EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Friday 31 January 2003
(*Morning*)

Session 1

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

2nd Meeting 2003, 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

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

*attended

WITNESSES

Janet Allan (Donaldson’s College)
Stuart Duffin (Scottish Chambers of Commerce)
Douglas Hamilton (Barnardo’s Scotland)
Iain Montgomery (Scottish Trades Union Congress)
Robert Mooney (National League of the Blind and Disabled)
James O’Rourke (Scottish National Federation for the Welfare of the Blind)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Jim Johnston

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Richard Walsh

ASSISTANT CLERK

Roy McMahon

LOCATION

Scottish Health Service Centre, Edinburgh

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Friday 31 January 2003

(*Morning*)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:28*]

European Year of Disabled People 2003

The Convener (Kate Maclean): I welcome everyone to this meeting of the Equal Opportunities Committee. I apologise profusely for the half-hour delay in starting the meeting. Some members have had problems in getting here—there have been some traffic problems. Other members will arrive. We have received apologies from Tommy Sheridan, Elaine Smith, Jamie Stone, Kay Ullrich and Lyndsay McIntosh.

I welcome Elspeth Attwooll, who is the Liberal Democrat member of the European Parliament for Scotland. One of the committees of which she is a member is the European Parliament's Employment and Social Affairs Committee. I hope that she enjoys this meeting. I also welcome Catherine King and Sue Mowat, who are interpreting into British Sign Language. I remind members and witnesses of the need to speak clearly and one at a time for the interpreters' benefit.

Last weekend, Gil Paterson attended the launch of the European year of people with disabilities in Athens. He will report back to the committee and to members of the public.

Mr Gil Paterson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I inform members of the public that I will be attempting to pronounce some Greek words. If anyone laughs, I will have them ejected.

As committee members will be aware, I attended the opening ceremony of the European year of people with disabilities at the Athens concert hall on Sunday 26 January 2003. The senior assistant clerk, Richard Walsh, accompanied me. I put on record my thanks to him for his invaluable assistance before, during and after the event.

I hope that the committee will allow me to give a brief oral report on the understanding that, in due course, I will provide a written report as a public document for a future meeting of the committee.

The committee heard evidence from the Scottish steering group for the European year of disabled people on 3 December 2002. The aims and objectives of the Scottish steering group for the EYDP were subsequently announced on 23 January 2003, in response to an inspired parliamentary question—reference number S1W-33375. I have submitted a copy of the response today as a late paper.

The Scottish steering group for the EYDP set out four main aims. The first aim is to work towards the inclusion of all who are affected by disability through promoting well-informed, responsive and effective decision making in policy and practices. The second is to build for the future by seeking to engage young people in the EYDP. The third is to raise public awareness of disability issues and the fourth is to ensure that, where possible, Scottish events are co-ordinated with United Kingdom-wide and European year of people with disabilities activities.

The opening event, which was attended by about 1,500 people, was organised jointly by the Greek Ministry of Health and Welfare and the European Commission, with the support of the European disability forum and the Greek National Confederation of Disabled People. The aim of the event was to transmit all over Europe the message that people with disabilities have a right to be accepted and to participate fully in society. The event also represented the launch of the EYPD bus, as part of the get on board initiative. The bus will visit the UK between 2 June and 2 July.

The address by the President of the Hellenic Parliament, Mr Apostolos Kaklamanis, gave particular emphasis to the role of children, whom he described as ambassadors for the EYPD. He said:

> "they can educate their peers and their parents".

There was also strong emphasis on achieving full rights and participation.

The address by the Minister of Health and Welfare of the Hellenic Republic, Mr Costas Stefanis, continued the theme of rights and participation. He referred to the removal of barriers to social inclusion, the creation of efficient and integrated services to assist disabled people and the reinforcement of local societies for self-help initiatives and social solidarity.

In her speech, the European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, Mrs Anna Diamantopoulou, reiterated the European Commission's commitment to the removal of barriers to social inclusion and to the elimination of discrimination and exclusion. She said that there would be three priority areas: employment, with the requirement for qualitative outputs from any supported schemes; assisted technology to change the lives of disabled people; and physical access to buildings. In the last area, she mentioned a competition between municipalities to find out which can offer best access to citizens. She closed her speech with the thought that the

> "indicator of civilisation for any society in the 21st Century will be the standard of services which it offers to those citizens with disabilities".

It is interesting that many groups at the event had expected the announcement of a draft horizontal directive on disability following the Návplion informal council of European Union ministers of employment and social affairs, which preceded the launch. That did not occur, although the council's agreement to mainstream disability issues to allow their review in national action plans on social inclusion was further strengthened by the announcement a few days after the launch event that the European Commission would from now on also seek to mainstream disability in its policy process along the lines that have been established for gender. More seasoned Europe watchers seem to expect that, given the European Parliament's whole-hearted support for a horizontal disability directive, lobbying of the European Commission may well move to ensuring a commitment to produce such a draft directive by the end of the year rather than production of the draft directive itself.

The president of the European disability forum delivered a rousing speech that called for the establishment of

> "two pillars of European society as a tangible heritage from the EYDP".

The first pillar was strong anti-discrimination legislation and the second was the consistent strengthening of the rights of people with disabilities so that there is no discussion about disabled people without their full participation.

The concluding address by the Vice-President of the European Parliament, Mr Guido Podesta, confirmed the main themes that were established by the previous speakers and appeared to announce the establishment of a new civic participation exercise—a European parliament of disabled people that will work directly with members of the European Parliament. That appears to tie in with the grant to the British Council of Disabled People for its United Kingdom disabled people's parliament project.

The event then heard six deeply moving and powerful personal testimonies on disabilities from across the European Union before a theatrical performance by the Theatre of Tuesday, which is a mixed theatre group of the Cerebral Palsy Association, Greece. The performance was based on the voyage home to Ithaca by Odysseus and musical interludes were provided during the event.

Prior to the launch, I took the opportunity to have an informal but useful discussion with Mr Bill Campbell and Sir John Wall. Bill Campbell represents Inclusion Scotland at the UK disability forum for European affairs and represents the organisation on the European disability forum. Sir John Wall is vice-president of the European Blind Union, former chair of the Royal National Institute of the Blind and a key player in the UK disability forum for European affairs.

I will submit more details in a written report in due course. However, I ask that the committee agree that the convener should issue letters and represent the committee's views to the many groups that were involved, acknowledging their hard work. Secondly, I ask the committee to agree to address the broader issue of our scrutiny of European matters as part of the clerks' legacy paper.

The Convener: I thank Gil Paterson. I think that I forgot to mention that Gil is the disability reporter for the Equal Opportunities Committee. He has asked the committee to agree that I should send letters on behalf of the committee to acknowledge the hard work of the many groups that were involved. Are members agreed that I should do so?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Michael, do you have any questions for Gil?

Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): No.

The Convener: As Gil Paterson said, the full report on the launch will be presented to the committee and will be posted on the Equal Opportunities Committee's website. I am sure that, if any members of the public or any organisations that are present have any questions for Gil Paterson about the launch, they will be most welcome to e-mail him once the report has been posted on the website. Thank you, Gil.

Item 2 on the agenda also relates to the European year of disabled people. We will hear evidence from two panels of witnesses. On the first panel we have Janet Allan from Donaldson's College, Douglas Hamilton from Barnardo's Scotland and Iain Montgomery from the Scottish Trades Union Congress. I will not ask the witnesses to make initial statements. However, if they want to make extended points during the lines of questioning, they are welcome to do so.

I will kick off with a general question to everybody on the panel. Why do we need a year of disabled people? Is that a suitable way of improving disabled people's situation in society? Are there any concerns that this type of showcase year might overshadow the continuing work of campaigning for and helping people with disabilities? Anyone can kick off with a reply.

Douglas Hamilton (Barnardo's Scotland): I will start. Thank you for inviting us along today. I hoped that one of our service users or a member of staff from one of our projects would be able to come. I apologise for being unable to arrange that. I extend an invitation to committee members to visit some of our young people during the year.

The idea of the European year of disabled people is fantastic. It will help to provide a focus for raising awareness on several issues. Barnardo's has been looking at issues around the participation in society of children and young people, particularly those with disabilities, and at how those children and young people can be given a voice in society. We have also looked at poverty and disability issues for families who are affected by a disabled child. We have highlighted issues of multiple discrimination, particularly in relation to families from ethnic minorities who have a disabled child—they could be called a minority within a minority.

Throughout the year, I hope that, because of the EYDP focus, there will be several opportunities to raise awareness on such issues and to take matters forward. The issues to which I referred would fall within the priorities that the UK Government and the EYDP have set.

Janet Allan (Donaldson's College): I concur with most of what has been said. Any raising of awareness is good, if that awareness is sufficiently wide to cover all groups of people. I suppose that I would have liked some young people to be represented here. When I gave evidence previously to a parliamentary committee, I took a youngster from my school. His evidence was infinitely more powerful than that of the professionals, who were paid to be there, if you like.

Interestingly, when I spoke to my fifth-year and sixth-year pupils yesterday in preparation for my coming to the committee meeting today, they said: "What year?" News of the EYDP had not got to them. Rather than using what is perhaps the older model of our helping young people, perhaps we should empower young people to help themselves.

Iain Montgomery (Scottish Trades Union Congress): I agree with everything that has been said. From our perspective, awareness is a big problem. Many workplaces and employers seem to think that awareness raising is a gimmick, but it must be a great deal more than that. It must be something sustainable that addresses many issues across society.

The focus is specifically on young people. The demographics of unemployment among disabled people show that young people in particular are affected. They have to struggle through the education system to prepare for employment, but they find further barriers when they seek employment. That is true for all disabled employees and disabled potential employees. Something important must be done in that area.

The Convener: Douglas Hamilton suggested a visit for the committee, but, unfortunately, the committee dissolves at the end of March—that is not as uncomfortable as it sounds. However, we are preparing a legacy paper for a future Equal Opportunities Committee. The clerks will take a note of the invitation and I am sure that a future committee will want to take it up. We invited some young people to give evidence, but they were not able to come.

Janet Allan made a point about awareness. Do the witnesses think that the European year of disabled people has not been particularly well publicised among organisations or the general public? What could be done at this stage to improve awareness?

10:45

Janet Allan: I do not think that the year has been well publicised to the people who need to know about it, although I do not know what steps have been taken to publicise it. People watch television and youngsters go to places such as McDonald's. I wonder whether the publicity has been too formal to reach the people who might say, "Great, that is about me and this is an opportunity for me to do something."

The Convener: That is an interesting point.

Douglas Hamilton: Barnardo's Scotland received money through the European year of disabled people to run a project. However, even though I am in the system, I was not aware of the Scottish launch until after it had happened. I was aware of the UK launch and I was invited to it, but we did not receive any word about the Scottish one. I admit that we must take steps to connect with what is happening in Scotland, but, at the early stages, the communication did not work both ways.

The Convener: Your answer pre-empts my next question. I was going to ask what involvement the witnesses' organisations had in the preparation for the European year of disabled people, either at a Scottish or UK level. When the committee first discussed the matter, we were concerned to encourage the participation of organisations that are heavily involved in the issues.

Douglas Hamilton: We have been given around £10,000 through the European year of disabled people for project work in three of our services. The project encourages the participation of children and young people through the snakes and ladders training game, which some members might have played at party conferences. We hope to use that model to allow the views of young people with disabilities to be heard in the wider community. The groups in Dundee, Inverclyde and West Lothian aim to provide a safe environment in the community for young people to tell local authorities, employers, schools and health workers about the issues that affect them. The money that has come through the European year of disabled people will focus on that.

Iain Montgomery: I am fortunate because I have been involved in the Scottish steering group for the European year of disabled people. I disseminated information about our activities as widely as I could, but some of the work has been limited. A classic example is that, on the day of the launch, there was a newspaper supplement about the European year of disabled people, but, as far as I am aware, it appeared in only one format in one newspaper and so was not accessible to many people. The supplement was not even in the newspaper that the Scottish steering group had been advised it would be in, so even we were not aware of where to find out what was happening. Moreover, the supplement was not trailed on the front of the newspaper but hidden in the middle. I accept that it is early days, but we clearly must do more to raise the profile.

Janet Allan: We have had no involvement.

The Convener: I have been hogging the questions, so I will let Michael McMahon in.

Mr McMahon: Thanks, convener. I apologise for being late this morning.

Iain Montgomery touched on the business community's role and he mentioned that it might see awareness raising as a gimmick. Has there been enough awareness raising in the business community? Are you aware of any projects that involved the business community and, if so, what were the benefits or problems with those projects?

Iain Montgomery: My experience of dealing with employers has been somewhat confrontational, which is unfortunate. One side tends to be looking for something, while the other side is costing it. There is a lot to be said for a partnership approach to exploring the benefits of long-term support for disabled people who are in the workplace or trying to re-enter it. We need to think more about partnerships than about "them" and "us". That agenda is being taken on board quite effectively by the public and voluntary sectors. We need to maintain that momentum.

Mr McMahon: A few years ago, I attended the launch of an initiative by the Confederation of British Industry. The CBI had identified that it was losing out on the potential of a large section of the community because it was not sufficiently aware of disabled people's needs. Have you any experience of a change of attitude in the business community, even if that has been because of the regulatory demands on it? Has any progress been made?

Douglas Hamilton: I shall hand that question over to Iain Montgomery.

The Convener: That is called delegation.

Iain Montgomery: There have certainly been improvements in attitude. Some of that has been the result of regulations, but there is a growing awareness that benefits can be gained from doing more than the minimum.

We always try to discuss the wider benefits with people. I shall give you a specific example. In one case, we had to argue for improved access for wheelchair users to a location. Once we had achieved that improvement, we found that other groups using the same location, such as mothers with prams, were also benefiting. We could then sell what we had done by saying that it was not just about disabled access or improving things for disabled people, but about creating a better image for the organisation that had provided the access. The organisation could then use that image to sell itself, which would help it to grow.

Janet Allan: We have to consider access, and what we mean by it, carefully. For people with whom I work—most of them are profoundly deaf—access to work is limited by access to post-school education, which enables people to compete effectively. We get into circular arguments when young people leave us and there is little or poor post-school support. For example, we have observed that there is a shortage of people to train our hearing staff in British Sign Language; we want them to be trained by deaf people, because BSL is their language, but no courses in Scotland train deaf people to do that work. A problem for industry is that there are not enough trained deaf people to run courses on deaf awareness in firms that could easily employ deaf people.

Mr McMahon: I shall change tack a little. On numerous occasions, when the committee has discussed in general terms initiatives to promote any one of the range of equalities, young people say, "Where do we fit into this?" Is enough being done for young people? Are they being represented in the initiatives that you mention? Specifically, how does the EYDP assist young people and what sort of representation do young people have generally in disability groups?

Douglas Hamilton: A couple of years ago, I was involved in some research that examined the participation of children and young people generally throughout Scotland. Three groups of young people who were not participating in existing structures were highlighted. They were children from ethnic minorities, very young children and children with disabilities. There have been attempts to find ways of working with children and young people with disabilities, such as those with communication difficulties and learning disabilities, to enable them to participate. The organisation Children in Scotland has been carrying out a project on that issue, which will also be a focus for our work this year.

From my experience with disability organisations and young people, I have found that young people often do not seem to have a significant voice in disability communities. I hope that we will improve that situation this year. The reason why they have not had a significant voice is because traditionally most disability organisations do not have a focus on children and young people. Although organisations such as Capability Scotland and Enable, with which we work closely, have been leading a lot of that kind of work, there is no structure in place. I hope that one will emerge during the year.

Janet Allan: Government has to make the legislation that it introduces in relation to disabled people accessible to the disabled person. This week, I asked a profoundly deaf, sign-reading sixth-year pupil who was going to a university for an exam whether the university had arranged for an interpreter. He said that he did not know, as his letter did not say. I told him to contact the university to tell it that he required one, but he said that it would not listen. I told him that the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 requires it to provide one. Enabled by the knowledge of the law, he was much more confident and I hope that he has told the university that the bill for the interpreter should go to it, not to him. The point is that he did not know what his rights were. Government must ensure that legislation is understood by the people whom it affects.

Mr McMahon: We know the good work that Capability Scotland and Enable do, but do young people feel that they can engage with national organisations? Can they get involved and ensure that their voices will be heard by such groups?

Iain Montgomery: That is a challenge. In the trade union movement, a lot of work is done to encourage young people to become more involved, but the initial visual impact of national organisations, particularly the trade union movement, is of a lot of old fuddy-duddies who have been around for years. Young people cannot see the relevance of such organisations, but it is important that they do. We need to make them aware of the fact that the organisations are not only relevant to them now, but will continue to be so as they grow up and mature.

Mr McMahon: As a former chair of the Scottish Trades Union Congress youth committee and now a fuddy-duddy, I can sympathise with what you are saying. The problem that you talk about can mean that children do not have access to the mechanisms that allow their voices to be heard.

One of the focuses of the European year of disabled people is to build links. What can be done to enhance the links between groups at a national level and an international level?

Douglas Hamilton: A lot of disabled people and young people are not involved in groups. Within Barnardo's, we have seven dedicated services that work with children with physical or learning disabilities. However, we would not be seen as one of the groups that you are talking about. There is a responsibility on organisations such as ours to try to provide links where we have them at other levels. We have to reach out to children and young people where they are and enable existing structures to make themselves accessible to those children and young people.

Mr McMahon: Will the European initiative enhance what we already have or kick-start something that people have been looking for for a long time?

Douglas Hamilton: To an extent, we are looking for things that we can get going—a lot of national work is being done in relation to that, although it is at an early stage. As Janet Allan said, we have to get the message out to children and young people that they can get involved and we have to provide them with opportunities to do so. That would be a positive outcome from the European year of disabled people.

Janet Allan: There is also a large group of children and young people who, realistically, will not be able to have an influence themselves, and their parents will be important as their mouthpiece. For the parents I deal with, one of the great difficulties is finance; they cannot work because there is no specialist child care. Another problem is simply getting their act together, because there are so many people to see. To empower parents, we need better child care and facilities for specific things, such as getting tuned into any of the initiatives that their children need help with. That would help.

11:00

Mr McMahon: I am sure that we will take that on board.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): One of the objectives is to raise awareness of the multiple discrimination that faces people with disabilities. How do you feel that the issues of multiple discrimination are being addressed, if at all, and what changes would you like to result from this year's activities?

Douglas Hamilton: Reference has already been made to our Apna project in Glasgow, which involves working with children with disabilities from ethnic minorities. As far as I am aware, the project is one of very few such services in Scotland, if not the only one. It is certainly the only project in Glasgow that has that focus. I was speaking to the service manager earlier this week and discovered that there are plans afoot to increase the service. There are bilingual workers who provide an appropriate and culturally aware service, but there is now a waiting list.

We have heard of people moving from one side of Glasgow down to the south side, simply because that is the only place where they can access such a service. That does not seem right to me. The service manager was talking about people changing their jobs and giving up their businesses to move across Glasgow and access a service for which they now find themselves on a waiting list. There is clearly an issue surrounding service provision for that group, and we hope that that will be highlighted throughout the year.

Iain Montgomery: I wholly support that. We were discussing a colleague who is taking up a position with Scottish Women's Aid, which provides a service for disabled women and women with disabled children who are looking for refuge. That sort of facility is unique. There is a tendency for society to put people into categories, and if someone crosses over one or more categories society finds it difficult to accept the issues or to realise what they are. We must be far more aware of dual discrimination and how we can address it.

Cathy Peattie: The Madrid declaration recommends that local authorities should draft plans of action on disability in co-operation with local representatives and organisations, so that they can spearhead activities in their communities. Do you feel that that would be a constructive way forward? If so, how could people work more closely with local authorities? We are concerned that those very people do not have information, so perhaps that would be better addressed at local level. It is important that local authorities are proactive, but how do we encourage them to be proactive?

Janet Allan: It would depend on which branches of local authorities—social work, education and so on—you were dealing with. When I think of multiple discrimination, I think of young infants who have no access to services. Disabled parents of disabled children have been mentioned. We have a wee one in school who was not picked up by any service until her mother went into Department of Health and Social Security bed-and-breakfast accommodation with five children, including that child, who had very complex needs. We load discrimination on discrimination as those babies become children, then adults, and more and more opportunities are missed. Education starts at three, but we need to provide services earlier than that, perhaps through health departments.

Cathy Peattie: You are talking about delivery through education or through health. Do you agree that, with local authority plans, we should be looking at mainstreaming and working across departments? It is too easy to pass issues relating to disabilities to the social work department, for instance, when they could involve everything from planning to education to housing. All departments that deliver services to communities need to be aware of the services that they need to deliver to people with disabilities.

Janet Allan: I would not argue with that. Joined-up thinking in local authorities is important, but there is a danger that the departments create a superstructure of industry, in which they talk to each other yet the actual delivery to the person who needs the service does not happen, because the structure is so complex and it is not clear who takes responsibility.

Cathy Peattie: That was my point. How do local authorities then engage with their communities and with local voluntary organisations?

Iain Montgomery: Local authorities already do some very good work in this area, and some of it is joined up. That work is about engaging with groups of disabled people or people who are discriminated against and involving them in the process. Children's services plans, which already exist in local authorities, are quite a good model, because they involve a full range of departments, but they also involve the people who ultimately benefit from the services that are provided. Again, it is about profile and awareness. It is about letting groups and individuals know that the opportunity exists, and making the opportunity accessible to them in terms of communication and physical access, and ensuring that their views are taken on board and that they drive the agenda.

Douglas Hamilton: I agree. Children's services plans are probably the logical place to start, because children with disabilities should be counted in those plans as children in need. Services plans are supposed to be corporate documents anyway, so that is the logical route. New structures do not need to be created. We should ensure that those plans work effectively.

I agree that many local authorities are already working in partnership and are doing good work. That just needs to be enhanced across Scotland. When we consider some of the funding streams that are becoming available, such as the changing children's services fund, let us ensure that money is dedicated for services for disabled children and young people. If money is available, that will focus local authorities' attention and ensure that something gets done.

Cathy Peattie: As an MSP, most complaints that I get from parents are from those who have younger children with special educational needs. They complain that local authorities never listen to them and that they feel excluded from such plans. How can we encourage local authorities and others to listen to those parents?

Douglas Hamilton: Without beating them with a stick?

Cathy Peattie: I do not care what we beat them with.

Douglas Hamilton: We hope that the provisions in the draft education (additional support for learning) (Scotland) bill to allow a supportive person to be alongside will go some way to addressing those concerns and will place more focus on listening to those people who are affected.

Janet Allan: Sometimes there are issues with the parents of disabled children in that they want specific education services for their children, but the authority, which is the provider and is responsible for paying, turns them down for one reason or another. If the parents want to appeal, they appeal to the authority, and find themselves going round in circles. For every one child who comes to us, we probably have three parents who would say, "We were not listened to." Choice should be available, but it is not, and because the appeal body is the local authority, the parents go round in circles.

Cathy Peattie: My background is in the voluntary sector, and I am reminded of the many years with this or that theme, or the flavour of the month or the flavour of that year, and everyone getting really excited that this would be the year to challenge a particular issue. How do we ensure that this year's flavour of the year does not disappear to make room for next year's flavour of the year? How do we ensure sustainability on issues relating to disability? How do we ensure that some of the issues that have been raised or are starting to be raised this year are kept on the agenda?

Douglas Hamilton: I can think of a number of ways to ensure that. Indeed, it is a shame that the Equal Opportunities Committee will be dissolving soon. Hopefully, those issues could be covered in your legacy paper and it would then be a matter of continuing the work that is being done now. You could set goals and call for certain things to be achieved by the end of the year. In relation to the participation of children and young people, for example, you could aim to have the structures, or at least the plans, in place by the end of the year for that to happen in the future.

It is important that we remain targeted on the issues. If there are issues around multiple discrimination, for example, let us set out what we want to achieve, say by the end of the year. Ideally, we want Government to commit to developing services and to making funding available. If we can raise awareness on those issues and give more people a voice with which to speak directly on the things that affect them, that will raise awareness. We can then put things into action.

We have to sustain things throughout the year. We should be looking towards the end of the year and deciding what we would like to have been achieved by the end of December. If we do not do that, things could end up fizzling out, so a plan needs to be in place. I have not been involved so much with the steering group, and I do not know what its plans are, but I hope that there will be something there.

Iain Montgomery: There are certainly plans. There is also the more cynical approach, whereby we ensure that we engage people's self-interest. At the launch of the year, we heard a very good presentation from an employee of B&Q, who spoke about the benefits to her employer of being more disabled aware and disabled accessible. If it is possible to engage people in that way, that will maintain the momentum and ensure that people keep their interest after the European year and the pat on the head, and after all the bunting has gone back in the box. It is important to view people's actions as positive: it is not just about having to do things, but about wanting to do them.

Mr Paterson: How will we be able to tell whether we have achieved the aims of the European year of disabled people? I will throw another question on top of that, for people to think about. I have deliberately used the acronym "EYDP" in my report. Using the acronym might seem like using shorthand, or being lazy, but does the use of "EYDP" instead of "European year of disabled people" in full make the year more sexy and highlight it better? If I am lazy and use the acronym—I will do so if I know that I am talking to people who know about it—am I missing out some folk, or does it encourage people to take note of the year?

To go back to my first question, how do we judge whether we have been successful?

Janet Allan: The targets that are set need to be measurable. When targets are set for the end of the year—as Douglas Hamilton was describing—it is important that we know what the measure of success will be.

I would guess that about 90 per cent of the population would not know what you were talking about if you mentioned EYDP. This touches on what Iain Montgomery said about self-interest. It would be good to have some sort of title that would give people a feeling that they have a right to get something—something with a "Get in there and take what's yours" feel to it. Those who most need Government benefits are often the ones who do not get them. I have a horrible feeling that the same thing could happen in this case if we do not get to where the people are.

Iain Montgomery: We should be slightly cautious, in so far as some of the measures of success will not be apparent over the 12 months. If the successes are truly to be long term, some of them will not become apparent immediately. We need to let people know that, so that they are not disheartened if, at the end of 12 months, they do not see a fundamental change in society, in the public sector or voluntary sector or wherever. We should set milestones rather than targets, and we should build on those. One of the things that we should ask at the end of the year is what we are going to do next. We should remind ourselves at the end of the year that the work is not finished, and we should keep it going.

Mr Paterson: Do you expect a difference to develop from what is, effectively, a pan-European campaign?

Iain Montgomery: I would like more disabled people to become involved locally. I would like them to realise that what is involved is not just some groups of people speaking for them; they can speak for themselves and become involved locally, then feed their views through those structures. I have always been guilty of thinking that there is just me and that I am all alone. If we use a pan-European campaign properly, people will become involved and will feel stronger for doing so.

11:15

Mr Paterson: Janet Allan spoke about targets. What targets should we aim for? That question is open to everybody.

Janet Allan: I agree with Iain Montgomery that a target is not the end point. Targets should cover the inclusion of young people in decision making. How many young disabled people were involved in the conception of the year? Is it what they wanted? Is it the best way to do what they want? I have no idea how the Scottish steering group works, so it is hard for me to specify targets, but the people whom the year is about should be involved in the decision making on it.

Mr Paterson: Is the year an opportunity for a wider discussion on the definition of disability?

Iain Montgomery: Yes, very much so. The experience is personal. Finding an all-inclusive form of words will be difficult, but the current legalistic form of words is also a difficulty. My trade union is unhappy with that wording and feels that it excludes as many people as it includes. However many amendments are made, people will always be excluded. Rather than legal protection, we should talk about full civil rights, which are the subject of a long-standing campaign that will continue and could run in parallel with the European year of disabled people. We need to consider rights and civic involvement.

Douglas Hamilton: As an outsider on such issues, I sometimes feel that it is best not to spend all our time focusing on definitions and that we should recognise needs. Whatever definition is used, the children and young people in question have needs. How do we meet those needs? Regardless of the labels that are attached, I would rather that we raised awareness of those needs, took action to provide services where they are not provided and listened where we do not listen. Sometimes, matters such as definitions can be a distraction from people's needs.

Mr Paterson: Do any objectives miss a target or have we missed out any objectives?

Douglas Hamilton: In the UK's objectives or in the European objectives?

Mr Paterson: Both, but I suppose that what is happening in Scotland and the UK is more important.

Douglas Hamilton: I highlight poverty issues, although they are probably included in the objectives. Poverty is a great need that could be addressed this year. The report that we published last year and sent to all MSPs highlighted the impact on a family of having a disabled child. It can cost three times as much to raise a child with a disability as it costs to raise a child without a disability. A family with a disabled child is less likely to be in work, and Government policies make work the route out of poverty. Because of the condition of a child, work is not an option in many families. How do we deal with that? We need to grapple with such issues.

If we are committed to reducing the level of child poverty and to eradicating poverty within a generation, we should tackle it. During the year, we should highlight the fact that a group is massively excluded from many of the policies that try to deal with those issues.

Mr Paterson: Is that where the Scottish Parliament can make the difference?

Douglas Hamilton: I hope so. Obviously, the Parliament does not have much power over issues related to benefits and social security. However, we have raised issues about the lack of specialist child care that is available for families who have disabled children. The Scottish Parliament could make a difference on issues such as housing adaptations and service provision.

The Convener: Douglas Hamilton and Janet Allan have talked about the lack of participation of young disabled people in planning and structures such as the Scottish steering group. It occurs to me that, when my daughter and son were young, I would have been vaguely worried about them sitting on steering groups and being involved in committees that were planning things to do with Government initiatives—or anything at all, for that matter. If they had come home and said that they would be sitting on a steering group, I would have been vaguely worried. Would such participation put terrible responsibility and pressure on disabled young people that perhaps they do not want? Is there a desire among disabled young people to be involved in planning at that stage? Would they prefer—as do a lot of younger people—that adults talked to them and took on board their points of view? I suspect that my kids would not have wanted such pressure.

Douglas Hamilton: I do not particularly want to sit on planning committees and I would not expect any child or young person to want to do that. I do not think that we have said that the young people should be members of the committees; we want to ensure that their views are heard when the committees make decisions and that things are being done appropriately for them. One of my big bugbears about the participation of children and young people is that it must be fun and the activity must be good.

It is quite daunting for me to sit in front of a committee such as this and I certainly would not want to put a child or young person through the experience. We will try to find ways to make participation fun and enjoyable in our planned snakes and ladders project. The end result of such participation is that we will be able to feed the views of children and young people into the decision-making structures and ensure that their views have been taken into account. Often, we ask young people questions, get their views and say, “Thank you very much,” before we carry on anyway.

Janet Allan: I agree with Douglas Hamilton to a large extent. I do not think that the young people want to be on committees.

We had persuaded some MSPs to come to the school to discuss an issue with us in the early evening. When I told some of the older resident kids that we were really lucky to get those people to come to the school, they said, “Aw, but what about the football?” That is what you expect from kids. However, they also said, “Will you tell them that we want A, B, C and D?” There must be avenues through which young people can get their voices heard. Most young people just want the result. We are guilty, as a nation, of failing to respect our young people; we take evidence from them and do not bother to tell them what has happened with it.

We talked about the national debate on education. The information that came out of that debate is readable by some of us, under duress, but it is not accessible to most of us and it is certainly not accessible to young people. Some feedback and interaction with young people would be useful.

The Convener: Thank you very much. That has clarified that matter.

I thank the witnesses for coming to give evidence to the committee. The result of the evidence session will be included in the legacy paper that we leave for the next Equal Opportunities Committee.

I suspend the meeting for a couple of minutes to allow for the changeover of witnesses.

11:23

Meeting suspended.

11:25

On resuming—

The Convener: I reconvene the meeting and welcome Stuart Duffin from Scottish Chambers of Commerce, Robert Mooney from the National League of the Blind and Disabled and Jim O’Rourke from the Scottish National Federation for the Welfare of the Blind. We had hoped to take evidence from the Minority Ethnic Learning Disability Initiative, but we have received apologies from its representative.

We will go straight to questions. As the witnesses have the advantage of having seen the previous evidence session, they will know what to expect. I will begin with a general question. Why do we need a year of disabled people? Is it the way to improve the situation of disabled people or any other specific group in society? Furthermore, will it have any positive effect or will it somehow overshadow the work and initiatives that are already going on?

Stuart Duffin (Scottish Chambers of Commerce): As far as the business community is concerned, such a year is important for raising awareness. We need to build up knowledge, skills and understanding within the business community and across the range of initiatives that involve employees, employers and customers. Raising awareness throughout the business community would be a key outcome of such a year; it is certainly an achievable and laudable target.

Robert Mooney (National League of the Blind and Disabled): Many media issues concern disabled people. Even if all that the European year of the disabled does is open up forums in which such issues can be discussed, that will be a major step forward.

James O'Rourke (Scottish National Federation for the Welfare of the Blind): It is important to have a European year of disabled people; however, it is more important that, once the year is over, we do not have to wait until the next year of disabled people for more positive steps to be made. We must ensure that the message gets through to business, employers, employees, education and benefits organisations that disabled people are out there and must be respected as much as anyone else in the community.

The Convener: What is your response to my question about publicity, which I asked the previous panel of witnesses? Are people in general aware that this is the European year of the disabled, or is it mainly the people in this room who have an interest in the issue? If the people whom we really need to make aware of this event are not aware of it, what more can be done to publicise it and to make people realise what we are trying to do?

Stuart Duffin: For a start, one has to ask where the business representation on the steering group is and, indeed, how we can raise the business community's profile in all the key issues. I speak this morning on behalf of Scottish Chambers of Commerce; however, in my day job, I am chief executive of West Lothian Chamber of Commerce, which has been trying to raise awareness with employers and business through developing links and working with key voluntary sector agencies. By doing so, we hope to develop a toolkit for the small to medium-sized enterprise sector. Such links and the promotion of issues locally are helping to raise awareness, but we are talking about more of a bottom-up approach than a national campaign.

The Convener: Is awareness being raised of the fact that disabled people have money to spend and that businesses should therefore be made more accessible to disabled people, or is awareness being raised in terms of disabled people needing to earn money so that they can spend it? Has awareness been raised among employers about the importance of being good employers?

Stuart Duffin: Awareness is being raised about both. Business is beginning to recognise that there is an untapped market of customers out there. Let us again take the West Lothian example: the retail sector in West Lothian, especially in Livingston, which is a new town, has the Almondvale shopping centre and the McArthurGlen designer outlet centre. Those are large retail regional outlets that are on the level. It is interesting to look at those developments in relation to the increase in disabled customers that has resulted from the retail community developing its awareness.

There is also an issue in terms of the economic drivers, in that there is a wealth of talent among people with disabilities. If we are turning Scotland's economy round from being a manufacturing economy to an economy that is based on knowledge and service to people, there is a key issue in considering the talent of people with disabilities who can add to that knowledge economy.

11:30

Robert Mooney: I work with Glasgow City Council, and I have been disappointed that the EYDP has not been publicised more within the council. It could have included such information in its monthly magazine or on the notice boards that it has all over the place. Those would be ideal places to publicise the year. I also feel that we should be publicising it to children through education and the schools, in order to raise their awareness.

James O'Rourke: I am retired and I feel that the issue has not been publicised enough through the media of television, radio, newspapers and advertisements. As a blind person, I feel that the year could also have been publicised more through talking newspapers.

Mr McMahon: My question is primarily for Stuart Duffin, but Robert Mooney and James O'Rourke may comment. You heard me earlier asking about initiatives in the business community; I mentioned one that the CBI kicked off a few years ago. What is your interpretation of the success of that initiative? Can you give us any examples of other initiatives that have been used by the business community to attract people with disabilities into the work force and to meet their needs?

Stuart Duffin: The CBI initiative was successful for a period, but that success was not sustained. A number of good outcomes could have been achieved if additional support had been given to the initiative, which could have embedded itself in good employment practice. One of the initiatives that we are considering in relation to disability in the work force is to encourage it to be seen as part of the corporate social responsibility agenda; we want to marry those two elements as a key policy directive for business.

There are three issues: first, we must consider the workplace. I will use the West Lothian example again. About 16,500 people in West Lothian are on some form of incapacity benefit. That is a huge pool of people to be exploited—I use the word in its best sense—both as consumers and as potential employees. A variety of initiatives work through the new deal; through connecting people with disabilities to potential jobs and through Scottish Enterprise's academies projects, which provide skills for particular sectors such as the health care sector, the retail sector or whatever. There are mainstream initiatives that disabled people should be able to access and develop.

There is potential on the consumer side for business to exploit disabled people—people need to be able to buy goods. The e-commerce debate is developing and the development of online buying is also a key initiative that we need to begin to exploit in relation to people with disabilities.

Mr McMahon: Do James O'Rourke or Robert Mooney want to comment on any initiatives?

James O'Rourke: As far as online buying is concerned, more companies should try to make their websites more friendly to visually impaired people, so that they can use them. There are websites from which visually impaired people can buy online without a problem, but there are many websites that are not visual-impairment friendly.

Mr McMahon: I have a specific point for Stuart Duffin. I know in general terms that the business community would like education authorities to ensure that the people who come through the education system are ready for employers to take advantage of at the end of the day. However, do you think that the education authorities are aware of the needs of young people with disabilities in ways that allow them, at the end of their schooling, to enter the work force on equal terms with their peers?

Stuart Duffin: There is an issue about capacity building in terms of young people with disabilities—for example, in building their confidence to go into the workplace, which is a new environment in which they are different from their workmates. There is an issue about education of the work force. Our terminology refers to the education of the work force for diverse work forces, so that people and work colleagues can understand the needs of disabled people. There is a multilayered need for education and awareness development that simply does not exist among businesses or employees.

Mr McMahon: Do you think that education as it stands is geared to ensuring that young people come into the work force prepared in any way for such diversity?

Stuart Duffin: No.

Robert Mooney: It is obvious that education is important in people eventually becoming employed. I think that most people know that a disabled person is twice as likely not to have any formal certificates when they leave school. I hope, and believe, that that is beginning to change. My son goes to a unit for the visually impaired within Penilee Secondary School. He has gone through the whole mainstream education system. Three pupils who attended the visually impaired unit left school last year and all have got university places—the situation is improving. The majority of children who left school the previous year got university places, so I hope that the situation is beginning to change through that. That is only one example, but I hope that it is being mirrored throughout the country.

Cathy Peattie: My point is on the issue of accessibility to jobs. Robert Mooney is right that more and more young people with disabilities are going to university. I have a young local constituent who is an honours graduate who is hard of hearing, and he is finding it difficult to get Scottish Enterprise to understand and to help him to fund a postgraduate course in information technology. He feels that he could develop his career.

How can we break down such barriers? That young man is a bright and enthusiastic honours graduate. How can he break down barriers and convince people that he is worth investing in and that, if he is given the opportunity, he will be an excellent employee? People sign up to many initiatives and say, "Let's do that—it will be wonderful," but the reality is sometimes that they do not do what they signed up to do. How can we change things? Can the European year of disabled people help?

Stuart Duffin: The development of potential must be put on the agenda and sold to people. We need to break down the physical and social barriers that exist and we must develop the skills and potential of young disabled people. We must also consider what type of economic structure we want in Scotland. We talk frequently about social inclusion, but we should also consider economic inclusion as part of that agenda. Perhaps local economic forums have a key role to play in taking forward that economic inclusion agenda; they aim to move the economy forward and employees or potential employees are a key element of that process.

Mr McMahon: I asked the other witnesses whether they believe that young people's voices are being heard in a way that enables them to gain access to the services that they require within the witnesses' organisations, to the representation that they need and to links with other organisations. Will the European year of disabled people assist in improving matters?

James O'Rourke: Young disabled people must be encouraged to speak their minds and that encouragement should start at school. They must not feel overawed by their able-bodied counterparts, but should be encouraged to discuss what they want out of life and how they would like to get it. The previous panel of witnesses mentioned young disabled people not wanting to sit on planning committees, but there should be a structure in which young people can speak to local forums, which could then bring their ideas forward. As young disabled people grow more confident, their involvement can be encouraged. There are many clever disabled people out there. I have worked in supportive employment all my life and there have been many opportunities to develop potential. We need to be more aware of the needs of young disabled people.

Stuart Duffin: The issue is about getting beyond the usual suspects, which is difficult. However, there are a couple of initiatives in Scotland. The Scottish Youth Parliament could be a good vehicle for developing the debate about young people, disability and access. We are all aware that the elections are approaching; the Hansard Society Scotland is running mock elections in schools and, in the European year of disabled people, such elections are a very good vehicle for young people to drive the agenda on particular election issues.

Robert Mooney: Confidence is one of the most important things for disabled people, including disabled children. It is important to try to build confidence; that can be done by integrating children at nursery school level. If disabled children are integrated at that stage, it helps raise their confidence and it is important in helping able-bodied children to accept disabled people. I went to a school for partially sighted children and was taken right out of the community. The school was miles from where I lived and my disabled friends went to schools all over the city. Integration is really important for building confidence.

11:45

Cathy Peattie: One of this year's key objectives is to raise awareness of the multiple discrimination that people with disabilities face. How is that being addressed? What changes would you like to result from the year's activities?

Stuart Duffin: In general terms, I would like the disability agenda's becoming a firm part of the community planning agenda to be a key outcome of the year, which would give the agenda a sense of longevity. There must also be engagement with local groups. The best way to embed any idea or policy change is to get people talking about it, regardless of the medium. It is very positive that we are beginning to talk about the issue this year.

James O'Rourke: I have a multidisabled, visually impaired boy and I would say that there is more awareness in this area now. In particular, a lot of good work is being done with visually impaired people with multiple disabilities through the Royal National Institute for the Blind in Scotland.

Cathy Peattie: I am interested in your opinion on the suitability of any key messages to do with awareness raising that should be conveyed over the year. Which are the important issues to raise, and how do we do that?

Robert Mooney: The most important issues are employment, education and integration. Forums such as the committee are important. The matter is about getting together with different organisations, including national Government, local authorities and voluntary organisations. We should use this year in particular to get together and talk.

Stuart Duffin: I agree. I add that one of the key messages that needs to be conveyed from the business community's point of view is the message about developing potential. That is about reducing employee turnover and instilling the attitude that people with disabilities are good employees. Keeping good employees is key to the economics of business these days. The corporate social responsibility agenda is also about enhancing industry's corporate reputation, which is a key element that we could achieve this year. The type of business that we want to see in Scotland will determine the sustainability of our economy.

James O'Rourke: I agree with that. We must ensure that consumers and businesses realise that disabled people are good employees and that they can work, provided that facilities exist for them, which does not always mean paying a lot to enable access or to change things around to make it possible for people to work in a certain environment.

Cathy Peattie: The Madrid declaration recommends that local authorities have draft plans of action on disability and that they work with representatives of local organisations to help to develop those plans and find ways forward. Do you feel that local authorities are able to engage with organisations and individuals with an interest in disability?

Stuart Duffin: That goes back to the point about being more heavily involved in the community planning process and having disability as a key agenda item for the modernisation of local government. Local authorities are beginning to consider area co-ordination teams and to develop joint centres, such as for health and Jobcentre Plus, to create an integrated, connected approach. That is key.

Cathy Peattie: How do you ensure that local authorities are not just paying lip service to an idea? Sometimes people have wonderful plans relating to disability, but the voices of people with disabilities have not been heard in the making of those plans. Local authorities have sometimes been guilty of that. I would be interested in what James or Robert think about ensuring that their voices are heard.

James O'Rourke: You are probably right. Local authorities throughout Scotland are going up hills and down dales as far as disability is concerned. I have been asked by the organisation that I am representing today to become involved in two local authority task groups on the visually impaired. One is making significant progress, whereas the other seems to be bogged down. People tell me that there are no services at all in some areas; when they ask why, they are told that it is all down to money.

Robert Mooney: Local authorities are striving to improve their relationships with voluntary organisations, and there are one or two good initiatives. However, I feel strongly that the way forward for local authorities in disability awareness is for them to employ more disabled people.

Cathy Peattie: Absolutely.

Mr Paterson: How will we know whether the European year of disabled people has fulfilled its aims?

James O'Rourke: I hope that whatever we bring forward this year continues next year and the following year. As I said at the beginning, we need to ensure that we are not here in three, four or 10 years' time saying exactly the same things that we are saying today. We held a conference on rehabilitation training for the sensory impaired at which we heard rehabilitation officers saying what rehabilitation officers had said 20 years ago. It is important that the agenda moves forward.

Stuart Duffin: It is key that we make links across the sectors. Today's evidence is a testament to that, given that Scottish Chambers of Commerce has given evidence on European year of disabled people. A successful outcome for the European year of disabled people would be the establishment of sustainable links.

Robert Mooney: As I said earlier, it is important that voluntary organisations, national Government and local government talk together. I hope that if that is achieved this year, it will continue for years to come.

Mr Paterson: Do you anticipate that that will help to make a difference, particularly for your own organisations or groups?

Robert Mooney: My organisation is the National League of the Blind and Disabled, which is a division of another trade union—we amalgamated only recently. We will raise awareness of the issues faced by disabled people within the trade union, and that will help.

James O'Rourke: I hope that this year's Scottish National Federation for the Welfare of the Blind conference, the theme of which was the European year of disabled people, raised the profile of disabled people. We have also set up a rehabilitation sub-group to consider the services that rehabilitation workers give clients. We are considering those services from the point of view of the employee, the client and the employer. We hope to be able to produce some proposals that we will advance through our contacts in the Parliament.

We took a Loughborough University transport survey to Lothian Buses' Portobello bus station last week, in order to look at various destinations and numbers on buses from the point of view of visually impaired people, although able-bodied and other disabled people were there too. We examined destination boards and how easy it is to identify destinations and numbers. We hope that we can move whatever proposals we produce on to next year and that we keep on moving forward.

Stuart Duffin: One key hope for the year is the development of an information hub of everybody who has been doing something in the European year of disabled people, so that the information and connections are available for any organisation or business that wants to take a step up the learning curve. It is often difficult, particularly for small businesses, to make such leaps, and having the information available is part and parcel of the year.

Mr Paterson: I was going to ask whether you thought that setting targets was appropriate, but it is implicit that all three of you have already set some targets. Should the Scottish Parliament set targets? If so, what type of targets should we set?

Stuart Duffin: We are not necessarily setting targets but outcomes—there is a subtle difference between them. If we set targets, we almost set ourselves up for failure, because circumstances might mean that we might not achieve them.

From the business community's point of view, particular issues would be, for example, considering a percentage increase over the year in the number of people with disabilities in the workforce or in self-employment. Those are specific, achievable goals. Another really useful, achievable outcome would be an increase in the use of the toolkit for small and medium-sized enterprises, to enable them to take a step up the learning curve.

James O'Rourke: I would like the Scottish Parliament to examine the services that local authorities give disabled people, which often help to get disabled persons into employment. I speak for the visually impaired, but I include all the disabled in what I say. The visually impaired need rehabilitation training—mobility training using a long cane or a guide dog. That training is most important for getting visually impaired people into employment but it is also important for life in general.

The Parliament must examine the local authorities that plead poverty, why they plead poverty and what can be done to help them and the other local authorities that seem to be getting on with the job. As I said, it is a case of going up hill and down dale throughout Scotland.

Robert Mooney: I agree with Stuart Duffin. We should not create targets that we might not meet, but we have certain aims, such as more employment for disabled people and a better deal in the education of our disabled children.

Mr Paterson: So perhaps the definition is to do with goals rather than targets.

Would you say that this is a particularly good year to open up a wider discussion on the definition of disability?

12:00

James O'Rourke: Yes, I think so. I think that any year is a good year, but this year in particular is a good opportunity to do that. What everybody should realise is that disability can come to anybody's door at any time. It can come when somebody is born or through illness or accident. A lot of people shy away from disability. You may remember the BBC programme, "Does He Take Sugar?" Many a time, as my disabled colleagues know, somebody will speak over your head to the person who is with you without consulting you at all. If this is the year when we can really raise the profile of disability, let us do it.

Stuart Duffin: This year is a particularly good year, given that there is an election looming—people with disabilities do vote.

Mr Paterson: Let me write that down.

Are there any glaring examples of things that have been missed out, which we should really pick up the cudgels for in Scotland?

Robert Mooney: There is something that we spoke about earlier in relation to access. Access to buildings is obviously important, as is access to reading material for blind people, but it is also important to educate the staff of Government departments and national companies. Access is not just about getting into a building. If I, as a visually impaired person, go into a pub for a pub meal and the menu is written only on a blackboard, I cannot access that information. I can ask a member of staff what is available, and if they read out the menu for me then the accessibility is there and that is fine, but if the member of staff says, "Sorry. I don't have the time. I'm really busy," that becomes a problem. Training is important.

Stuart Duffin: I would like to comment on integration and on understanding and awareness of disabilities in the curriculum. We have mentioned the curriculum and, in particular, the key role of civic education in schools in focusing on the broad disability agenda. Initiatives with the business community can also help to support awareness of disability in small and medium-sized enterprises.

Cathy Peattie: There has been—quite rightly—discussion about business having the toolkit to be able to provide appropriate support for work placements. There are also issues about training. Do you agree that the best people to provide awareness training are groups who have an interest in disability, rather than people who have no experience? Do voluntary sector disability groups have a key role to play, and should they be resourced to do some of that work?

Stuart Duffin: That is vital. We cannot all be good at everything, so we need some areas of specialism. That is a key element in developing a partnership role between the voluntary, public and private sectors in delivering awareness training. In West Lothian, we work with Into Work in delivering and supporting disability initiatives for employees. That partnership needs to be strengthened and facilitated.

The Convener: I think that Gil Paterson has a short final question.

Mr Paterson: As much for my own benefit as for anyone else's, I want to take a straw poll of what people think about using the term EYDP, which, as I said earlier, I use as shorthand. Is it a big mistake to use EYDP rather than the longer form? Perhaps anyone in the audience who has a view on that could write to us and let us know.

Stuart Duffin: EYDP sounds like an American medical soap.

Mr Paterson: So it might work.

The Convener: It sounds more like a police programme, like "NYPD Blue".

Robert Mooney: I feel that the long version should definitely be used. If I were to refer to our organisation as the NLBD, most people would probably not know what that is. It is important that we use the longer version.

James O'Rourke: I agree. If I said that I was from the SNFWB and you did not have the information in front of you, you would have said, "What is that?"

Mr Paterson: I would have thought that you were here to arrest me.

James O'Rourke: The use should depend on the context. If the term is being used in a big document, it could sometimes be abbreviated. Perhaps every two or three pages, the term should go back to the full name, so that people can get used to it.

The Convener: I thank the witnesses for coming along. I also thank all the Parliament staff for organising today's meeting—most people will not be aware of the amount of work that goes into getting us out of the Parliament chambers and into other venues. I also thank the interpreters for facilitating today's meeting

My thanks also go to all the people who sat in the public gallery and took an interest in our proceedings. I invite everybody to come through to the buffet in the Cramond room.

Meeting closed at 12:06.

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