



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Thursday 24 January 2013

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EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

2nd Meeting 2013, Session 4

CONVENER

*Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP)

*Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)

*Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)

*Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Dr Judith McClure (Scotland China Education Network)

Professor Antonella Sorace (University of Edinburgh and Bilingualism Matters)

Brian Templeton (University of Glasgow)

Dr Dan Tierney (University of Strathclyde)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Ian Duncan

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

European and External Relations Committee

Thursday 24 January 2013

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

“Brussels Bulletin”

The Convener (Christina McKelvie): Welcome to the second meeting in 2013 of the European and External Relations Committee. I make the usual request that all mobile phones and electronic devices be switched off because they interfere with the broadcasting equipment.

Agenda item 1 is consideration of the latest edition of the “Brussels Bulletin”, which is compiled regularly by our European officer, Dr Ian Duncan. Ian will talk us through the bulletin.

Ian Duncan (Clerk and European Officer): I will start in reverse order with the fisheries negotiations. You will recall that, the week before last, Hanzala Malik raised the issue of mackerel. The Norwegians and the European Union have agreed their total allowable catch for mackerel in accordance with the science, which accounts for 95 per cent of the catch. The remaining 5 per cent is to be shared between Iceland and the Faroe Islands. However, they are not catching 5 per cent of the total allowable catch; rather, on last year’s evidence alone, they are catching more than 30 per cent. That is not a great success at all.

Hanzala Malik asked why there had been no action at an EU level. That remains a question because there has still been no action. The next stage will be to broker a deal between Iceland and the Faroe Islands and the EU and Norway, but it does not look as if there has been progress. I suspect that the only way forward will be to look at other measures; we will have to wait and see what comes out in the next couple of weeks.

A couple of other things in the bulletin are worth commenting on. First, the Commission has published an action plan for entrepreneurship, which is probably helpful. I draw your attention to what it is terming the importance of facilitating access to microfinance or financial instruments, which will bring us back into the territory of JESSICA and JEREMIE—the joint European support for sustainable investment in city areas and the joint European resources for micro to medium enterprises. That will be important.

On funding, I want to draw your attention to the energy efficiency audit, which was done by the European Court of Auditors. It is worth noting that

it has audited the main recipients of the cohesion funds. It is not complimentary at all; basically, it is all but saying that wrongdoing has happened. Lots of money has been spent, but in some cases it is not easy to trace that money or to defend what it has achieved.

There is a consultation on energy technology, which is perhaps worth drawing to the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee’s attention. In addition, more money is going into energy—the European Investment Bank is injecting a further €10 billion into clean energy.

Willie Coffey will want to be aware that the credit rating agencies issue is once again back in the European Parliament. It is keen to introduce registration and regulation of those bodies.

Finally, yesterday and today the European Parliament’s Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development began its discussions on the reform of the common agricultural policy. At present, more than 1,000 amendments are being discussed. It is worth noting that no one now believes that agreement will be reached in time for the reform to be incorporated into a 2014 launch date, so that is now expected to be delayed until 2015. That would mean a continuation of the current arrangements for an additional year. That might be good news for some people in the west, but it is very bad news for the farmers in the east. That is what people are expecting; it is not a certainty but it is worth being aware of.

I am happy to take questions on those issues or on any other matters.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands (Con): I have two questions. First, on the mackerel issue, I understand that it has been said that Iceland and the Faroes are actually breaking the law. Can you explain how they are breaking the law? What law are they breaking?

Ian Duncan: That is a more difficult question to answer. Iceland and the Faroes argue that they are not breaking the law because the biological stock is changing and is now in their waters, so the commonsense approach is for them to catch the fish in their waters.

The laws that one might seek to invoke would be global laws or laws of original agreement. In the past, there has been an agreement among Iceland, the Faroes, the EU and Norway that the stock should be divided up in such a way that there is 5 per cent for Iceland and the Faroes and 95 per cent for the rest. However, that agreement was made at a time when, frankly, the mackerel were just not in the waters of those nations, which were therefore broadly indifferent to the issue. Now that the fishermen in Iceland and the Faroes are finding an abundance of mackerel in their waters—they could almost literally throw a net

from the beach to drag them ashore—they are resentful at being excluded from capturing the fish. In that sense, they now no longer feel bound to an agreement—not a law but an agreement—which they argue is no longer tenable.

Jamie McGrigor: I just wanted to clarify that they are breaching an agreement rather than a law.

Ian Duncan: Yes, that is right.

Jamie McGrigor: Secondly, when you said that the one-year delay caused by the negotiations on the amendments to the CAP may be good for people in the west but bad for people in the east, what did you mean by that remark?

Ian Duncan: As you may recall, when the member states in the east joined the EU, an agreement was reached—a slightly self-serving agreement for the west—that, as it would take some time for the eastern member states fully to understand what they could do with the CAP moneys, there was no point in giving them their share too soon. Instead, it was agreed that the current arrangements would be kept in place with only a slight adjustment for the east.

At the moment, therefore, a number of member states in the east receive considerably less CAP moneys than would otherwise be their share under the current agreement. In order for the member states in the east to get more money, other member states will need to get less money. The expectation is that farmers in the west would get proportionately less money as those in the east get more. Delaying the reform for a year will continue that slightly iniquitous balance of payments.

Jamie McGrigor: Thank you very much.

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): First, I suggest that it would be good for the committee to write a letter of congratulations to the Irish Government to wish it well with the new presidency.

Secondly, I am still concerned about the fish situation. I really think that we need to make some serious approaches to the European Union to ask that it get a grip on the issue somehow. I am not sure what the best route to take would be, but one suggestion that comes to mind is a ban on imports of all stock from Iceland and the Faroes until such time as we can come to a conclusion. That might make people focus on the issue a little. However, as I do not know the full picture, I am not sure whether that is the only option that is open to us. I would not wish to harm the industry in those countries, but at the same time we cannot allow them to harm our industry. There needs to be fairness, so action needs to be taken.

As a committee, we should perhaps write to the European Commission to bring to its attention that we have serious concerns about the issue and that we would rather that the Commission took affirmative action at the earliest opportunity. Unfortunately, these things tend to take a very long time to resolve and, in the meanwhile, we are losing the fish. That needs to come to a halt.

Ian Duncan: I can pick up on that. You might recall that five or six years ago the Marine Conservation Society accredited the mackerel fishery of the waters around the north-west and north-east of Europe as sustainable. You may have seen reports in the news this week that the society's advice is now to stop eating as much mackerel, because it is no longer being sustainably fished.

The frustration is that 95 per cent of the agreement is still being adhered to; the problem is the 5 per cent that is no longer being adhered to. The EU and Norway are doing what they are meant to be doing within the rules and guidance from the scientists, but Iceland and the Faroes are not, which is causing a serious problem.

The difficulty, and the reason why there is no ban on imports, is that support is not as widespread as one would imagine. The United Kingdom itself has been less than excited by the prospect of a ban, because principal mackerel processing takes place in the UK. A lot of jobs in the north-east of Scotland, up in Shetland and down in the north of England depend on mackerel processing. It becomes a more complicated thing to balance.

You are absolutely right that something must be done—there is no question about that—but it might be worth the committee asking what the Scottish Government and the UK Government intend to do to establish a more balanced and sustainable fishery as an urgent first step. Once we have that information we can take forward the issue as best we can, probably in collaboration with the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee of the Scottish Parliament, to make sure that we are all linking arms. That might be a first step.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): It would be a wise move for us to seek advice from our own Government in Scotland and the UK Government about the approach that they may wish to take. Ultimately, we need to have a negotiated settlement with our friends in the north, and ultimately that is what we will get.

I want to pick up other aspects of the "Brussels Bulletin". My attention is drawn to the Irish presidency of the Council of the European Union. One of the Irish commitments is to support enlargement of the union, which comes at an

interesting time, given the events of yesterday. We could face shrinkage of the EU if Mr Cameron gets his way and recommends the withdrawal of Scotland from the EU—perhaps against Scotland's will. We will have a very interesting discussion over the next three years, particularly on Scotland's position in the UK and therefore its position in the EU.

I am particularly interested in a little paragraph at the foot of Ian Duncan's report, which relates to accession states such as Serbia and Kosovo. I am sure that I do not need to remind Irish colleagues or any other colleagues about the delicacy of that issue. As many members know, Serbia does not recognise the independence of Kosovo, which is bound to introduce some difficulties in negotiations to bring Serbia into the EU.

I would like to put on record that we in the Scottish Parliament have and have had useful working relationships with Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia and so on and we would support a fair and simplified transition process for all those states to join the EU. I hope that Scotland will remain one of the nations in that family of nations.

Ian Duncan: It is worth noting that the next state that is likely to join the union is Croatia, which will join just after the end of the Irish presidency.

With regard to negotiations, Willie Coffey is quite right that Serbia and Kosovo remains a thorny issue. The Irish have adopted a different strategy. Rather than trying to tackle the big issue first, they are trying to tackle other issues in the hope of creating good will, which will then allow solutions to be found for the thornier issues. They are hoping to make progress with that.

I suspect that the bigger test will be Turkey, which, as members know, is the longest-serving accession state. It has been an accession state since 1999, which is a long time. Progress has been more or less stuck because of various member states halting what they call "chapters"—the chapters of the *acquis communautaire*. They close chapters, which means that nothing can be done with them.

10:15

The Irish are hopeful that something can be done to open up the chapters so that some progress can be made towards accession. As you will recall, a number of other member states have joined the EU since 1999. Even Iceland, which might not be quite as keen to join as it once was, is still considered to be more likely to join than Turkey, despite the fact that it put in its application only about 18 months or two years ago. I note your points.

Willie Coffey: Thank you.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): I wanted to ask about precisely that—Iceland's negotiations to join the EU. I think that one reason for the stalling of those negotiations is a domestic election in Iceland. There are four chapters outstanding, including the fishing chapter. I do not know whether that ties in with the mackerel dispute.

Are you aware of any plan on how to move on the Icelandic question, for want of a better phrase?

Ian Duncan: I suspect that the process is being held up by the fact that the Icelandic people are now no longer quite as vociferous in their push for Iceland to join. The president has always been lukewarm in his support for the idea and has suggested that a referendum might still be required if progress is to be made. The fisheries chapter will remain the most problematic of all, particularly given that the mackerel issue remains unresolved. I suspect that, until a resolution is achieved on mackerel, it will be all but impossible to make progress on the fisheries chapter. That is the biggest issue because, now that the banks are no longer quite what they were, the fishing industry is the industry in Iceland.

Roderick Campbell: Is it your view that, if the Icelandic people suddenly became a bit more enthusiastic about joining, Iceland could join quite quickly?

Ian Duncan: Yes. Iceland would be broadly compliant with all the necessary laws. As far as I am aware, there are some smaller issues that need to be addressed. The fishing chapter is the thorniest of all, because it could be addressed in different ways. I suspect that Iceland would seek to have various opt-outs from the common fisheries policy, which various member states—including, no doubt, the UK and Scotland—would not be supportive of, for various reasons.

If that issue could be addressed and adjustments could be made, I suspect that the fisheries chapter could be closed relatively quickly, but for that to be the case Iceland would have to address the mackerel issue and I have yet to see how its fishermen would accept its doing that. At the moment, its fishermen are determined—against all scientific evidence—that the stock is being fished entirely sustainably.

Roderick Campbell: An opt-out from the CFP might be of interest to a hypothetical independent Scotland in negotiations after the referendum.

Ian Duncan: I imagine that it would be of interest to lots of member states with fish.

Jamie McGrigor: I just want to pursue what Hanzala Malik said about sanctions being the answer. Am I right in thinking that the problem is

with not just the mackerel but the whitefish from Iceland that are also landed in this country, which our processors depend on, and that any such sanctions would be fairly undesirable for our processing sector?

I understand that the suggested total allowable catch for mackerel is some 600,000 tonnes. If Iceland and the Faroes are now catching more than 30 per cent of that TAC when their allocation is only 5 per cent, surely the answer lies in redistributing the 25 per cent extra that is being caught between all the catchers. If that were done, they might not have to take such a big hit and, in that way, the problem could be resolved. Do you have a comment to make on that?

Ian Duncan: I will comment on the white-fish issue first. You will be aware that most of the cod that is eaten in the UK is caught in Icelandic waters and that much of it is landed and processed here.

In discussions in Brussels before Christmas, the directorate-general for maritime affairs and fisheries was of the view that it could still create a restriction that would focus primarily on a single species—the mackerel—rather than an expanded restriction. If there was a desire to be punitive, the restriction could be expanded beyond mackerel, but the fact that that would have a concomitant effect on processors in the UK remains the sticking point for the UK.

Jamie McGrigor mentioned redistribution. It is one of those devilish questions, because the total allowable catch is broadly what scientists believe can be taken from the sea while leaving enough fish to breed and create the next generation of fish—it is, therefore, based on the science—while the allocation of the total allowable catch is based on an allocation key.

You will be aware that the allocation key for the North Sea was set quite some time ago. It is literally a formula: once you have the total allowable catch, you plug in the formula and you can see exactly what the UK gets, what Scotland gets and what all the member states get. If you were to accept that 600,000 tonnes was a wrong figure and, indeed, should be 30 per cent higher, the application of the distribution key would mean that the EU and Norway would still get 95 per cent of it. The Faroes and Iceland would get a wee bit more, but not what they are currently harvesting.

The Faroes and Iceland argue that there should be a redrafting of the allocation key. At the moment, the EU position is that small adjustments can be made, but the Icelandic view is that small adjustments are inadequate to represent what they see as a fundamental change in the stock. Your notion is a sensible one in one regard, but it

is unlikely to find support in Norway or the Faroe Islands.

The Convener: I see in the “Brussels Bulletin” that the sweetener, aspartame, has been reviewed five times since it was authorised in 1994 and is up for review again. There are grave concerns about the impact that it has on health. Could you give us a wee update on the situation? What does the fact that it is being continually reviewed mean?

My next question does not concern something that is in the “Brussels Bulletin”, but perhaps you could bring something back to us in the next “Brussels Bulletin”. William Hague has produced the fresh start project’s manifesto, which contains the UK Government’s proposed position on renegotiation. There have been many conversations about what that means. I am specifically asking about the consequences of a withdrawal from the social charter for the working time directive, workers’ rights, equal pay, gender balance and so on.

I have grave concerns about the impact of a withdrawal from the social charter. I do not know whether you have a comment to make on that matter or whether you would like to bring something back to us in the next “Brussels Bulletin”.

Ian Duncan: I suggest that I bring something back to you. As you might remember, it was a big step when the UK signed up to the social chapter. There is no doubt that withdrawal from any of the areas would have a huge impact.

I suggest that, in collaboration with the Scottish Parliament information centre, we put together a short note on what the social chapter means and the consequences that might result from any adjustment. That might take a little too long to make it available at the next meeting, but we can bring it to you as quickly as possible.

I included the NutraSweet issue in the bulletin because it struck me as an interesting one. NutraSweet is an almost endemic sweetener, and yet there have been many reports that have said that there are issues around it, and people in the USA have been concerned about it. One of the good things is that the European Food Safety Authority is assiduous in this area and follows the research closely. It is trying to assess the safe limits for the use of aspartame and the right approach to its use.

The EFSA’s consultation closes on 15 February. It is likely to publish an interim review of the responses. When it does so, we can take a look at it and see exactly what it is saying. The next step will be dependent on that outcome and on the recommendations of the EFSA. Once we know what its view is, we will be in a better position to know what will happen next.

The Convener: Are members content to send the “Brussels Bulletin” to the relevant committees, drawing the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee’s attention to the item that was mentioned earlier?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Foreign Language Learning in Primary Schools Inquiry

10:24

The Convener: With us for item 2 on the agenda we have Dr Dan Tierney, who is a reader in language learning at the University of Strathclyde and is also a Hamiltonian; Brian Templeton, a reader in pedagogy policy and practice at the University of Glasgow; Professor Antonella Sorace, the professor of developmental linguistics at the University of Edinburgh; and Dr Judith McClure, the convener of the Scotland China education network.

I welcome you all to the committee and I thank you for your written evidence. We are tight for time, so we will go straight to questions.

Jamie McGrigor: Should all future primary school teachers have a languages qualification, as recommended by the Scottish Government languages working group? If so, at what level, and how feasible is such a proposal?

Brian Templeton (University of Glasgow): Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to be here to contribute to this important development. That question goes straight to one of the essential issues that we have to deal with in taking forward a national strategy in this way. If we hope to have a national strategy that offers equality of opportunity to pupils all around Scotland, we need to move to a position in which all primary teachers can contribute to that process, so they need to be trained to a certain level. I am conscious of how difficult it is to do that, because trying to staff primary 6 and 7 is a demanding challenge and training primary teachers who are heavily committed in trying to deliver the entire school curriculum to an age range stretching from nursery through to P7 is a demanding task. Fitting in a modern language is a very difficult thing to do.

I am not sure that having a higher qualification in a foreign language is particularly important. What we need to do in teacher education is to look specifically at what we want teachers to be able to do and give them the skills that will enable them to do it. My preference is that through initial teacher education we train primary teachers so that they can work with their own classes. One weakness of the current system is that it relies too much on drop-in teaching, whether that drop-in person is a visiting specialist or a drop-in teacher who is leaving their own primary class to teach someone else’s class. That is not a good model for learning languages well, because pupils need continuity and daily exposure to the language. We have to try to move to a position in which every primary

teacher can work in the foreign language with their pupils.

In their initial teacher education we could equip all teachers to tackle two areas. One is about making links between learning a foreign language and a first language and how the two help each other, so that we can use learning a foreign language to give pupils a second chance at improving literacy in their first language. There is also the cultural dimension and cultural awareness, which all primary teachers could deliver as part of interdisciplinary projects, as they currently do. The difficult area is the language competence, because we need the primary teachers to be able to model and expose the pupils to the foreign language on a daily basis—that will be difficult. In future, we should try to get all primary teachers to come out of their training with that level of competence in a language and also able to tackle those other two areas.

In addition to that, we need continuing professional development programmes to take some teachers to a higher level so that they could organise, co-ordinate, and give inputs in that foreign language and act as language champions within their schools. They would have responsibility for co-ordinating activities and for linking with outside agencies and bringing in parents—people who have an ability in the language—and trying to co-ordinate that. We need a two-tier approach. We would be embarking on a demanding, long-term and fairly expensive programme, but it is essential if we really want to make a difference. I am sorry that my answer was so long.

Jamie McGrigor: That is fine. I am particularly concerned about rural primary schools, which do not have so many teachers. Will you comment on how this will work in rural primary schools?

Will you also comment on which languages children should learn and how they should learn them? I asked our previous panel of experts about that, but I did not really get an answer. Are there any particular languages that children should be learning, and why should they learn those languages?

10:30

Dr Dan Tierney (University of Strathclyde): You are asking absolutely the right questions. We need to decide what our objectives are. Do we want our children to start learning Chinese at the age of five and be fluent in it 10 years later so that they can go and work in China, or export to China? Do we want our children to learn French because that is the language that most of our teachers already have? Should we continue with that? Do we want our children to learn little bits of

different languages to celebrate the diversity of the languages that we have in our community, with some Punjabi, some Arabic and so on? It is a question of what our objectives are. That must be the starting point, and that is why I am worried about the report, because I do not think that it gives a clear steer on that. I think that that is why you asked the question.

The other problem is about continuity. The research evidence from Scotland—my research, the research of Dr Gallastegi and that of others—shows that there are some problems with mismatches. You are absolutely right about rural schools. [*Interruption.*] I am glad that that was your mobile phone and not mine.

The fact that teachers move around is also a problem. A teacher in your constituency who has learned German, for example, might go for a promotion in another school. If the children in the other school are learning French, we have a mismatch and a problem with a lack of continuity. I am slightly concerned that that is not taken into account at present.

The question is what we want to achieve. That must be the starting point.

The Convener: Can we make sure that all electronic devices are off, please? They interfere with the broadcasting equipment, Jamie.

Jamie McGrigor: I am trying to get it to go off.

The Convener: Thank you.

Do other members of the panel have views?

Professor Antonella Sorace (University of Edinburgh and Bilingualism Matters): Thank you for inviting me to contribute to the committee's work. I am very pleased to be here. If the proposal is implemented, it will be a real turning point for Scotland. I am aware of all the difficulties, but what is proposed is much needed.

I will make two points. The first follows on from Jamie McGrigor's observations about which languages children should learn. Speaking from the point of view of a researcher on how language development takes place in children, I can tell you that any language can be good, potentially. I know that we are talking about planning and which languages could be useful for the country in the future, and those are important considerations, but I can tell you that having more than one language in the same brain is a fantastic advantage for all children as it really opens the mind and it provides children with greater mental flexibility. That is independent of which languages we are talking about. From that point of view, a minority language that is spoken only in certain areas, such as Gaelic, is as good as a very important and useful language such as Chinese.

My second point is about how difficult it might be to learn particular languages. If a child is young, no language is more difficult than others. Learning Chinese would be difficult for us as adult learners, but learning it through exposure to the spoken language would not be difficult for a young child. The difficulty of learning languages is another worry that I have sometimes heard mentioned, but it is not justified given the way in which children learn languages. Young children learn languages implicitly. They do not need to know the grammar. In fact, they learn better when they are not taught the grammar but are just exposed to the language.

As I think Dan Tierney states in his written submission, older learners certainly learn more efficiently in the sense that they can benefit from formal learning much more than younger learners can, but that is a different kind of learning. It would be a great shame not to take advantage of the real potential for learning languages naturally, through exposure, that exists in young children.

Dr Tierney: It is important to make the distinction between learning a language as the natural language in the home or community in the bilingual situation and learning a language in the classroom in primary 1 and primary 2, which is a different situation. Again, it is important to stress that the reference to ease of learning was about hearing and speaking a language. Obviously, other difficulties come into play when it comes to reading and writing a language. It is important to make the distinction between language acquisition, such as when a Polish child comes to Scotland and learns English fairly quickly, and language learning, such as a child going to school in Hamilton, say, and starting to learn Chinese at age five and continuing to learn it through to 15—that is a different scenario.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I just want to confirm that my understanding of the pedagogy of teaching languages is correct. Are the skills required to teach a particular language transferable to the teaching of other languages? Is it possible for a teacher to be taught how to teach languages in general, so that they can change from teaching German to teaching French or whatever?

Brian Templeton: Yes. The methodology is certainly common to the teaching of all modern European languages. We talk about communicative methodology, which is based on how children learn—or acquire—their first language. Undoubtedly, the best way in which to learn a second language is to replicate the way in which we learned our first language, which, as Antonella Sorace said, is easy to do because the child is in the right environment for it, is exposed to the language being used meaningfully and listens to models that they can then make their own.

As Dan Tierney said, though, we cannot replicate that in P1, unless we have Gaelic-medium types of school, which are hugely expensive and would be very difficult to replicate throughout Scotland, to say the least. However, we can learn from the process, which is what the communicative approach does by trying to replicate the process. That is why there is such an emphasis on listening before speaking, which is then followed by reading and writing to support that. That ensures that the child hears the language being modelled by the teacher so that they can then start to use it for themselves, then use it more accurately.

That is why the teacher must have competence and confidence in the language in order to provide the model for the learner. That is the difficult bit for primary teachers. However, the skills of the communicative approach are common to all the languages, so we could help all primary teachers work with that element.

In the curriculum for excellence framework, we have three key aims for modern languages: one is to look at the interconnected nature of languages to see how the process of learning a new language gives the young person the skills that they need to become a better learner and helps them reflect on their first language. As I said, that can improve literacy. There is also the cultural awareness and active citizenship aim, and the communicative competence. With the correct input we can train all primary teachers to achieve the first two key aims, then try to give them the skills to ensure that they can give the pupils daily exposure to the language—in classroom language and number games, for example—so that they hear the language on a day-to-day basis. If that can be topped up with more specialist input on a drop-in basis, it will be a more sustainable model.

There are still important decisions to make, however, about which languages we want the pupils to continue with and to what level. Obviously, such questions are for the implementation phase, but it is important that we raise them here so that they are looked at in depth in the next phase, because they are difficult questions to resolve.

Roderick Campbell: My question is for Dr Tierney, before we get too far away from the issue that he is talking about. If we assume that the objective is linguistic competence, can you clarify what your one-plus-one languages are? What languages should we deal with?

Dr Tierney: That is not really a decision for me.

Roderick Campbell: I appreciate that.

Dr Tierney: It depends on what we want to achieve as a nation, does it not? The easiest language to go for would be French. All children

could learn French as their first modern language because we have a lot of people in the teaching workforce who have been trained in that language and who have done it as a higher. The second language could be Spanish or German. In that way we would not have a mismatch in terms of continuity into secondary school. We have significant problems with the present model for the transition into secondary, so I wonder what problems we would have if children start learning another language in P1. People move around and we have transition problems, which is a difficulty. Other countries have a simple answer: English is carried through from primary into secondary school. Other countries have continuity, but that is an issue for us.

It could be that, for example, you decide that Gaelic should be the first language, if we are willing to invest money in training up everyone in Gaelic and all our children learn it. The second language could be one of various other languages, including community languages, such as Arabic and Punjabi and so on. We could go down that route, but that depends on what we are trying to achieve.

I have been in 150 schools in Scotland, partly for my research and partly in my role as national development officer. What concerns me is that although it is, of course, wonderful to hear a five year-old singing a song in Spanish or playing a game in Italian or whatever, we need continuity to build on that. When we talk about languages for business purposes—to get a job or compete with our competitors—that is different and will cost a lot of money, if that is what we are trying to achieve.

I keep coming back to objectives. What worries me is the lack of continuity in our classrooms and schools. I do not think that the evidence from my research on that has been taken properly into account. We need to solve that. It would be a good idea for the committee to go to some staff rooms and talk to teachers to hear their views on that. We have significant problems and it is important to recognise them.

Dr Judith McClure (Scotland China Education Network): I will continue with that point. What we are trying to achieve is to get over the fact that we are so hopeless at languages and have a fear of speaking them. My languages are in my head and I am terrified of saying something in case I make a mistake—I think that that goes for an awful lot of people.

We must not look on languages as something that you need to be perfect at and pass examinations in. We must become confident in communicating with other people. Brian Templeton is absolutely right: our difficulty is the fact that English is a world language, so we are confronted with a range of languages. That is part

of our rich history and cultural heritage, however, so the more that children are introduced naturally to languages at an early stage and feel that they can communicate, the better. Making mistakes does not matter. I am probably making all sorts of mistakes as I speak English to you, but so what? You are letting me do that because I am saying something to you. We must get that sort of approach.

As Brian Templeton said, we must give our primary teachers the confidence to use other native speakers. The teacher must lead in the classroom, but languages must be a natural part of what happens.

I agree that we must sustain things. It would be terrible to focus on only two languages. As you will recognise, I am partisan about Chinese, but I do not think that everybody ought to learn it. Rather, it ought to be accessible and open so that people can see that it can be learned. Language learning and communication can go on through life, so we must not be hung up on getting it perfect from the start. We need enthusiasm and the capacity to learn, as Antonella Sorace has shown in her work.

Professor Sorace: As a cognitive scientist, I can tell you that, if you want a child to grow up as a fluent speaker of a language, the issue of continuity arises. From the point of view of development, however, there is plenty of evidence that exposure to one language benefits another language. We should not be overambitious in the sense that we must not think that we need to get everything right and in place in order to change. Even discontinuous exposure to languages is beneficial. It has been proved that even a child who has a little bit of exposure to a language and is then exposed to a different language can transfer a number of skills from one language to the other. Language learning in one language benefits the other.

I agree with Judith McClure that we should be more enthusiastic about exposing children to languages as early as we can. At the same time, we must face the issue of which languages we want to invest in and ensure that children reach high levels in. However, I would not underestimate the effectiveness and usefulness of even discontinuous exposure to multiple languages at an early age.

The Convener: On that point, as we have talked a lot about teachers, let me bring in a question from Hanzala Malik, who wants to ask about the skills needed by teaching assistants and other support staff.

10:45

Hanzala Malik: I am interested in Dr Tierney's comments about talking to teachers during their

break times—if that was the phrase that he used—and what he has learned from speaking to headteachers and so on. Does the panel believe that existing teachers and teaching assistants have the necessary teaching skills and sufficient resources to teach languages? For example, Glasgow City Council's schools might be able to deal with up to 150 different languages, but not all cities in Scotland will have that option. Glasgow has a huge pool of people that it might be able to tap into, but that may not be the case in other parts of Scotland. Can the panel identify sources from which we might gather the resources necessary to provide our teaching staff with those skills? I absolutely agree that additional support needs to be provided, but how do we dovetail that into our existing education system in which most schools do not have staff with additional languages?

Dr Tierney: We already have quite a number of teachers who went through the modern languages in primary school training programme, for which I was national development officer. We put a lot of teachers through that national training programme. As the person responsible for the implementation of that, I subsequently travelled around the country, from Shetland to Stranraer, to see what was happening and to speak to teachers. I followed that up with research for my PhD. Based on that, I am aware that we have a lot of teachers with modern languages.

One issue that emerged from my research is the fact that both teachers and pupils can move around, so we will sometimes have a mismatch. One thought was that a modern language might be embedded into all P6 and P7 class lessons by ensuring that the P6 and P7 teacher was trained in that language. However, we found that headteachers did not want that to happen because they wanted to be able, after a couple of years, to move the P6 or P7 teacher down into P1 or P3 and did not want to lock her into P6 and P7. Because of those problems, we have instead had the swap-over model that Brian Templeton described earlier.

In my research and from talking to teachers, I also discovered that sometimes schools did not carry on with a language because the teacher with that language had left or was on maternity leave. That causes problems of continuity for secondary schools, because some children will arrive in secondary after learning the language for two years, others will arrive having learned it for only a few months and others will arrive having had just a language awareness-type programme of the sort that Antonella Sorace suggested—obviously, that is something that we could go for. However, what happens is that the secondary teacher says, "I need to make a fresh start because they are all at

different stages." It is important to speak to teachers about that.

It might be a welcome idea to bring in people who have the language in the community as a way of—this is an important point—assisting the teacher. I did a study visit to France, where an attempt has been made to use such people rather than use trained teachers. In one school, a lady who had lived for a while in Jersey was basically doing the teaching, but she did not know how to teach a language—she did not have the pedagogy—so in a way the children were more confused. That could do some harm. However, getting assistants and people from the local community to come in and work alongside the teacher would be great. That would be part of what Antonella Sorace described as a language awareness programme. That brings us back to the distinction that I made between linguistic competence and language awareness.

Dr McClure: We have an enormous resource in our universities in not only the students who are learning languages, but international students. We attract large numbers of international students, which is wonderful for us. Getting them to go into schools as enthusiastic volunteers is a low-cost solution. That widens access to higher education because the students talk about their experience in university, and it can introduce children to native cultures as well as native languages. The primary teacher leads the partnership. That has worked in quite a number of schools and it could work throughout Scotland if it were done properly. We need to go for low-cost solutions that use our existing resources. For example, we must not forget that the British Council's connecting classrooms schemes enables schools to connect, via the internet, with schools all over the world to which they can talk in other languages. There are many such resources around, but the partnership with universities is a key one.

Brian Templeton: As Judith McClure said, there are lots of resources for teaching and learning. We also have cultural organisations that provide an immense amount of help to primary and secondary teachers to take forward languages. There is a lot of potential for using native speakers who are with us, for example.

In addition, we still need to look at the primary teacher's competence to co-ordinate that work and make it work for the age and stage with which they are working. We also need to be clearer about the objectives. If we are aiming for a P1 start, the objectives in P1 will not be the same as the objectives in P6 and P7. In P1 to P3, we will be looking at experiential learning, structured play, exposure to the language and enjoyment, for example. We may not be too worried about the continuity in the language, but we will have to

narrow the choice at some point and say that, if we want people to get a recognised qualification and achieve a level of competence so that they can compete with European competitors, choices must be made about which language we want progression, continuity and qualifications in. At that point, we must consider what is currently happening in the curriculum for excellence for P6 to secondary 3 and beyond, and see what issues we need to address there, as there are quite a few serious issues to do with continuity and how people can get to a certain level.

Most European countries tend to have clear targets, or at least measures of attainment, with their programmes for people to work towards, which are often linked to the common European framework of reference. Therefore, there is an international equivalence in what is being looked for. For example, people will look to achieve by the end of their school career independent user level in the first language that they started and possibly basic user level in another language. Once we move away from the focus on the early stages and look at those parts, we must think about progression, continuity and sustainability in the number of languages that can be taken to that sort of level.

Hanzala Malik: Very valuable points have come out there about using students from the community and, most important, focusing on the standards that we hope to reach. That is the real crux of the matter. The most important issue must be whether, using all the various facilities that are available to us, we are reaching the standards or benchmarks that we have created for ourselves. First of all, we need to get to grips with what the benchmark is at the primary and secondary levels.

Using the universities and university students is exceptionally good, of course, because it focuses our young people on thinking about going to university rather than into any other career from the start, which in itself is very valuable.

I return to the point that Dr Tierney made about his experiences across Scotland. It is clear that there are gaps that we will be expected to fill. Could we carry out a scoping project to try to find out how we can bridge those gaps? Perhaps you could share your views on that with us today or, if not, give us an idea later of how we could bridge those gaps, as it is clear that there are gaps that need to be filled.

Dr Tierney: There are gaps. I want the proposals to succeed, but we have set quite ambitious targets in saying that we will start with P1 and carry right through with the same language and in talking about competing with our European competitors. That concerns me a little bit in light of the problems that we have already identified.

Again, it comes back to our needing to decide what our objectives are. If we could train all our teachers a little bit in different languages and to have language awareness—the kind of thing that Antonella Sorace and Judith McClure are talking about—that would be fine, as long as we realise that that is what we are trying to do. Then, continuity into secondary school does not matter so much. However, when we start to talk about competing with and exporting to Germany—there have been references to such things happening—we need to be realistic. That would need everybody to be doing the same language and having continuity. That could be done in a local cluster, but the problem is that we already have mismatches even in local clusters. In the Giffnock area, for example, teachers were trained to teach Italian in their primary school, but the secondary school then decided to stop teaching Italian. Then, teachers have to be retrained in French.

It is important to recognise that there will be such difficulties. Some committee members are shaking their heads, but it is true. There are a number of such issues, so it is important to recognise that this is complex. We must decide exactly what we are trying to do and have a coherent programme. To be honest, I am not sure that the teaching force is ready or that we are ready to start in P1. I have great concerns about that, based on where we are at the moment. It is a laudable idea, but I am not sure that we are there yet.

Dr McClure: I hate to say it, but I would like to see language learning starting at the age of three. I think that the age of three is a great time to start hearing other languages, taking part and singing—the earlier the better, really. By the time you get to the age of 11 or 12, fear has set in.

Professor Sorace: Attitudes.

Dr McClure: Yes, attitudes have set in.

The Convener: My colleague Clare Adamson and I are visiting a school tomorrow where I think they do a taster in languages from nursery level and then right through. It is in Eddlewood, not in Hillhouse—sorry, Dr Tierney.

Dr Tierney: That is all right. I know it well.

The Convener: On the point about expanding out, both Brian Templeton and Dr Tierney mentioned the European dimension. Clare Adamson has a question about comparing and contrasting the different approaches.

Clare Adamson: We have touched on the economic reasons for encouraging the learning of foreign languages—the Scottish Government paper estimates that the loss to the economy because of our lack of foreign language speakers is £500 million. Obviously, we do not have a

choice about having English as the initial language, but how does the proposed one-plus-two model compare to what is happening in the rest of Europe?

Dr Tierney: Most of Europe is going down the one-plus-two route in the sense that they have started with English. If you take Spain, which I know best of all, the children start English and then pick up another language—Basque or Catalan, or French or German perhaps—at a later stage, with an awareness of that language. However, there is continuity with English and their teachers are trained in English at university, so they have a high level of English competence. It is easier for them in that sense. That is the direction that most countries have gone in.

I worry about the economic argument, because we may say that we will focus on that, but then we have to come back to what Jamie McGrigor said—which language? If we want our 15-year-olds to come out fluent in French for example, that is fine—it can be done. It will cost a bit of money to get us there, but it can be done. However, there is that same old problem.

It is important to be aware of that difference between developing linguistic competence for economic reasons and developing language awareness together with cultural awareness, which would be totally possible as well and would not present the same problems with regard to continuity into secondary education. We are in a different situation from the rest of Europe and it is important that we identify our own objectives.

Professor Sorace: Yes, we are in a different situation—that is certainly true—but that is not an argument for delay. There are decisions to be made. We are partly different from other European countries.

I have here a British Council report on early language learning in Europe—the ELLIE report—which can be downloaded from the web. It is the result of a longitudinal study of seven European countries where languages are introduced in primary school. It is a very complete report, and it shows that language learning really works.

England was one of the places that were looked at and, relatively, England fares worse than the other countries.

The report is very complete though, and it shows how important all the issues that we have mentioned are: training teachers; making them aware of how languages are learned; making sure that they have the required levels of competence; and so on. At the same time it shows that in other countries, introducing languages early on works and pays off.

The comparative element is important. I am organising an event here at the Scottish Parliament where representatives from four European countries will talk about the language learning situation. It is on Monday 4 February, from 6 pm to 8 pm. The context will be the one-plus-two proposal—Simon Macaulay will summarise it—but there will also be speakers from other countries who will present evidence. It will be an excellent opportunity to compare experiences.

It seems to me that the point is that although English is the world language and decisions have to be made about which other languages should be taught, we should act quickly, because it is true that this country faces a huge loss, including in economic terms. I have been invited by the *Financial Times* to speak, on 15 February, about the disadvantages of monolingualism for Britain. The business world—the private sector—is acutely aware of the problem, so something must be done.

11:00

Dr McClure: We must also take into account the fact that not everyone needs to get a higher level qualification in languages. Many different levels of qualification in languages are available from the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Quite frankly, having an access 3—national 3—qualification at least means that someone can communicate in a language. Having such a qualification would mean that people who work in hospitality and in our shops could communicate with visitors from abroad, with people who are domiciled here and with our own community in other languages. As we all know, that is not happening at the moment. In many areas of our economy, we are not communicating in other languages even at the most basic level.

We ought to encourage all pupils to make a choice of languages in their secondary education and to keep those languages going. In the longer term, I hope that future teachers will have a higher in a language; they and others should be encouraged to do so. However, languages at all levels matter. People must be confident enough to have a go.

Jamie McGrigor: We heard from Professor Sorace that she considers all languages to be important. I agree. She mentioned Gaelic, for example.

Dr McClure made the point that she wants the children to make a choice. Is there any evidence on which is the easiest language to learn?

Dr McClure: I do not think that that is the question. For children who are introduced to other languages at the age of three, I do not think that

one language is easier than another, as Professor Sorace said.

Jamie McGrigor: Is there a big difference between vocabularies of different languages in terms of the number of words?

Dr McClure: I do not think that that is the case.

Professor Sorace: No. Computationally—if you calculate the number of words—I do not know what the situation is, but from the point of view of a young child who learns a language, there is no difference between learning Chinese, learning Gaelic and learning French. I am obviously not talking about the written language or literacy; I am talking about natural exposure to the spoken language. In that regard, all languages are equal for a child's brain.

Jamie McGrigor: Okay; I accept that, but for someone who has already learned English, what is the easiest language to learn?

Professor Sorace: You are right to ask. It is an interesting question, but one that becomes more relevant with age. It is highly relevant to an adult language learner. I work in adult language learning, where that question is extremely important. For an English native speaker, certain languages are much easier than others.

Jamie McGrigor: Which ones?

Professor Sorace: Languages that belong to the same typological family and which share cognates and vocabulary.

Dr Tierney: She does not want to say Italian, but Italian is probably one of the easier ones to learn.

Professor Sorace: Everyone knows that Italian is a friendly language, but for a three-year-old child which language to start with is much less of a problem than it is later on in life. That is a very good reason for sensitising children as early as possible to the existence of other languages, to the sounds of other languages and to the fact that words are different in other languages. A child who knows that a pencil in English is a *matita* in Italian has an advantage. They know that other people have different points of view and that the object is not naturally called a pencil, because in another language it has a different name. That opens the mind and makes children more sensitive and more understanding of other people's points of view and perspectives, so there are advantages outside language that we must take into account.

Roderick Campbell: I detect from Professor Sorace and Dr McClure an enthusiasm for starting languages at a young age and in an informal way. Are there benefits in or problems arising from the transition from that kind of informal approach to more formal learning?

Professor Sorace: Having a background in the spoken language will help a lot in acquiring literacy in that language. After all, how do native children acquire literacy? They start to read only after they have developed a lot of spoken competence. However, many foreign language learners start by speaking and reading at the same time, which means that they do not have the benefit of being able to base their reading on that kind of spoken competence. Exposure to the spoken language is definitely an advantage.

Individual differences to do with, for example, individual cognitive profiles, histories and socioeconomic backgrounds again play an important role and become much more visible later when people start to learn a language in a more formal and structured way by learning grammar and so on. However, such differences are much less visible in younger children. To me, that is a very strong reason for exposing young children to languages as early as possible.

Dr McClure: There seems to be an assumption that, for children in secondary school, languages only happen for four periods every week. Instead, we should look at language as a subject that follows curriculum for excellence and goes across the whole curriculum. Children should listen to languages being spoken all the time; in geography, they should connect with other schools abroad; they should have assemblies in different languages; and foreign visitors who speak different languages should come into schools. Language should be a part of what we offer.

Willie Coffey: I want to broaden the discussion by asking what I hope will be two questions, depending on the time that we have. First, how do we encourage our families—in other words, the parents of young Scottish children—to assist in all of this? I would guess that parents of children in other European countries have another language while parents of Scottish children do not. How can we assist parents at home to participate in this exciting programme of bringing languages into our primary schools?

Professor Sorace: Speaking as someone who now has extensive experience of communicating with families not just in Scotland but elsewhere, I think that you make an extremely important point. It is absolutely necessary for families to support children in language learning but, in order to do that, they should have the right information about how languages are learned.

As someone engaged in the dissemination of information, I can tell the committee that I do this all the time and, indeed, have a public engagement service that allows me to talk to families at all levels from recently arrived immigrants to very highly educated and wealthy families. Given that there can often be

misunderstanding about, wrong expectations of and prejudices against early bilingualism, it is important to provide people with the right information.

That sort of thing is certainly possible; indeed, I have been doing this for some time now and am very optimistic about it. If the right information is provided at the right level, parents become very supportive and enthusiastic and can support their children. Children do not have negative attitudes to start with; instead, they absorb them from their families and the world around them. As a result, we have to act not only on families but on schools and the environment itself. We must ensure that people can make informed decisions based on correct information about how languages are learned and, as academics, we have a special responsibility in that respect.

That is related to Dr McClure's point about the involvement of universities in the enterprise. Universities can have a huge impact from this point of view, too, by bridging the gap between what comes out from research and what people actually think. A lot of good work can be done in that regard, which in my experience is very effective.

Dr McClure: Just to add to that, languages are a wonderful way of engaging parents in the life of the school. For example, parents love to come to take part in and see performances in other languages. As Antonella Sorace said, if they have the right information, they can also engage in languages at home. That is particularly the case if the school makes efforts to give them opportunities to do that and communicates what it is doing.

Dr Tierney: I have no problem with what has been described with regard to children having an awareness and a taste of different languages, but the important point again is what our objective is and what we are spending money to achieve. For example, is it that the children just have something to do with a festival in China, a festival here or a festival there? Is it that kind of language awareness?

On the point about parental engagement, about 20-odd years ago I was on Radio Scotland in the morning talking to Colin Bell about a lack of national motivation for learning languages, and just recently I was again on Radio Scotland talking about the same thing. The problem is that simply because of the dominance of English, we do not have the requirement to learn another language. Therefore, we must get over that, which is a big issue. I totally agree that we really need to convince parents that languages are important.

Willie Coffey: Thanks for that. What are your opinions about science students engaging with

languages? I am talking about kids in the later years of secondary school who may want to go into science or engineering as a career, and the importance of combining that with learning a language. My experience was of choosing a science route and excluding learning a language from that because I did not think that it was necessary. However, the evidence that we have heard today shows that it is increasingly important for graduates, particularly in science and engineering, to have had a modern language as part of their school curriculum. Is there sufficient flexibility in current curriculum arrangements to enable science and engineering students to learn a foreign language?

Dr McClure: If I was not sitting here, I would start to cheer at this point because I could not agree with you more.

Willie Coffey: Cheer if you like.

Dr McClure: I think that it is vital that people keep languages going. We must remember, though, that someone who is doing science and engineering may not want to study the literature of another language but may just want to communicate and read in that language. We must take account of that. There are now degrees in, for example, Heriot-Watt University in interpreting, which are not about literature but about interpreting. We need that sort of approach in schools, too.

We have just got to make it happen. We must see the importance of language learning and convey the message that to succeed in the world in the 21st century, Scotland must enable its young people to be able to communicate in other languages and people must feel that they can learn languages later in life and not just when they are at school. Certainly, it is vital that pupils going in the science and engineering direction have some communication skills in other languages.

Brian Templeton: I agree with that view. However, there are problems for language learning in the secondary school at the moment, which are linked to staffing and timetabling decisions that sometimes make it quite difficult for students to get the subject combinations that they want. It is partly to do with curriculum for excellence moving in and schools looking at timetabling and how many subjects they can offer.

Therefore, there are areas that could become a blockage to a lot of desirable things happening. My feeling is that we need to look at such areas carefully as well as look at starting language learning in primary 1. At the moment, I feel that there is a slight danger that if we do not look at some of the issues that need to be addressed further up and simply look at the P1 start, we will store up problems for later on. There are issues

that need to be resolved. That should not preclude having an early start for children's exposure to another language. However, if part of the language strategy is to put some emphasis on progression, continuity, sustainability and qualifications, we need to look at some of the blockages that might prevent those or that are causing difficulties at the moment.

Hanzala Malik: I want to make a point about interpreting. The University of Glasgow also provides that service. We are rich in that regard as we have some good facilities in Scotland; it is just a matter of taking them up.

11:15

Dr Tierney: I absolutely agree with the point about science. I want us to do better in languages because I want the students at my university who are engineers to have another language when they go abroad. That is certainly an aim, but it is important to consider how we get there. I do not want a child to start in P1 with one language, have a gap in P2, have a bit of discontinuity, get to P6 and P7, then go to secondary school and choose a language or follow a language only to find that the teacher is going over the same ground again. We must not have that lack of coherence and lack of sustainability. It is important that we get this right. Brian Templeton is right to say that we have problems with the upper stage of primary and that we need to get those fixed before we start going down to P1.

The Convener: Helen Eadie will come in on the issue of continuity and expand that point a wee bit more.

Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): Before I do that, I want to ask another question. I have been fascinated and intrigued by everything that I have heard this morning, and enthused as well. I drive across Europe every year and I go through all the countries all the way down to Bulgaria, so I am very interested in the subject.

Only last night, I chaired a meeting—in this room—of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on industrial communities, which focused on unemployment in communities across Scotland. We spoke to the skills minister, Angela Constance, and we talked about the fact that some 90,000 young people—16 to 24-year-olds—are unemployed at present, which is a dreadful situation. We have had that for decades; it is not just the responsibility of this Government.

The reality is that there are jobs in places such as Germany and other countries. Although there has been some contraction there, there are jobs. We heard only this week on the radio that Spanish people are going there by the dozen and getting programmes of language training—six hours every

day—so that they can have jobs in construction. While there are opportunities for us as a country, there are also opportunities for our young people to go anywhere in the world. As MSPs, we meet people from all walks of life and we also hear about the business opportunities that exist.

There are 27 countries, I believe, in the EU. Has there been an audit of the universities in Scotland to ensure that we are teaching a language for each of those countries in our universities?

Dr McClure: My guess would be that the answer is absolutely not. Our universities need to work together more coherently on these major issues that affect the whole country.

Helen Eadie: Could an audit of which languages are taught in Scotland's universities be done relatively easily?

Dr McClure: Surely.

Brian Templeton: An audit should be relatively easy to do. Dealing with the results might be more difficult.

Helen Eadie: Okay.

I return to the question that I should have asked you. Throughout our discussion, we talked about continuity through primary school and into secondary school. Would you like to say anything further about how we can improve capacity to ensure that the curriculum accommodates greater language teaching?

Brian Templeton: There has to be close liaison between primary and secondary. In the pilot model when modern languages in primary schools started, we had a cluster arrangement whereby the secondary worked closely with the feeder primaries and it delivered most of the training on a drop-in basis. As I said, I do not favour the drop-in method. We need the teacher who works with the class every day to be able—eventually—to do it. However, there has to be really close liaison between primaries and the secondary.

We also need to look at such provision from the primary teacher's perspective. Primary teachers are under a lot of pressure to deal with all the demands of the curriculum for excellence. For many of them, modern languages form a relatively small part of their remit. We need to find a way in which to support them, both through outside training and through having someone in the school who is trained to a higher level—as I mentioned earlier, they could be called a languages champion—and who takes a lead role in co-ordinating the work and organising parents evenings and links with schools abroad. In that way, there will be someone who is driving the work forward.

I read in the *Official Report* of your previous meeting about the school that you visited and its inspirational headteacher. That shows the difference that a really good teacher can make. At the end of the day, the best and most important resource in teaching is the quality of the interaction between the teacher and the pupil, particularly in modern languages, where the teacher is modelling the language for them. It is really important that we take those teachers with us and that we look at it from their perspective.

The Convener: We have mentioned that headteacher who was inspirational and motivated, and who was a bit of a positive ion in her staff group. Do headteachers need more support to enable them to take on that leadership role, or is it a question of harnessing a natural ability that is already there?

Dr Tierney: They need more support to do that.

Dr McClure: I think that they need to be empowered. They often feel that they are controlled too much. The inspirational behaviour that you described would be much more evident in other schools if headteachers were given the opportunity to do things for themselves, link up with one another and find their own natural partners. There needs to be experimentation, innovation and excitement.

Interestingly, as you noted, when the headteacher was asked what she wanted in terms of resources, she said:

“a wee bit of money”.—[*Official Report, European and External Relations Committee*, 10 January 2013; c 801.]

We are not talking about vast sums. We need to look at the resources that we have.

Dr Tierney: Whether we are talking about vast sums or not depends on what we are trying to achieve. We could be talking about vast sums. It is important to recognise that.

Helen Eadie: There are three parts to my last question.

First, should this transition be managed by a local authority strategy or a national strategy?

Secondly, you have talked about schools linking up through computers with schools abroad. Could you tell us about good examples of that?

Thirdly, I am a huge enthusiast for Italy and Sicily, because my best friend is Sicilian—a famous novelist; I will speak to you afterwards about her. I was especially interested to read in our briefing papers about the project that Professor Sorace is undertaking on bilingual families, which exposed Scottish children aged between three and seven, and their parents, to a new European language over a 12-month period. Could you tell us a little more about that?

Professor Sorace: The project has just been completed. We were one of five partners. Each country had to recruit 25 monolingual families. As you said, the children and the parents were exposed to a different language. They were provided with plenty of materials in a method that has been validated and widely tested all over Europe. Children are provided with engaging materials and hear the same story in different formats and modes—songs, books, videos, acting out, puppetry and so on. The families were followed for about a year, and were tested before and after their participation.

The project was successful, overall. I was interviewed on Scottish radio about it and was asked whether it is true that Scots are bad language learners. I do not think that that is true at all. We had the highest number of families who left the project in the middle, compared with other European countries. However, that was not because Scots are bad language learners but because they do not have the same motivation for their children to learn languages. That is what I was saying before. To get parents on board, we have to give them the correct information.

Scottish people are as good as anyone else at learning languages, but they often do not know that they are. They have a problem with confidence, partly because of the status of English. Therefore, we have to encourage them when they are very young to understand that there are many different languages and that they are fun to learn. As you were saying, awareness is important. It has benefits with regard to actual language learning and acquisition of confidence and brings real language competence in the longer run.

The project was useful in that it made us aware of the differences in attitudes in various countries. The families who completed the project did well. They are very happy and would like to continue with it. Unfortunately, we cannot do so at the moment.

Dr Tierney: Antonella Sorace has dealt with your third question, so let me deal with your first question, which was on whether there should be a national strategy or a local strategy. That is a crucial question.

A crucial aspect of that is which language is taught. To take an example that the convener will know well—I am a Hamilton man, but Motherwell is not that far away—let us imagine that North Lanarkshire Council goes for a policy of requiring all children to learn Chinese from P1 and French from P5 but South Lanarkshire Council goes for a different policy. You can already see the problems that would be caused by that mismatch of languages, but that is not addressed in the report. However, there is evidence of problems being

caused by having everything done at local level. Either we go for a national strategy and do everything together, or we leave it to local strategies and have the problem of mismatch. Antonella Sorace said that pupils learning a language at an earlier stage will be more enthusiastic later, but that will not be the case if they are going over the same ground in S1 that they covered with their primary teacher. That is another issue that we need to address.

The Convener: We are really tight for time—

Helen Eadie: We missed an answer to my second question.

Brian Templeton: I will quickly answer the middle question, which was on linking schools here with schools abroad. I think that that is an excellent idea. I was heavily involved in the curriculum for excellence development in modern languages, and part of that was identifying good practice. If there is one thing that every primary and secondary school in Scotland should do, it is to get involved in e-twinning whereby they make a direct link with another school, or other schools, abroad. That immediately gives a context or relevance for the learning and brings it alive. The whole community can get involved and parents are brought in, too.

An excellent example is the Sir E Scott school in the Western Isles, which has a link with a Breton school with which it has a Celtic connection, if you like, through the link between Breton and Gaelic. That started with the modern languages department, but the whole school and then the whole community became involved when a group from Brittany came across. That is an excellent example of putting into practice all the curriculum for excellence principles: relevance, enjoyment, challenge and so on. That is certainly a great idea. In fact, we need to explore how the whole area of information and communication technology can motivate learners and bring languages alive for them.

The Convener: We are down to our last three minutes, so I will allow Rod Campbell only a quick supplementary question.

Roderick Campbell: I have a quick supplementary for Dr McClure on the issue of transition between primary and secondary. Your written submission refers to the possibility of

“imaginative local partnerships, not necessarily organised by local authorities.”

Can you expand briefly on that?

Dr McClure: Schools ought to work in partnership with each other on the languages that they teach and they should try to arrange their timetables to make that possible. All kinds of things are happening, sometimes led by students.

Some students who want to learn Chinese are finding ways of doing that by, for example, going off to the Confucius Institute. We should let people do that without feeling that we need a lockstep approach all the way through.

We cannot afford not to do this. When China decided in 2001 that all its primary schools should teach English, only 5 per cent of its schools taught the language. Four years later, the figure was 64 per cent. We cannot do that. We can have strategic direction, but we cannot have that level of control. We need the strategic direction—I think that the report gives us that—and then local possibilities through which enthusiastic headteachers can find partners to bring things about. When it comes down to it, we are not talking about myriad languages.

Roderick Campbell: Thank you.

The Convener: A quick final question is on whether we access and use EU funds appropriately. From my meeting with the National Union of Students yesterday, I am aware that its international department is involved in running a language ambassadors programme in which young people are encouraged to use Erasmus to study abroad. Do we use EU funding properly? What are your thoughts on the use of Erasmus?

Brian Templeton: This is not my area of expertise, but I am conscious that our university tends to experience one-way traffic, in that many European students come to us but we find it difficult to get our students, once they actually think it through, to take up the opportunity. That comes back to a lack of competence or confidence in other languages. Unless the subjects operate mainly in English or include a strong English element, the students are very reluctant to go. Therefore, I do not think that we are accessing the funding that should be available. We need to look at how we support our students on that if we are to make that step forward.

The Convener: We have an on-going inquiry into EU funding, so that ties into our other work.

Do members of the panel have any quick final points? We need to finish in a matter of seconds.

Dr Tierney: My appeal is that you speak to the teachers, not just in the two possibly star schools that you are due to visit. Why not go down and have a cup of tea with the teachers over their lunch break to see how they feel about it? It is very important that we carry the teaching workforce with us. Teachers are aware of the complexities involved and they are under pressure from other parts of the curriculum. Ideally, we want this to happen, but I just wonder whether teachers are ready for it to start in P1.

The Convener: That is really good advice, which we may take up.

I thank you all for attending the meeting. We have looked at a lot of arguments and you have given us a lot of light. If, afterwards, there is anything that you think you should have said, we would be happy to hear from you again in writing as that will help to inform our deliberations for our report. Thank you very much.

That closes the meeting. Our next meeting is on 7 February.

Meeting closed at 11:30.

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