EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 21 March 2006

Session 2

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6th Meeting 2006, Session 2

CONVENER

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP)
*Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab)
*Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
*John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
*Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con)
Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP)
Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Jess Barrow (Scottish Executive Health Department)
John Brady (B&Q)
Patrick Browne (Scottish Beer and Pub Association)
Malcolm Chisholm (Minister for Communities)
Heather Lowden (sportscotland)
Gavin Macleod (Scottish Disability Sport)
Lorraine Thomson (Visit Scotland)
Mr Jim Tough (Scottish Arts Council)
John Wilkinson (Cinema Exhibitors Association)

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Steve Farrell

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Zoé Tough

ASSISTANT CLERK

Roy McMahon

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Tuesday 21 March 2006

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 09:34*]

Age

The Convener (Cathy Peattie): Good morning. In opening the sixth meeting of the Equal Opportunities Committee in 2006, I remind all those present that mobile phones should be turned off completely because they interfere with our sound system. I have received apologies from Frances Curran and Elaine Smith. Jamie McGrigor will be late.

Agenda item 1 is on the Scottish Executive's consultation document "Age and Experience: Consultation on the Strategy for a Scotland with an Ageing Population". I am pleased to welcome the Minister for Communities, Malcolm Chisholm, and Scottish Executive officials Fiona Hird and Jess Barrow. I invite the minister to make an opening statement.

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm): Last week, I was pleased to launch "Age and Experience: Consultation on the Strategy for a Scotland with an Ageing Population". Before I talk briefly about the consultation process, let me provide some context for the issue.

The Scottish Parliament has achieved quite a lot for older people, but there is more to do. We are trying to build on what has been achieved to face the future challenges of Scotland's aging population as the percentage of the population aged over 65 increases from its present level of about 15 per cent to more than 25 per cent in 25 years' time. That change is sometimes described as a problem or even—shockingly, in my opinion—a burden for society to bear. In a way, the heart of the strategy is to challenge stereotypes so that we see older people as a resource and as great contributors to Scottish society. We are trying to break down the stereotypes by saying that the increased number of older people in society is a great opportunity for Scotland. That is the foundation for the strategy.

However, the strategy does not forget what one might call the traditional service areas. We are looking to provide older people with the services that they need, when they need them. In our consideration of new models of service delivery, the idea of integration is very much to the fore. That is an outline of the proposed strategy, but I look forward to answering more questions about the details.

I know that the consultation process is of particular interest to the committee. The consultation document is being sent to a range of people and organisations from across Scotland. We are consulting older people's interest groups, community councils, housing organisations, rural organisations and many others. We also want to hear from professionals and service providers from the business and voluntary sectors. We worked from a wide variety of Scottish Executive distribution lists to send out a first tranche of 5,000 copies of the consultation document and more copies are being requested and sent out each day. We are also working with various organisations to tap into their networks of contacts.

We are encouraging as many people as possible to contribute to the consultation. Our website—www.infoscotland.com/experience—is a resource that gives people the opportunity to complete the consultation questionnaire online and to find out more about the development of the strategy. The website also features a range of opinionated models.

We know that a lot of information about the aging population is available, including a lot of work by respected academics and researchers. To ensure that our strategy draws on that expertise, we are commissioning a series of policy briefing papers that will provide an analysis of existing research and strengthen the final strategy. We are also commissioning a series of focus groups to explore the perspectives of different age cohorts, rural and urban perspectives and different equality perspectives, such as the views of people from minority ethnic communities and people with disabilities.

We are working with a wide variety of organisations to organise seminars on specific topics for which people with a special interest in a subject will be brought in. We are in discussion with organisations ranging from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to the National Union of Journalists, Age Concern Scotland and Help the Aged. We are involving the older people's consultative forum, which is a quarterly forum that I chair for leading Scottish voluntary organisations for older people. We are also working hard internally to ensure that ministers, Executive departments and officials are aware of, and contribute to, the strategy.

The consultation will last until 5 June. After that, we will gather together all the evidence and, making use of the responses, develop the strategy and launch it by the end of the year. All that work is being overseen by an advisory group of individuals from a wide range of interests covering employment, health, social care, housing, older

people's interests, equalities, new technology and volunteering.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to introduce the consultation. I am encouraged to hear about the committee's useful stock-taking exercise on age issues, the timing of which is helpful for our plans. I look forward to answering members' questions and hearing their views.

The Convener: We have lots of questions for you. The "Setting the Scene" paper that accompanies the consultation mentions several initiatives that are in place, such as joint future and "Building a Health Service Fit for the Future". What will the added value of the strategy for an aging population be?

Malcolm Chisholm: We are building on existing initiatives and policy developments. The two initiatives that you mentioned are good examples that, in their own time, have driven forward the agenda for older people's services. The joint future agenda is still developing; it concerns integrated services, which are central to the strategy. The developments in the health service following the David Kerr report are crucial to the way in which care is delivered to older people, with an emphasis on integrated care and keeping people at home as far as possible.

We are building on those initiatives; we are not trying to reinvent those policies. We hope to develop the idea of integrated services, which is fundamental to those policies and others. The new dimension challenges the stereotypes of aging and emphasises the great contribution that older people make to Scottish society and will make if some of the barriers to that contribution are removed. The strategy builds on our good foundation of policies and initiatives but broadens it and looks to the future. The intention is for the nation to address the challenges that we face because of Scotland's changing demography.

The Convener: "Setting the Scene" defines older people as people who are over 50, which I find worrying. How was that age decided on?

Malcolm Chisholm: That question is interesting. The document says:

"a flexible view needs to be taken of what 'older' means".

There is no answer to the question of when someone is "older", but if we are breaking down stereotypes, what age do we want to pick? The traditional age might be 65, but it might be said that that reinforces the stereotype. We are saying that people can do many things after 65.

The definition of older people has become international. To challenge and break down stereotypes, choosing the age of 50 might have some sense, because people might begin to experience age discrimination—in employment, for example—when they are over 50. We hear of many people who find it particularly difficult to get a job when they are in their 50s. Because of society's attitudes, there may be something to be said for making 50 the start of the definition of older people. That is not right in health terms, but I do not know the right answer in health terms, because people are having more years of healthy life, so the health definition will change over time. The process of aging may be gradual. There is no answer to the question, but I point you to the phrase about having a flexible definition.

The Convener: How does the development of the strategy link with the legislation on age discrimination that will come into force later this year?

Malcolm Chisholm: That legislation is timely for the strategy and is necessary. People will have questions about those matters that are Westminster's responsibility rather than ours. One of my answers is that at least some of what is happening at Westminster is entirely helpful and consistent with our approach and the age discrimination legislation is a good example of that. It will probably develop over time—for example, people do not have an absolute right to work when they are over 65, but some committee members and others probably think that they should have such a right. The age discrimination legislation at Westminster is a big step forward and I hope that we can build on it.

The Convener: The commission for equality and human rights will begin its work next year. How does the Executive intend the strategy to link with the commission's remit?

09:45

Malcolm Chisholm: It helps that age discrimination will be part of that organisation's remit and that the commission will have a role in relation to the age discrimination legislation. It is good that older people are firmly aligned with the other equality interests. It is hard to make comparisons but, arguably—well, I will not say what I was going to say. Age discrimination is a massive issue that affects many people, but it cannot be weighed against other forms of discrimination. Given our emphasis on breaking down stereotypes and challenging discrimination, it is helpful that dealing with ageism will be part of the commission's remit.

The Convener: We certainly welcome that. As you know, the committee has a reporter on age. We feel that age discrimination needs to be addressed.

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): I congratulate the minister on the excellence of his document. It is good that the Parliament is putting

its shoulder behind the efforts to eliminate many of the ageism problems and other discrimination problems that affect older people. The minister is to be congratulated and we will give him any help that we can.

The strategy has four clear aims. What further information can you provide about them?

Malcolm Chisholm: To an extent, the aims are open ended. The aim on access to opportunities to make a contribution is about recognising, acknowledging and valuing the contribution that older people make in diverse ways. I will speak tonight at the launch of the strategy on older people's volunteering, which I expect some committee members will attend. We know that older people make a massive contribution to volunteering.

Older people also contribute at work. I am mindful of what I say about that, because I have no wish for older people to be forced to work, but if they want to work, they should have opportunities to do so and the barriers to that should be removed.

Beyond work and volunteering, older people contribute to society in many ways, such as through intergenerational work, which has been flagged up. It is simple to see the economic contribution of older people, which is part of their role in the economy, although older people's spending power varies. The general contribution that older people make to their communities is significant.

We want to listen to people. We are saying that we recognise the contribution and asking what the barriers are to older people making a contribution. How can we support older people to make the contribution that they want to make to society? The strategy has nothing to do with compulsion; it recognises the contribution that older people can and will make and it will ensure that they have all the opportunities that we can provide them with.

John Swinburne: The strategy's objectives are wide ranging. To what extent are they achievable?

Malcolm Chisholm: We certainly have ambitions to realise the objectives and I see no reason why we should not be able to do that. I am now looking at the five objectives in the document. I have described some of them already, so in answering I will repeat myself to an extent. Opportunities are part of the language of the objectives, which also refer to the involvement of older people and maximising older people's contribution in ways that include

"promoting active and healthy ageing".

The fourth objective involves setting a direction of travel, identifying gaps and ensuring that priorities are right. The objectives are described in a way that can be realised.

We are determined to shift the debate. It depresses me—and, I am sure, the committee—when people have a negative view of an increasing population of older people. I genuinely see the strategy as a great opportunity for Scotland. We have a great opportunity to describe how that vision can be realised in practical ways and how we can turn the debate round to the advantage not only of older people but of Scotland as a whole.

John Swinburne: Do you agree with the projection that a child born today will live until 97 if she is female, and 93 if he is male? The retirement age of 65 was set pre-war and we need to look at it again. If people want to retire at 65, that is good, but if they want to continue working, we should put no obstacles in their way.

Malcolm Chisholm: That is certainly how I would like things to develop. Obviously, issues such as the retirement age are the responsibility of the Westminster Government, but even there we are seeing some helpful changes. For example, last April, there were changes that allowed people to defer or draw their pension while continuing to work. There will be a change to occupational pensions this April that will allow people to draw their occupational pensions and continue working for their employer. Some of the changes over which we do not have control are beginning to change the rigid view of the retirement age. It is a big area for the strategy. As I said before—I cannot say it often enough—the strategy is not to do with compulsion.

However, it is important to consider whether people want to go on working or whether they want to work in a different way and have more flexible models of working, for example shorter working hours. Although that is important for people over 65, it could be equally as important for those under the current retirement age. One way to retain workers in the health service and elsewhere is to offer different models of working patterns. That has been discussed by the advisory group and we want to look at it further. In that way, we hope to make retirement more of a process than an event.

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): Good morning. The consultation document refers to five areas on which views are sought from respondents. You mentioned two of them: contribution and opportunity, and work. The others are services, health and housing, and transport and surroundings. Why were those areas selected as the priorities for the strategy?

Malcolm Chisholm: To a large extent, I have covered the areas of contribution and opportunity, and work. One could say that those areas are the new frontier. The consequence of turning round and challenging stereotypes about aging is that we

will look positively at older people and the contribution that they can make. We have to open up that territory and ask how we can break down the barriers, in what way older people can contribute and what the obstacles are to older people making a contribution in the way that they want.

Those first two areas followed from our fundamental starting point that older people should be free to contribute in the way that they want for as long as they want. We recognise that work is part of that. It is a difficult area because once people start talking about compulsion, the debate changes completely. However, we are not talking about compulsion. We all feel that if people want to go on working, they should have that opportunity. We know that ageism in the workplace is a big issue. We decided that work needed to be addressed head on in the strategy, notwithstanding the dangers that the subject could be misinterpreted.

We are not forgetting what people might describe as the traditional service areas, which is why there is a section in the strategy on services for older people. There has been some progress, but we want to build on it to provide better services for older people. Integration is a key idea. We need to join up services better for older people, but there is a lot more to do under that heading to deliver more effective services.

We looked at health and well-being, but we are not trying to redo all the work that has been done by the David Kerr group. There is no big new focus on the health service, because the Kerr report carried the debate forward significantly on how health services should be delivered in a different way for older people in Scotland in the future. That follows from our view that older people can go on contributing much to society. We want to support people to have more years of healthy life, so the strategy focuses on how we can promote and improve people's health for as long as possible. That builds on the important work that is being done on health improvement throughout the Executive. However, we felt that it was important to open that debate out in this strategy. Of course, well-being implies a broad definition of health.

The final areas are housing, and transport and surroundings. We felt that it was important to ask how, if we want people to be able to live at home for as long they can and want to, we can create environments that enable older people to live in the community in a satisfactory way for as long as possible. That builds on the thrust of current policy about caring for people in their homes, but we felt that it was important to look at that area because a lot of work remains to be done on housing, for example. The results of the survey that we carried out the week before the strategy was launched were interesting. When we asked people throughout Scotland about factors influenced by the Scottish Executive that make for a happy old age, affordable accessible housing came out as the number 1 issue, marginally ahead of decent health and community care services. People are therefore saying that we are right to focus on such issues.

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): Good morning. I am pleased that the Scottish strategy is being launched, as I know that the Welsh strategy has been successful.

I want to ask you about pensions, a subject that has just taken up perhaps a quarter of today's meeting but which is not focused on much in the consultation document. You mentioned three or four times that retirement is a big area in the strategy. You also mentioned employment discrimination against people who are over 50. However, the consultation states:

> "Some issues like pensions and benefits are the responsibility of the UK Government. The Scottish Executive works closely with the UK Government on these reserved matters, for example to promote better take-up of benefits."

The committee is concerned that nothing more about that is mentioned in the consultation document. Given what is happening on pensions at Westminster, if respondents are not told that pensions are a reserved matter, they might respond on that subject as well. What are your thoughts about that?

Malcolm Chisholm: Some of the questions in the consultation are open ended. If people want to respond on reserved matters, they are entirely free to do so and we will feed their views to the Westminster Government. However, as regards developing our strategy, we are doing what we do in all policy areas and are concentrating on the areas for which we have responsibility. We do not want to say that people will not or cannot express views on reserved matters, but it is not the Scottish Executive's role to have pension policies and there would not be much point in having them because they would not change anything.

I understand that we must look at the matter in the round. As I have said this morning, I do not see the developments at the Westminster Parliament as contrary to what we are trying to do on age discrimination and changing arrangements to make retirement more flexible. I fully acknowledge the contentious debate about the state pension, but people recognise that that is not within our sphere of responsibility.

10:00

Ms White: Thank you for that answer. Obviously, other members and I will have views on

the reserved issues. It is your view that the strategy is not hampered by not specifically stating that the Scottish Parliament has no responsibility for pensions and benefits. You are quite happy to receive answers regarding pensions and benefits, as I think you probably will. You said that you will collate that information and pass it on to Westminster. How will you do that? What is the mechanism for that?

Malcolm Chisholm: We will report on the consultation and, if reserved areas are covered, that will be part of the report. The report will be given to the Westminster Government.

Nora Radcliffe: In your opening remarks, you said that integration is very much to the fore. We would all fall in behind that. The "Setting the Scene" document notes that responsibility for responding to an aging population does not lie just with the Scottish Executive. What input will other partners such as local authorities, health boards and the voluntary sector have in the development of the strategy?

Malcolm Chisholm: We aim to work in partnership with those and other bodies. That is reflected in the fact that the advisory group includes people from health and many other agencies. There will be a series of seminars, some of which will be arranged by specific partners such as COSLA and NHS Health Scotland, so there will be input in that way. There will also be specialist briefing papers, and partner organisations will encourage their own networks to respond to the consultation process. I know, for example, that the COSLA network of local authority older people's champions is going to tap into its local networks to feed into the consultation. We have a series of initiatives that will enable the various partner organisations to contribute fully to the strategy.

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): I am pleased to hear you emphasising that the consultation exercise should take on board the views of as many people as possible. Can you expand on that? As well as the written consultation, you have chosen various other consultation methods—focus groups, seminars and so on. What mechanisms were used to identify the wide range of initiatives that you have chosen?

Malcolm Chisholm: The officials did a lot of work on that, so they may want to answer. We tried not to rely on just one method of reaching people. The core document is a written consultation; that is the traditional, normal way in which we try to get responses. We wanted to use that as a starting point, but also to use as many other different ways as we could think of. I am not sure whether we selected from a broader range or whether we decided to use every different method that we could think of—a website, focus groups, and so on. Fiona Hird or Jess Barrow may want to comment on the thinking behind that.

Jess Barrow (Scottish Executive Health Department): We considered a range of different ways of getting the consultation out. The intention has always been to have a wide consultation. There is a limited time in which to do that, and there are limited resources. Within that, we have chosen a spectrum of methods that will reach out to a wide range of audiences and individuals. We took advice from colleagues in the Executive's civic participation team and looked carefully at the different methods of consultation that were available. We chose these methods as the best to meet our aims.

Marilyn Livingstone: The committee is aware that there are many groups that represent the interests of older people. We are looking for an assurance that the consultation will get to individuals who wish to participate as well as to the interest groups. Are you confident that the methods that have been chosen will allow that to happen?

Malcolm Chisholm: We certainly hope so. As I mentioned, COSLA's network of local authority older people's champions will get its local networks to feed into the consultation. We are already getting quite a lot of demand for the consultation document, but I understand the concern that you raise: how do we ensure that every older person in Scotland has an opportunity to feed in if they want to do that? Are you confident that they will be able to do that, Jess?

Jess Barrow: It is always difficult to reach hard-to-reach groups—they are called hard-to-reach groups for good reason. It is difficult to reach out to a broad cross-section of people who are not necessarily involved in interest groups, but we are aiming to do that by various means. We are using the interest groups because, often, their network extends beyond their immediate frame of reference. We are using a consultation that is accessible and easy to use, and which will have greater reach. We held a media launch last week to get it publicised as much as possible. We will use methods to make the general public aware that the consultation paper is out there.

The consultation has also gone out to community councils, who have been the key people who have asked for extra copies over the past week. They are keen to see it and to use it to reach people who are not necessarily involved in other ways. We are doing our best to reach out as widely as we can.

The Convener: We have often heard criticism of consultations by the Executive and others from organisations that feel that because the gatekeepers get the consultations, it is difficult to

get wider participation and wider views. Even sending the consultation to community councils—although it is good to do that—might not be the best way to get a wider consultation. We are interested in how you get past the gatekeepers.

Jess Barrow: We are doing our best to do that. One of the key things is the design of the consultation paper; it is easy to copy if people want to copy it. It is easy to download from the internet, and people can complete their response online. We are encouraging consultees to send it out as widely as possible to their networks. It is difficult to make a consultation as wide we would like it to be—the main way in which we will try to do that will be through the media.

John Swinburne: Do you agree that disability transcends normal politics and that the consultation should be done consensually? If that is the case, have other political parties been invited to send representatives along to your forum? If not, why not?

Malcolm Chisholm: There will always be controversy about who is on advisory groups. I understand the point, but I suspect that what John Swinburne suggests would make the forum more party political rather than less party political. I do not know. I do not regard the forum, which I chair, as being in any way party political. I do not ask for the political views of the people who come along because those views are totally irrelevant to their being on the group.

Nora Radcliffe: This is not a question so much as a comment. It is good that you are encouraging people to use the document as a foundation for discussion groups. Has it gone to wardens of sheltered housing complexes and to church groups? If it goes to local authorities, will it trickle down to that sort of distribution?

Malcolm Chisholm: That is a good suggestion. I do not know whether that is happening.

Jess Barrow: The consultation document has gone to all the housing associations, and we would encourage people to use it in that way. It will depend on the resources of individual organisations whether they take it forward. We have had a request for Gaelic copies of the consultation so that it can be taken to a lunch club in Lewis.

Nora Radcliffe: So your strategy is working.

Ms White: The consultation should involve as many people as possible. Could you do an advertising campaign? Are there posters available that could be put up in community halls and that type of thing, rather than just the document going out? We all go around lots of elderly groups, and I would be more than happy to take a poster out to wherever I go. I am sure that other MSPs would be happy to do that as well. Will there be an advertising campaign through which people can pick it up, rather than just a launch?

Malcolm Chisholm: We are not using that method, but we will reflect on the suggestion.

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): It is interesting to see that our questions are now homing in on the consultation process. Although the Scottish Executive has a good reputation for consulting as widely as possible, questions are being asked about the mechanisms that it uses and the basis for its choices. For example, is there a social-scientific basis to the consultation that allows you to say that your consultation methodology is good?

You mentioned academics and researchers. I am interested in how you will weigh the consultation responses. I assume that the researchers will talk to hundreds of people and, clearly, some responses will represent the views of many people whereas others will represent only one individual, whose views are not necessarily wrong. Real difficulty is involved in weighting consultation responses because findings can be skewed by poor weighting methodologies. The issue is one that all the committees need to consider. I do not expect a reasoned answer today, although if you have one, I would be happy to hear it.

Malcolm Chisholm: I do not have an answer today, but that is the kind of thinking that we may have to do seven years down the line. We have made great advances in our consultation mechanisms—certainly, in our formal consultations. Consultation is implicit in the founding principles of the Scottish Parliament, so we need to reflect on how we can get better at it. Obviously, it is important that we get it right. Although Marlyn Glen's intention in asking the question was not to discount consultation, other people tend to question the representativeness of consultations in order to do so. It is important that we get our consultations as right as possible; consultation should be seen as a positive thing.

On this occasion, we do not claim to have got everything right; we are not saying that this consultation is a whole lot better than others that we have done. There is no doubt that the consultation document comes within the general tradition of Executive consultation documents. That said, I hope that we have used a broader range of consultation methods. I am sure that the issue that Marlyn Glen raises could form the subject of an inquiry at some point. I am not sure which committee would have the responsibility for that, though.

Marlyn Glen: The point is important. The committee is keen to ensure that the widest

possible range of people is consulted. It looks as if the Executive is doing that on this occasion. Whenever I see that women have not been targeted in a consultation, I am always concerned; more older people are women, but few of the groups that are to be consulted target women.

How will the Executive target for consultation disabled people, people from minority ethnic communities and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people to ensure that their needs are met by the strategy?

Malcolm Chisholm: We aim to commission a series of focus groups that will look at the issues from the various equality perspectives. Jess Barrow wants to respond to a point that Marlyn Glen made previously. Jess may also want to comment on the point that Marlyn has just made.

Jess Barrow: The exercise is a consultation and not a research exercise, so it will not have the validity that proper social-scientific research would have. However, the commissioning of the policy briefing papers will draw on existing research to ensure that that is also included.

The consultation paper asks specific questions about the consultee—it asks whether they are making the response as an individual, or on behalf of an organisation or group, following a group discussion. It also includes questions that will allow us to analyse on an equality basis. The paper is constructed in such a way that we can analyse where views are coming from. When we have the information, we can begin to make a judgment on the representativeness of the responses.

Marlyn Glen: I am concerned that you may be planning to have only one focus group on equalities.

Malcolm Chisholm: I think that a series of groups is planned.

Jess Barrow: Yes—a series of focus groups will look at different equality issues. We will discuss with the contractors the precise details of how we will do that. There will not be one catch-all equalities focus group.

Marlyn Glen: How is the Scottish Executive actively promoting the availability of the consultation document in alternative formats? On the last page of the paper it says:

"This paper is available on request in alternative formats and languages."

Malcolm Chisholm: Such formats are available on request. Jess Barton gave the example of a request for the paper to be available in Gaelic.

10:15

Marlyn Glen: Yes, but you are not being proactive in pushing out those alternative formats, which the committee is always asking for. Instead of people having to hear from someone else that alternative formats are available, we would prefer the Executive to be proactive in making available alternative formats.

Jess Barrow: This afternoon, I am meeting Rohini Sharma, who is a member of the advisory group and represents housing associations. We will discuss how the consultation paper could go out more widely to ethnic minority groups. We will look again at the issue. At the moment, alternative formats are being made available on request.

The Convener: The committee feels strongly that it is important that material be made available in alternative formats as part of consultation exercises. If people do not know that a consultation paper is available in alternative formats, they will not request it.

As you mentioned, minister, the committee is engaged in a taking stock exercise on age issues. We hope to conclude that work in June. How do you see the two exercises working together?

Malcolm Chisholm: I suppose that it is a coincidence—albeit a happy one—that both the Executive and the committee are involved in this work. Obviously, the committee's findings will be very useful to us; your report will inform the development of our strategy. As it happens, the committee's work is perfectly timed.

The Convener: That concludes our formal questioning, minister. In the few minutes that remain, does any member have a question?

Ms White: The consultation period is about 12 weeks. Is that long enough? The findings will be drafted between June and August. Obviously, Parliament is in recess during that time, although I am sure that Jess Barrow will be working throughout those three months. Is three months sufficient to draft a report on the findings? You said that you will hold seminars. Will you go out to people and groups or will people have to come to Edinburgh for them?

Malcolm Chisholm: Two points arise. In answer to the first question, three months is normal for such consultations. I know that that is not an answer, but that is my view. Obviously, we want to try to complete the work this year, so we want to conclude the consultation in June.

I have a list of the seminars, but I cannot find it at the moment. Not all the seminars will be held in Edinburgh; they will be held in various places around the country. Perhaps Jess Barrow can say a little more on the seminars.

Jess Barrow: The location of the seminars will depend very much on the partner organisations that we are asking to organise them. We are reliant on our partners because they have

expertise in their specialist areas and they have the networks of contacts to draw in the specialists. For example, we are talking to Architecture and Design Scotland about a seminar on the built environment. Given that ADS knows the networks and has the expert contacts, it will decide on the best location and format for the seminar.

Nora Radcliffe: Are there any specific rural aspects to the consultation. I am thinking of everything to do with everything.

The Convener: "Everything to do with everything", minister.

Malcolm Chisholm: There will be a focus on rural issues in some of the focus groups and the seminars. Have I missed anything?

Jess Barrow: No. That is absolutely right. The seminars have not yet been confirmed. We are still in discussion with our partners. If we get the appropriate partners, we hope to have two rural seminars; one will consider rural services and the other will consider rural enterprise issues. We are well aware of the fact that demography affects people in rural areas very differently to how it affects people in urban areas.

Nora Radcliffe: It is good that that will be covered. Thank you.

Ms White: I will reiterate a point that I made earlier. You say that the seminars will be conducted by experts, minister, but will you advise the people who run them that they should go out to rural areas? Elderly people, disabled people and others cannot always get to seminars that are held centrally in Edinburgh. It would be good for your partners to hold seminars outwith Edinburgh.

It may have been mentioned earlier, but I hope that we can hand the results of our taking stock exercise to you. Will you feed its results into your work?

Malcolm Chisholm: Absolutely. We would welcome that.

The Convener: Thank you. We would welcome an outline of the seminars and any other meetings that are to be held around the country, so perhaps you will send that to us. We look forward to the outcome of the consultation and to working together on the results of our taking stock exercise.

Malcolm Chisholm: Thank you.

The Convener: I suspend the meeting for a few minutes to allow for the changeover of witnesses.

10:19

Meeting suspended.

10:22

On resuming—

Disability Inquiry

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is our disability inquiry. This is our first oral evidence session on the theme of leisure. I am pleased to welcome John Wilkinson from the Cinema Exhibitors Association, Patrick Browne from the Scottish Beer and Pub Association and John Brady from the Scottish Retail Consortium.

I will ask the first question. Have your members made you aware of any tensions that exist between providing services to disabled people and managing a profitable business?

John Wilkinson (Cinema Exhibitors Association): No. There is no such tension.

The Convener: That is good. Does everyone agree?

John Brady (B&Q): I agree. A few years ago, B&Q conducted research to try to bring benefits to all our customers. As part of that, we held disabled forums. We agree that there is no tension.

The Convener: Does Patrick Browne agree?

Patrick Browne (Scottish Beer and Pub Association): Yes, although there are occasional difficulties with physical adaptation of premises. It would be wrong to skate over that. On some occasions it is difficult for retailers, in particular those in my industry who operate outside pub chains, to absorb the costs of doing works and obtaining the permissions for them.

The Convener: As you know, we are engaged in an inquiry. We have heard that when premises are accessible they are accessible to everyone, not only to disabled people. They are accessible to people carrying bags, people with prams and all sorts. There might be fewer people with prams in your premises, but accessibility makes a difference to anyone who needs to get in.

Patrick Browne: I do not disagree, but the difficulty is that many pub premises tend to be older buildings. They tend to be listed and tend to have restrictions placed on them by planning regulations; that throws up issues in respect of what works can be done and how they can be done, which introduces cost considerations.

The Convener: My colleagues will ask you more about planning and physical access.

The committee has heard evidence about the consumer power of disabled people. How do you ensure that your members maximise their share of that market? Disabled people obviously buy goods and use services.

John Wilkinson: I do not think that we can treat disabled people any differently from undisabled people. If disabled people want to buy our product or use our services, they will come and do so. If they do not want to, they will not. All we can do is make our goods and services accessible. We cannot target disabled people any more than we can target the general population.

The Convener: If your premises are not accessible, disabled people cannot buy your services.

John Wilkinson: We might target them to the extent that we will try to let them know that we have made our premises accessible, but we would not target them any more than we would members of the population as a whole.

John Brady: We target all our customers, including our disabled customers. B&Q links up with Direct Enquiries—a company that allows disabled people to see what facilities are available in our stores. We do not have the same issues as the pub trade and the cinema trade because we do not have many stores that have two floors. We do not have stair issues because our stores are all on one level. We review our disabled parking, disabled toilets and so on. We completed such a review well ahead of the enactment in 2004 of the further provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Nora Radcliffe: How do your organisations support your members in the provision of services for disabled customers?

John Brady: By "members", do you mean our staff and so on?

Nora Radcliffe: I presume that businesses are members of your organisations. Do you offer them any advice, guidance, support or training to help them to deal with disabled customers?

John Brady: A diversity-training programme is one of the six modules that all our staff must go through as part of their induction. Health and safety is the key module, after which we move on to diversity and other business needs. The most recent figures indicate that about 28,000 employees out of more than 30,000 have gone through that training. The diversity training, which covers a number of issues such as ageism and so on, includes disability awareness and training in understanding the needs of disabled customers.

Nora Radcliffe: Is that training provided by B&Q or by the Scottish Retail Consortium?

John Brady: I can speak only from B&Q's perspective.

Nora Radcliffe: I am sorry, but the agenda states that you are representing the Scottish Retail Consortium. You are a member of the Scottish Retail Consortium, but you are speaking about what happens in B&Q.

John Brady: Yes. I can talk only about what happens in my retail environment and what we do in my retail sector.

Nora Radcliffe: Yes. Training is provided within B&Q, but does the Scottish Retail Consortium provide advice or examples of good practice to its members?

Patrick Browne: I will comment from a trade-association perspective. Ironically, I set up the Scottish Retail Consortium four or five years ago, so I have some awareness of how the SRC operates as well as of how the SBPA operates.

The SBPA's parent association is the British Beer and Pub Association. Since the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, it has produced various documents that provide its members with guidance on their responsibilities under the legislation and which say how, from a practical operator's perspective, they should seek to address them. The most recent guidance document was published in 2004 and sets out issues that people should consider in the light of the 1995 act. The document is available to our members on our website. I am sure that the SRC has adopted a similar approach, from the retail industry's perspective.

We regularly discuss current developments with the Disability Rights Commission and we pass information from such discussions to our members so that individual businesses can respond. The trade association's remit is to collate best practice and to provide guidance when we can do so, but how individual businesses comply with the legislation is a matter for them.

10:30

John Wilkinson: The cinema industry had a lousy reputation in the late 1980s and early 1990s. We started seriously to tackle disability just prior to the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, when we started to hold regular seminars or workshops—or whatever nice word we want to use this week. Our experience of finding out whether we would have trouble complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 meant that we took the issue much more seriously during the progress of the Disability Discrimination Bill. We started to issue guidance to our membership—that is, the cinema companies—and before the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was passed we started to produce more detailed guidance. Since then we have issued three major guidance documents—I do not know whether the clerk has circulated our most recent guidance.

The most recent major document was issued in 2002 and was amended to take account of the coming into force in 2004 of relevant sections in the 1995 act. We are starting to rewrite the guidance, which we aim to reissue in January 2007—that will be the publication date, but the guidance will be circulated before then.

The Cinema Exhibitors Association has targeted training sessions at managing directors rather than at staff, because we could not handle training for staff. During the past five to eight years, we have tried to enthuse top-level decision makers in the companies, so that they can encourage their staff from the top down. We do not suggest that the approach has worked in all companies, but it seems mostly to have worked. The major companies run disability and access training as part of their induction training.

During the past two years, we have concentrated on access for people who are blind or have hearing difficulties, which has meant that we have had joint industry meetings. We could not have written a large book of guidance on our own, because we do not have the knowledge for that. All that we can do is to encourage people and try to pass on information about best practice—that works most of the time. For example, a few months ago we were asked to supply texts for ushers and usherettes to use in certain circumstances. We did that. We do not know whether staff use the texts, but the approach was passed down through training systems.

Evacuation procedure training is a requirement and we recommend that our members include disability when they run such training and testing, which happens every month or six weeks.

Nora Radcliffe: The question that I was going to ask next has been answered by John Wilkinson in relation to the Cinema Exhibitors Association. How do the other witnesses' organisations develop materials on provision for disabled people? How do they make such information available?

Patrick Browne: The SBPA had conversations with the Disability Rights Commission about the DDA and the dialogue was pretty intense while the bill was in progress. As a result of that dialogue, guidance documents were produced, for which our members offered input. Our trade association operates in the same way as the Cinema Exhibitors Association in that we seek a buy-in from senior directors in companies, who then take matters forward in their businesses. The approach has had a reasonable degree of success. I think that the dialogue with the DRC on how the industry should respond to disability issues is continuing.

Nora Radcliffe: Do you receive feedback about whether what you provide is what people want?

John Wilkinson: Yes. We are certainly told when we get something wrong, but we are also told when we get something right. People say, "That seems to be going well." For example, people are telling us that the Cinema Exhibitors Association card—which gives two-for-one entry to qualifying disabled people to enable them to go to the cinema—is effective. However, if I said that we had had no complaints about the approach, I would be lying; we have had 30 or 40 complaints in 18 months, some of which have been pretty hairy. People comment when a measure works well, but they always tell us how we might improve it, which is useful.

Nora Radcliffe: Do you carry out proactive evaluation?

John Wilkinson: Yes. We meet cross-industry working groups and disability groups at least twice a year, so that they can tell us what we are doing right and what we are doing wrong. We are also proactive in that we seek feedback about subtitles from local cinema operators. We are proactively engaged with the Artsline, which is a disability access information service. Artsline is London-based, but the service will help us to produce an online access guide for—we hope—the whole United Kingdom. We produced a printed access guide for Strathclyde some time ago and we have produced such guides for Wales and London, but we cannot keep printed versions up to date. We also ran out of money, but we are always prepared to listen.

Patrick Browne: The SPBA does not necessarily seek information proactively from our members. As a result of the guidance that we produced two years ago, many of our members developed initiatives on disability, which is encouraging. For example, the Belhaven Brewery Company, which has about 300 pubs, has a disability policy as part of its company policy and runs induction training for staff in that context. The Scottish Executive was involved recently in a campaign to raise awareness in respect of people who have visual and hearing impairments. As part of that campaign, Belhaven produced a series of posters that were aimed at staff, and it tried to provide a checklist of ways in which staff could ensure that customers who have visual and hearing impairments can have a more positive experience.

We provided the core guidance and companies are moving on and taking forward initiatives. Of course, if our members were to approach us to ask for an update or to request a document on best practice so that they could take matters further, we would help them, as any trade association would.

Nora Radcliffe: Good things are obviously happening. Are there forums in which the witnesses' organisations can share best practice?

John Brady: I can speak only for B&Q. The company is a gold-card group member of the Employers Forum on Disability and we work proactively with forums in other companies. We feed information to the Scottish Retail Consortium on how to make things better and easier for disabled customers.

Nora Radcliffe: Is the Employers Forum on Disability a dedicated forum for sharing best practice?

John Brady: Yes.

Nora Radcliffe: The clerk just clarified that you are here to represent B&Q and that the Scottish Retail Consortium will provide a written submission. I am sorry that I pushed you to speak for the SRC.

John Brady: That is okay.

Ms White: I am pleased that so much proactive work is going on. However, disabled people have told the committee that it is impossible for them to be spontaneous about deciding to go to a cinema or pub. I take on board the access issues and the fact that some cinemas and pubs are old, but basically, disabled people must phone days in advance to get a night out. Are you aware of such issues? Have concerns been raised about them? Have you received complaints?

John Wilkinson: I would be delighted to answer those questions. When people talk about disabled people being spontaneous, they are generally referring to people in wheelchairs. Let us consider Parliament's debating chamber, in which there are six places for people in wheelchairs among 215 seats, although there can be nine additional seats if notice is given. There is exactly the same situation in cinemas. There will not always be more than six wheelchair sites in a cinema, so if a person wants to ensure that a wheelchair site will be available, they should phone the cinema and book a site. If the cinema is full, it is full; there is not much that we can do about that. We have a system that is similar to Parliament's system—chairs can be lifted out. However, receiving notice that chairs must be removed is nice because spanners have to be used. Life is made easier for everybody if people phone, although it is not necessary to phone most places because their wheelchair spaces are seldom full. People can phone the cinema if they want to bring along a group, although they should try to bring along groups in the afternoon because people can be kept together then. There is a problem and there is not a problem. Cinemas will occasionally be full and there will be no spaces, but most disabled people—whatever their disability—can be spontaneous.

Ms White: I am sure that you were desperate to say what you said about the Scottish Parliament.

John Wilkinson: No, I was not—I found out that information only this morning in a book on the Parliament.

Ms White: You were right to say what you said.

John Wilkinson: The illustration is good.

Ms White: Absolutely. I thank you for your honest answer. I am sure that you are aware of the issue of spontaneity. You mentioned adapting things if people phone. You are saying that people can be spontaneous, but that it would make things much easier for cinemas if people phoned to book places to ensure that they have a place. Seats can then be removed.

How do you work with your members? You said that you tell decision makers how to cope with disabled people when they come to cinemas and that you work with your members to adapt services. Do you say to managers that if a person spontaneously comes along to the cinema and the cinema is not full, they—

John Wilkinson: Managers know more about their sites than I ever will and they all go on company training courses. Information does not stay with the top people, but goes all the way down.

Ms White: So you speak to—

John Wilkinson: We speak to people, but we also issue a newsletter to every site. We will circulate information all the way down if somebody has had a problem or something has cropped up. We try to disseminate information, but we cannot make people read it.

Ms White: Absolutely.

Patrick Browne: No one has raised the issue of spontaneity with me. If customers with disabilities can access premises and there are facilities in those premises to cater for them, I would expect there to be no more of an issue for those people than for any other customer. The issue is the physical accessibility of, and facilities on, premises. I do not think that every pub in Scotland meets accessibility and facilities conditions, which clearly restricts the spontaneity of disabled people because they are unable to go into every pub, access the facilities and enjoy the customer experience.

Ms White: Obviously, not all disabled people are in wheelchairs—a disabled person might be visually impaired, for example. You are basically saying that if a disabled person wants to be spontaneous, they can be, although they should

go to the right type of pub. Are you saying that, although certain furnishings can be adapted, there is nothing that you can do, by speaking to your managers or members, to help those people to be more spontaneous?

10:45

Patrick Browne: I will feed your comments back to my members and raise with them the issues that you have raised. I take your point. Part of the reason why I am here is to listen to what people have to say and to try to progress issues. There may be issues that we have not thought about. In general, customers should be able to be spontaneous, but the difficulty lies in the nature of premises and the facilities in the premises—that is the critical issue for pubs.

Ms White: I have a wee supplementary question that has just occurred to me on the smoking ban and spontaneity. Obviously, smoking is not allowed in cinemas. However, it can be difficult for people to be spontaneous if they want to go to certain pubs. If people have to go into the street to smoke a cigarette and must therefore constantly leave and re-enter premises, will that make it even more difficult for people in wheelchairs to be spontaneous?

Patrick Browne: The smoking ban raises particular issues, one of which you have highlighted. If a person wants to smoke, they will repeatedly have to leave and re-enter premises, which throws up problems. However, the issue is again accessibility. If a customer who has a disability can go outside relatively easily, there will simply be the same inconvenience for them that any smoker would face.

Ms White: I wrote down some things about access for blind people and hard-of-hearing people that John Wilkinson mentioned. He said that the Cinema Exhibitors Association had perhaps been more proactive on safety issues than on anything else. The committee has heard evidence from the Royal National Institute for the Blind Scotland that there appears to be little provision of audio-described movies in Scotland, and we have heard evidence from the Scottish Council on Deafness that subtitled films are put on at unsociable hours. John Wilkinson has mentioned that his association works with those groups and he is obviously aware of those issues. Are you working with your Scottish members to improve provision of those services?

I had a meeting with young people—16 and 17-yeard-olds—with deafness-associated problems. Those people want to go to cinemas, but they cannot spontaneously go because there are no subtitles on films at particular times.

John Wilkinson: I will not go into the long history of what we have done with subtitles and audio descriptions, but we have worked on them since 1999. One of the first sites on which we installed equipment for a pilot scheme was Glasgow Film Theatre; we installed equipment at another site in Glasgow when we tested equipment on another 12 sites.

We were fortunate to convince the UK Film Council to use Arts Council England money to provide a trial in England on top of the pilot. We started to work with Scottish Screen and the Scottish Arts Council to try to go from a pilot to a trial in Scotland but, unfortunately, that has not happened—the possibility of grants has probably slightly slowed things down. However, the major operators are installing audio description and soft-subtitling equipment. Initially, we went through the hard-burned subtitles process and considered whether there should be captions, whether the subtitles should be English or American and so on. We decided that people wanted English subtitles and that they did not mind if captions were not coloured and we went down that line with soft subtitling. Just over a third of cinema sites in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have a screen with subtitling equipment and audio descriptions and nearly all the blockbusters are issued with audio-description and soft-subtitling disks. There is expansion, but things are not proceeding as quickly as one would wish.

We now have more sites and facilities in the United Kingdom than anywhere else in the world—we have led on provision of such services. Over the past four or five years, we have worked closely on the issue with the RNIB, the Royal National Institute for Deaf People and the British Deaf Association. Only a fortnight ago, I discussed the matter with representatives of those organisations at a committee meeting.

Ms White: I know that the GFT advertises widely that subtitles and audio description are available. They do not seem to show those films at unsocial hours, but unfortunately other cinemas do. You say that there have been many advances in technology that have enabled you to assist deaf and visually impaired people. Is technology available that allows you to make better provision for alternative formats? Is the problem a lack of co-operation from cinemas, which do not use the technology at social hours when people can go?

John Wilkinson: Most cinemas now provide subtitles and audio description—it is a growing market, although calls for the service are still limited. When we started providing it two and half years ago, subtitles were available about once a week in most places. Audio description is on all the time in the one auditorium to which it is limited. Soft subtitling is now run in most places twice a

week—usually on one evening during the week and at one afternoon show on a Saturday or Sunday. It depends on demand. The tests that we have done suggest that people who do not need subtitles do not like them coming up on the screen.

Ms White: How do you know whether there is demand for the service? Do people who are deaf or visually impaired have to phone up beforehand to say that they want to see a picture?

John Wilkinson: We are trying to gauge demand by putting subtitles on at specific times and seeing whether people come to those screenings, which we advertise through the magazines of the RNID and RNIB. We also advertise every subtitled screening and audio-described film. That information is available on the net and by telephone from local cinemas. If someone wants to come, they will find out when the service is available. Where we slip up is that we are not very good at advertising.

Ms White: That is an important point.

Nora Radcliffe: Is soft subtitling different from hard subtitling?

John Wilkinson: Hard subtitling is burned into each frame of the film, which is very expensive. It is also limited to that copy of the film. The process was used for a maximum of seven films, which were passed around the country. Soft subtitling comes on a disk and is projected on to the screen by a separate machine, so it can be switched on and off.

Nora Radcliffe: Is it up to the companies that produce the films to produce the disks? Do most of them do that?

John Wilkinson: Yes. It is now being done for the majority of blockbuster-type films. One of the problems that we have is that there are two systems—by Digital Theater Systems and Dolby—that do not match, which means that two different machines are required, but no cinema has two machines in place. We do not always get the disks for both systems. That is both a technical and a commercial issue. We are trying: we will get there one day.

Nora Radcliffe: One system may come out on top and become the standard.

John Wilkinson: In time, when every screen in the country is digitalised, it is debatable whether two machines will be necessary. In theory, digital projection can be switched on if a 4K projector is used. That has been done only at trial stage. At the moment, no one is prepared to introduce 4K projectors. Everyone is using 2K projectors, which will, I expect, be the standard in the UK.

Nora Radcliffe: Thank you. I did not understand the point, so I thought that I would ask about it.

Marilyn Livingstone: I want to ask the panel about physical access. You have given in-depth answers to previous questions, but we have spoken to a large number of disabled people up and down the country who have told us that, despite the provisions of the DDA, poor physical access remains a barrier to participation, particularly in leisure activities. Despite what we have heard this morning about all the work that is being done, there is still a view out there among disabled people that poor physical access is one of the largest barriers to their being able to participate. I would like your views on that.

John Wilkinson: Physical access can always be improved. It would be a lie to say that every screen in every cinema is accessible to disabled people. It is not always possible to make some older conversions accessible to everybody, no matter what is done. The choice is to close down the screen or to keep it going with limited access.

Accessibility is a problem, but we try to get round it. For example, if a film is shown on a non-accessible screen, we try to ensure that it is also shown on an accessible screen. That scenario can crop up in cinemas that have two or three screens. We try to ensure that a film is shown for at least one of the weeks of its run on an accessible screen. I know of operators who, if they have a film on an inaccessible screen, will put the film on an accessible screen for disabled people. Such things do not get shouted about. We hear about them only when they go wrong. In a way, that is good, but it is sometimes a little disappointing.

We have problems, and it would be pie in the sky to say that we have solved all of them. Access problems change. A prime example of that is the installation five or six years ago of stairlifts for a certain weight of wheelchair. Because the technology has improved, the weight of wheelchairs has increased so much that some stairlifts cannot take the weight. If someone turns up in one of the wheelchairs that do everything, the cinema can be inaccessible to that person. As technology improves and disabled people with even worse disabilities can get around more easily with chairs that are more like moving ambulances, screens that were once accessible to everybody become inaccessible. Whatever we do, therefore, we will always be behind. We can try to be ahead and we can succeed, but we will also be behind.

Patrick Browne: This takes us back to the first question. From a pub perspective, we need to differentiate. I represent six or seven pub companies that operate pub chains. In the main, when they build a new pub, they build in accessibility, so they will meet requirements and make the facilities fully accessible. Similarly, when

they take over pubs as part of the normal operation of their businesses, they will start by doing an accessibility audit. They will look at the premises, and if they can accommodate accessibility issues as part of a refurbishment process, they will do so. The problem in Scotland is that we have 5,200 pubs, two thirds of which are independently owned and operated. Effectively, stand-alone landlords or landladies run their businesses themselves and do not have access to a central pot of cash to fund wider improvements to what are more traditional pubs.

11:00

As I said earlier, most pubs tend to be older, smaller buildings in town and city-centre locations. People must compare the costs of doing accessibility work with the turnover and profit of the premises. Where our members have been able to deal with accessibility issues, they have done so. The problem is that it is difficult to adapt some premises because of listed building issues or planning restrictions. I am more than happy to elaborate on those points. Planning is a difficult issue, as is licensing. We should not forget that pubs are licensed premises and, if major adaptations are done, the licensee might have to reapply for their licence. That can throw up other issues about their operation of the pub and the profitability of the business.

The Convener: The committee heard about the access problems that people experience. For example, young people want to go to the pub but they do not want to take their mother with them. Sometimes, they find that the toilet is locked or full of rubbish. This is not about money; it is about good housekeeping. I accept that you speak for the bigger chains, but people complain that they cannot use the facilities that are provided because they are not clean, they are locked or they are full of rubbish. If I go into a pub, I expect to be able to go to the loo. I do not expect to have to ask for permission or for a key and I do not expect to have to clean it before I use it.

Patrick Browne: I will take those points back to my members and will try to make sure that the issues are addressed. I have to say that my members have probably complied with the terms of the DDA better than most independent pubs in Scotland have, but I am sure that there is always room for improvement.

The Convener: Sorry, Marilyn. I interrupted your questions.

Marilyn Livingstone: You raised a fair point. The committee heard about those problems.

We spoke to people from throughout the country, rather than focus on one geographical area. All too often, wheelchair users in particular told us that they had been denied access to services because they would cause a health and safety hazard. Do the panel members work with their members on education, help and support to ensure that disabled members of our community are not denied access when they try to participate in leisure activities such as shopping? How can we put an end to such practices?

Patrick Browne: I am shocked to hear that. I am not trying to disassociate myself from the parts of the licensed trade or the wider leisure industry where such things happen, but I would be appalled if they happen, because they should not. I do not know why such things are being said. Again, I will feed that back to my members to make sure that they are not involved.

John Brady: I am unaware of such issues in my retail area. I believe that we are quite proactive in making sure that anyone can get into our stores. In B&Q's larger stores, we provide electric scooters, wheelchairs and so on for our customers, and our staff are trained to help and serve customers. I am surprised to hear such comments, to be honest. I have not come across them in my area.

The Convener: I think you will find that, even if it is not an issue at B&Q, it is a problem in other retail outlets. I am disappointed that the Scottish Retail Consortium is not here to respond to the point because concern about it has been raised with us by people from throughout the country.

John Brady: I will take a note of it and pass it back to the Scottish Retail Consortium.

The Convener: That would be helpful.

John Brady: I presume that it can address the point in written evidence.

The Convener: Yes, but it is always good to discuss things and—as John Wilkinson did—to outline some of the issues around the difficulties. We cannot necessarily do that with a written submission, so it is a great pity that the Scottish Retail Consortium is not here.

Marilyn Livingstone: We heard about examples of best practice. I should say that there is good practice throughout Scotland, but we have heard of some cases in which such things have been said to disabled people, which is why we are raising the issue. Does John Wilkinson want to comment?

John Wilkinson: The matter should not have to be raised. However, if you were to put somebody in a wheelchair in certain situations without ensuring that the right facilities were in place, you could, in theory, create a health and safety or fire hazard, because egress might not be possible. My members do not tell people that they will cause a fire hazard—that should never be said to anybody,

and I am pretty certain that none of my members or their staff would say it. In theory, however, it is possible that someone could be told that, because of regulations. It would be wrong to say that it could not happen, and I do not think that it does, but in theory it could, because of fire regulations in particular.

Marilyn Livingstone: The main thing is that we are making the panel aware of the issue, so I hope that panel members can take that back to the various organisations that they deal with.

I have another question about the practical elements of physical access. We heard evidence that the layout of premises could be improved and were given examples of problems such as unsuitable or confusing signage, counters at the wrong height and information about products, such as labels and prices, being small and hard to find. Such things can create barriers. What more can your members do to improve physical and sensory access? I am talking not only about physical access, but about practical issues such as layout and how people can find their way around, read signs and access counters.

John Wilkinson: I would like to comment on that, because it is an interesting issue. There are regulations about what colour of signs we have to put up, but not all coloured signage is helpful to people who have difficulty in reading colour or who are slightly colour blind. There is nothing that I can do about that; that is down to you as legislators, I am afraid. We are retrofitting counters in cinemas to ensure that there is one at a lower height, and we are also doing that with speakers for audio loops, both at the concession stands and at the box office, but that takes time and it is not always possible to do it as quickly as we want to.

However, we should always bear in mind that what suits one disabled person can be an absolute pig to another person. A prime example of that is the successful campaign that the RNIB conducted to introduce the little bumps at crossings. It was a super idea and helpful to everybody, unless they were on sticks or crutches, of course, because they just went whoosh and could not get a grip. Things are getting better, but that example illustrates that what works for one person might not necessarily work for everyone. When we started writing guides, eight or nine years ago, we found that we had to bring together all the disabled groups, which realised that taking such action blew things for somebody else. This might not be nice, but if we are to create services that work for everybody, there must be compromise.

We have a particular problem with signage, just as we have problems with handrails in corridors, especially in older buildings. One rule says that we must have a certain sort of handrail—I cannot remember the exact technical detail—but that can make the corridor too small to comply with fire regulations.

We all try to do our best to make buildings accessible to everybody, but, with the best will in the world, we will never make them perfect. A building may suit one set of disabled people perfectly but cause problems for other people. At some stage, we must say, "This is the best we can do at the moment but, hopefully, we can improve in future."

Patrick Browne: On the accessibility of price lists or menus, as part of the service that our members offer individual customers, they tend to train staff to provide support, if required, for people who have a disability, such as a visual impairment. Table service is not much of a phenomenon in Scotland, but waiting staff could serve drinks direct to customers at tables rather than at the bar, where they would have to stand. Where possible, our members train staff to offer table service to such customers, so that they do not have to rely on being served at a counter.

I hate to return to this point, but bars are an integral fitting in many traditional pubs. Attempts to change a bar will have planning and building warrant implications. There is a serious issue, which I guess is part of the more general planning issue. In general, through using staff more effectively, our members try to find ways to deal with issues, rather than leave customers to suffer.

Marilyn Livingstone: I am particularly interested in John Brady's views on labels, because people's ability to read them is a big issue for retailers. People have different levels of impairment. Many people complain about not being able to read the small print or even the prices.

John Brady: We take proactive in-store measures. As I said, all our staff go through a disability awareness training programme, which trains staff to help people who have a visual or other impairment. If a person needs assistance, the staff will help. We do not have lots of different-sized labels in our stores, but if we receive a request in store for literature, information or instructions in different formats, we can provide it. The information, on a CD-ROM or in Braille, for example, is sent from the social responsibility department at our head office.

We are working with the Employers Forum on Disability on counters for new stores. We now have lower counters that allow people to access services more easily. We did a lot of work to consider our stores prior to certain provisions in the DDA going live in 2004.

Marlyn Glen: You have started to answer my questions, which are about information. B&Q's social responsibility idea is impressive, and John

Wilkinson mentioned advertising in different magazines. The committee has received evidence that disabled people have difficulties accessing information about available services and activities. Will you say more about the work that you do to ensure that customers can access information about services? We have received suggestions about Braille signs and talking menus to promote available services.

John Brady: We are working on signage, particularly in our new stores. As far as I am aware, we do not yet have Braille signage, but we are improving the signage in every store—the programme is evolving. Our customers have access to information through our customer service departments or our diy.com website. I believe that the website is now available at different resolutions, so that people can see it more easily. People can request literature and other information in different formats.

As I said earlier, we work with Direct Enquiries to give our customers information about access to our stores and what aids, such as wheelchairs and scooters, are available. The customers can feed back to us through Direct Enquiries, which allows us to learn lessons going forward.

11:15

Patrick Browne: This relates to the previous question. I am sure that there are examples of Braille signage and menus, but the typical pub operator relies on staff to be the interface between the customer and the business. There might be offers on food, and menus can change frequently. There would therefore be a cost consideration in using Braille or having talking menus. Most businesses would take the view that, provided that the staff were trained and were sensitive to disability issues, they should be able to meet needs.

John Wilkinson: Advertising our facilities is what we do worst. When films can be audio-described and there is soft subtitling, that is advertised on the big film posters. When cinemas advertise their listings in the local paper, they should state the times of showings and whether they are accessible, using the wheelchair sign. However, I know that they are failing to do that.

Cinema chains' individual websites show what access cinemas have and at what times they show films with audio description and soft subtitling. We help to fund subtitles @ your local cinema, which is the United Kingdom organisation that provides information on audio-described and soft-subtitled films. We do not yet have audio description and soft subtitling on our new television channel, Eat Cinema, on Sky channel 199—I recommend it to you all—but we are considering how to put it in place.

Can we do more? The answer is always yes. All we can do is keep trying. The one area where we have failed consistently for 10 years is in getting the information out to the people who need it. The number of people attending our cinemas last year decreased across the board, so we obviously failed everywhere. We have to consider how better to get the information over, and we keep trying.

John Brady: In our larger, warehouse-type stores, we have voluntary diversity champions. Part of their brief is to tell people about the services that we provide for disabled people and help us to understand disabled people's needs. They report directly to the store manager or the general manager.

Marlyn Glen: I move on to legislation. Will the panel members outline how they work with their members to ensure that they are aware of their duties under the DDA? Can the panel members assist their members with assessments to monitor their compliance with the legislation or give them advice on reasonable adjustments? That is obviously a big issue for pubs, as Patrick Browne said.

Patrick Browne: As I said, our parent association produced guidance and recommendations for its members to take forward. They are the focus. It is difficult for me to add to what I said previously.

Marlyn Glen: You give your members information, but they cannot come back to you for advice; they would have to go somewhere else.

Patrick Browne: As a trade body, we pass the information to our members. Obviously, if they want to pursue issues, they can do that with us. For example, we refer them to the Disability Rights Commission, which has comprehensive documentation on its website about issues that businesses should consider. There are checklists of the best practice that is out there. Indeed, the recommendation document picked up on some of that.

We flagged up issues in the documentation that was circulated to members two years ago. Since then, they have taken that information on board and rolled it out in how they operate their businesses. Like any trade body, we will consider the issues that members raise with us.

John Wilkinson: We have issued books and we have at least two meetings a year—we cut the number down from four. Disability issues are discussed internally if outside bodies are not involved. However, I have outside consultants permanently on hire if my staff or I cannot answer a question.

As far as access audits go, we have done a deal to get them at a cheaper price. However, it is up to members whether they do them. We also do audits with Artsline—I hope that we will do them over the summer in all cinemas. They are internal audits that will be done by the cinemas, their regional managers or their owners and they will be put online. We encourage people to keep doing the audits and to do them at an affordable price—that is all that we can do.

John Swinburne: Are your members aware of lack of transport being a barrier to disabled people accessing the services that your members provide for them?

John Wilkinson: The answer is, simply, yes—it is a problem. All we can do is provide parking spaces, preferably near the entrance, and a list of buses and when they run. In addition, if a disabled person arrives without a wheelchair, one can be provided. Public transport is a problem and all we can do is ensure that we give out information about what is available.

John Swinburne: So that is a problem that will have to be addressed more fully by this Parliament, apart from anybody else.

John Wilkinson: There is nothing that we can do to address it, although we have paid in certain towns for public transport to out-of-town cinemas. However, once the cinema stops paying such a subsidy, the council usually drops the bus service.

Patrick Browne: Pubs sell alcohol to people, and the last thing that we want is people drinking and driving, so I agree that the issue of public transport is crucial.

John Brady: It is the same for us. We also ensure that our stores are physically accessible and we recently increased the size of our stores' parking spaces in accordance with the new legislation. We have all the facilities there. However, I agree with the other guys that public transport is an issue.

John Swinburne: Do you agree that staff training in disability equality is a way of combating negative attitudes towards disabled people?

Patrick Browne: Yes, I do. Training is a critical issue for staff, particularly in a customer-oriented industry. We want to ensure that people get the best experience they can. From a pub perspective, the market is competitive and there will be challenges over the next 12 to 18 months. Our members certainly want to get as many customers through the door as they can. Staff training, making people aware of how to serve customers with disabilities and being aware of disability issues generally are critically important.

John Wilkinson: The person who meets the public when they come into the cinema must be well trained because they, not the bloke who is the manager, are its public face. Although the manager is part of the public face, the person the public meet is the one who is going to help customers have a good night or a bad one. As far as we are concerned, training on disability, access and good manners is imperative.

John Brady: As I mentioned earlier, we have a computer-aided training package for all our staff. It is one of the key parts of the induction that they have to go through before they are signed up as part of our team. More than 28,000 people are trained on that package and it has a key section about disability awareness.

We are also working on workshops to give our managers a better understanding of the market of disability and how we can better serve our customers. That training is being shared with the Employers Forum on Disability. We also have several people who have learnt British Sign Language and, as I have mentioned, we have volunteers who act as diversity champions in our larger stores.

John Swinburne: You have answered the second question that I was going to ask.

Can you think of any ways of combating negative attitudes towards disabled people that are not already being implemented?

Patrick Browne: Our members are aware of the campaigns being run by various organisations and the Scottish Executive. Certainly our members have gained a much greater awareness of the issue since the DDA was introduced and it has become more of an issue for the running of their businesses.

I am sure that more could be done, but awareness is at a much higher level now than it ever has been. I am sure that it could be improved, but there is a very high level of recognition at the moment.

John Brady: As I have already mentioned, we have been working since 1998 on disabled accessibility and education for our staff, and we have continued to work on and improve that over the years. It is a case of educating and training people and returning to it later. That is why the workshops that we are looking to do for our store managers is pretty vital; work is being done at the moment to get them up and running.

John Wilkinson: Awareness is high, but we have to keep at it. It has taken us 15 to 20 years to bring the issue to the top of the agenda and we cannot afford to let it slip. It matters all the time—I do not know whether that is the nice way of putting it.

The Convener: We have talked about a lot of issues this morning. Are there any other issues or

challenges that your organisations or members face in providing services for disabled customers?

Patrick Browne: While I have been speaking to my members over the past couple of weeks in preparation for coming along today, it has become obvious that planning and costs have become a real issue. People want to make progress but often cannot because they are in listed buildings, for example, or in buildings that have other restrictions. I do not know how to get around that. I am not sure that everyone wants major changes to be made to the frontages of buildings that have been around for 300 or 400 years, but if we want progress on some of the issues that we have been discussing, we will have to consider that.

Support for independent businesses to help them make physical adaptations is also an issue. A stand-alone operator who runs a small pub has a pretty marginal business and some of the costs that would be involved in making some of the changes are quite frightening. If we want progress, we will have to consider that issue and think about giving people more support so that they can make progress.

The Convener: You mentioned planning, which is obviously important with reference to listed buildings. Are there issues around building regulations and adaptations?

Patrick Browne: There are cost issues. If someone who runs a licensed business makes a small change, they have to notify the licensing board, get building warrants and be inspected for fire safety regulations, and a lawyer has to represent them at the licensing board hearing—it gets very expensive to make even relatively small changes. The sad fact is that under the new regime brought in by the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 agreed by the Parliament last year, even more minor changes will be subject to major variations. Licensees will have to go to the licensing boards more often to make minor changes. I just wanted to flag that up. Our members want to make progress, but planning, the costs of planning and its interplay with the licensing system is becoming a bigger issue.

11:30

John Wilkinson: I agree with Patrick Browne about the interplay between one set of regulations and another and trying to balance the two to achieve better access.

One plea I always make to government is for more grants. I do not mean that too flippantly. We have found that when money is made available for commercial and non-commercial enterprises, especially in the area of disability, it brings huge rewards. The grants do not need to be big, but they prove that local and national Government are actually interested and not just telling us, "You have got to do it." It is nice to see a little bit of help.

John Brady: Our buildings do not face the same challenges. The main challenges that we face are good housekeeping and ensuring that the facilities are accessible, that staff are trained and that they understand our customers' needs and can give them service when they come into our stores. The other challenge is to roll out education and training continually, to ensure that when someone enters a building their shopping experience is good.

The Convener: I thank our witnesses for their evidence; it has been very helpful. Thank you.

11:32

Meeting suspended.

11:37

On resuming—

The Convener: I am pleased to welcome our second panel: Jim Tough from the Scottish Arts Council, Gavin Macleod from Scottish Disability Sport, Heather Lowden from sportscotland and Lorraine Thomson from VisitScotland.

Good morning and a warm welcome to the Equal Opportunities Committee. We will move straight to questions. How do your organisations work to increase disabled people's participation in recreation, sport and the arts?

Gavin Macleod (Scottish Disability Sport): Scottish Disability Sport, which is a voluntary body, is the governing body for disability sport in Scotland. We have a wide remit. We develop opportunities for participation and we encourage young people with disabilities to go into multisport and sport-specific programmes. We help athletes with disabilities to fulfil their potential and reach the highest level—for the majority of our athletes, that is the Paralympic games.

We are a multisport organisation. We have identified six target sports and we put the majority of our resources into them. In line with the Paralympic movement, we are a pan-disability organisation, so we deal with athletes who have physical disabilities, athletes with learning disabilities and athletes with sensory impairments. We work across the board. We have 16 local branches throughout the country and they are responsible for developing sport at the grass roots. For example, they identify talent, find volunteers who want to get involved and persuade coaches that it is a good idea to work with athletes with disabilities. Our branches are our life-blood.

The Convener: So it is your branches that are involved in promoting participation at the local level?

Gavin Macleod: Yes. When we establish branches, we work closely with the local authority. Our branches are run by volunteers, but we try to beg, steal or borrow time from officers in the local authority who can support our volunteers and help to develop the structure at the local level.

Heather Lowden (sportscotland): We work with our key partners, which are local authorities and Scottish governing bodies of sports. They are our key delivery channels because participation happens at the local level. Along with local authorities, we are heavily involved in the active schools programme, which ensures that all young people at school have access to sport. That programme is a key mechanism by which we can access young people with a disability—both in the school curriculum and outwith it—and make meaningful opportunities available to them.

From next month, an education and training programme will work with the active schools co-ordinators in both primary and secondary schools in almost all 32 local authorities. We hope that the programme will support the co-ordinators by developing skills and expertise. If we emphasise to young people with a disability that physical activity and sport is open and available to them, they will continue with physical activity and sport throughout their lives. The programme will be rolled out to local authorities throughout Scotland, starting next month. It is interesting that such projects often involve partnership working and the participation of key partners—for example, Scottish Disability Sport and the Youth Sport Trust are our key partners in the education and training programme.

The Convener: Is there any evidence that the active schools co-ordinators have enabled more disabled pupils to participate in sport?

Heather Lowden: The programme is in its second year, but—

The Convener: I realise that.

Heather Lowden: Fourteen local authorities have built inclusion posts into the active schools network. We are beginning to get information from the research that has been done, which shows that the co-ordinators have enabled more disabled pupils to participate. I can give you anecdotal evidence—for example, some relevant groups have been set up in Lothian, but that will take us on to transport issues. However, there are some examples of good practice within local authorities.

Gavin Macleod: The key point is that a lot of enthusiasm has been generated. With sportscotland, Scottish Disability Sport established an inclusion forum within the active schools network to discuss how we can move things forward. Each local authority has identified somebody to be a member of that forum, which came about because of the demand from active schools co-ordinators for education and training. They told us, "We really need some tools, some advice and some expertise on including kids with disabilities in mainstream programmes in schools." It is along those lines that things have developed. There is certainly interest and demand.

The Convener: I ask Jim Tough to comment on what is being done in the arts.

Mr Jim Tough (Scottish Arts Council): For us, participation includes the audiences who come to participate in and enjoy the arts. Of course, most of what we do is done via the companies that we fund and support. A company such as Lung Ha's Theatre Company, which is long-term funded by the Scottish Arts Council, typifies the way in which we encourage disabled people to participate in the arts.

We are committed to the social model of disability. A lot of the issues that prevent people from participating are attitudinal. Our research on audience figures suggests that disabled people are 25 per cent less likely to attend arts events. That is a huge concern to us. We have to work through the organisations that we support, so we help them to develop their understanding and commitment through training. We also build in support through our funding criteria for, for example, the lottery funds that we disperse. Our access requirements for capital projects exceed the recommended minimums. We also published "Getting There: a practical resource for arts venues in Scotland to increase the inclusion of disabled people", which we supply both to the companies that we fund and more widely. It describes practical ways to encourage and enable folk with disabilities to participate as audience members or as artists.

11:45

The Convener: That was a question for the other organisations, but perhaps Lorraine Thomson would also like to comment.

Lorraine Thomson (VisitScotland): It is more a question for other organisations, as you say, but as far as encouraging participation among disabled visitors is concerned the main thing to highlight is our disability access scheme. For 20 years now we have had a scheme for accommodation providers, and we have had a scheme for visitor attractions for the past 10 years. Through those schemes, people can get information on where they can stay and what they

can do, which gives them a degree of confidence in making those decisions.

The Convener: What challenges do your organisations face in mainstreaming service provision for disabled people?

Heather Lowden: One of the key areas is meaningful consultation with people with disabilities. In order to ensure that facilities are appropriate and access friendly, the planning stage must involve consultation. Furthermore, it sometimes costs more for people who have a disability to participate in sport. It can take longer for them to learn and to acquire skills, so we must ensure that, despite its costing more, they still have the opportunity to participate. For example, people might need one-to-one coaching, or it might take five years for somebody with cerebral palsy to learn to swim, but it is worth while and necessary.

On the buildings and capital projects side of the equation, we must ensure that there are standards to ensure that all toilets and changing facilities are accessible. That may cost more, but it is essential that time is taken to get things right at the planning stage.

Mr Tough: The attitudinal barrier can be significant, and we have made progress over the past 10 years by challenging the attitudes that inhibit people from becoming involved. A key part of that is demonstrating what is possible. For example, Edinburgh Theatre Workshop's recent production of "The Threepenny Opera" had the kind of production values and quality of work that we want to encourage. It is a question of mainstreaming and of normalising the notion that what you see on stage is sufficiently diverse to represent what society looks like. In that sense, such projects can change attitudes in the arts sector, and we have worked hard to do that. I hope that we also take responsibility for our own actions in relation to changing attitudes within the council, among staff, colleagues and committees. Those attitudinal aspects affect the development of the art and the artist as well as the access theme.

Gavin Macleod: The mainstream agenda is absolutely key for us. We find, particularly in education, that there are fewer young people in our system than we have ever had before. There are a number of reasons for that, but the feedback that we have had shows that we have problems in identifying kids in mainstream schools. When they were in special schools, it was quite easy, because we had a captive audience, but now that those young people are, if you like, lost to us in the mainstream system it is difficult for us to get statistics on where they are and for us to get information to them. We rely on a number of people passing information on to them, which is proving difficult.

We hear about examples of good practice in primary and secondary schools, where many young people are getting high-quality physical education and sports provision. Unfortunately, however, we still hear about some provision that could be much better, so there is still a lot of work to be done to ensure that kids get a quality PE experience and can then get involved in the wider school curriculum, including after school activities. The fact that their transport leaves the school gate at half past 3 or 4 o'clock, when such activities begin, can be a problem. If those kids do not adopt an active lifestyle while they are at school, they will not carry that on in their mainstream lives, and it can be difficult for us to get them into our system.

Sport is the other item on the mainstreaming agenda. I am talking about the wider picture—our work with governing bodies of sport and sports practitioners throughout the country. There are some excellent examples of good practice. Through our work with governing bodies and individual coaches, we have made a significant difference to sports programmes, but there is still a huge amount for us to do if we are to make an impact and persuade people to provide opportunities for athletes who have a disability.

I agree with what has been said. At the end of the day, attitudinal barriers are the problem. For us, education and training are crucial to overcoming those barriers.

The Convener: Some of my colleagues will want to pick up on those issues later on.

Lorraine Thomson: In our leadership role as a tourist board, we mainstream service provision through the advice that we give to tourism businesses. We employ a range of means to raise the profile of the DDA, remind people of their responsibilities and give practical advice on how they can be compliant.

Ms White: Before I move on to spontaneity, I want to pick up on issues such as access. Scottish Disability Sport's excellent submission mentioned the Welsh structure and the good practice that is happening in Fife and Edinburgh. You spoke about mainstreaming and transport difficulties. What is so good about the Welsh structure? Perhaps you do not have time to answer that.

Gavin Macleod: That will not be a problem.

The Convener: Gavin is dead keen to tell you about the Welsh structure.

Gavin Macleod: The Welsh structure is the same as the Scottish structure—Wales looked at our structure and learned from it. The difference is that in Wales resources were provided to enable the disability sports organisation there to put

development officers with a specific remit for disability in every local authority area. The resources have been found to do a similar exercise on the performance element of sport. As well as development officers, there are performance officers and links have been established with the governing bodies in Wales. In other words, in Wales, people resources have been put in.

Wales has gone down the same road as us: there is now a unified body there, whereas in England there are eight bodies that cover disability sport. Scotland is lucky to have just one such body. Wales has been successful in replicating that structure, but extra resources have been provided. There is no doubt but that people make the difference: it is people who can overcome attitudes. When we have managed to get an officer in a local authority or—more important—a governing body of sport, that person has acted as a conscience. Having someone who can niggle away at an organisation and repeatedly remind it not to forget disability makes a significant difference. Progress can be made because the issue cannot be forgotten.

Ms White: I notice that you mentioned development officers. They are why Edinburgh has been so successful.

I want to pursue the theme of funding. I presume that sportscotland is the funder of Scottish Disability Sport. I am not saying that the organisation should be given more money—although perhaps I should be saying that. Sportscotland gets a great deal of funding. In 2003, the Executive gave £600,000 to sportscotland for Scottish Disability Sport and over the past three years sportscotland investment in SDS has increased from £89,000 to £195,000. Does the Executive decide where the money that goes to sportscotland is spent or can sportscotland make up its mind about where it would be best to spend that money?

The Convener: Perhaps you could explain sportscotland's structure and how it relates to your priorities.

Heather Lowden: In conjunction with the Executive, sport 21 guides where the money that is spent on sport in Scotland goes. It is meant to be for everyone, including all the partners in sport, local authorities, governing bodies, Scottish Disability Sport, commercial organisations and national organisations.

There are three key priorities: widening opportunities, developing potential and achieving excellence. Part of the money for the active schools network goes to the Scottish governing bodies of sport, which is how SDS receives its funding. Scotland is fortunate in having the pan-disability, multisport approach that Gavin Macleod mentioned.

Some of the other governing bodies work well with regard to making sport accessible for people with disabilities. For example, the Scottish Equestrian Association will have among its members an organisation that is concerned with riding for the disabled. The Scottish Archery Association also works well in that regard. SDS is seen as the co-ordinating body and, therefore, works with the Scottish Football Association, the Scottish Athletics Federation and so on to ensure that there is accessibility. Funding would be going into the governing bodies of various sports to support access for people with disabilities.

Ms White: That sort of explains the situation. As Gavin Macleod said, we have a model that is similar to the Welsh one but, because of funding, the system in Wales is much better than ours. We are trying to emulate it now, although we started it first. I am not making a criticism; I am just wondering how much money is involved and where it goes because, obviously, it is all public money. The Scottish Arts Council is in a similar position, as is VisitScotland, to an extent.

My other question is about spontaneity—people's ability to attend an event or whatever without having to book it first. Jim Tough said that 25 per cent of disabled people do not attend performances in theatres and so on. Is that because there is a lack of accessibility that means that they cannot be spontaneous in that regard?

Jim Tough: We need to find out the reasons behind that figure. I suspect that some of the reasons are to do with simple access issues relating to transport and so on. We want to encourage or require the organisations that we support to have a proactive approach to the issue that means that they ask themselves what they can do to respond to the circumstances of that audience in ways that will make that choice easy and that spontaneity possible.

We try to take a carrot-and-carrot approach. We try to create opportunities for those organisations to develop their marketing and audience development programmes in ways that are a bit more sensitive to the issues that we are discussing. We support programmes such as the Stagetext captioning programme, which enables live theatre to be done in particular ways. We need to work at both ends and offer encouragement to the arts organisations and the folk who want to take up that opportunity.

Ms White: Have the other witnesses heard from anyone who feels that they cannot be spontaneous about accessing a leisure facility and must book in advance? If so, what have they done to encourage their organisations to make it easier

for people with disabilities to take part in activities more spontaneously?

Lorraine Thomson: We assess the degree of access in accommodation and visitor attractions and make that information available to people who might want to visit somewhere, which means that no one should turn up somewhere to find that the place does not meet their requirements. That is quite helpful.

Gavin Macleod: There are a number of issues that affect people's ability to be spontaneous. Facility access is one and, on countless occasions, we have had to get people in through fire doors or carry them into facilities. At the end of the day, our view is that, as long as we can get them into the facilities, that is great and we can get them playing sport. Although we would be happier if the access were better, the more important issues are the attitudinal barriers such as the social implications of someone having a buddy or friend to go somewhere with them, the attitudes of staff and of the general public, whether someone can join a ready-made group in a non-threatening environment and whether information is available about where opportunities are. In that regard, we are responsible for finding the people who need the information so that we can get it to them. If we could tick all those boxes, we would be a long way down the line.

12:00

Heather Lowden: The issue is about attitudes, but it is also about leadership and ensuring that leaders have the skills and confidence to be able to welcome anyone who crosses their threshold. In addition, in certain sports, technical adaptations may have to be made. As the evidence to the committee shows, it is about having the right people there to make a difference—not only people at the local level who are capable of going that extra mile, but people at the sports partnership and regional levels, so that there is a pathway that allows individuals to move to where they want to go.

Mr Tough: The committee might be interested in an example of the work that Gavin Macleod referred to. Artlink Edinburgh has a well-established service that provides someone to chum folk to the theatre or music performances. We are investing a bit more in that service, which is a good exemplar for other organisations.

Nora Radcliffe: What additional challenges do the witnesses face in providing services for disabled people in rural areas?

Gavin Macleod: Transport is one additional challenge. In the Highlands area, there are three or four young athletes whom we feel have the potential to go all the way. One of them lives in Thurso—he is probably the only chair user in Thurso—and has the potential to be a great athlete. The question is how we get him to regular training or coaching sessions. We could try to tie him up with a mainstream club, but it might not be accessible or there might be attitudinal barriers.

Getting athletes to the local club, which might be in Inverness, and back has cost and parental support implications. From our point of view, there is also a critical mass issue in rural areas. We have enough chair users in urban areas for wheelchair basketball, but in the Highlands, for example, there may not be enough chair users, or we may have to transport people over great distances.

On the more positive side, because people in rural areas must look after themselves, they are often much more self-sufficient. We run a football squad training session in Stirling, and one young lad's dad religiously drives him down from Aberdeenshire to Stirling every other weekend for the sessions. Athletes in rural areas must rely on their own ability to get to places and are used to travelling. We find that the volunteer structure in some rural areas is better than it is in urban areas because people in rural areas have to look after themselves. It is swings and roundabouts, but people in rural areas certainly face big barriers.

Mr Tough: Transport is obviously an issue, and colleagues from our audience development department are working with the Executive on how we can tackle it. However, our other advantage is that we support touring and promoters, and we encourage them to reach everybody in rural communities. At the other end of the process, our capital programme has been quite successful in setting a standard and creating an opportunity that makes the mixture work. It is good if a tour involves people who are attitudinally aware of the barriers with which individuals are confronted and if the venues are accessible. For example, the McPhail centre in Ullapool has an exceptionally good theatre space, which is attached to a school and has high access standards. We try to tackle accessibility with that mixture.

Heather Lowden: We recognise that buildings and local facilities in island communities, for example, must be accessible. They may cater for a smaller percentage of the population, but they still need accessible sports facilities. Any project that is awarded a sportscotland grant—for example, a grant was recently given to a sports forum in the Western Isles—must ensure that it is accessible.

There are often many good volunteers in rural areas throughout Scotland, who know how to travel and go the distance to make things happen. There are local volunteer centres in each local authority, and six regional volunteer officers have

been installed. They will support volunteering in sport and will link people to the key networks.

It is important that coaching courses and seminars take place in rural communities as well as in urban communities. Coaching Scotland, the new coaching strategy, will seek to ensure accessibility throughout the country.

Nora Radcliffe: On funding, is enough allowance made for the unit costs in rural areas? If you are training a coach or providing a service in a rural area, the unit costs are huge in comparison with the costs in urban areas. There can be no economies of scale.

Heather Lowden: We hope that the sports partnerships will cover all the geographical areas. Having said that, there will be bigger areas to consider, such as the Highlands, but I think that—

Nora Radcliffe: May I stop you there? When we talk about rural areas, everybody seems to think of the Highlands and Islands. I represent a rural constituency in the north-east of Scotland and it has a different pattern of population spread from the Highlands and Islands. The same would apply to the Borders. We sometimes get too hung up on the Highlands and Islands model.

I apologise, but this is a personal hobby horse of mine and I just wanted to make the point.

Heather Lowden: The point is well made. The regional approach is supposed to apply to the Borders, the Highlands, Aberdeenshire, Grampian, Dumfriesshire and so on.

Sometimes, we have to take programmes to rural communities, rather than expect them always to travel. A series of coaching seminars and workshops will go round the whole of Scotland. They should be accessible.

Nora Radcliffe: That is good to hear.

Mr Tough: We support touring theatre companies. If their plans include rural areas, we would acknowledge the cost. For example, it will cost companies more to go over to the new An Lanntair centre in Stornoway.

Nora Radcliffe asked about the north-east. We support an organisation called NEAT—north east arts touring—for which local volunteers do a lot of work. We also support the Dumfries and Galloway Arts Association through what we call a guarantee against loss scheme, which makes its work economically viable.

Nora Radcliffe: It is good to hear that that is happening.

It has been suggested to the committee that organisations that receive public funds should be required to demonstrate accessibility. What do you think of that suggestion? Is it something that you consider when allocating funding?

Mr Tough: In our conditions of grant and in our funding agreements with organisations, we expect them to take such issues seriously. We have to take the reasonableness of accessibility into account, but we can develop the attitudinal aspects through training. Every organisation that receives regular funding from us is required to do disability awareness training. Within reasonable parameters, companies have to take such issues on board in whatever they happen to be doing.

Heather Lowden: All capital projects and new buildings have to adhere to equal opportunities policies on disability and there has to be an access statement.

We are also introducing an equity statement. Governing bodies have to demonstrate commitment to and enthusiasm for equity, which covers a wide range of issues, including disability.

Having considered the equity standard and worked with 12 of our governing bodies, we have realised that we want to do meaningful programmes that will help people who have a disability. We are looking at how we can demonstrate standards in a way that avoids the tick-box mentality. Our partners have been very good in working with us. Some of them have produced huge portfolios, although we are not saying that that is the whole point of work in this area. An equity standard is about demonstrating good practice and continually building on that. People can achieve a standard, but they can always strive to improve. We are consulting the governing bodies on what makes a difference and how people can demonstrate that easily.

Lorraine Thomson: As a publicly-funded body, we do not give out any grants and so on, so I do not know whether it is appropriate for me to reply to the question.

Nora Radcliffe: A lot of good work is going on and good things are happening, but public perception has not caught up. People do not know that it is all happening, although that will become increasingly obvious as we go along.

I wanted to ask about funding on the sports side. We have a super submission from sportscotland. A lot of good things are going on that seem to be centred around funding posts and people, which is excellent because people change attitudes. However, an issue that was not mentioned in the submission is whether disabled people who are involved in sports require specialist equipment. Once the attitude towards change is there and you have got people involved, is there sufficient funding to back that up? Can you supply the adapted equipment that people need? Is that an issue that we should pursue?

Gavin Macleod: It is an issue. It depends very much on the sport. In a sport such as swimming, there is not really any requirement for specialist equipment. However, in one of our sports—wheelchair rugby—a chair can cost up to £3,500, and money is not available for that at the moment. Our guys fundraise and grants are available locally for local athletes, but the problem is that such pieces of equipment are tailor-made for the individual, and young people grow out of them. A number of bodies fund sports equipment for young people, so opportunities exist, but not much is available for older athletes. The costs involved depend on the sport, but they are an issue for a number of our athletes.

Heather Lowden: People sometimes have issues with getting into and out of swimming pools. Sportscotland is working with design teams on ramps so that people can move in and out with dignity, which is another important factor. However, there is a cost to designing a swimming pool that has ramps that move into and out of the water, or adapting changing facilities. Specialist equipment can also be required, especially if someone is moving up the performance continuum.

Nora Radcliffe: How are your organisations preparing for the implementation of the disability equality duty?

Lorraine Thomson: Work has started on that. We are planning to have everything completed by October, although the duty does not come into effect until December. Things are very much in hand—one of our directors is considering the work of every department in VisitScotland to ensure that we are compliant ahead of time.

Heather Lowden: We put on last month's board agenda the issue of how sportscotland will meet the requirements of the duty. The board was involved in a two-day seminar, one of the dimensions of which was consideration of how we were going to implement the legislation, so it is being taken seriously at the highest level. Jill Bennett, one of our policy officers, has been put in charge of ensuring that good practice is in place. The implementation plan will be ready in time.

12:15

Mr Tough: Our updated strategy on arts and disability, which will be published next month, contains key actions to ensure that we get there. Some areas need activity. For example, we need to do a bit of work on making our application process available in different formats.

To go back to an earlier point, although we are concerned about access, we are also concerned about the development of the arts and arts practice, so we are increasing the available funds to enable wider recognition and mainstreaming of disabled artists' practice. Going beyond the requirements, we want to ensure that what people see on the stage or hear in concert halls represents our diverse country.

The Convener: Does Gavin Macleod want to add to that, as his organisation is about disability and sport?

Gavin Macleod: We are slightly different. We have been working towards the disability equality duty for some time now, so the work that we are doing is more about supporting our partners—local authorities, governing bodies and sportscotland—and leading them into the duty when it kicks into force in December. We have recently done some work on that with the Disability Rights Commission, which is really helping. We are getting an awful lot of requests for support at the moment. We are not the biggest governing body in the world—there are only a few of us—but we are supporting whomever we can.

Marilyn Livingstone: I will ask some questions about information. The committee has received evidence that information is really important to disabled people and that many of them have difficulties accessing information about the services that are available to them. Do the witnesses provide such information, and is it available in alternative formats? How is the information that is provided monitored and evaluated to ensure that it is fit for purpose?

Mr Tough: We do that through the provision of advice and through our own practice. General information about the Scottish Arts Council—in, I hope, a range of formats—is provided through our helpdesk and website, for example. As I mentioned in response to the previous question, we need to do a bit more work on different formats for our application process, so that disabled artists can be eased through it. If we are genuine about mainstreaming, everybody should be able to access information from the Scottish Arts Council.

Similarly, we provide the organisations that we fund or support with "Getting There", which is a guidebook to increasing accessibility in a range of situations, including venues and events. It includes recommendations about the standards that are required and whether to use printed material or other formats.

Lorraine Thomson: Marilyn Livingstone mentioned monitoring after information has been made available. VisitScotland tries hard to consult before we get to the stage of having information available in different formats. We have consulted the RNIB and access for all to ensure that our main brochures and guides, although in hard copy, are easier to read. Guidelines will come out quite soon for that.

Our main tourist brochure for Scotland has been available in audio-CD format for two or three years. I mentioned our access scheme. We produced the results of that in a brochure that is all about mobility and access. Our website, visitscotland.com, has also won different access awards and we are working towards compliance with the website accessibility initiative to try to get to the middle level of suitability.

Heather Lowden: Several of sportscotland's key documents are available in different formats. Monitoring is useful; we have just set out to do that through our communication strategy and we hope to have the results next year.

We find it difficult to get information directly to young disabled people and their carers. Together with Scottish Disability Sport, we are producing a DVD, which we hope we will be able to put into their hands. Unfortunately, because of data protection legislation, we have difficulty accessing young people's details. We might get the DVD to them through the active schools network. We hope that it will be made available to coaches as well, because it is the people on the front line who make things happen. One of our key issues is how to access young people.

Gavin Macleod: Identifying and getting information to particular young people is a problem that keeps haunting us. We have developed our own website, which we try to keep up to date with help from volunteers. We try to get the message out as much as we can through our website, and we produce a newsletter that gives a flavour of our work and that of our partner organisations, such as the governing bodies.

We are carrying out monitoring and evaluation on our education and training courses, come-and-try sessions and squad events to see where people heard about the particular event. A lot of information is passed on by word of mouth. We are reliant on networks.

We have a database of contacts to whom we distribute our calendar of events and details of our education and training courses. We try to add to that as much as we can.

Marilyn Livingstone: The committee has received evidence that the lack of provision of interpretation and communication support can be a barrier to disabled people participating in leisure activities. Are you aware of that barrier and, if so, how are you working to remove it?

Gavin Macleod: That is an issue for us. A number of our athletes require signers, but signers incur a huge cost and our budgets are small. We rely on volunteers or fellow athletes to sign for us. We all learn quickly to sign specific words.

Mr Tough: We offer financial opportunities for organisations to use stage text, for example, which makes performances more accessible. We also encourage and demonstrate good practice in the use of BSL. Our good gallery guide gives people information on our galleries. We have assessors who go to galleries and report on their accessibility and how the experience is made straightforward for people.

Heather Lowden: We have looked into getting people to sign at various conferences, but there is a shortage of signers in Scotland. We would endeavour to offer support, using visual cues.

John Swinburne: Do the witnesses agree that staff training on disability equality is a way of combating negative attitudes towards disabled people? Are there any other ways of combating such attitudes?

Lorraine Thomson: We have a network of 123 tourist information centres in Scotland. As a minimum standard, staff have to be trained in disability awareness, which I know definitely makes a difference. It is useful for such training to explain why certain things are needed. Understanding people's experience and why certain things might have to be done differently helps. The issue is taken seriously.

Heather Lowden: Sportscotland has a series of on-going training initiatives, because sustainability is important. In the past three years, we have had a fairly major programme of training for all staff. The Scottish Institute of Sport and various centres run the education and training programme. Furthermore, governing bodies are trying to provide education and training for their staff, volunteer coaches and leaders in all dimensions of sport. I agree that training is fundamental.

Mr Tough: Our organisation and the organisations that we fund have been through the training process. The attitudinal aspect is interesting, because fear and ignorance come into play. Once folk have been through the experience and get into the comfort zone, they can start other activities. We aim to have projects that show disabled people on stage—that should be the norm rather than the exception in mainstream theatres, galleries and musical performances. Training is part of the process, but it is a means to the end of shifting attitudes.

Gavin Macleod: Several issues arise. Education and training are key in shifting attitudes. In the past few years, we have done virtually nothing else but run education and training courses to try to keep up with demand from local authorities, governing bodies and the active schools programme. The new education and training module through sportscotland will help us to bring on new tutors. However, we rely on

volunteers to give their time. Changing attitudes is all about education and training.

After education and training, the real key is that people must take the issue by the scruff of the neck and get involved in coaching people with disabilities. We can train and educate people as much as we like, but they do not realise what the issues are until they get hands-on experience. About 90 per cent of coaches or volunteers who have been involved with people with disabilities come back with positive experiences—the fear factor disappears quickly.

We need to do much more work with role models. Our athletes with disabilities have had huge success at Paralympic games, but we do not use them enough as role models to show young disabled people what they can achieve if they are prepared to put in the hard work. In that respect, there is no difference between disability sport and mainstream sport—both are about hard work and attitudes.

The big issue for us is that, if we are to change attitudes, we need to change the media. I do not know how the committee can do that, but I wish you the best of luck. We plug away at that. Every four years, the Paralympics come along and we manage to hit some of the big newspapers and television channels. However, the majority of the time, with some glorious exceptions, we struggle to get any national coverage. Locally, where there are good-news stories about local athletes, we get an awful lot of coverage, but we struggle with national newspapers and television. There are good examples, such as John Beattie's show on a Saturday morning, which continues to profile disability athletes. Our wheelchair curlers have just returned from the winter Paralympic games with a silver medal, but I doubt whether they got much coverage in the newspapers, given that the Commonwealth games have been happening at the same time. That is an eternal problem for us. Minority sports in general struggle to get coverage in the media, but it is equally difficult for us.

Heather Lowden: I was just thinking about how we combat negative attitudes. The best way is to promote positive examples, but we are sometimes not very good at that.

Marilyn Livingstone: In its submission, sportscotland says that resources are required to roll out disability inclusion training and that education authorities need to be encouraged. What work is being done on that?

12:30

Heather Lowden: We are working with the active schools co-ordinators and the education authorities to ensure that the disability inclusion module goes into all local authorities on a rolling basis.

Marilyn Livingstone: Is that work progressing?

Heather Lowden: Yes. The training programme starts in April and within 18 months we hope to have covered all local authorities.

Gavin Macleod: The pilot of the initiative will start on 28 March in Moray with the Moray active schools group. Those schools will be our guinea pigs. Any subtle changes that have to be made to the programme will be made then. We have two years' funding through the Scottish Executive to roll out the training to every active schools co-ordinator in Scotland. The issue is where the training programme goes after that. Countless other people would benefit from such training, such as teachers, coaches, volunteers, sports development officers, facility staff and so on. There is a question mark over the future development of the initiative.

The Convener: We will now ask the different organisations a series of questions. We will start with questions for VisitScotland.

Ms White: Lorraine Thomson has answered some of my questions. She mentioned the audiovisual presentations and so on that are on the VisitScotland website. I was going to ask how you promote Scotland as a holiday destination, but obviously you promote it through the audiovisual presentations on the website. Does VisitScotland's website also mention the disabled facilities in Scotland?

Lorraine Thomson: Yes—mainly through the scheme that I mentioned. There is information on the website about the thousand or so tourism operators that take part in the scheme. The level of accessibility is given in their entry on the website, so people can see what category of access is achieved. That information is provided as part of the mainstream information that is included on the website.

Ms White: I know that you said that you consult beforehand on the category of access, but do you evaluate and monitor how useful the facilities are for disabled people?

Lorraine Thomson: When we inspect accommodation annually, we check that the disabled facilities are still in place. We have not done much direct evaluation, but that is probably an issue that we should think about. We thought that we could do a survey of the recipients of the guide that I mentioned, which provides a list of accessible places. That could be a good way of getting directly to the people who have received the information.

Ms White: That would be the start of some form of evaluation.

Lorraine Thomson: Yes.

Ms White: You mentioned that the star grading of the quality assurance scheme includes three categories of provision to disabled people. I want to ask about the monitoring and evaluation of that scheme. How useful is it to disabled people? Are there incentives for tourism operators to achieve the higher grading?

Lorraine Thomson: The access situation is interesting as there are different levels of access. Our scheme is about physical mobility access. When it comes to trying to achieve more, everything comes down to a commercial perspective. It is not the case that the biggest demand is for provision for people with the most severe difficulties; it may be that to do something less will attract a bigger market, because that might suit more people.

We are looking to review the scheme as it has been in existence for a long time. We are considering the experience in England, which has a different scheme. We are consulting disability groups and trade organisations to see whether we should change the scheme.

Ms White: We might hear about that. Perhaps you will consider evaluating the facilities that are provided.

The Convener: We move to questions for the SAC.

Marlyn Glen: "Scotland's Culture: Scottish Executive Response on the Cultural Review" announces the creation of the creative Scotland agency. How will the transition to the new agency be managed to ensure that a seamless service is provided to disabled people?

Mr Tough: I do not know that it will be left entirely to us to decide how the transition is managed. As the transition progresses, we in the SAC will want to ensure that the social model of disability is the one that is adopted by creative Scotland. Arts and disability must have a high profile in the work of creative Scotland. The report does not make many specific references to the issue, but it is important as part of our commitment to inclusion. We are committed to bringing our influence to bear to ensure that things change and that the good practice that we have supported is taken into the new body.

Marlyn Glen: That is reassuring.

In your submission, you express disappointment at the take-up of the professional development fund. However, you also note the lack of professional training opportunities for disabled artists and performers. What is causing that situation and how are you working to increase awareness of available opportunities?

Mr Tough: I suspect that the situation has come about because we have not achieved the critical mass of artistic activity—through, for example, having role models on stage and so on—that makes such opportunities available to disabled people. We need to work to make demand happen, and that can be achieved partly by mainstreaming opportunities in the wider artistic community. As with many inclusion issues, we need to make a long-term commitment to this process and to take every opportunity to continue to consult folk. I should point out that the demand for professional development opportunities emerged partly from our work during the European year of disabled people.

There are wee signs that things are changing. For example, last week, Claire Cunningham, who developed her practice through the Sounds of Progress company, won a creative Scotland award. We need to create an environment in which such role models can be established and professional practice can be developed.

Marlyn Glen: I wonder whether, as with sport, you should be thinking about involving young people.

Mr Tough: Absolutely, and we can do so not just through the mainstream companies. For example, I would expect that, in our support for the Scottish Youth Theatre, we would have the same standards and aspirations that we would have with any other company and would seek to engage with young folk in a very inclusive way.

Marlyn Glen: The committee received evidence from RNIB that, in Scotland, there is little provision of visually described movies. Are you aware of that concern and, if so, are you addressing it?

Mr Tough: Creative Scotland will probably have a wider responsibility for screen-based presentation and, as I said earlier, we want to encourage it to take such positive steps when it takes on its screen-based activities.

I should say that, in the past, we have funded such projects and programmes of activity. For example, the artist and director Matt Hulse has done a lot of work on cinema for the deaf.

Marilyn Livingstone: Are sportscotland and Scottish Disability Sport happy with their relationship, or can it be developed?

The Convener: In other words, how well do you get on?

Gavin Macleod: We talk to each other now and again.

As the representative from the governing body, I have to say that we have received exceptional support from sportscotland. We have link officers in the main three areas of widening opportunities,

developing potential and achieving excellence. We have also received support from sportscotland's facilities design team and have policy contacts. Moreover, the organisation's media people help us as much as they can by getting out press releases about our successes. As I have said, Scottish Disability Sport is a multisport organisation, and losing our base in sportscotland and the ability to network with sportscotland staff and other sport governing bodies would be a major minus point. Our relationship is very positive.

Things can always be better, but the relationship has certainly developed in the years that I have been involved with disability sport in Scotland.

Heather Lowden: I agree. We have a very good relationship with Scottish Disability Sport, which is our key delivery channel for disability sport. Indeed, we are very fortunate that the relationship is so good.

The point is that we have shared outcomes and targets. We both want young people to get the opportunity to participate and then to move through the sporting spectrum. In that respect, winning the silver medal in curling at the Paralympic games has been a major achievement.

Marilyn Livingstone: That is a very important relationship and I am glad to hear your comments on that.

My next questions are for sportscotland, which is co-ordinating sport 21, the Scottish Executive's national strategy for sport for 2003-07. How does the strategy encourage participation in sport by disabled people?

Heather Lowden: One of the key themes that flow through sport 21, within the whole system of ethics and equity, is its stated underlying principle that people, regardless of age or disability, should have the opportunity to participate in sport. We want to ensure that that continues to be the case when the new sport 21 strategy—or whatever it gets called—starts in 2007. I am sure that that will continue to be an integral dimension in future.

Marilyn Livingstone: How does sportscotland work with other sport organisations to help them achieve the standards set out in "The Equity Standard: A Framework for Sport" as they relate to disabled people? That would seem to be an important role for you.

Heather Lowden: Yes, it is. As I mentioned, we have been working with 12 sports. "The Equity Standard" is a new standard. Following work undertaken with the 12 governing bodies, some flaws have been revealed. We do not want it to become a simple matter of having a tick list. We want the organisations to be able to demonstrate the good practice that is going on. We have worked with a wide variety of organisations, from the predominantly voluntary equestrian bodies to the team sport organisations. At the moment, we are undergoing the first stage of becoming a governing body that will uphold the foundation-level equity standards. We think that a number of lessons will be learned through that.

Marilyn Livingstone: I will move on to a topical question. How is accessibility being built into the planning for major events such as the Commonwealth games? I am sure that we have all been watching the games over the past week. What sort of planning takes place for such events from your perspective?

Heather Lowden: Quite a lot of planning. It is interesting to note that Scotland was one of the first teams to make disability inclusive; the team that went over to Victoria in 1994 was an inclusive team that included visually impaired bowlers, for example. Therefore, there has been a history of that now.

For the 2014 bid, sportscotland is represented by our chair—she apologises very much for not being here today. She is part of the group and will be ensuring that the team is inclusive. There have already been discussions between Scottish Disability Sport, sportscotland and the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland to consider the possible events for 2014. We want the competition to be meaningful. We need to consider the countries that will be taking part, where the athletes will be and what events and sports will be most suitable. The discussions are under way.

The accessibility of any new facilities—whether national and regional facilities or facilities built for the Commonwealth games—will be taken into account. That will have an impact—facilities will need to be fully accessible, and they will require to have access planning agreements. That is relevant from the buildings point of view, but also from the point of view of programming the various sports. I should mention that Glasgow has a very good reputation in this regard. It has a lot of disability inclusion teams—I think that they are called community action teams, or CATs. It is all about inclusion. The key partners are all involved in that respect.

Marilyn Livingstone: Thank you for that. That is encouraging.

The Convener: We will now have questions for Scottish Disability Sport.

Nora Radcliffe: How do you work with disabled people to encourage their participation in sport?

12:45

Gavin Macleod: Where do we start? The younger we can get people involved in sport, the

better. At the moment, there needs to be a push to get more young people involved and to get them into a sporting lifestyle. Just like anything else, if we do not get people involved when they are young, it becomes much more difficult later. It is no different between us and mainstream sport in that respect.

There is a different dimension to the issue for people who have acquired disabilities. We cannot know when someone will acquire a disability, so we must be reactive when that happens and try to encourage such people into a sporting structure as quickly as possible.

The big issue is the identification of young people in schools. We will work on education and training with the active schools network to try to ensure that young people with disabilities are identified and receive high-quality physical education. We should ensure that the university curriculum for trainee PE teachers includes training on how to work inclusively with young people who have disabilities and we should ensure that local authorities run in-service follow-up to such training. We must also ensure that the active schools agenda enables disabled kids to take part in programmes that are running and that transport or inclusion does not become a problem for such kids. Links must also be created with extra-curricular, community sporting structures, through our branches or specific sport clubs that cater for people with disabilities.

Nora Radcliffe: I am interested in what you said about mainstream PE teachers. Do you have input into their training?

Gavin Macleod: No. In the past, we provided universities around the country with modules on disability awareness and inclusion but, unfortunately, we have had no input into PE courses.

Nora Radcliffe: Did the universities approach you for help in developing such modules?

Gavin Macleod: Yes. For example, the University of Strathclyde runs a module as part of the degree that it offers in sport in the community. One of our volunteers runs the module. We have had an input into the course for a number of years and it is no coincidence that a large majority of the guys who have taken up posts at Scottish Disability Sport in recent years have completed the course. We need to raise awareness at an early stage. If we do that, fears and preconceptions can be dispelled early—that is just common sense.

Nora Radcliffe: That seems to be a good avenue to go down.

In your submission, you call for funding to enable local authorities to appoint development officers with a remit to develop opportunities for disability sport and inclusion. How would that work?

Gavin Macleod: We have been quite successful with small pots of money from sponsors and other sources in the past few years. When I started working for SDS eight years ago, there were probably half a dozen development officers in Scotland whose remit included disability, whereas 29 such officers will attend tomorrow's professional officers group meeting. Those guys might be involved in disability issues full-time or for a small percentage of their time, but disability sport is part of their remit.

In the past, we have gone cap in hand to local authorities with £2,000 or £3,000 and asked, "What can we do with this small amount of money to help you to generate funding for a post?" We went to Highland Council with £2,000 or £3,000 and managed to get a development officer in place—I am talking about the Highlands again, as that is where I am from. Funding for that post came from eight different sources, which included the education, leisure and social work budgets, the Royal Mail and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, which provided sponsorship, and sportscotland and our local branch. We worried about how we would monitor the post and the six-monthly meetings were interesting, but the approach worked and the post was mainstreamed. We must consider how we facilitate such appointments. We must also ensure that we have an input into the work programme of individuals who are appointed. If our financial input is only £2,000 and the local authority puts in the rest of the money, it is difficult for us to demand a say in what the officer does. Sometimes that means that the local agenda is the driver and our agenda, which might be different, is ignored. A balance must be struck.

Nora Radcliffe: What barriers to the provision of services to disabled people do local sport organisations face?

Gavin Macleod: That is a difficult question to answer, because many problems stem from attitudinal barriers to do with fear and preconceptions, which must be broken down. There are certainly physical barriers, too. Some facilities are not user friendly and we find it difficult to get access for our athletes. However, as I have been saying throughout the meeting, attitudinal barriers are the problem.

We find that we have the biggest influence if we approach clubs through the mainstream governing body rather than independently as a disability organisation. We can reassure clubs that what they need to do is not difficult but simply involves adapting their coaching style. They need to differentiate, as they would with any athlete, but they have to take into account one or two extra

considerations when they do that. I do not think that we will ever convince everybody, but we are starting to pick off sports and coaches and increase participation.

Nora Radcliffe: The more you do, the more it spreads.

Gavin Macleod: That is right. If there are two clubs in an area and one of them is starting to attract extra members with disabilities, the other club will twig and say, "We're missing a trick." We need wider education.

Ms White: Some users told us that certain sport centres use health and safety rules as barriers to disabled people's participation. We heard about that in relation to trampolining and swimming. Despite the DDA, people are told that they cannot access those sports because of health and safety rules. Have you come across such cases a lot?

Gavin Macleod: Yes.

Ms White: I just wanted to know.

The Convener: How do you overcome it?

Gavin Macleod: It happens not just in general sports facilities but in schools as well. Staff say, "We can't include this child because they are a wheelchair user and there is a chance that somebody might run into them, or they might run into the wall." Again, the answer is education. We need to get across the clear message that children have the right to experience physical education and sport and the right to access sport facilities. We prefer to use the carrot rather than the stick but, given the DDA, a point will come at which people have to do what they should.

Ms White: You have training officers in some local authorities. If those local authorities do not use health and safety rules as a barrier to participation, surely that can be used against local authorities that do, assuming that the same sports are involved in both cases.

Gavin Macleod: Absolutely, yes.

Heather Lowden: We can influence projects that are funded by grant aid from sportscotland, but it might be worth while for the committee to contact the Institute of Sport and Recreation Management and the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management. We, too, have concerns about the use of health and safety rules.

May I return to the question about the Commonwealth games?

The Convener: Certainly.

Heather Lowden: EventScotland is a key partner in the bid and it is being supportive. Paul Bush is the key officer in charge of international sporting events—he used to be the chief executive of Scottish Swimming—and he is playing a big role. Scotland is small enough to allow people to get together and make a difference.

Gavin Macleod: Our great disappointment about the current Commonwealth games is the fact that Scotland does not have an athlete with a disability. One athlete was due to go but, unfortunately, they had to pull out due to ill health. The main reason is the selection of the sports and the categories within them. If the selection suits, that is great, but if it does not, that is not so good for the nation. In Manchester, our bowlers were gold medallists, but unfortunately their discipline was pulled. We do not know why.

That is a problem for disability sport in the Commonwealth games, but mainstream sport does not have that problem. As Heather Lowden said, we are talking to the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland, which has been proactive in asking us which sports and events should be held in Glasgow if the bid is successful. We said, "All sports and all events." I do not think that we will get that, but it is a good starting point for the negotiations.

The Convener: Let us hope that we can look forward to the games being held in Glasgow.

Thank you for your evidence, which has been very helpful.

Meeting closed at 12:54.

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