



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

**Thursday 11 January 2018**

**Session 5**



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**Thursday 11 January 2018**

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**CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

**1<sup>st</sup> Meeting 2018, Session 5**

**CONVENER**

\*Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

- \*Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con)
- \*Mairi Gougeon (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
- \*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)
- \*Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
- \*Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP)
- \*Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
- \*Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Emily Beever (YouthLink Scotland)  
Daniel Evans (West Lothian College)  
Luke Humberstone (NUS Scotland)  
Jackie Killeen (British Council Scotland)  
Marion Spöring (University Council for Modern Languages Scotland)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Katy Orr

**LOCATION**

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)



## Scottish Parliament

### Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

*Thursday 11 January 2018*

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:23]*

#### Interests

**The Convener (Joan McAlpine):** Good morning and welcome to the first meeting in 2018 of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee. I remind members of the public to turn off their mobile phones. Will committee members who are using electronic devices to access committee papers please ensure that they are switched to silent?

The first item on the agenda is a declaration of interests. On Wednesday, Claire Baker was appointed to the committee to replace Lewis Macdonald. I warmly welcome Claire to the committee. I am sure that the committee will want to join me in thanking Lewis Macdonald for his contribution to the committee as deputy convener since the start of this parliamentary session.

I invite Claire Baker to declare any interests that are relevant to the committee's remit.

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** Thank you, convener. I do not have any relevant interests to declare.

## Deputy Convener

09:24

**The Convener:** The Parliament has agreed that only members of the Scottish Labour Party are eligible for nomination as deputy convener, and Claire Baker is the party's nominee to the committee.

*Claire Baker was chosen as deputy convener.*

## Decision on Taking Business in Private

09:24

**The Convener:** Our third item of business is a decision on taking agenda item 6 in private. Do members agree to take item 6 in private?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Erasmus+

09:24

**The Convener:** Our next item of business is a panel discussion on the Erasmus+ programme. This part of the meeting will be broadcast on Facebook Live, so I welcome anyone who is observing today's meeting on Facebook Live.

I also welcome the witnesses. Jackie Killeen is director of the British Council in Scotland, Emily Beever is the senior development officer with YouthLink Scotland, Luke Humberstone is the president of the National Union of Students Scotland, Marion Spöring is a senior lecturer at the University of Dundee and Daniel Evans is the commercial and marketing centre head at West Lothian College. I thank you all for attending.

Members of the committee are already familiar with the Erasmus programme in different ways—indeed, I believe that several members have participated in the Erasmus programme. We were pleased that the Jack Kane community centre hosted our business development day last year, which told us a lot about the programme. There is a great deal of positive feeling towards the programme. That is one of the reasons why we are keen to find out more, and to give participants the opportunity to let the wider public in Scotland know more about Erasmus and tackle some of questions about the programme's future in the context of Brexit.

I am aware that the witnesses represent different approaches to Erasmus. Perhaps it would be helpful if you were to start by talking about what your organisations do in relation to the programme.

**Jackie Killeen (British Council Scotland):** Thank you, convener, for the opportunity to share an incredibly important story about Erasmus+ and its contribution in Scotland.

The British Council is the United Kingdom's organisation for international cultural relations and education opportunities. Along with Ecorys, we are the national agency for running the Erasmus+ programme in the UK, and have done that since 2014.

**Emily Beever (YouthLink Scotland):** Thank you for having me here today. YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work in Scotland. We are a membership organisation including organisations that the committee will recognise, such as the Scout Association, Girlguiding and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, as well as smaller and more local youth-work organisations. I am representing and will talk about the youth element of Erasmus+.

**Luke Humberstone (NUS Scotland):** I am the president of the National Union of Students Scotland. We represent all students throughout Scotland, so I will be able to tell you a little bit about some of the experiences that students have had on Erasmus.

**Marion Spöring (University Council for Modern Languages Scotland):** Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you. I am the chair of the University Council for Modern Languages Scotland. We represent modern languages departments and sections in universities in Scotland. We work in all our institutions and in collaboration with teacher training, schools and Scotland's national centre for languages—SCILT—to promote Erasmus and, through that, language learning and intercultural experience. I can talk about that.

**Daniel Evans (West Lothian College):** I am responsible for the international programme at West Lothian College and am here to tell you about the college's experience of Erasmus+. We have used it as a valuable tool to raise retention and attainment rates among our learners, as well as to provide more opportunities to those who have fewer opportunities.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much.

**Claire Baker:** I am interested in the figures. Over the past year, the funding coming to Scotland for the programme has increased from €16 million to €21 million. Do the witnesses have any views on what has led to that success and what factors might be involved in it? Have they seen any impact from the decision to leave the European Union so far? Is it having an impact on institutions making applications or students deciding to apply for the programme?

**Jackie Killeen:** I can talk a little bit about the figures. We are delighted with uptake over the past year. It is the 30th anniversary of the Erasmus programme, so it has had a bigger profile overall and an increased budget, which has enabled us to get the message out more widely. There is also a continuing and growing appetite for international exchange in all its forms throughout the country.

09:30

**Daniel Evans:** I can add to that. We are in the middle of a two-year programme that is due to finish in 2019. Normally, we would not apply again in 2018. However, we are going to apply for another two-year programme in January because this year is the last in which the UK Government will guarantee funding for Erasmus+. We will back load all the mobilities to 2019-20 so that we can continue the programme until 2020. That means a lot of extra work that we had not planned for in a

period when we are in the middle of organising mobilities. It is a strain on us. Our partners are anxious about our future involvement in the programme and our partnerships with them, because they are similar institutions to us. We organise our own mobilities and we reciprocate. Our partners are worried about losing a key partner in the UK. Those are our two main concerns.

**Claire Baker:** I have two other questions. The papers for the meeting give a breakdown of where the €21 million went—to universities, schools and so on. Did a particular sector benefit from that increase, or was it spread evenly across the board?

Other colleagues will pick up some of the broader issues, but I am interested to know whether West Lothian College runs the project in a way that is unique in Scotland. It seems to have a different model in terms of time spent abroad and the focus on encouraging what could be argued to be a more inclusive approach to the programme. Do other institutions use a similar model? Are we seeing more diversity in how the programme is delivered?

**Jackie Killeen:** I am sure that others will want to come in on this. Erasmus+ is a very diverse programme. It has three key actions, as the committee knows. It enables different kinds of mobility exchange and co-operation. Within each of those actions, there is a variety of approaches. Organisations ranging from voluntary organisations, to youth-work organisations, to youth groups, through to schools, colleges and universities can all apply.

We see a great range of approaches. Some institutions establish and maintain long-term links with partners over a number of years. Others grow new links at different times. West Lothian College is a particularly good example of how to approach the programme; the outcomes that it has achieved for its students are fantastic as a result of its approach. There are similar, if not identical, approaches across the country.

**Marion Spöring:** I can add something to that. Erasmus+ has been important for teacher development—in particular, to support the one-plus-two language policy in schools. Erasmus+ programmes support training of teachers not only through first degree and initial teacher training, but through professional development of language teachers. There has been some growth in programmes to support and facilitate the one-plus-two policy.

As linguists, we see Erasmus+ as being essential not only for universities but for all education sectors. We need graduates, but we also need people in vocational training and we

need better-trained teachers. It is an interlinked issue, which is the point that I tried to address in my submission to the committee. Erasmus+ is essential and should tie in with all education sectors. If we lose it, that will be a major disaster.

**Emily Beever:** To add to Marion Spöring's point, I say that Youthlink agrees that Erasmus+ is a great way for youth-work practitioners to embark on training and professional development opportunities. We have heard anecdotally from our members that because of Brexit looming and the uncertainty that it has created, people are going for those opportunities when they might previously have been a bit complacent about applying and thought that they might just apply in the next round.

Youthlink has run a project over the past few months on unlocking the potential for Erasmus by providing applicant support for youth-work organisations. Many of the organisations that are applying are very small and might not have the administrative capacity, know-how or experience to make an application of this type. We have been in support mode, helping such organisations to apply, and we have seen an increase in those that are interested in applying.

**The Convener:** We have a supplementary question from Richard Lochhead.

**Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP):** It is on a separate theme, so I will come back to it.

**The Convener:** Okay. Rachael Hamilton has a supplementary.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** It is for Emily Beever. It is great to have you here today representing YouthLink Scotland, particularly in the year of young people. I am interested to hear how Erasmus has helped you to train people to deliver educational and sporting opportunities. Can you talk us through some examples of how Erasmus has allowed young people to access more sporting and educational opportunities?

**Emily Beever:** Yes. From its visit, the committee already knows about the Jack Kane community centre, which from our perspective is a good example of work to broaden horizons with young people who have fewer opportunities. We think that such an approach moves holistically into educational attainment and wider achievement.

As Jackie Killeen mentioned, the programme is so diverse that near enough any project with Erasmus funding contributes to the aims that have been talked about. For example, we know that a lot of the large football clubs have taken Erasmus money. They are not necessarily doing youth work, but they work with younger players to improve their employability skills, language

learning and understanding of diversity, for example. Another example is the excellent projects that Fife Council has run on improving young offenders' employability by working with practitioners. There are projects all over Scotland from a range of different sources that are working towards those goals.

It is great that you mentioned the year of young people, because the projects contribute to the core aim of the YOYP of helping young people to shine globally and to have a say in matters that affect them, which we know is a fundamental right for young people. Erasmus+ contributes to achieving a lot of the frameworks that we have in Scotland, such as developing the young workforce or curriculum for excellence. Erasmus+ touches on all those areas and helps to achieve their aims.

**The Convener:** Does Tavish Scott have a supplementary question?

**Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD):** Yes. I think that €2.3 million was spent on the Erasmus programme in schools in the past financial year. Although I know what they are, can you just say what the benefits are for youngsters from Scottish schools going overseas through the programme?

**Jackie Killeen:** Funding goes into schools in a number of ways, including for teacher development and training, as Marion Spöring mentioned. Through Erasmus+, a lot of language teachers improve their pedagogy, their professional development and their networks across Europe and, indeed, beyond. The Erasmus programme is a main source of funding for that work, which is possibly not well understood. When people think about the Erasmus programme, teacher development and training is not the first thing that comes to mind. However, we are keen to ensure that people understand that the programme has that benefit as well as the benefit of providing mobility opportunities for young people.

Many schools are involved in exchange or co-operation programmes through projects on, for example, climate change, innovation or science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects. Erasmus+ enables them to have partnerships, co-operation and some mobility with partner schools—in the main, those are schools from across Europe. Erasmus+ therefore works at every level: the pupil level, the teacher level and the whole-school level.

**Tavish Scott:** How many secondary schools in Scotland have sent pupils overseas in the past year?

**Jackie Killeen:** We have the figures from 2014 to 2016, so we know that 11,168 pupils, students and young people went overseas in that period. However, we do not have the 2017 figures yet.



**Tavish Scott:** How many schools did that involve? Do you have a breakdown of that?

**Jackie Killeen:** I will have to double check that for you, but I think that it was around 550 schools.

**Tavish Scott:** I just want a sense of the scale of the number of schools that use Erasmus+ for overseas visits.

**Emily Beever:** It is also worth noting that it is not just going overseas that is a benefit of the programme, because so is bringing young people from abroad to Scotland. A lot of our youth organisations do international exchanges in which young people from across Europe come here. For example, Royston Youth Action in Glasgow had a scheme last summer, I think, in which it brought young people here, which had the same impact on the young Scottish people's language learning and understanding of other cultures as going abroad would have had. It is worth mentioning that that is a valuable part of the programme too.

**Marion Spöring:** There are also many projects that are not so visible, such as those where the university and school sectors work together. For example, at SCILT, university students who go on Erasmus exchanges work with schools in Scotland by meeting them before they go on the exchange, writing blogs and Skyping while they are on the exchange and visiting the school afterwards. There are many ways in which there is an impact without that being visible in the funding application. We try to make the most of the benefits of all those different opportunities.

**The Convener:** I was very struck by West Lothian College's submission in which it says that every further education learner in the college has the opportunity to apply for Erasmus and that that includes people studying motor vehicle maintenance, hairdressing, childcare and so on. Those are areas that the general public would not normally associate with Erasmus, but the programme must make a big difference to those areas, too.

**Daniel Evans:** Absolutely. We started in 2015 with a few sectors and I got requests from centre heads in other areas asking when their students were going to get the opportunity. For the 2017 application, we worked really hard to source partners across Europe that did vocational training and had a good reputation—as we do—for finding good work placements and outcomes for their learners in particular sectors.

We were able to source eight partners covering 10 different sectors, as well as a few side sectors. For example, our business students go to Cran-Gevrier, Bathgate's twin town in France, but we can also send our travel and tourism students there because the school there organises the same kind of placements. Our sports and fitness

students and our childcare students go to the same organisation in Italy. Over the past few years we have built a really strong relationship with a college in Spain, where our construction students go. We have worked all over Europe to find the best placements. Our motor vehicle students go to Kalmar in Sweden and we receive their students. We organise cultural events and great relationships have been built between the students and between the teaching staff.

It is a whole culture and ethos, and it brings a different dimension to our college. The college feels really vibrant and has a European feel. We have put up flagpoles and we fly the flags of the countries that we have students from that week. We now have flags from all over the world.

Our students are getting a completely different experience from the one that they had at school. Many of our learners did not have a great school experience and when they come to our college their horizons are lifted. They look beyond Friday and consider what they might be doing next year or in their future lives. When they come back from their mobility, it is as if they are different young people. It is just amazing—it is what keeps me going. I am head of commercial and there is no money in this—the funding is tight—but the difference that it makes to the young people's lives is just amazing.

**Mairi Gougeon (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):** I want to pick up a couple of points on the back of questions from Rachael Hamilton and Tavish Scott. Jackie Killeen talked about diversity and I was glad to hear Emily Beever mention the football clubs and the range of projects that Erasmus covers. In general, people tend to think about universities in connection with Erasmus. I know that the East of Scotland European Consortium has done a lot of work to build a picture of all the different bodies that take part in the Erasmus programme, particularly through local authorities and through nurseries—Jackie Killeen also talked about teacher training in that context.

My question is for Emily Beever. I know that you have been co-ordinating the keep Erasmus+ campaign. How has that campaign been going? Where do we go from here? Are you aware of any engagement with UK bodies, or are you part of any engagement with the UK Government about what will happen? Do you have any sense of where it is looking to go?

09:45

**Emily Beever:** Thank you for mentioning the campaign. For those members who are not familiar with it, YouthLink Scotland is leading a UK-wide campaign called keep Erasmus+, which is a partnership across the Erasmus+ programme.

We are working with a lot of sectors and partners, including the NUS, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, the National Youth Agency, UK Youth, the British Youth Council, the Scottish Youth Parliament, Young Scot, Leonard Cheshire Disability Scotland, YMCA Scotland and the Carers Trust Scotland, and a lot more people are talking to us about becoming partners. That has opened our eyes. We are an organisation that focuses on the youth work sector, but we can see the difference that all those organisations have made. For example, I have been really moved by the health and social care impact of Erasmus+ through the European voluntary service volunteers who work in Leonard Cheshire Disability. They really help disabled people in Scotland to live a full life, and the hope is that a career in that style of work will come from that.

We do not have direct contact with the UK Government at this point in the campaign, but we are hoping to move in that direction. We have lots of partners whose lobbying efforts and talks with different elected members are really wide ranging. For example, the British Youth Council has been talking to the politicians it is already in touch with in London, so we are moving in that direction. It is obviously a lot of work for everybody on top of what we are already doing, but we are really fuelled by the stories of people who have benefited from the funding. That really drives us to continue.

**Mairi Gougeon:** I do not know whether anyone is able to help with my next point. There are different examples of third countries that are part of the Erasmus+ programme. We have heard a bit about the model in Switzerland, which is a parallel programme. Does anyone have any details or finer points on how that programme works? For example, how does it work for other partner countries that are part of Erasmus+? I think that being part of the Erasmus+ programme would be the ideal scenario that we would all be looking for, but what are some of the other options and programmes, and how do they work?

**Jackie Killeen:** I am happy to start. The British Council's position is that we believe that the UK should seek to remain in the Erasmus+ programme. It is the biggest and most successful mobility and exchange programme in the world and it has multiple benefits at every level. If we are not part of it in the future, we would need to create something that tried to recreate all those benefits of participation. We are very keen that everybody understands what the benefits of participation are.

Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and EU candidate countries such as Turkey, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia participate fully as programme countries in the Erasmus programme. They are required to create

their own bilateral arrangements with Erasmus+ and make a financial contribution to the programme. Therefore, it is possible for non-EU members to participate in the Erasmus+ programme, but our starting position is that it would be better to remain in it and negotiate from there if we can.

The programme for 2021 onwards has begun to be developed. The national authority in the UK is the Department for Education. In our national agency role as the administrator of Erasmus+, the British Council has fed into the early stages of development on the kind of themes that the next programme might want to take on board. We will continue to do that as the programme is developed for as long as we are able to.

**Mairi Gougeon:** I will understand if no one is able to answer this, but does anyone know the particulars of the Swiss programme and how it operates?

**Emily Beaver:** We have a bit of further information. The Scottish Parliament information centre briefing that the committee received mentioned the higher education element of Switzerland's parallel programme. Switzerland also runs other branches of the project, such as the youth aspect, in the same kind of form. We reached out to Motevia, the national agency in Switzerland, and it said that the challenges that it has experienced include having to negotiate complex bilateral agreements to maintain the European programmes and being excluded from the international network and the further development of the EU programme for education. It sees the current approach as an interim solution and not as a long-term, sustainable piece of work; it really is temporary. There is more information on that in our written submission.

**Mairi Gougeon:** Thank you.

**The Convener:** There is extensive information in the written submissions that it is important to tease out. I was struck by the fact that there are programme countries and partner countries. Will you explain a little more about that? My understanding is that the programme countries are members of the EU or the European Economic Area and countries that are moving towards membership, and everyone else is a partner.

**Jackie Killeen:** Yes, and I suppose that the headline way of describing the difference is that it is about having the ability to shape and influence the programme—priorities, eligibility and what the programme will look like—as opposed to being on the fringes and participating from the outside in. That is the main consideration for us in thinking about the issue for the future.

**Daniel Evans:** If the UK becomes a partner country, organisations such as West Lothian

College would be excluded from participation, because we would no longer be able to do bilateral exchanges with the partners with whom we have built up relationships. We would be excluded from that aspect of the programme.

**The Convener:** Jackson Carlaw is next.

**Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** I am just in the queue, convener—I do not have a follow-up question; my question is on a separate point. If somebody else is ahead of me—

**The Convener:** I do not think that there are any supplementaries. Go on.

**Jackson Carlaw:** I am interested in the administration of the programme by the British Council. Obviously, it is the UK vehicle for participation but, in Scotland, we have a separate education system. I am interested in the administrative way in which the funds that Scotland secures are distributed. When we were in Brussels last summer and met with European officials, they had what I thought was the very open view that, in so far as there was potential for a differentiated settlement in the negotiations with the United Kingdom as the member state, ultimately, programmes such as horizon 2020 and Erasmus were potentially in that area. I am interested in the British Council's view on that.

The Prime Minister has stated that she very much wishes to see the whole United Kingdom participate. However, given the way that the British Council in Scotland is organised and operates, and given that Scotland has a separate education system, is it conceivable that, in a scenario where United Kingdom participation has not proved possible, Scotland could be a partner in Erasmus in its own right, in light of that administrative structure?

**Jackie Killeen:** That is probably a matter for the Government. The national authority for the whole UK is the UK Government and, within that, the Department for Education. We are the managing agency, alongside Ecorys. Obviously, we work across the policy differences and the reserved and devolved areas of competence throughout the UK. Erasmus+ has been successful in working with the grain of the differences across the UK. Any future arrangements for a managing authority or a national authority for a future programme would be a matter for Governments.

I hope that I understood you correctly—sorry, but I am not sure that I did.

**Jackson Carlaw:** You did, and I appreciate that answer. I am trying to establish how practical you believe the infrastructure that you have in place to manage the programme in Scotland would be in the event that Scotland sought to participate in its

own right, were that ultimately the only option that was open to us.

**Jackie Killeen:** If Scotland were able to participate in the programme in any way, either as part of the UK or in another form, we would work to ensure that we serviced that and met those needs.

As colleagues have said, there are strong aspirations at every level; there is a strong appetite to continue the programme and to make sure that the benefits that exist at every level are not lost.

I think that you asked whether the British Council would be willing and able to support that. We would obviously do that within the overall structure.

**Jackson Carlaw:** I am not advocating Scotland participating in its own right at this point, because the Prime Minister has made it clear that she hopes that the whole of the UK will participate. That issue created an interesting dynamic in the exchanges that the committee had when we were in Brussels, so I was interested in pursuing it with representatives here today to get a greater understanding of it. Thank you.

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** Travel is integral to the Erasmus+ programme. Notwithstanding the fact that countries that are far outwith Europe are also involved, the core of Erasmus activity is exchanges between countries that have existing arrangements for freedom of movement as part of the EU and the wider European Economic Area.

On the UK's current trajectory, we will lose the right to freedom of movement. If the UK was to maintain some level of engagement with Erasmus+ without our citizens having the right to freedom of movement, what broad impact would that have and what would be the specific impact on your organisations?

**Luke Humberstone:** Being part of the EU is not a prerequisite for being part of Erasmus+, but as we have seen from Switzerland, when rules on freedom of movement or immigration are changed it makes developing bilateral agreements with individual countries much more complex. We are concerned that there would be a lag in our ability to negotiate a new arrangement, which could mean that students would lose an opportunity to travel to other countries.

**Emily Beaver:** It is clear from the SPICE briefing and the research that we have done that it is difficult to get a full picture of what the agreement with Turkey looks like. We know that we might get something that looks similar to that model. I found the letters that are in the meeting papers interesting, as they gave me a little bit of

an insight into that relationship. Our guess is that our relationship will look similar to that model. It would be great if someone could get hold of the detail of what that agreement looks like.

**Marion Spöring:** It would certainly make it hard for universities, too. It would be a major concern for us, because we rely heavily on freedom of movement, which affects languages departments in general, exchanges through Erasmus+, staff and the wider teaching sector. As I said in my paper, universities in the UK and in Scotland have signed up to double the number of students participating in exchanges. Most of our students go through Erasmus+. If we do not have freedom of movement, it would be a disaster for academic and social reasons, for the internationalisation of the country, for the experience of our students and staff and for research.

**Daniel Evans:** My personal view is that the final decisions on the way that the UK deals with freedom of movement will have a direct impact on our ability to stay in Erasmus+ as a programme country. That view is based on the Swiss experience and what happened when Switzerland tried to restrict freedom of movement.

**Ross Greer:** As things stand, I assume that the majority of your engagement through the programme is with countries with which we have arrangements for freedom of movement as part of EU membership. Is that right?

**Daniel Evans:** Yes—100 per cent.

**Jackie Killeen:** It is worth adding that, through the international credit mobility dimension of the Erasmus+ programme, institutions such as the University of Edinburgh and the University of Glasgow have extended their engagement significantly beyond Europe, such as into South America. Under the current framework, it is possible to go further afield, such as to Australia.

**The Convener:** The Swiss experience has been mentioned a few times. People might not be aware of its history and background, so I invite Jackie Killeen to explain what happened with Erasmus when Switzerland withdrew from freedom of movement arrangements.

**Jackie Killeen:** I thought that your SPICe briefing on that was helpful.

**The Convener:** It is very good, but I hoped that we could get an explanation on the record.

10:00

**Jackie Killeen:** In Switzerland, a decision was taken to restrict freedom of movement that raised questions about how Switzerland would continue to participate in Erasmus+, participation in which is contingent on acceptance of the EU's freedom of

movement rules. As members of the single market, the 28 EU member states and the other EEA countries all accept freedom of movement. As I understand it, when Switzerland introduced those restrictions, it tried to negotiate what was described as an interim—I think that that is the word that was used—bilateral arrangement to allow Swiss citizens to participate in the scheme. That added cost and complexity to the programme, and made participation in it far more cumbersome for Swiss citizens.

That is a headline summary; I do not have a great deal of detail on how that filtered down to the institutional level or to schools and other participating organisations. My understanding is that the interim arrangement will have acted as a disincentive for application, because it made things more cumbersome and increased the timescales for people who wanted to apply and the number of stages that they had to go through.

**The Convener:** In its submission, YouthLink Scotland specifically ruled out the Swiss model on the ground that it was not appropriate.

**Emily Beaver:** When we reached out to Movetia, which is the Swiss national agency for exchange and mobility, it stated clearly that it did not wish to remain part of the interim programme in the longer term and that it wished to be part of the wider Erasmus+ programme. I believe that that is what the Swiss Government hopes to achieve in the next seven years of the Erasmus programme.

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** Good morning, panel. I studied through an Erasmus/Socrates programme some years ago, so when I read through the papers, it took me back to some pleasant and happy experiences.

I thought that Daniel Evans's comment about how students at West Lothian College are now looking beyond Friday is probably one of the most salient points that I have heard made about the Erasmus+ scheme in any committee. I am keen for all members to take that point on board, because it is extremely powerful.

I have some questions about the submissions that we received. Jackie Killeen said in her submission that 55 current world leaders have been educated in the UK and that she felt that the continuation of that would be beneficial in the future. Is there any evidence that the education of world leaders in the UK has been beneficial?

**Jackie Killeen:** We are talking broadly about the soft power of the UK's cultural relations. The UK as a whole and Scotland in particular are renowned for the strength of their education systems. The fact that people have had a positive experience when they have come here creates an on-going positive association with Scotland and the wider UK throughout their careers. We hope

that, if we are able to continue to participate in programmes such as the Erasmus scheme, the intake of foreign students and young people at different stages in their lives will continue. Such mutuality of exchange is extremely important for our success as a country overall. It is important not only for our young people to gain international experience, but for us to be enriched by inward mobility and for people to take away a positive and enduring lifelong association with the UK. That is one of the ways in which we contribute to the broader stability and prosperity of the country.

**Stuart McMillan:** I have a question for everyone. Some people who are in school and are looking at their future will be considering going to university to study languages and will want to take advantage of the opportunity to study elsewhere. How will the uncertainty that we face affect people in Scotland and people from elsewhere who might want to study in Scotland for a period of time? What impact will that uncertainty have in three, four or five years' time on the number of people who are able to take part in that cultural and educational exchange?

**Marion Spöring:** Just yesterday, the University of Dundee held one of its many events in which school pupils engage with business leaders from all over Scotland, and we talked about how important language learning, intercultural exchanges and going abroad are not only for people who go to university but for people who go to college and people who become hairdressers, engineers or information technology professionals. We talked about the skills gap, which is very wide. It is important to make our young people aware of the opportunities that exist.

There is great appetite for learning languages. In the university sector, we see more people learning languages as part of the degree that they are taking to become engineers, lawyers, psychologists or tourism specialists, because they see that as being essential. They understand that, even if they stay in Scotland, someone who is an engineer, a tourist guide or a driver, for example, has to be able to engage with other people.

There is a great appetite for learning languages and we have evidence that people would like to take advantage of the Erasmus+ opportunities. However, pupils, teachers and potential applicants are asking us how long they will have that opportunity for. Parents are concerned that that opportunity will be denied to their children. We try to reassure people and say that, after Brexit, the need to engage, go abroad and learn languages will be even greater. Of course, we cannot give people certainty, but there is an awareness among the public that we cannot shut ourselves off and that we need to have the opportunities to ensure that we do not do that. What is missing at the

moment is the impetus that would be generated by a campaign to make people aware of what it could mean if we had to withdraw from programmes such as this one.

**Luke Humberstone:** At the moment, the opportunity to take advantage of Erasmus+ is open to not only people at university but people at college, apprentices and members of staff. Obviously, that uncertainty is worrying for people. It would be a tragedy if the opportunity to participate in such programmes were lost.

**Emily Beever:** It is worth pointing out that Erasmus+ has consistently come up in a lot of the research that has been done with young people since Brexit about what their main concerns are and what they want their elected members to lobby for on their behalf. Another issue that has come up in that regard is social justice. The close tie between social mobility and physical mobility around Europe is a key issue for young people.

**Jackie Killeen:** I echo the points that fellow panellists have made about this being a significant area of concern. At the point when the UK is going to need to be even more international and have a strong base of internationalism with regard to the employability of our young people and our economic and social prosperity, the need to be able to participate internationally and take part in international exchanges has probably never been greater. We do not want uncertainty about the future to lead to young people feeling disincentivised with regard to looking at careers, study choices or opportunities that have an international dimension, because, more than ever, we need them to have that outlook and to be able to take advantage of those opportunities.

**Stuart McMillan:** That lack of clarity will certainly have a negative effect with regard to people considering such opportunities. I must admit that, when I got the opportunity to sign up to study abroad, I could not do so quickly enough. I genuinely know how beneficial it is to have that cultural exchange.

Jackie Killeen's final point touched upon something that Marion Spöring put in her written submission. Marion, you state that

"The still widely spread assumption that 'everybody speaks English' is a fallacy."

Would you like to expand on that?

**Marion Spöring:** It is a very widely held belief that everybody speaks English and that if you go abroad, it is okay if you speak English. English is my second language but it is not the case that everybody speaks English. Research by the Council of Europe, the European Language Centre and the British Council exposes that misconception. Although English is taught as the

first foreign language in Europe, that does not automatically mean that people have attained the skills to use it freely, because people only build up those skills if they back up their learning with exchanges, for example.

That belief that everybody speaks English is an obstacle in the mindset of society, which permeates many different areas, as people say that they do not need to learn other languages. Especially if you look at the employment market—not only for graduates but more widely—it is highly important that people have flexibility of mind or a global mindset. It is not just about language skills or the ability to say a little, but neither does it mean that somebody needs to be an absolutely fluent speaker. It is about having that understanding and having the willingness to learn languages and pick them up at different stages of your life. Lifelong learning also comes into that. It is highly essential that we develop that attitude in people.

Also, English as a language on the internet is going down. It is one of the biggest languages on the internet, but Mandarin and Arabic are catching up very quickly, as is Spanish. We cannot rely on everybody speaking English—and in any case, it is always much better if you can talk to people in their own language. Also, UK English is only one variety among many different world Englishes. International English is a specific variety, for example.

Most people in the European Union will have learned two languages. Certainly, if you go to university, it is expected that you are relatively fluent in two languages. In many cases, the graduates who come to us already have two languages and English, and are learning more. Our young people have to compete in the global market and here.

Yesterday, at the business event that we ran with SCILT, which is one of many events across Scotland, several large employers spoke to us and said that they have difficulties in recruiting appropriate staff at all levels, not just graduates, and they have to look to the EU to find people with the right skills such as selling skills and phone marketing skills. They just cannot find enough people who have the skills.

**Rachael Hamilton:** What would you all like to see as the future shape of a framework and how are you feeding into the negotiations? All of you have talked about the importance of Erasmus, how much benefit we get from it here in Scotland and the value that you find in it. What can we do better? What do you not like about Erasmus and how are you going to feed into the shape of things to come?

**Emily Beever:** YouthLink Scotland has been very involved, along with the national agency, in different elements of shaping the current programme. We would certainly like to maintain that. Our preferred option is that the UK would continue as a programme country with full access and involvement in shaping the programme and the full range of opportunities that come along with that.

We have already spoken about the campaign that we are leading on. We feel that that is our way of contributing to the negotiations as far as possible and we hope to shape those negotiations in that way.

**Luke Humberstone:** The title of the YouthLink Scotland campaign is exactly what we feel: keep Erasmus+. It is so vital and so positive that everyone who has been part of it thinks that we should keep it.

On whether there are any problems, there is possibly one around some of the timings of courses on the apprenticeship side of things. Perhaps that could be reflected on.

If we are going to lose Erasmus+, it would be great if we could replace it with something better in terms of the number of partner countries that would be involved, or come up with our own programme, but we have one already, so let us keep it.

10:15

**Daniel Evans:** I echo that it is really important that the UK stays in Erasmus+. However, I will mention a change that could be made. Our further education learners, who make up about 65 per cent of learners in the college, go on two weeks of work experience overseas and they undertake a work experience unit while they are there. They work, live and experience what it is like to be in a foreign country. Under the current rules of the programme, our higher education learners, who make up about 35 per cent of our students, must go away for a minimum of three months. For a college learner who lives at home, who might never have been overseas before, that is just too long. It is geared towards universities, who send their learners for semesters or for whole years. We need that three months to come down so that college HE learners can get an equivalent overseas experience.

**Rachael Hamilton:** I have a supplementary question on the point that you made about the timings, although it is not just about the work experience. My colleague Stuart McMillan, who has experience of the Erasmus+ programme, was explaining to me the difficulties with the length of degree courses in higher education. Have you found any difficulties to do with the difference

between three-year and four-year degrees? If so, how can we improve things?

**Marion Spöring:** It is an issue for specialist language students. The year abroad is compulsory, so they have to do a four-year degree, which is fully funded. It is also a requirement for entrance into teacher training. If the opportunity was taken away, it would be very difficult for the students because they would not be able to fulfil the requirement for entrance into teacher training, and it would also have a major impact on their results.

However, there are also a number of students who go abroad as part of three-year and four-year degrees. For the majority of students who do four-year degrees, there are options to go on to a three-year degree, but the likelihood that people will go abroad and fit that into their study programme will be very much reduced. They will be worried about their results, and the degree requirements and professional requirements will be much more difficult to fulfil. That raises more concern for students.

**Rachael Hamilton:** You mentioned the skills gap. Would some tweaks to the Erasmus+ programme increase employability? The employability opportunities are obviously huge. The SPICe document proves that the programme increases people's chances of getting a job. However, how about looking at the retention of students who come from other countries and working to keep them here to work and live in Scotland?

**Marion Spöring:** That would be beneficial. From the universities' perspective in general, I can say that many students who come to us initially for an Erasmus+ semester or year then continue to study here, maybe to do their postgraduate degree or another degree, and then to work here. It would be beneficial to look at ways for people to do that, and at opportunities to have teachers and other people share their experience here. That is extremely valuable. For teacher training, and if you want to successfully support the one-plus-two model, it is essential.

**Jackie Killeen:** We do not have tracking data on the numbers of incoming Erasmus+ students who subsequently stay, but we have quite a lot of anecdotal examples of people who have come on Erasmus+ programmes coming back to work, to take on postgraduate study or to develop careers. Those links tend to be positive and enduring.

The other point to emphasise is that we have done a lot of employer research and tracking of our own UK and Scotland participants in Erasmus+ and we know that they are not only more employable but more likely to retain employment and to progress into management

and have strong career progression than their peers who have not participated in Erasmus+ programmes.

The other area of concern for us is the reach of the programme into the whole of society and all our communities. We know that Erasmus+ is very successful for communities that have experienced disadvantage. If the opportunity were not to be available for disadvantaged communities, we would be very concerned about what would replace it, either in an interim period or beyond. It is possible that the gap could be filled in other ways in other areas, but we would be particularly concerned about young people from disadvantaged communities should the Erasmus+ opportunity not be available to them in the future.

The last point is that this is not just about languages, although languages are fundamentally important. We do a lot of research into what the UK's language needs will be in the future, and we are not doing as well as we could. We also know, however, that employers value international experience very highly, even if it is not gained from the point of view of being a linguist. Having had an international experience, be that on a work, voluntary or study placement, is a differentiating factor when employers look for their future workforces.

**Daniel Evans:** We welcomed a group of Spanish trainee chefs to West Lothian College a couple of years ago. We put half of them into Gleneagles and half into the Sheraton in Edinburgh for work experience placements, after they had spent a bit of time in our kitchens. Some of them continue to come back, and I believe that one or two have come back to the country after their studies and work here all the time.

When our students went to the Spanish college for experience, the story just grew arms and legs. The students ended up on the Spanish national news with our lecturer. You would not get that kind of exposure without the Erasmus+ programme. The students and lecturer were buzzing about it when they came back. We have a strong relationship with that overseas college now, which will continue regardless of Erasmus+, but Erasmus+ is what made it possible.

**Richard Lochhead:** Thank you for giving evidence today. You mentioned chefs; Scotland is short of chefs, so it is good to hear that you are making a contribution to getting more chefs to work in this country.

Parliament had a debate on Brexit this week, sponsored by the committee. One of the themes in the debate was that the EU wants a deal by November 2018, which is only a few months away. The UK Government clearly has a lot of work to do. What are your thoughts on whether the UK

Government is treating seriously the issues that we have been discussing today on Erasmus?

**Marion Spöring:** That is a hard question.

**Richard Lochhead:** Are you getting feedback? Are you getting positive messages?

**Emily Beever:** The Erasmus programme is just one of many, although all of us here know that it has a wide-reaching and strong impact on all our communities in the UK. We hope that the UK Government is listening to those who are talking to it about the impact, showing where it is making a difference. I hope that they will be opening the Government's eyes to that so that it will be a prominent feature in the next stage of the negotiations, and we will start to see some movement towards maintaining programme country status.

**Richard Lochhead:** The British Council has a close relationship with the UK Government. What feedback is it getting on how the Government is responding to its concerns?

**Jackie Killeen:** There are two parts to that. One is that we feed into the Department for Education as the national authority on the shape of a future Erasmus+ programme beyond 2020 when the current one will conclude. We welcomed the Prime Minister's statement in December indicating that participation in the programme will be underwritten until 2020. We noted that she highlighted education and cultural programmes in her speech. At every opportunity we have made clear the importance of programmes such as Erasmus+, horizon 2020 and creative Europe and made sure that the depth of the Erasmus programme's reach, as well as the breadth of what it achieves for us, is fully understood. However, I do not have any deeper insight into where that sits.

**Richard Lochhead:** It is ironic that in the year of young people we are talking about a threat to Erasmus, which is a big benefit of EU membership for young people. Do you have any thoughts on the fact that Scotland voted to remain, unlike other parts of the UK, and that young people in particular voted to remain? Was Erasmus a factor in influencing so many young people to vote remain in the referendum?

**Emily Beever:** Absolutely. As I said, the work that we have done since the Brexit vote has shown us that Erasmus was one of the key things on young people's minds in looking forward to their futures and the opportunities that they may or may not be able to access. It was definitely prominent in the issues that they care about.

**Jackie Killeen:** From our research with young people around the world, but in particular in Scotland, on attitudes to internationalism, we know that there is a huge appetite for Erasmus. Young

people want to be able to have such experiences and to exchange and develop overseas. It is important that we listen to young people on that, particularly in the year of young people, so that we can show how our young people can flourish internationally as well as at home.

We strongly encourage people to consider seriously applying for Erasmus+ this year. We encourage people not just to think that all these opportunities are under threat in the future but to take the opportunities that are available now and to apply across the range. There are application deadlines in February, April and October in 2018 and it would be fantastic to see as many institutions as possible taking up the opportunities.

**Richard Lochhead:** I was interested in Marian Spöring's comments about the importance of learning foreign languages in this day and age. Your message is that, if we do not continue to be members of Erasmus or have a successor to the programme, given the Scottish and UK track record of not being the best countries at learning foreign languages, it would be a setback for us in foreign language learning.

**Marion Spöring:** Definitely. Based on research by the British Council and by the British Academy, the 10 most important languages are not necessarily the languages that are taught in all institutions, although French, German and Spanish are fairly well catered for. If you look at different actors, such as export, German or Mandarin are at the first level of importance. We need to have a diversity of languages and not just European languages. We must consider the definition of what are the most important languages—there are community languages and heritage languages and there is British Sign Language. Those are not necessarily the languages that are taught in institutions. We need a diversity of languages and we cannot rely on teaching one or two languages in school. We need to have the supply of languages from the schools.

The point that I was making was that we need to take a strategic approach in Scotland, which focuses not just on schools but on all sectors—business, colleges, nurseries, adult education and lifelong learning. That is the only way in which we can address the issues, because they are all linked together.

**Claire Baker:** We all recognise the importance of the Erasmus+ programme and everyone here is looking for a way in which to maintain it in the future. However, we cannot ignore the fact that that will be a challenge, particularly in relation to freedom of movement, where we can see the direction that the current Government seems inclined to take. However, there are other opportunities, because what the programme will look like post-2020 is under discussion. Given the



Swiss situation and the challenges there, does anyone have an insight into the possibility of significant changes being made to the membership criteria that might make a future relationship for the UK slightly easier?

**Jackie Killeen:** I am sorry, but I do not.

10:30

**Claire Baker:** Our country, which is going through the process of leaving the EU, has particular issues with Erasmus. Are other countries that are trying to engage with the programme, or which are already engaged with it, looking for similar flexibilities to be introduced?

**Emily Beever:** I am not sure about flexibilities, but other EU countries wish to increase the Erasmus+ budget tenfold, which is a big movement. While we are scrabbling to try to keep the programme, they are trying to raise the budget tenfold. That other EU countries see such value and benefit from the programme and want to grow it even more highlights its significance.

The focus of the current seven-year programme has been diversity and inclusion. Research has shown that young people with fewer opportunities rate the programme more strongly than well-off young people do, so that focus has been successful. If the budget were to be increased tenfold, it would be interesting to see what the inclusion process and success rate of the new programme would be.

**The Convener:** It is important that we are clear that, as things stand, we will be outwith the EEA and we will leave behind freedom of movement, so it will not be possible for us to be a programme member—I see that you are all nodding. The only alternative is a UK-EU mobility programme, such as the one that the Swiss have come up with, which you have all said is not really what you want. However, even that does not seem to be on the table, and you have not given any indication that you have heard that it is being discussed. We will have to hope that sessions such as this one influence those who are taking forward the negotiations.

I thank you all very much for giving evidence today.

10:32

*Meeting suspended.*

10:39

*On resuming—*

## Scottish Government Reports

**The Convener:** Agenda item 5 is to consider the Government's six-monthly reports on horizon 2020, the one-plus-two languages programme, the European structural and investment funds and the transposition of EU directives. Do members have any comments, or would they like further clarifications on any of the reports?

**Jackson Carlaw:** Does this item include the letter that we have seen from Keith Brown about the European social fund?

**The Convener:** Yes.

**Jackson Carlaw:** I am concerned by the second paragraph of Keith Brown's letter, which warrants further investigation by the committee. Mr Brown indicates that, due to the failure to lodge the appropriate paperwork, Scotland will lose €22.2 million in grants from the programme budget. It is the case that, if the paperwork is not submitted correctly and on time, the funds are decommitted. The Government's declaration is that compliance is complicated and difficult to complete expeditiously. I am underwhelmed by that response.

I do not want to be too pejorative, but it would be useful for the committee to see how Scotland's performance relates to other participating authorities. It may well be that they will have had a shortfall, too. Are we able to establish our performance relative to that of others?

The sum of €22.2 million is not an insignificant amount of money to have to write off in the first phase because we have not been able to submit our application effectively. We could expect to receive more information about that.

**The Convener:** Does anyone else have other points to make about the letter?

**Rachael Hamilton:** It is also worrying that invoices worth £12.3 million were outstanding. Although £6.3 million has been paid back, a further £5 million is subject to appeal. I have the same concern as Jackson Carlaw does. Where is the information about that money? How is it to be accounted for? What will happen if the invoices are not paid? Will the Scottish Government simply write off that £5 million?

**The Convener:** I understand that the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee is conducting an inquiry into this topic. We could contact that committee and pass on our concerns to it. Additionally, we could write to the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work to ask for further clarification.

**Jackson Carlaw:** I would be content for us to write to the cabinet secretary expressing our concern but saying that we have raised the matter with the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee and asked it to advise us of the outcome of its inquiry.

**The Convener:** Are other members content with that approach?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** As no member wants to make a comment on any of the other reports that we have received, I end the public part of our meeting.

10:43

*Meeting continued in private until 10:55.*

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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