country.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I will follow up on exactly that point. Your recommendation is to replace the current model of a high-stakes, end-of-term, national 5 exam with a continuous assessment model. The Government has decided instead to add continuous assessment to the system as it currently exists. Do you have any concerns about that, or do you think that continuous assessment can work as an add-on to the exam system? Do we have to have one or the other, or can doing both in the same year work?

Professor Hayward: We need to keep an eye on that and see what happens with the continuous assessment. If it is built up across the course of the year and if, as a result, the amount of assessment contained in the examination is significantly reduced, so that the examination is shorter and more focused, that might work. However, the other possibility is that it might expand the workload, rather than contract it. If that is the proposal, we need more detail about what the balance will look like and how we ensure that it does not simply become what you described as an add-on. We need a complete rebalancing of the profile.

10:15

Gordon Stobart talked about something in his report that I think we sometimes forget, which is that exams are embedded in our culture. We attribute a gravitas to them when they are simply one way of gathering evidence. We are looking across the year at expanding the range of ways in

which we gather evidence to see whether we can address the issue of giving more time for teaching. It is tricky, and we will have to keep a very close eye on that recommendation to make sure that it actually achieves what it sets out to achieve, which is to solve that particular challenge.

Ross Greer: I am interested in the feedback from Peter and Douglas on that as well. We have very much focused, quite rightly, on the impact on the learner—the young person. Are there implications for teachers' workload if continuous assessment is added on to the current system as opposed to replacing nat 5?

Peter Bain: My quick answer would be absolutely, yes, but not necessarily because of the additional internal assessment. The internal assessment has to take place naturally anyway. That is why I do not believe that we necessarily have to have final exams. Teachers need to assess children to evaluate how they are getting on with the course and their level of learning, so that the teacher can then put in the next building block of the learning—we have to assess as we go. I mentioned that we still do end-of-unit assessments naturally, to make sure that that happens and that the children are ready for their exams.

If the assessment was formalised, that work would still have to take place; the teachers would just replace whatever internal unit assessment they are doing just now with a formalised one, so there would not necessarily be a work impact from that. However, there would definitely be an increase in the workload because of the bureaucracy surrounding the formality of the national unit assessment programme that would have to be put in place instead of the natural unit assessment that is necessary for the teacher to determine how best to support the child.

Ross Greer: Douglas, do you have anything to add on that?

Dr Hutchison: I agree with Peter. In terms of a case study, in the second year of Covid, when we had the alternative certification model with no exams, teachers complained that an enormous amount of assessment was going on in schools. We need to get the balance right so that the young people are not overassessed and, equally, so that the burden does not simply fall back on teachers.

On the balance between final exams and continuous assessment, young people like exams. They like the idea that they have something to work towards. It is not that anybody is saying, "Let's get rid of exams." I hear different views from young people themselves. I meet groups of senior pupils regularly, and they are divided on the issue. It is not as simple as saying that it is one or the other; it is about rebalancing.

That was clear in the Government's response, and it is clear here, but we need to keep an eye on the workload issue. It was clear in the alternative certification model year, but it was also clear a few years ago when Mr Swinney became cabinet secretary. The burden of assessment time on teachers due to unit assessments and so on was one of the hot topics then. We need to continue to monitor the issue.

Ross Greer: I have a final question. Professor Hayward, a few moments ago you used a helpful metaphor of the jigsaw that all these reviews add up together to make. If there was an origin point to this process, it would be the OECD review. This has been on-going for decades, but where we are now came from the OECD review. One of the very clear points that it made, which I think you have all mentioned at some point this morning, is that, for all intents and purposes, we do not really teach curriculum for excellence in the senior phase. We teach curriculum for excellence in broad general education, and then we teach to the test. Your recommendations were about bridging that gap and enabling us to deliver CFE as intended in the senior phase. Will what the Government has outlined so far address the specific point of concern from the OECD that there is poor articulation from BGE to the senior phase?

Professor Hayward: If I look constructively at what the Government has said, I see that it will look at the programmes of learning and at rebalancing the process, and that it is setting up groups to take forward the idea of project learning, although it refers to it as interdisciplinary learning.

The statement that the Government is going to work with young people and teachers to consider what the personal pathway would look like shows that we will potentially end up with a system that is closer to the aspirations of curriculum for excellence.

I was reading the report of a university colleague who was writing for the Irish Government, using Scotland as a case study and looking at Scotland from the outside. She made the interesting point that Ireland could learn from Scotland that simply having the aspiration of curriculum for excellence is not enough, and that it is important that the Irish Government considers not just the curriculum but the pedagogy and the assessment and qualifications. If you do not have that single thread running through, things will not go the way that you would hope that they might. Her comment was that Ireland could learn that it had taken Scotland 20 years to get to this point. She was talking about the draft report from our group and saying that it now looks as though Scotland is going to take forward curriculum for excellence in the way that had originally been intended.

Ross Greer: Thank you, and thank you for all your work leading up to this point.

The Convener: Just before we go to Willie Rennie, George Adam wants to come in briefly.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Good morning, everyone. I have been on the committee on and off during all my time as an MSP and, from day one, I have heard about teaching to the test. How do we take that conversation forward? Professor Hayward said that society puts a lot of emphasis on exams and results. How do we convince the rest of the world? Mr Bain said that we need to have that conversation with parents and employers so that they value and buy into the process. Getting that buy-in is one of the challenges that we always face. We can discuss it and say that this is the way forward but, out there in the real world, people will ask what we are doing.

I have already had a text from my very academic wife, who has watched today's proceedings, saying "Oh. Right." That is from somebody who is involved politically. How do we take the conversation forward and get the message out to the world that there are, as you say, other ways of assessing people?

Professor Hayward: I will give you one possible way of doing it. The independent review group was set up with a particular purpose, recognising that, if curriculum and qualifications and assessment are to change, society requires to change. The composition of the group brought together those for whom qualifications matter most—learners and, as appropriate, their parents or carers—and those who are involved in the design, development and offering of qualifications. Essentially, for any reform of qualifications to work, those who use qualifications must also be involved. Universities, colleges, employers and the voluntary sector all have to be in the process.

Each member of the independent review group was asked to set up a collaborative community group that brought together people from across their community, representing a diverse range of views. For employers, for example, we ended up with three collaborative community groups, one of which had members from some of the big international companies that were involved in the process, a second that had public sector employers, and a third that was small and medium-sized enterprises. Members brought together their different communities—there was one for parents—from throughout the system.

That cannot stop with the publication of the report. Changing the process means that that process of engagement with all those communities has to continue over time.

The independent review group already has a mechanism by which those conversations can continue. I find it remarkable that, 16 months down the line, there is still such strong support across the different communities for the ideas in the report. Therefore, you have the basis of an organisational structure that would allow those conversations to continue and the process of feeding out into the wider system to be identified.

Let us think about employers, since we have used that example. The question to each of the three groups would be: how do we begin now to engage with people in the community with whom you engage? How do we begin to get some of these ideas into the system? As they know their systems, their structures and their mechanisms, they are the best people to help us with that process.

As for the school system, I would advocate that, right now, we should be talking to the parents who are bringing their young children into early years and primary school education. We should be saying to them, "By the time your young people are in the senior phase, here are the exciting things that are going to be happening and the kinds of rich experiences that they are going to have."

That would provide a very practical approach to ensuring that there was a really good communications strategy and that people from their own communities were advising us on the best way of communicating with the different groups. That process has to begin now, and it will grow over time.

I would also highlight one other thing that I have seen, again in Ireland. When the Irish were changing a certain aspect of their education system, they developed advertisements for television and cinemas that said, "This is what the future will look like." I am sure that you will be able to find the adverts on YouTube, if you are interested, but they featured a little girl called Orla, and they took the parents through the changes. We need to think creatively about how we can best communicate with the wider public, recognising that this is all about cultural change. The independent review group and the community groups represented a way forward in which cultural change can be reflected in the practices that we undertake.

George Adam: Mr Bain, you deal with one of the key groups—parents themselves. That will be the big one to convince that this is the way forward. How do you see that happening? After all, you brought up the idea of the conversation.

Peter Bain: I will cover the business aspect briefly first of all, having had a lot of conversations with Tracy Black from the Confederation of British

Industry and having seen the reports and recommendations that were produced in that respect.

As one of my schools is heavily involved in vocational education, I have had the opportunity to chair a number of construction summits with regional businesses in which we have discussed what schools need to provide to young people so that they can make their way in the construction industry, particularly in construction and engineering. Those businesses are basically coming back and saying that the bit of paper that you get from the SQA has a shelf life of about six months. They are not really interested in that when it comes to the particular segment of those who leave school to go into work, particularly the construction industry. Instead, they want schools to produce youngsters with a set of core skills, so that when they go into the business, they can just get cracking. They have had that conversation with us, and I think that it is easier to convince employers to move forward, especially when you are selling a skills agenda-type curriculum.

As for parents, there are two main voices coming from the parent body, although both groups have actually been influenced by their own school experience. If the parent in question has had a particularly successful experience of the traditional, academic form of schooling—and the further back you go, the more academic it will have been, compared with the more balanced split between the academic and the vocational that we have in many, though not all, schools now—you will find that they think that a child has to get five highers, has to have English and maths, has to have a science, has to have a language and so on.

George Adam: Have you met my wife, then?

Peter Bain: They will come out with remarks such as “Why are they doing drama?”, “Why are they doing sports leadership?” or “What is that nonsense all about?” Pity the poor young person who wants to go into a career where those additional qualifications are necessary.

10:30

I will give a practical example. Someone who wants to be a physical education teacher needs to get a degree, but, particularly for a subject such as PE, where the number of applicants is massive, teacher education providers are not interested simply in whether a kid has five highers; they want to see whether they are academically able to go through the degree process. They are looking for qualifications such as national progression awards in sports leadership, strength and conditioning, refereeing and all those other things that the parent body generally considers to be Mickey

Mouse subjects. However, they are not Mickey Mouse subjects at all; a great deal of quality assurance goes into ensuring that those qualifications—[*Laughter.*] I have just noticed the referee in the room.

George Adam: Being a referee is not a Mickey Mouse vocation.

The Convener: Mickey Mouse. People say that a lot about me, but carry on, Mr Bain.

Peter Bain: Well, you will like this, because I am being very supportive of your industry. Such experiences can make the difference in that young person being able to get into their degree course, make a success of it and go on to have a vocation.

I could switch my example to talk about engineering, where most companies are not interested in someone getting five highers in S5 then another three plus a couple of advanced highers in S6. In fact, universities—I hope that I will be backed up on this in a minute—are not interested in pupils just clocking up highers. They want to see that they have acquired a baseline academic education and then have had a set of wider experiences and qualifications in the same environment. Someone who wants to do an engineering degree might do an engineering course at school, together with various NPAs in the same environment. The school, the local authority and the kid do not benefit from their clocking up multiple highers; using the other approach, they clock up experiences that allow them to navigate their university degree or college place, or move into the workplace, more successfully.

However, parents do not get that. It is only in the past three or four years—since the Covid pandemic—that we have seen an expansion in the provision of national progression awards. Fiona Robertson from the SQA was here six weeks or so ago, talking about the expansion in provision of NPAs. It has expanded because we have been convincing parents, through successful school experiences, or convincing the next generation, that they work. In my case, we started off with 20 national progression awards. We now have around 400, because, year after year, when the parents talk to one other, they say, “See that NPA thing? Actually, my kid loved that.” Societally, though, people will say, “NPA—what’s that nonsense? Get them a higher.” Experience helps to overcome that mindset.

My final point is that we have to be careful which parents we listen to. The ones with the loudest voices are probably those who went to uni and did highers, and who are now saying, “This is what we need.” However, we need to listen to the 60 to 70 per cent of parents whose kids need NPAs more than highers.

The Convener: A few members have still to come in, but, first, Ms Barrie, I think you wanted to respond, then perhaps Professor Hayward could comment briefly.

Shona Barrie: I agree with Peter Bain. If someone only starts learning and having those experiences when they begin at university, and they have not had them in the lead-up to entering their course, that is too late.

I wanted to come in with an example of the cultural change that has happened, given how the system has developed and such approaches have become normalised. I refer to the contextual admissions work that universities have done, across the sector, to widen access and remove barriers for the most disadvantaged pupils and some priority groups. We are probably about 15 years into that work. When we started, the feeling was that many parents would be concerned that their child was missing out because somebody else had received an adjusted contextual offer. However, it was recognised that it was all about levelling the playing field and understanding the context in which people achieve qualifications. That view was quite universally accepted, although I thought that we might be challenged in universities at that point. We have had a bit of press coverage, and some parents have commented, but, by and large, that cultural change has happened. We promote and advertise that approach as part of our admissions policies and on our website, and it is pretty well embedded and normalised. It would be possible to take the impetus of that cultural change into a different way of viewing qualifications and how they impact on different users, whether they be employers, colleges or universities.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The cabinet secretary's framing of the whole debate is about her plans being ambitious yet pragmatic, in contrast with those who want radical changes. Is the explanation about a lack of finance just an excuse, or does the cabinet secretary simply not believe in the principles behind your report?

Professor Hayward: I would have to be able to read the cabinet secretary's mind to answer that question, but I cannot. Being unable to do so, I have to go on the statement that she made to Parliament, from which I took the evidence that we brought to the committee today in our paper. I have to believe that that has been done in good faith and that we are looking at a pragmatic way of taking ideas forward.

We will never have a better chance. It is very rare in Scottish education to see such a breadth of communities coming in behind a set of ideas on something with the potential to be so contentious. If we are serious about getting it right for every

child, this is our chance to do that, and I hope that we have the courage to take it.

Willie Rennie: Your demeanour tells me something else. You are quite downbeat today, and you have talked about frustration and a lack of vision. You have said that there is a danger in going too fast but also in going too slowly, with an emphasis on the slow. I do not think that you really believe that the cabinet secretary is behind your report.

Professor Hayward: Let me move to one of Douglas Hutchison's points. The cabinet secretary has made statements to Parliament, on which we base our current thinking. The next question is whether, collectively as a society, we think that these are the right things to do and that we should go in that direction. I am a great believer in getting things out on to the table, so if there are issues to address, let us name them and deal with them. We need a pragmatic approach to moving things on.

We have lots of examples from previous work, such as the work that was done in Scotland on assessment is for learning. We have examples of asking schools and local authorities to try things out to see how they will work. We should begin the process of moving on, and we should do that with people and ensure that all the communities that Mr Adam referred to continue to take part in that discussion. This is Scotland's future.

Willie Rennie: I was very interested in what Dr Hutchison said about responsibility lying with the whole education community, including teachers and leaders. The implication was that the education secretary is a roadblock and that you would find a way of getting round her. Am I misinterpreting what you said, Dr Hutchison?

Dr Hutchison: I think you are.

Willie Rennie: She is not with you, is she? From your demeanour, you are seething. Your years of work have been ignored by the cabinet secretary and you are quietly seething.

Dr Hutchison: This is one of those times when a wee black hole opens up and invites us to jump in. [*Laughter.*]

You spoke about the cabinet secretary's plans being ambitious yet pragmatic. The question that occurs to me is whether this is about the cabinet secretary or about her reading of the system. We have spoken about bringing people along with us. Peter Bain mentioned league tables and the media, but the media would not use the league tables if they were not good clickbait—people like league tables.

We need to convince people as a system and build coalitions to get a consensus that there must be a better way. We must convince them that the

current system privileges a certain type of learner and a certain type of learning and that it does not privilege those who are poorest. There are vested interests in maintaining the system exactly as it is.

Change is challenging for parents and for teachers. We are often told that we need to take teachers with us, but they are up to their ears just trying to deliver in the way that Peter described. Leadership is not going to come from teachers, who are absolutely up to their ears in the daily stuff.

People like us need to take responsibility for building that coalition and convincing those with leadership responsibility that this is the right direction to go in and that the whole thing will not fall down. I have huge sympathy for people in leadership positions, having been head of education and director of education for 11 years now.

The convener will understand perfectly well that, every time you step on to a football pitch, there are 65,000 people there in an advisory capacity but there is one person making the decision. It is a bit like that when you are in a leadership position—you do not want to break the system—so it is about exemplifying and building coalitions around a way forward that will mean that we have a system that meets the needs of all our young people and not just a few of them. That is not happening at the moment.

Willie Rennie: Peter Bain, you have been very straightforward. This is an opportunity; you will not get many opportunities to tell the cabinet secretary directly what you think about the pace of progress. You are frustrated. What does the cabinet secretary need to do in December? What are the next steps to bring her more in line with your report?

Peter Bain: I am not here to give an individual opinion. I am sharing the opinions that have been shared with me. I am not here as president of SLS, but, in that role, I obviously represent its members. I am also a member of BOCSH and, as a headteacher, of a number of collaboratives. I led the IRG collaborative of school leaders, who were all signed up to the recommendations. A couple of weeks ago, I was at the city chambers, along with Douglas Hutchison, when the cabinet secretary led the first of three sessions with school leaders to listen to their views. The remaining session is on Friday in Edinburgh. With regard to those views, the opening sentence was, “This programme is not ambitious.”

We must be fair to the cabinet secretary, because we have seen only the opening gambit. In December, once she has listened to school leaders at those three meetings and once you have all gone back to talk to her and so on, we

might see a more ambitious and holistic programme of reform that is not evident in the opening gambit.

The position of the school leaders who I represent, who wrote to me to tell me what to say today, is that we do not seem to be tackling school leaders’ main concerns, which are related to how we measure success in Scottish education. We are being driven by the five-plus approach, so can the Scottish Government please work with the education community to develop a better way to measure the success of all young people and not just those who go on to university? That is the most pressing concern, and that is not mentioned anywhere in anything that has come out so far.

The second issue is that there is no strategic way forward to deal with the need to ensure parity of esteem so that the worth of all young people can be demonstrated to all levels of society when they leave school. I gave examples of that earlier. That is not being tackled.

The third most pressing call relates to the two-term dash. We should not take away examinations. Examinations are still an important part of our society and, for many—perhaps 30 to 40 per cent of people—they are a useful way of benchmarking and they help universities. What about the other 60 to 70 per cent? How can we develop the right qualifications and assessment system? It is not just about allowing for a situation in which some subjects have some exams or, as has been described as a way forward, a situation in which all subjects would have some element of a final exam and some element of internal assessment. No. Different subjects need different assessment models to suit the particular qualification, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

How do we benchmark that? Do we use, for example, the Scottish credit and qualifications framework? That is probably the way forward. That has been tackled in the opening gambit by the Scottish Government, and we welcome that as at least a move forward with something.

10:45

My last point is that the profession would, as Professor Hayward has just outlined, like to see a continuation of a similar systematic approach to reviewing the whole of the Scottish education framework, not just cherry picking the bits that we can afford. I appreciate that the cabinet secretary is under fiscal constraints, but we could still do two things relatively cheaply. First, we could continue the work of the IRG and the collaborative community groups that we have already established with some people who have experience of the discussion, and we could move

forward to a stage 2, in which we could have implementation groups to work out whether the recommendations would work.

We could have members of the IRG working with model schools. Take, for example, the personal pathway that I mentioned earlier. The BOCOSH group has recently said that it would volunteer its schools as models for parts of the SDA. Let us go to half a dozen schools, through SLS, BOCOSH or ADES, and say, "Pilot this and tell us what works and what doesn't work." We could do the same with the project learning aspect, too. Then, we can go back and legitimately say, "This will work, but this will not."

The Government has dipped its toe in the water, and that is to be welcomed, but we need to get cracking with the implementation groups, because they are not expensive to run. After all, we will not be making any heavy investments—indeed, we should not invest heavily in anything until we know that it is going to work.

The Convener: Bill Kidd is next.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): You will have to pardon the modulation of my tone at the moment—I am not particularly well.

You have answered practically all the questions that I was going to ask, but I am going to give you another opportunity to punt your points of view. In its response, the Government says that further activity will take place, starting perhaps in December, on considering key elements of the independent review's recommendations, such as a leaving certificate, interdisciplinary learning, modularisation of subject qualifications and suchlike.

You have already given us some really strong answers, but do any particular areas of your recommendations need to be explored further by the Government? This is your opportunity to say so, and the Government will be listening to what is being said. Is there something that you think really needs to be picked up on?

Professor Hayward: Peter Bain, Douglas Hutchison and Shona Barrie have all picked up on a range of things, but I think that we need to look at the recommendations as a whole and think about the sorts of issues that Peter Bain has highlighted.

When I think about reform, I think of it in terms of taking the back off an old-fashioned watch and seeing all those little cogs that keep turning; if one of those cogs gets jammed, the watch will stop. If we look at changing the qualifications system but not the data that we gather, that will have a negative wash-back on the success of qualifications. If, as a community, we do not continue to engage with other communities—if, for

example, we do not continue to talk to the universities and the employers to ensure that they ask for the Scottish diploma of achievement when young people enter university or when a young person goes into employment—the system will get damaged. If school inspectors go into schools and do not look for the kinds of behaviours and practices that are recommended as part of the new approaches to qualifications, another cog will get jammed.

Therefore, what we are hoping for in the December statement is some idea of how those ideas will be embedded in the wider picture of Scottish education reform. Colleagues might have other points to add, though.

Dr Hutchison: I agree that it is difficult to single out one piece. I want to go back to the question of how we get away from teaching to the test, because my answer is related to that. The answer is to focus on the learning. Qualifications and assessment are a way for young people to cash in their learning. If we think about the learning that children and young people do in school, they do so much more than is captured in an SQA certificate. The diploma of achievement is essentially about saying, "Let's capture, celebrate and articulate that much more."

On Monday, I met 10 S6 pupils from various Glasgow schools. I worked my way round the school captains in small groups and we had conversations about that. In order to become the head boy or girl or school captain, they had to go through an application process. They were interviewed, they had to give a speech to their peers and they were voted on by their peers and by teachers. A huge amount of learning goes on in that process, but how is that captured? We do not have a national 5 in activism, yet we have some of the most activist children and young people in our schools challenging racism, homophobia and a range of other things. That activism is not captured in an SQA certificate. The diploma of achievement is about saying, "Let's capture this—so much more learning goes on, so let's focus on it." It is about saying, "This is a really important part of what goes on, and this is where we'll capture it."

At the moment, we privilege the exam certificate—the SQA certificate. That is what is celebrated on 8 August or whenever the exam results come out, with kids opening their envelopes and going through that charade. The diploma of achievement is about moving away from that. If we want to move away from teaching to the test, let us celebrate every aspect of learning that goes on throughout the 15 years that children and young people spend in school. It is a shift, but that is how we get away from teaching to the test. To me, the diploma of achievement is a way forward in relation to that.

Shona Barrie: This is about getting it right for every child but, within that, it is also about getting it right for the young people who will go on to university or college, because universities' assessment approaches have changed radically. The skills and attributes that the Scottish diploma of achievement includes are the kinds of experiences that young people will have when they go on to university.

Countries across the world are developing these kinds of ideas and we do not want to be in a position where Scottish students, no matter where they go, are disadvantaged compared with students from other contexts who are engaging in the kinds of activities that are covered by the Scottish diploma of achievement. Our young people are used to sitting exams, and that is what they go beyond school with. When they go to university, they are faced with a range of approaches to assessment that they have never had access to before.

Bill Kidd: So, it is about the culture. It is about how teaching and learning take place more than it is about a young person saying, "Look what I've achieved—here's a bit of paper." That is important, of course, but it is also about how they learn and how they feel about learning. Is that correct?

Professor Hayward: It is about all of that. Fundamentally, it is about Douglas Hutchison's comment that children and young people do so much more. This is not about radically changing all of Scottish education; it is about recognising more of what already goes on in Scottish education and helping and supporting Scottish education to move in areas that it was always the intention would be recognised in curriculum for excellence but which, because they were not part of the qualifications system, became invisible in the process.

Peter Bain: I wanted to chip in earlier with a comment on the alternative certification model, which Douglas Hutchison mentioned. In many of the media reports and comments that have been made in Parliament and by the SQA—I have heard Fiona Robertson talk about this—it has been said that the ACM did not work because of the workload on teachers. That is being used as evidence that we should not move to more wholesale internal assessment. I have heard that multiple times, but it is not entirely true. The ACM did work for the schools that predicted that we would need such a model.

After the second lockdown, when we moved into the second year when exams were not held, certain schools predicted that we would not have exams and that we would probably need to do internal assessment. In the summer before the session even began, they planned to do internal assessment across the year, predicting that what happened in the first year would happen in the

second year, and that we would need all that internal evidence.

The schools that did that and spread the load in advance of the SQA's announcement did not report workload issues—far from it, they were quite happy. They used the natural internal assessment that they had to do to progress with the learning, and they evidenced it so that they were ready to provide evidence in the event that there were no exams. Those schools were very happy and content with the ACM.

The schools that complained about the workload issues were the schools that waited for the SQA to cancel the exams, which did not happen until February. It was no wonder that we had teachers complaining about workload issues and suddenly trying to accumulate a bank of evidence in February that proved that the kids had been passing their assessments from June all the way to February.

The ACM worked as long as it was planned. We could use the ACM quite comfortably again, as long as we gave everybody plenty of notice that we were going to do it. There is no workload issue, because you have to assess as you go through the course anyway. If we remove the exams at 5 level, we free up more time for, as Douglas Hutchison said, learning about your subject and learning the skills, not just learning how to pass the test. We just need to make that decision.

I have a second point, which is on the SDA. The concept of pushing forward the SDA with its three component parts as a single unit is essential to ensuring that we recognise the worth of all learners, not just those who could pass the programme of learning element. The interdisciplinary part—the project learning, as it is properly titled—is essential so that we can teach and learn in context, because that is what employers want to see, and it is a better way of embedding learning.

The personal pathway is also essential to recognise that we are not just producing knowledge and skills acquisition; we also have to produce young citizens and recognise the wider experiences that they get from being a young carer or whatever. If we do not deliver a certification that acknowledges all three parts, all we will do is go back to seeing kids waving certificates about in August.

Civil servants have advised me that we cannot legislate to publicise the award system in any shape or form. I do not know how accurate that is, and it is something for parliamentarians to consider, but I ask you to consider finding a way to deal with what Douglas Hutchison has described. In August, the SQA publishes the traditional awards—the highers that I teach and so on—and

everybody waves their bits of paper with their five or three highers, or whatever. The national progression awards, the skills awards, the professional development awards and every other award that contributes to the worth of a child are not published until we get into September. Nobody is interested in September, because we have had all the media attention where people are waving bits of paper about.

This sounds very simplistic—that is why headteachers and school leaders are frustrated—but why can we not find a system that prevents any of our agencies from publishing the awards for the year unless they do it all in one day? That would support parity of esteem and ensure an equitable success story for our youngsters. We should stop publishing the highers in August and everything else in September, and publish everything in September.

If Parliament, local authorities and the media can wait until September, kids can have a bit of paper that allows them to say, “I have my refereeing certificate that will help me get my PE job,” and, equally, “I have higher history, which will let me to do my history degree.” That seems small and insignificant, but nobody is really picking it up, even though it would secure parity of esteem in the mindset of our society to a large degree, and answer Douglas Hutchison’s point.

Bill Kidd: Shona, would that benefit your university, as the students come up?

11:00

Shona Barrie: Absolutely. The sector is not homogeneous: we have different institutions of different sizes and approaches. However, my experience over the past few years is that we have opened our minds to different types of learning and to where that learning is gained—rather than through school, it might be gained in the workplace, through experiential learning, through professional qualifications or through college. *[Interruption.]* I am doing a lot of work to recognise that type of learning and to translate it to a level in the Scottish credit and qualifications framework, so that we can say, “Right—this person didn’t do a formal qualification, but they have other experiential learning.” That will enable us to form a holistic picture of whether that person will be a successful student who will have a successful outcome.

The currency of university admissions teams was always qualifications and highers, but there has been a move away from that. The mindset has shifted, particularly through the work that we have done on widening access. It is now recognised that there is a broad range of routes into university; there is no single path. People do not

have to come to university straight from school; they can come via any number of different routes. There has been a real shift in that regard. There is now more progressive thinking about how universities use qualifications.

Bill Kidd: Was that noise an indication that Peter Bain is getting a raise in his wages because of what he said? *[Laughter.]*

The Convener: It was an alarm to remind us that we were supposed to have 90 minutes with our witnesses, which has now expired, and several other members want to come in. I know that our witnesses have a lot of information to get out, but I ask them to constrain their answers. If something has already been said, there is no need to repeat it.

We move on to questions from Miles Briggs.

Miles Briggs: Good morning, and thank you for joining us. The Government’s 2023 consultation found mixed views on the independent review’s proposals. Last year, Professor Hayward said that the independent review’s report reflected an agreed position, and she has outlined the working groups that led to that.

I ask the panel to explain the differences between the findings of the Government’s consultation and those of the consultation that was undertaken by the independent review. Given that we are all waiting to hear what the cabinet secretary will say in December, are you concerned that the Government seems to be content with the low-hanging fruit among the 26 recommendations that you put forward?

Professor Hayward: Peter Bain has already addressed the first part of that question. In the review, we found that people who came to the documentation cold tended to react. If you put two people in a room and ask them a question about education, you will get two different views. The idea of a consensus involving everyone is a pipe dream—of course there will be people who will hold different views. However, what we have in the group is a very wide and broad agreed position, which is something that people can live with.

With regard to the cabinet secretary’s response, people were often looking at the ideas cold. Peter outlined the fact that it was different when people had an opportunity to talk things through and when they thought about the vision of what we are trying to achieve. That is when we see ideas change. As Douglas Hutchison mentioned, teachers are really busy people and they need time to think things through and to be supported in that process. The cabinet secretary’s consultation was helpful, because it extended the numbers of teachers who were involved. However, through the process of the review, we engaged with teachers systematically. As Peter said, we found that

people were well intentioned with regard to what we were trying to achieve and were happy to work with us, as long as they were supported in that process.

Miles Briggs: Does anyone have anything to add to that?

Peter Bain: I answered that, to a degree, at the beginning. It is all about understanding. If you ask anybody something without their understanding it, they will give you a subconsciously conservative viewpoint, because people do not like change and do not react well to it. If you explain why you want change and how you would go about supporting that change, their viewpoint will change. Without having a discussion about how the change process will be supported, you will get a negative answer to change, no matter what the subject is.

We found the same thing during the IRG. We were at odds, in that some of the collaborative community groups were coming back with positive ways forward for certain things, but we were getting a different response when we went out to schools. We had already identified that, which is why we upped the number of school visits. Louise Hayward and I and other members of the IRG went to schools and spoke to more kids and leadership teams to explain things, just as Douglas Hutchison does. That helped to change their view.

Miles Briggs: An interesting point, which you raised earlier, is about the change that there has been in that the 20 per cent of pupils who we have been talking about—those who are not achieving a nat 5 level qualification—are still in school between S4 and S5. That may have changed since I was at secondary school.

I want to understand more about the positive destinations that the Government talks about. In the Government's response, it said that it will look at the possibility of a leaving certificate. You have outlined the value that the proposed diploma of achievement would have. For the college sector, that is quite clear for apprenticeship development, but employers need to be able to understand what skill set a young person has when they are taking them on. What work has been done on that? Although the Government is saying that it is looking at the possibility of a leaving certificate, is that going to miss the point?

Professor Hayward: Conversations always concentrate on national qualifications. As my colleagues have said, Scotland offers a myriad of different kinds of qualifications, and it is important that all of them are recognised. Peter Bain has made the point that, because all our attention focuses on only one part, we are naturally excluding a wide range of young people or adult learners who achieve qualifications that employers

value in different ways. There is a clear opportunity to try to redress some of the balance and to ensure that our conversations with employers continue so that they are kept abreast of the kinds of qualifications that young people will come to them with, as well as the ways that those qualifications will meet their needs as employers, and the needs of the young people who are engaged in those qualifications.

Peter Bain: I am conscious of what the convener said about repeating ourselves, but I think that the entire system is driven for the benefit of the top 30 per cent of attaining pupils of traditional subjects. Our discussions always gravitate to that. Let us take the responsibility, as leaders of education, to protect the 60 to 70 per cent of our kids who are not in that group. We talk about the need for exams for all these kids, but 20 per cent of kids do not even get one, and what about the other 10 per cent who might get two, three or four, or who fall below the five-plus national 5s? They are not getting exams. If we are saying that exams are so important, are we saying by default that we are not delivering an effective Scottish education system for the 60 per cent, or more than 50 per cent, of our kids who fall below the five-plus because they are only getting nat 4s?

I do not believe that. I think that Scottish schools and local authorities are providing a very good educational experience for the youngsters who are going through nat 4 courses and NPAs at that level and who are having wider experiences, which is why positive destinations for a lot of low-attaining schools are very high. Kids in schools that are in areas where more kids go into work are being better prepared. We should be celebrating their success in a national forum and through a national statistical opportunity, but we are not doing that the now, because we are too busy celebrating the five-plus kids who are going to uni. Although they are crucially important, that group makes up less than half of our youngsters. We need to celebrate everybody. It is that simple, but we are not doing it at all.

Miles Briggs: I do not doubt that all of us round this table want to see that. You mentioned the worth of all learners, which is important, but the idea of a Scottish diploma of achievement is that it is an award, because people need to understand the skill set. You mentioned credit, competence and core skills, but I am not clear on how an employer who is taking on someone straight from school will be able to understand what level of literacy and numeracy that individual who is coming into their business will have. In putting the flesh on the bones of that, have you—or the Scottish Government, in the work that you have been doing together—taken that forward?

Professor Hayward: We have looked at using the SCQF for that, because that tends to be a language that, if it is not increasingly understood, it should be. The review recommended that we hold the programmes of learning as they are now, so that where there were grades, they would remain. With project learning, young people would undertake projects at different SCQF levels and would get the credit associated with particular levels, depending on the level of challenge in the project. That would not be graded, but it would be within that framework. An employer could look at it, see that it is level 6, and know what that is the equivalent of.

For the third part, which is the personal pathway, we argued that it was not appropriate to assess, grade or categorise that, because the important thing is not the number or location of the experiences but what learning has taken place. It would be about the young person reflecting on what they learned through those experiences and how those helped them to decide that the firm that is offering the post would be a good firm for them and that it would be a good job for them. The young person would be able to talk to employers about that.

Employers told us that they feel a certain frustration that, when they are interviewing young people, they often do not have much to talk about and find it hard to make those connections. We thought that the personal pathway was a way of giving the young people that bank of knowledge. They could talk about the knowledge and skills that they have developed in their subjects. They could then talk about the projects that they have undertaken where they used those skills and relate them to the competences that the employer would find useful in the young person's role in their company.

Does that help?

Miles Briggs: Yes.

Peter Bain: The pathway was also designed to ensure parity of esteem and equitable opportunity for wider experiences for all. I will flip my practical example to a school with a traditional exam success rate of 60 or 70 per cent. That still means that 30 per cent of youngsters are not hitting the national benchmark. What are they getting out of school? They are probably getting a lot out of school, but it is not recognised anywhere, and that is 30 per cent of a high-attaining school. How do those young people go to an employer and have that recognised?

I mentioned the curriculum being warped, and that was picked up earlier. To hit those particular metrics, the curriculum and timetable are designed to maximise the number of hours in traditional subjects, at the expense of interdisciplinary

learning experiences, which are teaching and learning in context. Timetables are designed to maximise the amount of time in traditional subjects, but that takes away from the opportunity for young people to sit and consider what their worth is, what their wider experiences bring to them, and how they can formulate and publish that in a way that will benefit employers.

The 30 per cent of pupils who are not hitting the five-plus metric should be given time to think about and have wider experiences, to publish them in a format that employers can pick up on, and to learn better than in a traditional subject, so that interdisciplinary learning opportunities are better delivered. Schools are not creating timetables that allow that to happen.

If we had a compulsory SDA, with three equally valued component parts, schools and local authorities would have to realign their curriculum and timetable to give time out of the traditional subjects that support whatever percentage in order to ensure that, when all young people leave school, they have had personal experiences and are able to sell them, and that they have had the opportunity to learn and be taught in context.

That is what the SDA will force on schools. It will stop the warping of the curriculum to benefit only traditional subjects and those getting five or more highers, and it will ensure that our society has young people who are more broadly educated.

11:15

Professor Hayward: I have one tiny point to add. Education Scotland and the SQA are already beginning to tackle some of those issues. One group is already looking at timetabling and another at interdisciplinary learning. Those things are beginning and the seeds are there, but we must support them to grow and must look at the broader range of communities that can help with that process and can help us to build the pace that we need to ensure that no child in Scotland is left behind.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind): I am relatively new to the committee and some of the jargon slightly escapes me, so please forgive me if I am asking obvious questions. The leaving certificate and the Scottish diploma of achievement have already been mentioned by two of my colleagues. Are those exactly the same thing? We are using two terms, but are they the same thing?

Professor Hayward: I think so. That might be a signal that we might be looking for a different name. Calling it the "Scottish diploma of achievement" was our best shot at coming up with something. We spoke originally about using the term "Scottish baccalaureate" because, in

essence, the Scottish diploma of achievement has much in common with ideas in the international baccalaureate, but there was a reaction against the term “baccalaureate”. When we thought that through, “Scottish diploma of achievement” was the best that we could come up with in the time available.

I might be misinterpreting the term “leaving certificate” but I think that it is about bringing the three components together. We might think about what to call that and might end up with a different name, rather than “Scottish diploma of achievement”.

John Mason: That reassures me that I am not completely misunderstanding.

The Government response seems to be one of concern about the risks of entrenching and exacerbating social inequity and an example was given of richer kids going on skiing holidays. We are being told that would not be the kind of thing that goes into the diploma of achievement. Is the Government response fair, or is it misunderstanding your intention? Can you expand a little on exactly what would be in the diploma? Would it be a book? Would it be 10 pages, 20 pages or just one page?

Professor Hayward: It would be online and almost like an extended LinkedIn profile. Within that online profile, there would be evidence of the courses or qualifications undertaken and of the SQA level achieved within project learning. Those elements would be controlled nationally. For example, the SQA or its successor organisation would feed in that evidence of qualifications or of project learning.

There was a proposal that project learning would be different and would be owned by the young person or the adult learner, who would have the opportunity to insert what they thought was useful.

John Mason: Would that be entirely subjective?

Professor Hayward: It depends what you mean by that.

John Mason: If someone said something that was not true, would the teacher or the school correct that?

Professor Hayward: We said that it would not be assessed, but that it would be validated. A teacher would say that something did or did not happen and if it did not happen, it would be removed. There would be a process of reflection with the teacher, but, ultimately, the young person would decide what went in that area.

John Mason: Some of that would appear on a CV, would it not? A good CV would include it. If a pupil had been school captain, for example, they

would put that in their CV, so that an employer would know about it. If I were an employer, I would also be interested in the fact that a young person is a carer. For example, if they are caring for a sibling, and when they go home every day they are helping their younger brother or sister with their life, I would want to know that. Would that appear on the leaving certificate?

Professor Hayward: It could appear there, but that is one of the aspects on which there was a great deal of debate in the review group. For example, we talked with the groups about the skills that young carers develop. They include substantial organisational ones—for example, where they are having to link up with multiple agencies. Those are all really sophisticated skill sets. It was our intention that those aspects would be located somewhere like the personal pathway.

However, when we spoke to young carers themselves, some of them did not want to disclose their status, and we felt that we had no right to impose that on them. Instead, we explored having a teacher working with them to ask about the skills that they had developed. Such skills could be contained in the personal pathway, whether or not the young person disclosed their carer status.

The important point was that the information would be within the control of the young person. The wording could be developed in partnership with the teacher, but the young person would have control of it. When they were going on to college, university or employment, that would be there as a resource that they could draw on, to give them an evidence base for what they might put in their application. The young person would make visible to the employer or the university that which they wanted them to see.

John Mason: That is helpful.

Peter Bain: Could I add to that?

John Mason: I have one other point, Mr Bain. Perhaps you could comment on that, too, when you come in. The cabinet secretary says that this is a longer-term approach. Does it have to be longer term, or could it be shorter term?

Peter Bain: It absolutely *disnae* have to be long term; it could be short term. It will take as long as it takes to develop an information technology programme that would allow us to record that. Scottish schools are already doing all three component parts of the SDA, but they are doing so in isolation and are not combining all the information in one place.

The only delay could come from the fact that an implementation group has to map out the direction of travel and the fact that software would need to be developed to allow the information to be captured. I am led to believe that that could be

done easily. However, there is also a cost implication, as a private company would have to be paid to build the software. Alternatively, something like SEEMiS—the existing information management system that is used in all Scottish schools—could be used, or Skills Development Scotland could develop the software. However, the information is already being captured.

If we were to develop an IT system that allowed for capture of the CV material—for want of a better phrase—and was accessible by the SQA, or qualifications Scotland as it would be by then, using the candidate number, it would be able to press a button when the qualifications from the existing exams system go through, and automatically populate the learning programme part of that young person's online CV profile.

John Mason: So, it might take two or three years.

Peter Bain: I do not know exactly how long it would take to develop such an IT programme, but I imagine that it would not take more than a couple of years. However, the staff training would still have to be done, so that would need to be built in. The interdisciplinary learning part, if it is timetabled in, would be delivered largely by teachers, and the initial teacher education part would also need to be considered. Every school is doing interdisciplinary learning, but they are not necessarily doing it in a nationally structured way that would allow benchmarking to appear and trigger success on the online CV. Again, they are already doing it—we just need to go through the national assessment to validate it and have it added to the online CV.

The last part of that is the kids' part, and that can be done in personal and social education.

John Mason: Professor Hayward, do you want to come back in on that point?

Professor Hayward: Just very briefly, to say that, through the My World of Work website, work is already under way that would be the basis for the approach that Peter Bain has just described.

John Mason: Okay. That is good.

The Convener: Jackie, I know that that was moving into your area of questioning. Do you want to add anything?

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I was just going to ask Professor Hayward what the current barriers are for interdisciplinary learning in our senior phase. I know that you have touched on them briefly, but would you like to bring up any other barriers?

Professor Hayward: Peter Bain commented on the fact that schools are already doing interdisciplinary learning. Many schools already

are, but some are further along the line than others.

The report recommended that it is sensible to do some things locally and some things nationally. Let us say, for example, that schools were involved in developing examples of project learning, as Peter Bain has outlined already. As those projects were developed, they would be held centrally and made available to schools across the country. It is not that schools could just lift and use, because different schools are in different sets of circumstances, but they could adapt the projects into their own environments, which would give a supported path to schools where that is perhaps a more novel idea than in others.

Jackie Dunbar: Are you saying that schools could adapt projects to suit their needs? Would that not cause a problem, in that different schools could then start to do different things?

Professor Hayward: Well, let me give an example—

Jackie Dunbar: That happens in life; I am not blaming schools for doing that.

Professor Hayward: Everybody does not have to do the same thing—

Jackie Dunbar: True.

Professor Hayward: Our recommendation was that we work in the SCQF framework, which gives a set of standards at different levels in the system. It is the different standards that would bring the schools together.

Schools might do things that look very different, but if those things are at the same level of challenge in that framework, then whether they do them in a fishing community or an urban environment does not matter. The contextualisation does not matter; what matters is that the piece of work is at an agreed standard.

Jackie Dunbar: I totally get you now. Sorry, I misinterpreted what was said.

Peter Bain: The situation you are talking about already occurs in national qualifications. To use my own subjects as an example, although there is a standardisation to what we are trying to achieve in the subject, I could be teaching about Germany, a school down the road could be teaching about Russia, and another could be teaching about America, and so on.

The Convener: I pass on the thanks of the committee to Professor Hayward and our other witnesses, not just for your contribution here today but for the work with the review. The fact that we have overrun a bit shows the interest across the committee. We will all listen with interest to what the cabinet secretary will say in December. Following that, who knows, we might be keen to

get you back in again, but we will wait and see what final response the Government comes forward with later this year.

That concludes the public part of our proceedings.

11:28

Meeting continued in private until 11:59.

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Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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