

**EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS
COMMITTEE
CONFERENCE ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE
LEARNING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS INQUIRY**

Scottish Parliament, Friday 10 May 2013

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Martin Allan
Caroline Amos, Languages Working Group
Dr Lloyd Anderson, British Council Scotland
Dougie Atkinson, Voice
Josephine Audigier, Japan Foundation London
Christian Baert, SCILT, Scotland's National Centre for Languages
Laurent Batut, French Embassy
Graham Blyth, European Commission
Elizabeth Bradshaw, St Elizabeth's Primary School, Hamilton
Jeanna Brady, Scottish Parent Teacher Council
Janice Byers, Dumfries and Galloway Council
James Cameron, West Lothian Council
Kathie Cameron, COSLA
Gillian Campbell-Thow, Languages Working Group
Jenny Carr, Scotland-Russia Forum
Cllr Douglas Chapman, COSLA Spokesperson
Nancy Clunie, Dalrnarnock Primary School, Bishopbriggs
Hazel Crighton, University of Glasgow
Robert Dalzell, North Lanarkshire Council
Rosemary Delaney
Greg Dempster, AHDS
Stacey Devine, NUS Scotland
Hannah Doughty, SCILT, Scotland's National Centre for Languages
Nicola Dudley, Scottish Council of Independent Schools
Patricia Farrell, Priorsford Primary School, Peebles
Laurence Findlay, Keith Grammar School, Moray Council
Neil Findlay MSP, Education and Culture Committee
Fhiona Fisher, SCILT, Scotland's National Centre for Languages
Fiona Fraser, Bilingual Parent
Toria Fraser, Scottish Government
Seiji Fukushima, Japan Foundation London
Isabelle Gall, Carnoustie High School
Lore Gallastegi, Open University
Elise Gay, Le Français en Ecosse
Louise Glen, Education Scotland
Nikodem Goszcynski,
Liz Gray, City of Edinburgh Council
Belinda Greer, Stirling Council
Laurent Guillou, Institut Français
Tom Hamilton, General Teaching Council Scotland
Phil Harkins, IBM
Sue Hay, St Georges School for Girls, Edinburgh
Kirsten Herbst-Gray, Langholm Academy, Dumfries and Galloway
Kevin Howell, North Ayrshire Council
David Kerr, Dumfries and Galloway Council
Rebecca Kilgour, PGDE student
Margaret Kinsman, Dingwall Academy
Natasha Kozłowska, British Council Scotland
Sue Langlands, Scottish Government
Mary Larkin, East Dunbartonshire Council
Rona Lindsay, Kilmaurs Primary School
Simon Macaulay, Languages Working Group
Sandra Macgregor, Priorsford Primary School, Peebles
Marta Majchrzyk, European Parliament
Sheila Marr, Aberdeenshire Council
Janey Mauchline, South Lanarkshire Council
Jim McDonald, Scottish Qualifications Authority
Nicola McDowell, Midlothian Council
Judith McKerrecher, Languages Working Group
David McLean, West Lothian Council
Stuart McMenemy, Uddingston Grammar School, South Lanarkshire
David McMurtry, King's College, Aberdeen
Fiona Moffatt, Stirling Council
Judith Mohamed, Aberdeen City Council
John Morton
Colin Nicol, Angus Council
Fiona Pate, Education Scotland
Carol Paton, Falkirk Council
Gillian Purves, Victoria Primary School
Claire Rampen, NUS Scotland
Mandy Reeman-Clark, SCILT, Scotland's National Centre for Languages
Ann Robertson, City of Edinburgh Council
Ed Robertson, Scottish Esperanto Education Group
Udo Seiwert-Fauti, Press
Pam Semple, Scottish Government
Douglas Simpson, Highland Council
Matthew Skilling, NUS Scotland
Professor Antonella Sorace, University of Edinburgh
Emma Sowerby, Borders Council
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Ronnie Summers, School Leaders Scotland
Lorraine Sweeney, St Elizabeth's Primary School, Lanarkshire
Julie Symington, Tough Primary School, Aberdeenshire
Richard Tallaron, Le Français en Ecosse
James Temple-Smithson, European Parliament
Brian Templeton, University of Glasgow
Marie-Christine Thiébaud, Institut Français
Dr Dan Tierney, University of Strathclyde
Niall Tracey, After Words Language Technology
Jean Urquhart MSP
Lina Waghorn, Dundee City Council
Jamie Wallace
Pam Wallace, Angus Council

Conference on Foreign Language Learning in Primary Schools Inquiry

Scottish Parliament, Friday 10 May 2013

Welcome

09:03

Christina McKelvie MSP (Convener of the European and External Relations Committee): Good morning. We are feeling a bit worried up here because the drop at the back of the stage is very steep. When I saw the video cameras, I thought, “There’s going to be a ‘You’ve Been Framed!’ moment here.” It does not feel very safe. *[Laughter.]*

I welcome everyone to the European and External Relations Committee’s conference on learning foreign languages in primary schools. You might have noticed that over the past few days we have had a bit of publicity about this. We are proud of the fact that we still have the biggest number of hits on the Scottish Parliament’s Facebook page, because it shows that we are also embracing social media.

I thank everyone for coming along and am really pleased to see so many faces here on a sunny Friday morning. Our two speakers were just commenting on the weather, and I told them that I had booked it with our environment minister. I sent him a wee parliamentary question—“To ask the Scottish Government can you give us some sunshine”—and, amazingly, he delivered.

Before we start today’s business, I need to run through a few housekeeping matters to keep everyone safe. There are no plans to test the fire alarm, but if it sounds people should listen to the spoken announcements and our great security staff will direct you to the nearest exit, which is clearly signed. The fire assembly point is at the front of the building so that everyone can look and laugh at us.

If you need to use the facilities, the ladies’ toilets are straight across the foyer and, for the gents, you need to turn to the left and go round the corner. Please do not go into the lift. There are a number of staff in the room with us, including the committee clerks, and other staff about the building so if you need anything please let us know and hopefully we will be able to facilitate what you need.

Moving on to today’s business, I think that what we are here to discuss is really quite exciting. When I was interviewed yesterday, I was asked, “What’s this adventure you’ve been on?” I think

that “adventure” is exactly the right word to use. This has been a bit of an adventure for the committee because we have learned so many new things; for example, I have learned to say “Good morning”, “Goodbye”, “Hello” and “Thank you” in loads of different languages.

As a bit of background for the conference, I should point out that the committee has completed the first two phases of its inquiry. We started by visiting seven schools across Scotland and we have met pupils, teachers, parents, academics and anyone else interested in the subject. We have taken extensive evidence not just at committee meetings but from people who have written in and all the stakeholders. This conference is simply a gathering to allow us to pull everything together. I grant you that this is a different way of doing committee work and it is a lot of work for the clerks, but it seems to be a really good way of bringing people together to tease out the main points.

The main aim of this morning’s conference is to gather more evidence from a larger number of stakeholders. I would have loved to have had everyone give evidence to the committee but I was not able to; however, I have got you all in the room now, which is really good, as you will help to inform the committee’s work.

We hope to test some of our initial findings, which are covered in the four themes of this morning’s breakout sessions, and hope to publish our report in early summer—perhaps the middle of June. Later this morning, we will ask you a number of questions that stem from the evidence that we have gathered, and I look forward to hearing all your ideas and views. When Professor Antonella Sorace and I appeared on last night’s “Scotland Tonight”, I talked about the amazing kids who had embarrassed me, and Antonella looked really brainy as she talked about how the brain works. I got a text saying, “Who was that really brainy woman you were on ‘Scotland Tonight’ with?” It was obvious that they were not talking about me, so that person is no longer my friend—I am only kidding.

Plenary Session

Speech by Mr Jan Truszczyński

09:06

Christina McKelvie MSP: We will hear from three fantastic speakers who have absolutely amazing experience and a lot to offer our inquiry and this conference.

It is with great pleasure that I introduce the first speaker, Jan Truszczyński, who has had extensive experience in European affairs having worked in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs first as under-secretary of state and then as secretary of state. In that capacity, he was Poland's chief negotiator in the European Union accession negotiations—I think that we will have a chat about that later, Jan. [*Laughter.*] That was a quiet joke, but I think that some people got it.

Prior to that, Jan was Poland's ambassador to the EU in Brussels from 1996 to 2001. He joined the European Commission in January 2007 when he was appointed deputy director general for enlargement—that is another wee conversation that we can have—with responsibility for enlargement strategy and communication. He is now director general of the European Commission's directorate-general for education and culture, in which capacity he is speaking at today's conference.

I invite Mr Truszczyński to address the conference.

Mr Jan Truszczyński (Director General for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, European Commission): Convener, minister, honourable members of the Scottish Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you very much for the invitation to share a couple of thoughts about language learning and language teaching in Europe in such a perfect setting on such a perfect day and in a country that as one of the early adopters of language learning in primary schools paved the way for other member states.

In recent years, there has been a clear move towards starting the teaching of the first foreign language at an early age. The percentage of pupils learning at least one foreign language went up from 67.5 per cent in 2005 to 78.2 per cent in 2010; however, the starting age for learning a second language remains rather high almost everywhere in the EU.

According to recent data—and with the notable exception of Luxembourg—the introduction of a second foreign language as a compulsory subject happens between the age of 10, in Estonia,

Greece and Romania, and the age of 15, in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Austria.

In eight educational systems—those of the French-speaking community of Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Spain, the Netherlands, Sweden and, until now, the United Kingdom—a second foreign language never becomes a compulsory subject. We are still very far from the objective of enabling all pupils to learn at least two foreign languages from a very early age. That objective was agreed in Barcelona 11 years ago—back in 2002. Furthermore, the situation is increasingly incompatible with the changes in our societies and labour market.

Two days ago, I had a working meeting with some of the education ministers from south-east Europe. The education minister of Macedonia mentioned that the take-up rate for the Leonardo da Vinci cross-border learning mobility programme for vocational education and training students is encouragingly high in Macedonia. I expressed some surprise, as it is well known that languages are a big barrier to learning mobility for that category of students. He said that there is no problem because, for several years, Macedonian pupils have had English as a compulsory subject from the first class in primary school. The minister for education from Serbia joined the discussion and said that Serbian pupils also learn English from the first class in primary school. I then learned that Montenegro and Albania are on the way to introducing the compulsory teaching of a first foreign language from the first class of primary school. So, there is some catching up to do in the European Union.

In the past few years, the European Commission has been collecting a substantial amount of empirical data not only on the provision of language teaching, but also—and more important—on the outcomes of language learning. According to the findings of the “First European Survey on Language Competences”, which was published last year, one in seven 15-year-olds does not reach even the lowest level of the common European framework of reference for languages after several years of study. For the second foreign language, the proportion is one in five. That is worrying, and we must find ways to make our education systems more efficient in the teaching of languages.

European co-operation can prove quite effective when it comes to exchanging good practices and exploring innovative ways to support the learning of languages. Multilingualism is intimately connected with the European ideal of being “united in diversity”. It is appropriate that this conference is being held—almost to the day—on the 63rd anniversary of the Schuman declaration,

when we celebrate Europe day, as we did yesterday.

In November 2012, the European Commission adopted a communication entitled “Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes”, which is an important political document that sets out the things that need to be done to reach better socioeconomic outcomes through education. That policy document points out:

“Languages are more and more important to increase levels of employability and mobility of young people, and poor language skills are a major obstacle to free movement of workers.”

In an accompanying working document that is devoted entirely to languages, the Commission presents its analysis of the main problems and possible solutions. First, the outcome of foreign language learning in Europe is too low, although there are considerable differences in member states’ performances. Secondly, the current focus on English makes people forget that what will make a decisive difference in the future is proficiency in more than one foreign language. Thirdly, to make teaching and learning foreign languages significantly more effective, member states should take action in several different areas.

For example, we need to look at the quantity of languages offered and of the hours of teaching, the duration of language teaching, and the quality of teaching, teacher training and teaching materials. There needs to be focus, ladies and gentlemen, on making sure that language learning outcomes are geared towards supporting employability and mobility, and there needs to be guidance for parents and pupils on the choice of language competences that will be most useful in the future. Finally, there needs to be monitoring at local, national and European level to identify strengths and weaknesses and to improve the efficiency of education systems.

Of course, this is not the first time that we have made such proposals. In 2011, for instance, we published a policy handbook called “Language Learning at Pre-Primary School Level: Making It Efficient and Sustainable”. In the handbook, we argue that awareness of linguistic diversity and the acquisition of foreign language skills should start even before primary school. Efficiency and sustainability, as we know, are two key aspects of all language learning. I see that your committee also identified them among the main issues for discussion.

Our recent staff working paper offers guidance to education authorities that will improve the outcome of language learning. In order to measure progress, the Commission also proposes the adoption of two benchmarks of foreign language

competences for the horizon of the year 2020. By that date, member states should first ensure that at least 75 per cent of pupils in lower secondary education should study at least two foreign languages—the current figure in Europe is 61 per cent. Secondly, at least 50 per cent of 15-year-olds should attain the level of independent user of a first foreign language. The present figure is 42 per cent.

That is nothing but a Commission proposal. It has been taken up by member states, but they have not decided yet. We hope to see finalisation of the discussion early next year under the Greek presidency in the first semester of 2014, but that remains to be seen. Meanwhile, we hope that the proposal will continue to stimulate the debate around this topic and hopefully it will terminate with a decision by the member states. In the meantime, we will start preparing a new round of the European survey on language competences on which the indicator is based, thus allowing member states to check their progress.

Ladies and gentlemen, as some of you might have heard, we are preparing a new programme for the support of cross-border learning mobility, the exchange of good practice, and the support of policy reform in our member states. In it, we will include improvement of the teaching and learning of languages and the promotion of linguistic diversity, which is one of the six main priorities of this future programme. Once it is approved, you will see that it will offer concrete opportunities to support language learning through the mobility of students and staff, through the creation of partnerships and support for policy reforms.

EU programmes and co-operation are there to support member states in addressing the challenges in their education systems. Initiatives such as the one that we are discussing are tremendously helpful, ladies and gentlemen, and we in the Commission support debates like the one that you will have here today. I am quite confident that the Scottish authorities and Scottish practitioners will take advantage of the opportunities that the EU will offer from 2014 onwards. I invite you to share your experience and solutions with other countries that are today facing the same challenges. That can be done in the framework of the thematic working group of experts from all member states that we help to run—the thematic working group on languages in education and training.

In order to help national authorities improve the quality of language teaching and learning, the Commission has also joined forces with the European centre for modern languages of the Council of Europe. Waldemar Martyniuk, the centre’s executive director, will tell you more about the work that the centre is doing. I am sure that

Scotland, too, will be able to benefit from that common project. Those different initiatives, together with the support at EU level, should help Scotland and all our member states move forward to more and better language learning.

My colleagues in Brussels and I look forward to our continuing fruitful collaboration in this endeavour. It is necessary, believe me.

Thank you for your attention. [*Applause.*]

Christina McKelvie MSP: I think that you have got us off to a very good start there; I could see lots of heads nodding. Those are strong ambitions from the European Commission, but we obviously have an appetite to live up to them. I hope that we can realise some of those ambitions.

I remind people to switch off their electronic devices, because they interfere with the broadcasting and we want everyone to have an enjoyable morning.

Speech by Mr Waldemar Martyniuk

09:21

Christina McKelvie MSP: Mr Truszczyński has given us a good lead in to our next speaker, Waldemar Martyniuk.

Waldemar is assistant professor of applied linguistics at Jagiellonian University in Krakow—did I say that right? I was worried about the pronunciation, so I wrote down the phonetic spelling. I am told that Waldemar is a man of many linguistic talents and that he has been a teacher, trainer, author and visiting professor and lecturer at various universities in Germany, Switzerland and the USA. Since October 2008 he has held the post of executive director at the European centre for modern languages of the Council of Europe, based at Graz in Austria. We will now hear from Waldemar about his work at the centre. He will have his director's hat on today and we are very interested in hearing what he has to say.

Mr Waldemar Martyniuk (Executive Director, European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe): Thank you for that kind introduction. The “man of many talents” wearing a hat is an interesting image.

Minister, members of the Scottish Parliament and ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure to be here with you today. I am really surprised at the weather you have provided—you must have connections going beyond the environment ministry in your country.

I have the honour to represent here today the European centre for modern languages of the Council of Europe, where there seems to be a growing understanding and appreciation of the

necessity of good-quality education to achieve the high-level objectives that the Council of Europe has set for all the 47 member states to work together. Good-quality education is needed to achieve social cohesion and democratic citizenship, to promote intercultural dialogue and to contribute to economic development. On language education, well-developed language skills are both a prerequisite for unrestricted access to good-quality education and an important outcome thereof.

One of the main principles directing our work on languages is that the actual and growing linguistic and cultural diversity in European societies is not to be perceived as a problem to be solved, but rather as a potential benefit and a valuable resource. There is an understanding that supporting people in their linguistic development is an important aspect of an approach to education based on human rights and democracy—the two pillars that guide the work of the Council of Europe.

Educational systems face many challenges nowadays, such as increased mobility of people, globalisation of social and economic processes and rapid innovations in communication technology—jokingly speaking, Professor Google is taking over from the school teacher in many places. There are progressively more multilingual and multicultural classrooms. There is a need for compatibility across educational systems and qualifications, and to ensure equal access to quality education, which might be difficult to achieve with so much mobility happening. There is also a need to ensure the right of learners to quality and equity in education.

To sum up, the task for language education seems to be to seek the best ways of supporting European citizens in their linguistic development in such a way that they grow and develop as confident and successful individuals and as efficient and responsible social agents in the lifelong learning process. That is well in line with the concept of the Scottish curriculum for excellence that has been developed here.

The mission of the European centre for modern languages is to consider how we go about that task and support people in their linguistic development so that they grow as happy people and, at the same time, develop into successful social agents. It is not to tell people how to go about it but to initiate international co-operation and to seek ways to develop tools that show how to do what seems to be agreed upon.

The European centre for modern languages, based in Graz, the capital of Styria in Austria, is an enlarged partial agreement. It was set up in 1994 to provide a practical response to a need expressed by the Council of Europe member

states for the reinforcement of co-operation in the field of language education and respect for Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity. Currently, 32 states subscribe to the partial agreement; the 33rd, Serbia, is on its way. Unfortunately, after 10 years of membership, the UK withdrew from the agreement last year. We very much regret that.

The ECML's mission is to support its member states in the implementation and reform of their language education policies, taking account of the recommendations of the Council of Europe. It does so by promoting innovative approaches and disseminating good practice in the learning and teaching of languages. In that way, it addresses issues directly related to good quality education as a prerequisite for social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and democratic citizenship.

The centre runs four-year medium-term programmes of projects organised in co-operation with European experts in the field of language education. In fact, from 2001 to 2011, many Scottish experts contributed to and were involved in our programmes. Those projects, which cover training, research and development and awareness-raising activities, provide an international framework for gathering and disseminating information, for stimulating and facilitating discussion and for training in new approaches and techniques.

Participants in the centre's activities are selected by the member states. They are all key multipliers in language education at the national level, including language teacher trainers, curriculum experts, materials writers, and researchers and administrators involved in implementing language education policy. Approximately 1,000 language professionals participate directly in ECML-financed activities each year.

The ECML's programmes are directly determined by the member states of the partial agreement. The orientations set therefore reflect national priorities in language education, such as standards setting and assessment, promoting quality and excellence, the application of information and communications technology, developing skills for a competitive job market, and taking advantage of and benefiting from increased diversity in the classroom.

The centre's new programme, which is entitled "Learning Through Languages: promoting inclusive, plurilingual and intercultural education", just started last year. It focuses directly on learners' needs in language education, in both formal and non-formal learning contexts. It seeks to develop practical tools and materials, building on the strengths of the previous empowering language professionals programme and the

instruments that have been developed by the Council of Europe in this area.

The centre maintains an efficient network of national contact points, which assist in disseminating the centre's results to target groups at national level and in promoting the take-up and application of initiatives. We have set up an international non-governmental organisation—INGO—professional network forum, which now has representatives from 14 worldwide professional associations that are active in the field of languages.

In autumn 2012 the centre launched a new strand of activity within its programme, with training and consultancy being offered to ECML member states, focusing on identified priority areas and areas that have been proposed directly by member states. The initiative seeks to work in close contact with representatives of ECML states and to provide direct consultation and training in areas of identified needs.

We are not able to train all the teachers in Europe, but we can assist authorities in their efforts to reform their practices if they consider that to be useful and necessary. In that context, there is an increased need for more assistance to be offered to authorities at state and regional levels. That is where our partnership with the education and culture directorate general of the European Commission comes into play. We have signed a partnership agreement, under which we will be offering concrete interventions in countries that are interested in reforming, changing or improving their language education.

To date—over the past 18 years—the ECML has trained more than 15,000 multipliers and has produced over 100 publications. It is there to allow language professionals in Europe to take advantage of common expertise and experience. Under our new learning through languages programme, we are promoting inclusive, plurilingual and intercultural education. I was pleasantly satisfied—but not surprised—to see how much of the rationale behind our new programme is reflected in the evidence that has been collected for the European and External Relations Committee. That is not a surprise, because our programmes are based on, and reflect, insight from our partners. We use the key word "inclusive", and we mean it in a wide sense.

How do we provide coherent support for the development of linguistic power, which is what we might like to call languages? That includes all language competences in all languages that learners bring with them into educational systems, and those that we consider it useful and necessary to develop further. Whether we call them first languages, second languages, home languages, heritage languages, mother tongues—it is "father

tongue” in Polish—foreign languages, classical languages or sign languages, they are all part of a plurilingual repertoire: the magic linguistic power that human beings can develop to a considerable extent if they are supported appropriately.

We see a need to include all teachers as partners. As is reflected in the committee’s evidence, all teachers are, to a great extent, language teachers, whether they teach languages, history, physics or mathematics as school subjects. We also see a need to involve other partners—that is what the committee is doing through today’s event—such as parents, communities and businesses. How else would we know what is the best repertoire of languages in a given context?

In using the term “plurilingual”, we mean that we support the idea not of multiplying languages but of building up the language power that people are capable of developing, to safeguard the natural language sensitivity and creativity and support its further development, and to enhance language awareness and openness to languages. As was mentioned in the evidence that the committee received, that could involve starting with metalinguistic competences. Techniques such as intercomprehension between related languages could be used to enhance the development of people’s language power. Methods such as content and language integrated learning could be used to combine subject teaching with language teaching, because there is no teaching of language without content and there is no content teaching without language.

We also use the notion of intercultural competence building as part of language education, by which we mean that we encourage exploring and learning about and from the other, the unknown, the different, which is at the core of education.

We have several products in the form of publications and project teams to offer. I am certainly open to having discussions about how to establish a good working relationship with Scotland, despite the fact that the state membership of the UK is not an option at the moment.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.
[Applause.]

Christina McKelvie MSP: Again, that was a really valuable contribution to the work that the committee is doing, so thank you very much.

What you said about the multicultural and inclusive nature of your partnership agreement and how that can be built into society with sociable, happy young people is something that we all agree on. In the schools that I visited in Hamilton—some of the teachers from which are

here—I saw a group of amazing young five-year-olds who had completely embraced what they were learning, which was not just the language but the culture of the country concerned.

I know that many if not all of us in the room are a wee bit worried by the rise of far right movements across Europe and in some parts of the UK, and the media attention that that brings. If we educate our young people about multiculturalism and the need to be tolerant, understanding and embracing of other people’s cultures, as well as teaching them a language, we will be teaching them to be sociable, happy and interesting young people and will make them the global citizens that we all want them to be.

I am delighted to tell you that last night, along with a number of my colleagues, I was at an event to celebrate 40 years in Europe for Scotland. David Steel gave a wee synopsis of a book by David Torrance on Scotland’s place in Europe, which was really interesting. One of my colleagues spoke to the consul for Cyprus who, it turns out, is a medic at Yorkhill hospital. He said that it is necessary to teach children languages at the earliest age, because by the time they have reached the age of 12 their synapses have formed and it is more difficult for them to learn a language. If she had told me that last night, I could have used it on “Scotland Tonight” with Antonella Sorace and looked like a brainy person.
[Laughter.]

Speech by Dr Alasdair Allan

09:39

Christina McKelvie MSP: It is a real pleasure to introduce our third and final speaker, Dr Alasdair Allan MSP, because not only is he our Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland’s Languages but he is a colleague and friend of mine. It is not often that the opportunity comes along to introduce someone like that at an event such as this.

Alasdair has represented his constituents in the lovely Western Isles of Scotland as an MSP since May 2007. He is a great fan of public transport. He usually uses planes, trains and automobiles—and sometimes a ferry—just to get to a surgery.

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland’s Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): I once rowed, as well.

Christina McKelvie MSP: Impressive, eh?

Alasdair is the minister in charge of the Scottish Government’s languages policy, so we are pleased to hear from him. Aside from politics, Alasdair’s linguistic accomplishments, which put me to shame, include being named Gaelic

journalist of the year in 2006—you learn something new every day—and gaining a PhD in the Scots language from the University of Aberdeen, so he might give us a bit of the Doric as well.

Dr Alasdair Allan: Thank you for that warm welcome. I also thank the two speakers who have gone before me and made such distinguished contributions. Dziękuję za wypowiedzi, i witamy w Szkocji—with apologies to all our Polish friends who are present.

Mr Jan Truszczyński: I can reciprocate in Scots. [*Laughter.*]

Dr Alasdair Allan: You can do that later on.

I also thank the committee for inviting me to take part in its inquiry on the issue, which Christina McKelvie has chaired. Today is an opportunity to restate the Scottish Government's commitment to language learning in Scotland's schools. I know that, like me, many of the delegates who are here gave evidence to the committee.

Since so many people have said kind things about the Scottish weather and accredited it to politicians, it is worth saying that things sometimes work the other way. Some of you who are from other countries might not know that Scotland may be unique in that an environment minister here previously had to resign because it snowed. That puts one in mind of medieval kings being killed because the crops failed. It was also particularly unjust, given that I understand that the weather is currently reserved to the UK Parliament.

I look forward to hearing more of the views of those who are present and working with all those who have an interest in achieving the manifesto aim that the Scottish Government has set itself. I was interested to hear from the previous speakers, as I have heard from many other visitors, that in other parts of Europe it is normal for people to understand and speak several languages. I am conscious of how far we in Scotland have to go to catch up with that normality. I was also interested to hear about the EU survey of language competence and the European centre for modern languages. I am aware that the University of Aberdeen and SCILT—Scotland's national centre for languages—are involved in projects with the ECML.

I thank the committee for its inquiry. I welcome it and I am encouraged by your interest in the Scottish Government's one-plus-two proposals. I know that you share my view that we in Scotland must do better at languages because, as others have said, in this globalised world the importance of languages and language learning to Scotland's future economic and cultural prospects should not be underestimated.

I am pleased that the inquiry has helped to promote and raise the profile of the Government's policy commitment on languages. To recap briefly, we have introduced a model for language learning based on the European one-plus-two model, which is also known as the Barcelona agreement. We will create the conditions in which each child will learn two languages in addition to their mother—or father—tongue. That will be achieved over two sessions of Parliament and will be a transformational change to education in Scotland.

Some people still might not yet see the need for that change. I was recently on a radio programme where most people saw the need for it, but one or two phoned in to say that they did not. I am certainly encouraged that there is widespread support for the change among many people and organisations and across the parties in the Parliament. That acknowledges the diversity that exists in modern Scottish life and culture.

We need to build on that and to continue to spread the word about why language learning is so important to coming generations. It needs to become a new norm: something that we expect all our young learners to do. Nobody questions why children are taught maths or science in primary school, so it should be no surprise to anyone to learn that, in future, children will increasingly be taught languages.

I believe passionately that the case for earlier and more language learning is clear. First, the cognitive benefits of language learning are well evidenced. I draw your attention to the modern languages excellence group report of 2011, which sets out those reasons and—importantly—links language learning to enhanced literacy in the mother tongue. Recent evidence has been provided by Antonella Sorace—who spoke to me yesterday—that bilingualism delays the onset of the decline of mental faculties by two years on average. If that is not a reason to learn another language, I do not know what is.

Secondly, we live in a diverse and open society that is made up of people of many cultures, religions and languages. In the 21st century, an open disposition towards other languages and cultures is hugely beneficial and will lead—as has already been said—to our children having more of the openness, tolerance and understanding towards other languages and cultures that they need. As Lloyd Anderson of British Council Scotland has said, an intercultural understanding makes Scotland's young people better global citizens and so helps the nation to establish a solid position on the world stage.

Thirdly, there is plenty of evidence that multilingual youngsters have a competitive advantage in the jobs market. An expert witness,

Lauren Paterson from the Confederation of British Industry Scotland, told the committee:

“Our members have said that, in many cases, they are looking not for fluency from young people but more for conversational skills and the ability to understand and interpret different cultures, as that helps them to develop and cement relationships in different countries, which ensures that there are strong relationships when companies are looking to export.”—[*Official Report, European and External Relations Committee, 21 March 2013; c 1045.*]

Christina McKelvie referred in committee to the opening of the new Scottish Power office in her own constituency, and suggested that having the ability to speak Spanish would offer the 600 staff there wider employment opportunities in the parent company.

The question that the committee legitimately asked is: what is happening to make all those themes a reality? The Government’s languages working group presented strong recommendations on what steps needed to be taken to give children the opportunity to learn languages from an early stage. I agreed with those recommendations, and I have set in motion various actions to make their implementation possible.

The first meeting of the strategic implementation group that I convened took place earlier this week. The group is to be chaired jointly by Scottish Government officials and Belinda Greer of the Association of Directors of Education Scotland. It brings together key organisations to support local authorities, teachers and schools in the process of making our commitment to the one-plus-two approach a reality.

The group will act to engage with the system, supporting local authorities and others in developing local strategies for enhanced language learning in schools. I have given £120,000 to fund 10 pilot projects to explore innovative models for the one-plus-two approach. The preliminary findings from those projects will be available towards the end of the year.

It is great to hear about the dynamism and excitement around the pilots, and I look forward to learning more about the ideas and possible models that they are demonstrating. I have provided £4 million in the current budget year for local authorities in addition to the £4 million that they already receive for languages as part of their overall annual settlement.

As Willie Coffey said in committee, we are not suddenly bringing languages into primary schools where there has previously been no provision. We are not talking about creating another workforce. There is an existing qualified workforce with talent, skill and motivation, and we need to build on that and enable professionals to enhance their existing skills.

In order to know what the money will best be spent on and what additional resource will be required in future years, it is essential for local authorities to build an accurate picture of their existing provision and to use that to plan their strategy. This is a national policy, but I make it clear that I understand full well that making the policy a reality and rolling it out across Scotland will depend on the drive and determination of the education authorities, with the support and help of our other partners.

I do not underestimate the scale of the challenge. We must work collaboratively: local authorities, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, cultural organisations, unions, parents, the higher education sector and Government and Government agencies. We have to learn from best practice here and from European partners, such as the ECML, and we must work together to achieve this vision.

Primary school headteachers, local authorities and secondary schools will need to consider effective and practical strategies that meet local needs and circumstances, but it can be done. An example that I have described before, but which is worth repeating and which I have seen personally, is that of Sacred Heart primary school in Bridgeton in Glasgow, which is teaching four languages, with all pupils learning at least one language from primary 1. Another example is Langlands primary in Forfar, which has already started the one-plus-two model, teaching a first additional language from primary 1 and a further one from primary 5. We know that there is a lot of good practice in language teaching and learning within our schools. We want to encourage our schools to build on existing good work and we want to empower the headteachers to innovate and try models to find what suits their local circumstances.

The additional £4 million this year could be spent on a range of useful things that will build capacity in the system to take us closer to our goal, such as training teachers; creating opportunities for teachers to meet and share innovative solutions; empowering our teachers to try out methods to see what works best; supporting new approaches or buying in expertise of various sorts; and releasing EU funding to help support teacher exchanges, e-twinning and student placements.

The money could also be used for foreign language assistants. In practice, they are mostly used at present at secondary level. Their use should not be underestimated, because they offer value for money and they can work across clusters of schools. Not only do they provide schools with access to native speakers, but they bring culture, history and other perspectives with them. Thus, they can give our schoolchildren a unique

experience of another country's culture, which forms a vital part of learning a language.

I look forward to seeing local authorities bring their enthusiasm and creativity to bear on this challenge. They are the ones who will need to find ways to deliver meaningful language learning experiences for their learning communities, perhaps involving innovative new approaches and new collaborations.

As a concluding observation, I found my time in front of the committee very helpful. I think that the only negative press coverage that came out of it was from one journalist who criticised me for watching the Danish political thriller "Borgen" and urging others to do the same. I think that in that series there was a Government minister who felt that he had been demoted by being given responsibility for multilingualism. I can only say that, from my point of view, it is more than an ideal job, which I enjoy and believe in. The committee's commitment to looking at the languages issue and to this event today illustrates, I hope, a wider commitment in Scotland towards multilingualism.

You should be in no doubt that my colleagues and I are determined to deliver the commitment to create the conditions for all our children to begin learning a second language from primary 1 and a further language from primary 5. I hope that this ambition excites and encourages not only those with an interest in language learning but all those who want the best for our country and its future. Tapadh leibhse. [*Applause.*]

Christina McKelvie MSP: Thank you, minister. Everyone will have heard clearly not only your keen political interest but your personal and professional interest in the matter.

Question and Answer Session

09:55

Christina McKelvie MSP: We will move on to a question and answer session. We are running a wee bit over time, but we have about 10 minutes or so.

We have some people going about with roving mikes. I want to get in as many questions as possible. If you want to ask a question, stick your hand up. When I point you out, a mike will be passed to you. If you are comfortable standing, that would be great; if not, please remain seated. Please say who you are and what organisation you are from. If the questions are kept short and sharp, we will be able to get lots of good answers back to you.

Margaret Kinsman (Dingwall Academy): Good morning. Ten years ago, the UK Government recognised British Sign Language; nearly three years ago, the Scottish Government recognised British Sign Language. However, people only talk about languages as being spoken, so I was particularly gladdened when I heard Waldemar Martyniuk mention sign language as being part of languages.

Deaf people who are BSL users have no courses or recognised qualifications under the new curriculum for excellence. Dingwall academy has strong links with a Spanish university, and over the past three years, Spanish sign language students have come to Dingwall. They have worked with the BSL classes of both deaf and hearing children. I now have deaf and hearing pupils who can acquire a qualification in English and in Spanish but not in BSL. Is that not wrong at a time when we want our mother tongue to be recognised and with the second languages programme coming on stream?

Dr Alasdair Allan: I have sympathy for a number of the things that you are saying. I have visited Donaldson's school and a number of other schools where British Sign Language is being used and am sympathetic to the view that British Sign Language is a language. In the past, it was dismissed almost as a means of communicating in another language. That failed to understand that BSL, as you have said, is the mother tongue of many children. It is grammatically distinctive from English—it puts the adjective after the noun—and it has a value in its own right.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority is largely responsible—and independently from ministerial interference—for setting qualifications, which it does based on demand. We must look at whether BSL counts in the one-plus-two model. As I said, I am sympathetic towards that and I want to speak

to the SQA about it. That is not a promise, but we should continue to speak about the issue.

Mr Waldemar Martyniuk: I want to reinforce what I have said. Under our programme, we have a team that is working on sign language for professional purposes, so we have included sign language in the loop of languages as part of the linguistic power that we are talking about.

Mr Jan Truszczyński: A key activity of the lifelong learning programme is supporting co-operation projects that aim at the transfer of competence and good practice on sign language. We will continue in much the same way under the Erasmus for all programme.

Christina McKelvie MSP: You are pushing at an open door; let us push it open.

That is interesting. We have not had evidence on that topic come to the European and External Relations Committee. The power of this event is that it is bringing up new issues.

Professor Antonella Sorace (University of Edinburgh): I will add to the points made by Margaret Kinsman. There is important research on the benefits of bimodal bilingualism—having a sign language and a spoken language—which is an additional reason to give priority to any sign language, including BSL.

I think that this is a real turning point for Scotland, which I find it very exciting. There is so much interesting work to be done. The point that I wanted to make is that we should not underestimate the importance of information about the importance of languages.

I represent the world of research and I do research on bilingualism. At the University of Edinburgh, we also have a service that tries to reach as many people as possible with available, accessible information about the benefits of learning languages and multilingualism. I find that there are still very many misconceptions in not just this country but other countries. We have branches in other European countries and we try to reach all sectors of society.

It is very important to have on board as many people as possible with an awareness of the benefits and importance of multilingualism. That would help to put the learning of modern languages at the centre of curricula in schools. That needs to be done; it is a crucial element in the plan's success.

Christina McKelvie MSP: Thank you very much. I think that we will have reactions from all of our guests on that point.

Mr Waldemar Martyniuk: I think that that is it. Much has to change in the way that we talk about languages. We talk about those talented ones who

are granted the ability, which is not true. We need somehow to switch, which is what we are trying to do with our new programme, from the perception of languages as school subjects and teachers as being teachers of English, or, for that matter, physics or chemistry. My point is always that teachers are not teachers of English; they are teachers of young people, and English is the area through which they invite young people to explore the world.

Languages as part of cognitive power is certainly more appealing than languages as a school subject that has certain limits. That is where I see a need to encourage teachers to work together rather than separately, multiplying their efforts in subjects, some of which are called languages.

Dr Alasdair Allan: Yes. To amplify that, something that we need to do is create openness and receptiveness to learning languages, which currently does not exist in Scotland to the extent that it should. I have said before that I do not try to second-guess whether someone aged five is going to end up working in China or Germany, where they might need to use or want to learn languages, but we have to get to a situation in which that five-year-old grows up thinking that it is normal to learn languages. Currently in Scotland, it is not viewed as normal to learn languages.

I remember that, even when I learned Gaelic in the Western Isles, people could not understand why I had. Gaelic speakers could not understand why I had learned Gaelic in a Gaelic-speaking community, because it is not viewed as normal to learn languages.

The other thing that is worth saying, which will amplify the point that Waldemar Martyniuk made, is that in the past we have treated languages in secondary school very honourably, as something that might lead towards learning about those languages' literature at university. You will not find me disagreeing with that honourable aim, but we have to accept that many people want to learn a language simply so that they can do their job. That is why we have introduced a range of qualifications that are focused not on literature but conversation, which people can combine with doing higher in science if they want to be an engineer in China or Germany, for example. We have to think about language qualifications in a much wider way, and I know that schools are already thinking about that.

Mr Jan Truszczyński: It must be a concerted and continued effort of all those who matter in a given society: Government, civil society leaders, opinion leaders, business associations and headmasters of schools. There must be availability of and accessibility to foreign languages.

Whenever I go to a large town anywhere in Europe, I carry out a couple of very simple tests: I see how many television channels in my hotel room are in a language other than the local one; I go to a large downtown bookstore and see whether it sells books in other languages and, if so, whether those books are in languages other than English; and I see whether the large downtown news-stands offer anything that is not in the local language. I have not yet visited any bookstores in Edinburgh, but when I looked at the 100 or so TV channels on offer at the Holyrood hotel I found two non-Anglo-Saxon channels—Russia Today and Al Jazeera, both of which are in English. Scotland does not score very well on that count.

What is available on TV, in bookstores and at news-stands is driven by commercial interests. Government cannot possibly subsidise the availability of foreign languages by funding access to TV channels in other European languages, but I suggest that making a resolute, concerted effort to sensibilise people, to raise awareness and to show how these things are done in other countries and why it is useful to go more in that direction is a responsibility that should be shared by all local establishments.

Dr Alasdair Allan: Welcome as the idea might be, I can imagine what some newspapers would write if I tried to subsidise the Arabic edition of Al Jazeera.

Hanzala Malik MSP: I think that you would be a hero.

Christina McKelvie MSP: In some quarters.

We have time for one more question. I note that one of the committee members has indicated that he wishes to speak but if he does not mind I will take one of the ladies in the audience instead.

Claire Rampen (National Union of Students Scotland): I am a modern languages and linguistics student at St Andrews and am representing the National Union of Students Scotland. With regard to the minister's comment about not knowing whether a pupil is going to work in China, Germany or wherever, I started learning French in primary school because that is what we did in my class. When I went to university, I decided that I wanted to learn Spanish but, when I did so, I found that I had very little understanding of English grammar and that that had been completely lacking in my education. That made it very difficult to acquire a new language because when someone told me what a pronoun in Spanish was, I found that hard to translate because I had very little idea of what a pronoun in English was. Is there a place for a real understanding of English grammar and language in the primary school curriculum? [*Applause.*]

Christina McKelvie MSP: No offence to Jamie McGrigor, but I am very glad that we took that question. I will start with Jan Truszczyński.

Mr Jan Truszczyński: I must confess that I did not quite get the speaker's point so I would prefer to reply last.

Dr Alasdair Allan: I think that the answer is not only yes, but that that is already happening. In the primary schools that I have visited—perhaps I just get shown the good ones—metalanguage or grammar is coming into the teaching. Children, particularly those in primary school, are much more able to say what they have learned and why they have learned it and, as far as I can see, more grammar is probably being taught now than was being taught 10 or 15 years ago. That is certainly useful.

Related to that, we have to work out progression to ensure that children who start learning Spanish in primary 1 do not find themselves abandoned at the end of primary 7 when they are told to learn German. Obviously, you can learn both languages but you should not have to waste what you learned in primary school and you should be allowed to develop it further. That will involve learning about grammar.

Mr Waldemar Martyniuk: This is an important point. In the concept of plurilingualism that we are developing, building up the linguistic repertoire or linguistic power starts with the first language, not with the foreign languages that get added to the repertoire.

It is also important to be aware that, in the language of instruction—the language in which education takes place—there is a need to take good care to develop certain linguistic skills in order to get educated and to educate. That is why I keep saying that a teacher of physics, chemistry or history is, in what is the first language or mother tongue for some people, but not necessarily all pupils in European schools, a language teacher as much as they are a teacher of history, geography or physics. Certain cognitive competences go with that and, if they are not addressed, success in education is not assured.

Teachers might say, "Sorry, but we are not educated as language teachers—I am a history teacher." However, faced with situations where there is a clear linguistic problem, rather than anything else—not a lack of intelligence or cognitive power, but simply a linguistic problem—a teacher cannot think that it is not their problem, and that the child should just go home and learn the language properly, come back and then get on with their education. That will not work.

That is the case in more and more schools in Europe, but not just because of a huge influx of children with migrant backgrounds—native

speakers may not be sufficiently cognitively prepared to take education in their own language. That needs to be taken care of throughout primary and secondary education. It even goes as far as tertiary level, too.

Mr Jan Truszczyński: It is the member states that decide on the content and the organisation of teaching. The EU is only there as a support act. That support act must be designed as broadly as possible. That is why we have been supporting projects that help people to have discussions across borders about innovative pedagogies, the development of new ICT tools to support the teaching process and the preparation of new content. We have been supporting the growth of the e-twinning platform, which helps language teachers and pupils in teams led by the teachers to collaborate on joint projects.

We are also supportive of cross-border projects that focus on early childhood language education, provided that they contain a sustainable element. In plain English, those are projects that ensure that good care will be taken of the transition and continuity of language learning from pre-school level to primary school, and also into secondary school. After primary level, such projects will of course enjoy preference.

I could go on giving examples of what we support and how, but I will just emphasise that the work is very broadly designed. The sky is the limit, almost, as long as people wish to learn from one another, pass good practices on to one another and, above all, consider innovative elements in the teaching and learning of languages. Innovative pedagogy is one of the key phrases that we use in supporting multilingualism through EU programmes—the lifelong learning programme now, and the Erasmus for all programme from 2014 onwards.

Christina McKelvie MSP: Thank you very much for that.

I thank you all for your participation in the question and answer session. We could easily go on a bit longer, as many things have arisen from the questions and answers that have informed our work.

We have finished the Q and A part, and we now want to hear from the participants—we want to get into the break-out sessions. You will now be escorted to your preferred break-out sessions. Jenny Goldsmith will take over to ensure that you get there swiftly and safely. I am really looking forward to hearing what you all have to say in the break-out sessions, and we will see you again when you come back.

10:15

Conference suspended.

11:48

On resuming—

Feedback

Christina McKelvie MSP: Hello, and welcome back. I give a big thanks to my committee colleagues for chairing the break-out sessions, which I hope you found interesting. Just for your interest, Waldemar Martyniuk and I, as well as Nancy Clunie, from Dalmarnock primary school, have just been interviewed by STV news, because we have generated a bit of news here. So, well done, because that is down to you guys and your very enthusiastic participation.

Break-out Session: Funding

11:48

Christina McKelvie MSP: We are going to move straight to hearing about the break-out sessions. First, I invite one of my committee colleagues, Helen Eadie MSP, to tell us about break-out session 1, which she chaired. I think that she is going to tell us all about funding.

Helen Eadie MSP: Thank you very much, Christina, and I hope that you like my wonderful big note-pad that I have in front of me!

It is a pleasure to be here with you all this morning. Although I am a member of an Opposition party—the Labour Party—I am four-square behind the Government's initiative, but I have questions about the funding. Perhaps that is why I was put in charge of the funding workshop this morning. Clearly, though, everyone is trying to work out ways of applying a best-value funding approach. For me, one of the strongest points to emerge from this morning's meeting—I hope that you might agree—was made by the representative from the Japan Foundation, London, who explained how they discuss various issues regularly at their London centre. She informed us that sometimes £3,000 or £4,000 is available as funding for interested schools. She said that the secret was to try to get headteachers on board and committed.

I think that we all understand that making a difference on language learning is about having not only the political will but the professional will and professional support. I hope that all of us in the room who are keen to get more funding into our schools in Scotland can explore the Japan Foundation opportunity a wee bit further. I thought that it was a first-class example and it is useful to know that there is other European funding available.

A point that I labour all the time when I am in committee meetings and at every opportunity that I

get—I did so again this morning—is the issue of the European funding that we are not accessing. As Christina McKelvie knows, an excellent report was prepared for the committee by the Scottish Parliament information centre, which told us about the European funding that is available and what funding we are not accessing. I think that people in Scotland, which includes all of us, have an obligation to dig deeper to find out what funding is available that we are not accessing.

Professionals in the workshop made the important point that audit is an important aspect of that work. The Government is handing down the resources, but in reality putting £4 million into schools across Scotland works out at about £1,700 per school, which is not much at all. However, the money could be shared in different ways across Scotland, because it does not necessarily have to go to every local school or local authority.

The Government could take a different approach and present challenges for different geographical areas. For example, an area familiar to me as a geographical list area for MSPs is Mid Scotland and Fife, and there are eight list areas across Scotland. The Government could get the political and professional buy-in to ensure that the funding went to those areas. There could be networks consisting of, for example, headteachers, universities, parents and politicians: everyone who wants to see the languages initiative happening. We could also use information technology in so much of the work that is to be done. Our workshop thought that having a national rather than regional IT system could make a powerful difference to the work.

We also heard that the Comenius funding is being reviewed, although it will stay as it is for the time being. However, there was some suggestion—I do not think that any of our European officials are still with us to confirm this—that the Comenius funding could be doubled. If that is the case, we will warmly welcome it.

I do not think that I will have time to go through all the points that I have from the session, but I have a note of them all for the committee's inquiry report. The important point, though, is that no matter how much funding there is at the end of the day, it is vital that we are all galvanized and work together with the synergy that we need to be able to take this important work forward. It was highlighted that examples of best practice can be found even in the smallest schools, which we might not have thought would be the case. That was a key point to emerge from the discussion.

Have I gone over my time limit yet, convener?

Christina McKelvie MSP: You have a minute or so yet.

Helen Eadie MSP: That is fine. If we were in the chamber and the convener was in the Presiding Officer's position, she would have a button that would just cut me off magically. That is what the Presiding Officer does to us very brutally at times.

We need to ensure that, when we are doing work nationally on the issue, we have methods of ensuring its quality. We heard of an audit that a local authority had developed and done painstaking work on; we could envisage every local authority undertaking different audits to different standards. However, the Government's implementation strategy group could perhaps find a best-practice audit and roll it out across Scotland so that professional groups in each local authority area would not have to reinvent the wheel in that respect. We thought that that was an important point.

Another important point was made when we heard evidence from the teachers in the room. A representative of City of Edinburgh Council told us that there has been an incredible drop-off in the number of pupils who want to do languages at S3 level, because some students might see options such as drama, physical education and music as being slightly easier than languages when it comes to studying for exams. City of Edinburgh Council has seen evidence of that in the huge drop in the number of young people who take languages. We need to reflect on how we can help to change that.

A suggestion was made about celebrating all the best practice in foreign language learning that exists across Scotland. The fact that countries across Europe share knowledge and experience was alluded to, and it was suggested that perhaps the minister could take forward the idea of an annual event to share best practice and knowledge of what works. That could be celebrated at the event, perhaps by having awards. Although we know that there are things that are wrong in our schools and that huge challenges exist, we also know that professionals and pupils are doing a tremendous amount of work that needs to be celebrated. If the Government could be persuaded to go down that route, that would be first class.

A funding issue that was raised was about what happens when teachers are away doing Comenius programmes, especially longer-term ones. It is one thing for a teacher to take a week out of their summer holiday to do a course, but when it comes to six or ninth-month Comenius immersion programmes, thought needs to be given to how a replacement teacher can be funded to do the work of the teacher who has gone away. There is a funding issue there, which the committee might need to reflect in its report. It might need to ask the Government to raise it with the EU. If the

doubling of the Comenius funding is being considered, perhaps part of the extra funding could be used to pay for replacement teachers. We have enough unemployed teachers, and it would be good to have another way of using some of them.

Am I okay for time?

Christina McKelvie MSP: Your time is just about up, Helen.

Helen Eadie MSP: I will leave it at that, then.

I thank the members of our group, our scribe and our facilitator. Ailsa Kilpatrick and Denis Oag did an excellent job. Thank you very much for all your help in producing that feedback—it was first class.

Christina McKelvie MSP: Thank you for that comprehensive feedback.

Break-out Session: the Importance of Learning Languages

11:58

Christina McKelvie MSP: We will move on to our next group, which discussed the importance of languages. Hanzala Malik will step up to the plate and give us some feedback on its discussions.

Hanzala Malik MSP: Good morning.

First, I would like to thank all the participants in this morning's discussions—I am really grateful for your time and effort. I was honoured to have in my group so many experts not only in education but in business who are so passionate about their industry. I think that that was reflected in the points that were made, some of which I will briefly touch on.

One point was about the sales pitch and the need to ensure that people understand the value of learning languages and the job opportunities that become available as a result. We in Scotland are losing a huge amount in terms of employment and money simply by not having the right language skills available. A figure of £0.5 billion in lost revenue was quoted. That is a tremendous amount of income to be losing simply because we are not up to it when it comes to language skills.

It is important that we ensure that we get out the message about the importance of literacy and language skills. Our group included a representative of IBM, which employs a lot of people in Scotland. As a Scot, I found it quite disappointing that the company has to invite people from overseas to work for it because we cannot provide it with a workforce that has the necessary language skills.

I was enthused about and impressed by the fact that IBM takes the trouble to go and speak to secondary schools, and I congratulate it on that. If more businesses supported our schools in that way, perhaps we could turn things around sooner rather than later. That is important. It is a good example of businesses working together with schools.

We also talked about teachers coming from overseas to teach in Scotland. Funding streams are available not only for people to learn languages overseas but for us to employ people to come and fill the gap. I understand that, at present, 25 per cent of the language skills among teachers are in French, and all the other languages are way down below the radar—for some of them, we are at less than 2 per cent. That just shows the languages gap.

We spoke about the languages of the communities in Scotland. We have 150 communities, and they speak many languages. We have weekend schools in various languages. We do not seem to be tapping into that resource. We need to explore that possibility, particularly now that there are demands for new languages rather than just the ones that we call modern languages, although no languages are modern—they are all old. I am talking about people wanting to speak Urdu, Punjabi, Chinese, Arabic and various other languages.

There was mention of industry going to Brazil, Russia, India and China, and we discussed whether we should concentrate on those areas. Our group suggested that we do not want to go down that route. We want to keep things as open as possible and to encourage as many languages as possible. In particular, we want to concentrate on people who already have a language skill. Let us not lose that just because we want to diversify into a particular language. We must also marry up primary and secondary schools so that people continue to develop language skills rather than coming up against a brick wall at secondary because they can no longer do the same language. Those are all factual and practical points that we need to address.

There were also issues about culture and awareness of culture. We are such a multicultural community and we can tap into that. We need to explore possibilities to develop not only language, but the cultural element. For example, one issue that the representative of IBM raised was that, although we might have students with a reasonably competent level of language, they are perhaps missing the cultural element. People overseas want to trade with people whom they can speak to and who can relate to their culture. For example, I am talking about things such as local holidays—you do not go to a country to sell a

product when everybody is off on holiday. Those are small but important points that people need to address.

As I mentioned, teaching different languages is important. An audit is being carried out, and we will circulate the report to everybody who is here today. There are a number of important points that we can share with people, so that they do not have to reinvent the wheel. It is important stuff.

I take this opportunity to say that if anybody here knows of a study or audit report that they think it would be important to share with schools, please let us have it so that we can share it with everybody. Information is important and it is a powerful tool. It is also helpful if people share things that are successful. Please share them; do not hide them and keep them to yourselves. Share them with all of us, because we can use them.

Last but not least, we talked about people who need additional support for languages, particularly those with additional support needs. I got the feeling that people were suggesting that we do not need to do anything particularly special for individuals in that category, although it was said that they would benefit from more one-to-one or concentrated support. In fact, the idea that we should not overburden people with more than one language is a fallacy.

If we give people the opportunity to learn more languages, they benefit from that. I understand that we are short of time, so I do not want to speak for too long. That is just the nub of what we have discussed this morning. Once again, I thank all those who have participated this morning. I am grateful to you and I hope that we can rely on your support in the future.

Christina McKelvie MSP: Thank you for that very comprehensive reply.

Break-out Session: Skills and Resources

12:05

Christina McKelvie MSP: Jamie McGrigor was chairing break-out session 2. His group discussed the issue of skills and resources, which leads on quite well from where Hanzala finished.

Jamie McGrigor MSP: Thank you, convener. It was a fascinating experience for me to chair a round table that was clearly bursting with brains and talent. I found it rather terrifying but, at the same time, strangely refreshing. I thank my excellent facilitator, Jennifer Bell, and wonderful scribe, Eileen Martin, for noting down and précising the main points, which I shall read out.

Question 1 asked how existing teaching and learning resources and skills can deliver the one-plus-two agenda in the current curriculum.

It is important to establish joint working with high schools for continuity. On the succession of qualified teachers, we need to ensure that enough teachers come through in the future. Local authorities need to develop a strategy with a goal in mind. Learning a second foreign language should be treated as a project, rather than as a subject.

The use of foreign language assistants is very important. It was noted that the numbers had dropped from 300 seven years ago to only 69 at the present.

It must be decided within the teaching profession how the one-plus-two agenda fits into the curriculum as a whole. It is important to make pupils aware of the benefits of language for their future careers, not just for going abroad on holiday, in order that they become more enthusiastic about grabbing languages.

There should be collaboration between primary and secondary schools and we need to establish the roles of each of them. We should look at languages not necessarily as a subject but as a skill. Learning a language gives cognitive power; it opens up children's brains.

Question 2 asked how continuing professional development and training for existing staff should be delivered to facilitate the one-plus-two proposal.

Training can vary between local authorities; there should be a nationally approved qualification provided across the country. We need follow-up and refresher training to achieve continuous development. Post training, online communities can be used as an add-on; teachers should not rely on information technology completely. IT can be helpful but also hindering. In rural areas, the glow facility is useful as an add-on, but it is not an alternative to training. Glow has been beneficial in the Highlands.

On funding, more resources should be available to establish networks that allow professionals to connect with each other. Training hours are woefully inadequate; one authority currently has only 20 training hours. We should ensure that sustainability is not uncertain in subsequent years. Modern languages ought to be given the same resources of funding that are presently given to Gaelic.

Question 3 asked what kind of teaching or teaching model should be used. Primary school teachers are the greatest resource and it would be useful for them to have the opportunity to travel abroad. It is suggested that entry to teacher training should require a language qualification. Primary school teachers do not need to be specialists, but they must have confidence in languages. We should not try to force any

particular language, but there should be continuity in cluster areas.

Focused language sessions are important, but language should also be embedded in other areas of the curriculum. There should be a collaborative approach with primary and secondary teachers working together.

We should not rely totally on specialists but use them in an advisory capacity—they can also learn from primary teachers whom they meet.

Children need to be allowed to develop receptive skills and not just focus on a language. We heard from one of the pilot schools about a model of immersion and interaction that is working very well.

Advice should be taken from an external organisation to develop a work programme for teachers. That is that. Thank you.

Christina McKelvie MSP: Thank you, Jamie.

Break-out Session: Policy and Development

12:12

Christina McKelvie MSP: I now invite Clare Adamson MSP to talk about break-out session 4, which was the final break-out session. Clare's group discussed the issue of policy and development.

Clare Adamson MSP: Thank you convener. I echo the comments of my fellow MSPs in thanking everyone who took part today. I also thank Andrew Proudfoot and Judy Payen, who assisted me with chairing the session.

We were asked to look at policy and development and how best to implement the Scottish Government's proposals effectively. The first question was around whether language policy could be managed at a more central level to resolve issues such as the variation in delivery of learning materials and variation throughout the country. Are there more effective ways?

The discussion began with a bit of a lack of clarity about the objectives. That was felt to be important because, although we understand that it is important from a brain function point of view that children learn languages, if employability and articulation into secondary schools is important, the strategic decisions about what languages we might study become very important. There might be a need for a bit more clarity in that area.

The method of hubs and clusters of schools was talked about as a possible way of addressing some of the articulation issues such as getting local authorities or groups of schools to work

together. The hub for literacy teaching was used as a good example of how that might be carried forward.

On the strategic issues, there was a bit of discussion about where they should come from. Although the Government has a policy directive, we felt that there still needed to be a bit more direction at all levels, including local authorities and headteachers, and that that strategic buy-in was really important for delivering this policy on the ground.

Of course, funding became an issue. There were questions about how far the £4 million could go in implementing the policy. The funding that is available this year became critical because the group established that COSLA is making decisions about how that will be distributed now, but some of the quality improvement officers and the people who are involved in planning for education have already put their training plans for next year in place and they needed to know what would be available to help them in the process.

The second question that we had was what would be the best model for providing training to both existing and new teachers. We established very quickly that this is very specific to teachers because teachers come with various competences and qualifications, and there are different levels of need in this area. Some teachers would need a refresher course because they have been trained but they might not use the skills. We discussed South Lanarkshire Council's model, which is a menu of opportunities to allow people to choose training particular to their need. That was quite an interesting proposal that I am sure we will capture in more detail. There is also the option of peer training in secondary schools where language teachers are being used to assist other teachers in delivering other curriculum areas in foreign languages, and we mentioned the importance of using secondary teachers in primary schools and working within that articulation and hub model to bring together some of those skills and use them effectively.

The hidden costs in some of those areas were discussed, as well. Language assistants are very good value, but there are additional costs, such as national insurance costs, to the local authorities as a result of having them. The number of hours that language assistants are able to work also came up.

A lot of the training depends on the good will of the teachers. Teachers who undertake twilight training must give up their own time to do so.

One of the teachers said that it is not enough for a teacher to be one step ahead of the children, and that if we are to do what has been proposed

effectively and embed it properly, teachers have to be given a level of confidence and skill to deliver.

The SQA said that a continuing professional development model is possible, with certification and qualifications in the area.

There was a discussion that I found interesting in the context of what is happening in secondary schools. There seems to be a drop in language teaching, and language teachers are being made surplus. There was an indication that those language teachers could retrain as primary teachers and take their language skills directly into primary schools and support the whole school in those areas.

The final question was: how can the one-plus-two model fit into the existing curriculum? I should probably have said at the start that the overwhelming message that I have taken is that everyone is very supportive of what the Government is proposing. People have concerns about how it might be implemented and the barriers that might exist, but I think that there is complete buy-in to what the Government is trying to achieve.

It is very important that the heads—the leadership—are completely on board with what is being delivered. It is recognised that we are trying to achieve a culture change in Scottish schools and that, although primary schools might have gone some way towards that, secondary schools still have to undertake a huge hurdle. We should not underestimate the challenges in that respect. Everybody agreed that the curriculum for excellence presents an excellent opportunity to achieve the change correctly. Given that it can address some of the questions that have been asked, it is a very good model for taking that forward, with the correct support and training.

The final question came from the French embassy, which suggested that a steering model at the national level might help with clarification and implementation. From that, we again investigated the strategic implementation group and how it might work with local authorities and heads in delivering what the Government is planning.

I am not a linguist, although I had a career in IT previously and supported a French company. However, I have to say that “Tapez sur la console” does not take me very far in the work that I am doing these days.

I thank very much everyone who took part in the break-out group.

Christina McKelvie MSP: Thank you very much, Clare.

Closing Remarks

12:19

Christina McKelvie MSP: I hope that you enjoyed that feedback. I have been scribbling lots of notes, and we will have a full transcript of today’s event. Every word, cough and sneeze will be there—these guys from the official report have caught it all—and we will incorporate it into all the work that we do.

I want to say a huge “thank you” to all the speakers who have taken part today. Your enthusiasm has certainly enthused us. As I said at the beginning, this has been an adventure for the committee. When we first considered the inquiry, we thought that it was a really worthwhile thing to do but we wondered what we would learn. We have learned lots of really interesting things today about the ways in which our kids are being taught.

I enjoyed my time playing with the kids, and we played an interesting game of Twister. One wee boy shouted “Roja!”; I thought, “That’s red,” and I jumped on the red. The wee boy then looked at me with absolute disgust and said, “Your head should be on the red”. That made a very good photo opportunity for the local newspaper, because I did put my head on the red—the boy was five years old and he was indignant.

The information and feedback that we have received, along with the participation and co-operation, have been absolutely amazing. We intend to publish our final report before the summer so look out for it in mid to late June—we will let you all know when it is published. We will be looking for a robust response from the Government to it, and we will then take forward the recommendations in where we go with the Government. The Government is well on board with this; we just need to give it a wee helping hand with the implementation—I hope that the minister does not mind my being impertinent.

We are about to head off for lunch, but I would first like to thank some other people. This event would not have happened without the folk in the background. I want to say a huge “thank you” to Scotland’s national centre for languages—SCILT—which you will all know, for its invaluable advice and assistance. It also provided an interesting wee brochure about today’s events. I thank all my fellow committee members, whose enthusiasm has helped the inquiry along. It is a cross-party committee and we sometimes disagree, but on this topic we agree and we are all very interested in seeing it being a success. That has enhanced the work of the committee, and I thank them very much for that.

I also thank the Parliament staff. You will agree that they are absolutely fantastic. Any events that we have here go as smoothly as they do because those guys do a brilliant job in the background, keeping everybody right and ensuring that everybody gets safely where they need to get to and finds what they need to find. I thank them very much for that.

Last but not least, I extend a big “thank you” to our committee clerks, especially Jenny Goldsmith who has led on the inquiry. The clerks have been amazing in keeping us right, which is often like herding cats, and I thank them for that.

There is now a nice lunch for you downstairs, where you can do a bit of networking. It is quite an open area, so you can all have a gab and a catch-up in whatever language you like.

Arrivederci!

Conference closed at 12:22.

