

EDUCATION IN THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

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PREAMBLE

This paper follows on from the previous bulletin (Redford 2008), which covered the business of the Parliament's Education Committee between September 2007 and January 2008. The bulletin covers the education and lifelong learning remit of the Education Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee, from February to September 2008 of the third session of the Parliament (2007 - 2011).

FEBRUARY 2008 – SEPTEMBER 2008

The Education Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee had the following members during this period: Karen Whitefield (Convenor), Rob Gibson (Deputy Convenor), Aileen Campbell, Ken Macintosh, Christina McKelvie, Mary Mulligan, Margaret Smith and Elizabeth Smith. Full records of the committee meetings, including transcripts of proceedings and all committee papers can be found on the Scottish Parliament website at:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/ellc/meetings.htm>

The major areas addressed during this period were *Curriculum for Excellence* and the School Estate. This was part of the information gathering process agreed by the committee at its' away day in the summer of 2007, to inform their future work programme. Committee meetings considered a wide range of subordinate legislation in this period, including Individual Learning Accounts, the funding structure of the Scottish Agricultural College, the Protection of Children, Nutritional Advice in Schools, Student Loans and Graduate Endowment regulations. They addressed petitions on class sizes and foreign language learning in schools. Towards the summer recess they agreed their approach to the budget and received an annual report from the Commissioner for Children.

CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE

At their meetings on 27 February and 5 March 2008 the Committee took evidence on *Curriculum for Excellence* from the following witnesses:

Date of Committee	Witnesses
27 February 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Alison Coull, <i>Curriculum Division, Schools Directorate</i>Chris McLroy, <i>HMIE</i>Alan Armstrong, <i>Learning and Teaching Scotland</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Christine Carlin, <i>Assessment and Skills Division, Schools Directorate</i>Gill Stewart, <i>Scottish Qualifications Authority</i>
5 March 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none">David Cameron, <i>Association of Directors of Education in Scotland</i>Jane Liddell, <i>North Lanarkshire Council</i>Linda Kinney, <i>Stirling Council</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Larry Flanagan, <i>The Educational Institute of Scotland</i>Brian Cooklin, <i>Headteachers' Association of Scotland</i>Gordon Smith, <i>Association of Headteacher and Deputies in Scotland</i>

The papers provided to support the meeting on the 5 March 2008 included written submissions from David Cameron, Jane Liddell, Linda Kinney, The Educational Institute of Scotland and the Headteachers' Association of Scotland (ELLC/S3/08/6/1). The committee was also provided with a SPICe briefing paper, *The School Curriculum – Proposals for Change* (ELLC/S3/08/5/A). This paper provided the committee with an overview of the existing school curriculum, the 3- 18 review and the changes proposed in *Curriculum for Excellence*.

Alison Coull opened the discussion with an explanation of her role in the Curriculum Division and the importance of *Curriculum for Excellence*:

We are talking about the biggest change in Scottish education for a generation: about how everything that happens in schools, colleges and pre-school centres should be aimed at the national aspiration for young people. That means that the programme encompasses the work that we are doing on the curriculum, . . . on continuing professional development, initial teacher education, ensuring that teachers have professional confidence to exploit the new freedoms that the curriculum arrangements will give them, changes in the way that learning is assessed, changes in the way young people experience the qualifications framework, and changes in the accountability frameworks. (Coull, 27.02.08, Col 650)

Elizabeth Smith began the questions by asking about the implementation timescale, following the publication of the draft outcomes. Alison Coull replied that the curriculum would not be implemented, 'as such' (Coull, 27.02.08, Col 651) because it would be agreed as feedback was taken on individual areas and then considered across the curriculum areas. Elizabeth Smith then expressed her concern about the slow rate of progress in secondary schools. Alison Coull agreed that it had been slow and suggested that this was related to the influence of the qualifications framework. Aileen Campbell then asked about the reactions from teachers to *Curriculum for Excellence*. Chris McIlroy replied that the initial work on the four capacities had been well received. Jeremy Purvis then asked how *Curriculum for Excellence* would be 'judged' (Purvis, 27.02.08, Col 657) as a whole. Alison Coull replied that one indicator would be the data on destinations of school leavers, which was part of the concordat agreed between the Government and COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities). Chris McIlroy referred to the report *Improving Scottish Education* (HMIE 2006) which, 'gives us a benchmark' and said that future reports, 'will act as signposts of progress' (McIlroy, 27.02.08, Col 657). Jeremy Purvis went on to ask about the integration of existing policies such as Health Promoting Schools with *Curriculum for Excellence*. Alison Coull replied that the curriculum was overarching and would provide teachers with, 'professional freedom in the way an outcome is reached' (Coull, 27.02.08 Col 658). In reply to a question from Mary Mulligan about support for teachers to deliver the new curriculum Alison Coull answered that they were working with teacher training institutions and through the National CPD team. Alan Armstrong added that Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) was collecting examples of good practice which would be available online and Chris McIlroy highlighted a series inputs at national conferences. Shirley-Anne Somerville asked about the main challenges facing the programme, to which Alison Coull replied:

the cultural change from a system that has been used to quite a prescriptive approach and is being given new freedoms... We have a new team located within the Scottish Government. It is a joint team with COSLA... and will work to support local authorities and will try to pick up and support the change process. (Coull, 27.02.08 Col 664)

Mary Mulligan raised issues of the content of the three to five curriculum within *Curriculum for Excellence* and private sector provision. Ken McIntosh asked about the provision for vulnerable young people and engagement with parents. He was particularly concerned about what secondary schools would look like:

Do you think that secondary schools will look more like primary schools? Will they be organised along those lines, with a more open teaching approach? Alternatively, will we still have a system in which a history teacher teaches history, a maths teacher teaches maths, a geography teacher teaches geography and pupils choose which subjects to take when they are 13 or 14? (Macintosh, 27.02.08 Col, 668)

In reply, Alison Coull talked of exciting, relevant subject teaching with teachers making connections across subject areas: 'there is a range of rich opportunities for teachers to look across the curriculum for connections the piece and work collaboratively' (Coull, 27.02.08, Col 669). The committee pursued the issue of change with Ken McIntosh pointing out the concern felt by parents and teachers - 'the lack of clarity is quite unsettling' (Macintosh, 27.02.08, Col 669). In reply Alison Coull said that it was expected that subject teaching would 'have a very strong role in the new curriculum' (Coull, 27.02.08, Col 670). Alan Armstrong then explained the ways in which LTS were talking to pupils about the new curriculum.

The discussion with members of the second panel opened with Christine Carlin outlining the work done to link the curriculum with skills for life and skills for work, consideration of assessment prior to national qualifications and a review of national qualifications:

The content of national qualifications at all levels will have to be reviewed to ensure that it reflects the values, purposes and principles of the curriculum for excellence and that qualifications follow the curriculum. (Carlin, 27.02.08, Col 675)

The convener first asked about the place of vocational education within *Curriculum for Excellence* in relation to the issue raised in the OECD report (OECD 2008) where some local authorities and schools used Further Education colleges to deliver vocational education. Christine Carlin replied that was exactly what the curriculum was about, 'about what happens wherever young people are learning' (Carlin, 27.02.08, Col 677). She described the development of skills for work courses, which are available for all local authorities and development work with local employers in some areas. Christina McKelvie raised the issue of parity between vocational and academic courses in schools, which Christine Carlin referred back to the time needed to change cultures in schools. Elizabeth Smith followed this with a question about the examination structure, particularly the proposed introduction of a baccalaureate and why it should only be available for science and modern languages. Christine Carlin replied that aim of the baccalaureate was to bring existing qualifications together and that ministers had requested these areas to be considered first. The session ended with a question from Mary Mulligan about the future direction of assessment. In her reply Gill Stewart made the point that a wider range of assessment strategies could be used, although examinations are still needed. It was hoped to develop a wider range of assessments to support the learner. Christine Carlin added, 'we are looking at the entire structure of what is done between three and 18 and we are focusing on SCQF levels 4 and 5 in particular' (Carlin, 27.02.08, Col 686).

The committee meeting on the 5th of March 2008 heard from two further panels of witnesses (ELLC/S3/08/6/M). In his opening statement to the committee David Cameron commented on the general concern about the pace and clarity of the development:

We need to be somewhat clearer about what the essential building blocks are for progression and development in the curriculum; the outcomes alone will not cover all of that. People are looking for that greater definition. (Cameron, 05.03.08, Col 697)

The convener welcomed his comments and asked about the engagement of teachers, parents and young people with the new curriculum. In his reply David Cameron talked about teachers working under Annex B of *A Teaching Agreement for the 21st Century* (SEED 2001) as an extended professional, 'who has responsibility not only for the delivery of education to classes but for the pastoral care and development of pupils and for curriculum development' (Cameron, 05.03.08, Col 699). He felt that once the issues of clarity and direction were addressed then it would be easier to involve young people and their parents in the development. Linda Kinney and Jane Liddell went on to outline some of the ways in which Stirling and North Lanarkshire Council have engaged directly with teachers and headteachers to take forward the curriculum (ELLC/S3/08/6/1). Elizabeth Smith followed this with a question about changes to national assessment. David Cameron replied that his own view was that the nature of the assessments needed to change so that young people knew that they were successful learners, with the subject setting the context for assessment. Ken Macintosh then asked about possible changes to the existing examination structure and both Linda Kinney and Jane Liddell answered by giving the example of the techniques used in *Assessment is for Learning* and the way that had developed in schools. He followed this with a question about parents and how would they see their child's progression within a new system. All three panel members talked about working closely with parents and involving them directly in their child's progress. The committee moved on to ask about the practical issues of implementation in response to which David Cameron returned to his initial point about the need for clarity about the building blocks of the content of the curriculum. Rob Gibson followed this with a question about where the 'glue' would come from to bring together, 'lots of differing approaches in local authorities, schools, classes and at the level of individual pupils' (Gibson, 05.03.08, Col 715). David Cameron then said that he had suggested this to the management group for *Curriculum for Excellence*, but that this was a difficulty for the civil servants on the group because of their working relationship with ministers. It was also difficult for HMIE who would then be inspecting their own advice and that there was, 'a lack of clarity' (Cameron, 05.03.08, Col 716) about the role of LTS. He concluded by pointing out that the only other members of the group were the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and himself as a Local Authority representative.

Christina McKelvie then asked about communication between the sectors and the discussion moved on as Jane Liddell described how North Lanarkshire communicated across and between nursery, primary and secondary schools in her authority. David Cameron linked his answer to the committee title and suggested that there was a need to look at lifelong learning:

We cannot address those challenges on our own as schools, teachers or education services. Preparing young people for a future that we do not know and do not understand and for a present that we are struggling to adapt to ourselves will not be achieved by the efforts of schools and teachers alone. (Cameron, 05.03.08, Col 719)

The committee concluded this discussion with further questions about vocational opportunities and the support available for headteachers to take the new curriculum forward.

The final panel of witnesses returned to many of the issues raised in the earlier committee discussions. Larry Flanagan began by reiterating the concern of teachers

about their lack of engagement with the curriculum and particular concerns in secondary schools about changes to assessment structures. Brian Cooklin identified the concern of headteachers about a lack of, ‘national leadership and communication with all users’ (Cooklin, 05.03.08, Col 730). Gordon Smith was most concerned about the lack of clarity for schools, who were not sure what was happening. The convener welcomed their remarks and asked what each organisation would recommend to ensure that their members became more involved in the development of the curriculum. Larry Flanagan made the point that development work varied between local authorities and Brian Cooklin identified the need for clear leadership of the development. ‘We need the curriculum for excellence explained and sold around the country’ (Cooke, 05.03.08, Col 735). The committee moved on to discuss resource development to support the curriculum, with all three witnesses returning to the issue of the gap between the values of the curriculum and what it will look like in practice. The meeting ended with a discussion about possible changes to assessment and the need to support teachers and develop confidence in *Curriculum for Excellence*.

SCHOOLS ESTATE

At their meetings on 16 and 23 April 2008 the Committee took evidence on the School Estate from the following witnesses:

Date of Committee	Witnesses
16 April 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caroline Gardner, Cathy MacGregor and Mark Diffley, <i>Audit Scotland</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jeff Hamilton and Alistair Farquhar, <i>The Moray Council</i> • Jim Logue and Murdo Maciver, <i>North Lanarkshire Council</i> • Lindsay Glasgow and Audrey Palmer, <i>The City of Edinburgh Council</i>
23 April 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul Stallan, <i>Architecture and Design Scotland</i> • Moira Niven, <i>Association of Directors of Education in Scotland</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Louise Wilson, <i>The Educational Institute of Scotland</i> • Ian Small, <i>YouthLink Scotland Working Group on Youth Work and Schools</i> • John McKnight, <i>Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland Group</i> • Judith Gillespie, <i>Scottish Parent Teacher Council</i>

The papers available for the committee prior to the meeting on the 16 April 2008 included written submissions from The Moray Council, North Lanarkshire Council and The City of Edinburgh Council (ELLC/S3/08/8/1); and a SPICe briefing paper (ELLC/S3/08/ 8/2). This was further supported by papers from each organisation represented on the witness panels on the meeting of 23 April 2008 (ELLC/S3/08/9/1).

The meeting on the 16 April 2008 began with a summary from Caroline Gardner of the 4 key findings from the Audit Scotland report, ‘Improving the School Estate’ published in March 2008. There was a need to review the Government strategy for the school estate, which was published in 2003, to review the targets set at that time, to

consider design and environmental issues and to consider demand in planning for the future. The convener opened the discussion with a question about targets, to which Caroline Gardner replied that they were on target to provide 400 new schools by 2009 but that one of the issues highlighted in the report was the difficulty of measuring progress, particularly with refurbishment of schools. Elizabeth Smith asked about funding mechanisms for new building, to which Mark Diffley replied that although that was not the focus of the report there was evidence of Local Authorities sharing good practice through a group of councils who have been through the contracting process to build new schools. Cathy MacGregor added that there was an organised schools estate network open to all 32 Local Authorities. Christina McKelvie also asked about funding, in reply to which Caroline Gardner reminded the committee that the focus of the report was on schools estate strategy and that the issue of financing future work was part of the Finance Committee's work programme. Jeremy Purvis and Rob Gibson were concerned about the ways in which councils had used the different funding mechanisms. To which Caroline Gardner replied:

Government support . . . has been available for PFI-funded projects. A deliberate decision was made to provide support to councils to cover 80 per cent of the capital costs and 40 per cent of the on-going revenue costs for PFI. That support was not available to schools that were funded through more conventional routes. That is why there have been so many PFI projects and so few conventionally funded ones. We do not know what the funding package will look like in the future. (Gardner, 16.04.08, Col 803)

Ken Macintosh asked what the pattern of building was across Scotland and the ways in which local authorities were expected to work across the next three years. Caroline Gardner replied that they only had data on the schools planned up to 2009 and that the Government had a policy decision to make about the way in which the development of the school estate was funded. The discussion moved onto the environmental issues facing school buildings and Mark Diffley drew the committee's attention to schools in the report which demonstrated environmental sustainability. Aileen Campbell asked about the poor design of some school buildings. In reply Caroline Gardner recognised that some aspects of design, such as corridor width, were poor. The major concerns of pupils and teachers were heating, ventilation and access to natural light. The discussion ended with a question about the variation across Scotland and the need for flexibility in future targets to meet local needs.

The discussion with the second panel opened with an invitation from the convener for the panel to give their perspectives on, 'the effectiveness of planning for the school estate and how they reconcile potential differences' (Whitefield, 16.04.08, Col 814). Each of the councils represented on the panel outlined the ways in which they carried out long term planning through 10 year plans for pupil numbers. The convener then asked how they built flexibility into the plans for new schools to meet future pupil numbers. Murdo Maciver gave a detailed response listing the space needed within the site, flexibility of internal accommodation and curricular change. Elizabeth Smith then asked about the processes each council used, 'to ensure that its resources for education are best spent' (Smith, 16.04.08, Col 817). Alistair Farquhar summed up the responses of the panel with a description of the way in which Moray Council took into account, 'the condition, suitability and sufficiency,' (Farquhar, 16.04.08, Col 818) of school buildings. Jeremy Purvis asked about the relationship of school closures to new building, to which Murdo Maciver replied that although it was economic decision closures often led to better facilities and, 'better facilities lead to better learning' (Maciver, 16.04.08, Col 823). The committee followed this with a discussion about the various funding mechanisms which councils had used to develop their school estate. Alistair Farquhar made the point that the size of Moray Council

meant that it could not raise large sums through prudential borrowing, while Jim Logue described how North Lanarkshire had, 'been creative in coming forward with a package that realised £250 million through prudential borrowing, rationalization and efficiency savings' (Logue, 16.04.08, Col 828). The panel concluded with a discussion about the design issues facing new school buildings.

The meeting on the 23 April opened with a question from Rob Gibson about the assessments of improvements to school buildings. In reply Paul Stallan talked about the review that Architecture and Design Scotland has made of over 50 new school buildings. This has been done to a design methodology checklist, which had identified that many schools are compromising on space standards. 'Many schools were overcellularised and could not respond dynamically to the diverse curriculum, which is what teachers were demanding' (Stallan, 23.04.08, Col 840). Moira Niven made the point that the local authorities had learned from the first of the new schools and that future buildings would be better. In reply to a question from Mary Mulligan, Paul Standish pointed out that buildings could meet the needs of changing school roles through simple plans and space standards:

such as the ability to open out the building—perhaps to have patio doors on to a terrace, a sliding wall between classrooms or one that opens out on to a corridor. Those ideas tend to be value engineered out of the process and we end up with a closed cell in which, sometimes, it is not even possible to open the window. (Stallan, 23.04.08, Col 841)

Christina McKelvie asked if design had an impact on social problems. In response Paul Stallan talked about the importance of the external areas and Moira Niven of the positive impact on children of school refurbishment. Ken Macintosh asked about space standards for school buildings, which Paul Stallan said varied between local authorities and should be standardised. The meeting then discussed the importance of design and sustainability in new schools buildings. Paul Stallan stressed the need for design leadership throughout the process and for that the evidence from their survey was, 'that once ownership passes from the team that has public ownership at heart to another, commercial party, control is lost' (Stallan, 23.04.08, Col 858). The panel ended with a question from Mary Mulligan about the rationalisation of existing buildings to which Moira Niven replied that each authority had to work within its own priorities.

The discussion with the second panel of witnesses began with a question from Rob Gibson about changing ideas of sustainability, which led witnesses to comment particularly on the changing community provision in school buildings. Alan Small urged the committee to consider its' remit for lifelong learning. Jeremy Purvis then asked what the panel thought about the suitability of new buildings and he experiences of users. This led to a broad discussion covering consultation, involvement in the planning process, maintenance issues and the complicated booking processes of some new provision. There was particular concern about the costs for many small voluntary organisations and local groups in using new school buildings.

PANJABI LANGUAGE EXAMINATION

At their meeting on the 5th of March the committee discussed correspondence received by the convener from the Guru Nanak Sikh Temple in Glasgow regarding the lack of availability of a Panjabi examination, following the ending of funding. The committee debated the issue and agreed to write to the SQA to seek its comments on the possible inclusion of Panjabi and other minority ethnic languages in their provision. They returned to the matter at their meeting on the 23 April when they noted that the SQA were reviewing the possibility but that no examination was currently available. The committee agreed to write to the Cabinet Secretary to ask her views on the matter and to respond to the Sikh Temple encouraging them to contact local MSPs.

SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION

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

- Individual Learning Account (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2008 (SSI 2008/1)
- Police Act 1997 (Criminal Records) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2008 (SSI 2008/6)
- Fundable Bodies (The Scottish Agricultural College) (Scotland) Order 2008 (SSI 2008/draft)
- Designation of Institutions of Higher Education (The Scottish Agricultural College) (Scotland) Order 2008 (SSI 2008/163)
- Designation of Institutions of Higher Education (The Scottish Agricultural College) (Scotland) (No. 2) Order 2008 (SSI 2008/177)
- Central Institutions (Recognition) (Scotland) Revocation Regulations 2008 (SSI 2008/178)
- Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 Modification Order 2008 (SSI 2008/draft)
- Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003 (Amendment of the Definition of Child Care Position) Order 2008 (SSI 2008/draft)
- Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2008 (SSI 2008/draft)
- Charity Test (Specified Bodies) (Scotland) Order 2008 (SSI 2008/draft)
- Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2008 (SSI 2008/draft)
- Individual Learning Account (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 2008 (SSI 2008/204)
- Education (Student Loans) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2008 (SSI 2008/205)
- Education (Means Testing) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2008 (SSI 2008/206)
- Graduate Endowment (Scotland) Regulations 2008 (SSI 2008/235)

At their meeting on the 27 February 2008 (ELLC/S3/08/5/2) the committee considered a request from the Cabinet Secretary for their views on a possible Scottish Statutory instrument that would exempt colleagues from the independence requirement in the charity legislation and thereby enable them to keep their charitable status. The committee members recognised that this was one way to address the issue of colleges losing charitable status but were concerned that they were being asked about the issue in advance of the legislation. The convener pointed that this had been discussed with the Cabinet Secretary at their away day and welcomed her proactive approach. It was agreed that the convener would write to the Cabinet Secretary advising her of the committee response.

PETITIONS

At their meeting on the 20th February the committee agreed its approach to a newly referred petition PE1022 (ELLC/S3/08/4/2) on the promotion of foreign language learning and intercultural awareness in schools, colleges and universities. The Convener presented three options to the committee, who agreed to keep the petition open until publication of the funding council's report on Modern Languages in Scotland and to write to the Cabinet Secretary to seek the Government's views on modern languages in the curriculum.

The committee returned to petition PE1046 Schools (Class Sizes) on the 21 May 2008. They had first considered this petition on the reduction of in class sizes on the 27 October 2007. They returned to the petition on the 21 November 2007 and agreed to defer full consideration of the petition until information was available

from the annual pupil census in 2008 (Redford, 2008). At meetings in May and June 2008 the committee took evidence on the petition from:

Date of Committee	Witnesses
21 May 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ronnie Smith, David Drever and Helen Connor, <i>The Educational Institute of Scotland</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valerie Wilson and Jon Lewin, <i>The SCRE Centre</i>
28 May 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Murdo Maciver, <i>Association of Directors of Education in Scotland</i> • Brian Cooklin, <i>Headteachers' Association of Scotland</i> • Greg Dempster, <i>Association of Headteachers and Deputes in Scotland</i>
18 June 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isabel Hutton, Education, Barbara Lindsay and Robert Nicol, COSLA
25 June 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiona Hyslop, <i>Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning</i>

Papers provided to support the meetings included a written submission from The SCRE Centre and a SPICe briefing paper on class sizes (ELLC/S3/08/13/1). The meeting on the 21 May opened with a statement from David Drever summarising the benefits of the reductions in class sizes in support of the petition's aim of a staged reduction of all classes in schools to a maximum of 20. The convener asked for details of research which supported the proposed benefits. David Drever referred to student teacher achievement ratio research from Tennessee and longitudinal work undertaken by the University of London, which the convener countered with information from the University of Glasgow that said there was little difference in the performance in class sizes of 18 to 25. Ronnie Smith admitted that there were different opinions about class sizes but suggested that there was no disagreement about the positive benefits of class reduction. The convener followed this with a question about the relationship between class sizes and composite classes, as she received more correspondence about composite classes from parents. Christina Mckelvie then asked what the petition meant by a significant reduction to which David Drever replied that the aim was a maximum class size of 20 but they recognised that there were different issues each local authority area. The meeting moved on to discuss issues around the concordat between the Scottish Government and local authorities, which could impact on the existing plans for reductions in class sizes. The impact of falling birth rates and areas of deprivation were also considered.

The meeting with the second panel of witnesses began with a detailed explanation from Valerie Wilson of what the Tennessee research on class sizes involved. Jon Lewin then talked about the review of literature on class sizes that they had carried out for the Scottish Executive in 2001, which concluded that the conclusions, 'were at best confusing and at worst contradictory' (Lewis, 2105.08, Col 1069). Questions from the committee concerned the relationship between research outcomes and improved outcomes for all children. In response to a final question from Jeremy Purvis, Valerie Wilson pointed out that all research on class sizes had focused on early years. Further evidence was taken at the next committee meeting on the 28 May 2008. All witnesses appearing on 28 May provided a written submission, as did COSLA who were invited to appear but declined the invitation (ELLC/S3/08/14/2/A). The convener welcomed the panel on the 28 May and moved straight to a question about the advantages of reducing

class sizes to 20. Murdo Maciver replied experience and research would suggest that smaller classes enhanced the prospect of better learning but that it was dangerous to isolate one factor to improve learning. Brian Cooklin supported this view but reminded the panel that class reduction was not an answer to solve all problems in schools. Greg Dempster emphasised that while the evidence was strong for positive effects in the early years it was not available for other stages of schooling. Questions from the committee raised issues of pupil teacher interactions, flexibility for headteachers and the role of the concordat in achieving lower class sizes. They returned to the issues of composite classes and parental choice. Following the discussion with this panel it was agreed that the committee would write to COSLA asking for a representative to come to the committee to discuss the issues that were raised by its written submission.

Representatives from COSLA attended the committee meeting on the 18 June where Isabel Hutton explained that COSLA preferred a more targeted, local approach to class sizes:

Evidence suggests that smaller class sizes improve outcomes in, for example, the primary school years and deprived areas; however, the evidence on whether smaller class sizes lead to widespread long-term improvements in educational achievement is far less conclusive. (Hutton, 18.06.08, Col 1229)

Elizabeth Smith asked about the difference between national policy and local targets, to which Isabel Hutton replied COSLA was looking within the concordat at a joint agreement to reduce class sizes with local authorities deciding how they implement it. In answer to a question from the convener, Robert Nicol emphasised that there was no top down approach involved and that councils would make progress on class sizes where they could. The committee then asked further questions about local outcome agreements in relation to class sizes and falling school rolls. The meeting ended with a detailed discussion of the projected costs of implementing the national policy on class sizes. In response to which Isabel Hutton emphasised:

Each local authority has been given its pot of money for its priorities, and it is up to it to decide how it will use that allocation to reduce class sizes. That might not be done through a physical school build; other mechanisms may be used to do that. It is up to each local authority to decide how it will use its allocation of funding. (Hutton, 18.06.08, Col 1244)

The committee returned to the petition for a final time at their meeting on the 25 June 2008. The convener opened the meeting with the Cabinet Secretary by asking about the Government's policy on class sizes throughout school. In response Fiona Hyslop replied that although the Government recognised the aim of the petition research had shown that the greatest impact of smaller class sizes was in the early years. The convener pursued the issues of funding and the detail of concordat agreements with the Cabinet Secretary, to which she replied:

We will deliver the proposals that have been put forward and agreed with local government in the concordat, which will take forward our manifesto commitment to reduce class sizes in P1 to P3 to 18. I am pleased that, throughout the country, local government is taking forward that policy and will, as of this summer, deliver smaller class sizes. At the end of the day, this is not about a political spat between different parties; it is about the education of young people. (Hyslop, 25.06.08, Col 1279)

The committee then discussed in detail members experiences of the local implementation of the agreement.

BUDGET

The committee began consideration of the budget process at their meeting on the 30 April when they responded to correspondence from the Finance Committee about the review of the budgeting process(ELLC/S3/08/10/3). It was agreed that the convener would write to Andrew Welsh expressing the wish of the committee that the process was more transparent and accountable. They agreed to seek approval for a budget adviser at their meeting on the 14 May and agreed their preferred candidate in private at their meeting on the 18 June 2008.

ANNUAL REPORTS

The committee considered and agreed with minor amendments their annual report for the work of the committee from 9 May 2007 to 8 May 2008 at their meeting on 4 June 2008 (ELLC/S3/08/15/4).

At their meeting on the 25 June 2008 Kathleen Marshall, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People presented Annual Reports from the commission for 2006-07 and 2007-08 (ELLC/S3/08/A).

REFERENCES

- HMIE, (2006) *Improving Scottish Education*, HMIE: Edinburgh
OECD, (2007) *Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland*, OECD: Paris
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