



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Employment and Learning

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into Careers Education, Information,
Advice and Guidance in Northern Ireland:
NAHT Briefing

13 February 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Basil McCrea (Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister
Mr David Hilditch
Mr Chris Lyttle
Mr Fra McCann
Ms Bronwyn McGahan
Mr Pat Ramsey
Mr Alastair Ross

Witnesses:

Mr Dominic Clarke	National Association of Head Teachers
Mr Aidan Dolan	National Association of Head Teachers
Mrs Clare Majury	National Association of Head Teachers
Mr Liam McGuckin	National Association of Head Teachers

The Chairperson: I welcome Clare Majury from the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT). Did they make you president, Clare?

Mrs Clare Majury (National Association of Head Teachers): They did.

The Chairperson: I welcome Clare Majury, who is president of the NAHT and principal of Holywood Nursery School. Clare, I will let you introduce the team.

Mrs Majury: With us today, Basil, we have Aidan Dolan, who is our director of education; Liam McGuckin, who is the principal of Cave Hill Primary School; and Dominic Clarke from Sacred Heart College in Omagh.

The Chairperson: Super. The way that we do it is we will just go straight in. Members will have read your paper. Are there any members who wish to ask questions straight off?

Mr Lyttle: Thanks very much for your submission, which was extremely helpful. You raised one issue in particular: that, although progress has been made in recent years in relation to careers, there remains considerable variation in the time and resources allocated to careers across schools in Northern Ireland. Will you elaborate on that or include that in your comments?

Mr Aidan Dolan (National Association of Head Teachers): There is not a set time for careers education in a school or even a set level of resources for it. So, it is a local decision in the school as to the amount of time and emphasis that is given to careers. We hear from primary and secondary level schools, and we can also speak for special schools. You will see at the end of our submission that we have taken advice from a number of people who cover the whole range of schools. We would not be asking for it be set from the top that so many hours or so much of the resources should be set, because it will vary, in local conditions, as to the form and type of careers education, from one school to another. It has improved over the years, and continues to improve. The work of the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), and so on, has helped schools to move forward and develop things. I know that we have made some criticisms here of Learning for Life and Work (LLW), and so on, but good resources have been created, and I do not think that we should just wash them out. We might go on to make some criticisms, but good work and supportive work has been done. Dominic, from the secondary end, could talk well about some of the differences that exist in schools.

Mr Dominic Clarke (National Association of Head Teachers): I can elaborate from a post-primary point of view. Yes, there are some issues in relation to careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) in post-primary schools. One point that I would like to make, certainly from our experience, is the work of learning communities. I am sure that most people are aware that learning communities are really just where schools cluster together. The benefit of the CEIAG subgroup is that the difficulties that arise in a number of schools in the one area can be addressed. There might be a small issue in one school and a small issue in another. When those issues are pooled together, sometimes it is much easier to find a solution. A simple thing would be, for example, if there is a small need in a niche market in careers, it might be very difficult for a school to organise one or two pupils if they had a particular career that they wanted to investigate. However, if there are two or three pupils in the other schools, all of a sudden you have an interested group and you can justify and put together for transportation, for example, to go to an employer.

Also, a lot of work has been done in the learning communities with careers co-ordinators in schools to create resources and to try to find some commonality — not that they want the same produced.

The Chairperson: We get the point. Clare, it strikes me that, as we have some newer members, it would be worth just telling us what the NAHT is and how many people you represent.

Mrs Majury: The NAHT is the National Association of Head Teachers. It operates in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In the Northern Ireland branch, we represent the majority of school leaders, and we represent across all the sectors: nursery, primary, special and secondary.

The Chairperson: It is an influential group that you have here.

Mr Dolan: We have 800 members in Northern Ireland.

Mr Lyttle: You also mentioned that there is not sufficient information of the alternatives to A-level education. Can you speak about that a bit? Can you make some constructive suggestions, which we have heard previously from other submissions, on how careers teachers could avail themselves of work experience placements in industries?

Mr Dolan: Yes, it would be very helpful if there was a programme that careers teachers could access. They may have had experience when they were working as students, and so on, and maybe for a year or two afterwards, but when they come into the school and are in that career for many years, they might not actually be au fait with changes, and so on.

With regard to the question about qualifications, we do find that. There is a huge emphasis on the Russell Group universities, and they tend to control a lot of what happens in A levels and what is seen as good. There is a tendency towards the academic, which is good — I am not knocking that — but sometimes at the expense, maybe, of the more vocational aspects of qualifications. Some of the things that might, traditionally, be associated with further education — the BTECs, and so on — may not be seen to have the value that a traditional A level would have had. We have talked for years about how you balance that back up. In Germany, there seems to be a much more equal relationship between vocational and academic, but in the UK, it seems to be out of kilter.

The Chairperson: I take the point. There is an interesting bit in your submission about the fact that universities tend to skew thinking, and I think that there is a counterbalance for that.

Mr Lyttle: I appreciate those comments. In his statement this week about apprenticeships, the Minister said that there is a need for a complete cultural attitude change in how we value vocational learning. It has been helpful to receive those comments from you today. Thank you.

Ms McGahan: Your presentation talks about difficulties in rural areas. Clearly, you come from a rural area. Has any consideration been given to taking those services into rural areas? For example, Dungannon town has five post-primary schools. Has such an event ever been brought into Dungannon town, not the district?

Mr D Clarke: I do not understand what event you are talking about.

Ms McGahan: It says here that the majority of CEIAG events are held in Belfast and Derry. Dungannon town has five post-primary schools.

Mr Dolan: I used to be principal of one of the schools that you are talking about in Dungannon, before I joined NAHT. Schools in that area will work closely and organise annual or biannual careers events, to which employers are invited, and they are often held within the further education (FE) college in Dungannon. I think that still continues to be the case.

The problem that we are alerting you to is the number of employers there. There are no large employers, and when you go looking for work experience, it is very difficult to get. It is particularly difficult for the special schools to find work experience opportunities in rural areas.

Ms McGahan: I come from the Clogher valley area, and we have a large manufacturing and engineering sector. Obviously, the area of apprenticeships is being looked at. I wondered whether any consideration has been given to that, to encourage people in that area to take up such a career? How have you been proactive in that?

Mr Dolan: We are aware of Powerscreen and — *[Inaudible.]*

Ms McGahan: There is Sandvik there, and Finlay's as well.

Mr Dolan: Yes, there is Finlay's, and so on. They would be involved in those.

Ms McGahan: Right, OK.

Mr Dolan: They would certainly be invited, and I think that I have seen them at stands, and so on, presenting work opportunities. This week in the 'Tyrone Courier', one of those companies — I do not think it is Finlay's — has a huge ad about employment opportunities.

Ms McGahan: Finally, I have a daughter who does LLW. She is 16. I spoke to her this morning and she is very positive about it. I was very surprised to read your comments about it, stating that it is:

"a "catch all" content driven GCSE"

which

"has lost relevance in the secondary school".

Mr D Clarke: Let me just address that sore point. Yes, it is a very popular subject with a lot of kids. As it is not a purely academic subject, it gives them an opportunity, as was said in the previous presentation, to develop a certain amount of transferable skills that they can bring into it. In relation to careers, there was a misconception that was drawn on the fact that employability is part of learning for life and work, and is completely separate from careers advice. It tries to develop skills right through Key Stage 3 and into Key Stage 4. What you find when you take the feedback from some teachers in relation to LLW and the strands of LLW — citizenship and personal development — a lot of issues are then being put in. Some aspects of the co-ordination of LLW are that one of the challenges is that you have to decide what issues you want to deal with, what you will focus on, in relation to the strands of

employability, citizenship and personal development. So there are just more and more things being added, just as society evolves and the issues evolve.

Mr Dolan: That is what I meant by a catch-all. When there is something like that — a personal development issue — let us stick it into learning for life and work because we are all alive and most of us have to work. So it can fit in there, but it gets too wide. It might be an area that needs development in resources. It is good that your daughter has had that experience, but, sometimes, that is not always the case. It can be a bit content-driven with some teachers and in some areas.

The Chairperson: Can I just say to you that the benefit of this inquiry — and I am going to suggest something to you at the end of it — is that it is an opportunity for you to tell us, and we will feed into it. I have said to all people coming forward that I do not want any particular punches pulled. We have to deal with this issue. It is the case that, if people like it, that is great, but somewhere along the line we have to give our young people the necessary advice and guidance. I will, at some stage, Liam, get onto the primary schools as well, so do not think that you are going to escape on this thing.

Mr Dolan: I was just listening to some of the things that were going on earlier that were fairly negative about what is happening. There has been some really major good news about what is happening in the Northern Ireland education system, just before Christmas, in international studies. If we are bad, it is still the case that, in the English-speaking world, in literacy and numeracy, we are sitting up there at the top of the tables —

The Chairperson: Particular members want to go down certain routes. We look at things, and there are underlying issues about numeracy and literacy. We have got that. The particular bit that I want to deal with here now is careers advice. I will restate it, just so that we know why we are looking at it. We get a lot of employers coming to us and saying that they have jobs to fill but cannot get the recruits that they need. I have a lot of other young people and older people who say that they have all that experience and all those skills, but they cannot get a job. Somewhere, in the fast-moving world, we are getting a mismatch. That is what we want to find out because we understand the final sentence is that one of the big influences on young people will come from the school environment. Obviously there is parental influence as well. I want to know from the horse's mouth whether we are able to get schools to give our young people the sort of personal guidance that says, "You ought to be looking at this, or here's this", sort of thing. That is really what I want. I will actually say to you, as I have said to other people — so this is for colleagues. The paper is really good. Like all good papers, it begs more questions than it answers. We will find a way of engaging further, but not at this session, because we are limited in time and I want to get the topics out. Bronwyn?

Ms McGahan: That is me finished.

Mr P Ramsey: You are very welcome. I think the Chair is right to give you an overview of where the Committee is coming from. I will give you an example of a grammar school that I attended about 12 months ago. There were employment mock interviews. We had the business community and various others, and I was in a team of 10 students. Six of those students wanted to be teachers, for example. It was in that context — others can give examples of solicitors or other careers — that the parent would say, "Well, that is nice for my daughter or son to go on to be a teacher". However, the problem is that there are no jobs, so we have to diversify. As the Chair has said, it appears that the careers guidance has maybe not been as consistent as it should be. We could be smarter in what we are doing, so that is why we are holding a Committee inquiry into it — to try to determine best practice and how we move forward.

Parking that, you were here during the previous discussion with CCEA. What relationship do you have with CCEA in its primary schools and post-primary schools that you are involved in? Is enough being done in primary schools to prepare children for the next industry of ICT?

Mr Liam McGuckin (National Association of Head Teachers): From the aspect of ICT?

Mr P Ramsey: Yes.

Mr McGuckin: The CCEA accreditation is a very good one. We work at it from P3 upwards in primary school. There is one basic problem. If you are going to do the accreditation properly, you need a lot of capacity in bandwidth — I am losing myself here — and the amount of storage on your server. You

put multimedia, moving images and things onto that server, and we only have about a quarter of what we need.

Mr P Ramsey: That is an interesting point, and it is the first time I have heard it. There needs to be investment in capital or revenues to ensure — it is something that we can go back to at a later date. Taking on board that Europe is saying that you need to fundamentally change your curriculum and you are still not doing enough on ICT, can we progress further?

Mr McGuckin: I think that primary schools prepare children well in ICT. Many primary schools have gone down the line of looking at further technologies, such as iPads, for example. What we have had to do is buy in our own Wi-Fi system, at £38 per month, and fund it out of our local management of schools budget, because Wi-Fi has not emerged for primary schools, and I do not think for secondary schools either, yet.

The problem we have with our curriculum, and it was mentioned previously, is that it is very driven by literacy and numeracy and key stage results. That drives out a lot of creativity and the type of work that we need to be doing with children to make them ready for work in the 21st century. For example, we run an apprentice scheme in school, with a school fair. We give the P7s money, they have a project manager and a sub-manager, and they have to pick something that they are going to buy or make and sell to the parents. That is great. They get skills working together in different areas of things, but that is not what our curriculum is asking us to do. It is asking us to produce children with key stage results in English and maths purely by sitting working individually. We need to give children more chances to work together in groups and, as the Chair said, to speak. For example, at our open morning, I speak for five minutes and I say to the parents who come that our P7s will take them around. Children in Northern Ireland do not get enough chances to speak. In the USA and other countries, children can talk the talk, but they cannot actually do it up here. We can do it up here, but we cannot actually present. So, we believe that that is very important.

The Chairperson: I could not agree more.

Mr F McCann: This is interesting. In my constituency, a school that I actually attended myself has been identified as a low-achieving school, although the new head teacher has started to make some changes. I have a concern, because the majority of young people who come out of that school will go into local training schemes. The level of educational attainment in it is very poor. So, I am coming at it from that direction, although I am interested in the answers to the questions that you raised. I constantly argue about how different strategies deal with people who have been lost to society. That is why I asked about the number of people who fail GCSEs and what happens to them once they leave school. In this Committee, Basil has certainly been to the fore in and around the sciences and engineering.

We were at the planetarium a number of months ago, and one of the answers that we got was that they go out to primary schools and attract the interest of young people, but that when they leave, the old ways of teaching come in, and most people get distracted away from the likes of education. What they were saying is that if you want people to go into the sciences, you have to get them at five or six years of age. Is there anything in schools that allows people to come through that, or is there anything that prohibits it? What we need is a frank, accurate report that allows us to go and argue for the change that is required.

The other question —

The Chairperson: Fra, will you just hold on? I will bring you in for your second question. Will you deal with the issue about younger people?

Mr McGuckin: When we look at primary schools, we need to look at the whole child. When you get a child at P4, you think, "What will this child be like at 11? What skills will they have when they leave?" We would like them to have the opportunity to do science. The world around us has now been combined into geography, history and science to have good skills in IT, literacy and numeracy. The problem is that schools are being inspected solely on their numeracy and literacy standards. There is less emphasis on the whole child and on developing the whole person. Schools obviously feel pressure to achieve standards in those two areas. We need to have a wider view of education.

Mr F McCann: How would you change it? I know that that is a difficult question.

Mr McGuckin: The people who inspect schools need to have a wider viewpoint of what makes a good school and what skills a pupil should leave with, not just numeracy and literacy skills but the skills to speak to other people and skills in science. Just a wider view of education; their view is too narrow.

Mr F McCann: Do the inspectors or whoever in the system sit down with you? You are obviously the people responsible. Do they sit down with you and say, "Look, are there problems here? If there are, how can we fix those and deal with them?" Do they listen to your feedback?

Mr Dolan: A great question, Fra. As I say, we meet CCEA and the Education and Training Inspectorate on a regular basis. Do they listen to us? To be honest, we feel that they do not. They may take account of some of the things we say.

We have regular meetings with CCEA on issues around key stage assessment, cross-curricular assessments, and so on. We believe that we are the professional voice of leadership in schools and that we should be listened to. We have a lot of points to make about the ongoing changes to Key Stage 3, for example, to do with the assessment of ICT, which you mentioned. It is very hard for us to influence. We can chip away little pieces.

When the Department starts, let us say, to create a new policy, it does not start with head teachers and their opinion. It starts somewhere within its own labyrinth of civil servants. If we can get an early look at that, and sometimes we do, we can get changes made to things. However, by the time it gets to consultation stage, it is nearly set in concrete, and that is what is going to happen. We have had it from 0-6 right through to the current changes that may be happening to GCSEs and A levels. A lot of it is nearly predetermined before the public get to hear about it.

Mrs Majury: We are in a system that is becoming increasingly data-driven. The Department and Government like something that you can measure. It is very easy to measure literacy and numeracy. It is really hard to measure self-confidence, creative thinking, problem-solving and all the things that we really need our children to develop. As Liam said, we need to find a way to look at the whole child.

Mr F McCann: Chair, you addressed the question earlier in relation to the presentation last week from the CBI about the number of apprentices who had applied, and then it went right down. It was quite shocking to hear what the CBI said about the levels of education that people had and could not apply for what might have been skilled jobs. In terms of —

Mr Dolan: Fra, can I just interject? Sorry. The same criticism is made by universities, which are getting the best — let us say the academic people — out of our schools. They say that they arrive and are practically nearly illiterate, according to some of the things I have read. I am just querying some of the things that are said. It is very easy for people to fire this mud around. I brought to you this morning — and I know, Basil, that you have kept me quiet on it a bit — the information on international studies. Do not get too carried away that our education system is somehow a total failure and we are not meeting the needs of young people. As parents, are your children being failed or are they succeeding?

The Chairperson: Let us be clear what we are addressing. If you look at where the jobs of the future will be, the CBI — and I am quoting the CBI only because Fra brought it up — says there will be 10,000 IT jobs in the coming years. There is a worldwide shortage of well-paid IT jobs. We appear not to be able to persuade people that that is a useful thing for their talents. You could say the same thing about renewable energies — you know, the people who are going to go round, whether it is plumbers or engineers, to put up big whirly things. We do not get enough of those either. So, there is a mismatch between what we think — and you actually put it in your paper about where the jobs will come from. People are telling us that they know where the jobs are but cannot get the people. All we are asking is could you not, please, train up the people so that they can get jobs?

Mrs Majury: I think there is an issue with funding, particularly with IT. Schools are usually running on computers that are as near to geriatric as makes no difference. I am a nursery principal, and all my kids are coming in and going like that across the screen of a 10-year-old laptop. If we want schools to promote those areas, we have to fund them properly.

Liam is doing wonderful things in his school, but it is all self-funded and it is cutting other areas of the budget to do that. Our budgets are incredibly tight. If we need to get children to work harder in ICT,

we need to have the best equipment for them. We need to have broadband that will actually carry the load. Currently, our schools do not have that.

The Chairperson: You may also need to have teachers who know about IT. There is a generational thing going on here. It is no disrespect to anybody, but it moves very fast.

Mr F McCann: Chair, I just want to make one more point. I know that you hog most of the meetings, Chair, and I usually let you away with it — *[Laughter.]* — but at the beginning of the presentation, Aidan said that there was no set time for careers and that it was up to the schools and would depend on the conditions that existed. What would those conditions be in determining what careers advice would be available?

Mr D Clarke: I can speak from our point of view and the discussions that happened in the local post-primary schools. It depends, I suppose, from a leadership and management point of view on the priority that careers are given in any school. For example, to supplement what is LLW in Key Stage 3, we have brought in a distinct careers period for year 10, which is the old third years.

That would not necessarily be the case in other schools. That is a decision that we looked at. We thought about the needs of the pupils and of society, and looked at the pupils to see how they were best served by the time allocated to them. They have x number of periods per week. Other schools may decide that they will deliver the same type of information but do it, for example, as part of personal development. So, it really comes down to a management decision in consultation with the needs of the kids. It is about how you divide up the time that is allocated for any given key stage. It is not prescriptive; there is nothing telling you what you have to do, as is the case for other subjects.

Mr Lyttle: There seems to be a real tension between providing quality careers and equality of opportunity to all our young people and autonomy for the school. I am concerned about the term "variation". You seem to have introduced really good best practice there. Why is such a level of variation devolved to the schools?

Mr D Clarke: I am not the best person to answer that. I can speak only for my school, but I will do my best to answer the question. It is really down to the management and leadership of the school. There are pressures. When the results come out about schools, they do not give results about your careers education; they give results on how you did in English, maths, science —

Mr Lyttle: That is the problem. What is more important than the employment that a pupil gets at the end? It is not just about qualifications. Is that how we —

The Chairperson: I think that the point has been made, Chris.

Mr Lyttle: All right.

The Chairperson: If you are being judged on your numeracy and literacy targets and not on careers, that is what you will get. We need to look at that. We got your point.

Mr Lyttle: Thank you.

Ms McGahan: I want to return to something that Aidan said earlier. I sit as a member of the Dungannon and Coalisland neighbourhood renewal partnership. There are high levels of child poverty in those areas, which means that most of the kids have no GCSEs. Sometimes, the problems do not lie with the education system, but in the home, where, for many reasons, kids are not getting support and encouragement. There is a secondary school that has a very focused and targeted approach to dealing with that. We recognise that the problems do not lie with just the education system. It is about building confidence, and a lot of those kids do not have the confidence. I am not quite sure how teachers deal with that, because other agencies may need to be involved.

Mr Dolan: Some of the best practice is happening where there are enhanced schools that run programmes that can bring parents in. There are many schools that will do that to upskill parents in basic parenting skills right through to literacy. Schools have done ICT training for parents. We can get some engagement with parents, and some of that is happening in the area that you are talking about. We can get a general raising of a community so that its self-respect can grow.

The Chairperson: Can I stop you there? There will be an issue at the end about parental involvement in certain challenging areas where there is more enhancement. I want to bring in two members who have not yet had a chance to speak, and we will come back to that issue.

Mr Allister: I wanted to return to the issue of the science deficit. As head teachers, do you accept that the downplaying of science in our primary schools, to the point at which it is not inspected and is not a core subject in its own right, is feeding through to a negative preparation for the career opportunities in the STEM — science, technology, engineering and mathematics — subjects?

Mr Dolan: It is difficult to give a yes or no answer to that, because you are looking at a direct causal effect. It would seem self-evident that what you are saying is right. If there is not an emphasis at that young age, where would it come from?

Mr Allister: It should not be any great surprise to us that there is a STEM deficit.

Mr Dolan: It is maybe not a surprise, but I cannot say for definite. I do not have the research; perhaps CCEA has research that shows that what you are saying is the case. I am just thinking that it sounds likely. If there is not an emphasis —

Mr Allister: If we are going to deal with that and have a more focused careers approach and a greater success rate, we are going to have to address curriculum issues.

Mr Dolan: That is correct.

Mr Allister: That would be a prime curriculum issue.

Mr Dolan: Yes. After literacy and numeracy, that area of science and ICT needs —

Mr Allister: Would it be your considered opinion that you have to start that at the earliest opportunity?

Mr Dolan: It would certainly be mine; I do not know whether anyone from NAHT wants to say anything about that.

Mrs Majury: We would be of the opinion that the broader the curriculum, the more beneficial it is to the children. You cannot just focus on a few core areas. You have to look at the whole child and bring everything in.

Mr Allister: With respect, my question was about whether we need to reinstate science as a core primary school subject, which would be inspected in primary schools.

Mr McGuckin: It is still inspected as part of —

Mr Allister: Yes, but it is not in its own right.

Mr McGuckin: No. It allows the teacher to take a more overall view. For example, P5s may study the topic of water. That can bring in aspects of history, with the Egyptians, and recycling —

Mr Allister: Yes, but will you just help us with something that approximates to a yes or no answer?

Mr McGuckin: I believe that the secondary and grammar schools teach science well. I do not —

Mr Allister: I am asking about primary schools.

Mr McGuckin: I do not think that it affects their career choices.

Mr Allister: So, all the talk that we have had about the science deficit in primary schools is just nonsense?

Mr McGuckin: It affects us because we need to teach a wide curriculum and make the children aspire to as many careers and paths as possible.

Mr Allister: That answer contradicts what I have taken from the tenor of a lot of what has been said this morning.

Mr McGuckin: We are saying that we are being judged solely on literacy and numeracy.

Mr Allister: We will make what we can of that.

The Chairperson: An argument is put forward that, at the age of 10, children are hugely enthusiastic about mathematics, and that we have it beaten out of them by the age of 14. You could say the same thing about science: the years of wonder are from 10 to 13. If we do not get them involved in that at those stages, there is no point in doing a GCSE or an A level because they have gone off to look at the Vikings or something. Do you not accept Mr Allister's point, which was that we have lost something in our science education in the primary sector because we have removed science as a discrete core competency?

Mr McGuckin: It enables a school to work with its surroundings and materials. We primary schools are limited in what we can do in science compared with a secondary school. We do not have the materials. I do not want to go back to funding, but we do not have the basic materials —

The Chairperson: What if you had the materials?

Mr McGuckin: If we had the materials, we could do more. However, it is difficult in all aspects, whether it be money or storage, to have various pieces. I am very lucky to have a very modern school, but I do not even have the room in the school to store equipment.

The Chairperson: I do not want to try Mr Hilditch's patience any further —

Mr Hilditch: You are all right.

The Chairperson: You are very kind, David.

There is an issue. People talk to us about training eight-year-olds in computer programming. If you give kids a chance, they pick it up and away they go. They are great. If we are serious about getting computer programmers, which seems to be what the world needs, we need to know what we need to invest in. We are picking up that, if we leave it too late, you miss the boat with them. That is why I am really keen to find out what primary schools have to say about this. Our young people are more competent. The primary school education that you get now is completely different from what it might have been 20 or 30 years ago.

Mr McGuckin: When you work with young children — Clare has mentioned this — and IT, you need machines that will work. I can switch on a PC in my school, go and make coffee, come back, and it still will not have loaded. By that time, an eight-year-old will have lost interest. Yesterday, our P7s were studying the Titanic. By the time they get the information, the lesson is over. We have 400 children in our school. We have a computer suite of 30 computers that have been there for 10 years. They are not fit for purpose. The kids cannot do the work. We do online ALTA — adaptive learning teaching and assessment — maths, which is a great scheme. Children can work and expand their level. You can have a child at P4 working at P7 or secondary-school maths level if the computer works quickly enough. We need the tools to do the job.

The Chairperson: OK. We take that point.

Mr Hilditch: This is probably a very similar point to Pat's about work experience. Twice a year, we get people in here on work experience. The young guy who was with me in January gave an example of what was happening in his class. Around 60% or 70% of them went to other schools because they wanted to be teachers. What does that tell us about careers advice? Are we still using historical advice? What is the situation? That is a real figure that is happening out there.

Mr Dolan: Positively, it must be that the teachers are good role models. They obviously think that it is a great job, which is good news. However, you want to widen it out. Some of the ideas for doing that include bringing in people from industry, and so on, and widening the experience of careers teachers. The traditional route in Northern Ireland, to use my area as an example, is to go to their local school, which is the Royal School Dungannon or St Patrick's Academy, and then to St Mary's or Stranmillis, and they come back to their area. They might not have had much chance to gain experience in a wider working environment for any period. We suggest that there should be ways for careers teachers to go out on secondment to get more work experience. I do not believe that they even have to leave the country to do that — they could spend some time at Finlay's or somewhere.

Mr Hilditch: Why are so many kids still looking to that career when we know that the numbers are not there?

Mr D Clarke: May I come in on one point there? This was mentioned much earlier, but I think that we are talking about a generation gap as well. Kids want to train to be teachers because they see it as a vocation and a very good job that they would like to do. There is a dearth of such jobs. There are very few in the local area, but the modern 19- or 23-year-old does not necessarily look only to the local area for employment. They are happy to go to different countries to get employment, in the hope that they will come back. So, although there is a barrier to local employment, they say that they would really like to be a teacher. I have heard teachers tell pupils that they understand that, but they should consider the job prospects. However, the response is, "I really want to be a teacher, and, if needs be, I will go to England, Australia or America. I will try somewhere else, in the hope that I can come back". They are more mobile and look to the global as well as the local market.

The Chairperson: Meanwhile, we have the issue of unfilled vacancies for IT, life sciences or whatever.

Mr F McCann: Chair, can I just —

The Chairperson: Sure; despite the fact that you do not allow me to say anything, you go right ahead, Fra, it is your Committee.

Mr F McCann: It is interesting, because we have touched on primary education and secondary education, and Clare raised the important point of how we deal with preschool education. I think that that needs to be included, because it is part of how we deal with the whole cycle. One of the reasons why we started rolling the careers ball was that employers — including, I think, Powerscreen in Tyrone, the owner of which did a major newspaper article on the subject — said that people in schools, colleges and universities were being directed down the old educational routes of teaching, law and medicine. It was said that a mechanism was needed also to direct them towards engineering and computer technology. That is one of the things that concern us. A number of weeks ago, someone from the statistics and research agency (NISRA) told the Committee that there were 550 skilled jobs out there that nobody is taking up.

The Chairperson: OK. So you have got the point, and I will not take you over it again because I am under pressure for time.

There are a couple of specific points that I want to ask you to deal with. You may do them a wee bit on the record, but I would actually like you to write to us. It is just that I would like it on the record. The paper was very good, but obviously constrained. So, for instance, you say that the development of self-presentation and marketing skills — presumably along the lines that Liam talked about — is:

"an undeveloped area and constrained by time availability and the lack of resources."

I think that we need to teach young people how to speak.

The next thing is:

"ELB advisors and the Careers Service often lack the time and knowledge to support the work of schools in this area".

That is a fairly challenging statement, which I would like you to have a look at.

Another interesting statement is:

"A weakness of this strategy is the variation of confidence teachers have in integrating careers into their lessons."

I do not need you to deal with it now, but I got the bit about the universities and the BTECs and all of those. However, the following is an interesting issue if we are trying to get people out on work experience:

"But finding a suitable employer with the commitment to provide a meaningful placement can be difficult."

We talked about teacher experience. The paper states:

"Businesses need to be given incentives to run work experience programmes."

We have picked up on some of the general issues, but we have not really talked about the careers provision in schools. As Dominic said, it is fairly variable, and if a school or learning environment is into it, we can go and do it. We would like a definitive statement from you on how you, as head teachers, would do careers if you were all together. I take the point about how the inspectorate, CCEA and various people in the Department want to view things. In my opinion, there are no better advisers to us than NAHT, so I would like to hear you expand a bit on that. We may not have time to do that in a Committee session, but we may get you to come back and have an informal session with members when we have time to deal with the specific areas that have been brought up. I want to put on record the bit about education and library board advisers and the Careers Service often lacking time and knowledge.

Mrs Majury: I think that the issue is that the boards are shrinking, and they have been shrinking for years in preparation for the Education and Skills Authority (ESA). That has meant that head teachers and teachers in general have found themselves in splendid isolation. There is very little training and support available for teachers. I was up at one of the boards, and it described its Curriculum Advisory and Support Service, which is its training service for schools, as having become like A&E because you do not get into it unless you are critical. They are responding to schools that are doing really poorly in inspections and are putting in big support packages, but for other schools that are just trying to develop their competencies, the support is no longer there, and it is something that we will need to see addressed under ESA. Schools need support, and there needs to be continuing professional development for head teachers and for teachers in general. At the minute, that is somewhat lacking.

Mr Lyttle: May I ask a short supplementary question in relation to that? How much of an issue is it that the only professional qualification for teachers in careers appears to be the full-time postgraduate course, which is very difficult for a full-time teacher to access? Is that a major issue?

Mr D Clarke: It is the first point that I have written down. From a post-primary point of view, you train to be a science teacher, a maths teacher or a history teacher. Careers are central to the development

The Chairperson: We get the point. I have to curtail it because I am under pressure. Thank you very much for your time. Please have a chat with the Committee Clerk to see whether we can have an informal briefing. In any case, I would like you to review the Hansard report and pick up some bits in more detail. Thank you very much.