



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee

**Thursday 20 September 2018**

**Session 5**



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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**CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> Meeting 2018, Session 5**

**CONVENER**

\*Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)

\*Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

\*Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con)

\*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

\*Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)

\*Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Roger Billcliffe (Roger Billcliffe Gallery)

Malcolm Fraser

Eileen Reid (Former Head of Widening Participation, Glasgow School of Art)

Stuart Robertson (Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society)

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Stephen Herbert

**LOCATION**

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)



# Scottish Parliament

## Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee

Thursday 20 September 2018

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:02]*

### Glasgow School of Art

**The Convener (Joan McAlpine):** Good morning and welcome to the 23rd meeting in 2018 of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee. I remind members and the public to turn off their mobile phones, and I ask any members who intend to use electronic devices to access committee papers to ensure that they are turned to silent. We have received apologies from Tavish Scott, and we are joined by Sandra White, whom I will bring in later.

Our first item of business is an evidence session on the Glasgow School of Art. This is our first evidence session on the art school, and we will hold a further evidence session on the topic. I welcome our witnesses: Eileen Reid is the former head of widening participation at Glasgow School of Art; Malcolm Fraser is an architect; Roger Billcliffe is the director of the Roger Billcliffe Gallery and a Charles Rennie Mackintosh scholar; and Stuart Robertson is the director of the Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society.

We are all here because Scotland has lost a masterpiece of global importance. Many agree that the Mackintosh building was the most significant piece of architecture—indeed, the most significant piece of art—that has ever been produced in Scotland. After the 2014 fire, which destroyed part of the building, the investigation by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service was clear about the causes of the fire and the reason for its rapid acceleration. There was enormous sympathy, and an understandable determination to move on and rebuild, but now the building has been completely destroyed in a second fire and many people, not just in Glasgow but around the world, want to know why. I know that some of the experts on our panel have raised those questions.

Media reports at the weekend in advance of today's meeting focused on the debate about rebuilding, and I am sure that members will have questions on that subject. However, before we move on to that, I want to ask the members of the panel whether they think that lessons were learned from the first fire and, if not, why not. Was there a systemic failure of risk assessment on the part of the custodians of the Glasgow School of Art Mackintosh building?

**Roger Billcliffe (Roger Billcliffe Gallery):** We do not know whether any lessons were learned, because the school has not said a word about the 2014 fire. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service report that was published is redacted. It tells us what happened, but it does not tell us—although the service must know—why it happened or who was responsible for it.

The school has refused to comment on the fire, other than to say that the initial spark, which was caused by a student using a banned substance in the school, was an accident, so we do not know whether anything was learned. We do not know whether the school proceeded to protect the vents that caused the fire to spread. We are talking about a fire that was put out within three minutes of the fire brigade arriving, but which had already spread up to the top floor by the time the fire brigade arrived. That is because, from the basement, there was what was, in effect, a chimney, although Mackintosh designed it as a ventilation shaft. Modern ventilation shafts are automatically blocked off at each floor when a fire occurs, to stop the fire spreading.

Between 2008 and 2012, the school spent £8.5 million of Heritage Lottery Fund money to make the building, in the words of its then director,

“fit for the 21st century”,

but the building was by no means fit for the 21st century because of the failure to protect the vents. It was a fire trap waiting to happen. The luckiest thing that happened in the 2014 fire is that nobody died. If someone had died and there had been a fatal accident inquiry, we would have had answers to the question why the school was not protected. There could have been a public inquiry, which would also have answered those questions.

The school promised the Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society that we would see the results of an internal inquiry. We do not know whether that inquiry ever took place, because we have never seen anything. Nobody knows whether lessons have been learned.

**The Convener:** Eileen Reid, you worked at the school from 2000. Do you know whether an internal inquiry took place after the 2014 fire?

**Eileen Reid (Former Head of Widening Participation, Glasgow School of Art):** A lot of rumours are circulating. Part of the problem is the fact that we are relying on hearsay and rumours. The first of the two major rumours concerning an inquiry is that, on the Saturday morning following the 2014 fire, a senior member of staff was tasked with investigating the causes of the fire and photographing the building, along with the chief fire officer in north Glasgow, and that a report was written, which was suppressed. I do not think that that version is correct.

I think that the correct version is that the task was to organise the decant from the Mackintosh building very quickly and, in doing that, to photograph the part of the building that had not been burned, although the part of it that had been burned was photographed, too. What seems to have emerged from that is that there were multiple failures of health and safety in the Mack building in the run-up to the degree show in 2014, and a list of concerns and findings, rather than a report, was handed to the director at the time, Tom Inns.

In my view, when that emergency committee was set up on the Saturday morning following the first fire, at the very least there should have been an immediate internal investigation. I do not mean a disciplinary investigation to do with the source of ignition—such an investigation might or might not have taken place. I mean a systemic investigation into how we ended up in a situation in which the risk in the most vulnerable and at-risk-of-fire building in Glasgow—apparently, it was at the top of the fire service's list—and possibly in Scotland was not calculated properly. If an investigation had taken place into the causes of the 2014 fire, it might have been the only way that lessons could have been learned. I do not know how lessons can be learned unless there is an investigation.

**The Convener:** You are talking about an investigation into the managerial processes around health and safety, as opposed to what the fire service did.

**Eileen Reid:** Yes. The main focus of the fire service is, quite rightly, on the point of ignition and the cause. The fire service is not particularly about apportioning responsibility.

Anyone who worked in the art school—I defy anyone to say otherwise—knew that the building was a risk. We all knew it. We used to talk about how many minutes we would have to get out. It was precarious, given 100 years of—not abuse—but the way that the building was used and the presence of flammable materials and the rest. Our main protection was the fire and smoke alarm, which went off what felt like frequently but probably was not—I set it off myself once. If you were at the top of the building when the fire alarm went off, you moved. We did not need reports or risk assessments—we did not even know that the ventilation ducts were not closed off—but we knew that it was a very hazardous building. Of course I am concerned about the iconic building, but it was a threat to life, too.

**Stuart Robertson (Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society):** After the 2014 fire, the loss on the Mackintosh side was very much underplayed. The art school focused predominantly on the degree show and the students. The level of loss in the first fire was not really put into the public domain. Even today, it is

very hard to analyse through the website what was lost, which I think was more than 150 pieces of original Mackintosh furniture and his two original oil paintings.

We know what caused the first fire, and there are discussions about the supervision of the art school and why all those flammable materials were allowed to be brought into the school. As Roger Billcliffe said, we have not been privy to the report of the investigation, so it is hard for us to add to it.

**The Convener:** From an architect's point of view, was the response to the first fire correct? How should the art school management have gone about it?

**Malcolm Fraser:** I think that lessons were learned from the first fire. My daughter had been studying at the GSA and graduated the day of the fire. We had been at her graduation and were leaving when we got a really horrific text from her saying that there was a glow on the horizon.

We need to wait for the report from the Fire and Rescue Service to understand what went wrong this time. We need to look in more detail at issues of statutory oversight, and at better statutory oversight. This happens to too many historic buildings—the GSA is one of a recent number—and we need to ensure that the lessons that we draw from the Mackintosh disasters are not just about the Mack building, but apply to all historic buildings in Scotland. We need to take more care of those buildings, because we do not at the moment. For me, the first fire was caused by the Mackintosh being treated as an icon to be monetised, without good care being taken of it. An empire was created around the building without care being taken of the jewel at the heart of it.

In the case of the second fire, the causes are more likely to be failures in statutory oversight. I really hope that the investigation tells us how we can tighten up statutory oversight to ensure that we take care of buildings on site. The building in Glasgow that was lost around the same time as Littlewoods in Liverpool are more examples. I make a plea to look wider and to improve the lot of all historic buildings, as well as taking care of the future of the Mackintosh building.

10:15

**The Convener:** You have said publicly that a certain type of flammable insulation was used, but the document released this summer by Glasgow School of Art said that it abided by all the statutory regulations both from Glasgow City Council and from Historic Environment Scotland, and I think that Historic England was mentioned as well.

**Malcolm Fraser:** The material is legal. It was used in Grenfell. I am distressed that it was used in the Mackintosh, but I have looked in great detail—

**The Convener:** Do we know for sure that it was used?

**Malcolm Fraser:** It has not been confirmed, but all reports from the site were that it had gone in. Having looked at the issue in great detail—because it is an extremely sensitive point—I do not believe that the material is flammable. I have seen tests on it where it just does not go on fire no matter how many blowtorches you put on it, so I would not raise that as a contributory factor to the fire, although I would want the investigation to confirm that.

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** The comments that we have heard this morning suggest that, as Malcolm Fraser has said, there has been a level of exploitation of the legacy of Mackintosh and that there may not have been recognition of the cultural significance of the building or the due care that would go along with maintaining that. I was interested in some of the comments in Malcolm Fraser's submission about the 2014 fire, the insurance payout and the fundraising that went on around it. There was an insurance payout, but at the same time there was a big degree of fundraising, and you say that the fundraising was for additional work. You described other historic buildings that have been vulnerable to that kind of risk. Is that the standard insurance arrangement?

**Malcolm Fraser:** The insurance for the fires was different, because one was in an existing building and one was during building work. What happened for the latest fire is that a standard insurance clause was taken out—the school has confirmed that it was in place—that pays for the rebuild of what is lost during a fire that occurs during construction. That is absolutely standard industry practice, and I understand that that is in place. I regret that people were saying, "Why should we spend all this money when we've got a housing crisis?" That is an understandable thing to say, but it is not us, or the Government, that is paying the money; the insurance should pay out to put the building back as it was, and that should put a lid on that question entirely.

**Claire Baker:** I am not disputing what you say, but I thought that Glasgow School of Art said at the weekend that it thought that the insurance would cover it but that it would also be looking for charitable and other inputs to the overall funding package. It seemed to suggest that the insurance would not be enough for an overall funding package, although it made it clear that it was not looking for public money to fill any gaps.

**Malcolm Fraser:** I cannot speak for the art school and I cannot say why they would be doing that. After the original fire, as I understood it, the school raised money to look for betterment, to pay for better insulation, fire alarms and so on, and they used endowments and more space as a vehicle to improve the general lot of the estate. That is what the fundraising was for.

**Claire Baker:** Does everybody think that it was clear that that is what the fundraising was for? You also mentioned other materials that were lost in that original fire.

**Stuart Robertson:** The school had meetings with people from Windsor castle and York minster to discuss how they dealt with their fires, and one of the things that came out of that was to do a forensic examination of the art school before doing any clearing up. Again, that costs money, and that would be outside the insurance costs. Elements such as that are one example of additional costs. I am not sure what the value was, but it may have been around £4 million-worth of Mackintosh furniture and items that were lost in the fire.

**Roger Billcliffe:** The reason why the fire spread in the first place was that one ventilation shaft was not protected. There were another dozen of them throughout the school, and the insurers were obviously not going to pay for the protection in those ventilation shafts. That would be extra to any money that the insurers paid to reinstate the parts of the building that were damaged. The school rightly decided—it could not do anything else—that it would need to look at the shafts, but we do not know what it did.

As far as insulation is concerned, the chief conservation architect of Page\Park wrote a paper that was published by the *Architects' Journal* in which he itemised and specified the insulation that was used. As Malcolm Fraser said, it was the same insulation that was used at Grenfell.

**Claire Baker:** What relationship has the Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society traditionally had with the Glasgow School of Art, given the importance of the building? Prior to the fires, was the society involved in any discussions around the maintenance or protection of the building?

**Stuart Robertson:** We would like to have been more involved. The society has been very supportive and has an advocacy role for all Mackintosh buildings. A couple of years ago, we did building surveys of all of Mackintosh's collection, which were funded through the Monument Trust, to give us a gauge of the condition of all 50 buildings, including monuments. The society has an on-going programme that looks after Mackintosh's collection and promotes it worldwide.

We would like to have been more involved in the last four years of the project. I have found it very difficult to get access to the building over that period of time—I can count on one hand the number of times that I got access. Since the last fire, I have had more recent discussions with one of the architects from Page\Park and a staff member at the Glasgow School of Art, who have said that they wish that the society had been more involved in the project.

**Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** I want to pick up on some of the comments that have been made. In 2014, there was a catastrophic failure. If there had been a catastrophic failure in some other organisation, that organisation would have needed to go back to basics, go through all its processes and policies and see whether it could do something differently. That is what we would anticipate happening in normal circumstances in a large organisation. To what extent did any of that happen? What culture was operating after the first catastrophic fire, in 2014?

**Eileen Reid:** I left the institution in November 2014, and I am not sure what has happened since then. I have talked to lots of current colleagues and ex-colleagues, and it seems that nothing much was done at all. Any institution of that size has to manage risk—some risks are unavoidable—and the culture at the GSA in relation to the building was one of managed risk. We had lived with that risk, and the building had survived until then. The attitude was that a fire had not happened for 100 years, so why would it happen now? There was a fallacy in that logic, and it was not very good from a risk assessment perspective.

Decisions about investment and about health and safety needed to be taken in the wider context of the significant pressure on Historic Environment Scotland's budget. It is a small, specialist institution that relies on economies of scale and that faces huge challenges, and the approach to risk was looser than it should have been. For example, there was one health and safety officer for the entire school, not just the Mackintosh building, and there was no dedicated fire officer for the school. For years, prior to the 2014 fire, the health and safety officer warned repeatedly—as did the Mackintosh curator—that there were significant risks. For example, contractors would come in, remove the boards that were used to cover up the ventilation shafts and not put them back. There were also issues with the electrical conduits that went up into the shafts. Perhaps there is no record of that in any formal report or inquiry, but, apparently, it is recorded in health and safety committee minutes.

That approach worked up until 2014, but then it failed. I do not think that any particular individual is at fault; I think that the failure was systematic and that there was a misjudged attitude to risk for such a hazardous and iconic building—and for people's lives. There was a small number of individual senior managers with huge remits, and that—not to mention resources—must be factored into how they managed the building and the school in general. I do not understand why they did not immediately conduct a thorough and rigorous investigation.

**Malcolm Fraser:** They were doing what our university culture asks of our institutions—increasing the estate, bringing in more students and building big, flashy new buildings, which they named after themselves. They were not looking after the jewel at the heart of their estate; that was the primary failure of Glasgow School of Art, and many institutions do the same. They fail to care for the jewel at their heart.

**Annabelle Ewing:** Other colleagues will look at whether there is an inherent unresolved conflict in an institution such as the GSA operating its business and being the protector of a world heritage site.

I want to ask Malcolm Fraser about something that has puzzled me. After the fire, the GSA issued a statement to say that, at the time of the fire, the Mackintosh building was not part of the GSA's operational estate but was in the management and control of Kier Construction Ltd. What does that mean? I presume that the GSA remained the owner of the site and that, therefore, it was the principal and the contractor was the agent. Would you have expected there to be no oversight function and that it would be a case of the GSA saying, "It's nothing to do with us—we're the owners but we have absolutely nothing to do with this building"? Is that how it normally works?

**Malcolm Fraser:** The legal process is that a site is handed over to its main contractor, which has ownership transferred to it for the currency of the contract so that it can carry out its obligations in looking after the site. That is standard practice.

**Annabelle Ewing:** Is there no subsequent communication between owner and contractor?

**Malcolm Fraser:** Yes, there is communication. The GSA should have put in place structures around the contract that required the main contractor, Kier Construction Ltd, to look after the construction design management, health and safety, proper procurement for the contract, employment practice and other such things. Those structures are in place, but I want to talk about the adequacy of those structures and the statutory oversight that goes with them, because that is what was missing. I have heard nothing to suggest



that the proper processes were not put in place in terms of project management and construction management or with regard to what was required of Kier Construction.

I hope that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is now working with the building standards department and other agencies to have oversight of the contracts. We do not want to just guggle about in the evidence, looking at the building and working out how the fire was started; we need to know why materials were stored in the wrong place, why there was no compartmentalisation of the building and why the people who were trained to inspect the building for fire 24/7—whom Kier Construction said were there—were not there. Where were they? What training did they go through? What system ensured that they inspected the building as they said they had? What was the oversight, and where did it go wrong? Clearly, it did.

**Annabelle Ewing:** That is interesting. We need to know what exactly was put in place by the GSA board and Kier Construction. I assume, from what you have just said, that you were not aware of that. We do not know either, and it would be a key part of the jigsaw that you are referring to.

**Malcolm Fraser:** We have heard about the investigation, but I want to hear about its details and to know that it is going to look at contractual arrangements, building control, building standards and how the construction design and management regulations were applied in this case. Those are the critical places where several things clearly went wrong.

10:30

**The Convener:** The construction design and management regulations were introduced as health and safety regulations in 2015. Are they not quite demanding? For example, they expect the contract to cover very wide possibilities of risk and to take into account the history and the historic nature of the buildings—is that correct?

**Malcolm Fraser:** The regulations were not introduced in 2015; they were changed and updated at that time. They have been introduced gradually. A fire risk assessment should have been carried out as part of the construction design and management process, and I have alluded to the absolute need for the investigation to look at the adequacy of that assessment. If it is found that it was not adequate, why was the proposal allowed through? What needs to be tightened up in that process?

**The Convener:** Some fire experts have asked why a temporary sprinkler system was not installed. We know that a sprinkler system was about to be installed, but apparently it is good

practice in certain circumstances to install a temporary system.

**Malcolm Fraser:** Perhaps that is so, but you sometimes find that it is the sprinkler system industry that is saying that. I do not think that what will come out of the inquiry is the need for every building site to install a sprinkler system during current works, because that might make life very difficult. However, I hope that there will be talk about whether that would have made a difference, whether it would have been feasible and so on.

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** The board of governors of the school plays a senior role in the whole process. Its *raison d'être* is to look at the effective management of the school, the school's vision and investment in the school, and it is also responsible for risk assessment. How competent do you believe the board was prior to the first fire and in the period before the second?

**Roger Billcliffe:** It has not had a great deal to say. Muriel Gray's comment over the weekend was the first substantive one since 2014.

The board has changed considerably, and it has changed along with the school's attitude to Mackintosh. Up to 20 years ago, the administration was very much aware of the importance of Mackintosh and the building not just to teaching. Most of the directors of the school of art since the war had been taught in the Mackintosh building or had other connections with it, but that stopped around 2000, when an administration was built that was not dependent on people who had been trained in the school and had specific knowledge of the building. There was only one curator of the Mackintosh collection, and he had been there for 20 or 30 years, so he was a good source of information.

The composition of the board of governors seems to have changed, too. It now seems to be full of academics from other institutions, retired civil servants and a couple of businessmen. Back in 1900, when the school was built, the board was primarily composed of local businessmen who found the money to build the school. The money did not come from the Scottish education department.

The board is now totally different. You might say, "Well, the school is totally different." In 1900, the Glasgow School of Art had one building—the Mackintosh building—and now it has 15. Only 20 per cent of the student population visits the Mackintosh building. Previous students who are now practising architects, jewellers or whatever tell me that, in all their time at the art school, they never went through the building. There have been all sorts of changes, and the board has changed in the same way to reflect changes in administration

in higher education and the school's growth. However, those changes in no way reflect the jewel that the board has at the heart of its estate.

**Malcolm Fraser:** Once again, I will mention my daughter, as her experience is particularly useful. Before this year's fire, she had been told that the intention was to move all first year students into the building after the rebuild to be taught together, so that everyone could experience the Mackintosh building. She and I thought that that was a really good idea. The glory of the building was that it was such a great teaching and learning environment. We have plenty of Mackintosh's work that is behind glass with "Do not touch" signs on it, but the building was and should be again a working building for students. The richness of education that Scottish students have had in it is reflected in the output of Scottish artists and architects, and we need to return to that.

I would like the Glasgow School of Art to talk about what it wants to do with the building when it gets it back and which students will go in it. I would like it to reconsider the idea of putting all first year students into it, as that would be a really positive approach.

**Alexander Stewart:** The leadership of the organisation is crucial. You have given examples of what the school was planning to do and how that was progressing. What it was trying to achieve in providing that opportunity sounds reasonable. However, I get the feeling that fitness for purpose and having governance and scrutiny in place were still big issues for the school, the management and probably the students. There was an issue about how that was co-ordinated so that the building was given the opportunity to feature as it should. It appears that the building was continually put at risk even after the first fire, so lessons had not been learned. As I say, I have an issue with the governance and scrutiny of the whole process and with the leadership of the school going forward.

**Malcolm Fraser:** With respect, it is not my impression that lessons were not learned in relation to the proper scrutiny of building contracts and things that should have been put in place, although my colleagues might disagree with me. As I said, I await the investigation, because I think that there has been a failure in those processes. Eileen Reid is perhaps closer to the issue, although I have a closeness through my daughter. My view is that things improved after the first fire and that the current contract was properly put in place, albeit that it failed catastrophically.

**Roger Billcliffe:** We do not know that, because the school has never commented on what lessons it may have learned.

**Alexander Stewart:** Mr Fraser, you do not seem to have evidence to support that claim, so we must treat it with a bit of scepticism. It appears that the leadership was not transparent or good with governance or scrutiny, so questions about the process remain unanswered. That is the crux of the matter.

**Malcolm Fraser:** I hope that those issues will come out in the investigation, although I am concerned that it could be too narrow and based just on a report into the fire when, as you suggest, it should look at the responsibilities and processes behind the decisions that were made.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I will follow on from Alexander Stewart's questions, although I will be a bit more direct than he was. Given what we know and have heard this morning, are the Glasgow School of Art board and executive fit to manage the reconstruction of the building and to manage the school going forward?

**Roger Billcliffe:** One cannot predict whether they are fit to do that; all that we can do is look at what they have done in the past four years. Let us not forget that the art school was a building site because they allowed it to burn in 2014. Stuart Robertson has said that the Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society was not formally consulted about the reconstruction—the one that disappeared in June this year—although there is a lot of expertise in the society. I was involved in a committee that was arranged to discuss whether the chairs in the library should be like the ergonomic ones that we are sitting on here or like Mackintosh's chairs, but that is the only input that I and other people with my range of expertise and knowledge have had. The school and its architects have kept the process under their control.

We are unable to judge whether they are qualified to do it. I have heard from contractors that they would have done things in a very different way, but they were instructed to follow a pedantic system that their peers in 1900 would have used and that Mackintosh specified. However, Mackintosh did not specify how the school should be built. He gave the contractors a set of drawings to show how it was to look and to be laid out, and how they built it was entirely up to them, within their contractual estimates. Some people say that Mackintosh never made a site visit, although I doubt that.

I have heard stories of special nails having had to be brought from America to nail the library together, because nobody makes the same nails here. Nailing the library together was madness when the heating system was changed to an under-floor system, which is the least conducive to maintaining the status of a wooden interior. The library interior is wood—with a wooden floor, wooden walls and a wooden ceiling—inside a

brick box. It should be heated in a way that protects it, yet the architects chose to put in an under-floor heating system against the contractors' advice—or, at least, the contractors said, "If you do that, we'll have to construct it in a different way," but they were not allowed to do that.

**Stuart Robertson:** I have said a couple of times that, for the rebuild, I would like to see more sharing of knowledge, with an expert panel or a trust put together to drive it forward, because it is a big project. The school is very much a teaching school, but a lot of staff members have been performing dual roles over a period of time and the school has suffered on the education side. With a major conservation project, an expert panel should be put together to drive it forward.

**Eileen Reid:** I agree. The rebuilding of the library was a massive undertaking—the next project will be even bigger, of course—and it detracted from the school's core business. I know that this is not the Education and Skills Committee, but the 2014 rebuild of the library diverted resources, attention and focus away from what the school is really supposed to be there for.

I do not know whether the board has the necessary expertise. I would not hold any particular individual responsible, but the board, as a governing body, has the ultimate authority and performs the key role of providing oversight for delivery of the remit. The board places huge responsibility and time commitment on the non-executive members.

What about the GSA's ability to focus on its core business—its delivery against strategic priorities, its key Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council outcome agreements, its international developments, its recruitment and its student experience? In the past two years, the GSA has been bottom in the national student survey, not just in Scotland but in the entire United Kingdom. Last year, it said that that was about the displacement of students and problems around the 2014 fire. However, I do not see that the current set-up is fit for purpose, given the massive rebuild. What is going to happen to the student experience? That should be the school's core business. In my view, there should be an overarching, very experienced board of experts from across the country driving forward any rebuild, with the oversight of the board, which would let the school get on with its core business.

I do not know much about the board other than the recent announcements by the chair, which do not seem to address any of this particularly—they are just about the building being rebuilt, and that is that. We need something a bit more thorough. The GSA needs to be creative, it needs a vision, it needs to think about what it is going to do with the building and it needs to think about what it is going

to do with its students. My view is that it should find a permanent campus for the next 10 years and focus on its core business.

10:45

**The Convener:** We have to move on. Ross Greer is next.

**Kenneth Gibson:** I have not even had a supplementary question, and others have, convener.

There is a consensus that an expert panel should take the issue forward. That is productive. However what kind of timescale are we looking at? You are talking about developing an expert vision, but how long will it take to get designs in place and a contract to do the rebuilding? No rebuilding had taken place in the four years since the first fire. What kind of timescale are we talking about before we would see the Mackintosh building restored to its former glory?

**Eileen Reid:** As a non-expert, I do not know. However, I would say that there has to be a public consultation. There is a great deal of sentiment, emotion and hyperbole around, which I can understand. However, that kind of approach does not sit well with a clear-sighted strategic vision for the future. Whatever board or panel is in place, perhaps it can conduct that public consultation. I know that we have been told that everything has been decided in a meeting and that the position is not negotiable and is not up for discussion, but I think that that was a rushed statement because, quite obviously, there has to be proper consultation. That process will take a considerable amount of time before exactly what is going to happen is decided on.

Consultation is important. The local community has suffered more than anyone else in all this, and there has to be a much broader discussion about the issues before the board and the management get to the point where they are producing plans. Last week, people were talking about the situation as if everything is in place and the process will be like putting up Lego. However, it is a huge, complicated undertaking. The community in Garnethill and the surrounding businesses have experienced quite a shock.

Although the high-octane, emotional response that we have been getting from certain of the spokespeople who are involved in the art school—particularly from the chair of the board—is understandable, we need to move away from that and have some proper visionary and creative thinking about the future. That, in itself, will take a long time. I cannot say how long the building element of the process will take.

**Stuart Robertson:** There is also an extent to which I can see that the school is being seen as the catalyst for a partial regeneration of Sauchiehall Street, and there are questions about whether that side of the art school becomes part of the campus or a design centre.

That part of Glasgow is in need of a huge boost, and I think that there is a wider element of the discussion that involves the Victorian architecture in the city and what is done with it over the next 20 to 30 years, because the city is currently not looking after its Victorian architecture. As mentioned before, Mackintosh is a big pull that brings people in from all over the world, but money is not being spent to support these buildings. The Scotland Street school in the south side is a typical example, as is the Martyrs school. The Hill house is undergoing renovation just now, which I am slightly sceptical about, as it involves security being provided with no human being in place. There are a number of issues with how the masterplan is driven forward.

That element needs chairing. There needs to be a more joined-up approach in the city. A lot of things are going on in the city, but there is no joined-up approach. That has to change.

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** Annabelle Ewing brought up the statement from the GSA about the site not being in its operational estate when the second fire occurred. I think that the GSA put out two statements in a row along those lines. In response to that statement, Kier Construction put out a statement saying that there was an agreed fire safety plan. However, it was not clear whether it was agreed internally within Kier, which was the site manager at the time, or whether it was agreed with the GSA. Is any of you aware which of those is the case?

**Malcolm Fraser:** The plan will have to have been submitted as part of its tender, and it will have to have been updated. All sorts of sharing processes are in place. To me, there has been a failure in either the plan or its execution, and I think that the key to this fire lies somewhere in there. I want the investigation to tell us what has gone wrong with the plan and/or its execution and how better statutory oversight can ensure that it does not happen again.

**Ross Greer:** If the GSA was involved in the development of the fire safety plan, which you are indicating would have been the case through the contract, was it unfair or even dishonest for it to attempt to distance itself as it did in those statements? After all, those statements prompted Kier to put out its own statement that there was an agreed safety plan.

**Malcolm Fraser:** The GSA appointed a project manager, a design team and a principal designer

to take forward the construction design and management plans. All of them should have had oversight of the plan. Again, without knowing the details of the plan, I do not know whether they have ticked off an inadequate plan, whether an adequate plan has gone forward but has not been carried out properly or whether the on-site procedures that were agreed as being necessary were not carried out. That is what the investigation will tell us. Clearly there has been an enormous failure in the process, but I have not heard that the proper documents and oversight were not put in place for the contract.

**Ross Greer:** If the site is reconstructed in one form or another and returned to the ownership and operational control of the school of art, what confidence can we have that this will not happen again? What will we need to be confident that there will not be a third fire? I do not think that, after the first fire, anyone thought that there would be the risk of a second one and such immense destruction to something of immense historic importance to Scotland. I think that there was a perception among the public that steps would be put in place to make sure that that did not happen again, but it did. What do we need to be confident that it will not happen a third time?

**Roger Billcliffe:** We talk about the first fire and the second fire. I have had a lot to do with artists who have been trained at the Glasgow School of Art and, indeed, with its students and staff, and the older ones tell me, "Well, there were fires every month. They were put out by the staff, and they were mainly caused by the students and the staff smoking in the studios." The 2014 fire was caused by somebody contravening the regulations set up by the school itself, apparently with the complicit acceptance of a member of staff of the school. How do you legislate against that sort of thing happening again?

The students today fill the school not with turpentine, oil paints and so on but with very expensive and very hot projectors, dozens of televisions and computer monitors and cables that link them together strewn all over the building. It is a firetrap. Firemen will tell you that most fires happen because of electrical faults, although there are some that happen as a result of someone with a cigarette falling asleep in bed. The school's product is driven by modern technology.

Sadly, this will happen again. Fires are no respecter of what people do not want to happen.

**Ross Greer:** Perhaps I should rephrase my question. You make the very fair point that fires will happen, but, as I think you have said, this is about compartmentalising things and preventing fires from spreading. The design of any reconstruction will have to put a huge emphasis on

ensuring that any such instance can be compartmentalised and contained.

**Roger Billcliffe:** I hope that any designer involved in this work will be fully aware of that.

I was going to say that the school gets away with certain things, but “gets away” is the wrong phrase. Because it is an A-listed building, building control does not have the oversight that it would normally have, and things are allowed to happen as a result of that status. If you are building it from scratch, you can build all those things into it.

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** It seems to me that there are two questions that somebody needs to answer, although I am unclear as to who will answer them and make the decisions. First, what should be rebuilt? Should we have a like-for-like replica, with the building restored to its former glory, or should we keep the shell of the building with some sort of interpretation of what it was inside? Secondly, what should the building be used for once it has been rebuilt?

A number of suggestions have been made and, if we ask 10 people, we will probably get 10 different answers. It could be a museum, but how would we build a new building that authentically replicated an old one? It could be an exhibition space that rightly gives artists a space. It could be a working school, but by then 12 years or perhaps more will have passed without it being a school and, given that the GSA has 14 other buildings, should it be used as a school? As others have alluded to, it could be more of a community space, given the massive upheaval that the fire has caused to those in the surrounding area. What would Charles Rennie Mackintosh want to happen next?

**Roger Billcliffe:** How do you second guess that? I think that most architects facing the same situation would say, “Yes, rebuild it,” or, “Yes, let me have another go at it.” I apologise to Malcolm Fraser, but giving it to somebody else to have a go at it would not answer the question, because we would not know what we were going to get. Not too far away from the art school, we can see what we get if we leave an architect with carte blanche.

The art school is not a difficult building to build. To go back to an earlier question, we will spend more time talking about how it should be built, who should build it and when it should be done than it will take to actually put it up. It is two towers, a central tower and a great big empty space in between, which was full of studios. It has all been computerised. Malcolm Fraser knows much more about this than I do but, in theory, one could press a button and get the drawings. The information that we have could allow the drawings to be produced within, say, three months. We would

then need to find a contractor and the site would have to be cleared. It would be very quick to put up, but there will be a lot of talking about it.

I think that it should be rebuilt as it was, because it is a work of art. Unlike the “Mona Lisa”, which is hand touched by the artist so nobody can replicate it, the art school was the work of the 100 tradesmen who built it, but we can also see the concept of the designer. That concept remains, and there is no reason why it cannot be replicated. There are examples of that. In places such as Uppark house and Windsor castle, nobody knows the difference. There are things that we should not do—we could say that the interior of the house for an art lover is something that we should not do—but, fortunately, there are no artistic areas in the art school that need interpretation. It is a very simple building to put up. The site is difficult, but what Mackintosh put on it, apart from the complications of the west elevation and the library, is a relatively simple and perfect answer to the brief.

**Stuart Robertson:** The building is too important to disappear. It is classed as Mackintosh’s masterpiece, and it shows everything that he was trying to do. In 2010 or prior to that, an audit found the building to be the only one in the campus that was fit for purpose, which says a lot about 1960s buildings. It is at that cusp of modernism and it has cultural importance. We would not build student flats on top of Edinburgh castle if it burned down. The Mackintosh building is one of the big attractions for people coming to the art school and it is viewed round the world as being world class. We sometimes do not appreciate what we have in this country. A number of years ago, it should have received world heritage site status. We did learning journeys to Chicago and Barcelona to see what was being done there, and we asked why the Mackintosh building in our city was not a world heritage site. The city should work for that for the future, because that status is very beneficial. If the building disappeared, that would be a tragedy and would show that Scotland does not care about culture.

11:00

**Malcolm Fraser:** We have more information about the building than we have about any other building in Scotland. A huge number of its fixtures and fittings are in storage off site, so facsimiles would not be returned to the site; the fixtures and fittings would be authentic. Parts of the library that were ready to go in are off site, too. The building is reconstructable, and the purpose of reconstructing it would be that, reconstructed, it would be a great working building.

I go back to where I started. We are not talking about a work of art that you stand away from and

look at; it was a good working building. It was tough, it took a kicking, it had been used and abused, and it could continue to be used and abused in its rebuilt form for the purpose for which it was originally built. It is unusual that a historic building still worked perfectly for its function—that was part of its beauty, and that gives it more importance. It was a building of transcendent importance in architectural history. We must get it back and not do something different. We must make certain decisions about the heating system, for example; the architects were struggling quite well with those decisions, and they should continue to struggle with them. We should rebuild the building. Those are the two critical issues.

The building worked. Its beauty was that it worked for students, informed them and sent good students out into the world. It was a creative and hard-working place. What happened was terrible, but the building needs to be what Mackintosh designed it for and it needs to still be working in the 21st century. That would be a glorious thing to celebrate. We and the school need to focus on how to get back there, learning lessons along the way.

The legacy of the Mackintosh building should be that fewer historic buildings burn in the future, that there is better oversight, that we care for historic buildings more, and that we give them the importance that they deserve, even down to things such as VAT. If a building is repaired, 20 per cent VAT is paid; if it is knocked down or a new building is built, the VAT is zero. Architects who care about historic buildings labour under that sort of ridiculous thing.

I would like to think that we can get back to having students in a wonderful working building that is a living work of art, not a dead reliquary work of art, and one that spins out lessons for how we care for other such buildings in the future.

**Roger Billcliffe:** I agree in principle that, in an ideal world, one should do that, but Mackintosh designed the building with the director of the school, Francis Newbery, for X number of students, and it now has XXX students. It is overcrowded, students cannot work in the ideal situation that Mackintosh intended for them, and the vast majority of them do not need the facilities that he provided.

**Jamie Greene:** I have a brief follow-up question—I know that we are short of time. Who should be consulted on the next steps, and who should make the final decision?

**Roger Billcliffe:** Who owns the building? Does the Scottish Parliament or the Scottish Government own it? I have proposed that it become a different kind of building and that the art school should move its students somewhere else.

I am aware that I have not proposed who should pay for the art school to find a building to house its students somewhere else.

Many stakeholders are involved—Stuart Robertson could probably list a dozen of them off the top of his head. All the people who gave money for the reconstruction—they did not quite give as much as £35 million—have a voice in what should happen in the future. The art school has said that nobody wants their money back, but it was careful not to ask people whether they would give it the money again. I know from some of the charities that gave money that that will be a no-no. Hundreds of people, not just in Glasgow but around the world, could have a valid input into how the school should be rebuilt.

**The Convener:** We have to move on, and we will go slightly over time. One more member of the committee wants to ask questions, and the member whose constituency includes the art school is also here.

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** I have found the session very interesting. Do you think that any public money should go into the rebuilding if there is a version 3?

**Roger Billcliffe:** The insurers say that they will fund it. We do not know what the sum is; £100 million has been suggested. However, we do not know how much the building was insured for. In any insurance policy, there would be either a like-for-like clause or a cap. If the building's function changes and the art school has to be compensated for the loss of accommodation for its students, I presume that would be a public cost.

**Stuart Robertson:** When a building goes under construction, the insurance is usually split between the construction company and the school. That happened when we did work at Queen's Cross in 2006. I do not know what insurance was on the construction side.

**Eileen Reid:** A considerable amount of public money will be spent indirectly if the job is done properly for however long it takes. When I refer to indirect public funding, I do not mean that public funds will say, "Here is £50 million." If it is done properly, there will need to be a change in the managerial infrastructure to accommodate the job. Just rebuilding the library was bad enough. Despite what Roger Billcliffe says, I am no expert, but it does not make sense why it would go up so quickly if putting the library in at the top of the building took so long.

**Stuart Robertson:** Two years were spent doing research into it. An awful lot of investigation and forensics were done during that period, and more was learned about the building and Mackintosh because of the first fire. A lot of valuable

information was found. That was all done carefully before the work on the building was started.

**Roger Billcliffe:** And it is still available.

**Stuart Robertson:** All that information is still available. There is 3D and additional information, because the building had changed throughout the decades. In each decade, subtle changes had been made and the fire stripped out some of those things. A massive amount of information was learned about the original building.

**Eileen Reid:** I do not know the answer to the original question. It depends on what decisions are made about the future use of the building. I really believe that that decision needs to go out to full consultation. There needs to be a proper discussion about it. Once that decision is made, we can look at the issue. For example, the other day somebody said to me that the displacement from the Mackintosh building and elsewhere was possibly only about 20 per cent maximum. I am not sure; we would need to check with the art school. That must be taken into consideration.

When the art school burned down this time, my emotional response was that it was lost; it was gone. I know that my colleagues here will not agree with that sentiment at all. It almost feels too soon. It is gone. What are we going to do? It is a bit like when the Buddha statues in Afghanistan were blown up; we felt this great wrench. Sometimes something is just gone.

I have now come round to the view that it definitely has to be rebuilt, but I do not know whether it should be rebuilt immediately and as fast as possible to accommodate a relatively small percentage of students or whether we should just take some time over it. If the guys are right—and of course they are—

**The Convener:** I am sorry to interrupt, but we are almost out of time.

**Eileen Reid:** We have the plans. It does not need to be rebuilt now. The next generation can rebuild it.

**Malcolm Fraser:** I do not want to go around in circles, examining our entrails, and tearing each other apart for blame. It needs to be rebuilt for students and we should go ahead and do that. I would regret it if talk of public money going into the rebuilding got the insurers off the hook.

I would like to see leadership from Glasgow School of Art in talking about insurance and finance, what it will take, what the timescales are, and what it thinks should happen in the building. As I said, I would like that to be about the students and how they share the experience of that wonderful building. I invite leadership from Glasgow School of Art in looking at the finances, the uses of the building and a programme for

getting it back. I want to see that building crowning Garnethill again, full of creativity and students, as soon as possible.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much. We are joined by the member whose constituency covers Glasgow School of Art, Sandra White MSP. Do you have any relevant interests to declare, Sandra?

**Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** I have no relevant interests to declare.

There are two issues—obviously, there is what has happened to the fantastic, iconic building. I think that it is not just tragic but criminal that it has happened twice and I want to put that on record. As Eileen Reid mentioned, the community cannot afford to wait another 12 or 15 years to get their lives back on track.

Have lessons been learned from the 2014 fire? I heard what was said. As far as I am concerned, no lessons have been learned from that fire. The report was redacted, but my understanding is that the fire started after a student had a projector running for three hours and when a member of staff tried to put out the fire, they blew it up the shaft.

I have questions that I want to ask. I do not know whether the panel members want to answer them, but perhaps the committee could look at them. Why was the cover of the shaft off? Why was there no fire retardant material inside the shaft? Why was the report redacted?

A number of members have raised the issue of Kier Construction and the Glasgow School of Art. I have had a number of meetings with the board but I have not been able to meet the chair of the board, Muriel Gray—I have not met her at all. I have met Tom Inns. When I asked these questions, which have been asked by Annabelle Ewing, and said, “Surely you would check on what was happening?” I was told that a project team reported to the board every month. I hope that the committee will write to the Glasgow School of Art to see whether it can get those minutes because, as far as I know, nobody here realises that there is a project team. However, that is what I was told by Tom Inns in regard to that issue.

The other issue that I want to ask about is whether you think that the board is fit for purpose. Should it remain in its present form, or should the iconic building—not just the school of art but the iconic building, which is a world heritage site—be taken under public control and out of the hands of the board? From what I have seen, there has been a lack of transparency and there has been no communication with the local community on what is happening in the area, so I do not think that the board is fit for purpose. I open that up to panel members for quick answers.

**Roger Billcliffe:** You have answered your own question. You have itemised exactly what is wrong with the school of art's handling of the 2014 fire, going forward until this summer's fire. The most common reason being put forward for this summer's fire now is that a piece of old wiring at the top of the east elevation of the school sparked and set fire to the roof. Photographs of the fire show it starting in the roof and spreading from east to west and then falling on to the O2 building.

**Sandra White:** My understanding is that the fire fell on to the O2 ABC building so surely, if you are talking about who is culpable, these questions have to be answered by the board.

**Roger Billcliffe:** The contractors cannot design scaffolding against the possibility of a catastrophic fire. If they did that, all contracts would be unviable. Malcolm Fraser will know how that would affect costs.

**Sandra White:** If security staff were going about, surely they should have seen the fire.

**Roger Billcliffe:** Yes, but sprinklers were in the school in 2014 but they were not connected up because the sprinkler firm had encountered asbestos—asbestos that should have been removed by the architects and their contractors between 2008 and 2012.

That is why I say that the fire department report should be shown in its unredacted form, so that we know who is responsible. It is not a blame game—I am not saying that they should go to prison—but the same architects who were employed to do the 2008 refurbishment of the school were employed to restore the burnt school in 2016 or whenever it was and the staff are still there. I do not want to send them to prison, but I would like to make sure that they do not operate in a system in which they can do something like that again.

**The Convener:** Does anyone else want to quickly come in?

11:15

**Eileen Reid:** I want to make a quick comment. This relates to the Garnethill community as well. One of the astonishing things was that the fire alarm did not go off that night and this so-called gold-plated security that was agreed or not agreed seemed to comprise of three security guards in total so there was only one on duty at any given time—he was located in a Portakabin and was supposed to spot what happened visually.

The community has been saying, “We didn’t hear any fire alarms.” I do not know where the responsibility lies for all that but the board management is not fit for purpose because it is beyond their infrastructural capacity, not because

of personal failings. That is where the discussion needs to go in relation to having some other overarching board.

**Roger Billcliffe:** The community has suffered more from Glasgow council's building control department than it has from the art school.

**Malcolm Fraser:** I suggest that the committee inquire about the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service investigation to establish its terms of reference and ensure that it gets to examine contracts, responsibilities, adequacy and onsite compliance.

**The Convener:** Thank you for that helpful advice. I thank all the panel members for coming to give evidence. We will hold a follow-up session and invite management from the Glasgow School of Art, and I am sure that we will put some of these issues to them.

11:16

*Meeting continued in private until 11:32.*



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

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