



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 3 March 2021

Session 5



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EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

8th Meeting 2021, Session 5

CONVENER

*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- *George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)
- *Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
- *Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab)
- *Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con)
- *Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)
- *Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
- *Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
- *Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
- *Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

- Jean Blair (Scottish Qualifications Authority)
- Gayle Gorman (Education Scotland)
- Carrie Lindsay (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland)
- Janie McManus (Education Scotland)
- Steven Quinn (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland)
- Fiona Robertson (Scottish Qualifications Authority)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Gary Cocker

LOCATION

Virtual Meeting

Scottish Parliament

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 3 March 2021

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning, and welcome to the eighth meeting of the Education and Skills Committee in 2021. I ask everyone to turn their mobile phones to silent mode to avoid disturbing the meeting. We have received apologies from Alex Neil.

Our first item of business is a decision on whether to take agenda items 4 and 5 in private. Any members who object to that should do so by indicating it in the chat box.

I see no indication that members object.

Subordinate Legislation

Police Act 1997 and the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007 (Fees) (Coronavirus) Amendment Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/71)

09:30

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is on subordinate legislation. It is consideration of an instrument that is subject to the negative procedure. Details of the instrument are in paper 1 of members' papers. Does anyone wish to make a comment on the instrument?

I see no indication that members wish to comment.

Coronavirus and Education

09:31

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is an evidence session on coronavirus and education, with witnesses from the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

I welcome from ADES Carrie Lindsay, who is its president, and Steven Quinn, who is the chair of the curriculum, assessment and qualifications network. From Education Scotland are Gayle Gorman, who is the chief inspector of education and chief executive, and Janie McManus, who is the strategic director for scrutiny. Fiona Robertson is chief executive and Jean Blair is director of operations at the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

I invite Carrie Lindsay, Gayle Gorman and Fiona Robertson to make brief opening statements.

Carrie Lindsay (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland): Good morning. It is a privilege to be here; we are happy to answer any questions. Because of the number of things that you want to get through today, I will not make a statement.

The Convener: Thank you. I was not aware of that.

I invite Ms Gorman to make a statement.

Gayle Gorman (Education Scotland): Good morning, convener and committee members. I am happy to be here to discuss coronavirus and education with you. As with ADES, given the range of what you wish to cover we do not have an opening statement, but look forward to our discussions.

The Convener: I invite Ms Robertson to make an opening statement if she wishes to do so.

Fiona Robertson (Scottish Qualifications Authority): Good morning, convener and committee members. I am similarly happy to be here to answer questions, particularly those relating to qualifications, but I have no opening statement to make.

The Convener: That is helpful. I am sure that we have a lot of questions to get through. Iain Gray will be followed by Jamie Greene.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I have two lines of questioning—one for the SQA and the other for Education Scotland. With your forbearance, I will ask Fiona Robertson the first question.

The Convener: If other members want to come in on your first area of questioning, I will go to them then come back to you. Members who want

to come in on the first area of questioning should indicate that by putting an R in the chat box.

Iain Gray: One area that the committee has explored with the SQA and with the Deputy First Minister on a number of occasions is last year's procedure for appealing against results—in particular, the problems of young people and families who felt that a school's assessment had been unfair and who then found that they could not appeal because appeals had to be submitted by their examination centre. The committee last discussed that with the Deputy First Minister back in November. He said then that he would be willing to look at cases of people who found themselves in that position, if they had evidence.

I have a constituent for whom it has taken six or seven months to get evidence from his son's school. He now has evidence that the school did not take proper account of the circumstances that prevailed at the time of the assessment and has asked the SQA for an appeal, but has been told that last year's appeal procedure is closed, so he has nowhere to go. Why will the SQA not consider appeals from such young people—there are others—who now have evidence that the assessment that was made and submitted at the time was not a fair one?

Fiona Robertson: The decision to award grades for 2020 on the basis of teacher evidence was made by the Scottish Government. The SQA was under a legal obligation to award grades in that manner. With the agreement of the Scottish Government, we put in place a procedure for appeals based on quite limited grounds—either that there had been an administrative error by the school or the SQA, or there was evidence of discrimination. Schools could appeal, with the agreement of the candidate, if they had evidence to do so. We were mandated by law and direction of the minister to award grades on the basis of teacher estimates.

The appeals process ran until 7 September, with a little flexibility thereafter. My colleague Jean Blair can talk about that in more detail. A number of appeals were considered and a significant proportion were upheld. There is a point every year at which we have to close the appeals process. We operated with a degree of flexibility after 7 September. We have now had to move on to concentrate on 2021 appeals. We would consider further issues in relation to appeals for last year or for this one, but that is the process that we put in place. We considered the appeals as effectively and as timeously as possible. Schools and candidates were given ample opportunity to consider appeals.

I am not aware of the specific case that Mr Gray mentions, but I am happy to have a conversation

with him or the school or the candidate if that would be helpful.

Iain Gray: That would be helpful. I will send you the details of that particular case and, perhaps, some others that I know of.

My concern with that answer is that some young people are not considered. I appreciate the effort that was put into considering appeals that were made by examination centres, but there are young people and families who wished to appeal directly to the SQA. The process meant that their appeals were not considered: they were refused because the SQA was not willing to accept direct appeals.

In the discussions that the committee has had on that, considerable concerns have been raised. Dr Tracy Kirk, who is an academic who has looked into the matter, is concerned that the process abrogated those young people's rights. The Deputy First Minister has assured the committee on a number of occasions that that would be taken into consideration in the 2020-21 appeals procedure. When will we know what the procedure is, and will young people be able to appeal directly to the SQA if they believe that the assessment that the school has made is flawed?

Fiona Robertson: We intend, following the work that we have done with partners on the alternative certification model, to issue a public consultation in relation to our appeals service for 2021 appeals. We will be pursuing many of the issues that you highlighted in your question, including young people being able to appeal directly and the grounds that might apply for an appeal.

It is important that we will engage with young people—as we already have—about the emerging process for 2021. Crucially, it will be the subject of a public consultation, so there will be an opportunity for parents, learners and practitioners to provide views, and for Tracy Kirk and any other parties to comment on the appeals process for 2021. The process is not yet confirmed, because it is important that we consult on the issue, given the interest from young people and beyond.

Iain Gray: Can you tell us the timetable for that?

Fiona Robertson: I anticipate that the consultation will be issued shortly—in the next week or two. It has gone through a process with stakeholders and is currently going through a process with our board and qualifications committee. The qualifications committee is meeting today to discuss that process, among other things.

Iain Gray: Okay. I will move on to my question for Education Scotland, unless the convener wants to bring in anyone else.

The Convener: If you move on to Education Scotland, I will bring in individual members after that.

Iain Gray: My other question is on measures to mitigate the effects of the loss of learning over the time of the pandemic, particularly for young people who in any case face greater barriers than most to achievement in our schools. In my constituency of East Lothian, a tutoring scheme has been set up, which is making a programme of individual one-to-one tutoring available to around 300 young people who have been identified by their schools. Those young people will be allocated a tutor who will work with them over a period of time, virtually—at the moment, anyway—to help them to catch up.

I have raised that on a couple of occasions, with the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, and I was told that the facility was available to all young people in all parts of Scotland through the e-Sgoil national remote learning facility. I ask Gayle Gorman to give us more details of that tutoring initiative.

Gayle Gorman: Mr Gray raises an important point about supporting our young people during the pandemic and, importantly, beyond it. There are various programmes such as the one that Mr Gray described through which local authorities are using some of the money from the Scottish Government or schools are using money that they were given by the Scottish Government to provide a variety of support.

Since the autumn term, we have been running study support sessions in partnership with e-Sgoil. We have three each evening in a range of subjects, and those have had huge uptake by young people. Small groups are brought together with two teachers online for subjects such as higher history, philosophy and languages. One teacher runs the teaching session and the other works with the young people and their responses on the chat function and answers questions and queries.

09:45

Those groups have grown exponentially during the months of closure, and we continued them as school buildings were physically reopened. A widening range of subjects is available, from national 4s through to advanced highers. Young people have fed back how much they have learned from that approach and how they have created network learning communities for students together. That is supporting their learning in school.

We are continually adding to that offer and bringing more subjects on board. I have attended a couple of the sessions to test, listen in and hear the engagement. The feedback from students has

been hugely positive. That is available not only through the e-Sgoil platform—it is not behind the glow firewall. Children and young people sign up for the sessions. They can do that through the school, but they do not have to. There is open access and, currently, well over 4,500 young people are engaged in the sessions. As members can imagine, many are engaged in more than one subject. There are unique individual users, but many of them take up three or four subjects.

There is good work there, and there is growing use of that approach as we continue to come out of the closures. That has been a good network for learners. They are learning and challenging one another across Scotland and taking that learning into the classroom, and their teachers are building on it. There has been positive feedback from parents, children and teachers on the use of those study support sessions.

Iain Gray: How long do you expect that support to continue? Do you see it going on beyond the pandemic to try to mitigate the effects of the year that we have had? It will be more than a year by the time that we are talking about.

Gayle Gorman: Indeed. We certainly see those study support sessions continuing, particularly if we are thinking about access to the wider curriculum, access to subject choice, and all the issues that the committee has discussed on several occasions in the past. One of the further learnings from this terrible tragedy relates to the advancement of the use of information technology and remote learning. Teachers have done an amazing job in developing different pedagogies. My team have supported that in respect of the technology and in discussions about different pedagogies for different types of learning.

We must not go back to traditional methods. We must remain in a proactive and recursive learning mode. The feedback on remote learning from our young people is that they really value in particular recorded lessons that they can revisit at a time that suits them. They can go over concepts of learning and work with others on things that they find challenging.

We certainly see the e-Sgoil offer and the national e-learning offer growing and developing as the pandemic, we hope, finishes, but also as we look at a different approach to education, as many countries globally will do. We have the opportunity to support that with the glow network, and I see that continuing. We do not have any plans to stop those broadcasts and events. In fact, we are looking at further innovation.

The Convener: Before we move on, Ms Robertson mentioned that Ms Blair might want to come in on Iain Gray's initial questions. Does Ms Blair want to add anything to what has been said?

Jean Blair (Scottish Qualifications Authority): I would be happy to describe the process, if that would be helpful.

The Convener: I think that it would be.

Jean Blair: As we know, centres had to submit appeals on behalf of their candidates. I should be clear that candidates had to give permission for those appeals before they were submitted—we looked for that as part of our process.

We first did a quick administrative check to see that all of that was in place and that the centre had the support of the candidate. The appeal then moved to an initial panel of experienced managers who are used to handling appeals by centres and candidate malpractice appeals. They made a recommendation to a second panel that was very experienced in handling appeals, which consisted of me and the head of service. If we had any doubt about the nature of the appeal or we needed more information before we made a judgment, we reached out to the centre and asked for information. We would therefore clarify information and ensure that we had the full facts before we arrived at a judgment.

When we arrived at that outcome, we advised the centre in writing. If the centre remained dissatisfied about that, it could phone and have a conversation with the head of service. That could often lead to a change of outcome. If the centre could provide us with more information in support of its appeal, there was a chance that that would lead to a positive outcome. If, on the other hand, it did not lead to a positive outcome, the appeal could then go into an escalated appeals process.

We received only four cases in which centres believed that there had been a procedural irregularity on the part of the SQA. In all cases, no such irregularity was found to have occurred. The process that we put in place was quite robust. We considered the evidence carefully at each stage and, if it was not complete, we reached out to the centre for more information.

Of the majority of the 664 appeals, 565 concerned centre admin errors. We were trying our best to give centres and candidates—learners—the benefit of the doubt through the appeals process. We did what we could through the process on the limited grounds on which it was operating.

The Convener: Are you content for us to move on, Mr Gray, or do you wish to come back in?

Iain Gray: It is fair to say that I appreciate that information. I do not think that the committee has heard evidence that there was a problem with the robustness of the appeals process for those who were able to appeal; the issue concerns those who

were excluded from the appeals process. Thank you in any case, Ms Blair, for that information.

The Convener: I now call Mr Greene, who will be followed by Ms Wishart. I ask members to ask all their questions on all areas, which I think would be easier. Given the size of the committee, we will go to each individual member in turn.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I have two separate and distinct areas of questioning. The SQA questions are separate, so I will keep them until the end.

My general questions on education are probably best directed to Education Scotland. I have four areas, but I will lump them into two, to make it easier. The first concerns remote learning, recovery and catch-up. My main question is: why did it take so long to get digital devices to those who were lacking them during the pandemic? Why did some pupils have such a varied experience of what remote learning looked and felt like? Why, for example, did some pupils have a large—*[Interruption.]*

Sorry, convener, but I think that your microphone is still on.

The Convener: Sorry. I just dropped a piece of paper. My apologies.

Jamie Greene: I was hearing a rustling noise. I will start that question again.

Why did some pupils have a very good experience of remote learning, with live face-to-face teaching, while others had little or even none? The other part of that first question was on digital devices.

The Convener: Who wants to respond first? We will go to Ms Gorman.

Gayle Gorman: It might be best to start with our ADES colleagues, as the roll-out of digital devices was under the Scottish Government's remit, and Education Scotland is not involved in the roll-out of equipment or connectivity. I am sure, however, that my ADES colleagues will be able to talk about the implications and implementation of that at local authority level.

Carrie Lindsay: We received a number of devices across local authorities, and we were able to distribute those in various tranches. There was a bit of a delay because of the supply, but that was necessary, and it happened across Scotland. We received batches across the whole of Scotland, and we also provided connectivity—it was not just about the devices. Janie McManus may wish to comment on the remote learning overviews, which suggest that there was much better access after we were able to distribute devices and provide connectivity.

It is fair to say that remote learning is not all about online learning; it is about a range of approaches. We do not want our children and young people to be sat in front of screens constantly, so we wanted to ensure that our young people had different opportunities. The devices certainly helped us to do that.

We are still working with local authorities so that they can purchase more devices. There is a range of approaches among our local authorities to ensure that we provide equity of access to resources, including devices. As I said, we also want to ensure that the approach is not based only on devices.

Janie McManus might want to comment on the overviews and what they found.

Janie McManus (Education Scotland): The system must be commended for what it has done. It has been a huge challenge for everyone who has been involved in education. We have found, from the engagement of our team of inspectors with local authorities, schools and headteachers, that the experience of remote learning has improved since the first lockdown and over the course of this term.

A key point that we have highlighted is that the variability in high-quality learning and teaching existed before Covid, so it is natural that, during the pandemic, there has been variation within schools, across schools and across local authorities, as everyone has grappled really quickly with delivering all their learning and teaching online.

We have certainly seen a commitment to professional learning to help teachers, schools and staff to grapple with delivering learning remotely and in other ways. Over the piece, the range of activities that schools have provided for children and young people—whether it is pre-recorded lessons, live learning, independent learning or open-ended tasks—has increased. Schools and local authorities have also gathered feedback from learners and parents in order to adapt and amend their approaches.

There has been positive work, but there are challenges for everyone. There are challenges related to practical subjects and the provision of very specific support, but there is certainly the commitment in the system to work through those challenges and to arrive at solutions.

Steven Quinn (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland): To pick up on Janie McManus's final point, this is an iterative process. We have to remember that schools are all about learning—that applies not only to the children and young people in schools but to the whole school community, including all our staff in schools and in central positions.

Across the country, schools have been really good at engaging with their school communities through pupil focus groups, parent councils, parent surveys and so on. They have tried to improve what they deliver as time has gone on. Central local authority teams across the country have reached out to communicate with parents and, indeed, children and young people in considering the emerging themes, where the challenges are and how we can continually improve the offer to our children and young people.

What we are delivering across the country today is, of course, much better than what we delivered a month ago, two months ago, three months ago and so on. I expect that what we deliver will continually get better, although I hope that it does not need to get continually better and that we get all our children and young people back into school.

Jamie Greene: Absolutely—everyone on the committee and, I am sure, everyone in Government shares that goal and ambition. The reality is that things are getting better, but it has taken a while to get where we are. Despite the endeavours and efforts of schools and teachers, many young people fell through the cracks.

10:00

It is a worry that Education Scotland has said that it is not its responsibility to ensure that children are online or connected. Is it not the role of Education Scotland, as the Government agency in charge of education, to ensure that children are connected and able to access online learning? Even if it is not your responsibility, is it not for you, in your role as Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, to ensure that that is happening?

Perhaps you can comment on that as you answer my next question, which is about recovery and catch-up. What national plans are in place for catch-up programmes? Those might include tutoring and mentoring. Is there a co-ordinated national approach to that, or is that something else that has been left to local authorities or even individual schools?

Gayle Gorman: We are clear about Education Scotland's roles and responsibilities. It is not part of our remit to fund devices and device roll-out: that sits with the learning directorate in the Scottish Government, working in partnership with local authorities. That is clear in our framework and our governance documents. However, we are fully committed to supporting that and we have been working in partnership, as ever, across the Scottish education sector to support and drive that.

The inspectorate has been talking to everyone across the system to identify the barriers. In the beginning, those included connectivity. The issue

was not only the provision of devices; some rural communities lacked connectivity. We also identified best practice and looked for examples of schools and local authorities that had found ways around that, such as dropping off physical resources.

Wonderful work is going on across Scotland. Our role is to capture that and feed it into the Covid-19 education recovery group so that it can see where the challenges and successes are. We also feed that information to the Scottish Government via ministers so that they can support the drive to ensure greater connectivity for all our learners. We want all our young people to have that, not only now but in the future.

We have been working across the CERG workstreams on a recovery plan. No one in the Scottish education family is working independently. We are keen to have a joined-up response to Covid. CERG is driving that. Education Scotland has taken the lead in a number of the workstream groups, particularly on professional learning for teachers. We are supporting pedagogy and delivery but also health and wellbeing for teaching and support staff and for headteachers, who are shouldering the burden.

We have been developing a range of recovery materials, including some for children and young people, such as the resilience alphabet, which was widely used and continues to be used. We have YouTube support channels for children and young people and we have subject-specific guidance and support.

We will continue working with CERG, and with our partners in ADES, the SQA and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to ensure that there is robust support to help children and young people and our schools to recover from the period of physical closure.

We must also draw on some of the global research. Michael Fullan's recent research looking at the right drivers for whole-system success recommends

"avoiding a 'loss of learning' mindset that would take us back to traditional learning."

There is a need to think differently. We should build on the positives and on the learning that has taken place to create a co-ordinated plan that comes from all partners and supports our young people to recover in the fullest sense, particularly in health and wellbeing and socialisation.

Work is on-going and it is co-ordinated through CERG. It does not sit with any one organisation.

Jamie Greene: I am trying to rush through my questions, so not everyone needs to respond to every question, because they are on different themes and topics. It is clear that there is lots of

great work going on, and we should be thankful to those who are doing it. However, what I did not hear or get a sense of from your answer, Ms Gorman, was that there is someone in charge of a co-ordinated national approach. It sounded as though lots of good things are happening in silos but that there is not a co-ordinated approach or centralised responsibility for delivery. In the interests of time, perhaps you would respond to the committee in writing on how it is structured.

I have a technical question, which is for any of the panel, around the announcement that was made yesterday by the First Minister about testing capability to ensure that we can get young people back into schools. Do any of you know how many test kits will be available and how many staff or pupils have been identified as potential candidates to receive those tests? If, as it is planned, they will be offered two lateral flow tests per week, how many schools will the test kits be offered to and how many will be made available in the time required to allow young people to go back to school in the next fortnight?

Carrie Lindsay: Our experience so far is that we have sufficient numbers of the testing kits in all our schools. The only place where distribution happened a little later was with our private providers, and we are catching up with that now. It was more complex to distribute them to all our providers in the private, voluntary and independent sectors. We have enough supplies to do what is required, which is to test all staff and young people who wish—it is not mandatory—to be tested.

At the beginning, we felt that young people—*[Inaudible.]*—to have the tests—*[Inaudible.]*—from others that our young people want to be responsible and they are keen to take part in the testing process. Currently, there are sufficient quantities and we have no reason to believe that that will change, because all our schools are back although the numbers will obviously increase with the return to school. We will be able to monitor quantities as we go, but at the current time we have sufficient.

Jamie Greene: I think that that covers it.

The Convener: We lost you for a few moments, Ms Lindsay. Are you content that you heard everything that you needed to, Jamie?

Jamie Greene: You were breaking up a little, Ms Lindsay, but I got the gist. I did not hear any numerical data, so feel free to write to the committee if you have that. I would be interested to know exactly how many schools will be receiving tests and how many staff have been identified as potentially asking for them. It is just a volume game and a matter of planning ahead to ensure that the cover is there. It sounds as though you are confident that the tests are available to

anyone and everyone who asks for or is offered one, which is good. It would be great if you could keep us posted on that.

I have questions for the SQA. Shall I ask them now, convener, or let other members come in?

The Convener: I will let other members in now and come back to you for those further questions.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Good morning, panel. My first question is for Education Scotland. We always knew that some form of blended learning was a possibility but, yesterday, the First Minister said that Education Scotland will produce guidance only four working days before it is supposed to be implemented. Why is it not ready now?

The Convener: Ms Gorman, we are not hearing you.

Gayle Gorman: Can you hear me now?

The Convener: Yes, we can.

Gayle Gorman: Thank you. I sometimes have signal issues.

Thank you for that question. The guidance is planned to go out today to support that information. The decision was made by the Cabinet only yesterday and then announced by the First Minister. On the nuances, such as how many children will be coming back and in which year groups, that practical guidance is being updated in consultation with CERG members and with some members of the profession directly, to test out how it would land and how it would work. That information will be in the system later today, less than 48 hours from the announcement.

We think that we have acted keenly and swiftly, in consultation with all our professional associations—all the members of CERG—to turn around that agreed advice and guidance, which will be out tomorrow. However, we could not write that guidance when the decisions—particularly the clinical decisions that drive it—could have led to a differently phased return or different groupings. We are proactively on top of that. I had some things prepared and have edited them to enable that guidance to go ahead later today, once CERG members have signed it off.

Beatrice Wishart: Thank you.

In a previous answer, you mentioned the health and wellbeing of staff. Teachers now have to plan learning for a remote class and an in-person class, and for additional evidence gathering for assessments. Do you accept that that is a significant increase in workload?

Gayle Gorman: There are challenges for how schools will operate that. That is why we have been very careful in ensuring that the local

empowerment of schools, teachers and departments is at the heart of the guidance that will be released because, as we all know, every single school is different—each has a different physical building and a different staff ratio and, at secondary level in particular, each follows different courses. The headline guidance is about how to work that and what some of the parameters are—in particular, around health and safety.

There are challenges. However, the work that we have been doing collectively, as part of the national e-learning offer, will support that. Last week—and there is a big push throughout March, because we were aware that some return might happen—we launched a focus on remote learning for secondary 1 to secondary 3, because some of those young people may not be in school very frequently. My ADES colleagues may want to comment. We have worked proactively with the BBC so that, as the primary children go back, its programming turns to focus on an offer for S1 to S3. From Monday, e-Sgoil live and recorded lessons have started to focus much more predominately on S1 to S3, and we have a growing bank of recorded resources, which will focus on S1 to S3, to support teachers' workload.

As well as that, we will put out across—*[Inaudible.]*—national challenges, some of which link to the up and coming COP26—the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties. Those are interdisciplinary learning national challenge activities and questions that teachers can direct young people to, so that they are working on that and there is not a big ask of teachers themselves to take that activity, as well as some other challenges and activities around creativity, music, dance, sport and so on, and a push on outdoor learning activities and engagement.

We want to help to address that and to support the system in trying to co-ordinate, while we must also maintain a focus on our national qualification young people and ensure that they focus on their pathways. A lot of work is going on, has gone out in the past week or so and will continue to go out to try to address that, but I recognise the challenges of the model.

Perhaps Carrie Lindsay would like to comment a bit more about that locally.

Carrie Lindsay: I am happy to comment. Obviously, not having the guidance currently is a challenge, and it is difficult for our secondary schools in particular. It is easier for the primary schools, because they are all coming back—we are very pleased that they are all coming back. We gave our professional opinion as part of the discussions, as Gayle Gorman has said, and we now have to enact what the Government has asked us to do, in the terms of the guidance. We

are working hard at local authority level, as we always do, to support our young people so that they get the best possible experience. *[Inaudible.]*—offer for S4 to S6, to ensure that they are going to meet their national qualification requirements, while we continue to make sure that S1 to S3 have an effective experience in learning.

As part of that, we want to see that all young people have an opportunity, at some point before the Easter holidays, to come back and see what it is like to be back in school. They are keen to be back and to see their friends, and we are keen to welcome them back. However, that cannot happen without a lot of organisation.

10:15

It will be done differently across the country, because different circumstances and school and geographical settings mean that the numbers of children who will be able to come in at one time will vary. A lot of work will undoubtedly be required from all authorities. It is important that we now be given the go-ahead on what will happen, as we want to make the process work for our children and young people and ensure that our schools are safe places to be for them and for our staff.

Beatrice Wishart: I have one more question about the impact on learning that we know has happened. Some young people and their parents are questioning whether there is any point in their going to university. They feel that they have had a lack of exam experience due to there having been two years of cancellations, and they have also been studying courses with reduced content. They do not feel that they will be in a position to cope with university. Every young person is in the same position, but with the cessation of other school activities and the general restrictions that have been put in place, there seem to be symptoms of negativity and lack of motivation among some. How can we counteract that for pupils who will be staying on at school for another year?

Carrie Lindsay: I will give a brief response and then I will hand over to Steven Quinn, who has the qualifications remit in ADES.

You are right. We want to ensure that our young people are not disadvantaged, which is why it has been good that we have been able to use teacher judgment and to support our young people into their post-school destinations. We have a challenge ahead of us on the employability agenda. We know that there will not be as many jobs available for our children and young people, so we need to think about further and higher education and how we can put them in a position to be able to access those.

I will hand over to Steven Quinn, who is more knowledgeable on the qualifications aspect.

Steven Quinn: First, I will talk about the young people who are in front of us just now and who will be leaving school to go on to jobs, college, further training or university. Across the country, schools are working hard with them not only on their qualifications and on ensuring that learning and teaching lead to appropriate assessment and the achievement of the grades in their qualifications that their work and effort merit, but on how we can support them on to the next part of their learning journey. Those could be young people at all different levels. I know that central teams and support staff in schools are working with them on interviews to help them on that part of their journey, whether they will be going on to college, university or the workplace. Of course, such work would normally take place in school, but everyone is making the best of it.

I turn to young people who will be coming to or staying in our schools. No one disputes that the academic aspect, including qualifications, is of critical importance. However, we must also ensure that we get our young people back to enjoying the wider aspects of school life. For many who are coming towards the end of that time, it is all the other things that they do that set them up for life beyond school. It will be critical that we get them back into school and that, for the years ahead, they get back to having the opportunities that their peers have always had, such as going on school excursions and trips, planning proms, being on committees and doing other leadership activities.

How do we ensure that we make the most of those opportunities? Schools are already doing that using pupil equity funding and some of the recovery money that has been given to them. It is about how we plan for our children in future instead of only being reactive to what is happening now. What is happening now is important, but we also need to be proactive about what comes next and ensure that the kids who are going through school at the moment get those opportunities. We do not see the loss that they have had so far as being irretrievable if we do everything we can to catch up and ensure that they are ready for the opportunities in future.

Beatrice Wishart: Thanks, Mr Quinn. It is about learning, but it is also about the whole school experience. Many senior pupils have lost the end of school ritual and all that goes with it.

I have another question, but I am conscious of time.

The Convener: I will come back to you at the end, if you are happy with that.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): My question is for Gayle Gorman. I am interested to know whether she or anyone else at Education Scotland has seen the interim findings of the

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's review, and whether she has been asked to comment on them?

Gayle Gorman: As key stakeholders, ADES, the SQA and Education Scotland have been involved in the planning around the OECD review since 2020 and, as I think is publicly known, we have seen a very early draft discussion document. That was to allow us to check factual accuracy and to present any additional evidence before the report is openly discussed at the stakeholder forums, which many of us are involved in, in March.

We have seen some initial discussion and thoughts that are part of that report, as is normal with the OECD process. In fact, before the OECD review was done, Education Scotland and the SQA submitted significant evidence about activity from previous inspection reports and other documents that we have, as we have done with similar reports in the past.

Oliver Mundell: The reason I ask is that we all want the Scottish education system to be fighting fit as we come back from coronavirus. Are there any early lessons to be learned, or things that you will start working on, because of what has already been shared with you? Have you moved on to start planning? This is probably the best opportunity for a reset that we have had in a long time.

The Convener: I am very conscious that we do not want to pre-empt the report. Ms Gorman has seen an interim version, but I will let her answer if she wishes to.

Oliver Mundell: With due respect, I do not think that that is fair. If an education body that is responsible for delivering education in Scotland is aware of concerns from the OECD, it seems logical that it would start considering those early findings at the first available opportunity. I am not asking Ms Gorman to share the details; I am only asking whether that work has started.

Gayle Gorman: These are very early days, and the stakeholder discussion needs to take place—that is happening during the next couple of weeks—before any work can begin. It is a collective discussion. The methodology that the OECD uses is based on system learning, which we welcome.

Mr Mundell is right that this is a good time, both globally and nationally, to reset and consider our wishes and aspirations for Scottish education in future. We look forward to that, but we will do that along with the OECD's timeline, plan, dissemination and the actions that it controls.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): The committee has rightly focused on the coming

months and how we will recover as we progress through the spring, but it is also important that we look to the coming academic year. We will need to recover from the impacts of the past 12 months, but it is increasingly clear that Covid will not go away once we have vaccinated the population; we will have to live with it.

I have two questions that follow from that. First, what work is being done on adjustments for the new school year to ensure that social distancing can be maintained? Will there be particular impacts on subjects such as music and physical education, in which social distancing requirements are problematic?

Secondly, delays to capital projects in my constituency mean that hybrid and virtual learning will continue into the new school year. I have written to Education Scotland about that. I am interested in the views of ADES and Education Scotland on the appropriateness of that approach. Surely, we should be attempting to maximise face-to-face learning and not turning virtual learning into the new normal.

I would be interested in hearing responses to both those points.

Carrie Lindsay: You are right: we are looking at how we can build on the expertise that we have unearthed across all our teaching professions. We now have lots of people who are much more skilled at delivering through remote platforms and at doing recorded lessons, so we are already looking at how we can build that into what will happen, going forward.

The national board—which I, as the president of ADES, and representatives of Education Scotland and the Scottish Government sit on—is looking at our national e-learning offer. Part of that work is to think about what we can learn from the pandemic to take forward in e-learning. That work is under way.

I do not recognise what you said about delays in capital projects; in local authorities, capital projects are on-going. There will be slight delays—not significant delays—that will mean that the work that is under way will perhaps not be able to realise our new buildings, going forward.

On the point about physical distancing, I am obviously not privy to the scientific and clinical advice, but we are clear that we want all our children to be back in school as soon as it is safe for our staff, and for our children and young people. We hope that that can be done without the need for social distancing.

We need to be flexible in our thinking for the new academic term. We recognise that remote learning will come in when groups of children need to self-isolate or when everyone in a school needs

to self-isolate. Contingency plans are in place at local authority level and, as I said, we are looking at how we build on that learning on things like—*[Inaudible.]*—going forward.

Daniel Johnson: I want clarification on a point that you just made. I agree that we must learn lessons from parts of virtual learning that have been found to be of value, but there is a fine line between that and the introduction of virtual learning as the new normal. You gave the example of pre-recorded lessons, which are useful in addition to face-to-face learning. Can you clarify that virtual learning will be in addition to face-to-face learning rather than a substitute for it, and that some of the patterns of the past year will not become the normal expectation on delivery of learning in our schools?

Carrie Lindsay: Absolutely. That is why I said that we are keen to get back to face-to-face learning for all our children and young people. Given all the harms that are around just now—not only those that relate directly to the pandemic, but those that relate to not being able to be together socially—we want our children and young people to be in a school environment.

However, there are things that we have learned from the experience. For example, some young people find it much easier to contribute online than they do in a classroom setting. We need to think about how we support individual learners, not by moving everything online but by using approaches to enhance learning, personalisation and choice in our schools.

10:30

Gayle Gorman: I echo what Carrie Lindsay has said. There is a quote from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development that I have used an awful lot in the past few months. It said:

“Technology can amplify the work of great teachers, but it will not replace them.”

That is the focus of our aspiration. I am very aspirational; I am keen for the social distancing requirement to be gone—that is in the hands of clinicians, obviously—because it causes huge issues with bringing the children back and being able to support them through these challenging times.

We have done significant work, as Carrie Lindsay said, on looking to the future and thinking about how to adapt the best parts of remote learning to the in-school learning experience.

I have always said that schools are not the physical buildings: they are porous, and the pandemic has shown us just how porous they are and what a central role they play in communities. If

we take a porous approach in which school walls are not a barrier, we can have a new narrative that takes the best for all, and which has the expertise of teachers, face-to-face relationships and highly effective pedagogies at its heart.

Given the right conditions, remote learning can be effective, but it does not replace the physical interaction between a school teacher and the learners. We are working with partners to develop that. We now have an awful lot of exemplary resources that can be used in addition to the in-school experience.

I am very much with the committee on wanting to bring our young people back to school, without the restrictions, when it is safe to do so.

Daniel Johnson: I thank witnesses for their responses. My next questions are on SQA certification and estimates. Since we last spoke to Fiona Robertson we have received additional information. I have questions about evidence gathering and how the approaches for different subjects might relate to each other.

This morning, I was looking at the detailed sets of guidance on evidence gathering for chemistry and for English, which are quite different. For chemistry the emphasis is very much on class tests and on use of past papers and specimen papers to gather evidence. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a broader range of evidence applies for English. The same types can be used, but so can others such as coursework, so the emphasis is different.

Two questions arise from that. How far will certifications be comparable between subjects, given that they will be assessed in ways that are qualitatively different? Could you provide more detail on how consistency will be achieved where class tests will be used? I recognise that this is hearsay, but there is concern that everyone will be asked to sit last year's paper, which was prepared but was not set, but it will—[*Inaudible.*]

The Convener: I am sorry, Mr Johnson, but we are losing your connection. We missed a lot of your question. I think that you were making a comparison between chemistry and English. Could you repeat the final point in your question?

Daniel Johnson: I will try to do so succinctly. Given that different subjects have different approaches to evidence gathering, how are they comparable? When they are used, how will class tests be set consistently to ensure that candidates in different settings cannot exchange the questions that they were set?

The Convener: I will go to Miss Robertson first. If other witnesses want to comment, it will be helpful if they indicate that in the chat box.

Fiona Robertson: There are two parts to Mr Johnson's question. The first part was on the differences in evidence gathering and guidance across different subjects. In broad terms, there are differences in the assessment approach that we take across different subjects every year, based on the skills and knowledge that we expect and, of course, on the differences between the subjects themselves. There are a lot of course-work components in English, so the approach to that is different to, for example, the approach to chemistry, for which other skills and knowledge are expected. Therefore, in part, the guidance across each subject reflects the broader assessment approach that is part of any normal year.

As Mr Johnson will be aware—I talked about this the last time I was at the committee—we undertook a consultation on modifications to assessment this year in anticipation of the disruption. Some courses, particularly the practical subjects, had elements removed because we felt that that would be too difficult in the context of the arrangements for this year.

There are always differences across subjects with regard to the skills and knowledge that are expected and, therefore, the assessment approach that is appropriate. I want to highlight that such broad differences are reasonable and expected. The production of our guidance on evidence gathering for every subject and course heavily involved subject experts within SQA, but we also engaged with subject teams, which include teachers and practitioners in schools and colleges, and some of our appointees, who are important in the work that we do every year.

On the assessment approach, which is the second part of the question, we provided assessment resources across each subject and course. We thought that that would be helpful to schools. The resources have been provided on a secure website with guidance around security—as you would expect—in order to mitigate the risks that Mr Johnson highlighted.

It is important that we have given schools and colleges some flexibility in the assessment approach that they take through our oversight of the guidance around evidence gathering, in which the focus is on the quality, not the quantity, of evidence. We have provided flexibility, so I do not anticipate that, across Scotland, every young person will be taking exactly the same exam paper or that the exam paper will be split into sections. There will be a variety of approaches reflecting the circumstances, the curriculum approach that is taken by individual schools, the progress that was made before Christmas and the work that has been done since Christmas. I hope that that answers your questions.

We are confident about the flexibility of the approach that we have highlighted in the guidance that we have provided, alongside the well-established differences in the assessment approach across subjects.

Steven Quinn: I will not labour the point about differences between subjects. Fiona Robertson has addressed that. We would assess different subjects differently in any normal year.

It is important that everyone, across the system, works in partnership to ensure that young people get the best possible outcome. I can take Mr Johnson through some of that.

Teachers have been engaging with our training on understanding standards so that they recognise what the national standard is when they are putting together assessment tools. Validation of the assessment tools is important, which is why work is being done in local authorities and regional improvement collaboratives on validating assessment tools.

Schools should carefully consider whether to use an entire SQA paper, but they are being advised to consider assessments that do not necessarily mirror previous exam papers. Schools must look at their own cohort of young people. In understanding national standards and making sure that they are meeting them, schools must also sample appropriate course content that will give their young people the best possible opportunity. They will use SQA materials to support that process, and they may use some whole assessments, but they should modify materials when that is the appropriate way to support their own cohort.

It is important that the focus now is on learning and teaching but that young people also understand when they will be assessed. They need to know what assessment will look like and how it will affect their final provisional grade.

We then come to marking, which again ties in with understanding standards and knowing what constitutes appropriate evidence. There must be cross-marking in schools and sampling and moderation within and between schools. That should be supported by local authorities and, as appropriate, by RICs. The SQA will do its own sampling, as part of that process.

If we work together through all that, along with making appropriate checks, and if we revisit assessment methodologies and marking, we should get to the point at which young people get the outcomes that their work deserves and which fit the opportunities that they have had in a disrupted year. If we can all do that, we should have some confidence that the outcome will meet the needs of almost all young people. We alluded earlier to the fact that there will always be some

for whom that does not work. The appeals process should pick that up.

Fiona Robertson: Mr Quinn has succinctly highlighted our approach for this year, as set out in the alternative certification model. The parts of system must work together to deliver for learners. There are critical roles for schools, local authorities and regional improvement collaboratives, supported by resources, guidance and quality assurance from SQA. The system must work together to get that right.

Daniel Johnson: I am mindful of the time, but I would like a brief clarification. Steven Quinn has said that the assessment model should give candidates the grade that they deserve. What is the benchmark for that? Pupils have had a very disrupted year, with varying levels of access to education and teaching. Different schools have delivered different amounts of each exam course because of the different impacts of the virus. What is being tested? Is it the knowledge across the full syllabus for each course or is it what has actually been able to be taught in that particular school to that particular pupil? Is it the 70 per cent of the syllabus that they were able to deliver or is it the full 100 per cent of what the course syllabus intended, if you understand that distinction?

10:45

Steven Quinn: First of all, we should recognise that the full course will not be completed this year. The SQA recognised that at the outset, and the course content across subject areas has been modified to take into account that there was always going to be a disruption to learning for everyone—that is already in place.

Because schools need to meet the national standard, I think that they will sample assessment tools that go across the breadth and depth of course coverage. Of course, within that, you do sample. You cannot ask a question on every single area of any course; that is not the way assessments work. Schools will have the opportunity to ensure that they are meeting national standards and that they are covering the breadth and depth of the course, but you must remember that the course will have been modified for all across the system.

Daniel Johnson: I recognise the point about sampling, but what I am asking about is slightly different. Even with a modified course, not all schools and not all pupils will have been able to cover it to the same extent, because there is not a level playing field. My key question is whether that lack of a level playing field is being taken into account, even with a modified course.

Steven Quinn: I am sorry if I did not make it clear enough. To reiterate, I think that schools

have the opportunity and that they will, where they feel it is appropriate, put their own assessment pieces together, which, I stress, must meet national standards and have the course coverage and depth. When you are making your assessment, you have the opportunity to determine what is in that assessment piece, but you still have to meet the national standard. That is where the moderation and the validation of the assessment tools comes in, across the local authorities and across the RIC, to ensure that the examination—the assessment piece—that you are giving to a young person is as fair and equitable as the assessment piece that another young person is getting in another school.

Fiona Robertson: I will add to what Steven Quinn has said. We undertook a crucial piece of work at the start of the academic year in anticipation of the disruption to learning, which is where Mr Johnson is, understandably, focusing. It has, of course, been a disruptive period at a crucial stage in students' educational life. We undertook modifications that were focused on the evidence requirements, which we stripped right back. We stripped them back, subject by subject, to ensure that young people could complete the work comfortably during the year.

Obviously, following the First Minister's announcement on 4 January, the message was that the focus should be on learning and teaching. We have also highlighted an approach of two to four pieces of evidence, which Steven Quinn has talked about, which will be critical to the judgments that are made about grades and demonstrated attainment by young people throughout the year. The national qualifications 2021 group, of which Steven is a member, has made it very clear that demonstrated attainment still needs to be at the heart of the approach that we take, so evidence is key.

Nevertheless, we have stripped back our requirements as much as possible, bearing in mind the circumstances of this year, so that young people can complete the work that they need to and so that, as Steven rightly highlights, there is some flexibility in the assessment approach that schools and colleges take to ensure that their approach meets their circumstances.

We produce understanding standards materials across all our subjects, and a number of events are taking place to support teachers in understanding the standards—for example, the difference between an A grade and a B grade, and the types of evidence that they should look for in any particular context. We hope that those materials also assist with the local moderation that Steven Quinn highlighted, which is also supported with additional national quality assurance.

The Convener: Are you content for me to move on, Mr Johnson?

Daniel Johnson: I am, but I hope that colleagues will ask about quality assurance.

The Convener: If there is time, I will bring you back in at the end.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): All my questions are for the SQA. In her answer to Iain Gray, Fiona Robertson confirmed that public consultation on the appeals process will probably start in the next week or two. When will the SQA make its decision on the appeals process and be able to confirm how that will operate?

Fiona Robertson: As I said, the appeals process will go live in the next week or so. There will be a short period of consultation, and we will then work through the responses. I hope that we will be able to confirm our position on the appeals process in late April or early May, at the latest. When we publish the consultation on the appeals process, we could set out the issues in more detail to the committee, if that would be helpful.

The Convener: That might be helpful. I am not sure how that would fit in with the election campaign and the election, but we would be grateful if it could be given to the clerks.

Ross Greer: That would definitely be appreciated, although, as the convener highlights, in 22 days' time our ability to engage in the process will be severely curtailed for some time.

Tomorrow, it will be seven months since last year's results were released, and it is four months since the 2021 exams were cancelled. Why is the consultation process taking place only now? Why did it not start months ago?

Fiona Robertson: As I have highlighted, we have been taking forward work around modifications to assessment, working through 23,000 responses to that consultation, and publishing those last October. Critically, we have also been seeking to ensure that we have the alternative certification model in place, with all the guidance around gathering evidence and assessment resources across in excess of 140 national qualifications courses. Mr Greer will know that the SQA is also responsible for higher national and vocational qualifications in the college sector, and it has been important to ensure that that work has been taken forward, too.

It felt important to the SQA, in discussion with the national qualifications group, which is convening and co-creating the work, that the alternative certification model, with all the guidance, materials and modifications, was in place. That is what we have sought to ensure. Looking at other parts of the UK, we can see that we are in a strong position, with schools having all

that material to hand. I accept that the appeals process is important, and we have been taking that forward as quickly as possible. It will go live shortly.

Ross Greer: May I take it from that answer that it was a capacity issue? It is a perfectly fair line of argument to say that you decided to prioritise getting the alternative assessment model agreed and rolled out across the range of qualifications that you offer. It came down to capacity: you would have got started on the consultation on the appeals process had you had the capacity, but, given the capacity that you had, you decided to prioritise the assessment model.

Fiona Robertson: Yes, it is fair to say that we prioritised the development and conclusion of all the details on the alternative certification model, in the interests of learners, schools, colleges and practitioners. Everyone has been working very hard to do that. The work that has been done on the guidance that I have set out across all those courses and the modifications to all the national qualifications courses, in tandem with the work that we do for the college sector around higher national vocational qualifications, is not trivial. I give Mr Greer and the committee an assurance that we have been working hard to deliver that work for the system.

Ross Greer: I do not underestimate for a second the scale of the work, given the range of qualifications. However, the money that was saved because last year's exams did not take place was returned to the Scottish Government. I might have tried to hold on to that in order to increase capacity in recent months.

On the submission of evidence required from schools, I understand that 25 June is the deadline for the final submission of estimated grades. Can you confirm the deadlines for the production and submission of evidence? Do schools need to submit that by roughly the end of May?

Fiona Robertson: On 16 February, we published the five key stages with revised timelines. Those were originally published before Christmas, but, given the move to remote learning after Christmas, it was important that we worked with the national qualifications group to agree a set of revised timelines. I am happy to take Mr Greer through the process.

During stage 1, which runs until April, teachers and lecturers will access, as we have discussed, subject-specific guidance and assessment resources and will gain understanding of the standards, materials and webinars from the SQA. Obviously, learning and teaching will continue. During stage 2, which runs from April into May, school, college, training provider and local authority quality assurance will continue. Mr Quinn

has talked about some of the work that is already being done on that across local authorities. During May, the SQA will request reviews and provide feedback on assessment evidence from each school, college and training provider. We will be providing more information to centres about that process shortly. From the end of May—

Ross Greer: I do not mean to be rude, but I have read through that process. It would probably be helpful, and it will save you a bit of time, if I tell you why I was asking the question. My understanding is that, potentially, nothing will be required of pupils after the end of May. At that point, it will be for schools and the SQA to engage on the submission of grade estimates. I am trying to get an understanding of the evidence that pupils will be required to submit. Might that end at the end of May?

Fiona Robertson: No. Steven Quinn might want to come in on that. Learning and teaching will continue until the end of term. In pushing back the timelines, we have sought to maximise learning and teaching.

Learning and teaching come first, before assessment. That is really important, and it is my view and the view of the national qualifications group, which Gayle Gorman also sits on, that learning and teaching come first and that they are the focus. Quality assurance is an iterative process of on-going review, and the final evidence does not need to be provided during May. We will sample a range of evidence to see whether it has been assessed to standard, but not all learning and teaching needs to be done before that happens.

We think that that is important, because learning and teaching have been constrained this year, and it is really important that young people get the opportunity to do learning, because that learning is critical for further progression, whether a young person is leaving school or continuing at school.

The short answer to your question is, therefore, no.

The Convener: I will bring in Mr Quinn.

11:00

Steven Quinn: Fiona Robertson answered the question towards the end of her comments. Just to give Mr Greer absolute clarity, I can say that schools will be working with their young people on the assessment pieces right into June. All that will happen in May is that the SQA will ask for some sampling of initial assessment pieces so that it has confidence that the process is working in schools. Children and young people will continue to learn and to have their assessments for as long as possible—up to the end of June, when we will get

those provisional grades in. That will give additional learning time and, therefore, a better opportunity for young people to achieve in their assessments.

Ross Greer: A number of teachers and pupils have got in touch with me, particularly recently, asking when we will have greater clarity on what the return is going to look like and the timescale for it. Their concern is that a number of pupils will likely get returned to school—it will be into April by the time that they are back with any consistency—and will face a rather intense few weeks of regular assessment under what, to them, will feel very much like exam conditions. What assessment has been made of the cumulative impact on the mental health and wellbeing of young people of the now inevitably condensed period in which that has to take place?

Fiona Robertson: Colleagues may want to come in as well. We are all very conscious of the fact that this year has been disrupted and that some constraints remain in the remainder of the school year. However, we have sought to provide as much flexibility as possible. For example, the national qualifications group gave a very clear steer on prelims and the need for the deployment of a variety of approaches to assessment.

I know that local authority colleagues will be very cognisant of those health and wellbeing issues. We have also looked at some of those issues in the context of an equality impact assessment and a children's rights and wellbeing impact assessment. Steven Quinn and Carrie Lindsay may want to come in more substantively on those issues with how local authorities are managing some of those issues as they consider the return to school.

We have been really clear in the national qualifications group that, when schools return, the consolidation of learning—on-going learning and teaching—will be key. We are certainly not seeking to have an assessment bulge towards the end of the year. That would undermine the notion of exams being cancelled for all the right reasons. That point is important, and I think that schools are doing all that they can to ensure that those issues are being considered.

The Convener: No other panel member has indicated that they want to come in, so we will go back to Mr Greer.

Ross Greer: I appreciate that the primary responsibility for the wellbeing of young people is with the school and the local authority, which are there to directly support young people. However, clearly, decisions that are made at a national policy level on how assessments are conducted this year have an impact. It is welcome to hear

that that has been factored into the equality impact assessments, so I will maybe give those a read.

I have one more question, which relates to Daniel Johnson's line of questioning. The NASUWT has pointed out that there are science subjects for which no topic areas have been removed—I have not checked that for all science subjects. It has raised the same concerns as the Educational Institute of Scotland about the volume of work that is expected to be completed, that pupils can be assessed only on what they have learned and that there are still some subjects for which, essentially, there is an expectation that more learning will be delivered than is realistic.

How have you ensured consistency so that pupils who, because of the range of subjects that they happen to have taken, have ended up with a heavier assessment burden are not disadvantaged this year? I accept the previous point that subjects are assessed differently and that there will inevitably not be complete consistency across the board, but we do not want to have a completely different kind of inconsistency this year, based on how the subjects were adapted to fit the unique circumstances

Fiona Robertson: I go back to our consultation on those issues. In that, we provided propositions on modifications and we got feedback on those not only from many practitioners but from young people and parents. We published details of that on, I think, 8 October 2020, which included a "You said, we did" document that reflected on the feedback that we got and the action that we had taken. There were many instances in which the feedback changed our approach to our modifications.

On science specifically, a big element of change in the science subjects was the removal of practical coursework, which was to reflect the public health reality that that would be difficult to conclude if and when young people were undertaking periods of remote learning and teaching, and with social distancing and so on in place. Obviously, there were health concerns around carrying out practical experience. However, the removal of coursework freed up time for remaining elements of the course.

We have sought to take a proportionate approach across the subjects. In the sciences, and in a number of other subjects, the assessment is synoptic—that is, it is not topic by topic; you are looking at a range of issues in any assessment approach. It can be difficult to remove elements in those subjects, whereas it may be more straightforward to do that in other subjects.

I am happy to elaborate on that. However, we have worked hard to ensure coherence of approach across the considerable number of

subjects that we offer while being cognisant of the well-established differences in assessment, which Steven Quinn and others alluded to.

The Convener: Are you content to move on, Mr Greer?

Ross Greer: I have one more brief question, if there is time, convener.

The Convener: Yes, there is, but we are getting to the point of running out of time, so please be brief.

Ross Greer: In this instance, Ms Robertson could follow up my question in writing, if she would prefer. It has been flagged up to me—it was last week, so things might have changed, and I have not been able to locate the relevant document—that the drama marking scheme is, in essence, unchanged. The document does not mention the effect of masks and social distancing, which, obviously, have a significant impact on performance. Can you confirm whether the guidance is being updated? Are you aware of that guidance? Perhaps the person who flagged up the issue to me was mistaken and the guidance has already been updated.

Fiona Robertson: If I may, I will come back to you with a more substantial answer. For many practical subjects we have, in effect, carried out a second round of modifications, which bear in mind the current circumstances. For example, in music, young people can record themselves playing, so they do not have to be in the school physically. There are some analogies with drama and how to judge performance elements. I am happy to come back on the specifics, taking account of the fact that drama is offered at different qualification levels.

Ross Greer: Thank you.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): My first question relates to the one that Ross Greer asked on the public consultation on the appeals process. I want to clarify whether I am understanding this correctly. The consultation starts this month and ends next month, lasting for a maximum period of four weeks. How is the consultation being done? Does it involve parents, teachers and pupils? What do you hope to gain by having such a short consultation period? The question is for Ms Robertson.

Fiona Robertson: We would all recognise that our aspirations for the consultation period can be difficult to meet at this time. We undertook quite a constrained public consultation in August 2020 on modifications to assessment, which was a two-week consultation, and we are considering something similar for the appeals process. However, we are seeking to engage as much as possible as part of that.

I will come back to the committee, if I may, with a more detailed timeline for the appeals consultation, which may be helpful to the committee in ensuring a wider understanding. We would all accept that the aspiration that many of us have for 12-week consultations will not be possible to achieve in this case, although we will seek to engage as much as we can during the consultation process.

As I say, I will come back to the committee, if I may, with a more detailed timeline.

Rona Mackay: Thank you. That would be helpful.

My next question is for Gayle Gorman of Education Scotland. How is Education Scotland holding local authorities to account on individual school performance regarding remote learning and return-to-school catch-up? How much oversight does Education Scotland have when it comes to provision becoming a postcode lottery? I am talking about affluent and less affluent areas. I would be grateful to know whether you are monitoring individual schools and local authorities.

Gayle Gorman: Equity has, of course, been a challenge and an issue in education globally for some time; we have been really concerned about it, particularly with reference to the child poverty figures from before the pandemic, and given the acceleration of that during and, we predict, after the pandemic.

I will hand over to my colleague Janie McManus, who can give you some of the details from our inspectorate work, which is done separately, in the scrutiny directorate. The weekly reports—there have been seven of them now—have covered children and young people's experience of school, with parental views on the variation. Last week's report dealt with the quality assurance of local authorities, which picks up the point about breadth and depth. We are extending that work through March and into April into further education and the work of all 27 colleges, looking at equity and the quality of learning and teaching.

Janie can say a bit more.

Janie McManus: On quality assurance, we examined local authority phasing plans back in June 2020, looking at each authority's arrangements for what was a blended learning model at that point, and we provided authorities with individual feedback in pulling that together in case those arrangements were required for August last year.

Since January, as Gayle Gorman has highlighted, we have been carrying out national overviews of practice. We have been building those up and producing reports on a weekly basis so that we can look at what is happening on the

ground, engaging with schools and local authorities. We have also engaged with parents and learners to get their views on what the experience of remote learning has felt like for them.

Each week since January, we have been publishing weekly reports and overviews about what has been happening. In each of those reports, we have set out a series of recommendations for areas that everyone in the system needs to consider in order to ensure that children and young people are getting the best possible experience under what are extremely challenging circumstances.

A key focus for us in the national overviews was to begin with local authorities, and that is what we did. We looked at the arrangements that local authorities had in place for assuring the quality of remote learning in their locality, and we took a deeper look at what was happening in schools. We then revisited schools to look at how they were taking account of the entitlements to remote learning that were published in January. We were really pleased to find that improvements had been made along the way.

11:15

Last week, we published the first in our next phase of reports, which looks at some of the recommendations that we set out previously. We take a closer look at how local authorities and schools have been tackling those and we exemplify strong practice. We hope that, by sharing that strong practice, other local authorities and schools will learn from it and improve their approaches. As Gayle Gorman said, quality assurance of local authorities was one of the first areas that we looked at in January, and it has been one of the first areas that we have looked at in the second phase. We look at the different approaches that local authorities are taking to assuring the quality of learning and teaching that children and young people in their locality are experiencing over this period of remote learning.

Rona Mackay: I would like a brief answer to this next question, as it is on a big subject and we do not have much time. In your findings so far, has there been a marked difference between results in affluent areas and those in less affluent areas?

Janie McManus: We have not looked specifically at that area. We have pulled out national messages in our reports. We have looked at the different approaches that schools have taken to meeting the needs of children and young people. It has been really pleasing for us to see the approaches that schools and local authorities have taken for vulnerable children and young people, particularly around pastoral support and

understanding the needs of children and families. On participation and engagement, support is being tailored for those children and families who are harder to reach.

Those findings have been pulled into national reports, and it is national messages that we have been giving out.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I know that in some prosperous areas of Scotland—and perhaps those that are not so prosperous—even primary schools require security during parents evenings. That is because parents with high expectations can put huge pressure on teachers when they feel that their children are not doing as well as they expect. That pressure sometimes comes from teachers with children at the same school or employees of the same local authority.

Is it not the case that, with teacher assessments replacing exams, even more pressure will be placed on teachers to award grades that not all pupils merit? Obviously, the children of parents who do not lobby teachers will be at a disadvantage, given the relentless pressure that is imposed on behalf of others. How will that pressure be countered to ensure equity in the assessment process and to protect teachers in the process? Perhaps Janie McManus could respond to that.

The Convener: I will bring in Ms McManus, but I am conscious that it might be more appropriate for Ms Lindsay to answer that question.

Janie McManus: Thank you, convener. I think that Ms Lindsay would be better placed to answer that.

Carrie Lindsay: I will pass over to Steven Quinn in a minute—we are passing the question round to the most appropriate person—but, before I do, I have a couple of comments.

I have certainly not experienced security being required to make sure that parents behave. We would hope that everybody who comes into a school takes responsibility for ensuring that they behave in a way that is acceptable to everybody. However, I understand that pressure can sometimes be put on teachers by parents who feel that things are not going the way that they would like, and sometimes that is a difficult situation—I absolutely accept that.

We strive for equity in everything that we do for our children and young people, but we know that society does not always allow it to happen in the way that we would want it to, because of resources, policies, society and the geographical boundaries with which we live. However, part of the job of a school is to try to ensure equity in

everything that it does, because our children and young people are all-important to us.

With regard to equity as part of the assessment process, I will hand over to Steven Quinn. He has already outlined a bit about the moderation process.

Steven Quinn: Thank you for that question, Mr Gibson. It is a really important one, and we have looked at it seriously.

One principle of the alternative certification model in relation to the quality assurance that is provided by local authorities—including both school and central teams, and with the support of RICs, where appropriate, and of the SQA—is to ensure that it is not ultimately one teacher who determines the provisional grade of a young person. Without going into a great deal of depth, what I mean by that is that the teacher needs to be supported throughout the process. The teacher carries out the teaching, and they might mark a piece of work for assessment, but that might also be marked by other teachers in the department. It is important that there is then cross-marking and a checking process. The quality assurance procedures in the school, in the first instance, must allow that checking to take place so that there is consistency of marking across the piece.

In addition, the local authority has to have processes in place that allow sampling across schools, especially where there is a small department of only one or two teachers. The SQA plays a part with its own sampling process, so that it is comfortable that the school's processes are correct. At the end of that process, the local authority is comfortable with the school's process, the headteacher is comfortable with the department's process and the department is comfortable with each individual teacher.

If we do that, when it comes to a parent not being happy with the outcome, the teacher has a level of protection, because it is not the teacher who has determined the provisional grade; it has been determined by the process, in which many people have been involved. That is critical, because we cannot place the burden of responsibility only on the class teacher, as that would be unfair.

I am grateful to you for bringing up that question, Mr Gibson.

Kenneth Gibson: I am reassured by that comprehensive response.

One issue about assessment relative to exams—this is why I have never been a big fan of assessment—is that some parents help their children with assessments. Some parents not only pay for tutors; sometimes, they might help their children with their portfolios and homework. Other

parents do not, for a variety of reasons—maybe they cannot because they do not have the education themselves or they are extremely busy. Given the position that we are in, how can we ensure that the attainment gap does not grow during this period? Obviously, exams are something that a parent cannot sit for their child.

The Convener: I will go to Ms Lindsay first. If other witnesses wish to come in, they should please put an R in the chat box.

Carrie Lindsay: We take the excellence and equity agenda very seriously in all our schools across Scotland. The gap changes. We talk about the gap in attainment in education, but we have to ensure that our schools are looking for a new gap that might have arisen because of the pandemic. Different families have found themselves in different situations. Some have been unable to cope during the pandemic. Some families who we thought might struggle have found that the situation aligns more to their way of living, and, although they do not have as much routine, they still manage to get through the work that is required.

It is incumbent on all of us in schools across Scotland to make sure that we identify the gap and that we provide support for our children and young people where that is required. I absolutely understand the comment about some parents being able to access tutors or give a bit more support, and that would be the same at any point in a school calendar, not just during a pandemic. We are aware of that, which is why there are a number of study groups, including e-Sgoil, which we talked about earlier. We are offering a range of things to some of our young people.

Teachers are professionals, and they know their children and their families really well. They want to make sure that they are trying to narrow that gap and that the young people who need extra support are able to receive it. We will continue to work in that way in order to close the gap wherever possible.

Kenneth Gibson: Last year, there was obviously huge political pressure to ensure that no child lost out as a result of lockdown. In reality, there was grade inflation, which was understandable, and there is likely to be grade inflation this year; that is just the fact of the matter. How can we ensure that children who are in earlier years of school and will be sitting exams next year and the year after are not penalised? They have also gone through lockdown, but there might not be the same grade inflation in their favour as we saw last year and will probably see this year. How can we restore some equity to the Scottish education system and ensure that standards are maintained?

The Convener: I am conscious that we missed Mr Quinn out from the last set of questions, so I will bring him in first and then go to Fiona Robertson.

Steven Quinn: I just want to provide some clarity in relation to Mr Gibson's previous question on how parents can support their young people. I want to assure him that the assessment pieces that a young person will deliver this year will be assessed in controlled conditions. They will not produce the assessments themselves at home; the assessment will be done in controlled conditions in the school.

Fiona Robertson: I was going to make the same point as Mr Quinn and talk about the guidance that we provide to schools on the assessment conditions and expectations around controlled conditions and how they are managed.

On the second part of Mr Gibson's questions, I have said at committee on a number of occasions that we have a duty to the young people of last year, this year and next year. That is why standards are so important. It is not just about an A grade in Arran being the same as an A grade in Aberdeen; it is also about looking across years. That is why the standard and integrity of qualifications are so important.

Obviously, we will take a different assessment approach following the cancellation of exams this year. Throughout this meeting, we and ADES colleagues have highlighted the work that we are doing around standards so that they are understood and how we are using material, events and so on to help teachers in that understanding.

In answer to your earlier question, Steven Quinn highlighted cross-marking and the checks and balances that are in place in schools and local authorities, combined with our work to sample evidence to check on standards. We are doing as much as we can to ensure the integrity of the awards this year while being mindful of the challenges that young people have faced.

As we have highlighted this morning, working together is critical in delivering fair and credible results.

11:30

The Convener: I am very conscious of the time, but I have promised to come back to five members. I ask them to be brief with their questions, and I hope that the answers will be equally brief. We will begin with Iain Gray, who will be followed by Jamie Greene. I ask Daniel Johnson to take the chair for a few moments.

The Deputy Convener (Daniel Johnson): I will bring in Mr Gray.

Iain Gray: I have no further questions.

The Deputy Convener: That was nice and straightforward.

Jamie Greene: I will use up Mr Gray's time allocation, then.

Further to the line of questioning on what will happen next in education as we emerge from the pandemic, it is important that teachers, pupils and parents have confidence in the institutions that govern the delivery of education and the awards system.

The chief executives of Education Scotland and the SQA will probably have followed with great interest a recent parliamentary debate in which the motion concerned the actions of both agencies. The wording of that motion is quite clear, but, in the interests of time, I will quote the relevant parts:

"The Parliament believes that the support, services and decision-making provided by Education Scotland and the SQA have not met the expectations or requirements of ... teachers, pupils or parents"

and

"considers that there is compelling evidence that neither body is fit for purpose and that they have lost the confidence of teachers, pupils and parents".—[*Official Report*, 17 February 2021; c 85.]

The motion was agreed to by a majority of members. Obviously, you were not party to that debate and are therefore at a slight disadvantage in discussing it, but I offer you the opportunity to respond to the terms of the motion.

The Deputy Convener: Before I hand over to the witnesses, it is fair to comment that decisions on the structures for education are policy matters, which are for politicians. However, any witness who wishes to refer to the points, observations or criticisms that were raised during that debate can do so now.

Gayle Gorman: I thank Mr Greene for giving us the opportunity to comment. I am conscious of the time, so I will do so briefly.

Education Scotland followed the debate with interest but also with disappointment. Some of the comments made in it mainly referenced previous roles in our organisation, which has been restructured and redesigned. We also have a new delivery model, a new approach and a new corporate plan for the recovery phase.

Our team has worked to support and deliver improvement across Scottish education during these challenging times. We have provided the national e-learning learning platform, which currently has more than half a million users. We have adapted and upgraded it, introduced new technology and led approaches to remote learning across Scotland. Our digilearn.scot website has

had more than 238,000 views of our professional learning and it supports teachers to deliver during the pandemic. Our professional learning website provides support for teachers. The sessions, including headspace, blethers, stepping stones, personal coaching and mentoring, reflective supervision and webinars, have been block booked every time that we have released them.

Our support for every subject—including support for remote learning, Wakelets, subject webinars and subject guidance—has continued, as has our direct support for individual schools, local authorities and RICs, in which we work alongside them, supporting, adding capacity, supporting strategic leadership and developing contacts with schools across Scotland. The feedback is that all that support is making a significant difference. That is without even considering our central role in CERG, in which we support and work collaboratively with its members to deliver guidance at a time of great uncertainty across Scottish education.

In its submission to the committee, the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association welcomed and recognised the role that Education Scotland has played in reducing pressure on the system—through our work on stopping inspections early, supporting and addressing the needs of schools, and supporting teaching and learning—and it welcomed the detailed guidance and support materials that came from Education Scotland. Therefore, I certainly did not recognise some of the content of the parliamentary debate, nor did my teams or those we support. We are, of course, learning throughout the pandemic. However, the organisation is newly redesigned, structured and led, and the new corporate plan for the recovery period shows a very different way of working from that which was previously in place in the organisation.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

The Deputy Convener: I hand back the chairing of the meeting to the convener, who has returned.

The Convener: I will bring in Ms Robertson.

Fiona Robertson: I share the sentiments that Gayle Gorman has expressed. We are aware of the political debate about Education Scotland and the SQA. I am very proud to have led a dedicated team of public servants—many of whom are teachers and lecturers—in delivering what has been a very challenging brief during the past year because of the cancellation of exams only weeks from when they were due to be held in 2020.

In 2021, we have worked with the education system to deliver an alternative certification model across national qualifications and, at the same time, to deliver modifications to the huge range of

qualifications that are available to learners across Scotland.

The SQA does not sit apart from the system; it is part of it. In a normal year, we would work with many thousands of teachers as our appointees. We continue to work with teachers in developing the approach, and we get very positive feedback about our work.

We had to review almost everything that we do in short order and under a huge amount of scrutiny. That scrutiny is perfectly acceptable, but we have had to be fleet of foot to ensure that we can continue to deliver. That has been challenging, but I share the sense of disappointment about some of the commentary on the work that is being undertaken.

As Gayle Gorman said, it is important that we are a learning organisation. We will, of course, learn and reflect on the circumstances of last year—I think that all parts of the public sector will be doing that—as we consider the issues. However, I must stress that we worked very hard last year to deliver.

The Convener: Mr Greene, I am sorry, but we are running short on time. Are you content for me to move on?

Jamie Greene: Yes. I wanted to give both organisations the opportunity to respond formally, on the record, given that they did not have the opportunity to do so during the debate. I thank the witnesses for their responses.

Beatrice Wishart: My question is about prelims. As part of the evidence-gathering process, we learned that some schools still intend to proceed with prelims. Ms Robertson spoke about the variety of approaches—prelims were included in that. Will you expand on the reason for still including prelims? Some people who have been in touch with us have referenced the anxiety that that is causing for young people. They have also mentioned that some pupils might have experienced bereavement and be grieving. I want to understand why prelims are still in the mix.

Fiona Robertson: The national qualifications group issued communications that made it clear that prelims are not a requirement of the alternative certification model this year and that schools and colleges might wish to take a variety of approaches to assessment. I go back to the guidance that we have produced on evidence gathering and assessment. There is no expectation or requirement from the SQA or the national qualifications group, which includes ADES, that prelims should take place. That said, the matter is for schools to consider. Some schools wish to continue with that approach; that is a matter for them. Prelims are not a requirement of the model. Prelims are, by their nature,

preliminary examinations, so the decision is for schools to take.

Beatrice Wishart: If you have any understanding of the number of schools that might hold prelims, it would be helpful if you could provide that information to the committee.

The Convener: I am sure that Ms Robertson will do that.

Fiona Robertson: The SQA is not able to provide that information, but my ADES colleagues might be able to consider that. As I said, we have a flexible approach to curriculum delivery and design. In any year, including this year, it is for schools to consider whether to hold prelim exams, and we have made it clear that there is no requirement to do so. We do not collect or hold the information that Beatrice Wishart has asked for. I do not know whether my ADES colleagues wish to add to that.

The Convener: In the interests of time, we can perhaps write a letter to ADES and local authorities to try to establish whether that information is being collated and whether it can be made available to the committee.

Ross Greer: My question is for Education Scotland. Rona Mackay asked whether there have been notable differences between the quality of remote learning in more affluent areas and that in less affluent areas. The response from, I think, Gayle Gorman was that that is not being looked at because a national approach is being taken. Given the amount of discussion that has taken place about levels of digital poverty and exclusion in this country, and given how acutely aware we all are of the different impacts over the past year, why was that matter not looked at? Will it be looked into now?

Gayle Gorman: That answer did not come from me; Janie McManus was commenting on what some of the core questions have been thus far. I will allow her to come back in and talk about how we have picked up that information but have not produced a specific report on it. On Mr Greer's question, the issue is central to the work that are we doing, to the feedback that we are giving to partners, to the work of CERG and to the—*[Inaudible.]*—reports.

Janie McManus: For the purposes of the reports, we pulled together national information overviews on remote learning. We did not look at particular areas or at particular areas of deprivation. We looked at how schools have responded in meeting the needs of learners and pupils, including those who are more vulnerable, and at the planning that has taken place in schools to adapt the remote learning offer to meet the differing needs of learners. However, we have

seen that a consistent approach has not been taken.

In our evaluation of approaches, issues relating to equity and closing the poverty-related attainment gap are very high on our agenda. We are pulling together information—in particular, on approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap over recent years—and we will share that evidence shortly so that we can see what progress has been made.

Schools' awareness of the particular needs of children and young people is clear; schools and teachers are very aware of the needs of their individual cohorts. They are looking closely at interventions that will support children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to make progress in their learning. We have seen a huge improvement in that in recent years. It has been high on teachers' agenda, as they tailor teaching and learning approaches during remote learning, to look at the support that they can put in place for individual learners.

To reiterate what I said when I was talking about the reports, we were looking at pulling the reports together as part of a national overview rather than as a comparator report.

11:45

The Convener: I will bring Mr Quinn in.

Steven Quinn: It is okay, convener. I was going to come in on the previous question, but, as we are running out of time, we can answer in writing.

The Convener: Thank you.

Gayle Gorman: The last time I was at the committee, I mentioned the work that we have done on the equity audit and Education Scotland's central role in gathering and collating information and drawing out the substantive evidence in that report, as well as our work on the Scottish attainment challenge equality impact report, which looked specifically at deprivation areas and use of the challenge funding. I should have mentioned that in my introduction.

The Convener: Mr Greer, are you content to move on?

Ross Greer: Yes. I apologise to Ms Gorman for misremembering who had originally responded to that line of questioning.

The Convener: Mr Johnson, do you still have a supplementary question?

Daniel Johnson: Yes, and I am happy to get a written response to it. On the quality assurance process, I have read on the SQA website the details around banding and standards. I am happy to be directed to where the detail is on this. The

page on quality assurance seems to be very high level, in that it sets out that external verification will be established against previous expectations for centres, and that there will be three verification outcomes: “accepted”, “accepted*” and “not accepted”. I am hoping that the SQA will be able to provide more detail on precisely how that assessment will be made, with regard to looking at the evidence provided and how that compares the tolerances, as well as on the format of external verification meetings, and how those processes might work. Is that documented or will documentation come out on that? I ask all that bearing in mind my questions at the previous meeting and the issues that arose last year from the quality assurance process.

Jean Blair: The information that you are looking at relates to where there is normal quality assurance taking place—normal external verification. In other words, it relates to the situation previously with internally assessed coursework components that were offered by schools in, for example, the sciences.

We will put in place different quality assurance arrangements this year, in line with the fact that we are in a unique situation. As you have heard, we are working closely with a range of partners, so there will be local and national quality assurance, which is more supportive. Anyone who is selected for quality assurance will be provided with specific feedback that is designed to support them to make the right judgments. Partners will be expected to share that in their centres and across their local networks. Therefore, we will be taking a different approach to quality assurance, and we are happy to provide you with more details on that.

Daniel Johnson: When will that be documented and released?

Jean Blair: It will be documented and released imminently. We are developing a communication on that now.

The Convener: That concludes our questions to witnesses. I thank ADES, Education Scotland and the SQA for their attendance today. As this is likely to be the last time that you attend the committee in this parliamentary session, I thank you all for your engagement over session 5.

Next week, we will hear from the Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland.

11:50

Meeting continued in private until 12:07.

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