



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
The National Assembly for Wales**

**Y Pwyllgor Menter a Dysgu
The Enterprise and Learning Committee**

**Dydd Iau, 2 Ebrill 2009
Thursday, 2 April 2009**

Cynnwys
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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Alun Davies	Llafur (yn dirprwyo ar ran Christine Chapman) Labour (substitute for Christine Chapman)
Paul Davies	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Nerys Evans	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Lesley Griffiths	Llafur (yn dirprwyo ar ran Jeff Cuthbert) Labour (substitute for Jeff Cuthbert)
Gareth Jones	Plaid Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) The Party of Wales (Committee Chair)
Huw Lewis	Llafur Labour
David Melding	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Sandy Mewies	Llafur Labour
Jenny Randerson	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Judith Cole	Pennaeth Ariannu Rheolaidd, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Head of Recurrent Funding, Welsh Assembly Government
Jane Hutt	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur (Y Gweinidog dros Blant, Addysg, Dysgu Gydol Oes a Sgiliau) Assembly Member, Labour (Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills)
Suzanne Jones	Cyfarwyddwr, Scope Cymru Director, Scope Cymru
Julie Prosser	Prif Ddeisebydd, Deiseb Anghenion Dysgu Ychwanegol Ôl-19 Principal Petitioner, Post-19 Additional Learning Needs Petition
Mair Watkins	Pennaeth y Gangen Anghenion Dysgu Ychwanegol, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Head of Additional Learning Needs Branch, Welsh Assembly Government

Swyddogion Gwasanaeth Seneddol y Cynulliad yn bresennol
Assembly Parliamentary Service officials in attendance

Mike Lewis	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Dan Collier	Clerc Clerk
Siân Hughes	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil yr Aelodau Members' Research Service

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.30 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.30 a.m.

Cyflwyniad ac Ymddiheuriadau Introduction and Apologies

[1] **Gareth Jones:** Bore da, bawb. Estynnaf groeso cynnes i chi i'r cyfarfod hwn o'r Pwyllgor Menter a Dysgu. Atgoffaf bawb i ddiffodd eu ffonau symudol ac unrhyw ddyfais electronig arall ac i beidio â chyffwrdd y meicroffonau—nid oes angen gwneud hynny. Nid ydym yn disgwyl ymarfer tân, felly os yw'r larwm yn canu, bydd yn rhaid inni ddilyn cyfarwyddiadau'r tywysyddion. Mae'r cyfarfod hwn yn ddwyieithog ac mae clustffonau ar gael fel y gallwch dderbyn y gwasanaeth cyfieithu ar y pryd o'r Gymraeg i Saesneg, ar sianel 1, a gallwch droi i sianel 0 i chwyddleisio'r sain. Darperir cofnod o'r cyfan a ddywedir yn gyhoeddus.

Gareth Jones: Good morning, everyone. I extend a warm welcome to you to this meeting of the Enterprise and Learning Committee. I remind everyone to switch off their mobile phones and any other electronic devices. I request that you do not touch the microphones—there is no need to do so. We are not expecting a fire drill, so if an alarm sounds, we will need to follow the directions of the ushers. This is a bilingual meeting and headsets are available for a Welsh-to-English interpretation service, which is available on channel 1, while amplification of sound is available on channel 0. A record of all that is said publicly during this meeting will be made available.

[2] Mae dau ymddiheuriad wedi dod i law'r bore yma, oddi wrth Christine Chapman a Jeff Cuthbert. Yr ydym yn croesawu Alun Davies, sydd yn dirprwyo ar ran Christine Chapman. Nid dyma'ch ymddangosiad cyntaf chi ar y pwyllgor hwn. Yr ydym yn falch o'ch gweld ac yn edrych ymlaen at eich cyfraniad. Yr wyf yn deall y bydd Lesley Griffiths yma am 10.30 a.m. i ddirprwyo ar ran Jeff Cuthbert.

We have received two apologies this morning, from Christine Chapman and Jeff Cuthbert. We welcome Alun Davies, who is the substitute for Christine Chapman. This is not your first appearance at this committee. We are pleased to see you and look forward to your contribution. I am given to understand that Lesley Griffiths will be here at 10.30 a.m., substituting for Jeff Cuthbert.

[3] Yr wyf hefyd yn eich atgoffa ein bod wedi rhoi caniatâd i ffotograffydd fod yn bresennol yn ystod y cyfarfod hwn. Nid yw wedi troi i mewn eto, ond efallai y daw yn y man.

I also remind you that we have given permission for a photographer to be present during this meeting. He has not arrived yet, but he may well arrive shortly.

9.31 a.m.

Deiseb Anghenion Dysgu Ychwanegol Ôl-19 Post-19 Additional Learning Needs Petition

[4] **Gareth Jones:** Fel cefndir i'r eitem hon, cawsom wahoddiad gan y Pwyllgor Deisebau i ystyried y ddeiseb anghenion dysgu ychwanegol ôl-19. Gan y byddai hynny'n edrych ar fater a drafodwyd gan y pwyllgor addysg yn yr Ail Gynulliad, penderfynwyd ymgymryd ag ymchwiliad byr a chraffu ar y Gweinidog a'r rhanddeiliaid allweddol. Bydd y prif ddeisebydd yma i roi cyflwyniad byr ar y mater ac i ateb cwestiynau Aelodau.

Gareth Jones: As background to this item, we were invited by the Petitions Committee to consider the post-19 additional learning needs petition. As it dealt with an issue on which work was done by the education committee in the Second Assembly, we decided to undertake a brief inquiry and to scrutinise the Minister and key stakeholders. The chief petitioner will be here to give a brief presentation on the issue and to respond to Members' questions.

[5] Trown yn awr at gynrychiolwyr Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru a chroesawu Jane Hutt, y Gweinidog dros Blant, Addysg, Dysgu Gydol Oes a Sgiliau, Judith Cole, pennaeth ariannu rheolaidd a Mair Watkins, pennaeth y gangen anghenion dysgu ychwanegol. Croeso i chi, Weinidog, ac i'r swyddogion sydd gyda chi'r bore yma. Nid wyf yn teimlo bod angen cyflwyniad. Yr wyf am ddiolch i chi ar ran yr Aelodau am eich tystiolaeth ysgrifenedig a'r atodiadau hollbwysig ar y mater hwn. Daw'r cwestiwn cyntaf gan Paul Davies.

We turn now to the Welsh Assembly Government representatives and welcome Jane Hutt, the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, Judith Cole, head of recurrent funding and Mair Watkins, head of the additional learning needs branch. A warm welcome to you, Minister, and to the officials that accompany you this morning. I do not feel that there is a need for a presentation. I thank you, on behalf of the Members, for your written evidence and the crucial appendices on this matter. Paul Davies has the first question.

[6] **Paul Davies:** It is obvious from yesterday's Plenary debate and Scope's petition that the provision of further learning and education for young people with additional learning needs is not adequate. I note that the previous Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills Committee produced a report on this with many recommendations in March 2007. One of the recommendations in that report suggested that the Assembly Government should review whether the total funding available to further education colleges for additional educational needs is adequate and whether the funding mechanism for distributing it to colleges could be improved. What additional mechanisms, if any, have you put in place since that report? How much additional funding has been allocated to this area and what criteria do you use when deciding whether exceptional funding should be awarded for a learner going to a further education college?

[7] **The Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (Jane Hutt):** I am very pleased to come before the committee today and to follow up this important subject. We had a useful debate yesterday that has fed helpfully into your considerations and inquiry this morning. I made the point yesterday that we have been following through policy issues, not only building on our national service framework for children, young people and maternity services, but also, importantly, the reports of the previous Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills Committee and the Committee on Equality of Opportunity. So, we have had very important evidence from Assembly committees on policy development and, most importantly, from Government on the steps that we are taking to implement those recommendations. Equally important is getting the transfer of powers through the additional learning needs LCO, which was the first Assembly LCO to complete its progress, and that happened last year.

[8] The main point of your question is on funding. We have taken forward mechanisms to support young people with special educational needs. We have to take that through school, into further education and, beyond that, into work-based learning and higher education. As part of that, we have been looking at specific funding to support discrete specialist provision as well as access to mainstream or residential provision. If you look at the significant funding that has been made available to support learners, you will see that it amounts to over £40 million in specific funding and I will break that down for Members. Of the £40 million for 2008-09, £14.5 million was for supplementary, residential and exceptional funding for further education institutions, and that supports about 10,500 learners. There was £18.44 million for post-16 special school and out-of-county provision, and there was £8 million discrete provision for learners with profound and multiple disabilities. For that funding to be allocated appropriately to each learner, every learner has to have an individual learning and skills plan. That is drawn up by Careers Wales in working with the young learners, their families, and the other agencies involved. Obviously, the learning and skills plan is about learning needs. Often there are other needs that have to be taken into account, including social and health needs. So,

the overall amount, as I have said, is over £40 million, and it is broken down in that way. We allocate funding according to the needs of each learner as a result of that learning and skills plan. I do not know whether Mair or Judith want to add anything for clarification.

[9] **Ms Cole:** Expenditure on residential provision has certainly gone up over recent years. Expenditure on exceptional funding tends to go up and down, because it is very much individual learner related. If you look at the supplementary funding stream to further education institutions, you will see that it is a discretionary funding scheme, and we have given them funding ranging from 75 per cent of the requested level up to 100 per cent. It has been 100 per cent this year, and it was 100 per cent last year. Beyond that my memory does not stretch.

[10] **Paul Davies:** So, it is based on individual learners, and there is no maximum as far as colleges are concerned.

[11] **Jane Hutt:** It is about assessed need.

[12] **David Melding:** I am a bit confused about the Welsh Assembly Government's strategy. Learners with profound and multiple needs are often in out-of-county residential placements. Is it our policy to try to equip the FE sector to be able to provide locally—at present, an increasing number of placements go out of county—or is it thought that, because of the numbers in any particular year and the fact that we have 16 or so FE colleges, it is difficult to develop facilities, given that there may be a couple of years when you do not have people with profound and multiple learning difficulties trying to gain access, or you may have people with a range of difficulties that you have not experienced before. What is the policy? In the evidence, we were told to look at the east of England

9.40 a.m.

[13] Have they been able to localise more spending and move away from reliance on out-of-county placements? Is that also your aspiration? That is, reshaping spending rather than, perhaps, saying that we need lots more. Out-of-county placements are usually five or six times more expensive than what you can provide locally.

[14] **Jane Hutt:** The policy is to start with the learner and the learner's needs. We have talked about the ways in which those needs can be assessed. We could go back over the importance of the transition planning, and we are doing a lot of work on that to ensure that there are options. As I have said, if it starts from the learner, there have to be options for the learning and skills assessment to ensure that the learner and those engaged with the assessment can see what options are available. However, it must start from an individual assessment of need and then consideration can be given to the provision that is available.

[15] Perhaps it would be helpful for us to look at the stages. Careers Wales acts on our behalf and on behalf of the learner to look at the learner's needs. It looks at them in the final year of school and the plans that develop can be taken forward in terms of options and funding, and so on. The learner's options could include day provision in further education colleges in Wales and could often be integrated with support from local health and social services departments, or it could be support for residential placements in colleges in Wales or England, again, according to assessed needs and the wishes of the learner.

[16] If we look at the policy options, we have a range of provision in Wales. We have four colleges that have very specific options available, including some residential provision at Bridgend College. However, looking at the numbers, 6,000 learners accessed independent living skills courses last year in our further education colleges. Those courses were for learners with profound or complex needs. The exceptional funding is important. Of course,

part of the assessment relates to an extra learning support assistant, extra equipment and communication facilities. Every college has to seek to fulfil the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.

[17] I have mentioned the 6,000 who are accessing independent living skills courses in our FE colleges. In addition to this, in 2008-09, we supported over 200 learners in residential placements in Wales and England. Ideally, we would like to ensure that, wherever you live in Wales, you will have the option of accessing further education in a local further education college. The possibility that we discussed yesterday of what Scope has described as a 'virtual college', where you can have co-location, is something that we certainly want to explore further. We are funding pilots to look specifically at learning needs in post-16 education, which takes us to the key point of this petition in relation to post-19 education.

[18] Therefore, it starts from the learner's needs and assessment, which has the learner at the forefront and multi-agency support. Then, it has to be about the provision that is available. That can be day and residential provision in Wales or outside Wales. We are undertaking pilots and it might be useful if Mair said a few words about that to see how we can improve the range of provision.

[19] **Ms Watkins:** There are two pilots under way, both of which stem from the former Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills Committee's review of special educational needs. The one that is specifically looking at post-16 provision and transition is the transition pilot project for key workers. As we know, key workers are standard within the national service framework and have a fundamental role to play in supporting families, gaining information and considering options, whether that means going on to further education or employment. So, we have five pilot sites looking at key workers at the moment and we are working closely with Care Co-ordination Network UK to embed those standards across Wales. The total amount of money available for the key worker pilots was £1.5 million, but we have increased that to £3 million with convergence match funding. The other pilot scheme is part of the whole statutory reform agenda.

[20] As the Minister mentioned, we now have legislative competence around additional learning needs. It was raised in the Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills Committee that there is no single definition of what we mean by 'complex needs'. We tend to define those with complex needs as those with profound and multiple learning difficulties. However, there are other areas of need, such as autism, which are extremely complex and need a multi-agency approach. As part of the pilot projects on statutory reform, we are looking at complex needs and how we meet them. We are also looking at non-complex needs, which could be different types of additional learning needs that are not quite as severe—possibly dyslexia or communication difficulties. In relation to that, we are looking at the role of the additional learning needs co-ordinator and, above all, at the quality assurance and monitoring and the outcomes for these learners.

[21] **David Melding:** I think that those answers are quite reasonable—that you had a range of provision—but they were quite long and discursive. I still do not know whether you think that there needs to be a more profound reshaping of the service so that there is more access to local provision and that FE institutions across Wales should therefore look at this area and improve the services that they can offer. The petition says:

[22] 'For students who do not wish to attend residential, there is no appropriate College in Wales for them to attend that can meet their complex needs.'

[23] I still do not know what your strategy is. Is it to shift things profoundly because you think that there is far too much out-of-county provision and you have to deal with the consequences, or do you think that you have quite a reasonable range of options to meet most

needs?

[24] **Jane Hutt:** We want to ensure that there is choice—that there is an option not to go out of county and not to have to choose a residential option. I am sure that all Assembly Members will know that we have constituents who have sought a residential option because there is very specialist provision on offer. There are specialist colleges not just inside Wales but also outside Wales, and it is important that those offers from around the UK are available to our learners. We would wish to ensure that a young learner—we are talking about post 19—could access appropriate lifelong learning, as well as post-19 learning, as locally as possible. That is what we would want to seek as a starting point, David, in terms of policy.

[25] We have described the range of provision that we have and the funding. We have given you the actual figures and one of the appendices to my written statement, giving the discrete provision, shows that virtually every college in Wales is getting extra funding that is specifically targeted at particular learners with particular needs. I think that it is important to demonstrate that all our colleges are engaged in some way in trying to deliver. However, it goes back to the fact that work had to be done through these pilots on how we deliver learning to students with very complex needs. There are issues in terms of numbers; if you want inclusion and integration, you would want there to be more than one learner receiving that specific provision because otherwise they could be excluded from the mainstream. Inevitably, there are going to be issues about whether that can be provided in every college in every community. That is where, in other policy areas, we look to more regional, cross-boundary provision in terms of colleges and local authority areas. I think that it is reasonable to say that some colleges, like Bridgend College with Weston House, have developed a specific expertise—I know that Weston House is residential and we are not just talking about residential options. This is about developing expertise. We know that Neath Port Talbot, for example, is talking with the Royal National Institute of Blind People about the possibility of developing facilities there. Obviously, we are very interested in working with Scope on particular needs and complex issues.

9.50 a.m.

[26] I said yesterday that I am looking forward to visiting Craig-y-Parc School, because I know that that is where we can identify where there are particularly complex needs that we need to address fully if we are not already doing so. However, we must recognise that we are talking about such a wide range that one size does not fit all. We need specialism to be developed and our learners to have funding targeted to their needs. We also need to ensure that, as a result of these pilot schemes and the work that we are doing, we can make a range of provision to meet a range of needs.

[27] **Nerys Evans:** Hoffwn wneud tri phwynt penodol. Yn gyntaf, bu i ni grybwyll yn y ddadl ddoe—a soniodd Mair Watkins amdano'n gynharach—diffinio 'nam cymhleth'. A allwch ymhelaethu ar y cymhlethdodau sy'n deillio o hynny ar hyn o bryd, y pryder y mae'n ei achosi a sut yr ydych yn ceisio goroesi hynny?

Nerys Evans: I would like to make three specific points. First, we mentioned in yesterday's debate—and Mair Watkins mentioned it earlier—defining 'complex impairment'. Could you expand on the complications arising from that at present, the concern that that causes and how you are trying to overcome that?

[28] Yn ail, a ydych yn hapus gyda'r broses asesu ar hyn o bryd? A ydych yn ymwybodol o unrhyw broblemau mewn ardaloedd gwahanol o Gymru yn ymwneud â gwahanol agweddau ar y broses asesu?

Secondly, are you happy with the current assessment process? Are you aware of any problems in different areas of Wales relating to different aspects of the assessment process?

[29] Yn olaf, ar bobl ifanc Cymraeg iaith gyntaf sydd ag anghenion arbennig a namau cymhleth, mae gennym waith achos sy'n dangos nad yw rhai awdurdodau lleol yn gallu darparu datganiad anghenion arbennig drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg. Ar gyfer bobl gyda namau cymhleth nad ydynt yn siarad Saesneg fel iaith gyntaf, mae hyd yn oed yn bwysicach eu bod yn gallu cael mynediad i wasanaethau a darpariaeth addysg drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg. A gredwch fod darpariaeth ddigonol ac a yw'n broblem? Sut y byddech yn asesu hynny?

Finally, on young people whose first language is Welsh who have special needs and complex impairments, we have casework showing that some local authorities are not able to provide a special needs statement through the medium of Welsh. For those with complex impairments whose first language is not English, it is even more important that they can access services and education provision through the medium of Welsh. Do you think that there is sufficient provision and is that a problem? How would you assess that?

[30] **Jane Hutt:** Yesterday, I think that I also mentioned that when we consider definitions, it is difficult, but that we need to find a consistent approach. If we are to meet the needs of young people with special educational needs, we must ensure that we have appropriate guidance to enable us to assess need. I mentioned yesterday the guidance that we issued in January 2007, in the form of a circular, on how schools should record information. It is important that this starts at the school level. The pupil level annual statistical census, PLASC, system enables schools to do that.

[31] I will list some technical issues around definitions. Under the special educational needs code of practice for Wales, pupils' needs are categorised under four main sub-headings: cognition and learning; behavioural, emotional and social development; communication and interaction; and sensory and/or physical. We have already mentioned that we are undertaking pilot schemes to see whether we are focusing on the needs of those pupils with the most complex needs and how we can improve multi-agency working in terms of assessment.

[32] The former Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills Committee acknowledged that there was not a universal definition of children and young people with severe and complex needs, so I hope that our pilot projects will help—and not just us in Wales because this policy area is so important.

[33] On whether our assessment procedures are right, I refer to what Mair said about key workers and transition. A key recommendation from the former Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills Committee was to look further at transition. When the Committee on Equality of Opportunity met and took evidence, the disabled young people from the reference group kept referring to the fact that key workers and effective transition planning were needed. That is not a new policy, so this is not about coming up with a new policy, but about delivering on an existing policy. We know that transition is crucial and that key workers are vital and, as Mair said, we are putting in funding in order to get the assessment right. We are not leaving it to the last moment, because a key worker should be in place to enable a young learner's needs to be assessed at a much earlier stage, prior to the ages of 16 and 19.

[34] We are undertaking a review of Careers Wales at the moment, because it has a crucial role to play through the learning and skills plans that it has to develop. In fact, Careers Wales has set up a new interactive website, called My Future, for disabled children and young people. It is very engaged in looking at transition planning, self-awareness development, decision making, interests, skills and ideas for young people. That is a new development. We have recently provided £50,000 for the next three years to Skill Wales to work on a number of fronts to do with accessing education and employment. We are seeking to improve our assessment process, and that forms part of the ongoing work.

[35] The transitions reference group that I mentioned yesterday, which was set up directly

as a result of delivering on the national strategic framework and the former Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills Committee's recommendations, has an education and training sub-group, on which sit representatives from Careers Wales, Scope, SNAP Cymru, RNIB and various other organisations such as Fforwm and further education colleges. That committee is the key place for improving and reporting back to you on the development that is taking this forward.

[36] The issue of additional needs and statementing through the medium of Welsh is an important point for the Welsh-medium education strategy, which we will shortly be submitting for consultation. Without waiting for that, it is clear that we have to ensure that there is provision and an adequate response to statementing when it happens, and that, if appropriate, a statement is in place.

[37] **Jenny Randerson:** The figures for students with profound and multiple needs show an increase from 317 to 342 between 2004 and 2008. I have talked to those who work in the field, and they predict a continued and steady increase. I found the total numbers interesting, Minister, because I have seen several cases at my constituency surgery, and that is because there always seems to be a problem with getting the funding. Given that the needs are both complex and obvious, there seems to be so much argument at the edges. No-one could possibly deny that the needs exist, but people are all the time arguing at the edges. My concern is at how long it takes to put the funding packages in place. How can you speed this up and make it less distressing for the families concerned? The distress to the students and their families is so obvious. They have never had an easy life, and being at this stage in their lives seems to make things even more difficult. I am interested in hearing whether you think that the transition key workers will deal with that.

[38] Forgive me, but I would like to go back to the point that I made to you in yesterday's Plenary, which I have also made in writing, about the delay in your department's making decisions on funding when students have to or wish to take a residential place at a college that is outside their area. There is the whole issue of which college they go to. I would like a clear commitment that this will be dealt with and that decisions will not be made in the last week in August, which makes life difficult for the families in terms of planning.

10.00 a.m.

[39] With regard to the list of specialist residential colleges, and the four in Wales, I am still trying to get my head around which colleges do what. Can you outline for us the specific areas of expertise in the four colleges in Wales, so that we can then, by exception, realise what cannot be covered in Wales?

[40] You mentioned that Neath Port Talbot College could develop an expertise—I think that you said that it was working with the Royal National Institute for the Blind. Is that entirely its initiative, or is that led by your Government's policy? Have you facilitated that development? Given that the college wants to develop an area of expertise, and that there are many other areas that need to be covered, will Government policy lead that development, or will it be up to individual colleges to find a niche in the market to develop its own expertise? Will that be entirely on the colleges' own initiative? It could mean that we could end up with a very uneven pattern—it could be like hospices all over again, where certain areas do not have one because people have not set it up. If you leave it to the colleges, we could end up with plenty of provision in one part of the country and none in another, and provision for one thing but not another.

[41] Minister, you gave us some figures earlier, but can you provide those in a written note via the Chair? I have looked through the papers and I cannot see them, so if they are not there it would be helpful to have those figures in writing.

[42] **Jane Hutt:** When assessing the numbers in terms of need, that should also drive the kind of provision that we want to develop. It comes back to David's point, in a way. For example, we know from the PLASC data that the number of learners with autistic spectrum disorders has increased. Therefore, we must start responding nationally and locally in partnership to the need identified through the PLASC data. The PLASC data show us that the number of pupils described as having profound and multiple difficulties has fallen between 1997 and 2007, as I mentioned in the Plenary debate yesterday, from 755 to 700. The PLASC information is vital to steer us in terms of what specialist provision we need to develop locally and nationally.

[43] You make a very important point about timing and getting decisions made quickly and appropriately, and the uncertainty that learners and families face. In fact, I was saying to my officials before we came in that surely we can improve on this. There are issues around the fact that for some learners there is a genuinely multi-agency situation, in that you are talking not just about the learner's assessment in terms of educational need through the learning and skills assessment, but also about health and social services needs in terms of a funding package. In yesterday's Plenary debate, I mentioned the £11 million that was provided for residential provision: £7 million is for education and £4 million is for health and social care needs. So, getting those packages together can be an issue.

[44] This is probably where I need to bring Judith in, but we also have a duty to ensure, when we are funding, that we have the latest possible assessment of need. That is the difficulty. Needs can change and develop and become more complex. What is the cut-off point? When do you say, 'This is the assessment so let us make the decision on the funding package'? I have every sympathy with the points that you have written to me about, and which other Members have raised. We need to try to find a way of streamlining and speeding up the process to ensure that learners and their families get timely decisions following these assessments. It comes back to the fact that that means good key worker planning and early transition planning, so that it is not all done at the last minute. Judith, you may want to talk about the duties under the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

[45] **Ms Cole:** As you acknowledged, we get more applications from people who want residential courses than we do from people who do not. So, we must make an assessment of whether those needs could be met locally, first, because it is a financial concern and, secondly, to ensure that we are treating everyone equitably. We therefore have to ask for up-to-date information for us, for social services and for health. It is not as though most people are getting late decisions, but we acknowledge that some of them got later decisions than is good. So, we have taken steps. I know that some long-term stuff is going on with improving key workers, but we also took steps to go to meet Careers Wales, which pulls the assessment together, to ask why it is not working quickly. What is it that we need to know that the application is not telling us? We do not want a situation in which an application comes in, sits on someone's desk for while, we look at it, but then we have to go back for more information. We think that getting that part right will be a quicker win than the development work on transition generally. I hope that the series of workshops that we have held with Careers Wales will improve that end of things and that we can make the decisions more quickly.

[46] **Jane Hutt:** It may be useful for me to write to you more formally with the details of the specialist colleges in Wales, given the amount of time that we have this morning. We have four specialist colleges, which cater for learners from England as well as from Wales. It is important to say that. For example, Beechwood College caters for learners aged 16 to 25 with autistic spectrum disorders or Asperger's syndrome, and caters for learners from England as well as from Wales. Pengwern College in Rhuddlan, north Wales, is one of three further education colleges associated with Mencap, and it supports students with moderate to severe learning disabilities. Bridgend College has a specialist centre at Weston House, which offers

24-hour care and curriculum provision for young people aged 16 to 25 with moderate to severe learning disabilities or physical disabilities. Coleg Elidyr is the specialist FE college for students with moderate to severe learning disabilities in Carmarthenshire.

[47] I mentioned Neath Port Talbot College and RNIB, and you asked about that. RNIB is also involved in our transitions working group, and it is looking, together with other national organisations, such as Scope, at developing specialist provision in partnership with colleges. That is just one example. I feel that we have everyone around the table, nationally, in this external reference group on transitions to start to identify gaps in Wales. We are putting money into pilot schemes. We must also be realistic. This goes back to the point that David made about what we could provide to promote accessibility to all our learners, because there are other issues to consider, such as in transport, health and social services. I hope that that gives you some indication of current provision and of how we are planning to meet needs. We will certainly share the financial information that I gave you earlier.

10.10 a.m.

[48] **David Melding:** The Minister mentioned this earlier, in response to my question, I think, and the official, Judith Cole, just mentioned it. Residential placements have been quite popular. I think that we have all dealt with constituents who have been pushing local authorities to fund one, for instance. If local provision is strengthened in the manner that we have just been discussing, do you anticipate that the demand for residential placements might decrease? I am just wondering whether some people turn, in desperation sometimes, to an out-of-country placement, let alone an out-of-county placement. I just want to get an idea of your strategic direction.

[49] **Jane Hutt:** This goes back to the fact that we have to engage with learners. It is a multi-agency decision and planning process for each learner. If we could develop more local, localised and co-located provision, I hope that there will be fewer requests to go to residential placements.

[50] **Gareth Jones:** Thank you. Finally, I believe that Sandy Mewies has a question.

[51] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you, Minister, for what you have said so far. I am glad that the direction of travel is towards giving more choice because there is little doubt that transitional arrangements for young people with any sort of additional need, whether physical or anything else, have always been extremely difficult. I bet that everyone here has had someone in their surgery telling them that life seems to end at 16. What happens after that? I am glad that choice is being examined. Many people will want their children at home with them and many children will want to stay at home. They need to be given that choice where possible.

[52] One slight concern that I have—and you have touched on it—is that there are multiple disabilities and multiple definitions of them. I am not clear that every agency understands the same thing when a descriptor is given. Are you confident in that, and are you looking for some consistency? I used to inspect special schools, and I was a chair of a social services department, so I have some idea of how difficult these shared understandings can be. Are you also confident that agencies, such as Careers Wales, have the specialist training to identify and forecast what young people need to make their future lives as fulfilling for them as they can possibly be, because that is what we are aiming for? How hard are you looking at smaller regional placements for people? I am afraid that there will always be a need for out-of-county residential placements.

[53] You also touched on transport, and it is no good saying that there is provision just over the border, because a young person may have to spend a lot of time waiting for transport

to wherever he or she is learning and to be collected to go back again. It is like any school bus, is it not? While a school bus might pick up 20 pupils in one spot, a smaller bus will pick up one pupil here and one there, which can add two extra hours onto a school day, and that is not right for anyone. How closely are you looking at transport needs, because it all needs to be taken in context? Alongside that is the fact that all needs have to be taken into account, do they not? If a placement is not genuinely multi-agency, it will not work anywhere.

[54] **Jane Hutt:** The national service framework has standards on transition. The expectation is that multi-agency authorities have to deliver on those standards. We have to go back to the special educational needs code of practice for the definitions, as well as the circular that we issued in January 2007 to inform the work of collecting pupil-level annual school census data by schools. I do not think that there is more that we can add to it at present as regards the difficulty of definitions, although we are doing work on it, via the pilot schemes. The PLASC data collection is now rigorous, and has been in place for two years.

[55] On the guidance, I have mentioned the NSF and the question of whether Careers Wales is appropriate, and has the necessary specialism. We are undertaking a review of Careers Wales, which will look at its specialist functions and role around additional learning needs. Careers Wales also sits on the education and training sub-group of the transitional reference group, which is an important development. We have had task groups working on drafting guidance for young people, parents and professionals, which will bring together current guidance on transitions and learning skills assessments. That will be ready quite soon. Do you know when, Mair?

[56] **Ms Watkins:** It is on its way.

[57] **Jane Hutt:** The transport issue is important. There is no requirement in the Education Act 2002 to provide transport for disabled learners, but our Assembly Government guidance in circular 05/2007 says that LEAs must specify what transport arrangements can be made for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Good practice suggests that, where possible, LEAs and their partners should provide support for learners with SEN until at least the age of 21, and ideally up to 25, wherever possible. You may want to secure some information on how that is being delivered across Wales. Those regulations are also in statute. We talked about regional options, cross-boundary options, trying to keep people in-county, but transport can be a real issue, depending on the complexity of your needs. Everything goes back to the individual, but there is provision for transport, and we will have to look at that when we start developing more localised provision.

[58] **Gareth Jones:** I believe that that concludes the questions that we have as Members. Is there anything else that you would like to add, or any point that you wish to make?

[59] **Jane Hutt:** Without wishing to repeat myself, I do need to say that we are developing a made-in-Wales policy, and we are in the middle of that at the moment, particularly our work through the transition reference group. The focus of the Petitions Committee and now the Enterprise and Learning Committee on monitoring our progress has been extremely helpful to me and the officials, to see where the points of concern are emerging, and that is important.

[60] **Gareth Jones:** I also thank you on behalf of the committee. The information that you have provided has made transparent what we all know is a challenging area. Matching provision to need is one of the most difficult areas of all. We are heartened, I am sure, by the efforts that you are making in this respect. Thank you for bringing that transparency, and for the further information that you will share with us. We are grateful for your contribution this morning. It has helped us tremendously to understand the nature of the challenge, and what lies ahead. Diolch yn fawr iawn i chi.

10.20 a.m.

[61] We now move to the second part of the scrutiny session. The key people are with us this morning representing the petitioners on the post-19 additional learning needs petition. We have the paper and a copy of the petition wording; we are aware of the response to that petition as presented to the Petitions Committee, and we have a copy of the Minister's response. I am delighted to extend a warm welcome this morning to Julie Prosser, the principal petitioner, and to Suzanne Jones, director of Scope Cymru.

[62] Julie, you will be aware that we are very supportive. We have empathy and some understanding, but, of course, we need to hear from you about your concerns and aspirations and what your wishes would be. So far, it has all been on paper, but we are delighted that you are now here to share your concerns with us. It will help us to formulate a way forward. It is up to you how we proceed: if you wish, you can expand on a few things and we can then move to a question-and-answer session. Are you happy with that?

[63] **Ms Prosser:** Yes, I am. Thank you for allowing me to come to speak to you. I am here because of my daughter, who will be 19 years old this year. She is leaving school in July, and, pretty much, there is nothing for her. I know that she is not an isolated case. I have been talking to families whose children left school two or three years ago. I have asked them what their children are doing now. Some of them are at a home, and some of them are in day centres, and they are not appropriate places. I am afraid that my daughter is going to be one of them—someone who does not show up in any of the statistics. It has become clear to me that the young people that I am trying to describe are like my daughter Tamara: they go to schools like Craig-y-Parc School, they will most definitely have physical disabilities, they will have profound learning difficulties, and they may have sensory problems, communication problems and, sometimes, behaviour problems—profound, complex needs.

[64] These people, like my daughter, have been protected by their statements and have had a wonderful education; they have accomplished so much in our eyes, and, all of a sudden, it just stops. It was cloudy, looking back, but it all became clear to me about two years ago, particularly when Careers Wales told me that there are no college courses for my daughter anywhere. I thought, 'I am not going to just take that. I am going to find out for myself'. So I went to the local college, and I eventually got it to do an assessment for my daughter so I could see for myself what the problem was. I just received a little e-mail saying 'Sorry, we cannot meet your daughter's needs'. That was it. I spoke to quite a few people in different colleges. Someone I spoke to at one college—and you will probably understand this more than me—said that the funding methodology does not work for people like Tamara. She said that it works well for the mainstream, but that it is very black and white— young adults like Tamara do not tick the boxes and it just does not work.

[65] People talk about the funding that is being made available and all of this money, which sounds lovely, and they talk about courses designed specifically for people with learning difficulties and disabilities, but I have been told that the entry level is too high for my daughter, so she cannot even get to the college. Even if she could get there, it does not have the facilities—the medical facilities, the therapists, the accessibility or the specialists. She does not even get off the starting blocks, if you know what I mean.

[66] People have talked about residential options. She should have a choice, and some residential options are not appropriate because of her medical needs. Young people should have the choice, and my daughter wants to stay at home, but she also wants to further her education. Third-party arrangements are an interesting issue. It sounds very good: if the college cannot provide what is needed, it will look at other places. So I went looking. There is a lovely place run by the Touch Trust, which is doing some wonderful work. I rang around so many colleges—as did Careers Wales, to be fair—asking whether, because they could not

provide for people like my daughter, they would work with a third-party agency. Most of them gave us a blank 'no' and one said that it did not touch third-party agencies at all. Basically, most of them said that they did not have enough learner units, meaning that they did not have enough money.

[67] One college told me that the problem was that they had had cutbacks and that, in looking at the different learners wanting to come in, they looked at those that will take most of the money and, unfortunately, children like Tamara are going to take a lot of money to support, so they pretty much get pushed to one side and left out. I find it very unfair that the people who have this money are looking across the board and looking at my child and deciding not to include her. That is an equal opportunities issue, and I do not find it very fair. I tried to go to the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills for help, but still, with three months to go, Tamara has nowhere to go—nothing has been decided.

[68] I could talk to you all day about the nightmares of transition. People will come to transition meetings, but no-one wants to take responsibility for funding. No-one has any particular defined role, and no-one seems to know who is doing what. With regard to transport, I have asked whether Tamara could go to a skills centre that I found in Barry, but I was told that the transport cannot be funded. They are not willing to support the escort. She would need personal care when she is there and help with eating, and the money is not there. That is what it pretty much comes down to. I have a transition meeting tomorrow, which is nearly as scary as this one today. Not once in those meetings has my daughter been given a choice, and not once has it been said, 'What would she like to do?'; all that has been mentioned is day services, and I have said, year after year, that she does not want to go to day services—they are not appropriate. Tomorrow, a care plan will be discussed, and they are going to try to argue that day services will meet her needs. You have to go to these day services to see what they are like. I know one mother whose daughter goes there, and she pretty much sits there for most of the day. It is a factory setting, and she has a bed in the corner and, in her care plan, she lies on the bed most of the day. There is a sensory room there, but no-one has shown them how to use it, so she does not even get to go in there. I could go on and on about that.

[69] So, in conclusion, I cannot believe that this has been allowed to go on for so long. I have newspaper clippings here that show that people have been trying to say this for a long, long time. I did not want to come here to criticise; I just wanted to show the huge flaw in the policies on further education for children like my daughter, Tamara. I would really love to take you all to see what the children who have left school are doing—or what they are not doing. That would speak volumes. That is why I am appealing to you. Personally, I do not just want to see a long-term solution; I want to know what will happen in three months' time, when Tamara leaves school. I want her to have an equal opportunity. I am so proud of what she has done over all these years, and so much money has been invested in that. They are small skills but, for her, they are leaps, and they are miracles to me. She has done so well, and now that she is 19 years old it is suddenly going to stop.

[70] **Gareth Jones:** Thank you. You have summed up what the petition is about. I was a bit concerned as to the direction in which we were heading or the direction in which you wanted to head, but you have explained precisely the nature of the challenge. We all know that it is a difficult area, but we are all dismayed with what we have heard about the situation out there.

[71] To explain to you the nature of this committee, there will be support—that goes without saying—and we will draw up a draft report, which we will send to the Government, but it is up to the Government to act. Hopefully, it will take on board our considerations, concerns and recommendations.

[72] You mentioned that this is a scary meeting—not at all. We are here to help, and we are very grateful to you for sharing those concerns with us. Members want to ask further questions so that we can have a better understanding and to help us to decide how we are going to approach this. Nerys Evans is first.

[73] **Nerys Evans:** Thank you for your presentation, Ms Prosser. I have two questions for you and one for Suzanne. You spoke about the assessment that you had from the college. Did you find, from speaking to other parents, that assessment is a problem, or is the assessment process okay but that you did not get the answers following your daughter's assessment?

10.30 a.m.

[74] The issue of funding has come through quite clearly in your presentation. Do you think that funding is the main problem, or is it that no-one is taking ownership of it or responsibility for seeing that through? Is it a bit of both? Is funding the main problem or is the problem the fact that no-one is taking responsibility?

[75] **Ms Prosser:** Funding is always an issue; it always comes down to money. However, the other points that you just mentioned are also relevant. With regard to assessments, the problem is that the specialist schools have a holistic approach—there are therapists involved, teachers and speech therapists, all of whom know the needs of these children. However, in further education, there is no specialist knowledge. They look at someone like my daughter, Tamara, and think, 'What can we teach them?'. They do not know how to assess someone with those needs. I am not an expert; all I can do is pass on my experience. Some of them have the best intentions. However, one came to visit Craig-y-Parc, they looked around and said that we were doing a wonderful job but that they would not know where to begin.

[76] Money is definitely one of the biggest issues, but even if you put a lot of money into a further education college, you would need people there who know exactly what needs to be done, otherwise you are just throwing that money away.

[77] **Nerys Evans:** So, it is ownership and responsibility, and funding.

[78] **Ms Prosser:** Definitely. I have been in transition meetings where I have asked who will fund the provision, but no-one wants to know.

[79] **Nerys Evans:** Julie mentioned that no-one asked her daughter what she wanted to do. Is that a common problem?

[80] **Ms Jones:** Yes, it is a very common problem. I started this job back in August. In my first week, the main issues that I was picking up related to what parents would be doing with their youngsters when they left schools such as Craig-y-Parc. Many of them were given the option of going to England, to residential colleges, but there are only seven residential colleges in England that will take profoundly disabled children—the ones that we were talking about—and they have a long waiting list. Not all parents want their children to go outside Wales and not all children want to go to England. They want to stay in Wales with their friends and their families. So, it is a big issue.

[81] **Nerys Evans:** Do you find that, in the process, parents and children are not even asked what they want?

[82] **Ms Jones:** They are not asked. If they are asked, it is usually at the very last point. Transition needs to start much earlier than it does now. There needs to be a dialogue with the youngster, not just with the parent.

[83] **Nerys Evans:** Thank you.

[84] **David Melding:** I would like to ask Julie a question. You were here for the previous session that we had with the Minister. I was trying to get a view from the Government with regard to whether it wanted more services to be delivered locally in further education institutions or whether it would continue to rely on the current mix, which, for people with profound difficulties, often means residential provision, or that they stay at home and go to day centres. Were you reassured by the Minister's answer that they genuinely want to see a choice? I will leave it there and will then ask you a subsequent question depending on the answer. However, given what the Minister said, do you feel more positive than before you came into the Assembly this morning, or do you feel that the Government is, perhaps, not developing policy quickly enough? You said that you were quite surprised when you first realised that there was very little for people in local FE colleges.

[85] **Ms Prosser:** When I say 'surprised', parents told me beforehand that that was the case, but you think that it cannot really be true, until it gets nearer the time when your child is leaving school. You realise that logic goes out of the window. Unfortunately, it is a fact of life. I do not feel any more positive after what was said this morning. Again, I am not here to criticise, but I think that it is only because this issue has been pushed that they are looking at it. Over the last few years, I have fought to be heard by them, but no-one seemed to want to know. So, I think that it is becoming more recognised as a need and, in the future, that will happen, but I still do not feel comfortable about what will happen to my daughter.

[86] **David Melding:** I know that we have heard from Suzanne that there is quite a long waiting list for the half a dozen or so specialist colleges in England that offer residential places, so it may be difficult, even if your daughter wanted to go to one, for her to get a place. However, when dealing with the people with whom you have had to discuss her continuing educational requirements and general care, have you had a sense that they would rather you pursued a residential option and that they feel that it is a bit more irritating trying to find local provision? Is there a culture that means that the only option is for her to be at home and attend a day centre or attend a residential college?

[87] **Ms Prosser:** Yes. I think that they were surprised that I did not want to choose a residential college. Tamara's friend wanted to go to a residential college, but they have done a u-turn on that now, and they want her to look at local colleges. She will have to go through the same process as Tamara, so I do not quite understand that. It seems that, if you do not fit the box and you do not carry on down the route that you have started, they say, 'Hang on, what are you doing?'. Given that I said 'no' to a day service, and I highlighted the problems with that, they suddenly do not know what to do because I have not gone down the route that they wanted. Does that answer your question?

[88] **David Melding:** Yes, it answers it clearly. You said that you went directly to more than one FE college; could you tell us which colleges you went to?

[89] **Ms Prosser:** I went to Coleg Morgannwg. Careers Wales and I rang quite a few colleges, and most of them admitted straight away that the entry level was too high. Bridgend College was another. My first port of call was the local colleges. Coleg Morgannwg would not reply to me at first, but I dug my heels in and would not take no for an answer, and I made them carry out an assessment. So, Coleg Morgannwg was the first to say that it could not meet our needs. That college went down to Craig-y-Parc and said, 'It is wonderful, but we would not know where to start'.

[90] I then pushed even more—all the ladies in the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills know me by first name now—as I would not take that as a 'no'. I asked where else I could go. They said that the funding was available, and I said, 'Tell me

where it is and I will go there now'. Only a month ago did they tell me to try Bridgend College. So, I rang Bridgend College and Careers Wales, and the entry level was too high. I asked about a third-party arrangement and was told that the college had never heard of that. So, those are the types of problems that I am encountering. I have been waiting for the college to ring me back for three weeks. Time is passing and this has been going on for years.

[91] **David Melding:** For my final question, the Minister said that the Government's aspiration—and I have no doubt that this is true—is to start with the learner and then try, wherever possible, to deliver the type of education around that learner's preference. Would you say that Tamara's experience has not fitted that pattern at all? Is that the principal cause of your frustration regarding what you want your daughter to access in order for her to develop in early adulthood?

[92] **Ms Prosser:** Most definitely. I do not think any of her wishes have been taken into consideration, in terms of anything that she would like to do. Unfortunately, it is all down to money. I do not know whether it is appropriate, but when she leaves school, everything she has done will come to a stop. All of her equipment will be taken away. It is as if no-one wants to take responsibility for that. A year ago, in the transition meeting, I said that no-one was helping, and I was getting quite upset. I said, 'When my daughter leaves, if you do not support me to be as good a mam as I be, and if I do not have the support or equipment, she will go downhill physically and mentally; she will regress and I will not be able to stop that happening. Please tell me what you are all going to do'. No-one made a comment, and the person from the school who was chairing the meeting just turned to me and apologised. She said that she was so sorry and, after the meeting, she said that she never wanted to do that again.

[93] **David Melding:** I do have another question even though I said that my previous question was my final one. The other point that I thought that the Minister made that we would have to accept is that, unfortunately, not every college will be equipped to deal with people who have profound requirements.

10.40 a.m.

[94] You went to your local college, Coleg Morgannwg. Can I assume from the fact that you have talked to Bridgend College that you would have found it quite acceptable to travel to Bridgend, to Glan Hafren College in Cardiff or to Newport? Can I assume that you and Tamara would have accepted and settled for quite a long travelling time to access specialist regional provision? What I suspect you have been saying in your evidence is that you do not expect these services to be provided everywhere, but you do expect them to be provided somewhere within a reasonable travel time, so that you can go there and return each day.

[95] **Ms Prosser:** I do not think that it would be practical to expect provision in every college, because you are talking about a very small group of young adults. If you ask any parent that question, they will tell you that they will travel as far as necessary. Practically speaking, I would not have a problem with taking my daughter to any of those places that you just mentioned, if they had appropriate provision. I think that they talk about hubs where there are a few students like my daughter. If they could continue with what has been done, like in Craig-y-Parc School, we would not have a problem with that.

[96] **Jenny Randerson:** Julie, you said that the equipment was going to be taken away. I assume—and perhaps you can clarify this—that that is because the equipment was provided by the school.

[97] **Ms Prosser:** Some of it was part-funded by the health and education departments. For example, Tamara needs to be on a standing frame every day—I did not know whether it

was appropriate to bring this up because this is about her health needs, but it reflects the complex nature of the needs of these children. She has to use a standing frame every day for many different physical benefits that will keep her well, but because the children's services in the health department provided that, they are going to take it from me, because adult services will not continue with the maintenance of it. We also have what we call a 'working chair'. Rather than hours and hours of physiotherapy on a table, Tamara is in a working chair, where you take the supports away slowly. She is on a wonderful programme called MOVE, which stands for movement opportunities via education. You try to get them to facilitate the things that they do in learning, but at the same time they are being physically challenged. It is what I call 'an activity chair'. That was funded by the health department again, I think, but because it came from children's services, they will not allow it. Children's services have said, 'We will want a payment for it—half the price of what it was worth', but adult services will not commit to anything.

[98] **Jenny Randerson:** Thank you; that is helpful. When you say that you went to Bridgend College, was that Weston House?

[99] **Ms Prosser:** I have not been to Bridgend yet because I am still waiting for it to get back to me. I have rung the college. I have just recently been told about Weston House—three weeks ago—because I kept pushing the issue and nagging DCELLS, and was told, 'Go and try Bridgend'. So I have phoned the college on numerous occasions and have spoken to a lady, but I am still waiting for one of them to get back to me so that I can visit the college. However, I have already been told that the entry level is too high for her because she would have to show numeracy and literacy skills. I feel that when you look at these children, you cannot expect them to jump through certain hoops. Whatever they can accomplish is wonderful for them and the way in which they learn is totally different to other students, but I do not think that that is appreciated.

[100] **Jenny Randerson:** Thank you. I have one question for Suzanne. When the Minister was here, she explained that there is only Weston House in Wales that deals with physical disabilities, as far as I could understand from what she was saying. However, yesterday, during the debate that my party moved on further education, the Government did not support the part of the motion that said that there were no facilities in Wales. I wonder whether you would clarify that, from the point of view of Scope. Are there, or are there not, facilities in Wales? It would appear that there are no facilities, from your viewpoint, for the kind of young people whose difficulties do not fall within Scope's remit, and the Government appears not to accept that. What is your reasoning for saying that there were no facilities?

[101] **Ms Jones:** This all goes back to the issue of what we mean by complex and profound needs. We have Beechwood College in Wales, but to gain entry to that college you have to be on the autistic spectrum—you have to be diagnosed as having autism. Not many of the children who fall within our remit have autism. Some do, but they are not many. You have the MacIntyre School in Womaston near Presteigne, and although that used to be a college, it is now for pupils with challenging behaviour. When you have a young student who has profound difficulties mixing with students with profound behavioural problems, the two do not match. You have Coleg Elidyr, which is for students who have moderate to severe learning difficulties—we are looking at profound learning difficulties. The college does not accommodate many students who are immobile and wheelchair users. It is also a Rudolph Steiner college, and I have had parents tell me that they do not want their children to go through such a college. That is up to them; it is their choice. You then have Pengwern College, and that, too, is for young people who have learning disabilities, but they have to be on the autistic spectrum. There are a few colleges for students on the autistic spectrum, but not all the students that we are talking about are on the autistic spectrum.

[102] **Alun Davies:** Mrs Prosser, you have given us some powerful evidence this morning.

That, and the experiences that you have described, contrast sharply with the evidence that the Minister gave in a previous session. Something that I find striking in your remarks is that you have had to do so much alone. You described how you have waited by the telephone for people to call you back, and I find that very disturbing. To what extent have bodies such as Careers Wales and local authorities provided you with the support that your family requires? You mentioned your meeting at a school, at which none of the bodies' representatives seemed to be able to provide you with advice, let alone the support and guidance to manage a case. It appears to me that you have got where you are through your own efforts, and the public agencies and public departments, which are designed to provide support to you and your family, have simply failed to do any of that. Is that your experience?

[103] **Ms Prosser:** Definitely. I was reading about the important role that Careers Wales plays. I do not want to criticise anybody, but my first recollection of Careers Wales is from about three years ago, when a letter was sent to me at home saying that such-and-such a gentleman had met my daughter, and that they had had a chat—remember: my daughter has no speech. The report said that she does not like school—although she loves school—and went on to say that she was going to go home to chat to her mother about what she wants. That was it, and I just thought, 'What a silly man'. I just put it to one side because I did not think that it meant anything. Had I known the important role that Careers Wales plays, I would most definitely have challenged it on that letter. I am not the type of person who likes to get angry with people and shout, because that does not get you anywhere, but on the numerous occasions when I telephoned Careers Wales, DCELLS and colleges, I pretty much told them how I felt. At one point, I told Careers Wales, 'You should be helping me. I want a meeting now with a particular college, DCELLS and you'. They arranged it. DCELLS turned up but had told the college not to come, so nothing really came of the meeting, and I was told by DCELLS to take the college to court. I really do not think that that is the answer. Nothing came of the actions that were pinpointed. All the while, I was trying to say, 'Look, there's an educational course being provided in Touch Trust. Will someone fund it?'. It did not make sense to me that an educational course was available for which there should have been some educational funding only for everybody to say 'no', because, for some reason, it does not fit the funding criteria.

10.50 a.m.

[104] My second meeting was with the college on the Monday, but DCELLS would not come to that. Its answer was, 'There's nothing more we can say'. Then there is this lovely lady from the YMCA Wales Community College, which is not a traditional college, and she has a lovely attitude. She is trying to provide something, but she does not know how the funding works, because the college is so small. However, DCELLS would not come, and the college said that it did not want to put pressure on it. That says to me that the attitude is not right, because it is not a question of putting pressure on anyone, but how we can move forward. It is clear that there is nothing for those with profound learning and physical disabilities. If it was my job, I would be there and I would ask, 'What can we do to help?', but there is an attitude of not wanting to put pressure on, and that is the sort of fight that I have had—I have felt a bit like the Lone Ranger many a time. Tamara and I feel totally unsupported.

[105] **Alun Davies:** You have more patience than I have—I would be furious had I been treated like that by those agencies. In terms of co-ordination, do you feel that the different agencies that you have had to deal with talk to each other? I find it quite astonishing that the equipment that your daughter requires should be taken away from her at a particular time because that suits the agency or the particular public body—they do not seem to take your daughter's needs into consideration. Do you get the sense that these public bodies are speaking to each other, and that the co-ordination of your daughter's education support needs are, as the Minister has said, at the centre of their deliberations?

[106] **Ms Prosser:** They definitely do not communicate with each other. I am very often the one talking to all of them to try to bring it all together. The last meeting that we had was in December and the next meeting is tomorrow, so months have gone by in which I have been ringing round everyone asking whether we could meet together. I was the one trying to organise the meeting, to be honest. I do not know whether this is applicable, but instead of asking those who have worked with Tamara for years what is applicable for her and what her needs are, or talking to me and my daughter and the school teacher. In the transition meeting tomorrow some therapists will not even be there because they do not feel that they have a role to play.

[107] **Alun Davies:** So, no-one from these different agencies have taken ownership of your daughter's case?

[108] **Ms Prosser:** No. In fact, I have been told that at tomorrow's meeting they will rethink the whole package, not just in terms of schooldays—they are going to rethink what support I have on weekends, and in the evenings, because my daughter does not sleep in the night. Therefore, for the first 18 years I was up all night looking after her, as well as during the day, so you can imagine that I was more than grateful for her to go to school, and I also work. I have been told that they are going to rethink all that in tomorrow's meeting, and that they are also going to look at a day-centre package, although we definitely do not want her to go to a day centre. So, tomorrow's meeting is frightening for me, because I know that the decisions will not be based on what Tamara needs. They have said that they are not going to look at what the child therapists and teachers are saying, but what the adult therapists and so on say, because they are in a better position to know about adult needs, but they do not even know my daughter. I have been told that the occupational therapist—even if I have the chair and the standing frame—will not be able to maintain them because she is not trained to do that, yet these are the people making the decisions.

[109] **Alun Davies:** Who do you mean by 'they'?

[110] **Ms Prosser:** Occupational therapists. The speech therapists have never even seen her.

[111] **Alun Davies:** They will be at the meeting tomorrow?

[112] **Ms Prosser:** Yes. The occupational therapist will not be there, but I have pushed this, and I am trying to have a meeting with Bro Morgannwg trust, so the boss will, hopefully, be there. Their attitude is that they do not even have to come in to look at Tamara's needs until she leaves school—well, that certainly is not planning.

[113] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you, Julie—it has been interesting, to say the least, to hear what you have had to say. One of the things that I wish to explore further, although I might already have one of the answers, is why you strongly object to day centres. I have seen cases where people strongly object to them because of the age range—young people are in with people who are much older who either do not do anything or anything that they do does not cater for a young person. I do not know whether that is part of your objection, but it is one of the objections that I have heard. Based on your experience, is there any way that day-centre provision could be improved, because your daughter will also need physical care during the day? Is there any way that day centres could be improved, perhaps not in terms of care during the school day, but by providing leisure activities and so on? We are talking about young people, not elderly people, and they do not want to sit on a chair or lie down on a bed all day, and need stimulation. What are your objections to day centres and how do think that they could be improved, if not for your daughter—you have identified where you would want her to go—but for other young people?

[114] **Ms Prosser:** I cannot speak about all day centres, because I have only been to two local ones—but when I went to the first and nearest one, it was not a pleasant setting. The smell was not very nice, and I know how that might sound, but that told me something about the atmosphere of the place. The young people who were there were mostly able bodied with learning difficulties. We were shown around the centre and one young lady needed to go to the toilet, but was told that she would have to wait because I was being shown around and it was half an hour later when she was taken to the toilet. I would have been far more impressed if our guide had said, ‘Do you mind waiting while I see to her?’ It told me something about the staff’s attitudes, and that is what I go by sometimes. There was another group, just hanging around. Two members of staff came out and said, ‘What are we doing? Oh, we’re taking this lot out’. That upset me.

[115] That was the first centre. In the second centre that I went to, most of the young people had Down’s syndrome. They were lovely and the centre was lovely for them, but it is not appropriate for my daughter to go there. I asked one young lady who goes there what she does, and she is the one who I mentioned earlier who lies on the bed for most of the day. At Craig-y-Parc School, you would never find young people like her lying on the bed, because there is so much that they could do, even if they need to lie down physically. I asked her whether she goes swimming or to Cwm Cycling, because wheelchairs are attached to bikes there to go for rides—stimulating things, as you said, or social activities perhaps. She told me that she does not go swimming or to Cwm Cycling. When I asked why, she said that she had not been assessed yet. I asked how long she had been there, and it had been two years. That tells you something.

[116] As I said, it was a factory setting; it was on an industrial estate, so the young people cannot even go out. My daughter has managed to ride a trike through the MOVE programme, but that will all finish. I had no hope of getting a trike for her, so I went to charities and I have managed to get her a trike. However, if she went to the day centre, even if I took the trike down there, the doors would not be wide enough and would she want to ride around an industrial estate? I do not know whether you have been to Craig-y-Parc, but it is in a beautiful setting. It is the ideal, I know, but it is about things such as that. In addition, the staff are not specialists and do not know how to cater for these needs; with the best of intentions, they do not know what to do. Does that answer the question?

[117] **Sandy Mewies:** It does. It is not putting like with like. Groups have different needs and you cannot put one group with another, because of that.

[118] **Ms Prosser:** I find that the issue of money is always very much present.

[119] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you very much; that is very useful.

[120] **Huw Lewis:** I hope you do not mind, but this is not so much a question as asking for your opinion on a proposal or an idea that I am floating. It has struck me from all the discussions this morning, as you have just said, that the issue of cost and money transfixes people and turns them into rabbits in the headlights, in a way, because we are talking about costly issues. There is also the issue of how institutions respond to real people and their needs. Sometimes, we can have an institutional set-up that is absolutely fantastic at doing that, but, at other times, it breaks down. The breakdown mostly comes between institutions that you would expect to work together, but do not. We have a wealth of resource in Wales for meeting the needs of young people and providing the specialist care that they might need for their educational progress and so on. We have hundreds of teachers and therapists, and dozens of institutions that provide that every day and do so really well, namely schools.

11.00 a.m.

[121] When it comes to the transition to after school, I cannot understand why it could not be routine, for instance, for a third-party arrangement to be established as a matter of course between local specialist schools and colleges. I have a specialist school in my constituency, and it is a fantastic place. I had this discussion once with someone there who will remain nameless: it has marvellous facilities, both recreational and educational, but come 3.30 p.m. or 4 p.m. it is all locked up, the lights are switched off, and everyone goes home. It is also empty during the school holidays. I am not suggesting that it is simply a matter of opening up the facility so that people can go back to school—that is not what we want. We want progress. However, I cannot understand why, within a region of Wales, specialist schools could not feed into a college that might be identified as a hub. There could be a sharing of expertise, and a transfer of staff between the two, so that, over time, expertise is built up, and you reach a situation where there are centres of expertise within the FE sector as well. Of course, there would be a cost implication. However, I cannot see that it would be anything like the cost implication of suddenly attempting to magic up new areas of expertise in the post-16 sector, where there are none at the moment. It would also mean a dialogue with those specialist schools, because it would be pushing them out of their comfort zone in the work that they do. Let us not forget that they are institutions too, and they might be very good at what they do, but perhaps we are expecting people to remain in their comfort zones a little too much when it comes to the delivery of services for younger adults. It is odd that we have hundreds of people who do the kind of support work that Ms Prosser's daughter needs every single day, and suddenly, when she hits a certain birthday, they all go off and do something else.

[122] **Gareth Jones:** Julie, do you want to add anything at this stage?

[123] **Ms Prosser:** No—I totally agree with Huw. It is simple, to my mind. They do so well for so long, and many staff have said—because some do have good intentions—that they do not feel comfortable in doing the work, and are afraid. If someone was around to show them what to do, it would happen. I think that I have said enough.

[124] **Gareth Jones:** We have all had an opportunity to ask questions. We are grateful to you for sharing your experiences and concerns with us. I am sure that I speak on behalf of all the Members when I say that the experiences that you have had are disappointing, to say the least. We can talk about costs, but there is no real cost to consultation, and empathy, and trying to help. They are not issues of hard cash; they are issues of being helpful, and concerned, and sharing the burden, as it were. We are not talking about cash when we talk along those lines. This is certainly a wake-up call, there is no doubt about that, and you should take great comfort from that. In coming here, you have shared with us your concerns and aspirations. I am disappointed to hear what you said about the transition meeting, at which I would have thought that the agencies and specialists would come together and be able to make some positive contribution.

[125] We have to look at everything in the light of the issue in the petition itself of FE provision, which was the talking point as far as the Minister was concerned, but I want to reassure you that all Members here will have taken note of what you have said. It is an urgent matter. All I can say now, as Chair, is that we will draw up a draft report, and we will look at that in our next meeting after the recess. We will have to make certain recommendations, based on our discussions this morning. I thank you, and Suzanne from Scope, for sharing your experiences and wishes for things to improve in future, not only for Tamara, but for all youngsters in Wales. The principle is fine: let us put the student or pupil at the centre and support them, but we are not getting there. We are certainly not there yet as far as Tamara is concerned. Diolch yn fawr iawn. Thank you very much indeed. Best wishes to you.

[126] **Ms Prosser:** Thank you.

11.06 a.m.

**Cynnig Trefniadol
Procedural Motion**

[127] **Gareth Jones:** We now need to move into private session, so I ask David to move a procedural motion.

[128] **David Melding:** I move that

the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order No. 10.37(vi).

[129] **Gareth Jones:** I see that there are no objections.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 11.06 a.m.
The public part of the meeting ended at 11.06 a.m.*