



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Employment and Learning

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Careers Education, Information, Advice and
Guidance Inquiry: DEL/DE Briefing

10 October 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Basil McCrea (Chairperson)
Mr Thomas Buchanan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister
Mr Sydney Anderson
Mr Phil Flanagan
Mr David Hilditch
Mr Chris Lyttle
Mr Barry McElduff
Mr Pat Ramsey
Mr Alastair Ross

Witnesses:

Mrs Nuala Kerr	Department for Employment and Learning
Mrs Judith Shaw	Department for Employment and Learning
Mrs Dorina Edgar	Department of Education
Ms Patricia Nelson	Education and Training Inspectorate

The Chairperson: Nuala Kerr and colleagues from the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and the Department of Education (DE) are here this morning to brief the Committee.

Mrs Nuala Kerr (Department for Employment and Learning): Good morning, Chair.

The Chairperson: Nuala, are you taking the lead?

Mrs Kerr: I am.

The Chairperson: Will you introduce the team?

Mrs Kerr: I will.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much. You are most welcome. I remind members that the session is being recorded for Hansard. The Department for Employment and Learning's response to the inquiry has been provided to members, as has the Department of Education's. Nuala, over to you.

Mrs Kerr: Thank you, Chair. First, we welcome the opportunity to be allowed to present to the Committee. As you mentioned, we forwarded a written account of the work that we have been doing

on careers. I want to provide a brief summary of that to begin with today, and, with your indulgence, my colleagues from the Department of Education will do the same.

The Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning jointly launched the Preparing for Success careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) strategy and its associated implementation plan in January 2009. The Careers Service will lead on the implementation of the strategy on behalf of DEL, and Judith Shaw and I will provide an overview of DEL's view on that. Our colleagues Dorina Edgar from the Education Department and Patricia Nelson from the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) will present the Department of Education's perspective on it.

In relation —

The Chairperson: Are we going to do this in two halves?

Mrs Kerr: Yes, if that is OK with you, Chair.

DEL has two key responsibilities in careers guidance: first, the delivery of careers information, advice and guidance; and secondly, the associated policy development. The Department provides an all-age service from post-primary school onwards and has no remit in the primary school area. The Careers Service has formal partnership agreements with all post-primary schools, including special and independent schools where careers guidance is appropriate. Currently, 98% of post-primary schools fall into that category. The purpose of the agreement is to support the schools' careers education programme and to provide pupils, particularly those in years 10 and 12, with access to impartial careers information, advice and guidance.

During 2011-12, 87% of year 12 pupils received one-to-one careers guidance from the Careers Service, and 52% of year 10 pupils received support with subject choice and transition planning. That was delivered through group sessions, as well as by one-to-one guidance. We are also working with DE to increase access to pupils, and that Department has written to schools to reinforce that message.

The Careers Service provides information on jobs, education and training opportunities, including further education (FE), apprenticeships and Training for Success. Careers advisers also provide information on science, technology, engineering and mathematics or STEM-related careers opportunities and priority skills areas. They can provide class talks, one-to-one guidance and attend careers events and parents meetings. The provision is tailored to the needs and wishes of individual schools and agreed with those schools. The Careers Service supports young people on Training for Success through induction talks, one-to-one guidance and exit talks. All training suppliers have a named careers co-ordinator, and the Department assigns a careers adviser to each training provider.

Each FE college employs qualified careers advisers who provide a comprehensive careers guidance service to their students. In addition, the Department assigns a careers adviser to each college and operates a referral process.

Individual higher education institutions employ qualified careers advisers and deliver a comprehensive guidance service to their students. Schools, colleges and universities are represented on the careers steering group, which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Preparing for Success strategy.

The Department employs more than 100 professionally qualified careers advisers, who are based in 27 locations across Northern Ireland. They are based in careers centres, jobcentres and jobs and benefits offices. All careers advisers carry a mixed load of young people and adults, and they work with clients of all abilities. A small number of those advisers carry a majority caseload of young people with special needs. Additional support for individual clients is offered to colleagues. Staff are allocated on the basis of school pupil numbers. Therefore, we believe that there is equal provision for young people in urban and rural areas.

Careers resource centres provide support for adults. Out-of-school provision for young people has been established in Belfast and Londonderry, and a resource centre model is being tested in Dungannon as an exemplar for rural settings. Facilities have also been enhanced in Downpatrick and Bangor. In addition to the Careers Service, through NI Direct, we provide internet access to a wide range of careers information, jobs education and training opportunities. The website also provides

access to careers-matching software, and work is ongoing to enhance the website and to make use of other media, including text messaging and Twitter, to access young people.

The Minister has maintained the budget allocation for the Careers Service at about £6.3 million per annum. The Department's recruitment policy requires that all careers advisers are professionally qualified to postgraduate level. Continuous professional development (CPD) is part of the Careers Service's commitment to quality. There is a focus on ensuring that knowledge and skills are kept up to date, with particular emphasis on labour market information, as well as priority and emerging skills. The Department's advisers attend an average over six CPD days a year, which exceeds the 20 hours that the Institute of Career Guidance recommends.

To reinforce professionalism and provide access to CPD materials and opportunities, the Department pays membership fees to the Institute of Career Guidance for all careers advisers and managers, and members are required to subscribe to the institute's code of ethics. Quality and continuous improvement are important in the Careers Service as a whole, and it is working towards achieving the matrix accreditation by March 2013, which is the national standard for the delivery of careers information, advice and guidance services. To conclude, I confirm that Preparing for Success supports the Programme for Government, the economic strategy and the Department's skills strategy. The Department is working closely with our colleagues in DE on the strategy's implementation, and progress to date has been very positive. However, we recognise that, when the strategy was developed, we were working in a different economic and social context. We have responded to significant changes in our environment by developing a streamlined and effective referral system with the Department's employment service, improving access for people in work by extending the opening hours of the Belfast resource centre, which is a pilot for other centres, and, in the active management of 16- and 17-year-olds, especially those who are at risk of becoming long-term not in education, employment or training — NEET — by supporting them into employment, training or education.

I will pass you over to Dorina Edgar from the Department of Education.

Mrs Dorina Edgar (Department of Education): Thank you very much indeed, Chair, for the opportunity to brief the Committee. The briefing paper that we provided covers our response to the issues that were raised in your terms of reference, but, if you permit, I will make some short opening remarks.

The Programme for Government and the Northern Ireland economic strategy rightly recognise the particular contribution that education can make to growing a sustainable economy, and, through our education service, it is recognised that our young people are supported to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and personal attributes that they need to live fulfilling lives as the employers, employees and entrepreneurs of the future.

In focusing on the contribution of education to economic growth, the Department has reshaped its post-primary curriculum through the entitlement framework to make it more relevant to pupils' needs, employment prospects and career aspirations. As a consequence of the increased flexibility of the curriculum from Key Stage 4, there is a need for even more robust careers education, information, advice and guidance to be provided in post-primary schools. With a greater choice of pathways offered to pupils at Key Stage 4 and post-16 comes a need for increased support for pupils in making decisions at key transition points, particularly in year 10, year 12 and year 14. That, coupled with changes in the employment patterns and future skills needs, requires that schools provide high-quality CEIAG on a whole-school basis that supports the development of pupils to become effective career decision-makers in their own right.

Schools are expected to provide effective careers education that involves the whole school. Schools have a number of tools at their disposal to support them in the development of good careers education, including quality standards indicators that the ETI developed, as well as the Department's guide for developing effective career decision-makers. That aims to improve the quality of careers learning opportunities and encourage greater cohesion in the provision of information, advice and guidance in schools.

It is not possible or desirable for schools to provide CEIAG in isolation. Today, schools must, and do, work in close collaboration with the Department for Employment and Learning's Careers Service to guarantee that pupils have access to impartial advice, guidance and up-to-date careers information, including labour market information. Mrs Kerr highlighted the valuable role that careers advisers who work in partnerships with schools provide. Schools also work closely with employers, which is greatly

welcomed. I acknowledge their valuable contribution, from offering work experience to talks, workshops and other activities in schools.

Careers education is a very important and integral part of the curriculum, specifically in the area of learning for life and work in post-primary schools. It is our expectation that every child will have access to careers education while at school. Indeed, every subject teacher has a role to play by linking their subject content to, and making connections with, the world of work. The vision of the principal for his or her pupils is key to the robustness of the careers education that any school provides. I can point to examples — I am sure that my colleague from the ETI can also do so — of where schools have put pupils' needs first, offered good teaching and learning opportunities, choices of courses, good advice and guidance, and where achievements in results have improved markedly.

All ETI inspection reports must comment on the quality of careers education in school. Those comments are provided back to the school, and we expect them to take note of them. Where practices could be better, the feedback will identify the areas that should remain the focus for attention. The ETI comments also allow us to identify good practice.

All schools are members of area learning communities. We ask those communities to report annually on an implementation plan for four key strategic entitlement framework priorities, one of which is to deliver and develop a careers programme that assists an individual in making informed choices about the courses and pathways that are open to them that best meet their individual need.

You will be aware that the Department delegates a budget to schools to cover the costs of delivering the curriculum. We believe that schools, staffed with professionals, are best placed to make decisions for the delivery of the curriculum, including careers education. So, it is right and proper for principals to deploy resources locally to meet that need.

Careers teachers benefit from ongoing non-accredited CPD opportunities, inset days, training from the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, and opportunities in area learning communities to share good practice and avail themselves of training opportunities on an area basis. The Department has developed CPD modules for careers teachers, which we wish to see accredited. The CPD modules will encompass the key knowledge and skills that are required of school staff to lead and manage CEIAG effectively.

The careers strategy makes clear that careers teachers and careers advisers have distinct but complementary roles. Schools are responsible for providing effective careers education, and although teachers are not required to have a specific careers guidance qualification, schools should provide them with access to the qualified professional expertise, as well as the impartial advice and guidance, that is available from the Careers Service.

I will finish there, Mr Chairman. Thank you very much indeed. We are happy to take questions.

The Chairperson: Thank you. That is very kind of you. Will Members indicate whether they wish to contribute?

It all sounds very good on paper, but we obviously would not be having an inquiry if we did not think that there were some problems with the system. Do you think that there are problems with it?

Mrs Edgar: Do you mean the system of careers education in schools?

The Chairperson: Yes.

Mrs Edgar: Evidence from ETI reports shows that, since the introduction of the strategy, there has been a great percentage increase in the number of schools that are providing good or better careers education, information, advice and guidance. However, that still means that 30% do not do so. So, yes, there is an issue for those schools.

The Chairperson: Those improvements have come in the past two years and from a fairly low base. Who will audit the ETI? What does it know about careers?

Mrs Edgar: The people there are qualified professionals.

The Chairperson: They are qualified professionals who are out of date and not in touch with modern reality. I do not know whether you heard the preamble, but if you did not, I will invite Mr Ross to repeat that. We have a huge shortage of software engineers and a huge opportunity here, but I do not know how many teachers are able to talk about software or have any experience of it. We all have anecdotal evidence. However, what tends to happen through the entitlement framework and the flexibility that you talked about is that people go to their core and teach drama and those sorts of things, because they think that that is good for an all-round education. However, it does not get people to a place where there are potential employment opportunities.

Mrs Edgar: I do not agree with your point on the entitlement framework, Chair. The idea is to put a pupil's needs and career aspirations first. A pupil has to be informed about careers opportunities. That comes from accessing information, which is part of the role both of schools and careers advisers. In developing the curriculum, we asked school principals and their senior managers, including careers teachers, to take account of local and international developments. We are not asking every pupil to do software engineering. That would be entirely wrong. If someone has an interest in it, they should have the opportunity to follow a pathway towards software engineering. In the past, such opportunities were not there, because there was this original core curriculum and you were, therefore, restricted in what you could do. However, the opportunities and flexibility that the entitlement framework now offers mean that you can say, "Software engineers are needed, so what qualifications do I need to follow that path?" You then have your employers sell that message to the area learning community in the school, then provide that through your curriculum. In fact, it does keep the doors open.

The Chairperson: I do not wish to be in any way rude, but this Committee has a challenge function. We appreciate your comments, but the statement came out about the two Departments seeking to be part of the Executive's growth strategy, and Invest Northern Ireland can tell us that we are short of software engineers by 1,000 graduates a year. If we could get more, as Mr Ross indicated, we would have a bigger opportunity. Meanwhile, we tend to churn out lawyers and doctors like there is no tomorrow. Most of the industrial people who appear before the Committee tell us that they are not getting the type of people they need for the jobs they have.

Please understand that I am not having a go at you personally but at the process. The challenge is that it appears in many cases to be box-ticking. Whenever people talk in general about whether you can justify this if the Public Accounts Committee or somebody else looks at it, yes, you can. Are we getting the right response for our children and industrialists, no, we are not. I do not want you to feel that I am focusing on you entirely, but, in general, who most influences the decision-making process of children or young people, and how do we plan to engage with those key stakeholders?

Mrs Kerr: Quite often, parents are the main influence on what young people choose as their careers. Conservatively, that leads them to the professions that you mentioned. However, you will be aware of the work going on in explaining the IT sector to young people and parents to tell them that interesting, exciting and well-paid jobs are available in and needed by that sector. They have the task to explain that and to show parents what a job in software engineering may look like, because I am sure that many would not know.

There is also work to ensure that young people leave with qualifications that enhance their opportunities to take up posts in software engineering. The content of the A level is being changed, which will direct people more towards the software engineering elements of that A level rather than to the information and communication technology (ICT) user aspects, which possibly was the case. Maybe, could I —

The Chairperson: I am quite happy for you to come in, but I want just to put my three points to you.

Mrs Kerr: I am sorry, Chair.

The Chairperson: No, it is OK. I will put them down, and you can choose to answer them in whatever way, and then I will be finished and will bring in colleagues. There seems to be an issue about people making decisions earlier in their academic careers that send them down a particular route, so when they want to do something else later on, they cannot. In other words, if they do not take double-award science or whatever and suddenly discover that they want to be a scientist, they cannot do that. There is an issue about how we deal with that.

There is also an issue, which is covered by some of your points, Nuala, and, I suspect, in some of the others, about the softer skills of communication, team work, making yourself employable and all those issues. I know it is heresy to say this, but it is not about just the children. I always pick the wrong profession, but let us say that if we produce 10,000 librarians, they cannot all get a job. There has to be some planning in how we do it. How do we encourage universities and further education colleges not just to respond to demand but to influence demand through bursaries, education things or whatever? As the twig is bent, so grows the tree.

Finally, we are getting information that even the Careers Service does not feel that it is fully integrated between DEL and DE; it feels very much the Cinderella. I highlight those issues, but I am happy to go back and deal with the points that you have to pick up on. I am sure that my colleagues will have their own points to make. Will you deal with those in whatever way you feel is appropriate? Members will then have their questions.

Mrs Edgar: You mentioned making decisions too early and limiting yourself. We say — and schools are aware of this — that we want to keep options open at Key Stage 4. It is far too early to narrow your options at the age of 14. It is more likely that people will know what they are doing at 16. They can narrow their options then. We do not mind them tasting and testing occupational areas through occupational skills courses, but we advise them to try to keep their options open so that all routes — scientific, academic or whatever — are open to them at that stage.

As the name indicates, the revised curriculum was revised recently, and underpinning every part of it are the skills that, as you say, employers are looking for. So, managing information, creative thinking, problem solving, decision-making and working with others are integral to the curriculum. In every subject, teachers will find ways of group working, or —

The Chairperson: I get the point. You are telling me that I do not need to worry; you have that sorted.

Mrs Edgar: That is now part of the statutory curriculum.

The Chairperson: I have got that particular point.

Mrs Kerr: If you have finished, I will ask Judith to tell you how the Careers Service helps young people to reach decisions and understand what is available in the marketplace.

Mrs Judith Shaw (Department for Employment and Learning): First, on the point about making decisions early. Nuala mentioned the access to pupils that we have at the minute. There is an issue that, at year 10, we are talking to just over 50% of those pupils. We have a drive to try to increase that because that is a crucial stage in decision-making at a time when young people are choosing subjects. As you said, rightly, if they drop subjects at that stage, there is no opportunity to open those up again. So, we are working actively with DE to try to get access to more pupils at that stage. Hopefully, that will influence future decisions.

We try to get pupils to look at their own strengths and aspirations but also to open their minds to the careers that are out there, what different subject choices lead to and what qualifications are required for different disciplines. In the past couple of years in particular, our emphasis has moved much more towards introducing labour market information; letting young people know about the priority skills areas and where future opportunities lie. That is a change in direction. It has always been there but not to the forefront as it is now.

That links in to what we are doing with parents. At the moment, we are finalising a guide for parents, which is about trying to support them in their role in supporting their young people to make career decisions. The first part of that is about looking at what will be the career opportunities in the future and trying to encourage parents to think beyond the professions of doctor and lawyer to see that science subjects can lead to many other opportunities. So, we are aware of the issues and are working towards resolving them, but we in no way think that we have got there yet.

The Chairperson: OK. I get that you are aware of the issues. It is not just science, engineering and software; we understand that there is a range of issues. I am not being selective on that point. As you have just said, the key thing is that we are not quite getting the desired outcome for anybody at the moment. We will see whether we can help with that.

Ms Patricia Nelson (Education and Training Inspectorate): I think that we have a bit of a mountain to climb here because the culture in Northern Ireland schools and among parents has been very conservative. You mentioned the established professions. There is no doubt that many parents see success for their child as being entry into those professions. There is a job of work to do in informing parents about the opportunities that exist. Having said that, it is a bit of a chicken-and-egg situation. If the jobs are not seen to be there for their young people, they are not going to opt for those subjects in school that could lead towards those employment opportunities. It is a bit of a dilemma. If it is not obvious that employment exists, parents will not encourage the young people to take those subjects.

In schools interpreting the curriculum in a broader way and keeping doors open, we are now coming across examples. For example, last week, I was inspecting in a non-selective school where all pupils now take GCSE science. That is a very specific, deliberate effort to keep those doors open for their pupils.

We cannot talk about the curriculum without talking about English and maths and the whole idea of careers education, information, advice and guidance being one strand of an entire mechanism of support for young people. However, unless they are working with the literacy and numeracy co-ordinators, career progression for young people into something that suits their ability and aspirations is not going to happen. So, although we need to keep the curriculum broad and keep doors open, the other thing that keeps those doors open is achievement in English, maths and those other, softer skills that you are talking about. We know that employers are probably a little bit critical of the way that young people are coming out of school today without those.

The Chairperson: I will just pass over to colleagues now. I will come back to the point, Patricia, but at least we realise that there is a mountain to climb. As a Committee, we really want to find out how we can start tackling that.

Mr Buchanan: In 2009, you launched the Preparing for Success strategy. That was three years ago. The aim of that was to develop effective career decision-makers. How has that progressed since then? How closely are those people in contact with the real world, if you like, so that they are successfully seeking to bridge the gap that we have? There are employers and businesses that need a certain type of skilled young person, and they do not have them because we do not have them trained. How close are they to the business world, so as to ensure that you are giving the right type of guidance to those folk to get people trained in the right direction? It seems that the gap remains and nothing is really being done about it.

Mrs Shaw: From the careers strategy perspective, the Business Alliance is represented on our careers steering group and is working and engaging with our education colleagues on what the business sector is looking for in employees. There is a lot of business engagement work going on. From the point of view of making sure that the Careers Service advisers are tuned in to the needs of businesses, through our professional development work with the advisers, we have the sector skills councils coming to work with the advisers throughout the year, keeping us up to date with developments in industry and what employers are looking for. The advisers also engage in industrial visits from time to time to go out and see what is happening. That is how we keep the staff in tune with what is happening in the real world.

Mr Buchanan: If that is all ongoing, why do we have such a gap in skills requirement? If you are so closely in contact with the businesses and the skills that are required, why do we have such a skills gap?

Mrs Kerr: Fundamentally, we need to look at what influences young people about their career opportunities. We produce industry fact sheets that tell young people about what the job opportunities are, what qualifications are needed and the earning potential in those kinds of jobs. In a perfect world, they would read that information and act accordingly. However, young people are influenced by all kinds of things, and parents are one of the primary factors, as we touched on. Through the future skills action group, the IT industry is recognising the fact that it has to tell young people about the jobs and opportunities that are there, to engage with them in all kinds of ways and to encourage them to understand the potential that is there. The task of marrying the specific needs of industry at any given time will always be difficult.

We need to encourage young people to be open-minded about making choices that respond to changes in the job market. We can then make interventions that allow people to change careers, retrain and take up opportunities as they emerge. You will be aware that some of the initiatives with

ICT, for example, are all about that. In the interim, we have to encourage universities and FE colleges to offer courses that are industry relevant, so that young people, once they make their choices, end up with qualifications that the industry needs. Those institutions are engaged in that process with industry by modifying their courses and making them more industry relevant and then providing young people with the incentives to follow those courses. We can see —

The Chairperson: Hold on a tick. As the Deputy Chairman pointed out, if you are so closely aligned with business, why is that not working?

Mrs Kerr: In many instances, it does work. People make decisions that allow them to pursue what they need to do, but there are always mismatches between what young people do and what business needs. From time to time, we have to intervene to help match that better. All those instances I described — changes to qualifications and course offerings and different interventions — help to match young people to that need. In the same process, we educate those who influence young people so that they can see what the emerging opportunities are, which may be different from what we, as parents, would have experienced in our working careers.

Mr Buchanan: Rather than simply providing information, perhaps careers advisers need to encourage pupils by saying, "Look, here is where the gap is. If you go down this road, you are going to get a job." They really need to encourage pupils to go down certain roads rather than just provide them with information. Perhaps that is the way forward.

Mrs Kerr: Our task is to provide young people with the information that allows them to make rational choices. While they are in school, they are encouraged to develop their decision-making skills —

The Chairperson: I want to bring other people in, but I before I do so, I just want to say that the job of careers advisers ought to be about more than that, as the Deputy Chairman said. It is not just about providing information. As you said earlier, in an ideal world, they would read the fact sheet and make a logical decision. I agree that there are certain influences such as parents, some of whom are hugely conservative, and they want their children to get careers advice on nursing, teaching, medicine and law, and that is about it. *[Interruption.]* That is a parent looking for me just to see why things are wrong.

What the Deputy Chairman is saying here, I think, is that we would like to see more proactive engagement from careers advisers. The list, which I read out, of the people who influence the young included parents, peers, teachers and TV, but it did not include the Careers Service. We are investing a lot of money in that, and I think that the Deputy Chairman is right to say that it needs to step up to the mark.

Ms Nelson: I think that it is fair to say that, in the past, schools operated in something of a vacuum and were separated from the needs of business and industry and from an awareness of what those needs were.

We have good evidence from inspection activities that labour market intelligence is starting to be used in determining what opportunities there are for young people, and that, in turn, informs the school or area learning community's curriculum offer to those pupils. Although a work in progress, and in some schools and area learning communities it is early days, something that has also happened is that, through the offer of professional and technical programmes — the content of which is informed by the sector skills councils — there is a direct link between the world of work, industry and business and what is going on in schools. That is a significant cultural change in our schools today.

The Chairperson: Before Pat Ramsey speaks, I will just tell you this: the Committee will not let you get away with telling us, "Look; there was a problem, but it is all OK now".

Ms Nelson: With respect, I have just said that it is early days but it represents a significant change.

The Chairperson: I am happy for you to assert that, Patricia, but that is what the inquiry will establish. I understand that we all understand where certain factors may need to be dealt with. The question is one of the efficacy of our intervention.

Mr P Ramsey: The Committee carried out a thorough inquiry into young people's employment opportunities in its inquiry into young people not in education, employment or training. That inquiry

brought forward recommendations to ensure that young people had better choices at post-primary age. Do you accept that we are failing young people because so many of them are slipping through the net? Putting aside arguments about whether parental aspirations for the child are in the areas that the Chair outlined, there are areas where we have absolutely failed young people across Northern Ireland. I am not assigning blame, but I do not see joined-up thinking. For example, where does the Department of Education fit into the Employment and Learning-led niche strategy on careers guidance?

On Monday, I attended an event held here at Stormont by the post-19 lobby group. It was about parents across Northern Ireland. Every year, across Northern Ireland, 100 children with learning difficulties leave school, absolutely abandoned by the system. I saw parents in tears in the Long Gallery as they explained how their daughter or son was leaving school this year with no opportunities, no careers guidance. What are you offering those marginalised and vulnerable children?

Mrs Kerr: Clear work is being done with young people to transition them from school into training and educational opportunities. I will ask Judith to explain what work we do with —

Mr P Ramsey: Before Judith comes in, I will say this: with respect, the Long Gallery was packed. There were parents there in distress. They were telling me that nothing is being done.

The Chairperson: OK; we have got it, Pat.

Mrs Shaw: We work with young people of all abilities in mainstream and special schools. Young people with statements have a transition plan that is developed at age 14. Careers advisers, along with other professionals, are invited to work with the schools, the young people and their parents on an annual and ongoing basis to develop those plans and to look at what those young people will do when they leave school. So, we are actively involved with such young people, and the school is obliged to invite us to be included in that process. All the advisers are trained to work with people with special needs. They are working with them, but our role is not to make provision at the end of that. What they do depends on the needs of those individual young people.

Mr P Ramsey: Sorry, Chair, for going off on a slight tangent, but it was in my head and I felt it worth asking. I accept what you say in good faith, particularly Nuala's point about parental aspirations. So, what formal engagement at post-primary level is taking place with parents?

Mrs Shaw: In relation to special needs, there —

Mr P Ramsey: No, I am parking special needs, although I would be interested in getting figures and/or statistics detailing how many young people with special needs have secured employment opportunities. However, I want to park that —

The Chairperson: Just hold on to that point. Do we have information on that?

Mrs Shaw: On the number of young people with special needs who go into employment?

Mr P Ramsey: Yes; over the past three years, for example.

Mrs Shaw: I do not have that specific information.

Mr P Ramsey: I wanted —

The Chairperson: Hold on, Pat. There is a specific issue about how we get people with learning disabilities or other disabilities into employment. I would be interested to know whether we could find out what those figures are. Perhaps you could send that information to us when appropriate.

Mrs Kerr: Yes, Chair. We will be able to help you with some of that information.

The Chairperson: That would be fine. We will put that to one side.

Mr P Ramsey: We are looking forward to the inquiry. We want to see best practice, and we want to see where, for example, we can look at standards in other areas as well. However, most of us here

are parents and we want the best for our child, but, at times, our aspirations are not what industry demands. What formal engagement takes place with the parent at post-primary level to encourage their child to go down other routes that are more relevant to industry today?

Mrs Shaw: From the perspective of the Careers Service, that would be done through parents' evenings in schools. Parents also have the option to come along to careers guidance interviews, although, in practice, not many parents take up that option at the moment.

Mr P Ramsey: That is more relevant to DE, to be fair. What are you doing at post-primary school level to encourage, stimulate or lead parents to think that the industry now wants science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects rather than the —

The Chairperson: OK, Pat. We will put the questions to DE.

Mrs Edgar: It is as Judith said; there is constant communication with parents about what people do in school, from reports and parents' evenings to annual reports of activities at school; careers forms part of that. We report back to parents at various stages, and certainly as regards choices, every parent is invited —

Mr P Ramsey: Will you share with this Committee, Dorina, information, whether in letter or other communication form, that you share with parents?

Mrs Edgar: Communication that I have with parents?

Mr P Ramsey: Yes, communication that the Careers Service has with parents. A formal —

The Chairperson: OK. You have put the question.

Mrs Edgar: I do not write to parents because I do not know parents' addresses. We have policy responsibility for careers, and we have delegated that to the principal of the school. It is they who —

Mr P Ramsey: Sorry, Dorina, but I think this is important. You say that parents are being communicated with on a regular basis. Can we determine what form that communication takes?

Ms Nelson: I will give one example of communication with parents that would particularly have happened in the early days at the start of the implementation of the entitlement framework. As a result of DE guidance, the principals of schools within an area learning community had communicated and, in most instances, offered meetings with parents to explain what the entitlement framework was and what the implications were for their sons and daughters.

The Chairperson: Pat has made the point that if parents are one of the key stakeholders, and you mentioned that their view of the employment market is probably based on what it was like when they were considering careers, it is a fundamental issue for how we climb this mountain, that —

Ms Nelson: Your point is well made.

The Chairperson: We would like some information on how effective what we are doing is. I will not mention anybody around this table, but certain parents will say, well, we might have been invited, but we could not go, perhaps because we were working or we did not think it was appropriate. They will say that you are the expert, so you should do it. We are not cracking the issue that Pat is bringing up, and I would be interested to know whether the current strategy of engaging the parents is failing or succeeding. I would like to know how we can get that information. Is it coming from schools? You represent the Department of Education.

Mrs Edgar: I could ask schools to provide that for you.

The Chairperson: That would be very useful, but do you not think that you would like to know that as well? We are only asking for —

Mr P Ramsey: Could we get the communications that you are having with the schools in respect of this?

Mrs Edgar: Yes.

Mr P Ramsey: The guidance that you are giving to principals and parents.

Mrs Edgar: Yes, absolutely. That will not be a problem because we write guidance for teachers each year on the entitlement framework.

Mr P Ramsey: Could we have that for the past three years?

Mrs Edgar: Yes. That is not a problem.

The Chairperson: Please also reflect, when you read the Hansard report, on how effectively we are engaging with parents. If we take that as an issue that has been noted, we would be interested to know how that works for you.

Ms Nelson: One strategy in the inspection process that we use to find out the views of parents is the circulation of a questionnaire to a sample of parents prior to the inspection, asking their views on different aspects of the school's work. That includes specific questions relating to careers.

The Chairperson: I am sorry, Patricia, but how do you know what you do not know? If a parent is pretty sure that they want their son or daughter to be a nurse, and they went into careers advice and are told, "Yeah, you should be a nurse, you want to be a nurse, speak to a nurse", that is a self-fulfilling prophesy. We are trying to change people's mindsets. I was down at Citi and they were telling me that they had employed, I think, 60 graduates but the cut-off list for interview was a 2:1 degree and 9 A*s at GCSE. They said they were overwhelmed by the talent but there were simply not the jobs for those people. Something is not happening in the communication.

I understand that you recognise the identification problem but how will we tackle that and how will we know whether we are doing that well? We will leave the parents bit and you will have a look at that.

Mr Anderson: Thank you for your presentation. Why does the Careers Service not engage with schools at parents' evenings; or does it? I go along to the parents' evenings of schools that I am involved with. Do you go along to parents' evenings when the teachers and pupils are there to talk about careers?

Mrs Shaw: Yes, we do go along. We have a partnership agreement with pretty much all the post-primary schools. As part of that, we agree how we will spend the amount of time we have with a particular school. If a school wants us to be along at parents' evenings, we will be there.

Mr Anderson: It is always the school having to ask. You are not promoting that yourselves: asking when it will be having a parents' evening when you can go along and discuss careers with parents and pupils when you have them all in one room.

Mrs Shaw: The partnership agreement is a two-way process. So, yes, we would be saying to the head of careers at the beginning of the year when negotiating the agreement —

Mr Anderson: And do you?

Mrs Shaw: We do, and we do go along to the majority of parents' evenings.

Mr Anderson: What is the success of that engagement? That is what we are trying to tease out: that engagement and how much success you are having.

Mrs Shaw: We would be at the majority of year 10 and year 12 parents' evenings.

The Chairperson: It is not enough for you to say, aspirationally, "This is what we do. We push it out as what people should, might or could do." We need to know whether they are actually doing it. Are they getting engaged in that area? Can you shed any light on that for us? We would be delighted to hear how effective the parental engagement is from your perspective.

Mr Ross: The Chair said something about the culture. I do not doubt that there is a culture that many parents want their children to be lawyers, doctors or teachers, and we know we have far too many of them. There was also a culture in many schools that it was just about getting pupils to university. My experience of careers, which was not that long ago and is much closer than most people in the room, was all about being given university prospectuses.

The Chairperson: That is enough from you. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Ross: It was all about choosing what university you were going to. It was not about deciding what career you may do or subject choices at university to get to that career. That was pretty poor as well. I do not think that anybody in the room would be saying that any pupil should be forced down a particular career path. Nor should you be telling pupils which career path to go down. At the same time, government has job creation targets. We know the areas in our economy that we want to grow. Government is the funder of education and a major funder of our universities. Clearly, in that respect, there is a need to at least funnel some pupils down a particular route where there is a need in the economy, because we want to make sure that careers advice is about getting young people careers and not just qualifications. I go back to what I said at the beginning. You can get lots of children with qualifications to be lawyers, doctors and teachers, but there are no careers there for them. We have had some success in getting well-renowned law firms in Northern Ireland, but we still have an abundance of lawyers and teachers. The point that the Chair made is important. We need to ensure that pupils go to the areas where they are going to get employment.

On that point — I know that other members have said it as well — I am glad that the labour market identification stuff has been done. That is the current need. Perhaps by the time pupils go through university and get their training, maybe five or six years down the line, the market will have changed. I have three questions. First, what work is being done to identify the future needs of industry? The needs at present may not be the same as those in five or six years, so what work are you doing to identify future needs?

Secondly, what level of engagement is there between pupils and companies so that companies can go into schools and say, "This is what we do, and if you are interested in doing that, this is the path you have to take, and these are the qualifications you need at school and university"? What engagement at that face-to-face level are companies getting involved with in schools?

Thirdly, you said that you are working with some of the companies in Northern Ireland and that they will be telling you what their needs are at present. There are huge opportunities for Northern Ireland in companies that are currently not here. As I said previously, when I was in San Francisco, there were companies doing a lot of work with data, computer programming and IT firms. They want to move their operations, perhaps to somewhere in Europe, and they want to come to Northern Ireland because we have a good reputation for the students who are going through our universities. They like the fact that universities are fairly responsive to their needs. What work is done on a more global scale, with Invest NI or anyone else, to find out about the needs of other companies around the world that, potentially, would want to invest in Northern Ireland, if we have the right graduates in the areas that they are interested in?

Mrs Kerr: I will take some of those points. First of all, you asked about what we view as the future skills needs for the economy. You will be aware of the skills strategy Success through Skills and the research work that underpinned that strategy. That research work was done jointly by our Department and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) to help inform us about what the future economy could look like and what the skills needs to serve that economy are likely to look like. You will be aware that that indicated the demand for higher-level skills, and skills in specific areas. We do know, in strategic terms, what those particular skills needs are. That sets the broad agenda for developing the skills opportunities with all those who are delivering on that part of the agenda.

We also engage with the industry in various guises. Judith spoke about our work with the sector skills councils, part of the task of which is to tell us what industry needs are now and what the developing needs are likely to be. We also work with particular sectors that have particular needs. We have talked about the future skills action groups in relation to ICT, and the current ones in relation to engineering, the tourism sector and the food sector. Where there are particular issues emerging, work is done on a more task-and-finish basis. We work very closely with the industry and the academic institutions together at the table to develop strategies to deal with their more immediate needs. So we

do have a pathway and a plan for the long term. We take intermediate actions with our education institutions. We have seen the additional —

The Chairperson: We have got the general point there, but Alastair's point was: where is the strategic blue-sky thinking? We are talking here about space at the moment.

Mrs Kerr: The strategic thinking is in the skills strategy. It is underpinned by the research that was done jointly by us and DETI to see what the future opportunities are. It is also influenced by the work on MATRIX and other developments that are there. So, we work closely —

The Chairperson: OK. We take that point. I do not know whether Alastair is happy with that answer, but he can comment on that. You have a couple of other points, Alastair, so it is with you.

Mr Ross: I wanted to know about face-to-face interaction with companies.

Mrs Edgar: There is a lot of interaction in schools on STEM subjects in particular, whereby teachers go out into industry and employers come in and resources are developed for pupils. You mentioned some of those resources; they include CERN videos, STEM Heroes and a STEM directory; and we have got Young Enterprise NI and people providing work experience —

Mr Ross: Ideally, you will want pupils to go out to businesses and see these things, but that is not always going to happen — it is very difficult to do that on a regular basis — but how many schools get companies or business leaders in to talk to them? I do not need that information now, but if we can get information on how many schools are actively engaging with companies and getting people in to talk to their pupils, and about how regularly they are doing that, it may be useful for us. I do not expect that information now, but if we could get that, it would be useful.

The Chairperson: Can you get that information for us?

Mrs Edgar: Yes, we can ask schools for that.

Mr Ross: My final point was about global engagement with companies. I am thinking about what their needs would be if they were considering investing here. Is any interactivity going on there?

Mrs Kerr: We keep in touch with our colleagues in DETI and Invest NI about emerging opportunities, but, more specifically, when companies that will potentially invest here are identified, we work closely with Invest NI to ensure that those companies will have the skills that they need made available to them. That is a medium-term action from the point of view that the companies identified as seeking to locate here are ones that we would work closely with to develop the skills that they have a specific need for. We have worked with a number of companies that have been mentioned, and we engage with Invest NI as soon as those opportunities have been identified.

Mr Lyttle: Thank you for your presentations today. It is a cross-departmental issue, so it is good to hear from everybody.

The hypothesis that there is a problem seems to have been totally blown out of the water in that, in 2010, the quality of careers education information, advice and guidance was good or better in only 37% of post-primary schools. It is not just a problem; it is a complete mess. It is difficult in that there have been significant improvements, and clearly things are being set straight, but I think there is still a fear that we do not really have a good handle on the quality of information that young people across our schools are receiving in relation to this issue. I have heard phrases about there being "mountains to climb", so at least there is recognition of the problem, but the information we are getting about what is being done to address those problems is still really thin.

I will not go through all the issues again, Chair. It is encouraging to form a working contact with officials on this issue, and there is clearly a huge amount of work to be done. Hopefully, we can help contribute to that.

The Chairperson: You just wanted to make a statement, then?

Mr Lyttle: Yes.

The Chairperson: Good, thank you.

Mr McElduff: Can I hear something about careers advice for students in the Irish-medium sector and particular opportunities that might accrue, for example, as a result of the Irish language broadcasting fund? I want to know whether our young people in the Irish-medium sector are being attended to properly by way of creative industries training and that sort of thing.

Secondly, —

The Chairperson: Barry, just two questions. We will come back to you.

Mrs Shaw: We engage with Irish-medium schools and offer partnership agreements in the same way as we do with all other post-primary schools. We are engaged with those schools. I cannot tell you precisely what opportunities are drawn to their attention, but the advisers would certainly be expected, as they would be in all schools, to look at the needs of that community. I would expect them to —

The Chairperson: OK. We have got the point.

Mr McElduff: On the first answer, I do not think that there is an understanding of particular opportunities that might arise for pupils in Irish-medium education. There does not appear to be that type of understanding.

I will move on to my second question about the provision of course advice for admission to institutes of technology and universities down South, which seems to be a real problem. I have come across a number of young people who have had to unintentionally take a year out because they were given poor or wrong advice in the past two years. The Careers Service in the North does not appear to have a proper understanding of the Central Applications Office (CAO) admission system. Talented young people are taking a year out in a feeling of desperation, and I believe that the fault for that lies with careers services in our schools. I have concrete examples of where it has not anticipated hurdles and has misled or wrongly advised pupils.

Mrs Edgar: I think that there is a role for careers teachers and careers advisers to discuss the applications process and to be totally up to date. Schools have been using all those processes for a number of years. If they are directing young people to routes into higher education, it is beholden on them to find out about that. Part of the issue for some people might have been the acceptability of some of the qualifications they were undertaking. I do not know whether that featured at all in your conversations.

The Chairperson: The point is that young people are expected to look for advice from the careers people.

Mrs Shaw: There are two points there. From the Careers Service point of view, we do train advisers to look at the two systems of UCAS and the CAO. I am aware that at the Northern Ireland Schools and Colleges Careers Association annual conference last year, one of the main speakers spoke to over 100 careers teachers about the CAO admissions system.

The Chairperson: So what is your understanding of the problems with the CAO system?

Mrs Shaw: I suppose the question is whether people are being given the wrong advice or whether they are making the wrong choices.

The Chairperson: From our limited knowledge — correct me if I am wrong on this, Barry — the problem is that the CAO does not accept A levels taken over two years, and that it does not recognise A* grades?

Mr McElduff: I think that that would be identified as the main barrier. I am probably identifying the second barrier. As Dorina said, there are conversations addressing those issues. The problem really is that careers advisers do not understand precisely that point. Say, for example, that a very talented young person does an A level in fifth year. The points accrued from that A level cannot be added to the points accrued for A levels taken in seventh year, and, because a careers adviser did not know

that, that young person is forced to take a year out. I have concrete examples of that happening to young people from local families.

Mrs Shaw: Again, it is about trying to keep people's options open at an early stage and about ensuring that they understand that there are different requirements if they are thinking of going to university in the Republic of Ireland.

The Chairperson: The point is that it is not just about those looking to go to a university in the Republic of Ireland. People might also look for information on universities in the rest of the United Kingdom or wherever. There needs to be a repository of excellence and knowledge that is up to date on all things. That appears to be missing.

Mr McElduff: There was great uncertainty with changing circumstances recently with regard to entry into Scottish universities. I have examples of careers teachers contacting our constituency office or other constituency offices to gain insight or up-to-date information about the new rules. Where is it all falling down?

Mrs Shaw: We are in a continuous professional development programme and we try to keep advisers as up to date as possible. Knowing where to get information is one of the key pieces for advisers.

The Chairperson: The challenge, in not just the point that Barry made, but wider, is that, with circumstances changing so rapidly, how do you ensure that your people are kept absolutely up to date? Although we are looking at this in a continuum, for the individual concerned aged 16 or 18 this is the defining decision for their life. Although we may come back and say, "Do you know what, we need to look at this again for next year," that young person has made decisions, for better or worse, to go down a particular route.

We are interested in how you keep people up to date. We would like to know more about that because we think that, potentially, the role played by the people in your organisations might be enhanced. We still have an open mind at this stage of the inquiry but they have to be absolutely front and central and fully informed.

Mrs Kerr: You are completely right. We have been going through a period of very rapid change, and the split between how we fund higher education and others has created a number of anomalies. The Scottish example is a particular problem because individual higher institutions in Scotland made different decisions. None of us could have anticipated that or have information on specific institutions. The Scottish system is starting to try to standardise its responses and trying to put its own house in order. We should then be better informed about the general position.

With the Irish situation, we want to make people's choices as open as possible. We are making the funding arrangements more transparent and more in line with what we offer in all other places. I am hoping that the anomalies will be gradually improved, but I accept entirely our need to keep abreast of current changes as soon as possible.

Mr McElduff: Just to record a positive, I thank Judith and her colleague Frances for a productive meeting I had some months ago when I requested a meeting on a range of these issues.

The Chairperson: Duly noted.

Mrs Shaw: I want to make two points, the first on keeping advisers up to date. We link in with the Institute of Career Guidance, UCAS and other organisations where there are changes. We keep up to date that way in getting information out to advisers. We send out a monthly bulletin to advisers on up-to-date issues. Advisers feed information to us whenever they come across anomalies or issues. For example, if they are dealing with a university in the Republic of Ireland and find issues, they feed that to the centre. That is communicated to all advisers. We are continually trying to keep up to date and keep the advisers up to date.

The other issue I want to highlight is that, yes, providing information is a key part of what we do, but not all that we do. The advisers are all professional careers advisers. They provide advice and guidance as well as information, so they are working with young people and adults to help them to use that information in their decision-making process. It is aligning that with their aspirations and abilities. It is not just as simple as giving information.

The Chairperson: Judith, I am going to move on to Jim after I have made this statement, unless you really want to come back. We do not doubt that well-intentioned people are doing their best in this situation. We know that you care passionately, but the point made earlier by the Deputy Chairman was that it needs to be more than just having a read of a few figures and making your mind up on whatever you want to do. I can tell you that the experience of almost everybody around this table when they were getting careers advice — that was further back for some than for others — was pretty bland. We need it to be more one to one and focused.

I looked at your pupil ratios. I actually think that we might need more than this. You need careers advisers with a status in the overall mechanism of providing education. I think that is the point that Alastair brought forward. It is not about getting them a qualification; it is about getting them a career. I think that was a really good point. Despite all the nice things you tell us, we are not convinced yet, notwithstanding the fact that you are here, saying that it is all right. As I said before — and Nuala will know this, because I always make the point — the Committee is not having a go at anybody individually. We understand that you are professionals doing your best, but we are concerned that, whatever it is we are doing, we are not where we need to be, so you should take it in that spirit.

Mr Allister: You tell us that the Careers Service is very tuned into meeting the skills gap and very conscious of STEM needs, and all of that. If we wanted to find objective criteria to judge that by and benchmark it against — for example, if I were to ask you about the consequence of that focus on directing young people towards available and relevant career choices — would you be able to show, for example, that there has been a significant fall-off in the number of students taking A-level media studies or A-level drama, and instead focusing more on science or subjects that might help fill the skills gap? Do you have those statistics?

Mrs Edgar: We might have that in the Department. I would need to ask. Our stats and research branch will have information.

Mr Allister: Sorry, but if you are the Careers Service, would that not be an obvious way to benchmark and judge whether you are having any impact or whether it is all just hot air that is passing everyone by?

Mrs Edgar: I have definitely come across some statistics on the uptake of STEM subjects in the past, and there has been an increase in the number of people accessing higher education courses as a result of interventions.

Mr Allister: I would like to see that, and I am a bit surprised that if you are benchmarking towards success in filling the skills gap, you do not have that sort of information. I would certainly like to see figures showing, over the past five or 10 years until now, what percentage of students were taking peripheral subjects as opposed to STEM subjects at A level, for example, so that I could look at it and see that people must be guiding students towards the wisdom of pursuing science rather than the luxury of pursuing drama.

Mrs Kerr: I do not subscribe to that view. We have already had a question about the scope that there was in cultural and media studies and the opportunities that there are in that sector in Northern Ireland. There are career opportunities in a wide spectrum of subject choices.

Mr Allister: There are two things about that. First, that says to me that there is not really a serious engagement with the STEM needs in Northern Ireland.

Mrs Kerr: That is not the case.

Mr Allister: Secondly, it suggests a fear to recognise — we all know them, my own children included — children taking what seems like the easy option to do media studies. However, that very often leads to nothing. For some it does, but for most it does not. Surely, if we are serious about providing people with the skills to work in the real world, where we are told that most jobs shortages are in respect of STEM subjects, we should see a manifestation of an increase in people taking up those subjects and pursuing them. Of course, there is a place for people doing media and drama and all sorts of peripheral studies. There is a niche there, but, generally, that is not where the bulk of jobs will be found, and we need to direct most people to the right sources.

Mrs Kerr: We can provide evidence, as Dorina said, and I think we will see evidence of the choices that have been made by young people through higher education. Part of that is due to the incentivisation that those education establishments have offered to encourage young people to follow careers instead. I think that the evidence is there.

The Chairperson: Would you and Dorina be in a position to provide that between you? It would inform the inquiry if you could provide it in whatever format you think appropriate to address Mr Allister's concerns.

Mr Allister: Secondly, in relation to the budget as referenced on page 25 and 26, if I am reading tables 1 and 2 correctly, they state that you have a static programme budget. However, table 2 shows a dramatic increase in the number of adults to whom advice is being tendered. Is that correct?

Mrs Kerr: Yes.

Mr Allister: What does that say about the adequacy of the budget?

Mrs Kerr: First, the main costs of the Careers Service are for staffing. It refers to the focus on the growth in the number of adults being referred, particularly from the employment service.

Mr Allister: Your staff complement has not increased.

Mrs Shaw: No, but we have tried to compensate for that. We have been developing our website to encourage people who are looking for information and are able to help themselves to use the website rather than to use the —

Mr Allister: You are dealing with an 81% increase in the number of adults who you engage with, and you are doing it with the same level of staff. That speaks to staff hitherto being under-deployed or staff today being overstretched. Which is it?

Mrs Kerr: We are operating in a situation of financial constraint. Every Department is seeking to make efficiency gains. In terms of —

Mr Allister: Have you got enough staff?

Mrs Kerr: We have to look at changing how we make our offering in terms of —

Mr Allister: Have you got enough staff?

Mrs Kerr: At this stage, we have enough staff.

Mr Allister: Right. Have you got a big enough budget?

Mrs Kerr: At this stage, we believe we have a sufficient budget.

Mr Allister: Are you spending all your budget?

Mrs Kerr: Yes.

Mr Allister: Thank you.

The Chairperson: I am not absolutely convinced. I follow the line of argument that Jim was making. We had a very interesting presentation that you can read the Hansard report of, if necessary, when we were looking at other parts of the Department's work in employment services. One issue that came out when the Prince's Trust talked to us was about how the one-to-one mentoring that it is able to give makes a difference. I am not casting aspersions on staff in other areas, because people do their best in these situations, but when you had a more general approach, it was less effective. It is a working hypothesis that may not yet be proven, but I think we should be engaging more intensively and having more one-to-one engagements with people rather than cutting back. If we are serious about matching our employability skills with our employment opportunities, more may need to be done on that. I think

you might need to keep that in the back of your mind. I really do not think that we have paid enough attention to careers advice over recent years.

Mrs Kerr: That may be true but we are testing the resource centre model we talked about earlier. That is all about giving people the opportunity to use a differentiated service. We have the resources and access to information, advice and guidance and they can use that by talking to a careers adviser or by doing their own research. There is a spectrum.

We are intervening on the NEETs side where one-to-one mentoring and support is more intensive. I think we will see that being delivered under the NEETs strategy. Different people need different things at different stages in their careers. Adults who are clear about what they want to do may well be different from a young person who is not clear what their career path is. It covers a wide spectrum of need that we need to respond to.

The Chairperson: OK, we will take that on board. With covering so much, we did not get into the different issues about NEETs. They have a different set of issues, which, obviously, we have to deal with. That is just the way the conversation is going. I am sure that you will be following the Committee's inquiry and looking at it.

You may find this strange, but we are actually trying to help. I know that you are doing a good job and trying to do it better. From the coalface, all these folk round here deal with it on a day and daily basis. They are offering you their knowledge, and we just need to try to fix it for everybody.

Mr Anderson: Jim touched on an issue about whether you have sufficient advisers. Looking at the ratios, I see that it goes between 196 to 269. That is quite a wide gap for the number of pupils.

The Chairperson: What page are you on, Sydney?

Mr Anderson: Page 24. That averages out at 233 pupils per careers adviser. You said that there was a fairness across the sector, whether urban or rural. Is there any discrepancy for rural pupils, who I have an interest in, or are more resources maybe being directed towards what we or I would see at times as disadvantaged rural areas?

Mrs Shaw: We have our finite figure of in and around 103.5. We look at the post-primary school numbers in each of the office areas and allocate advisers on that basis. Whether a rural or city school, the numbers are the defining point. I am taking it that they are of all ages but that is the factor that we use to determine our numbers.

Mr Anderson: So, there is no weighting given to certain disadvantaged clusters or areas in relation to job prospects? It is just really a numbers game, is that what you are saying?

Mrs Shaw: It is a numbers game. That said, our numbers are small.

Mr Anderson: Do you not think that consideration should be given or —

Mrs Shaw: We have 103 advisers in 27 locations. In some offices, we have only one or two advisers.

Mr Anderson: That comes down to the business of whether we have enough resources. I think you said, Nuala, that you had.

Mrs Shaw: We have enough resources to do what we are trying to do at the moment.

Mr Anderson: Everyone likes more resources.

Mrs Shaw: If the remit changes, then, yes, we would need more.

The Chairperson: Mr Anderson has brought up a point. Page 48 of the paper states that careers advice was evaluated as good or better in 87% of selective schools but the figure was only 66% in non-selective schools. In voluntary schools, the figure was 91%, but in controlled schools, it was only 62%. One could argue that we need to divert resource to areas where there is greatest perceived need.

Mrs Shaw: Is this about schools provision?

Mrs Edgar: Rather than about careers advisers?

Mr Anderson: It may be about schools provision, but it identifies the need to direct extra resource to certain areas and the fact that perhaps resource should not just be equally spread out right across the board. We have these particular areas, be it in one sector or the other, and I think that the level of resource needs to be looked at. As Nuala said, do you need more resource?

Mrs Kerr: I was talking about the careers advisers in DEL. We hear what you are saying and will consider that point on the schools side.

Mr Anderson: I will finish on this quick point. The report states that 98% of post-primary schools are on board. What about the other 2%? I do not know how many schools that equates to, but that would be a big loss to them, depending on the schools and number of pupils involved. I would be interested to know where they are.

The Chairperson: OK. Let us see whether we are going to get a name.

Mrs Shaw: They are special needs schools. We have talked to them about the provision, but that is not appropriate for them. However, they are aware of the service, if they need it. I think that the other two are independent schools.

The Chairperson: The Minister for Employment and Learning said in a statement that he hoped it would rise to 100%. Is it the case that that is not realistic for particular circumstances? Are there other ways forward or is that something that we need to pursue with them?

Mrs Shaw: No, it is not appropriate for them.

The Chairperson: OK. Thank you. Is that all right?

Mrs Kerr: I was just going to say that there are the special needs schools and then there are other schools at the top end that do not necessarily need to avail themselves of that.

Mrs Shaw: They have partnership agreements, but they are not using us to the full extent. That is a different issue.

The Chairperson: Will you to write to us and tell us about the 2%, and we will deal with it on that basis?

Mr Flanagan: Ladies, thanks very much for your presentation. I kind of agree with Alastair's comments as somebody who went through the education system not that long ago. You have heard from other members, who have either been contacted by constituents or influenced by their children, that there is a problem with the Careers Service. It is not performing as well as it could. It focuses on getting people into university but not on getting them a career or meeting the needs of the industry.

This is the start of our inquiry into careers, so I will be very open and ask you, as people involved in this on a daily basis, what recommendations can you make to us or what changes would you like to see made to the system in order to improve it? How can we adapt the current system to ensure that young people going through the education system are pointed in the right direction for the future needs of industry?

Mrs Edgar: It is about communicating to parents the benefits of the entitlement framework and the underpinning careers advice and guidance that go with that. As Patricia said earlier, there definitely is a culture out there —

Mr Flanagan: Sorry, can I just stop you? How does communicating the benefits of the entitlement framework encourage more people not to go away and become a teacher, a doctor, a lawyer or a builder?

Mrs Edgar: It is about the school offering a curriculum that meets the needs of the pupil and informing their curricular offer by taking account of labour market information, where the priority skills are and where the growth areas are. The schools that have done so have seen performance improve. That links in very closely with careers. There is no point in offering a whole wide range of courses to people if those courses do not lead somewhere. In our guidance on the entitlement framework, we are saying to schools that they have to offer robust qualifications with clear progression pathways that lead somewhere, while taking account of labour market information and priority skills areas.

Ms Nelson: From my perspective, in addition to what Dorina just said, what is required is much more intensive one-to-one support and mentorship for individual pupils to try to underpin that changing culture that eventually percolates through to parents. It is also a matter of trying to ensure that pupils really do have continuous advice and guidance, not just at key transition points but drip-fed in from year 8, culminating in the subject choices at year 10 that leave the doors open, then possibly becoming more specialist post-16, and so on. It is the whole idea of making sure that the standards and achievements of the young person are in line with their aspirations and their career goals. That is something that really needs to be bolstered and supported by mentorship and support mechanisms.

Mr Lyttle: I think that is really insightful. It is a huge challenge for a teacher to do that. Are we asking too much from full-time teachers to be able to meet that challenge?

Ms Nelson: Teachers obviously have a role in mentorship and support, but one of the things that we are beginning to see in inspection evidence is that there is a much more joined-up approach to the different elements of advice and guidance. Teachers in our schools know their pupils really well, whether they are people with responsibility for pastoral care, the special educational needs co-ordinator in the school or, indeed, the careers adviser. One of the things that we may not have done well enough in the past is ensure that all that information and intelligence is shared so that we can nip the danger of underachievement in the bud, support the lower achievers and make sure that we are providing a challenge for potentially really high achievers and high-flyers. You are absolutely right: a teacher in a classroom cannot do that on their own. We need the joined-up elements. We have also seen, in a minority of schools, specialist mentors, who may well have been retired teachers, coming back in and providing a purely mentorship role for individual pupils. I think it was the Chair who mentioned those sorts of strategies. There is certainly evidence that, in the minority of places where we have seen it happen, it works to good effect.

The Chairperson: Patricia, I am warming to the ETI, despite what I said at the start. I want to conclude with a couple of points.

Mr Flanagan: Can I ask my final question before you conclude?

The Chairperson: Sorry, Phil, I thought you had finished, but I will tell you that the Chair will decide what happens, but if you wish to ask a question —

Mr Flanagan: I respect your authority on that, Chair. My final question is about identifying the skills of a careers teacher. Mentoring was touched on. When I went through school, for the first half of my post-primary education, my careers teacher was an English teacher, and for the second half, I had a biology teacher. They were not really aware of what was going on in the wider world. Is that what we are looking for in a careers teacher? Is it just getting somebody who is trained as a teacher, but might not actually be aware of what happens outside the education system, and just giving them an extra job to do, or do we actually try to get people who might have some sort of inclination of what goes on in the private sector or people with a business background to work either with a careers teacher or as a careers teacher? I remember that, for the first five years of my time in school, careers was everybody's favourite class, because it was a free class. You went in and looked through a university prospectus for 40 minutes and had a real good time to yourself. That is probably what happens in an awful lot of schools. Getting a teacher who is primarily focused on a specific aspect of the curriculum to offer broad careers advice might not be the best way forward.

Mrs Edgar: The mapping guide that we produced as one of the tools to support schools in their implementation of the strategy recognised that, within every single area of learning, there are opportunities to raise aspirations and discuss your subject as regards career choices. It is not just the role of the careers teacher; it is the whole school approach, as I said earlier, with careers at the centre and the senior management team, the principal and everybody involved with developing the curriculum. For the careers teacher, of course there has to be, in their interaction with business and

parents etc, a responsibility to keep informing themselves. Again, they are supported by the careers advisory service and the education and library boards that provide the training. Also, in the area learning communities, there is the opportunity for sharing good practice. Every single school is a member of an area learning community. You are right: it is a case of continually updating yourselves. I am sorry to bang on about it, but we say in our guidance to schools on the entitlement framework to take account of labour market information and priority skills areas. So, they do need to liaise with workforce forums, or something, that you get in the colleges.

Mrs Kerr: Workforce development forums.

Mrs Edgar: Workforce development forums that come in from the colleges. It is not a one-off thing; it is a continual upgrading.

The Chairperson: OK, we got that point. I am glad that Phil brought the question up because it is a really good question. He is telling you the way he sees it, and there is an issue. Phil, the floor is yours.

Mr Flanagan: No, go ahead.

The Chairperson: We went to some of our employers and one said that they took teachers out of school and had them for a week in their employment so they could see the skills and take that back. That happened to be an engineering firm, but not every teacher will be an expert in engineering. I think the point that Phil is making, and correct me if I am wrong, Phil, is that you need somebody who really knows the issue, whether it is engineering or French. Simple, general careers advice may be just a free period.

Mrs Edgar: Exactly. Again, there is that partnership model with the careers adviser who will have the industry knowledge as well. However, I accept that there are schools that may not deal with it as robustly as you are suggesting. Since the policy came out and the increased focus that we have had even on careers in these past few years —

The Chairperson: How many teachers would have been out in industry for, say, a one-week placement?

Mrs Edgar: I do not know. I would have to find out for you.

The Chairperson: That is the line you are going down, Phil, is it not?

Mr Flanagan: Yes.

Ms Nelson: Just to clarify something: the careers co-ordinators in schools would not be expected to be experts obviously in every field or every aspect of industry. Their role is one of referral and more generic advice and guidance but it becomes more specialist as it filters through to subject specialists in the schools. Very often, we find that the subject specialists in schools, in conjunction with the careers advice and guidance co-ordinator, will organise a series, some more comprehensive than others, of visiting speakers and visits to employment settings, and so on.

It is not so much the matter of the careers co-ordinator being the specialist and knowing everything about everything. They cannot. Very often, those co-ordinators are passionate about the pupils they are teaching. They are incredibly committed and hard working. Whatever points they are getting very often do not reward them for the job that they are doing. It is quite a complex situation that is navigated pretty successfully by those co-ordinators. However, they are very often dependent on the level of knowledge and experience that the subject teachers have and how they transfer that knowledge to their pupils.

Mr Flanagan: Is one of the problems that being a careers co-ordinator is simply a secondary role and their primary role is to be a normal teacher? Would it work better if, through area learning communities, there was a dedicated careers adviser working in a number of schools and travelling around schools?

Ms Nelson: That is a very creative, positive idea.

The Chairperson: That has stunned you into silence there, Phil.

Mr Flanagan: I know. It is like me bringing a motion to the House and the DUP supporting it.

The Chairperson: There is a general, serious point. I will finish up if Phil is finished.

Mr Flanagan: Go on ahead.

The Chairperson: Although I take your point about the careers co-ordinator, there is a role for that as well. However, I really do think that what changes people's lives are individual connections with teachers. We all have a teacher who we remember with affection or not but they made a difference. The problem for us is that many of our teaching staff are now in a certain demographic around the age profile. I also suspect that there may be gender issues in the proportion of different genders. We talked about parents earlier. We are now talking about individual teachers, not just careers advisers. Individual teachers need to have an opportunity to get into industry for a period and understand what is going on. I can remember going round. People go to a printworks, and think that all they do is graphic design. They do not realise that they need people to drive forklift trucks, go out and sell things and do the accounts. I am not sure that we have got the connection between the school and/or careers advisers and the changing world of employment. That means that the background knowledge and experience that allows an adviser to tell a pupil they should go and try such-and-such is not as relevant now as it may have been in the past. That is in no way trying to say to people that they are not doing a really good job in other ways. It is just that the world is moving so fast now, it is really hard for anybody to keep up to speed.

When we get submissions from Departments, and I understand how and why you do these things, it is sort of departmental speak to tell us all the good things they are doing just to make sure that we have not missed anything. However, we are trying to do something a wee bit more creative and innovative to help to change the system and say things to it.

I will even say, Patricia, I know you will have made a submission as part of the departmental submission. However, there is quite a lot of information that you really ought to bring to our attention, particularly around the ETI. I say to all of you here that you should maybe think again about your submissions and use them as an opportunity to say, "If it was down to us, here is what you should do." You do know because you are engaged in this area.

We are not trying to get at you because things are not working. We are trying to help to make things better. We need to get beyond the tick-box mentality. When you read over the Hansard report and reflect on the way that the discussions went, you may consider whether there is additional focused information that can shape policy. I know from talking to the Minister for Employment and Learning, and, I am quite sure, it is the same for the Minister of Education, that we are all determined to try to make this a better place.

So, if you come back, take it that, when we ask specific questions, it is a challenge for you. This is where a bolt of lightning comes through the window and hits me. Is it absolutely 100% that all education is child-centric and that the child is absolutely at all times 100% on top of the issue? Do we not have an obligation to society as a whole to employability and to the strategic direction of the Government? It is not that the Government or anybody will turn round and say, "Look, you want to do fine arts but we will take you and make you an engineer." Of course people should be allowed to follow what they think their talents are, but it needs to be a bit more than a laissez-faire attitude.

When it comes to media studies, which Jim brought up, or when we look at ICT graduates coming out of universities and half of them cannot get jobs, it is not because ICT is not in demand but because software engineers are in demand. Point-and-click web design is not in demand because we can all do that ourselves. The issue is that we need to be more proactive. You need to get teachers, parents and, in particular, careers advisers absolutely at the pinnacle of what is required.

I do not know whether anyone wants to say anything in response to that or whether you just nod and say thank goodness we are getting out of here. That is the point. I thank you very much for your contribution. There were some pointed questions, I know, but I hope you found that they were well intentioned. I invite you to consider your submission and see whether, in addition to answering the specific points that you agreed to deal with, you think you should be giving us some more information.

Mrs Kerr: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to present and we will consider your suggestion.

The Chairperson: OK. Thank you very much indeed.