



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 7 November 2018

Session 5



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EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

26th 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)

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

*Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab)

*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

*Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)

*Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

*Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)

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

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Alice Ferguson (Scottish Youth Parliament)

Richard Lochhead (Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science)

Catherine Mackie (Scottish Youth Parliament)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Roz Thomson

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 7 November 2018

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Interests

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning and a warm welcome to the 26th meeting in 2018 of the Education and Skills Committee. Our first item of business today follows a change in committee membership. I put on the record the committee's thanks to Mary Fee, who has been serving on the committee, and wish her the best in her new parliamentary duties. I welcome Iain Gray, who is joining us today, and invite him to declare any relevant interests.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Thank you, convener. I draw the committee's attention to my declaration of interests, which says that I chair the Hibernian Community Foundation. It delivers a range of educational and employability courses, often in partnership with education institutions, in particular Edinburgh College.

The Convener: Thank you and welcome to the committee.

Decisions on Taking Business in Private

10:01

The Convener: Under agenda item 2, is the committee content to take agenda items 6 and 7 in private?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Thank you. Is the committee content to take future reviews of evidence in our music tuition inquiry in private?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Thank you.

Subordinate Legislation

Assigned Colleges (University of the Highlands and Islands) Order 2018 [Draft]

10:01

The Convener: Next we will consider a piece of subordinate legislation that is subject to the affirmative procedure. There will be two agenda items on the draft order. First, the committee will have an opportunity to ask the minister questions, and I welcome Richard Lochhead to the committee, along with his officials: James Boyce, head of the college policy team, and Gemma Grant, solicitor to the Scottish Government. The details of the draft order are included in paper 1.

I invite the minister to make an opening statement.

The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Richard Lochhead): Good morning, convener and committee members. It is fine to be back again in a different capacity. I congratulate the new members of the committee who are at their first meeting today. I speak from experience when I say that it is a good committee.

I look forward to engaging with the committee in the weeks and months ahead in my new role as Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science. I will be delighted to return in the near future to discuss with the committee any of the big issues on the agenda. Today I am here to discuss a relatively technical issue, but I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the committee about the draft Assigned Colleges (University of the Highlands and Islands) Order 2018, which assigns Argyll College to the regional strategic body for the Highlands and Islands region—the University of the Highlands and Islands.

Argyll College, which is one of the smaller colleges in Scotland, provides tertiary education across 11 centres throughout Argyll and the islands, serving a population of approximately 88,000 people. In the Highlands and Islands region, eight colleges are already assigned to UHI. Argyll College was not assigned to it in 2014 as the college did not meet what are known as the fundable body criteria under the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005. The decision was made after the determination by the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council in April 2014. However, Argyll College is already represented on UHI's further education regional board and it is an academic partner of UHI. In practical terms, all that the assignation will

do is to change the route by which funding is distributed to the college.

Until now, North Highland College has contracted with Argyll College for the provision of further education in the Argyll region. North Highland College, which is already assigned to UHI, has been responsible for assuring the delivery of quality fundable further education by Argyll College. After the assignation takes place, funding to Argyll College will instead go from the Scottish funding council to UHI and from UHI to Argyll College as part of its distribution of the further education funding for the region.

Before Argyll College can be assigned to UHI, the Scottish funding council must be satisfied that the college complies with the fundable body criteria under the 2005 act. They ensure that a college has adequate provisions in place to deal with its governance and management, as well as financial accountability and quality control mechanisms.

Between 2014 and 2018, Argyll College was assessed by Education Scotland, the Scottish funding council and UHI's internal audit service. All outstanding recommendations from earlier assessments have now been addressed. On 29 March 2018, the Scottish funding council wrote to my predecessor proposing the assignation of Argyll College to UHI as it was satisfied that the college now meets all the fundable body criteria that are set out in the 2005 act. My public consultation was published on 28 May and closed on 25 June, and 100 per cent of responses supported the proposal to assign Argyll College to UHI.

In summary, the assignation is strongly supported by the sector and it will empower the college to take accountability of its governance and funding under the oversight of UHI as the regional strategic body. I am confident that the benefits that this will bring to the learners, employers and communities that the college serves will enable it to move forward. I am happy to take questions from the committee.

The Convener: Thank you. Are there any questions from members?

Members: No.

The Convener: In that case, we move to agenda item 4, which is the formal debate on motion S5M-14432, in the name of the minister.

Motion moved,

That the Education and Skills Committee recommends that the draft Assigned Colleges (University of the Highlands and Islands) Order 2018 [draft] be approved.—
[Richard Lochhead]

Motion agreed to.

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

Richard Lochhead: Thank you. I take it that that will be the usual process when I appear before the committee in future. [*Laughter.*] Thank you for starting as we mean to go on. I appreciate that.

The Convener: I hope that you do not regret your offer. I am sure that there will be plenty of opportunities when we want to have you before us again. Thank you.

The committee must report to Parliament on the draft order. Are members content for me as convener to sign off the report?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Thank you. I suspend the meeting for a few minutes to allow witnesses to change over.

10:07

Meeting suspended.

10:09

On resuming—

Music Tuition in Schools Inquiry

The Convener: We move on to agenda item 5. This is the first week of our inquiry into music tuition in schools, and we are starting by hearing some experiences and perspectives, particularly from young people. Earlier this morning, we had an informal session with a number of young people and interested stakeholders in order to hear their experiences, and we are glad to welcome two of the young people to the table to provide formal evidence. I welcome Catherine Mackie, member of the Scottish Youth Parliament for Glasgow Southside, and Alice Ferguson, member of the Scottish Youth Parliament for Linlithgow.

The questions on which the informal session was based are in paper 2.

I invite Alice and Catherine to say a little about their experiences of music tuition at school and the experiences of their peers and indeed their constituents, as MSYPs.

Alice Ferguson (Scottish Youth Parliament): Hi, everyone. As Clare Adamson said, I am the MSYP for the Linlithgow constituency. I am also a young person who participates in the instrumental service that West Lothian Council offers, and I started a campaign last year after the free service was under threat from West Lothian Council budget cuts. The campaign was called WLmusic and it invited young people across West Lothian to express what they thought about the service and why they would like to see it saved.

It was extremely moving, as the comments from young people, from primary age to secondary age, were so powerful. It was clear that young people had so much that they wanted to say to save the service. One young person said:

“You will deny thousands of young people in West Lothian the opportunity to develop their musical talents, talents that at this point they may not even know they have.”

As we said in the informal session, people do not learn only how to play an instrument. They learn so many skills that they can take with them through life. By introducing a charge for the instrumental service, you are denying young people that opportunity, depending on how much money they have, which should not be the case. West Lothian has gone from having a free service to charging. It is unfair, and it is not right to deny young people the opportunities.

As I said, I have not just developed skills in playing the trumpet. I play the trumpet and I have done my grade 8 exams, but I have also made

new friends through music and through the extracurricular activities that it provides. I have become more resilient, confident and open minded in everything that I do. From a mental health point of view, I have benefited from the creativity, and feeling that I am part of a community—for example, part of a band—is really good for my mental health.

The one-to-one teaching that I have had from my music teacher is something that we do not get in any other class. Such teaching has allowed pupils to establish relationships of trust, continuity and security that they often struggle to find in teachers or peers.

I hope that my comments have demonstrated that music is not just about playing an instrument but is also about the skills that people build, which they can take through life.

Catherine Mackie (Scottish Youth Parliament): Hi. I am the MSYP for Glasgow Southside. I echo Alice Ferguson's points. I learned the violin from primary 4 up until my fifth year at school and it allowed me to sit national 5 and higher music, which was fantastic for me. To learn the violin did not just provide me with the skill of playing the violin and the ability to say to people, "I can play the violin", it also allowed me to join an orchestra and the strings group in the school and to make new friends.

I am now at university, and outwith my studies I am learning the saxophone. That one-on-one tuition with my teacher, Ms Freeland, has been invaluable. If I had not learned how to play the violin and the saxophone, I would not have been able to sit national 5 or higher music because, as part of those qualifications, pupils have to play two instruments for their exam, or play one instrument and sing. I cannot sing to save my life, so that was not an opinion. It had to be the violin and the saxophone.

If you do not make music tuition free for all young people, how are they going to be able to do their national 5 or higher music? It will affect so many of my Glasgow Southside constituents. Many of them do not have the funds to learn how to play an instrument. If people cannot do that, who knows what potential talent we could miss out on? We could have the next Bach or the next Nicola Benedetti in our schools.

You really should not cut music tuition. I have learned a lot of skills and made a lot of friends through music, and even general knowledge about music is very handy. It is definitely a big issue for my constituents in Glasgow Southside. Music tuition is not something that should be cut. The benefits of music far outweigh any financial costs of music tuition.

10:15

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I was interested in what Catherine Mackie said about qualifications. As she rightly said, this is about much more than qualifications, although she mentioned exams. When I was a minister, we set up a working group on instrumental music tuition. One of that group's findings was that, whatever else local authorities around the country did about instrumental music tuition, they should not charge for lessons that led up to a Scottish Qualifications Authority qualification. What is your experience of that? Do you think that people have to pay to get SQA qualifications in music-related subjects?

Catherine Mackie: I went to Craigholme school and do not have experience of a state school. If a person was going to do national 5 music or higher music, the tuition was free if they sat the keyboard or vocal exam—in fact, they could get both free. If the person did keyboard music, they would get tuition from their music teacher as normal; he would also teach them singing. However, if they wanted to play any other instrument—such as the saxophone, the cello, the ukulele or the clarinet—they would have to pay, because a specialist teacher would come in. I am not 100 per cent sure what the scenario is for other schools, but people can still get free tuition for some instruments.

It should not be the case that some instrument tuition for SQA qualifications is free whereas other tuition is not. People getting keyboard tuition for free for SQA exams but not violin tuition is bad. That would put people off sitting national 5 or higher music exams, and maybe the advanced higher.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Good morning. I thank both of you for your excellent opening statements.

Can you give us an idea of how many of your friends might have been put off taking up music because of the potential costs involved in playing some instruments? What impact is that having on people whom you know?

Alice Ferguson: I am in the school band, and I watched the transition from the free service to what happened after the charges were implemented. The band is just not the same; there are not as many people in it. People almost feel that they have to be in it now because they pay, whereas before people chose to be in it and they did that for themselves rather than because their parents told them that they had to because they pay £382 a year. It is really sad to lose that spirit and that people have lost the feeling that they are doing something for themselves and not because they have to.

A lot of my friends have now dropped out of music because they cannot afford it. That is

ridiculous. Why should somebody be denied the opportunity to play something and do something that they want to do just because they cannot afford it? It is really sad and a shame that some people do not get that opportunity. When your friends watch you being able to go on to play the trumpet and be in a band and they are not able to do that, you feel rubbish.

Catherine Mackie: My response is slightly different. I am at Glasgow Caledonian University, and we are not affected in quite the same way. I am studying for a degree in social sciences. If a person wants to do music, it is a case of doing it outwith the university. I have noticed that there is a free music society at the university to help students to further their musical talents from school.

Some of my new university friends have talked to me about not being denied music education at school outright; it was more a case of the costs putting them off. That seems to be an absolute shame to me. It makes me quite upset to think that a girl from Milngavie could not learn how to play the violin because of the costs involved and because she did not want to burden her parents financially. Think about it. She could have ended up being fantastic. She could have potentially got a grade 8 in violin. She could have been the next child prodigy. However, she could not do that because of the costs.

There have been other experiences. Obviously, you meet a broader range of people at university. I have become friends with a lot more people who have said that they would have loved to have taken music at school, but they missed out because of financial barriers.

It is imperative that music is free for everyone. Cost should not be a barrier. We cannot put a price on music. Music is a fantastic experience, and people should not have to pay for music tuition.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): A number of people who submitted written evidence to us were keen to highlight that those who benefit most from free music tuition often have family backgrounds in which they would not necessarily have a range of other opportunities if they had to pay for them. Most obviously, that is because of family income.

Alice Ferguson mentioned the changes that she has seen in her school band and the changes across West Lothian. She said that people have not been able to continue with their music. Is there a common thread there? Have people from backgrounds in which the family has a lower income been the most likely not to continue with their music?

Alice Ferguson: Yes. It is the privileged who get to do music now. That is going back to Victorian times. Only the elite get violin tuition and get to do music. The council wants to reduce inequality, but it is increasing inequality by charging for music. There are opportunities to go to music camp, play in concerts, learn an instrument and do grade exams for people who can afford them, but people who do not qualify for school meals but cannot necessarily afford to pay £300, £500 or £600 a year are not able to get tuition. That has a negative impact on those young people, and that is increasing as opposed to reducing inequality. As I keep saying, that is a shame. It is not right that the privileged are the ones who get to do music and that the ones who cannot afford to do music do not do it.

The Convener: Does Catherine Mackie want to come in on that issue?

Catherine Mackie: Alice Ferguson covered everything very well, so I am quite happy to move on to other questions.

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): Good morning to you both. I will pick up on a couple of things that you both mentioned. Alice, you spoke about the charge being £382 a year. What does that charge cover? Is it all your tuition and rental of the musical instrument? How does it work?

Alice Ferguson: Yes, it is £382 for a year's tuition. That covers one 25-minute lesson a week. Sometimes it is one-to-one teaching but sometimes, because of the reduced numbers, it has to be six to 10 pupils because the teacher is travelling. The charge also covers a band, an orchestra or an ensemble for an hour. The cost works out at roughly £10 for a 25-minute lesson, which people can get cheaper if they go private. Ten pounds would get 30 minutes of one-to-one private tuition, so why are people paying £10 for a 25-minute lesson with maybe six other people? The charge is £382 in West Lothian. In Clackmannanshire—we were talking about it—it costs over £500 for a pupil to have music tuition. In West Lothian, £10 for 25 minutes of playing an instrument is absurd.

Jenny Gilruth: That is helpful. Thank you. Catherine, you mentioned that you were offered the violin in primary 4—is that correct?

Catherine Mackie: Yes.

Jenny Gilruth: How did that come about? Were you identified as a pupil in your class? How did you get that offer? Maybe, Alice, you can talk about how you were first offered the opportunity to play a musical instrument and when that came about in your education.

Catherine Mackie: I could have started learning to play the violin in primary 2, but I never fancied trying an instrument until a night that the school held when every music teacher came and had their instrument on show. You could go up and try each one to see if you fancied learning to play an instrument, so I went around all of them—little P4 me—very enthusiastically.

The music teacher for violin, Mrs Barron, was there and I tried out a violin. I immediately loved it. It was not so much that I was gifted—my poor parents had to listen to me practising—as that I had an absolute love for it compared to all the other instruments. I thought they were okay but that I would much rather play the violin.

Jenny Gilruth: You say that Mrs Barron was your music teacher.

Catherine Mackie: She was my violin teacher—she specialised in the violin. She would come in once a week, teach all her pupils and that would be it.

Jenny Gilruth: There was a music evening when you were all offered the opportunity to try different instruments.

Catherine Mackie: Yes. All pupils were invited to come along and try any instrument they wanted to see if they fancied taking up music.

Jenny Gilruth: Alice, what about your experiences?

Alice Ferguson: In around primary 5, I think, we were all made to fill out a form. I do not know whether it was an assessment. It was not a test, as such, but it assigned us to either strings or brass. We were then given the opportunity, depending on how compatible we were, to take up strings or brass. That continued from P5 to P7. In secondary 1, the opportunity extended to woodwind and guitar. That is how it came about.

Jenny Gilruth: When you were in primary school, was it a music specialist, not your class teacher, who delivered that tuition?

Alice Ferguson: Yes, it was a music specialist.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Alice, as far as you are aware, in your school, are there any other charges of any sort for any other subject area or additional tuition, or is it just music that has this problem?

Alice Ferguson: As far as I know, it is just music. The papers that I read said—I think—that music is the only subject that has charges for completing the exam. Someone said in my WLMusic campaign:

“I find it unfair how when we are low on money music and art get thrown away.”

You would never get charged to do maths—you just would not. Why are science, technology, engineering and maths subjects apparently more valued than music and creative subjects? It is strange that someone has to pay hundreds of pounds to sit music exams or get instrumental tuition but can sit science exams free.

Liz Smith: Your campaign has been very successful. Can you tell us a bit about that campaign, about the responses that you have had and about what you hope to achieve?

Alice Ferguson: The campaign ran for a couple of months at about this time last year. Young people were given a card to hold up, saying why the West Lothian instrumental service should be saved. That was when the service was under threat of getting completely scrapped. Young people from primary to secondary shared their experiences and said why they wanted the service to be retained. They said:

“It helps improve my co-ordination”

and

“It allows me to participate in something educational, creative and rewarding that I would never normally have the chance to experience.”

They also said:

“Music should be accessible to everybody, not just the privileged”

and

“Music opens doors for us. Music makes you smart.”

Lots of responses were posted on social media. People were re-tweeting comments, talking about the issue and sharing their experiences. It was a great way of getting across, with a personal touch, what the instrumental service is about. It was really great to hear from young people about all those experiences.

Liz Smith: Did you get any response from the local authority to that campaign? Have you had any official responses to it?

Alice Ferguson: I have not had any official responses, but the campaign definitely reached a lot of the councillors and I think it played a part in the service being retained.

Liz Smith: Do you feel that there is quite strong public support for what you are achieving?

Alice Ferguson: Yes, definitely.

Liz Smith: That is good to hear. Thank you.

10:30

Iain Gray: I want to ask a bit more about choice of instrument. You both talked a little bit about that when you talked about how you started, but I have a specific question for Alice about West Lothian.

I think I am right in saying—if I am not, you will correct me—that, initially, the council proposed to keep tuition free but to restrict it to brass only. Following the campaign and the response from the public, the council took the alternative path of keeping tuition wider but charging for it. How do you feel about that? I understand that you would like all tuition to be free, but there was a choice between keeping it free but very restricted or starting to charge but keeping it wider? How do you feel about that choice? Which was better?

Alice Ferguson: As you say, initially, the council proposed to cut 50 per cent of the service. I believe that just brass, woodwind and piping tuition would have remained free. My campaign was focused very much on the fact that music should be available to everybody and that music tuition should be free, otherwise that would be promoting inequality. That is what I was primarily campaigning for. West Lothian has had a free service for goodness knows how long and then, suddenly, the council is charging £382 a pupil. That is not what I was after or what lots of my constituents were after.

Iain Gray: I understand that, but how wide a choice of instruments did you feel you had? Did you feel that you could learn any instrument, or did you feel that your choice was restricted?

Alice Ferguson: I certainly think that, now that the charges have been implemented, the whole thing has become far more restricted and far less about what music is about. The service is far more restricted and not as good.

Iain Gray: You learn trumpet, do you not?

Alice Ferguson: Yes.

Iain Gray: One option would have been for trumpet tuition to remain free while some other instrument tuition disappeared. I am asking whether you think that would have been better than what has happened, which is that there is now a charge for everything.

Alice Ferguson: The preferable outcome would have been free tuition for every instrument, but I know that the cuts had to be made. Ideally, everything would have remained free, but charges have now been implemented across instrumental tuition, which has negatively impacted the service.

Iain Gray: When you started, how wide a choice did you both have of the instrument that you would learn? Do you feel you had the chance but it had to be trumpet or violin? Did you have a wide choice of instruments to learn?

Alice Ferguson: It was definitely nice to have the wider choice of violin or trumpet, but what was far more appealing was the opportunity to be taught how to play it and to be part of a band or ensemble, which is an opportunity that we had

never had in primary school. Being given a door that opened on to a world of music and skill building was a far greater opportunity than being able to pick between two instruments.

Iain Gray: Catherine, it sounds as though you got a choice of what instrument you would learn.

Catherine Mackie: Yes, I definitely did, but I my answer is going to be a bit different because I went to Craigholme school, not a state school. I had a choice, but someone who goes to a private school will probably be able to afford the tuition for any instrument. I had the opportunity to choose any instrument that I wanted, but that would not have been the case if I had been at a state school.

The fact that my experience was absolutely fine does not mean that people who are struggling financially would manage the charges. I still think that tuition should be completely free for everyone in state schools. It just seems wrong to charge for it. As Alice said, maths, English and even drama are free, so why is music always the first to go on the chopping block? It seems wrong to make people pay for it when it used to be free.

Iain Gray: In a lot of systems, people who are studying music as a subject do not pay; the charge is only for those who receive instrumental tuition outside that or who play in a band. Do you think that is okay?

Catherine Mackie: I acknowledge that that is an improvement and that someone could still learn a musical instrument, but it seems a bit restrictive in that they would have to take music as a qualification. What if someone wanted to learn music for the benefits to their mental health, to make new friends in an orchestra and to have that playing experience?

Realistically, not everyone will want to study for national 5 music. It is not just about performing; it is also quite theoretical. I feel that it is a bit unfair to force—or near enough force—people to sit a national qualification in music when they might not feel comfortable sitting the theory exam as well. That would be a barrier.

The best solution would be to keep music tuition free for everyone. The benefits are clear: your mental health improves and you end up with more friends if you join a band or orchestra. Heck, even your grades can improve. There are studies showing that people who study music do far better in all their other subjects as well. The clear solution seems to be to keep music tuition free for everyone.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): Students who want to do national 5 or higher need to do an instrument, or two instruments, but people are being restricted in their choices. People who want to be violin specialists for their higher music

cannot do that because there is a charge for it. I am interested to hear your sense of how common that is.

More generally, has the Scottish Youth Parliament done work to identify not just what is happening in West Lothian and Glasgow but more widely? How are local authorities responding to the challenge? Is what has happened in West Lothian common in the experience of young people?

Alice Ferguson: The Scottish Youth Parliament, as most of you are aware, is the democratically elected voice of Scotland's young people. We have a unique democratic mandate to represent the views of young people aged 12 to 25 across Scotland. The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that music tuition should be free for all secondary school pupils and that local government should strive to implement that by 2021. That policy was passed in 2015 and was renewed in August this year. That shows that young people want music tuition to remain free. That is what is wanted across Scotland, as the Scottish Youth Parliament has identified. That is what we hope will happen.

Johann Lamont: I accept that the Youth Parliament has done that, and I am persuaded by the whole argument around the importance of music and about music tuition in terms of qualifications, as well. To what extent is that not just a policy statement by the Scottish Youth Parliament? What work have you done on what is happening in other areas? Obviously in your campaign you have highlighted what has happened in West Lothian. Do you know what the experience is in other local authorities? Is West Lothian an extreme case or is it an average case of what is happening?

Catherine Mackie: Could you please repeat the question? I am sorry, I did not quite grasp it.

Johann Lamont: Yes. I can see the Scottish Youth Parliament has taken a policy position to believe in free tuition, which is driven by the experiences of some young people, for example in West Lothian, which has started to charge. Do you know from other elected representatives in the Scottish Youth Parliament whether that is happening in other parts of Scotland?

Catherine Mackie: I cannot speak on behalf of all local authorities because I am Glasgow-based. I cannot imagine that West Lothian is the only one. I remember from Alice Ferguson's sponsored campaign that it definitely appeared that other local authority areas were taking a massive interest in the subject. Because they were taking such big interest, those other local authorities would also be facing the problem. I definitely do not think that it is just West Lothian that is

experiencing the problem. I am pretty sure that Glasgow is facing it as well. That might not be on quite as extreme a scale as West Lothian—the West Lothian situation is very bad, according to Alice Ferguson. I definitely think that all local authorities are to some extent struggling with music tuition.

Johann Lamont: I will ask a last question about the West Lothian situation. Is there any provision by which families who have low income can pay less? When charges were being increased for everybody, was any distinction made for families on low incomes so that they could pay less?

Alice Ferguson: People who receive free school meals get free tuition. The people in the middle will miss out most—the people who do not earn the most and who are just squeezing by. They have to ask what music tuition will compromise. It will be football lessons and going on school trips, for example. People who cannot afford to pay for music tuition need it most—they need the continuity, the trust and the skill building of music tuition. They will miss out most.

To go back to Johann Lamont's other question, I know that Clackmannanshire Council has doubled its charges in the past year.

The idea that music is not valued across Scotland is the big point. In West Lothian we are trying to get across that music and instrument tuition are just as important as STEM subjects, if not more so, in building skills. The attitude needs to change: cutting budgets for instrumental services is working backwards. It is telling people that they cannot build the skills that music builds and that music is not an option. It is all about STEM subjects and academics; it is not about music and creativity. The campaign was trying to put across that music is important, and that it builds more skills, generally speaking, than some academic subjects.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): I agree with a lot of what you have said. My youngest son certainly benefited from free music tuition. He learned keyboards and guitar, and that has stood him in good stead since he left school.

There was a survey by Connect—formerly the Scottish Parent Teacher Council—from which I will mention a comment. What is your reaction to the following?

"However, a few individuals made comments that they were willing to pay if money goes to help those who cannot afford tuition. 'As a high earner, I do not believe my children should receive tuition for free and would be happy to pay if this subsidised lessons for others'."

Alice Ferguson: My view is what I said earlier. There is a spectrum. You have people who do not earn much and you have people who earn a lot,

and you have the people in the middle who, generally speaking, would not be given extra help. Those people will miss out—the people who get by to live a happy life—well, everyone lives happily. Those are the people who will be disadvantaged because they are not viewed as needing help. They will have to make compromises in other things in order to pay for music tuition. The message is that tuition should be free for everybody; that no matter who you are or what financial background you come from, you should be able to get instrumental tuition for free. Dividing tuition up according to how much people earn and drawing lines that say that some people qualify for free tuition but others do not promotes inequality.

Gordon MacDonald: Of the 32 local authorities, 23 have been charging for a number of years, although some charge for hire of instruments rather than for music tuition. If there were to be a charge for the instrument—a hire fee—as opposed to there being no music tuition, would that be more acceptable or would you prefer that it was all free?

10:45

Alice Ferguson: It all being free is the way to go. That is my constituents' view, as well. WLmusic has showed that people want it to be free. The benefits are colossal.

Rona Mackay: How do your teachers feel about the situation? Have any of them said anything directly to you? You do not need to name them, obviously.

Alice Ferguson: I know that teachers feel very upset about taking instruments from pupils who can afford to do lessons but cannot afford to buy their own instruments, and about watching pupils go to concerts when their parents cannot afford to pay for tickets to the concert because they are paying for tuition. For a teacher, it must be heartbreaking to watch pupils whom you have taken through from primary 5 to S4 dropping out because they cannot afford to continue. That is not why people go into the teaching profession. I know that teachers have been really upset by the situation—by having, just because the parents or carers cannot afford to pay, to take away something that young people value.

The Convener: There are no further questions. I thank Alice Ferguson and Catherine Mackie for coming along this morning. You picked up on many of the themes from the informal session—particularly the benefits for educational achievement and for mental health and social skills, which are very important.

Hidden costs was another theme from this morning. It is not just about paying for tuition: access to instruments and opportunities to

participate in orchestras and so on might bring additional costs. That has all been covered. Thank you both very much for your attendance.

10:47

Meeting continued in private until 11:28.

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