

# **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE**

Tuesday 3 December 2002  
*(Morning)*

Session 1

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## EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

19<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2002, Session 1

### CONVENER

\*Kate Maclean (Dundee West) (Lab)

### DEPUTY CONVENER

\*Kay Ullrich (West of Scotland) (SNP)

### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

\*Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con)

\*Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)

\*Mr Gil Paterson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

\*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP)

\*Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

\*Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

### COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

\*attended

### WITNESSES

Bob Benson (Disability Rights Commission)

Mike Holmes (Enable)

Gordon Matheson (Royal National Institute of the Blind Scotland)

Ron Skinner (Scottish Disability Equality Forum)

Yvonne Strachan (Scottish Executive Development Department)

### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Jim Johnston

### SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Richard Walsh

### ASSISTANT CLERK

Roy McMahon

### LOCATION

The Chamber



## Scottish Parliament

### Equal Opportunities Committee

*Tuesday 3 December 2002*

*(Morning)*

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:18*]

### Item in Private

**The Convener (Kate Maclean):** I open the meeting. We have apologies from Tommy Sheridan.

Item 1 on the agenda is to decide whether to take item 3 in private. Item 3 deals with an approach that has not yet been agreed by the committee. Is it agreed that we will take that item in private?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## European Year of Disabled People 2003

**The Convener:** Item 2 is evidence from the Scottish steering group for the European year of disabled people 2003. I apologise, as the committee was unable to obtain the services of a British Sign Language interpreter for the deaf. That highlights again the shortage of BSL interpreters in Scotland. Would the committee like me to write, on its behalf, to the Executive to get an update on BSL provision? I understand that the Executive BSL and linguistic working group met on Thursday 28 November, so we may be able to get an update from it. Is that agreed?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** I welcome to the committee representatives from the Scottish steering group for the European year of disabled people. Members will know Yvonne Strachan from the equality unit, as she has appeared before the committee on many occasions. The other witnesses are Bob Benson, from the Disability Rights Commission; Gordon Matheson, from the Royal National Institute of the Blind Scotland; Mike Holmes, from Enable; and Ron Skinner, from the Scottish Disability Equality Forum.

Members might wonder why there is a television in the committee room. We are going to watch a 10-minute video that was produced by the DRC as part of its "Actions speak louder than words" campaign. The video will be shown on the Parliament's internal feed this lunch time, as a way of highlighting the European day of disabled people. All MSPs and members of staff will be able to watch the video then.

*Video evidence was shown.*

**The Convener:** I will suspend the meeting for a couple of minutes to allow the screen to be removed.

10:32

*Meeting suspended.*

10:34

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** I reconvene the meeting. As I said, that video can be seen on the Parliament internal feed and a copy is available from the Parliament's learning resource centre.

We move on to our evidence-taking session. I do not know which of our witnesses will speak on behalf of the group.

**Yvonne Strachan (Scottish Executive Development Department):** We have agreed that I will make a short introductory statement. However, I hope that, through questioning, my colleagues will engage with the committee and reflect their particular interests.

We thank the committee for giving the steering group the opportunity to talk about the European year of disabled people, particularly given that today is the European day of disabled people. Instead of mounting any particular activities today, we have agreed to focus on the forthcoming year of activities.

My colleagues have already been introduced. It might be useful to highlight the fact that membership of the steering group is far wider than the organisations that are represented here this morning. Obviously, not everyone could attend today. In addition to my colleagues who represent the DRC, Enable, the Royal National Institute of the Blind Scotland and the Scottish Disability Equality Forum, the group includes representatives from Inclusion Scotland, Capability Scotland, the Scottish Trades Union Congress, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Advocacy Safeguards Agency, Update, the Scottish Council on Deafness, Deafblind Scotland and Sense Scotland. We have also engaged with a consultant on disability, who has helped us with some of our activity.

The steering group was formed early this year, largely because we knew that the European year of disabled people was being planned for 2003. We felt that it was important to provide a focus and to co-ordinate activities across disability organisations to ensure that what happened in Scotland would be as good as it could be. We are very pleased that co-operation from and engagement by the wide range of disability organisations has been so productive.

As the committee knows, the European year of disabled people will be launched in Athens in January 2003. The European Commission has provided €12 million for events during the year. Member states will distribute those funds, which means that the UK Government, through the Department for Work and Pensions, has responsibility. The UK aim in the year's activities will be the promotion of rights and participation.

The DWP has administered a UK-wide grant scheme that is backed by £500,000 of European money and £1 million of UK Government money. Successful applications for grants will be announced today by Maria Eagle, the UK Government minister with responsibility for the year. We understand that Scotland has done pretty well in that process and we are looking forward to seeing the results.

Scotland has been represented on the UK national co-ordinating committee established to oversee events throughout the UK by Bill Campbell from Inclusion Scotland, who is also a member of our steering group. Unfortunately, Bill cannot be here today, but I take this opportunity to express our thanks for his hard work during the year and for the continuing commitment he puts into and travelling he does for the steering group.

As I said, the Scottish steering group aims to provide co-ordination and focus for activity and to treat the year as a very important vehicle for raising awareness of disability and finding some concrete, longer-term measures. The group was convened this June and has met several times to discuss a work programme and agree its aims and objectives. We have four key objectives: to work towards the inclusion of all affected by disability through promoting well-informed, responsive and effective decision making in policy and practice; to build for the future by seeking to engage young people in the European year of disabled people; to raise public awareness of disability issues; and to ensure that, where possible, Scottish events are co-ordinated with UK-wide and EYDP activities.

In order to deliver those objectives, we have agreed a baseline work programme, which will consist of a website to publicise the work that is being done during the year; a transport conference and an awareness-raising event; a debate or conference in conjunction with the Scottish youth parliament and COSLA's youth dialogue initiative; the co-ordination and promotion of artworks and performance art throughout the year; and looking at mechanisms for disabled people and disability organisations that might be encouraged and developed throughout the year.

In addition, because a number of Scottish organisations have made bids—as I said, we will know which bids have been successful later today—we are keen to ensure that what the steering group does links with what is happening locally and what is being done by local organisations. Co-ordination will be undertaken. The steering group will be keen to examine the successful projects to see how they might be built on and co-ordinated with the work of the group.

The steering group's view is that as people become enthused by the project during the year, a number of ideas will arise, which we will wish to examine to determine how the different organisations that are part of the disability movement in Scotland can engage with them. We expect that there will be opportunities for further activity as the year rolls out.

There will be a launch event to provide a major focus for the year. The UK is launching EYDP on 22 January and we plan to launch it in Scotland on 23 January. We hope to involve the First Minister

at an event in the morning and engage with the Parliament in the afternoon, and we are working on holding a reception or event in the evening to engage key stakeholders and disabled people from throughout Scotland. The aim is to ensure that we raise disabled people's awareness of rights and participation in society. We will engage with different media to ensure that the publicity for the year is used to the best advantage.

The Executive wishes to thank the members of the steering group, who have given their time and energy over the past six months in developing our activities. We look forward to a fantastic year, and towards even greater engagement with the disability organisations that have been involved thus far, and with others that have not. The steering group will continue to meet so that it can act as a focal point for co-ordination during 2003. At the end of the year, we will have a finalising event, but that has not yet been discussed by the steering group. We will see how ideas emerge in the early part of the year before we decide upon the best way to finish off what we hope will be a spectacular highlighting of disability issues throughout 2003.

**The Convener:** We will move to questions.

**Mr Gil Paterson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I start by apologising for missing a couple of meetings. The meetings of the Procedures Committee, which is going through a long report on the consultative steering group principles, take place at the same time as those of this committee. I have come straight here from that committee.

The figures for bids for projects from Scotland show that we are underperforming. There were 836 applications for local projects, 69 of which were from Scotland, so we appear to be underperforming by between 15 and 20 per cent. There were 344 applications for national projects, and Scotland is bidding for 28. Do you have any information on why we are on the low side, and why we are not taking advantage of the situation? Will there be a penalty further down the line?

**Gordon Matheson (Royal National Institute of the Blind Scotland):** I know that the Royal National Institute of the Blind Scotland decided to limit its applications deliberately so that they were more likely to be successful. We will find out later today if that is the result. I do not know how other UK organisations have approached the issue. The fact that there may be fewer applications does not necessarily mean that there is less interest or that we will be less successful.

**Mr Paterson:** Is there a consequence in the budget? Is a figure allocated particularly to Scotland on a pro rata basis, or were Scotland's bids just some of the bids making up the global figure of 836 bids? Will there be an aggregate, so

that the smaller number of bids scores the same when it comes to the financial settlement?

10:45

**Yvonne Strachan:** There were two types of projects—local and national. The number of bids across the piece meant that the process was well oversubscribed. More than 1,200 bids were made, and it was impossible for all to be successful. Criteria were set and a process was undertaken. We have Scottish representation on the national co-ordinating committee, and we were assured that there would be a breadth of distribution of projects so that the successful ones would not all come from one geographical area.

There was not a pro rata allocation of funding, because that is not how the bidding process worked. Local bids were for a maximum of £10,000, while the larger Scotland-wide or national projects were for a maximum of £50,000. The successful projects will be announced today. We will need to see the pro rata figure, but we are certain that Scotland has not done badly in the process. We will have to see what that means for local projects.

**Mr Paterson:** Is there not a Scottish figure?

**Yvonne Strachan:** Once the projects are announced today, we will know the number of successful projects in Scotland and will be able to judge how well we have done out of that. Our understanding is that we have done fairly well, and we have had no cause to believe that Scotland has been disproportionately or badly treated. However, there was such a heavy subscription for the grants that many bids will not be successful.

**Mr Paterson:** On what basis have the projects been selected for support during 2003, and has the UK group responsible for selecting projects involved the Scottish steering group in the decisions?

**Yvonne Strachan:** I do not have the list of criteria with me today, but I am more than happy to ensure that that is made available to the committee.

The Scottish steering group did not take part in any decision making about the projects. Those decisions were a matter for the member state and were conducted at a UK level. The steering group has been determining what activities we will undertake in Scotland collaboratively between different organisations and complementarily to what is being done by or through individual, project-funded activity. We have not been engaged directly in making decisions, but we ensured that people knew that the process was taking place. That information was shared throughout the steering group, and people were

made aware of the process of bidding for a grant under the UK system. As a steering group, we did not have a responsibility for allocation or determination of successful bids.

**Mr Paterson:** I will make a political point and suggest that in our devolved situation, it would have been a good idea for you to have been given the responsibility of being involved in bids.

**The Convener:** I think that we would be better reserving the political points to when we are taking evidence from politicians.

**Mr Paterson:** Yes. I could not help myself.

**The Convener:** I should point out that if any witness other than Yvonne Strachan wants to respond to a question, they have only to indicate. They do not have to press any buttons on the microphone console; their microphones will come on automatically when I call them to speak.

**Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab):** When Yvonne Strachan spoke at the beginning, she mentioned the make-up of the steering group. Although I obviously commend the organisations that are on the group representing people with disabilities, I am curious that there does not seem to be direct representation on the group from employers, either large or small. I accept that the groups that are represented are in themselves employers, but I am thinking of employers organisations engaging with small businesses or the Confederation of British Industry. Why are such groups not represented?

**Yvonne Strachan:** The original intention in bringing the group together was principally to bring together organisations of and for disabled people with a view to shaping the kind of work activity that disabled people would like to see in the course of the year. You are quite right to have flagged up the fact that others will need to be persuaded or engaged in the process, and that part of the exercise was, and is, being considered for the steering group's work. As a steering group, we did not extend the membership of the organisation to all the other stakeholders and people who may have to be persuaded, as that would have made the group rather large. We acknowledge, however, that the work will have to focus particularly on employers and business people.

Although I did not elaborate on it, that is one of the objectives that we want to push forward in delivering the programme, so that there is positive engagement by all those who need to know and who have a responsibility for making a difference in that important area. You are right to say that we did not have those bodies explicitly represented on the group, but that has been part of our discussion.

**Elaine Smith:** It is important to have that on the record. I am comfortable with Yvonne Strachan's answer, as she seems to feel confident about engaging with the steering group and with other stakeholders.

I turn to employment issues. The briefing paper from the Scottish Parliament information centre mentioned some of those issues. Having seen the thought-provoking video that we watched, we can identify major barriers, and not just physical ones. The briefing paper says:

"the implementation of the final stage of Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 ... will require service providers to make reasonable adjustments to the physical features of their premises to overcome physical barriers to access."

However, attitudes, preconceptions and misconceptions are all barriers that are not strictly covered.

The SPICe paper also states:

"one of the objectives of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 is to eliminate discrimination against disabled people in employment. The labour force survey ... showed that 39% of disabled people were in work, in contrast to 81% of non-disabled people."

There have clearly been cases that have tried to challenge that but, as the briefing paper highlights, the act

"represents the 'stick' in dealing with employment issues", rather than a carrot.

How do you think the European year of disabled people can help to raise the profile of disability issues? What specific plans or projects do you think would be good at delivering in that area, bearing in mind the fact that the successful projects will not be known until this afternoon?

**Gordon Matheson:** As well as the efforts that we are undertaking as a steering group, each of the organisations will be campaigning during the next year. The fact that it is the year of disabled people will, we hope, lend weight to our individual campaigns. RNIB Scotland's principal campaign issue next year is employment, because the Scottish figures indicated that 80 per cent of blind and partially sighted people of working age are unemployed.

Our principal campaign issue next year is employment. That coincides with the opening by RNIB Scotland of a new £1.4 million employment and learning centre in the grounds of Jewel and Esk Valley College in Edinburgh, which will deal with employment rehabilitation and ensure that people throughout Scotland have a better opportunity to access learning and employment. We will brand many of those efforts as European year of disabled people campaigns, even though they are RNIB Scotland campaigns.



**Bob Benson (Disability Rights Commission):**

I am really glad that the committee showed the "Talk" video, because it is as relevant now as it was two years ago, when the campaign was launched to encourage active commitment from people to doing things, rather than just words.

One important aspect for the Disability Rights Commission of partnership working with the members of the steering group and the other groups that will be involved, particularly with business, as the year goes by, is that it gives us an opportunity to raise awareness of disability issues throughout the country. It also gives us another opportunity to raise general awareness of rights for disabled people. In particular, it will provide us with a focus for private and public sector organisations. We want to stimulate debate not only in the Scottish Parliament but throughout the country.

The commission has organised a major exhibition on disability as a civil rights issue and we will formally ask the Scottish Parliament to house the exhibition in October and November of the European year of disabled people. We are also running several away days throughout the country—one will be held in Scotland—on disability rights awareness. As part of them, we will focus on the physical adjustments issues that are coming up under the DDA's provisions on access to goods and services, as well as the DDA provisions that are in force.

**Ron Skinner (Scottish Disability Equality Forum):** I will build on what Yvonne Strachan said when she kindly outlined the steering group's four main aims. The first aim is to work towards the inclusion of all those who are affected by disability, because disablement affects not only the person who is disabled, but the whole family.

Within that main aim, we have several objectives. I enlighten the committee about the fact that we wish to approach business leaders, professional bodies and the public and voluntary sectors about how they might support the EYDP, raise awareness and improve policies and practices. That covers the employment facet. We hope to have a launch early in the new year at which we will target business leaders and organisations such as the CBI, with a view to employment.

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** I will wrap two questions into one and ask a slightly different question about a rural aspect. For definition, what is the relationship between the Scottish steering group and the two groups that we know of at the UK level, which are the UK Government steering group and the national co-ordinating committee? What are the aims and objectives of the Scottish steering group for the European year of disabled people and how,

if at all, do they differ from those of the UK Government steering group, apart from having a different target geographical area?

**Yvonne Strachan:** I will answer those questions quickly. The UK co-ordinating group has an external membership from a range of disability organisations that is comparable to our Scottish steering group. The Government steering group involves interdepartmental co-ordination that enables engagement from different Government interests, to provide assurance of support and engagement at an official level in the year's development and promotion.

I outlined the Scottish steering group's four aims in my introduction. As Ron Skinner said, we have several objectives within those aims. We are happy to explore them with you, and if it would help, we can share with the committee a paper that covers an agreed set of aims and objectives.

Our overall objectives do not differ. The key objective for the year is to raise the issue of disability, to give it profile, to highlight it and to raise awareness. The theme for the UK is the promotion of rights and participation. We intend our four aims to be part of the process of promoting the issues around disability and encouraging participation across a range of issues. We are using the term participation in its broadest sense, meaning not only the participation of disabled people in the year, with their views being highlighted and reflected, but the participation of the much wider community in understanding what the disability issues are and engaging in the process of change. We are taking that broad theme and applying that definition in the widest way, and we see the activities of the Scottish steering group as being entirely complementary to the UK approach. I hope that that answers your question.

11:00

**Mr Stone:** It does. Thank you for your answer. You have painted with a broad brush the wider macro-scene in Scotland and the UK.

I declare an interest in the subject, in that my wife is disabled. I represent a constituency in the far north of Scotland, so I would like to turn your attention to the remoter parts of the country, where there are issues such as distance and sparse population. My wife does not represent a large statistic numerically, and there is a chance that people such as she can be lost in the overall scheme. How, among the many responsibilities of the Scottish steering group, can such issues be considered further? How can you audit delivery out there at the sharp end? How do you view the roles of health trusts, health boards, local authorities and local care organisations? I know

that those are difficult questions, but you will understand that they are of enormous interest to me and to people in my constituency.

**Yvonne Strachan:** I will make a small general point, after which Mike Holmes will come in to reflect on the matter. Mr Stone makes an important point about rural issues and the responsibility to ensure that what we do on disability during the year is not central-belt focused. The steering group has discussed the matter, and the networks that each organisation has and those of the organisations with which they are in contact, are very wide. Although there is a Scottish focus through the steering group, we hope that delivery will be across the board. We hope, too, that the various local projects that are in place will reflect that.

**Mike Holmes (Enable):** I shall comment on the issue of delivery in remote and rural areas. I represent Enable and Gordon Matheson represents RNIB Scotland; a number of other organisations that are represented on the steering group are Scotland-wide. We are made well aware of the issues that face people who live in remote areas. This year, our annual general meeting took place in Thurso and the people there told us that it is as far from Glasgow to Thurso as it is from Thurso to Glasgow. We have had fed in to us the issues that affect people throughout Scotland.

**Kay Ullrich (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I would like to follow up one or two points that have been raised. Given the impact on areas that are devolved to the Scottish Administration—such as education, transport and health—would not it have made sense for a Scottish group to have been able to select projects for funding in Scotland? I would like to hear various views on that.

**Gordon Matheson:** As has been said, the steering group is not part of the decision-making process for awarding grants.

**Kay Ullrich:** Yes, but I am asking whether it would have been better for a Scottish group to have been able to select which projects in Scotland should be awarded grants.

**Gordon Matheson:** I shall make an observation on the logic of the UK decision-making process. I understand that the body at the UK level that decides to which projects awards should be granted has decided deliberately that its members will not make decisions about applications from within their own areas. That is an attempt to be completely transparent and to ensure that the applications are assessed only according to the advertised criteria. The Scottish representative on that committee will not—even at UK level—be considering Scottish applications.

**Kay Ullrich:** So a particularly Scottish dimension will not be considered.

**Yvonne Strachan:** Perhaps I can answer that.

**The Convener:** I will let Ron Skinner in. He indicated first that he wanted to answer.

**Ron Skinner:** When I was involved with the steering group, I raised that issue at an early stage. I thought that Scotland ought, on a per capita basis, to receive a tenth of the available money. Obviously, that was not acceptable at UK level, but because Scotland's population is roughly one tenth of that of the UK, I thought that that seemed to be fair enough; however, we did not win that point.

**Mike Holmes:** It is a shame that we are not meeting this afternoon after the announcements of successful bids have been made. If this afternoon Scotland ends up with less than one tenth of the pot, I will support Kay Ullrich's point of view. If we end up with more than one tenth of the pot, I will be quite happy.

**Kay Ullrich:** It seems to be a pity that the decision has not been devolved in the same way as the Parliament has been devolved and as so many other matters that impact on disabled issues are devolved.

**Bob Benson:** Perceptions were an important issue for the steering group. The steering group is networked into a vast range of other organisations—the very groups that were making applications. The steering group was very sensitive to that and did not want to be seen as the group that was making decisions, but which was also making applications from which the network groups might directly benefit. That was a primary part of the decision-making process in the steering group.

From what Yvonne Strachan is saying—and if Gil Paterson's information is correct—it is quite heartening to hear that there have been fewer applications. That suggests that we have received very high quality applications, which must be the most important thing that we could hear.

**Kay Ullrich:** I agree with Mike Holmes that it would have been better to have this meeting after the allocations had been announced, but only time will tell.

I have a completely different question about the steering group. How will you know whether you have achieved your aims? What sort of monitoring and evaluation process do you envisage in Scotland for the European year of disabled people?

**Bob Benson:** The work programme indicates clearly that there will have to be a project management approach to each of the areas of work that we are considering. That will include the usual risk assessment, the full evaluations that need to be built in on the value of the time and

money that will be expended on those processes.

We would like a major parliamentary debate at the beginning of the EYDP and another at the end of the year. The Parliament would then be able to judge for itself the progress that has been made throughout the year, based on the information that we provide. Such simple techniques would give people the sense that something has been achieved during the year.

We want to see the EYDP as a catalyst for activity that will go on way beyond the year. We want to see concrete results for disabled people at the end of the year, particularly in areas such as capacity for disability groups. We want to see some of the issues that we have highlighted coming through in the equality strategy.

**Ron Skinner:** Bob Benson has just picked up on the point that I was going to make, so I will state it simply. I will gauge the success of our efforts by whether something lasts beyond 2003. If we raise awareness or do something that is continued in the years thereafter, that will represent success.

**Gordon Matheson:** To be frank, I believe that there are hard measures. We have reliable statistics that indicate an 80 per cent unemployment rate, so we should set targets for reducing that figure; that would be a hard measure. No matter what initiatives are taken next year or in the years to come, if that unemployment figure is not reduced, we will have failed.

**The Convener:** Do you have another question, Kay?

**Kay Ullrich:** No—but I would like to emphasise the point about the subject's being a continuing, lasting concern rather than its being merely the focus of an event.

**Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab):** I have looked at a list of the organisations that are involved in the steering group and it strikes me that there is a shortage of representatives of organisations that deal specifically with young people. I know that all your organisations have a remit in relation to young people, but there is no young disabled persons organisation involved. What benefits specifically for young disabled people would you expect to result from the EYDP?

**Yvonne Strachan:** That is an omission on our part. We have invited the Scottish youth parliament to send a representative to the steering group, but we did so once the discussion about our activity and focus had largely taken place. The group was clear that there had to be engagement with young people, but as members know, there are no specific organisations of young disabled people, so we had to consider other appropriate

avenues. The representative of the youth parliament will join us on the steering group—it is my omission not to have pointed that out earlier.

We want to make engagement with young people a focus during the EYDP—we have identified that as one of our key aims. It will form part of what we do around the launch of the EYDP, and it will be a significant feature of all our activities. My colleagues might wish to add points about their individual organisations, aside from what the steering group will do in relation to that objective.

**Bob Benson:** We could build on some of the excellent work that has been done around education issues following the coming into force of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, which underpins the individual rights of schoolchildren and young people. There is also a link with the new legislation on duties to plan, which has come through the Scottish Parliament.

We will now catch up with England and Wales. When we move towards a tribunal system for children in Scotland, that will make a big difference. We need to build on that and to consider the position of young people in society, not just that of young people in employment, although employment is enormously important. We should also be thinking about young people moving into adult life. Full-time employment might not be the obvious course for some young people who have profound impairments, but everyone has a valued role in society. We need to consider how that can be built on; the voluntary sector has a key role to play in that.

**Yvonne Strachan:** I wish to re-emphasise a point that I made earlier. In addition to looking forward to the participation of a member of the Scottish youth parliament on the steering group, we are looking forward to an event that will take place in the summer, involving the youth parliament and COSLA's youth dialogue initiative. We are currently exploring how to develop those plans.

**Mr McMahon:** One of the EYDP's stated objectives is to

"promote the exchange of experience of good practice and effective strategies devised at local, national and European level".

Has the Scottish steering group linked up with other relevant groups at national or European level, or does it plan to do so?

**Mike Holmes:** I will reply on behalf of Enable. We are a member of inclusion Europe, which is a group of like-minded organisations for people who have learning disabilities throughout Europe. We have already worked on an art exhibition featuring art by people who have learning disabilities. More than 1,000 pieces from throughout Europe were

submitted to the exhibition, and 40 pieces have been chosen for exhibition. Three of those 40 came from Scotland, which is not a bad percentage. The exhibition will go to 11 countries throughout Europe, and another seven countries have expressed interest in taking the exhibition. Scotland has offered to host it.

Our organisations are linked with European networks, and we exchange information about the stuff that we are doing and models of good practice. I think that the other organisations on the steering group already do that, in a sense, as part of their general work, and they are doing specific things to mark the EYDP.

**Gordon Matheson:** RNIB Scotland is a member of the European Blind Union; a number of organisations have links with other European organisations for disabled people in their fields. At the most recent meeting of our steering group, someone made the point that we have to remember that we are talking about a Europe-wide initiative. Our efforts had focused, perhaps inevitably, on initiatives that we were going to develop in Scotland. When we planned our programmes and examined our priorities, we considered what we wanted to do within Scotland. We started by focusing on our priorities as organisations that are either solely Scottish or that have, as in the case of RNIB Scotland, devolved management. We thought about how we would then link to the UK and we thought that we had better not forget that we were talking about a European year of disabled people. We are aware of the European dimension and we will look to develop it over the year. I do not expect any junkets, however.

11:15

**Mr McMahon:** You sound very disappointed by that.

**Ron Skinner:** At the committee meeting on Friday, we heard that a European disability organisation was visiting Ayrshire to learn about best practice. That is a prime example of a European organisation coming to see what is happening in Scotland.

**Kay Ullrich:** The organisation could not go to a nicer part of the country.

**Ron Skinner:** I believe that Ayrshire is open at this time of year.

**Kay Ullrich:** It is indeed—it is open all year round.

**Mr McMahon:** Another objective of the EYDP is to raise awareness of multiple discrimination that is faced by people who have disabilities. I refer to gay people with disabilities, members of ethnic minorities with disabilities and, more especially,

women with disabilities. How is the steering group ensuring that issues of multiple discrimination are highlighted during the year?

**Yvonne Strachan:** That is an important part of what the year will be about. There is recognition that the needs of particular communities within communities are often ignored, so there is often a one-dimensional approach to problems. One might focus on a person's disability, but the fact that the individual is a woman or is from an ethnic minority community might also have implications. We hope that the objective of engaging the widest range of people in discussion and participation during the year will allow that focus to emerge. We will also look at how we can foster exchange.

It will be important to see the steering group as not being the only channel for activity. The idea behind the year is to raise the focus and to engender across the piece activity by other organisations and groups that might not be specifically of or for disabled people, but which ought to have an interest in the matter. The discussions that we hope to have with other equality groups will be an important part of that. There is nothing specific in the work programme that I can identify at this stage, but moving the agenda forward in the year is part of the steering group's thinking.

**Gordon Matheson:** We will invite civic Scotland, including organisations such as the equality network, to engage with our efforts on the launch event. The disability organisations have tried to get ourselves together so that we have organisation and plans for the year. We are now at the point at which we are beginning to look out a bit to see how we can engage with other organisations.

**Yvonne Strachan:** One of our objectives is to give equal weight to the experiences, needs and aspirations of disabled people irrespective of their form of impairment, ethnic origin or other circumstances. The objective is that there should be recognition of multiple discrimination as well as a focus on specific disability.

**The Convener:** I want to pick up on one of Michael McMahon's questions about young disabled people. Yvonne Strachan said that a representative of the youth parliament is now on the steering group. I spoke at a conference last week, which the Scottish Executive's "Equal Futures" conference sponsored. Most of the young people who were present said that they had not heard of the youth parliament and did not know much about it. The Scottish youth parliament is very valuable, but given the structure within which it operates, I am not sure how well it is able to pick up the feelings of young people at the grass roots. If young disabled people are not involved in the decision-making process, the youth parliament will

not take on board their views. Can you explain in more depth how young people are being involved and how the specific problems that young disabled people face are being taken on board?

**Yvonne Strachan:** That is an important question. I understand that the person from the youth parliament who will join us has a disability.

It is difficult to determine how much engagement the youth parliament has with young disabled people. The steering group wanted to include a representative of the youth parliament in order to enable its perspective to influence the group's overall work plan and strategy. It is not intended that activity, engagement and thinking should be restricted to the steering group. We will emphasise to the organisations that are party to the steering group and with which it will engage that this is an important area that needs to be developed.

We agree that it is difficult to gauge the views of young disabled people, because there is no specific body that we can ask. However, because young disabled people encounter so many difficulties, we want to find a better way of engaging with them. The steering group's task during the year will be not only to focus on engaging with disabled young people, but to identify better ways of delivering that engagement. We will work with and through all the different organisations and their networks, which include young disabled people. Those people will feed in views on what needs to be done to make a difference. Mike Holmes and Gordon Matheson might want to comment on that issue from the perspective of the organisations that they represent.

**Gordon Matheson:** I agree that we are all responsible for ensuring that the objective of involving young people is achieved. As Yvonne Strachan said, involving young people is not straightforward. RNIB Scotland runs family weekends and some of its officers have experience of working with young people. There is dialogue within RNIB Scotland about how we can engage our young members with the EYDP.

**Mike Holmes:** I reiterate what Gordon Matheson said. Because of the specific nature of their disabilities, young people with learning disabilities find it incredibly difficult to speak out and they are not supported in making their views known. Enable is involved in innovative work that is supported by the special educational needs innovative grants programme. Young people with learning disabilities are being teamed up with other young people, who support them in speaking up for themselves. That is a difficult and time-consuming process and it is almost impossible to pluck someone out to represent disabled young people on a particular body. A great deal of work must be done before that can happen.

**Ron Skinner:** In my local area—Stirling—it is very difficult to get young people, especially young physically disabled people, to engage with organisations. It might come as a surprise to the committee to learn that I was once a child and, to be honest, as a youngster I kept away from disability organisations. I do not know whether young people in my area are not engaging with disability organisations because they are able to integrate easily into the jobs environment and society. However, we have grave difficulty in involving youngsters in our organisation at local level.

**Elaine Smith:** I do not know whether there is an answer to my question. What has been said and explored is worrying. Does anyone know whether any of the projects that have put in bids specifically target young people and encourage some kind of overall organisation for them, given what Ron Skinner said about young people being less willing to engage in the work of existing organisations?

**The Convener:** We will need to wait until this afternoon to find out about the bids. The committee might want to explore that issue again once we have found out which bids have been successful and which have not.

**Ron Skinner:** Perhaps the committee could indulge me a little longer. My organisation, the Scottish Disability Equality Forum, is considering an innovative project to engage with young people in relation to their going to and from school and their social lives in after-school activities. We are considering a special needs transport area in which there are more than 50,000 passengers a year. We would like research into their use of transport and what their problems are, which we could feed back into our organisations. However, there are difficulties.

**Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con):** The Madrid declaration recommends that local authorities should draft local plans of action on disability in co-operation with representatives of disabled people, and that they should set up local committees to spearhead activities for the year. What has happened in Ayrshire has been mentioned, but are there any moves by the steering group to encourage such activity at local government level?

**Yvonne Strachan:** COSLA has engaged with the steering group and I understand that the matter will be discussed with its equality network—which includes a range of organisations from different local authorities—with a view to determining how local authorities can engage in the process. We hope that local authorities will in their own right commit to the process. Activities that local authorities should undertake have been suggested and we hope that that will be a vehicle

for them to follow matters up. I hope that the steering group will not just put out a diktat and say, "This is what you must do," but that there will be collaborative engagement through COSLA's offices and that there will be discussions about the work of the equality network.

**Mrs McIntosh:** You mentioned co-ordination. Are there any particularly Scottish dimensions to disability issues on which to focus during the year, which might need to be highlighted in any developments at European level? Are any mechanisms in place for doing that?

**Yvonne Strachan:** It is probably a bit premature to answer that question. However, the points that Gordon Matheson made must be borne in mind. The steering group thinks that whatever we do in the year must result in things that will last and on which we can meaningfully focus. There should be Scottish solutions to Scottish problems, but it would be premature for us to dictate what those solutions will be. We hope that, as a result of the debate and the raising of awareness, demands and issues that need to be tackled in the Scottish context will emerge, as well as matters that can then be flagged up in a European context.

I do not want to speak on behalf of the steering group, because we have not discussed the matter, but I would say that our thinking is that something ought to emerge for the future. We should consider such matters as the year progresses and ask, "What does this mean?" and "Where do we take these messages after December 2003?"

**Gordon Matheson:** I do not think that there are uniquely Scottish disability issues. Our job in Scottish organisations is to advance issues in the Scottish context. For example, there will be transport issues in more remote areas, although issues relating to the inaccessibility of transport exist throughout the world.

**Mrs McIntosh:** Jamie Stone made that point earlier.

**Gordon Matheson:** The political structures that we operate within to try to advance such interests are largely devolved, so we operate in a different way.

The figures indicate that the levels of unemployment among those who have sight problems are even higher in Scotland than in the United Kingdom as a whole. Although the issue is not unique, there is evidence that the unemployment problem is even more acute, certainly in the case of those with sight problems.

11:30

**Ron Skinner:** As has already been highlighted, the unique problem is probably transport. We hear much about access to the built environment, which

is all fine and good for someone who can actually get out of their house and travel to the place that they want to get into, but special needs transport needs to be examined specifically in Scotland, particularly because of the huge rural hinterlands that we have. In my area, we are well served with special needs transport by dial a journey in Stirling. I would like that sort of service to be rolled out throughout Scotland—

**Mrs McIntosh:** And for it to be affordable, into the bargain.

I note that one of the changes that is hoped for in the European Union disability strategy is—I can just see Yvonne Strachan's reaction—

"mainstreaming disability in policy formation".

Do you have an opinion on the current situation in Scotland? Can you highlight any examples of best practice from other European countries that might apply in Scotland?

**Yvonne Strachan:** The Executive and the Parliament along with many public sector bodies have recognised that mainstreaming is the most effective way in which to make changes in the long term, particularly changes in service delivery and other areas that affect people's lives. That principle underpins the equality strategy and is the approach that we endeavour to take across the piece on disability.

That does not remove from the equation the need to be directive or for specific activity where it is required. That will be done where change is specifically required, such as in legislation on special needs. However, the key is to get people to reflect and to recognise that, if we are to make the changes that are part of the key objective for the European year of disabled people—which is to recognise that the problem does not rest with disabled people, but with disabled people not being able to engage in society because engagement is not made possible for them—we must take the responsibility to think about what we can do to remedy the situation as far as possible. The process of mainstreaming is a mechanism for doing that. As members know and have heard many times, it is a long-term process. We are making advances, but we have a long way to go.

The European year of disabled people in the coming year will be important for helping to shape a better understanding of what needs to be done. We hope that policy makers throughout Europe will reflect on the dialogue and engagement, and that that dialogue and engagement will ultimately be reflected in the way in which we begin to look at what needs to change in order to make a difference. The EYDP will be important as part of the mainstreaming process, but mainstreaming will continue thereafter. We will advocate that during 2003 and beyond.

**Gordon Matheson:** I have a brief general point to make as an example of mainstreaming. More than 70 per cent of youngsters with sight problems in Scotland attend their local mainstream school, but RNIB research indicated that a quarter of those did not routinely receive their school books in a format that they could read and that a third had had examination scripts put in front of them in a format that they could not read. RNIB supports the presumption of mainstreaming, but mainstreaming needs to be resourced and individual needs must be supported.

**The Convener:** I thank the witnesses for coming on behalf of the EYDP steering group. I am sure that the committee will work closely with you in the months ahead to ensure that the European year of disabled people is a success.

11:33

*Meeting continued in private until 11:54.*





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