



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 3 October 2018

Session 5



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EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

24th Meeting 2018, Session 5

CONVENER

*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)

*Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab)

*Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)

*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

*Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)

*Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)

*Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

*Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con) (Committee Substitute)

Jamie Hepburn (Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Roz Thomson

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 3 October 2018

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Interests

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning and welcome to the 24th meeting of the Education and Skills Committee in 2018. I remind everyone to turn their mobile devices to silent, as they may interfere with the broadcasting. We have received apologies this morning from Liz Smith, and I welcome to the committee Alison Harris, who is attending as a substitute. As it is her first meeting, I ask Alison Harris whether she has any interests to declare.

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): I have no interests to declare.

Decision on Taking Business in Private

10:00

The Convener: Item 2 is a decision on taking business in private. Is the committee content to take in private item 6 today, consideration of the report on our young people's pathways inquiry at future meetings, and consideration of our work programme at our next meeting?

Members indicated agreement.

Young People's Pathways

10:01

The Convener: Item 3 is the fourth evidence session in our inquiry into young people's pathways. I warmly welcome to the meeting Jamie Hepburn MSP, Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills; Hugh McAloon, deputy director and head of fair work and skills in the Scottish Government; Jonathan Gray, head of community learning and development policy and post-16 programmes; and Murray McVicar, unit head, learning directorate. I invite the minister to make some opening remarks and to tell us in general terms how developing the young workforce is progressing.

The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills (Jamie Hepburn): Thank you, convener. I do not intend to make too substantive a set of opening remarks, other than to say that I very much welcome the focus that the committee has had in its inquiry into young people's pathways and the great interest that it has taken in the developing the young workforce agenda. There is great support for that direction of travel.

Undoubtedly, we will get into some of the detail about progress later. My estimation from going out and about—from going into the school environment and working with the 21 regional groups—is that significant progress is being made but clearly much more remains to be done. We will get into that in a few moments' time, so that is all that I have to say just now, other than to congratulate you on your new role, convener. This is my first time at the committee since you took that esteemed office.

The Convener: Thank you, minister.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): Good morning, minister. We are at the halfway point in a seven-year DYW programme that aims to transform the relationship between schools, employers and colleges and the preparedness of young people for the world of work. Are you satisfied with the pace of change that has been achieved so far?

Jamie Hepburn: Given that we have achieved the headline target of reducing youth unemployment by 40 per cent on 2014 levels by 2021 early, of course I am satisfied. We now have 21 regional groups covering the length and breadth of Scotland beginning some innovative work. They differ greatly region by region, which is what we wanted to see, because each area has its own local requirements, its own local economic needs and its own demographics. Having those 21 employer-led groups embedded and beginning to create new relationships, or reaffirming existing

relationships, between employers and the school environment is good progress. A 17 per cent increase between August 2015 and August 2016 in the number of young people attaining vocational qualifications has to be welcome.

Undoubtedly, there is more to be done. This is a seven-year strategy, but the culture change that we want to embed has to go further than the seven-year period. It has to be embedded longer term. That is not going to happen overnight, but yes, I believe that we have made good progress already in this early phase.

Gordon MacDonald: You mentioned the 21 regional employer groups. There are obviously challenges in trying to hit some of the relevant key performance indicators, such as the percentage of employers employing young people direct from school, the employment rate for young disabled people, and positive destinations for looked-after young people. How important are the employer groups and how are you attracting the right quality and number of employers, given that the vast majority of employers in Scotland are small and medium-sized enterprises?

Jamie Hepburn: There is always going to be a challenge and we find that to be so across the range of activities that we have in place; we often hear that engaging small and medium-sized enterprises can be challenging when it comes to apprenticeships, for example. It is essential for the developing the young workforce agenda that we do so. That is particularly the case in those geographies where SMEs make up an even bigger share of companies than they do in other areas.

We are entrusting our regional groups with taking that activity forward. They are the people who are best placed to do it. Some of the people who are tasked and charged with heading up those groups are themselves involved in SMEs. They are the ones who have the best knowledge on the ground about how to make the appropriate connections in their local areas, and we trust them to get on with that.

I go back to the point that I made about progress. I see it happening on the ground, but there is more to be done.

We have been moving in the right direction with the equalities agenda. For example, I know that, in the last period, we have seen an increase on the 2012-13 baseline figures of 6.7 percentage points in positive destinations for looked-after young people. The employment rate for young disabled people is, in line with that for disabled people of all ages, shockingly low—it is unacceptably low. We have set out our ambitions to do much more to tackle the disability employment gap, but it is moving in the right direction. There was an increase of 8 percentage points compared with the

baseline figure of 35.2 per cent in 2014. We are moving in the right direction. There is positive progress but, again, there is much more to do.

Gordon MacDonald: There are different pathways that young people can take now. The table of information that you provided shows that there has been progress in encouraging people to look at the options for college or training programmes and so on. How do you reach out to parents, who have a huge amount of influence on the options that young people have when they decide what they are going to do after school?

Jamie Hepburn: This is a thorny topic; fundamentally, it is the parity of esteem issue. We have no problem in the main; obviously there are still significant issues in terms of the poverty-related attainment gap, although that gap is closing and attainment among those in the lower income deciles is growing at a faster rate than among those in the upper income deciles.

In the main, there is no problem with parents recognising and understanding the value of young people going on to tertiary education and higher education in particular. There is still a challenge for us in broadening horizons and getting them to understand that there is just as much value in young people pursuing vocational pathways. I see that often enough when I go out to speak to modern apprentices and see the great value that they have taken from the work-based learning that they are engaged in. Many of them had intended to go on to higher education, but they have preferred this avenue because they have started to get a wage sooner than they would if they had gone to university.

Yes, there is a significant piece of work to be done. Skills Development Scotland is actively engaged across a range of activity to make parents better informed of the options that their children can have in the school environment and, just as critically and perhaps more so, post-school. When the Deputy First Minister and I met the chair and the chief executive of Skills Development Scotland a few months ago, we discussed this very issue. Skills Development Scotland is now actively participating in parents evenings in a way that it did not before. There is still an issue with getting parents to engage even when that happens, but there is other work under way as well. For example, Skills Development Scotland is developing a dedicated site for parents to better support their understanding of careers information and guidance. In August, the national action plan on parental engagement, family learning and learning at home was launched. It is a three-year plan that has been pulled together by the Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities with input from the National Parent Forum of Scotland to work to the end of ensuring

that parents are better informed about the choices that their children can have.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): I was hoping to ask the minister about equality of opportunity across the country. One of the key concerns for me, certainly as someone who represents a rural area, is that the challenges around DYW are different in different regions. To some degree, no matter how hard some of the rural DYW groups work, there is a limited pool of employers in their areas, which ultimately restricts the opportunities for some young people. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that young people, no matter where they live in Scotland, have access to the same opportunities?

Jamie Hepburn: We are taking a range of different measures in different ways. For example, for modern apprenticeships, we introduced the rural supplement for training providers last year in recognition of the additional challenges, barriers and hurdles that training providers and people engaged in a modern apprenticeship face in rural communities. That is an enhanced payment for providers in recognition of the additional cost that is involved. That was a success.

In fact, we have broadened the scope. Last year, qualification for the supplement was determined by location in the local authority areas that we recognised as being most rural. We have expanded that so that qualification is now defined by postcode. If a training provider is based somewhere that is defined as a remote rural area or a remote town, they can qualify for an enhanced payment. Far more training providers and far more people who are engaged in a modern apprenticeship are benefiting from that. The Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council has a formula for allocating extra funding to colleges based on rurality as well.

Again, we are entrusting our developing the young workforce regional groups with this work. I am sure that Mr Mundell has engaged actively with the developing the young workforce regional group in Dumfries and Galloway, which I have been hugely impressed with. All the regional groups are doing great work, but the work that has been done in Dumfries and Galloway is very innovative. It had a fantastic jobs fair, which was held at the Crichton campus in Mr Mundell's constituency, to which it invited children from across the entire local authority area. It supported those children to come to engage with the array of employers of all sizes that exist across the area. The group is also doing innovative stuff such as having sectoral groups feed into its board, so that each sector in the area can have its interests properly represented. Again, that is very much led from a grass-roots level in recognition of the fact that the people who are entrusted with taking

forward the developing the young workforce agenda on the ground understand best what is available and what challenges exist in their area. If there is more that we can do, they can feed that back to us and we can consider it.

Oliver Mundell: I was at that jobs fair and I know that you were there as well, but we missed each other—very conveniently, I was leaving just as you were walking in the door.

Jamie Hepburn: I would have been happy to see you there.

Oliver Mundell: However, a number of schools were not able to be present at that event because of transport costs and, by the time the DYW group was in a position to offer transport to those schools, it was too late for some of them. The distance from some schools to Dumfries, the time that it would have taken out of their day and their staffing levels made it difficult for all young people in the region to attend. I understand that positive measures have been taken across the board, but are the difficulties of delivering some of these measures in rural communities being taken into consideration in the funding for DYW groups in rural communities?

10:15

Jamie Hepburn: Essentially, the way that any group is established is that its members come forward together. It is not a top-down model at all; it is determined by a group of people coming together. We asked Rob Woodward, who is the former chief executive of STV, to head up our efforts at a national level on employer engagement and engagement with the groups. He reached out to people, particularly in areas where it was proving difficult to get groups established. I had that conversation with Mr Scott and I am very pleased to say we have a very good and active group in his constituency now.

Those people would come together and bring forward a proposition to the national group. If that was thought to be a good proposition that would take account of the forecast costs of their activity, it would come to me for sign-off. Again, it comes down to the group taking forward what it thinks it requires.

That said, of course, this is an experience of being informed by what happens on a practical basis. If a particular group finds that there is an impediment to a certain form of activity, we will consider it. For example, in Mr Scott's constituency, I had a very useful meeting with one of the co-chairs—in Shetland, the group has three co-chairs, which shows how different each group can be. The co-chair I met raised the issue of the additional costs involved in chairs getting from an island community to participate in round-table

meetings with other chairs. I have undertaken to take that away and consider it. If issues are raised, we will consider them.

Another point is that I would not expect—not that I want to be top down and instructive on these matters—the Dumfries and Galloway group's efforts to be entirely located in Dumfries, despite its being in your constituency, Mr Mundell. Indeed, I know that the group is undertaking activity across the entirety of the local authority area.

Oliver Mundell: My final question is whether you feel that the balance is right between the needs of employers and the needs of young people. That is another concern that has come up locally, as some parents and certainly some teachers feel that, although it is very positive that employers are taking part in the DYW group and are doing a great job at building engagement, the process ends up motivating bright young people who have potential and have ideas to do other things to stay locally and work for some local employers that struggle to find young people willing to stay in the region and work for them. Those young people do that for exactly the reason that you talked about before, which is that they see an incentive to earn money quickly, rather than considering all the career options that may be available to them. Do we have that balance right?

Jamie Hepburn: That is the fundamental point. It is about ensuring that young people are as informed as possible about the opportunities that exist on their doorstep. It is always going to be the case that some young people choose for whatever reason—I know that it is a particularly acute issue in rural communities and I would not shy away from that at all, but it also happens in urban communities—to move elsewhere because that is just what they want to do. We will never be able to mitigate that entirely.

What we can do, though, is try to deal with the issue of young people feeling that they have no option other than to move away when in fact there might be options available to them. This is a process of ensuring that employers can engage with the school environment in an appropriate fashion, not only to better shape the curriculum so that young people can make decisions about the subjects that they want to study to get them into particular career pathways but, sometimes, to do something as simple as making young people aware that they have an employer on their doorstep. I have been quite surprised to go to communities where there is a long-established employer that employs a substantial number of people and find that, invariably, although the young people are probably aware that the employer is there, they do not have any idea what it does. If they do not have any idea what that employer does, how can they know whether it is

something that they want to engage in? Again, that speaks of the need for engagement.

In terms of the balance of interests, I do not see any conflict between the interests of the employers engaging in this and the interests of young people. Indeed, it is a virtuous cycle. I would describe it as being in the employer's enlightened self-interest to be engaged in this agenda. It is about employers giving something back to young people in their community to help them with their education but, in addition, by offering work experience opportunities, for example, employers can identify a young person who is adept, skilled, keen and interested in working in their particular business and they might then end up offering the young person a job. I do not see any inherent tension between the interests. It is about making sure that the balance is correct, and I think that broadly we have that right.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I will ask a couple of supplementary questions. First, I apologise to Mr Hepburn for not being in Shetland when he was there. It was Anfield with my son or Mr Hepburn, and you will understand the pressures that occasionally fathers come under to—

Jamie Hepburn: Did they win?

Tavish Scott: Of course they won; it is Liverpool.

Jamie Hepburn: It was worth it, then.

Tavish Scott: Indeed, but I do apologise for not being present. I have two supplementary questions that relate to Oliver Mundell's questions. They are both on work experience. I am sure that, when you were in Shetland, it may have been reflected to you that, although young people are entitled to one week's work experience in the senior phase, there is a lot of parental pressure for earlier work experience in the earlier stages of secondary school to help young people in the way in which you have just been describing. Has the Government given any thought to how best to encourage more and earlier work experience opportunities for young people in the earlier phases of secondary school?

Jamie Hepburn: Again, that has to be determined. We cannot be top down and tell each school what they have to do. If a young person identifies an opportunity and a head teacher at his or her school feels that is something that they can support, I would absolutely encourage that to happen. If you are talking about something happening on a systemic basis, clearly we seek to be informed by what we are putting in place. I think that it is appropriate that we focus the work experience element, because we want it to be meaningful work experience, particularly with regard to the roll-out of modern apprenticeships

and foundation apprenticeships. I think that it is appropriate to have that largely focused at the senior phase of secondary school. That is not to say that, if there are opportunities for earlier work experience, they should not be explored or supported.

Beyond the provision of work experience, we should be ensuring that, even in advance of secondary school, within the primary school environment, we are engaged in making young people better aware of the world of work and the opportunities that exist for them to be actively engaged in thinking about how their learning can sit better within it.

A range of activities is taking place early in the school experience through the developing the young workforce agenda. I have some specific and localised examples. In Fife, Dalgety Bay primary school is engaged in thinking about career education as an integral part of its school improvement planning. Busby primary school in East Renfrewshire has developed a skills academy. Bonhill primary school in West Dunbartonshire is engaged in thinking about enterprise and entrepreneurship. There are other examples of employment engagement at that stage, but there obviously has to be a balance struck between that type of activity and work experience, which is different.

Tavish Scott: I take that, and it is entirely fair. The point that I was driving at concerned young people who are probably going to leave at S4 or who leave at S4 and what support they have had to assist them in the choices that they make. I take all that you say about the senior phase and what you say about the primary schools—that is fine—but my specific point is about those S4 leavers. Can we do more for those young people at an earlier stage in school? I take your point about the top-down approach. It is for the local delivery groups to do some work on that, but do you have a view about it?

Jamie Hepburn: Yes, I would agree. I think that we can do more for them, and that is a fundamental part of the ethos of the developing the young workforce agenda in terms of the direction of travel that we take on careers information guidance.

In recognition of the issue that Mr Scott is talking about, we are now starting to consider how we deliver foundation apprenticeships, for example. When they were introduced, they were very rigidly a two-year approach. We are now starting to explore whether we should be a bit more flexible, for the very reason that Mr Scott mentions, because, if a young person starts the foundation apprenticeship in S4 and decides to leave at the end of fourth year, then they are not going to have completed the course and got a

qualification. I would much rather that they might be able to do a year's work experience and get some form of qualification, and, if they decide to stay on, they can continue and proceed to get a further qualification in fifth year. If they do not decide to stay on, then at least they have some form of qualification as they enter the world of work. Again, with that particular model, it could be that the employer says, "This person is good. Let us give them a modern apprenticeship". Indeed, I think that the success of the foundation apprenticeship programme that we put in place will not solely be judged on that, because we also want universities to recognise it as a qualification for entrance to university. Ultimately, however, its success can be judged by the number of young people who are engaged in a foundation apprenticeship and move on to a modern apprenticeship. We are probably not quite there yet, but that is where I want us to end up.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): Good morning, minister. I have a follow-up question on foundation apprenticeships. Can you give us a bit of detail about how the targets for foundation apprenticeships were reached?

Jamie Hepburn: They have been reached on the basis of recognising that we could not just go in overnight and say that thousands of these are going to be delivered. It has been a process of growth, which you can see if you look at the overall trajectory of foundation apprenticeships over the past few years. Last year, 1,245 were provided—as I said to Mr Scott, that cohort continues this year, as it is a two-year programme. The year before that, there were 346 and, before that, there were some forerunners to try to test whether the approach would work.

Essentially, we are designing a new model of delivery of work-based learning in the school environment in a way that schools are not used to. Frankly, Skills Development Scotland is also not that used to delivering that type of activity with schools, so you have two different cultures trying to learn from one another. Ultimately, I want us to get to a place whereby foundation apprenticeships are embedded and recognised as a normal part of the school offering. We are by no means anywhere close to being there. If we tried to do that from day 1, it just would not have been possible.

Our approach is very much predicated on steady and onward growth to get to the point where I would like us to be. Again, that would help with the point that Mr MacDonald has made about parity of esteem. If we can get to the place where foundation apprenticeships are embedded within the school environment and recognised as a normal part of school delivery, we will break down a lot of the barriers that arise from a perception

among parents that the pursuit of academic education is superior to that of vocational education. Of course, to be fair to parents, if they have just sent their kid to secondary school, neither they nor their child will be very well aware of what a foundation apprenticeship is. It is going to take a while for that to be recognised as an inherent part of our school offering. When we get to that stage, I think that we will have a lot less of this concern about parity of esteem.

10:30

Mary Fee: On the point about the process taking a while and the fact that schools are not used to foundation apprenticeships, Colleges Scotland and Scottish Chambers of Commerce have said that the term "foundation" leads to confused perceptions, and that there have been difficulties in recruitment due to poor promotion. What is the Government doing to tackle that? At the beginning of last year, the Government pledged 3,000 foundation apprenticeships. At the end of last year and the start of this year, that figure was reduced to 2,600. Was that figure reduced because of the confusion around perceptions of what they actually were or was there another reason?

Jamie Hepburn: I will not apologise for setting out an ambitious trajectory. However, we need to constantly review what we are doing, on a basis that is informed by practical experience. Given that, as I said, we have had 1,245 starts in cohort 2, the ambition of up to 2,600 was a stretching one for us this year. I will not apologise for that, because I want to see us continue on that growth trajectory.

In terms of the point around the language that we use and the term "foundation apprenticeship", I am not hung up on the terminology. I would observe that that was the name that was recommended by Ian Wood's report but, if there is a better name for it, I am willing to consider what it might be. That said, I do not want us to go through the constant process of reinvention because, if we get to the stage at which people start to understand what a foundation apprenticeship is, why would we want to change it? To be fair, it may be early enough that we can do that, and I recognise the point you make. Those of us in the generation that went through standard grades will remember that there was such a thing as a foundation standard grade. There were perhaps preconceived notions about the value of that form of study, which I will not get into right now, but that could be filtering through to the perception of what a foundation apprenticeship might be. I am all ears. If anyone around this table has a better name for it, I am willing to hear it.

Mary Fee: Are you confident that you will meet the target of 5,000 foundation apprenticeships for next year?

Jamie Hepburn: We will obviously see how many people have started and, of course, I point out that the target is not 5,000 starts but up to 5,000 starts. Ultimately, it is a demand-led programme, so we need to see how many people take up the opportunities this year and we will see where we are next year. Right now we are working towards the target on that basis.

Mary Fee: If the figure of 5,000 is not a target but is something that you are working towards, will wherever you peak below that simply become your target?

Jamie Hepburn: No.

Mary Fee: Is your target 5,000?

Jamie Hepburn: It is to provide up to 5,000 places. I want as many of them as possible to be taken up, but I need to make our decisions based on practical experience as well. This is a learning process. I want to emphasise again the new understanding that there has to be between different forms of delivery models. Skills Development Scotland is tasked with rolling out foundation apprenticeships. It is used to delivering things in a certain fashion and schools are used to delivering things in a certain fashion, so we are still working to try to make sure that those cultures are working and are brought closer together.

Mary Fee: So the target of 5,000 is an aspiration, but it is flexible to a degree.

Jamie Hepburn: It is not about flexibility; it is about trying to offer as many opportunities as possible and then encouraging as many people as possible to take those opportunities. That goes back to the point that that you made in your first question, which I did not properly answer, about promoting these opportunities. There probably is more that we could be doing to promote these opportunities. Again, that is something that we are tasking Skills Development Scotland with. There is inevitably a role for us as a Government, there is a role for COSLA in engaging with its constituent local authorities, and there is also a significant role for our 21 developing the young workforce regional groups, especially in encouraging employers to take part. We can only offer these opportunities if we have employers who are willing to provide them. We can go out and put the contracts in place for the training provision. That is the straightforward part of it. The more difficult task is getting employers to engage—they are doing so; we need more to do so—and then getting young people to engage with the opportunity.

Mary Fee: Last week, when I asked representatives of SDS this question, they said that they are confident that 5,000 foundation apprenticeships will be delivered. It sounds as if they are more confident than the Government. Your target is up to 5,000, but they were quite confident last week that they would be delivering 5,000 opportunities next year.

Jamie Hepburn: I am always pleased and heartened to hear about the confidence of Scottish Government agencies in delivering the programmes that we entrust to them.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Following on from that slightly, you have talked about the promotion of the foundation apprenticeships and how you are trying to get the balance right. Do you think that schools are doing enough to promote them? There was some concern that schools were undermining motivation in some aspects. Of course, some schools may be looking towards their figures for university admissions. Do you think that schools are fully on board with this in a way that will help to get the foundation apprenticeships embedded in the system?

Jamie Hepburn: The picture will be mixed, if I can be candid with you. It will be patchy for two reasons. The opportunities are such that the apprenticeships are now available in every local authority area. That is significant progress. They are available, if I remember correctly, in virtually all of Scotland's secondary schools. However, not every framework is available across every local authority area and every school environment. That is why it is important for us to continue to grow the offering. As we grow the offering, as we grow the number of opportunities, schools will start to see this as a real opportunity for young people to take up.

That said, where we are offering them, they are being pursued by an increasing number of young people, so that says to me that schools are doing two things: they are letting young people know about the apprenticeships; and, even more importantly, they are facilitating their participation through flexibility in timetabling, which is no small undertaking for a school. They are doing that to allow young people to take part in foundation apprenticeships. Yes, of course, there is more that every part of the system can be doing to promote them.

Rona Mackay: What plans do you have to measure how the take-up of foundation apprenticeships is growing and the success of the system? How are you capturing that data?

Jamie Hepburn: We can measure all that. If the committee is interested, we can provide details of what has been available over the pathfinder

projects and the two cohorts of intakes that we have had thus far. When I was asked this question by Iain Gray in the chamber, I said that we will make information publicly available on participation in foundation apprenticeships.

Rona Mackay: When you have that information, I will be interested to know whether there are any geographical differences. In my local authority area, the schools are high achieving and pride themselves on the number of university entrants that they have. I would be interested to find out what the differences are throughout the country or within each local authority area. How close are we to getting any sense of that or any figures?

Jamie Hepburn: They will differ. We can break it down by local authority area. I can provide that to the committee, so we can understand that very readily. It will only be raw statistical data, so trying to get underneath what is driving that requires a wider piece of work.

I would not want to draw too many conclusions at this stage because, as I say, we are still at the stage of growing the number of foundation apprenticeships. I have been pleased with the growth that we have seen. Any reasonable person would say that going from 346 starts two years ago to 1,245 last year indicates substantial growth. That said, to try to draw wider conclusions from 1,245 starts would not be the most informative thing to do. I think that the critical thing for us right now is to get out there and promote foundation apprenticeships and vocational learning in its wider sense as something that is of significant value for each school environment to participate in.

Ms Mackay, who represents the constituency next door to mine, obviously knows her area much better than I do, but I am aware of her area and, yes, there are obviously schools there that are doing significantly well in terms of academic attainment. But do not tell me that there are not kids that are being left behind in those schools. There are, and we need to make sure that they are supported as well.

Rona Mackay: I know, yes.

Jamie Hepburn: We need to make sure that they are supported through things like the attainment Scotland fund and the pupil equity fund so that they can have better academic attainment but also so that they can have positive outcomes in the labour market. That speaks of the necessity of ensuring that we have a good vocational offering as well, although, again, that should not just be targeted at those who might not have good academic attainment. I have seen enough young people out there who maybe got five As at their highs—which is significantly better than I did at school—and who then, because they have

decided that it is a good opportunity, have gone on to do a modern apprenticeship. That is a legitimate option for them to pursue.

The way I look at it is that we need to ensure that young people are as informed as possible of all the options that they have before them, can make informed decisions and explicitly recognise that each of those options is as valid as the next.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Good morning, minister. You might be aware that the Education Scotland review of personal and social education, which came about as a result of an inquiry that this committee undertook, has published its phase 2 results. It found that the case load of a guidance teacher in Scotland varies between about 75 and 280 young people—the average is around 200. Given the importance of guidance teachers in successfully implementing this agenda, can a guidance teacher with a case load of between 200 and 280 young people provide the level of one-to-one support that young people require?

Jamie Hepburn: In every school, I want all teachers, through the leadership of their headteacher, to embrace the developing the young workforce agenda. I think that we are starting to see that.

We should be clear, though. Our guidance teachers play a critical role in supporting young people. We are not discharging the responsibility for delivery of the developing the young workforce agenda specifically to guidance teachers. It is for each headteacher to identify what is described as “senior resource” in their school to take forward the developing the agenda. That may or may not be a guidance teacher. I would rather suspect—I say this boldly, without having the evidence in front of me—that it will not be guidance teachers in the main who are charged with the responsibility, although, of course, guidance teachers are invariably also subject teachers. To be clear, guidance teachers are not specifically tasked with taking forward the agenda.

There has been a question about whether we can better support schools to roll out the developing the young workforce agenda by providing additional help. In a number of schools in the Glasgow area, we are about to pilot a new member of staff, who will probably not be a member of the teaching staff, to be charged with rolling out and developing the agenda within their specific school environment.

I hope that that provides reassurance. I recognise that, to varying degrees in different schools, depending on the school environment, guidance teachers will have significant case loads—that is probably not the right term, but I cannot think of a better one—and a significant

number of young people whom they are supporting. Ultimately, guidance teachers are supporting all young people in our schools to a greater or lesser degree, and we are not seeking to place the burden of the delivery of the developing the young workforce agenda entirely on their shoulders.

10:45

Ross Greer: I accept that, minister. It is not their responsibility entirely, but given that the guidance teacher has primary responsibility for one-to-one support of young people—and “case load” is a term that the Scottish Guidance Association would use, so it is appropriate terminology—the issue is important.

I will move on to Skills Development Scotland careers advisers. The committee has consistently heard—not just in this inquiry but over the past number of years—substantial anecdotal evidence from young people that the choice that is available to them is perhaps not really a choice. Nominally, a school might offer more options for their future pathways it did previously, but on an individual level, young people might feel that their decisions have already been made for them. Last week, I asked SDS about that, and I wonder what your thoughts are. When a careers adviser sees that young people are not being given the individual choice that they should be given, what role would you expect them to take? What level of engagement would you expect them to have with the school to address that situation?

Jamie Hepburn: Primarily, I would expect them to engage with the young person to offer them the information, advice and guidance that they need to make an informed decision. I would absolutely concede that I have heard the same point made. Young people often feel that they are not given the fullest information that they need to make subject choice decisions that will allow them to proceed through school and get the qualifications that they require for their choice of career, or they are not made aware of the different career options available to them. I hear that, and that was a huge part of the reason why we tasked Ian Wood and the commission to come up with recommendations for developing Scotland’s young workforce. That is a critical element of the developing the young workforce strategy.

Ultimately, how a careers adviser would approach that matter is up to their individual judgment. They cannot be imposing anything on a young person. The fundamental issue goes back to the culture of our educational environment. It is about ensuring that parents, teachers and young people are all aware of the variety of options and pathways. As the developing the young workforce group in Glasgow said, there is no wrong path. We

need to make it very clear early on that each of the options available is of equivalent value to the others.

Ross Greer: You are right to say that the adviser’s primary responsibility is to young people. If they observe a structural or cultural problem in a school, should they take that up with the management of the school or with the local authority? Is that a discussion they should be having with staff?

Jamie Hepburn: I would hope that every school is structured in such a way that any person who is working there should be able to raise issues of concern with the senior management team.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I want to pursue the issue of young people’s entitlement to careers advice. What proportion of young people can expect one-to-one support from careers advisers?

Jamie Hepburn: My memory of that is that it should be available to all young people.

Johann Lamont: That was not what we were told last week, so you might want to come back to us on that.

Jamie Hepburn: My memory could be mistaken.

Johann Lamont: Yes. We were concerned—I was certainly concerned—that there was a conflation of “one to one” and “face to face”. Do you have a definition of face-to-face careers advice?

Jamie Hepburn: My definition of “face to face” would be speaking as we are right now. It would not necessarily be across a table, but it would involve speaking face to face. However, I recognise that in some environments—going back to the challenges of rurality—that might not be possible and people might have to use some other means to facilitate that discussion.

Johann Lamont: Is there a limit to the number of young people that there can be in a room when a careers adviser is giving face-to-face support?

Jamie Hepburn: I cannot answer that question.

Johann Lamont: Would you accept that if the careers service says that it offers face-to-face support, and it turns out that that support is one occasion with 30 people in the room, that would be literally meaningless in terms of supporting young people’s ability to make decisions?

Jamie Hepburn: I think that it would rather depend. I had the pleasure of going to North Berwick high school, which has a careers adviser, and the support there is more or less like a class offering careers guidance. My estimation was that that approach was working there.

The fundamental point—and maybe this is where I was slightly mistaken in terms of the way that I answered your first question—is that every young person who wants a face-to-face meeting should be able to get that. If a young person's opportunity to get that type of support was precluded and guidance was only offered in a room of 30 people, that approach probably would not be that effective.

Johann Lamont: Would you would be willing to look at that? Apart from anything else, if one-to-one support is only given to those who ask for it, those who perhaps need it most are least likely to be in a position to ask for it. Would you accept that that approach may actually reinforce inequalities in terms of awareness of what options are available? It would be helpful for us to know what you think entitlement to one-to-one consultation is and whether that is the same as what we were told last week.

Clearly, somebody coming in and giving a presentation on X, Y and Z is quite different from what is implied by "face to face", which is that there would be engagement with a young person and dialogue about what options are available to them. Would you accept that the challenge is to deliver a careers advice service to individuals that takes into account their abilities in the context of big numbers of young people?

Jamie Hepburn: Yes. The fundamental point you that you made is about what careers information and guidance we should offer. We have already committed to a review of careers information through the programme for government. That is something that we are doing now.

I would be very happy to take on board the specific points that you raised, although I would want them to be evidenced. I agree that we need to make sure that the young people who most need the information and advice feel confident enough to ask for it. Of course, that should involve reminding them that they are entitled to ask for it, and if that is not happening we need to look at why. We need to make sure that our systems work. I have spoken several times now about making sure that young people are as informed as possible, and ultimately the fact that they are entitled to this form of guidance has to be part of the information that is relayed to them.

Johann Lamont: Do you share my concern that the "face to face" phrase that was used last week actually masks the challenge to the careers advice service, because it can refer to events where there is one adviser and up to 30 young people?

Jamie Hepburn: I would need to see the comment before I came to any conclusions as to whether I share your concern. I make the point

again that it is not necessarily inappropriate for a group of young people to be brought together for careers information and guidance. However, if it was only available to them in that form, that would be a concern.

Johann Lamont: Are you willing to look at the extent to which that is the only option for some young people, given that, from what we heard last week, there is not universal provision of one-to-one support?

Jamie Hepburn: I can undertake to see what information and evidence we have on whether there is a systemic problem of that nature. I have not been made aware that there is, but we can certainly have a look at it.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): A recurring theme today has been parity of esteem and what the developing the young workforce group told us about encouraging a better understanding of options other than university. Is there any measurable data or even any anecdotes to suggest that young people's school experience reflects that ideal? Is there anything to suggest that attitudes are improving and that more information is being provided about non-university options? When will that be measured, or is it like the French revolution and too early to tell?

Jamie Hepburn: I have not drawn my own conclusions on the French revolution yet either, Dr Allan.

We can look at the statistical information. The proportion of young people who are utilising college-based study in the senior phase of the school environment would testify that there is growth there, while the growth in foundation apprenticeships would suggest that more young people are availing themselves of the opportunity to take part in work-based vocational learning.

Young people's awareness of the opportunities is harder to measure. I would go back to my response to Mr Greer. Too frequently, I hear young people say that they have not been made aware of all of the options. A lot of those young people have not long come out of the school system and are at the next phase of their lives. The challenge for us is to ensure that we keep engaging with young people, which we are doing through the "The 15-24 Learner Journey Review". We have worked with Young Scot towards that end and will continue to do so. We will also engage with YouthLink Scotland to ensure that it continues to inform the work that we take forward through the learner journey review.

To demonstrate that we learn from practical experience, Rob Woodward suggested that we should try to ensure that there is at least one young person on each of the regional DYW

groups, so that we can better understand the lived experience of young people in relation to the information and advice that they are offered. To be candid, though, I hear young people say that they have not been fully informed of the opportunities available to them.

Dr Allan: This may be difficult to measure, too, but a number of members—yourself included, I think—have referred to the reality of parental attitudes and pressures around the choices that young people make. Parents are one of the biggest influences on young people when they are making decisions. Is anything being done to educate parents about parity of esteem and to encourage them to see these things in the same way?

Jamie Hepburn: I would go back to the answer that I gave you earlier about the significant body of work that SDS is engaged in to ensure that parents are better aware of the opportunities available to young people through careers information and guidance. That work is happening and will continue.

Dr Allan: The counter-argument to that—again, you may have alluded to this—is that there are still young people who have parental pressure in the opposite direction. A young person might be the first member of their family to think about going to college or university but have an obstacle to overcome, not through lack of parental support but because, for various reasons, their parents consider that a high-risk option. I take it from what you are saying that we do not want to lose sight of the pressures in the opposite direction. Is there anything that you are doing to make sure that that does not happen?

Jamie Hepburn: Absolutely—that remains firmly on the radar. We are doing so partly through the developing the young workforce activity, to ensure that young people are aware of all the options that they have. Clearly, that is a critical element of the work on widening access to higher education. I am not leading on that work but the committee will be aware of it.

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): You said at the start that SDS now attends parents evenings and, in your response to Alasdair Allan, you spoke about engaging parents. The National Parent Forum of Scotland submission talks about expectations on parents. Obviously, the Government cannot force parents to engage—if they do not want to engage, they might not do so. What Government does have control over is the consistency of offer across the country. Last week, I asked SDS the average number of hours that it would expect careers advisers to spend in schools. Do you have an understanding of that nationally? Is data available

to you about an average careers guidance officer's engagement with schools?

Jamie Hepburn: I cannot say with 100 per cent certainty that such data exists, but we can certainly commit to seeing what information is out there.

11:00

Jenny Gilruth: I understand that SDS expects careers guidance officers to spend half a day in one of its national hubs. Would the Government expect those officers to be out and about in schools more regularly than they are in the hubs?

Jamie Hepburn: Not necessarily, because SDS's hubs are high quality. The hubs also have great value in that they allow people—not just young people, incidentally—to come in off the street to seek information and guidance. We have to strike the right balance, and we will always look to see whether that balance has been struck. It is entirely appropriate for officers to base some of their activities at hubs, because good work is being done from them. I have been able to go to a number of hubs, and I remember being at the one in Inverness, where SDS was able to bring a number of young people out of the school environment for some practical, hands-on information and advice. Employers can engage with the young people at the hubs, too. There is a role for that type of activity.

Jenny Gilruth: Gender segregation came up last week, when we considered the issue with SDS in relation to subject uptake. It is still a pressing concern, including with regard to apprenticeships. Are you able to tell us about the Government's work on tackling the issue?

Jamie Hepburn: Yes. Gender segregation is an issue of significant concern to us and we are undertaking a range of activities. Ultimately, it manifests itself negatively in a variety of ways, most obviously in the gender pay gap, and in subject choice and occupational choice—or at least occupational outcomes, because there is not necessarily a choice, and people pick careers around their wider life circumstances.

We are trying to do what we can in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics strategy to make sure that we engage with young people at an early age and that more young girls are aware of the value of studying STEM subjects. There is activity under way there. The STEM strategy was taken forward by Shirley-Anne Somerville when she was Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, and my colleague Richard Lochhead will be taking that forward now. The STEM strategy continues to be rolled out, and Skills Development Scotland is working towards

supporting apprenticeships through the equalities action plan.

We should primarily think of this as trying to encourage more women into areas such as STEM. We must also do more to encourage more men into what are viewed as traditionally female sectors such as early years learning and childcare. There are a whole host of good reasons to do that, not least because we are significantly ramping up the number of hours of childcare that are provided and need to recruit significantly more people. In doing so, we should not overlook half of the population. This is an important issue—activity is under way and will continue to be taken forward.

Jenny Gilruth: I do not know if you can answer this, but I want to ask about the gender balancing of classes in schools. For example, it is still the case that there might be only one girl in a class of physics students at national 5 level or higher. Does the Government have a view on issuing guidance to schools to stop that from happening?

Jamie Hepburn: No, I do not think that we do. I do not know how that would work on a practical level or whether that type of approach would necessarily be effective. It is far more important that we undertake the activity that I have set out in order to encourage more young women to study subjects such as physics. That said, there is probably more that could be done to support young women in such circumstances. I am aware that networks have been formed of women studying physics—probably at higher education level more than at school level—so that they can engage with one another even if they are not necessarily at the same institution.

Mary Fee: I asked last week's panel about the support that is available for care-experienced young people. The minister will be aware that such young people often have quite complex needs. The percentage of care-experienced young people who reach positive destinations is quite low and has increased by less than 2 per cent. What specific support is available for such young people?

Jamie Hepburn: I do not have the figure to hand, but I think that the proportion of young people with experience of care in positive destinations has increased by more than 2 per cent from our baseline figure. It sits roughly 20 percentage points lower than for the population as a whole. Clearly, that is totally and utterly unacceptable because it manifests itself in poor outcomes not just in the labour market but in life in its wider sense for young people with experience of care. I do not underestimate the scale of the challenge.

One of the things that the Deputy First Minister is leading on, particularly in discharging his

responsibility for the education and skills system, is trying to make sure that all Government policy is informed by awareness of adverse childhood experiences. In that regard he held a compelling conference at Bellahouston academy in Glasgow a number of months ago. I attended that conference, as did all education ministers and a number of other cabinet secretaries, and we discussed how to ensure that we are better aware of adverse childhood experiences. Experience of care is uppermost among those experiences, because if you are care-experienced there are invariably other reasons for that, and you may have had a number of adverse childhood experiences.

We will continue to determine what support we can provide. For example, in modern apprenticeships, I have ensured that people with experience of care, up to the age of 29, across all frameworks, can qualify for the highest level of payment for their training provider. That is not the case for every person entering our modern apprenticeship frameworks. That is one practical way in which we are trying to encourage employers to take on more people with experience of care. Work is also under way on how we can better support young people with care experience through the tertiary education system. I do not have the full detail, but we could get that for the committee.

We are alert to that agenda and aware that we still have some distance to go. At the First Minister's request, a wider body of work is being taken forward to look at how we can better support people with experience of the care system across all areas of Government. Again, we can provide more details to the committee about that work.

Mary Fee: Further information on any initiatives that are currently available would be really useful. It goes back to the point that Ms Lamont raised about careers advice. Quite often, the lack of availability of one-to-one support may initially disadvantage care-experienced young people who, because of their background, may not be as confident as others. They might need additional support and be less likely to come forward and identify. All of those things should be in place. The scheme that you talked about in relation to apprenticeships is welcome, but something like that should be in place to support care-experienced children whatever destination they choose.

Jamie Hepburn: Earlier this year, SDS launched its new corporate parent plan, which sets out a number of areas of activity. There should be an enhanced careers information and guidance offer from SDS for young people with care experience. Of course, young people generally who are at risk of disengagement should be case

managed by SDS. There should be support through the system we have in place already.

With regard to other specific forms of activity, we are for example now working with MCR Pathways in Glasgow, which is an impressive organisation that supports young people with experience of care. The organisation is led by a man named Iain MacRitchie, and it would be well worth the committee contacting him, because he has taken forward an impressive programme doing fantastic work supporting young people with experience of the care system and achieving very positive outcomes for them. We are beginning to support that work. We also work with Who Cares? Scotland to offer work placement opportunities.

Work is under way and activity is happening. Inevitably, there is more that we can do. We will always seek to do what we can to support people who have been in the care system. It should be uppermost in our minds that we have a fundamental responsibility to them because, at some stage in their life—it could have been for quite a substantial part of their life—the state was charged with the responsibility for caring for them.

Mary Fee: I asked the same question to the SDS representatives last week, and they spoke about assessments and needs-based matrixes, but they were unable to give me an example of anything that SDS does that is specifically targeted at care-experienced young people. I am grateful for the information that the minister has been able to give me today.

Jamie Hepburn: It is disappointing that they could not do that, because I have just been able to.

Mary Fee: Thank you.

Alison Harris: I have been listening with interest, minister. I want to go back to the DYW experience and ask what the Scottish Government is doing to make it easier for business to support work experience. In particular, with professions such as medicine, how is the Government helping more disadvantaged people to get work experience in those professions?

Jamie Hepburn: We are dealing with that in a variety of ways. For example, Glasgow City Council runs a mentoring scheme and the Government is an active participant in that. The scheme is paired with a specific school, which is John Paul academy in Summerston. The public sector can absolutely play a role. The national health service could also play a role, although we need to be cognisant that it is obviously very busy. We need to facilitate as much employer engagement as possible with young people and with schools, and we have asked our developing the young workforce regional groups to do that. If any particular barrier is identified, we want to hear

about that and try to bring it down, because we want to ensure that employers across all sectors can be part of the agenda.

Alison Harris: How do you ensure that best practice is replicated across all local authorities?

Jamie Hepburn: I mentioned Rob Woodward. He regularly brings together all the chairs of the regional groups. He also brings together all those who are employed by the regional groups as the development leads. They have different titles, but in essence they are tasked with developing the offer in their regions. They have dialogue to learn from one another about what they are doing, what is working well and what is not working so well, and they can link up and learn from one another. That is writ through our system.

We also have the developing the young workforce national advisory group, which is jointly chaired by the Deputy First Minister and Councillor Stephen McCabe from Inverclyde Council, who leads on education and young people for COSLA. I sit on that group as well. That group will look to hear what has been effective and use that to advise and inform what our offer at a national level should be.

11:15

The Convener: To follow on from that, developing the young workforce operates regionally, and the opportunities can be quite different across Scotland. For instance, the opportunities in oil and gas in the north-east or in some of the fintech industries in Edinburgh are not available in the other regions. I am thinking about the development of the fourth industrial revolution and how automation will change practically every area of our lives, from care to manufacturing and all of these areas. Has any work been done to ensure that we do not repeat that regional disadvantage for people? How are we getting information about opportunities elsewhere in Scotland to areas where there are problems? I know that it is difficult because work experience has a geographic element, but how do we ensure that young people are aware of all the opportunities across Scotland?

Jamie Hepburn: Fundamentally, that goes back to the information and guidance that they are provided with, which I hope happens as early as possible. There is an inherent tension. I accept that we have to get the balance right but, fundamentally, developing the young workforce is delivered on the ground regionally. It is designed to ensure that young people are aware of what is happening locally and to give them experience on a sector by sector basis. They could acquire skills with a local employer that are transferable to an employer elsewhere.

We need to try to strike that balance. You will be aware that there is a common concern in our remote and rural communities that young people have to leave to get employment opportunities—some members will be more aware of that than others, because they represent such communities. That is sometimes true, but I know from what I encounter that it is sometimes a perception more than the reality. There are opportunities in those communities that young people do not always avail themselves of. We need to ensure that they are aware of those opportunities so that we sustain and support local employers and economies and ensure that young people do not feel they have to leave a particular area. Equally, they must be aware that there is a wider world and, if they want to go elsewhere, they should have that opportunity, too.

Dr Allan: On that point, I agree with what you say about the two realities of remote and island communities, although I do not like the word “remote”. There is sometimes a lack of opportunities but, as you have said, there is sometimes a lack of awareness of what the jobs are. I wonder if you could comment on a situation in the Western Isles that may be common in other island communities. If a young person is thinking about coming back from university to the Western Isles, there is no obvious list of the available jobs there. Can anything more be done at a practical level simply to make people aware of a list of vacant jobs?

Jamie Hepburn: Probably. Skills Development Scotland will have a role and it will want to use the labour market intelligence from Scottish Enterprise or, in Dr Allan’s and Mr Scott’s case, Highlands and Islands Enterprise to know what is available. The enterprise agencies should work with their raft of account managed companies to know what is available. They can then work with Skills Development Scotland to help supply the labour to fill those opportunities. Clearly the enterprise and skills agencies review and the work that has emanated from it can have a role in that. If there is more that can be done, we are willing to consider that, but my hope is that that is happening right now. There should be no impediment to it, anyway.

Tavish Scott: I have a few questions on your letter to the committee of 20 September, which looked at the funding streams under the 2018-19 budget. I think that there are seven different funding streams, which amount to £12 million or so. There is also potentially European social fund funding that local authorities and other groups will apply for, as well as one or two other things. Is the landscape too messy? You may have been asked that when you were in Shetland, but is there too much going on? No matter how good the regional DYW group and the local authority are, there is a

heck of a lot going on. Some of it is bid funding, some of it is formula funding and some of it is administered by SDS, which means a huge amount of bureaucracy. To borrow a phrase from Dr Allan, is there a chance to take the guillotine to some of this?

Dr Allan: That is a paraphrase.

Tavish Scott: He was not suggesting that we use it on you, minister.

Jamie Hepburn: I think that it was a paraphrase, but I am always willing to wind up Dr Allan as well, Mr Scott.

If the truth be told, I cannot recall whether the question came up in Shetland, but it certainly came up at the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee yesterday when I gave evidence on employability programmes. I think that the issue manifests itself more in that area than in the operation of the developing the young workforce programme in the school environment, but certainly with our employability programmes there can be a bit of a confused landscape. That is not to say that any individual element is not doing good things. In fact, I cannot think of any element that I have encountered about which I have thought, “Well, that is a waste of time.” All the elements are doing good and valuable work.

However, there is no question but that the system needs to be more coherent, which is why we have produced “No One Left Behind—Next Steps for the Integration and Alignment of Employability Support in Scotland” and why we are reviewing the various employability initiatives. Those initiatives are not exclusively for young people, but some of them are geared towards young people. We want to reduce duplication and fundamentally to ensure that there is greater awareness of what each offering is. As I said yesterday, one of my big challenges is that the lion’s share of delivery is vested through local authorities, and I do not know what each local authority is doing. On the back of “No One Left Behind”, I have written to COSLA to seek an agreement that we will work together on a common basis to ensure that we have a more coherent system. We will need to work with others as well. The Department for Work and Pensions has committed to taking part. We also need to work with the third sector and various providers and, fundamentally of course, people who go through those programmes.

To come back to the formal learning environment, that issue is also an element of activity through the 15 to 24 learner journey review. That is probably not so much about there being a cluttered landscape; it is more about the individual route that a person might take. There is perhaps concern that some people do not take as

straight a journey as possibly in articulating from one part of the system to the next. It is possible that not enough people who qualify through a higher national diploma go on to the next element of higher education at the appropriate level, if they choose to do so. We are looking at those issues through that work.

Tavish Scott: For the budget for the next financial year, which is 2019-20, is it your intention to have that work concluded so that we will see a change in the structure?

Jamie Hepburn: We are still going through the budget process, so I have to be careful what I say. Right now, my working assumption is that there will be some changes. It will not be revolutionary next year—now I am engaging in the talk of the French revolution, too, or I could be talking about another revolution. However, it will not be wholesale or complete. There will probably be some changes, but many of the elements that we have in place now will remain.

Johann Lamont: I want to go back to our previous discussion about a definition of a positive destination. I noted your letter, in which you said that the Department for Work and Pensions does not give you the right information, and that the right information is not sought by—

Jamie Hepburn: It is Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs rather than the DWP. I am always willing to criticise the DWP, but I should probably not do so in this case.

Johann Lamont: I do not know why it would not want to share the information. You also said that Skills Development Scotland does not ask for the right information. Can you confirm that it is still the Scottish Government's view that a zero-hours contract is not fair work?

Jamie Hepburn: An exploitative zero-hours contract is absolutely not part of our fair work agenda.

Johann Lamont: So if you were able to get the information, you would not define a zero-hours contract as a positive destination.

Jamie Hepburn: I have set out the position in writing as a direct response to the question that Ms Lamont asked at my most recent appearance before the committee about how we can better understand what the destinations for young people are. If I recall correctly, she conceded that there could be inherent difficulties in obtaining the necessary information, some of which we have identified. We can measure the proportion of the overall workforce who are on a zero-hours contract on an estimated basis through the labour force survey, but that is a sample survey.

We do not measure post-school destinations—which are now called positive destinations; in the

past, reference was made to those who were not in education, employment or training—on a sample basis, and I think that that is a strength of our system. We can work out exactly where people have gone. I would not want to lose that by moving towards—

Johann Lamont: With respect, if you can identify specifically where people have gone, it cannot be much of a leap of imagination to work out whether they are on a zero-hours contract. I can assure you that young people know when they are on a zero-hours contract. They know when they are at the mercy of being on the rota. It is really important that we have a sense that you would do whatever you could not to distort the figures on positive destinations by including jobs that we would all agree do not offer training, stability or a guaranteed number of hours.

Jamie Hepburn: I make it very clear that we are not distorting the figures. The figures that we have laid out are robust. "Positive destinations" is the term that we use. It could be argued that any form of terminology that we use could be inherently loaded. Previously, we talked about people who were "not in education, employment or training". We could revert back to that, but it became a pejorative term for those who were not in education, employment or training, who were referred to as "NEETs". I do not want to get too caught up in what we define as a positive destination.

Johann Lamont: I guess that what—

Jamie Hepburn: What I am committed to doing—I have put this commitment in writing, and I make it again today—is doing everything that we can to better understand what the destination figures mean. That includes us doing what we can to establish how many young people might end up on what is termed a zero-hours contract.

You have made the point that young people absolutely understand when they are on a zero-hours contract. Largely, I would probably agree with that, but that understanding is usually informed by engagement with campaigning organisations that well understand what a zero-hours contract might be. The point that I am trying to make is that the issue is not as straightforward as we might think, at first glance, but I remain committed to looking at it, and I have set that out in writing. We will continue to do so, and I will be happy to come back to the committee at the earliest opportunity to say where we get to with that.

Johann Lamont: I very much welcome that last point. I understand what you said about the term "not in education, employment or training" being seen as pejorative, but it was pretty accurate, whereas the use of the term "positive destination"

for somebody who is on a zero-hours contract is not accurate. I think that young people who are waiting to get the rota by email know exactly what the limits of their rights are.

What conversations have you had with business about your definition of fair work? I am concerned that businesses increasingly see the use of zero-hours contracts not as a way of managing the edges of their business, but as a core approach. What conversations are you having about that?

What role does careers advice have in empowering young people to define what is reasonable for them to expect from their work and to understand what a zero-hours contract is and, critically, what role trade unions have in enforcing their rights? One of the big gaps when it comes to zero-hours contracts is not in young people not knowing that they have some employment rights, but in their not knowing how to enforce them. They have not been given support and advice on the role of trade unions in enforcing them. I commend Unite the union and the better than zero campaign, which I know have engaged with you directly, for their highlighting of such issues.

Do you think that it should form part of the core job of careers advisers to give young people information on what could be defined as an exploitative job? Could they give young people who are not doing modern studies information about trade unions and their role in providing advice to people on how to exercise and enforce their rights in the workplace?

11:30

Jamie Hepburn: You have asked me a lot of questions, but there are two fundamental ones. First, you asked what dialogue we have with business on the fair work agenda. We have constant dialogue on that. We are committed to publishing a fair work action plan by the end of this year, which I am charged with responsibility for. Engagement with business on the issue will be central to our approach to the fair work agenda. We also have the business pledge, which we have been trying to get more businesses to take. Fair work is at the heart of that, too. I am constantly taking forward that part of the agenda. It is in my ministerial title: I am the Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills. When engaging with business, fair work is an essential part of that equation.

I agree with what you said about the role of trade unions in informing young people of their rights. I commend Unite and the better than zero campaign. I have been able to engage with the Scottish Trades Union Congress's youth conference over the past two years, and I will continue to do that. We will continue to support the STUC and its individual affiliate members through

the variety of funding that we provide directly to them through the trade union learning fund and the trade union modernisation fund. I notice that we and, indeed, the STUC have been criticised for some of that work. That is life. I will take the criticism on the chin, but I think that it is right for us to work in partnership in that fashion.

When it comes to how we can ensure that young people are aware of their rights, I believe in having a rights-based focus in education. If there is more that can be done, we will certainly be willing to look at that.

Johann Lamont: You are saying that you believe that there is a direct role for careers advice in informing young people about the role of trade unions in enforcing their rights in the workplace.

Jamie Hepburn: I believe that we take a partnership approach with the trade unions, which we provide with significant resource for the purposes of education. How they might be able to engage with the educational environment is an issue that I am willing to discuss with them, and—

Johann Lamont: I am talking about young people who are not in trade unions.

Jamie Hepburn: That is right.

Johann Lamont: I am asking you whether, at the point at which they look at the world of work, careers advisers should do something to define what is a reasonable working environment and to explain the role of trade unions.

I am conscious of time, so I will make my final point. Would you be willing to do some work to look at the extent to which business now sees zero-hours contracts as the model for delivering their business? There is certainly anecdotal evidence that suggests that that is happening. Does the Government think that it could inform or shape developments in that area?

Jamie Hepburn: There are two issues there. I commit to raising the point that you make about careers information and guidance with Skills Development Scotland. We ask SDS to take forward careers information and guidance work. Careers advisers are qualified individuals who are asked to do certain work. We would need to have dialogue with them about what we expect them to deliver within the scope of careers advice.

With regard to your point about zero-hours contracts as a business model, the labour force survey shows that the prevalence of such contracts is reducing in percentage terms in the labour market in Scotland, but such contracts persist, and they are more prevalent in some sectors than they are in others. I think that it would be very difficult for us to define whether specific businesses view the use of zero-hours contracts as a usual part of their business model, but I am

happy for us to look at the issue and to consider what we might be able to do.

Johann Lamont: I make a plea to you to ask that question in your conversations with business. I think that you will find that in the hospitality industry, even though a restaurant will be able to assess how many folk might come through its door in a given week, very few people on the floor will now be on anything other than a zero-hours contract.

Jamie Hepburn: Yes. The flipside is that although there are huge historical perceptions about the hospitality sector, it is increasingly investing much more in training and providing apprenticeship opportunities for young people. We need to be careful when we talk about sectors, because there are individual employers within sectors, who will have different employment practices.

However, I must make it clear that, when I speak to businesses, the fair work agenda—which covers zero-hours contracts, the objectives of the fair work convention's framework, the living wage and all the other areas of activity that I am engaged in—forms part of my concerted efforts to engage with that community.

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

I will suspend the meeting briefly to allow the witnesses to leave, but I ask committee members to remain in their seats, because we still have some business to deal with in public.

11:35

Meeting suspended.

11:37

On resuming—

Subordinate Legislation

Special Restrictions on Adoption from Ethiopia (Scotland) Order 2018 (SSI 2018/272)

The Convener: The final item for us to consider in public is a piece of subordinate legislation. Do members have any comments to make on SSI 2018/272?

There being none, does the committee agree to note the order?

Members indicated agreement.

11:37

Meeting continued in private until 12:05.

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