

Childcare sector viewed as second-class profession, inquiry told. By Press Association, 31st January 2019

Bosses at childcare organisations have said the industry struggles to retain and recruit good staff, with the profession viewed as “second class”.

Representatives from Quarriers, Aberlour and Barnardo’s were giving evidence as a panel at the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry on Thursday.

They were asked to provide an impression of what is working and what is not within the sector.

SallyAnn Kelly, chief executive of Aberlour, said: “I think there remains an issue with recruitment and retainment, across the country.

“Recruitment and retainment comes up as a key issue across the sector, that includes adult providers as well.

“We have relief pool staff, we always have several on an ‘as and when’ basis.

“We do, on occasion, need to use agency staff.”

Charles Coggrave, head of safeguarding at Quarriers, said: “It’s quality not quantity, but we need a quantity of quality.”

He added: “It’s remarkable sometimes that folk are as flexible and willing to be flexible with time.

“To be able to get a phonecall at 6.30am in the morning to be told ‘someone’s sick and can you come in to cover?’”

He then claimed he had heard assertions there is “not a career” in the industry, adding that “working with children, working with vulnerable people, there’s still a perception that it’s a bit second class”.

David Beard, head of corporate safeguarding at Barnardo’s, said he could not be certain there are no risks with using agency workers.

But he added they seek assurances that “correct, proper processes” are followed when doing their work.

Warnings were given against a tendency to prefer starting a care system from scratch, rather than reforming it.

Mr Beard said: “We have a history of ripping up the good and starting again.

“Let’s take the good things, develop the good things.

“It isn’t fundamentally broken, we need to make it better.”

Ms Kelly said more efforts need to be made to identify potential problems with children, before they go into a care setting.

She added: “We need to think very seriously about prevention and early intervention and giving support to families.

“To continue to care for their children and avoid them coming into care in the first place.

Mr Coggrave said: “I’ve been working in this industry for 30-plus years, every year we have heard ‘if we could invest more in social services or whatever we could save money and get a better experience for the person’.”

The inquiry, before judge Lady Smith, continues on Monday