



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Tuesday 25 April 2017

Session 5



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Tuesday 25 April 2017

CONTENTS

	Col.
FUTURE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION.....	1

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE
11th Meeting 2017, Session 5

CONVENER

*Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con)

Mairi Evans (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)

*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

Rachael Hamilton (South Scotland) (Con)

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP)

*Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Martine Bisenius (European Union Society, University of Edinburgh)

Heather Cameron (Scottish Youth Parliament)

Lara Carmena (East Lothian Youth Council)

Maddie Chambers (East Renfrewshire Youth Forum)

David Chipakupaku (Voice of My Own)

Maximilian Kriz (European Union Society, University of Edinburgh)

Lauren O'Keefe (Consulate General of France, Edinburgh)

Kirsty Smith (East Renfrewshire Youth Forum)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Katy Orr

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Tuesday 25 April 2017

[The Convener opened the meeting at 13:02]

Future Relationship with the European Union

The Convener (Joan McAlpine): Good afternoon and welcome to the 11th meeting in 2017 of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee. I remind everyone to switch their mobile phones to silent, and any members who are using electronic devices to access committee papers should ensure that those are switched to silent, too. We have received apologies from Richard Lochhead and Tavish Scott.

Today, the committee will have a round-table discussion with young people to explore Scotland's future relationship with the European Union. I welcome all our attendees, who have joined us from a wide range of youth groups across Scotland. I understand that you have spent the morning discussing in detail Scotland's future relationship with the EU and the issues that you consider to be most relevant. The participants were separated into four groups, each of which was allocated one of the following topics: the economy; education; the environment; and human rights. Two representatives from each group have kindly agreed to speak on behalf of their groups in our evidence session this afternoon.

It is my pleasure to welcome Kirsty Smith and Maddie Chambers from East Renfrewshire youth forum, whose group was focused on the economy. We also have Martine Bisenius and Maximilian Kriz from the EU society at the University of Edinburgh, whose group focused on education issues; Heather Cameron of the Scottish Youth Parliament and Lauren O'Keefe from the French consulate, who have been discussing the environment; and, finally, David Chipakupaku of Voice of My Own and Lara Carmena of the East Lothian youth council, whose group looked at human rights. Thank you all very much for agreeing to participate on behalf of your groups.

Before we consider in more detail the specific areas that you discussed, I begin by asking all the participants to share with the committee their groups' thoughts on how the negotiations have progressed since the EU referendum result.

Perhaps the representatives of the economy group would like to begin.

Maddie Chambers (East Renfrewshire Youth Forum): In relation to the negotiations and, indirectly, the referendum, a lot of individuals in our nation are extremely uninformed—or perhaps have been misinformed due to the biased media. Another problem that we felt has not been dealt with in relation to the negotiations is access to information.

Kirsty Smith (East Renfrewshire Youth Forum): Our group felt that not enough information was published to allow the public to make a sound and informed decision on what way to vote in the referendum. On top of that, we see that politicians and Government are not informed enough to make a sound decision on what to propose and what to do. We feel that we have not had the level of publication regarding negotiations on Brexit that we would have hoped for in order for people to be informed in making decisions on what they are supposed to do.

The Convener: We now move to the education group.

Maximilian Kriz (European Union Society, University of Edinburgh): Our group believed that students are already under a lot of pressure because of academic work and having to find a job, and some students are suffering from those pressures. Indeed, the uncertainties surrounding Brexit and the negotiations—or pre-negotiations—so far with regard to issues such as funding, the Erasmus programme and opportunities in the labour market have only increased the pressure on students.

Martine Bisenius (European Union Society, University of Edinburgh): It is important to give young people a voice in the Brexit negotiations or in talks about Brexit, because it is mainly their future that is at stake. After all, it is young people who will be most affected by Brexit.

The Convener: Does the human rights group want to comment on the negotiations so far?

Lara Carmena (East Lothian Youth Council): Our main concern with the negotiations since the referendum has been about the level of insecurity and uncertainty surrounding our futures. We have concerns about employment opportunities, education, university, studying abroad and travelling. For example, will we need to get visas for all those things? Those concerns might not be real, but nobody has clarified for us what is going to happen.

David Chipakupaku (Voice of My Own): Another issue that was raised was the underrepresentation of a wide range of people among those who are going to speak to the

European Union about how we Brexit. A lot of the people who have been going to speak to the EU have been older, white, male, heterosexual and able bodied, which means that a wide variety of people in this country have not had full representation in the negotiations.

Lauren O’Keefe (Consulate General of France, Edinburgh): We are concerned about how young people will be represented in the negotiations, given that over three quarters of young people voted to remain in the EU. There is consistent talk of a hard Brexit, but the vote was split almost 50:50, so why is it not a soft Brexit? Who is representing the remainers?

Heather Cameron (Scottish Youth Parliament): There was concern about what Brexit actually means, which I think is something that we are all asking ourselves. The fact that many young people could not actually vote and that the terms of Brexit are to be decided only by politicians and not in a democratic way frustrated many young people in our group. The young people also expressed concerns about Theresa May wanting unity in Westminster, when actually we need opposition to have a better discussion of what Brexit actually means. The young people who could not vote in the referendum cannot necessarily vote in the upcoming election, so there is a lack of engagement with young people in that respect.

The Convener: Thank you for those useful opening comments. As we are rather tight for time—we need to finish this session before Parliament’s plenary session opens at 2 pm—I will move straight to asking you to address us about your particular topic areas, starting with the economy group.

Kirsty Smith: On trade, our group felt that organisations will start to pull out of the United Kingdom, which will have a knock-on effect on its worth and its ability to make money and thrive as an economy. We felt that we would not want the UK to go for a hard Brexit, which another group touched on, because of the 50:50 split in votes for and against. We also felt that not being part of the single market in trade deals, with movement of people, products and goods, was not the right course of action for our economy.

With regard to movement of people, we also heard from EU citizens who currently live in the UK. A lot of them—and we have a real-life example with us today—have had ideas for starting up organisations in the UK; however, they now feel a great amount of uncertainty because, as we have said, there has been a lack of publicising these matters in the media to enable them to make informed decisions.

My partner in the group will now touch on some more issues.

Maddie Chambers: Going back to the idea of the individual, I think that what we see right now is a security blanket structure for freedom of movement as far as the UK and EU membership are concerned. We do not see that in other countries. Indeed, there is a desire to work or travel in the EU that we do not see with places such as America, because of the lack of safety in relation to visas and other issues.

We see that assurance as vital to UK principles. If we take away that security blanket, we lose business prospects, as those individuals will feel happier and safer returning to their home countries to start businesses and to study. That will detract from the UK and its economy, as we will lose the prospects presented by individuals who have new ideas and who can bring new skills to our nation as a whole. We see that as being extremely detrimental to our economy as far as freedom of movement is concerned.

Kirsty Smith: On top of that, we discussed the creative industries and the EU funding that goes into them. We felt that leaving the EU would have a knock-on effect on organisations and further careers, not only for UK citizens but for EU citizens studying in the UK, given that a lot of these industries are heavily funded by the EU. We see the loss of that funding as a disastrous step that might mean less creativity in young people’s careers, choices and opportunities.

The Convener: Thank you. I will now open the discussion up to committee members, who might have some specific questions for you.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): I am interested in the point about people from EU countries who had plans to set up organisations in the UK or who were thinking of doing so. Am I right in taking that to mean business-type organisations?

Kirsty Smith: Yes.

Lewis Macdonald: Can you say, then, what the impact on them will be? You said that people are now having to think twice because they do not have the information that they need. Is there a particular area where information could be made available earlier—when it really matters—to enable people to make those decisions?

Kirsty Smith: I would definitely highlight the area of trade. Businesses obviously work for profit; if, as a result of a hard Brexit, we are no longer in the single market, they will have no idea what the trading schemes with EU countries will be like, and lots of them will not take the risk of not making enough of a profit to thrive.

Lewis Macdonald: So your concern is really around trade. Do citizens' rights—in other words, the rights of people to do such things—come into this, too?

Maddie Chambers: The human rights aspect definitely comes into the economy, given how the economy affects the individual. We see that as a mutual relationship, in that the country and individuals who are native to the UK—or EU nationals—have assets that they use to provide for each other. We feel that the UK provides individuals with a high-quality education, safety and security, and those individuals provide us with new skills and assets. We feel that that relationship is very beneficial.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Is there an impression that Scotland and the United Kingdom currently have a welcoming business culture, but with Brexit that will change?

Kirsty Smith: Can you repeat the question, please, so that I can get it in my head?

13:15

Stuart McMillan: Sure. Currently, is there an impression that Scotland and the UK have a welcoming business culture that is open to opportunities for non-UK nationals?

Kirsty Smith: Yes, I definitely think so.

Stuart McMillan: With Brexit, though, will that be challenged?

Kirsty Smith: That is what we are saying. It will definitely be challenged, because the security blanket that we have spoken about is being removed. The many young people who come to university here from, say, America and who therefore must have visas can often feel under threat and put mental pressure on themselves to work hard in their education so that they do not get knocked back. Brexit will have a knock-on effect on the mental states of EU citizens who come here to learn and be educated, because it is an added pressure on young people that is simply not needed.

The Convener: Perhaps the group that is considering education issues will go next.

Maximilian Kriz: First and foremost, our group recognised the importance of education, especially higher education because, nowadays, you more or less need a degree if you want to succeed or, at least, to have an edge in a competitive job market. That importance puts a lot of pressure on students and on their health, including their mental health—pressure that is even higher because of the uncertainties of Brexit.

More or less all of us in our group have benefited from the advantages of EU membership.

Scottish students benefit from the Erasmus programme, from EU funds and from diversity in the classrooms. International students such as Martine Bisenius and I get to study in Scotland. However, we discussed several concerns regarding the pressure that is now on young people.

Martine Bisenius: I will outline some of those concerns.

One of the main concerns is the Erasmus programme, which benefits many students. People can learn languages and social skills through an Erasmus programme. For example, Scottish students can go abroad and learn another language, while European students can come here and experience Scottish culture. We fear that, if the Erasmus programme is stopped for UK nationals, that cultural exchange will be lost. The Erasmus programme also represents an opportunity for Scottish students who could otherwise not afford to do so, to go abroad. The Erasmus fund provides around €400 a month for people to study abroad. The scrapping of the Erasmus programme is a major concern for people in our group and students in general.

Another issue is EU funding for research at universities. There are many world-class Scottish universities but, apparently, there are already fewer people who are willing to come and do research in UK universities because of the uncertainty about funding. Research funding might be stopped, which is a concern especially for smaller universities that might have less funding. A lot of research might not be able to be carried out.

There is also EU funding for education programmes in regions such as the Highlands and Islands—there is one called outward bound. There is a question whether that funding will be replaced by UK or Scottish funding but, until that happens, there is a question whether and how such programmes will survive after Brexit.

For EU students coming to Scottish universities after Brexit, the questions are whether they will have to pay tuition fees and whether their degrees will be recognised outside the UK. Currently, the Bologna process means that all EU degrees have the same standing, but nobody knows how that will develop in the future.

Lastly, EU students who are studying in Scotland or the UK are concerned about whether they will be allowed to stay after Brexit, whether they will need a visa in future and whether they will be able to get a job here.

Now we have some recommendations.

Maximilian Kriz: I very briefly want to give the committee some recommendations that our group deems important. First, we want the Erasmus

programme and funding for not only research but student support to be secured. We hope that young people will be given more of a voice in the negotiations through, for example, consultations with think tanks such as the Scottish Youth Parliament, although we appreciate that this particular event marks a very important step in engaging young people in the Brexit debate.

We also recommend a commitment to the continuation of free higher education for EU nationals, because that is what attracts many to Scotland. That, in turn, boosts the economy, because they bring a lot of money with them. Finally, we deem it important that mental health services be improved for students suffering from the pressures of higher education, which have increased because of Brexit.

The Convener: Thank you very much. Perhaps I can start the questions for your group by going back to the point about the beneficial effects on the Scottish economy of EU students studying at Scottish universities. Do you or your group know of many examples of EU students staying in Scotland after they graduate in order to set up businesses or even to start families and make a life for themselves? Evidence that the committee has taken suggests that demography is one of the big challenges facing Scotland and that we need more young people living and working here. Has free tuition for EU students at Scottish universities helped that process?

Maximilian Kriz: Speaking from personal experience and from the experience of my international student friends studying in Scotland, I know that many of them stay in the UK—especially London, which is a kind of sponge that takes in a lot of students from Scotland and international students who studied in Scotland. However, many stay in Scotland, mostly in the big cities of Edinburgh, Glasgow and perhaps Aberdeen. The policy in Scotland of free higher education for EU nationals is very attractive, because it means getting a high-class education that you would not get at a low cost.

Martine Bisenius: When I came to the UK as an EU student, I thought at first, “Perhaps afterwards I’ll stay, get a job and make a life here.” However, with the uncertainty of what is going to happen over the next few years with Brexit, a lot of my friends from the EU are now saying that they are going back. After all, you do not want to settle down and then, in a few years’ time, be told that you have to leave.

The Convener: Thank you very much.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): In your opening remarks, you talked about our potentially not being able to attract as many students from the rest of the EU into our universities in the first

place. In other words, the issue is not just the insecurity of those who are currently here but the ability to persuade anyone else to come and study. Indeed, I have already seen that for myself; when I spoke to a visiting Austrian high school group, I discovered that two who had been thinking of applying were seriously reconsidering, because of Brexit. You said that we could make some policy changes or clarify, say, funding issues, but what can we do with the overall message to young people elsewhere in Europe to persuade them that they would be more than welcome to come, live, study in and contribute to this country? How can we get that message out?

Maximilian Kriz: Off the top of my head, I cannot think of a specific policy that could be changed. Perhaps Martine Bisenius might be able to think of an answer to that question in the next 30 seconds.

A big effort has to be made in this respect. As I know myself, coming from the continent, what we mostly hear on the mainland is the English media talking about Brexit, the Conservative Government, Theresa May, the snap election and so on, but what we—and, indeed, students who might be interested in studying in the UK—do not really hear about is the attraction of Scotland. I could not at first think of a specific policy action that could be taken, but perhaps something could be done to increase efforts in promoting Scotland. For example, England has been vocal in promoting itself and Britain. Prince Charles and Camilla recently visited Europe, but I do not know of any Scots who have gone to Europe. A first step would be to suggest that the First Minister should go and talk about Scotland to different heads of states in Europe.

Martine Bisenius: A first step would be to stop students feeling insecure about Brexit. There must be, to some extent, a guarantee that students will not need to pay tuition fees and that they will not need a visa, so that at the point of their entry into education here they will know that they will be able to stay for the length of their studies and that there will be no increase in tuition fees. In addition to that, perhaps a campaign could be started to say that Scotland is European-friendly and that it loves European students.

Lewis Macdonald: I have a couple of points to make about reassurances for students. Martine mentioned the Bologna process through which qualifications are recognised among European countries. That is independent of the European Union and extends to many European countries outwith the European Union. It is important to say that that is not in any direct sense at risk unless someone somewhere was to take a strange and bizarre decision unconnected with leaving the EU. That is one assurance that we can offer.

This morning, I saw that the EU negotiating guidelines for the Brexit negotiation with the UK had been amended to say that the EU is looking for an automatic right for citizens who have lived here for five years to remain in the UK. Would that outcome be reassuring to those who are here at the moment and to those who might come in future as students?

Martine Bisenius: Definitely. It would be a great reassurance to have a guarantee that people who have lived here for five years could stay.

Maximilian Kriz: More ideally, the period should be three or four years. As you know, university degrees take four years in Scotland and three years in England, so there would be uncertainty with a longer period. For example, anyone who comes to study in Scotland for four years would not know what might happen in that missing year, after which they would have a right to stay. Many obscure policies could be developed to prevent people from getting work or whatever.

Such a guarantee would be a good step in the right direction, but a shorter period would be even better.

Stuart McMillan: Your point about the Erasmus scheme is well made and your encouragement of students to take part in it is welcome. I studied in France, Germany and Sweden and I had the time of my life—while working very hard, I hasten to add.

When I did my masters, I secured funding through the European social fund. That fund—certainly in Scotland—is considered to be for helping out local areas, but it benefits individuals, too. Therefore, your point about funding is well made.

You mentioned a number of areas that I will not touch on, because colleagues have already done so, but you made valid points on research, on the challenge facing Scottish universities to encourage researchers to come here once we have left Europe, and on where the research funding that we get from Europe will come from in the future.

The Convener: From your perspective, and that of your contemporaries, as young people who are choosing an institution in which to study from among many across Europe, is there a great deal of competition between higher education institutions across Europe? If that is the case, might Brexit disadvantage our higher education institutions in attracting students because of the package that could be offered to them?

13:30

Maximilian Kriz: That is definitely possible. For now, the UK attracts people because it has very high-class and world-leading research and world-

leading research institutions such as the universities in Scotland, and because people can come here, study and then return—they do not need a visa and it is not a hassle. Without that, I think that it would be different. For example, I could go instead to the Netherlands, which also offers English-speaking degrees—I would not have to be able to speak Dutch. I could just go there with no hassle, study and get a good degree.

I do not think that there will be a dramatic disaster in that no one will come to the UK any more, but many people will think twice about it, and it might be very bright minds that will go elsewhere.

The Convener: Thank you. We will move on to David Chipakupaku and Lara Carmena for their presentation on human rights.

David Chipakupaku: One of our first concerns about human rights is to do with who the Government is talking to for post-Brexit trade deals. In particular, we have concerns about the human rights records of Saudi Arabia and China. I know that we will never find a utopian country or a place that is 100 per cent wonderful in every way, but our group had concerns about talking to countries that execute people for being gay and countries that block their people's access to the internet so that they cannot properly educate themselves on what is happening in the world.

Lara Carmena: The EU is in charge of the European charter of fundamental rights, which ensures that things such as anti-discrimination measures and gender equality measures are kept up across the EU. So far, there has been no announcement about what will replace that to assure us that those things will continue across the UK post Brexit.

David Chipakupaku: Another thing that has not been fully and officially confirmed is the security of EU migrants' rights. I know that the Labour Party announced something about that this morning, but currently the Government does not have any sort of plan for that. It is very concerning that people's livelihoods are being played around with as bargaining chips.

Gibraltar is also an issue, and it is concerning that former ministers have gone on to Sunday politics shows saying, "We want to go to war with Spain." It is almost as though the Government does not understand that these people are real people who exist and have lives. That is another concern for us.

Lara Carmena: Lewis Macdonald mentioned a plan that people who have been living here for five years would be guaranteed the right to remain, but that security has not been in place in the period since June and does not exist at present. EU citizens in the UK have had no certainty that they

will be allowed to stay here. The Government has simply been using their lives as bargaining chips.

I speak from personal experience as I come from a family of Spanish migrants and I have Spanish citizenship. I got a British passport only recently—two weeks ago—and my mum is now having to get permanent residency and change her citizenship simply due to the complete uncertainty about our future.

David Chipakupaku: I will move on to tourism and human rights, about which I have a long list of facts. In 2015, 36.1 million overseas tourists came into the UK, contributing £22.1 billion to the economy. In July last year, the Home Office reported a 41 per cent increase in religion and race-based hate crimes in England and Wales compared with July 2015. During the two weeks before the EU referendum and on the day, 31 police forces reported almost 1,550 race and religion-based hate crimes, and during the two weeks after it, that spiked to 2,241.

After the EU referendum, Polish communities received leaflets that called them vermin and an Iranian Kurdish asylum seeker was attacked in London. We also cannot forget the Westminster attack and the foreign nationals who passed away during it because of home-grown terrorism. Personally, I have had numerous experiences of race-based hate crime, which have increased ever since 23 June.

I am not trying to say that every person who voted for Brexit had some sort of race-based intolerance towards me or anyone who is from a different country. Over lunch, I was speaking to a Scottish National Party voter who voted to leave the European Union and it would be good to have greater representation of people who voted for Brexit who are more liberally minded and who are not as intolerant as other people who voted for the same idea.

Lara Carmena: We also discussed the idea that all those acts of racism come not from ignorance, but from a lack of knowledge of other cultures and religions. There should be more in place to educate people about other ways of life to ensure acceptance in society, especially in a post-Brexit, perhaps slightly more isolated UK, where, because of monetary problems, people might not have the freedom to travel to explore those cultures for themselves.

David Chipakupaku: We had a young lady in our group whose sister was abused for wearing the hijab. Attacks like that against freedom of expression and freedom of religious expression, as well as the so-called integration policy that was announced by the UK Independence Party, fill people with fear and are very worrying indeed.

Those were almost all the points that we had.

Lara Carmena: We need to remember that being different is definitely something that should be celebrated and should bring people together, especially in these uncertain political times.

The Convener: Thank you for that.

David, you said that you have had personal experience of racial comments. Have such comments increased since Brexit and can you absolutely relate them to Brexit? You do not have to answer if you do not feel comfortable doing so.

David Chipakupaku: Those kinds of comments have increased since Brexit. I would say yes to the question of whether I would relate the increase to Brexit.

A point that we missed out is that people in the public eye are now making comments that a few years ago would have been shut down and stopped—such comments are now not as criticised or put in check.

The Convener: Are you thinking about politicians in particular, or about the media?

David Chipakupaku: Both.

The Convener: Lara Carmena, is that also the experience of your family?

Lara Carmena: Yes. Since Brexit and everything that went on in the American elections, a lot more racist attitudes have been stirred up and brought into the public eye that previously would have been shut down. That has caused an increase in people being less accepting of others, which has definitely affected people negatively.

Lewis Macdonald: I guess that you have highlighted two different aspects of human rights that are affected: first, the rights of European Union citizens who are here in Scotland; and, secondly, the rights of everyone living in this country. We hope that the first aspect can be addressed in the Brexit negotiations, but the second is about the bigger picture.

David Chipakupaku mentioned the election campaign that is currently under way. Is there something that we should be doing or arguing for in relation to human rights in the UK and Scotland that we need to do more of because of Brexit? Do we need to make a change to our domestic arrangements to ensure that everyone who lives here has the fundamental human rights that you have both talked about?

David Chipakupaku: Informing citizens is the most important part of that. When people were considering the issues—the economy group spoke about this point, too—there was not enough published information on what the European Union does.

I believe that Mr Greer is the spokesperson on Europe for the Green Party. This is about integrating education into manifestos, public broadcasts and campaigns—both neutral and political—to make sure that people understand matters such as what the European Court of Human Rights is. That could be done through something as simple as handing out a leaflet. I know that that costs money, energy, manpower and time, but such simple steps could solve issues in the long run.

Lewis Macdonald: That is very helpful. Thank you.

Ross Greer: My question touches on exactly what David Chipakupaku has just said. As well as being my party's spokesperson on Europe, I am its spokesperson on education, so when people bring both those issues together, I am usually quite pleased.

David is absolutely right about the need for more education on a whole range of issues. Lara Carmena talked about having more education about the variety and diversity of different cultures, faiths and traditions, so as to foster that sense of multiculturalism. That is very important.

However, we should not fetishise the right of freedom of movement. I am totally uncompromising on it and absolutely believe that we should have it but, even if we do, only a very small number of people in the UK will take advantage of it and will go and study somewhere else in Europe. Therefore, it is not that just by having that right, every young person in the UK will know exactly what every other culture in Europe is like. There is much more that we need to do, that aside.

Doing that would also pick up on some of the points that have been addressed before, about the lack of information in the campaign and about not just improving education about the society that we live in and its variety but having civic education about what the institutions are. That is exactly the point that David just made about knowing what the European Court of Human Rights is, or the European Court of Justice or the EU as a whole. I know members of the European Parliament who say that they have been there since nineteen-ninety-whatever and that even they do not know quite how everything works. That base level of education needs to be increased.

One other question that I have for the panel concerns a really important point on the trade deals that were mentioned. There are issues with those at the moment; we sell arms to Saudi Arabia, which many people, including myself, find unacceptable. We will make a lot of trade deals in the next couple of years. How should those negotiations proceed? How should we involve

wider UK society more in the process, so that it is not just about Governments going away and making deals that we believe compromise our values?

Lara Carmena: People need to be more informed, first of all. When Theresa May was in Saudi Arabia recently, the issue that was covered in the news was Cadbury Easter egg hunts. Important issues are very much screened out—there seems to be a big filter on what we find out from the main news channels. First, that needs to change, which would at least educate people about what is going on; then, they could take a stand from there. If they are not fully educated and do not know what is going on in the first place, how can they develop opinions that will lead them to say, “Actually, I do not like what is going on. I do not agree that we should be selling arms to Saudi Arabia”?

Stuart McMillan: I agree with the panel about fully educating people, particularly on the EU and its past. I studied European business management and it was a challenging area to learn about.

On our school system, if we were to do more on the teaching and promotion of how the European institutions operate, something would have to give, because the time that students have available in school is always a challenge. It is very easy—certainly for politicians—to say that we need more education about X, Y or Z in our schooling, but the challenge is the amount of time that students are in school for.

David Chipakupaku: I might end up by being criticised for saying this, but one of the problems that I have is with the fetishisation of legacy 2012, following the London Olympics, and legacy 2014, following the Glasgow Commonwealth games. Physical education is incredibly important to our nation and we need to ensure that our country is healthy and fit but, because of the amazing work that was done in London and Scotland in 2012 and 2014, there is favouritism towards sport over the arts and political education, which are two things that I am big on. I plan to go into the media when I leave school and I love music and art. I find joy in physical education as well, but we need to have a proper sit-down discussion—I could go on for hours about this—about ensuring an equal layout for different types of education to ensure that our young people are properly educated in various ways.

13:45

The Convener: I hope that someone from the Education and Skills Committee is listening to those comments, which could help with its youth engagement event.

I invite Heather Cameron and Lauren O'Keefe to make their presentation on the environment issues that they have been discussing in their group.

Lauren O'Keefe: Our group discussed concerns about the environment, which is never prioritised in any mandate at the moment; it is always at the bottom of the list. We are worried that some of the environmental protection laws that the EU has created might be lost once we leave. We wonder whether they will be maintained.

There are many lessons that we can take from Europe. Places such as Holland and Scandinavia have a lot of initiatives, for example people get money for disposing of bottles. There are so many more things like that that we could take from Europe and do in this country.

We are also concerned about a recent reconfiguration at Westminster, where the environment department's funds were reduced. The environmental situation is one of the biggest problems of our time and, for young people, it is our future. Older people who voted will not see the impact but we will, so the environment is really important to us.

Furthermore, we can take lessons on renewable energy from countries such as Denmark, which has a target to go carbon neutral by 2050. We have a target to reduce carbon emissions by something like 40 per cent by 2030, but a lot more could be done, such as encouraging less consumption of meat.

We also wonder whether sustainable fishing and farming will continue. They benefit the economy, especially all the fishing in the north of Scotland, but will fishing and farming damage the environment if we do not have the EU regulations any more?

Someone in the group raised a point about nuclear energy. Scotland is not proceeding with any more nuclear programmes when, in fact, it is a sustainable form of energy. We get about two thirds of our energy from Europe, so how will that be replaced? Will it be replaced with renewables or will the Government just continue with fracking and approaches like that?

Heather Cameron: Leading on from sustainable energy, we wonder how we will continue to research environmental improvement when the UK has cut its funding. How will we continue to ensure that our scientific research and teaching are of a high standard if we are not attracting the high-quality teachers?

Our group was also concerned about Scottish transport. Many European countries have higher levels of public transport and promote sustainable transport methods such as cycling. One of the

group members pointed to Holland and the great cycle lanes that it has in its cities. Many young people in rural areas of Scotland can get from one place to another only by driving, which is much less sustainable than using public transport. Therefore, our group was really keen for our public transport to be improved and for it to be of sustainable quality.

A member of our group raised concerns about food safety, if we leave the EU. He has a severe allergy and EU law states that restaurants must tell him if their food contains his allergen and that, if a problem arises, they are liable for the accident. If that and similar laws are not maintained, there could be severe health implications for him and other people like him.

Our group was also concerned about international co-operation on the environment. We need to co-operate with other countries on sustainable and long-term solutions. We want to make sure that Scotland stays committed to goals, such as the sustainable development goals, and that, by leaving the EU, we do not diminish the climate targets. In fact, we could take it as an opportunity to increase our climate targets and to prioritise the environment.

The Convener: It is not surprising that you, like many young people, are concerned about the environment. Will Brexit make it more or less likely that we can address your concerns about environmental protection?

Heather Cameron: Initially, our group was concerned that leaving the EU would have a detrimental effect, because so many of the UK's environmental laws are from the EU. However, we can take a more positive outlook and see it as an opportunity to improve and to build on EU standards. In fact, we could have higher standards after we leave.

Lauren O'Keefe: Brexit could be seen as an opportunity to make a difference and to look good to other countries. We could start to create laws that are even better for the environment. If we look at animal welfare, there are no battery hens because of EU law. Will we maintain or improve those laws?

Lewis Macdonald: I will pick up on a couple of your points—not only are they important, but there is a bit of depth to them. For example, you have talked about the importance of public transport and renewable energy. I represent the north-east of Scotland and am based in Aberdeen, where the European Union has helped to fund the offshore wind deployment centre, which will be built in Aberdeen bay in the next 18 months, despite the opposition of a certain Donald John Trump. We also lead on hydrogen buses—we have the largest fleet of hydrogen-powered buses in Europe.

Both those initiatives have been supported by European funding and legislation; they have also been driven forward locally in the city, by Scotland and by the UK. Although you are right to say that a common European standard is supportive of good, effective environmental regulation, there are opportunities to go beyond that standard. In your response to the convener's question, you said that we should take those opportunities and that we can do things even better if we set our minds to it and make that policy decision. Does that represent your group's views?

Animal welfare has also been mentioned. The welfare of pigs in captivity is higher in Britain than it is anywhere else in Europe, because we have gone beyond European regulations. Do you see taking such an approach as a potential area of growth?

Lauren O'Keefe: That is good to know. We do not want to see Brexit as the means simply to get out of good laws on the environment and animal welfare.

Ross Greer: There was a huge amount of great material in your presentation. It did not cheer me up at all, because the risks to our environment and to our ability to tackle climate change are immense, as you have observed.

You have raised a huge number of important issues. The one point on which I would disagree is nuclear power. It is risky, but it is also expensive and diverts money that is needed to make the transition to renewables happen.

If we have to make the case—yet again—to people in the UK about the importance of the environment and tackling climate change, would it be more effective for us to talk about the jobs that the transition to renewables would create? Should we argue that it is a matter of social justice, because we would be able to end fuel poverty with a more effective renewable energy infrastructure? Should we talk about needing social justice not only at home but globally, because people are suffering elsewhere in the world from climate change? We need climate justice. If we start talking about the environment in terms of the economy and social justice, will it make it easier for us to galvanise people around the need for the UK not to lower standards and to give up on commitments, but to raise them and to make new commitments?

Heather Cameron: Yes, that is a good point. That approach would help the environment to be a more pertinent and pressing issue. However, people are becoming involved and interested in the environment for its own sake—we see that in the rise in the number of Green MSPs who have been elected. That pushes businesses to become more sustainable, because doing so makes them

look good to the public. Your method would be a good one to follow.

The Convener: I know that members have other questions but, unfortunately, it is five minutes to 2 and we have to wrap up before Parliament opens at 2 o'clock. I thank all the young people who participated in our event and who have given evidence to us today.

Whenever I speak to witnesses who come before parliamentary committees, whatever age they are, they say that it can be a daunting experience. I hope that it has not been a daunting experience for you—it certainly did not sound like it, because you are all extremely articulate, and we benefited from hearing what you have to say.

I thank the other young people who did not speak on the record, but who I know had a vital role in contributing to the evidence through the workshops that informed your groups. Thank you all very much for coming along today. It is a great example of how the Scottish Parliament can reach out to groups in society who we do not hear enough from. Given some of the issues to do with Brexit and young people, it was important that young people got their say today in the Scottish Parliament. I thank everyone who was involved in making that happen.

Meeting closed at 13:55.

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.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@parliament.scot



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba