EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 29 January 2008

Session 3

£5.00

Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by RR Donnelley.

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE
2nd Meeting 2008, Session 3

CONVENER

*Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab)
*Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP)
*Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
*Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD)
*Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)
*Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Catherine Bromley (Scottish Centre for Social Research)
Professor John Curtice (Scottish Centre for Social Research)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Terry Shevlin

ASSISTANT CLERK

Roy McMahon

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Tuesday 29 January 2008

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 11:04*]

"Attitudes to Discrimination in Scotland: 2006"

The Convener (Margaret Mitchell): Good morning and welcome to the second meeting in 2008 of the Equal Opportunities Committee. I remind all those present, including members, that mobile phones and BlackBerrys should be switched off completely, as they interfere with the sound system even when they are switched to silent.

Agenda item 1 is evidence taking on the report "Attitudes to Discrimination in Scotland: 2006". I am pleased to welcome two of the report's authors: Catherine Bromley, who is the deputy director of the Scottish Centre for Social Research, and Professor John Curtice, who is a research consultant with the centre. I invite Professor Curtice to say a few words on the background to the report before we ask questions.

Professor John Curtice (Scottish Centre for Social Research): I thank members for giving us the opportunity to talk to the committee about our research. The report's origins go back to 2001, when the Scottish Centre for Social Research—which I will refer to hereafter as ScotCen—brought together Stonewall Scotland and the then Disability Rights Commission, Commission for Racial Equality and Equal Opportunities Commission to undertake a comparative study of discriminatory attitudes in respect of age, gender, race/ethnicity and sexual orientation. We did so in part in the knowledge that the United Kingdom Government had signalled an interest in creating a single equalities commission and that therefore there might be interest in a body of research that did not simply examine one particular equality group, but which made it possible to compare attitudes towards the various groups. From subsequent conversations, I know that the comparative aspect—the fact that we examined more than one equalities group at the same time—was highly innovative, as such work had rarely, if ever, been done elsewhere. Similar work was done subsequently down south, but our research was probably the first time that such work had been done.

That initiative led to the inclusion of a module of questions in the 2002 Scottish social attitudes survey, which is an annual high-quality survey that is conducted by the Scottish Centre for Social Research. The centre regularly carries out face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of about 1,500 people. The survey is designed to facilitate the academic study of public opinion and the development and evaluation of public policy. The module was funded in part by what was then known as the Scottish Executive, together with additional money from some of the participating commissions.

Subsequently to that research, which was widely welcomed and which was the subject of a presentation to the Equal Opportunities Committee three or four years ago, we approached the co-ordinating committee that had been created in Scotland as a result of the intention to set up what is now the Equality and Human Rights Commission. The aim was not simply to repeat the previous exercise, but to extend the work to include the two equalities strands that are now the subject of legislation but which were not four years ago: discrimination on the basis of age and that on the basis of religion and faith. In part, the aim was to replicate the work that we had done previously, but it was also to extend some of the work and to find out more about the origins of discriminatory attitudes.

That research, which we are talking about today, was backed by the co-ordinating committee and funded in part by the Department of Trade and Industry, which was responsible for the EHRC, together with the Scottish Government. As with the 2002 module, the work was developed in collaboration with members of the predecessor commissions, Stonewall Scotland, Age Concern Scotland and the Scottish Inter Faith Council. A steering group was set up, involving representatives of the various equalities groups and the Scottish Government, to give us advice on the content of the questionnaire. That describes the origins of the report, which is the second of two such initiatives that we have taken in collaboration with various equalities groups.

The Convener: That is useful background information. The committee welcomes the fact that the new research covers the six equality strands. The report contains an enormous amount of information, but what do you consider to be the most significant findings? What have been the most significant developments—both positive and negative—since the previous study was undertaken?

Professor Curtice: Positive and negative are in the eye of the beholder, so I will let the committee decide on that. However, I will bear in mind your request for me to talk about changes over time as well as the key points in the research.

In most situations, but not all, only a minority of people expressed a discriminatory point of view about the various scenarios, options and groups that we asked them about. That was typified by a very general question: we asked whether Scotland should try to get rid of all kinds of prejudice, or whether sometimes there is a good reason for people to be prejudiced against a particular group. Only 29 per cent of people expressed the latter view. That is a typical figure from our research.

That does not always hold, however, and it varies by group. For example, discriminatory attitudes were quite commonly expressed towards Gypsies/Travellers and transsexual people; such attitudes were also not that uncommon with respect to gay men and lesbians, and Muslims. In contrast, discriminatory attitudes were less likely to be expressed towards people with disabilities—we focused on learning disabilities—and in respect of women.

There are some fairly typical, but not invariant, patterns about the kind of person who is more likely to express a discriminatory point of view. The first of the two most common patterns is that such attitudes seem to be more common among older people than among younger people. We are inclined to the view, although we cannot demonstrate it directly in our research, that that is undoubtedly a generational phenomenon. Older people were brought up when society was rather different; when they were children, different attitudes were expressed towards some groups and they were socialised with a rather different set of attitudes. Younger people might have experienced a more multicultural education, and they live in a society in which a diversity of groups is much more commonplace. The second pattern is that there are clear educational differences. Universities tend to produce people who are relatively liberal on such issues. In contrast, those with few, if any, educational qualifications are more likely to express discriminatory points of view.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, we confirmed other research that finds that, for the most part, but again not invariantly, people who say that they know someone from a particular group—for example somebody who is Muslim, or somebody who is a gay man or a lesbian—are less likely to express discriminatory views.

In the research, we tried to understand why people hold discriminatory attitudes. In particular, we considered the relative importance of two things, the first of which was the extent to which people are more likely to hold or express discriminatory attitudes if they express concern about what we call the cultural threat that they feel might arise through the arrival of new and different people in Scotland. We asked people whether, if more Muslims, people from ethnic minorities or people from eastern Europe came to Scotland, Scotland might begin to lose its culture. The people who hold that view and who feel that sense of threat, or who feel uncomfortable that the country and society that they think they know seem to be changing, are, generally, much more likely to express discriminatory attitudes.

In contrast, the extent to which people feel uncomfortable seeing people engaging publicly in cultural practices that might be regarded as somewhat different or unusual seems to be rather less important. In the report, we said that it seems quite difficult to have a society with a low incidence of expressed discriminatory attitudes if people do not feel that they have something in common with members of other groups. That seems to be quite important.

This is not invariant, but it tended to be true, and it is an obvious challenge for policy makers: people were more likely to express discriminatory attitudes in more intimate settings than they were in more public settings. For example, one question in our research was about attitudes towards people from a variety of groups and whether people would feel happy or unhappy if a close relative of theirs married somebody from such a group. In general, people were more likely to express discriminatory attitudes in answer to that question than in answer to a question about whether somebody from a certain group was suitable to be a primary schoolteacher. That raises issues for policy makers because, at the end of the day, the state probably does not think that it has the ability to pass legislation that says who people can or cannot marry.

11:15

One thing that was somewhat tangential to the original research but which proved to be rather interesting is the work that we did on people's attitudes towards positive action, which uncovered two things. First, positive action can be quite controversial and can, in some circumstances—depending on the details—produce quite high levels of opposition. Secondly, the people who express concern about positive action are, typically, the opposite of the people who are likely to express discriminatory attitudes. In particular, those people who have degrees and are in relatively well-paid occupations make up the group who tend to be less keen on measures to, for example, give greater training opportunities to women or to people from ethnic minorities to ensure that they get adequate promotion opportunities. Of course, that might suggest that people in that group are concerned about their own interests, which they suddenly find to be at stake.

The Convener: Thank you. The committee will, no doubt, want to ask you more about several issues that you have raised.

You mentioned that people are less likely to express a discriminatory opinion in public than they are when they are asked in an intimate setting. Could it be said that you are, almost, eliciting an expected response? Is there any feeling that there might be a freedom-of-speech issue, in that people might think that they cannot say what they really think because that might go against legislation or just not be politically correct?

Catherine Bromley (Scottish Centre for Social Research): With such research, there is always a concern about whether people are giving true answers. The interviews were all conducted in the same setting—that is, in someone's house—and people were taken through different scenarios. We asked questions about relationship situations, about goods and services, about primary school teaching and so on. The interviews happened in the same setting; only the scenarios changed.

We put in place various measures to address the issue to which you refer. For a start, not all the questions are asked face to face—sometimes, we put questions in a self-completion booklet, so that people do not necessarily have to say what their answer is. Secondly, we find that people are, generally, fairly honest. A stranger has come to their house to speak to them. As long as people are introduced properly, I find that they build a rapport—the interviewers are trained to give no reaction to anybody's answer, so people can say exactly what they feel. In answer to some of the questions, high numbers of people—up to half, in some cases—expressed concerns around, for example, transgender people or Gypsy Travellers. That suggests that there are fairly high levels of people being as honest as they want to be.

It is interesting to note that, if it is socially unacceptable to articulate something, that, too, is a social reality. If someone feels uncomfortable saying something, it is because they know that it is not something they ought to be saying. However, the extent to which that dampens responses is probably quite minimal.

Professor Curtice: We are well aware of the issue that the convener raises and have worked to acknowledge it. For example, you can see that we are always careful in the report to talk about the expression of discriminatory attitudes. Further, we included some questioning of a kind that—the literature suggests—might uncover discriminatory attitudes that might not be expressed more directly. People were asked for their views on what the state has been doing about discrimination and whether they thought that attempts to create equal opportunities for women or ethnic minorities had gone too far. The pattern of answers that we got to those questions on so-called covert discrimination did not differ from the pattern of answers to the other questions—and as Catherine Bromley said, sometimes half the people questioned expressed discriminatory attitudes towards certain groups anyway.

The percentage of people who said that things had gone too far was similar to the percentage of people who might express unhappiness about a prospective marriage, or who said that gay men and lesbians should not marry or that somebody should not become a primary school teacher. A different pattern was not uncovered. As I said, questions on positive action uncovered different patterns, but questions on covert discrimination did not.

Catherine Bromley: We have not yet explored the issue of change over time, which Professor Curtice mentioned earlier. There is an argument that the change-over-time pattern should be the same even if the absolute measure that is being used is not a true reflection of what is happening, as there will be no reason why people will be more or less likely to answer a question honestly four years later. Therefore, if we see a change in any direction, we will think that a genuine change has happened. For example, we saw an increase in discriminatory attitudes towards Muslims, which might not be unexpected given what has happened and that issues to do with Islam, terrorism and so on have been debated much more. I think that our figures picked up on that. A big social change has also happened as a result of the introduction of civil partnerships; attitudes towards gay men and lesbians therefore became less discriminatory in the period between the two surveys being carried out. It is interesting that, depending on the group that we are talking about, different patterns can be seen. That reflects the social situation.

The Convener: We shall touch on that matter a little more later on.

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I was intrigued by what the report said about positive action, and thought that there was a contradiction in terms. The report seems to show that, in general, less educated people have more discriminatory attitudes than more educated people, but more educated people seem to have more discriminatory attitudes when it comes to promotion. Were those results less to do with discrimination and more to do with self-preservation?

Professor Curtice: I, too, found those results intriguing. We cannot prove why a different pattern exists, but we should bear in mind that we are talking about measures that are designed to ensure that people from certain groups get

adequate opportunities for promotion. Perhaps those measures will mean that certain groups are given additional opportunities—to gain qualifications, for example. People who have profited from existing educational routes or career development routes in a company, the public sector or whatever seem to be rather more resistant to the idea of positive action. Of course, there is a potential implication: if training schemes worked, perhaps such people's ability to maintain their positions would be under threat. However, we can only speculate.

There is another possible interpretation, which may or may not be true. Highly educated people seem to be more concerned about discrimination on all our other measures, which perhaps indicates their adherence to a process model of social justice—that is, they seem to believe that a socially just society is one in which the processes treat people equally. That adherence may lead them to be concerned about things that deny people access to primary school teaching or bed-and-breakfast establishments, but they may also reason with themselves that giving somebody from a group an advantage is procedurally unfair. That may be the more philosophical interpretation. Such reasons may explain why a different pattern of attitudes exists.

Catherine Bromley: Interestingly, we found that although older people were in general more discriminatory than younger people, younger people expressed the most concern when asked about competition for jobs from eastern European migrants or ethnic minorities. There were very few areas in which that happened, and the parallel that can be drawn is that a threat to one's position can foster discriminatory attitudes. The same holds true for an executive who finds it harder to get promoted because there are other people who are equally capable and for a young person who is worried about job opportunities.

Sandra White: I was intrigued and quite concerned about all this, because it seems that the people who are rolling out programmes to enable disabled folk or folk from disadvantaged backgrounds or ethnic minorities to get these jobs show more discriminatory attitudes. Equality training might be more relevant to their profession than it is to others.

Professor Curtice: That might be true. However, it is not the case that all people in salaried positions or with university degrees are opposed to positive action; in fact, a section of people, particularly those who are involved in equalities work, is not only opposed to discrimination but clearly committed to positive action. That said, the report shows that once we venture out of the immediate equalities community into a broader section of society, we find that those two aspects do not necessarily go together.

Perhaps that holds a warning for policy makers, who should not assume that even if a society feels that it is wrong to discriminate or overtly to deny someone a good or service, it will necessarily endorse measures to overcome some of the more structural forms of discrimination, which is the purpose behind various forms of positive action. Instead of thinking that, having won the first battle, they will not face a second, policy makers should try to build up public support for such measures.

Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): The report is strictly about attitudes, not behaviour. You note that it is possible for discrimination to occur in the absence of discriminatory attitudes. Presumably, that comes down to awareness. I am thinking of the language at Letham project, which discovered that schoolteachers were completely unaware of the fact that they were discriminating against Scots-speaking pupils. Given that a person might not be aware that their behaviour is discriminatory and that discrimination might occur even in the absence of particular attitudes, is there not a risk that your research, which focuses on people's behaviour and attitudes, might well underestimate the level of such behaviour?

Professor Curtice: Yes.

Bill Wilson: That is what I thought you would say.

Professor Curtice: We have made it clear that the study is not about discriminatory behaviour. However, I will say that although there may be a correlation between the incidence of discriminatory behaviour and the incidence of discriminatory attitudes, such attitudes are not the only cause of discriminatory behaviour.

Bill Wilson: Have you considered doing further work to identify the margin of error in that respect?

Professor Curtice: I dispute your use of the word "error", because we are not trying to measure behaviour. That would be quite a different, and certainly demanding, research project.

That said, I can almost guarantee members that if we undertook such a project you would say to me, "Well, did people admit to you that they engaged in this behaviour?" If people were not aware that they were engaging in that behaviour, asking them such questions would be the wrong research technique. We would have to conduct participant observation or take a more qualitative approach.

At the end of the day, we have to examine the structures. If a company's workforce is 50 per cent male and 50 per cent female among its junior employees but 75 per cent male and 25 per cent female among its senior employees, it is clear that we need to ask whether there are structural

sources of disadvantage in the organisation. For example, the criteria that are used to decide promotion might have an inherent gender or ethnic minority bias, and such information is uncovered not by asking people or by observation, but by analysis.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP): I do not want to show any prejudice in asking this question.

In her final report as chief executive of the Scottish Refugee Council, Sally Daghlian said that attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers in the Scottish political and media context are more positive than attitudes in England. Given the positive work of the previous Executive and the current Government to change attitudes towards asylum seekers and workers from overseas, is there evidence that discriminatory attitudes are more or less widespread in Scotland than in other parts of the UK?

11:30

Professor Curtice: There is a little. Professor Miller, from the University of Glasgow, did a project with us in 2003 on attitudes towards Muslims, which made an explicit attempt to come up with a Scottish-English comparison. At that time, people in England were rather more likely to express discriminatory attitudes towards people from Muslim backgrounds than were people in Scotland.

However, we replicated some of the questions in Professor Miller's research and it is clear that attitudes have moved in the other direction. It follows that even if it is true that there has been a friendlier media and political environment in Scotland—in the context of initiatives such as fresh talent, for example—that environment has clearly not been sufficient to prevent an apparently increasing incidence of expressed discriminatory attitudes towards Muslims and perhaps ethnic minorities in general.

You have read the questions that people were asked. Nearly 50 per cent of the people who were interviewed agreed with the proposition that more Muslims, black and Asian people and people from eastern Europe coming to live in Scotland would be a cultural threat. Even if we expand more generally from Professor Miller's research, we cannot alter the finding that opinion has headed in a more adverse direction over time, as a result of wider developments in UK society.

Bill Kidd: You said that a strikingly large number of 18 to 24-year-olds expressed concern about jobs being taken by workers from eastern Europe. That relates to Sandra White's comment about self-preservation. There is a perception among young people that people are taking jobs that they would normally do, which is why the young people express such concern. Are Government measures to try to change attitudes the right approach to tackling the problem, or would that be whistling in the wind?

Catherine Bromley: It is difficult for us to identify the best way of solving problems or changing attitudes. There is a limit to how effective public campaigns to try to change attitudes can be if economic concerns are driving those attitudes. Grow the economy. Make younger people feel more secure about opportunities. Focus on the young people who do not go to university—there is much focus on the half that go to university, but the other half have different concerns. A balance must always be struck between public awareness campaigns and policies that try to eliminate ingrained inequalities.

Professor Curtice: Young people aged 18 to 24 are typically in a relatively insecure position in the labour market. Either they are still trying to find a job or they have only just found a job and are not necessarily sure that they are in the right job. They do not have the sense of security that comes from holding down five jobs—or one job—in 20 years. Therefore, the study might well have uncovered insecurity about the labour market that is also reflected in attitudes to other matters.

I will say more about the finding about 18 to 24-year-olds and the finding that attitudes to Muslims and perhaps ethnic minorities have become less favourable. We know from research into British social attitudes down south, where attitudes towards ethnic minorities in particular have been charted over 20 years, that there has been a long-term decline in racial prejudice. We also know that the change in the law with respect to gay men and lesbians is both a reflection of dramatic changes in social attitudes that date primarily from the late 1980s and something that has helped to impel the process. However, it is only recently that the majority of people in society have accepted that sex between two people of the same gender is not wrong. That is a relatively recent development.

There seem to be long-term changes in UK society, in which Scotland is sharing, and various forms of prejudice and discriminatory attitudes seem to be becoming less common. However, as Harold Macmillan would say, "Events, dear boy, events." Circumstances change. A change in circumstances has caused various allegations to be made about members of the Muslim community being involved with alleged terrorist organisations. There have also been unusually high levels of immigration into the UK in recent years. What we should infer from that is that, although there might be long-term trends towards greater liberality on some issues, events and developments can always uncover discriminatory attitudes. There is always the potential for the revival of such attitudes.

The other clue is in one of the things that seem to be true about people's attitudes to black and Asian people. If we ask someone whether they would be unhappy about a close relative marrying an Asian person, not many people express concern. In other words, individuals are now accepted as part of our society. However, if we ask questions about collectivity, or questions that refer to black and Asian people in general, we tend to get higher levels of prejudice. That is another indication that there is still potential for concern to be re-aroused if events go in that direction. Clearly, that has been true for the Muslim community in recent years.

The Convener: I wonder whether problems arise with the questions. If, instead of asking about threats, questions were more positive and asked whether there were circumstances in which migrants coming into the country could be seen as a positive thing, would that elicit a more balanced analysis of what people are feeling?

Professor Curtice: Yes, and we tried to do that. We asked whether people agreed with the statement that

"People from outside Britain who come to live in Scotland make the country a better place".

That statement gets a different pattern of response; a third of people agree with it and only a quarter disagree. Many people sit in the middle and say, "Yes, on the one hand, but on the other …"

You are right, convener. None of the questions should be taken at face value. The survey researchers were always aware that if we gave people a statement and asked them to agree or disagree with it, there was a danger that they would yea-say, as it is easier to agree than it is to disagree. We get something of a different picture if we turn the question round, but then we have to decide whether the glass is half full or half empty. We might regard that statement as being evocative of the spirit of the fresh talent initiative, but only a third of responders positively endorsed it, so there are still two thirds out there who are not quite sure.

The Convener: Do people have to positively endorse such a statement if they have a reasoned explanation of why they do not, such as that there are insufficient jobs in a specific area?

Professor Curtice: Of course not. I am just giving you some idea of degree. That statement is designed to find out whether people will positively endorse and embrace people coming to Scotland from different backgrounds and cultures outwith Scotland. It is clear from the analysis that if someone expresses concern about more Muslims or more people from eastern Europe coming to Scotland, they are also more likely to disagree with the idea of more people coming to Scotland. Although we ask the question in a different way to identify better those people who are concerned, undoubtedly there is a link between such concerns. Whether we ask the question positively or negatively, we are still trying to uncover the people who are consistently expressing concern.

The Convener: If people do not endorse the statement, is that discrimination per se?

Professor Curtice: No, I do not regard the questions that I referred to as a measure of discriminatory attitude. The purpose of those questions was to try to understand some of the reasons why people express a discriminatory attitude. Those people who express concern about people coming to Scotland are more likely—in general, but not in all circumstances—to say that they would be unhappy about a relative marrying somebody from a certain group or about somebody from such a group being a primary school teacher. That is not evidence of a discriminatory attitude in itself, but people who express concerns about what we call cultural threat are more likely to express a discriminatory attitude in response to a number of our questions. That is the link that we are demonstrating.

Sandra White: The last part of Bill Kidd's question was about Government policies, and Professor Curtice spoke about same-sex marriage, on which there is a Government policy. From your research, did you find that Government policies on tackling discrimination tended to follow public opinion or did you find that such policies were developed in response to hostile public opinion?

Professor Curtice: The answer is both. Unfortunately, I am old enough to remember when male homosexuality was illegal. The state has certainly made a lot of progress on that issue, as has public opinion, as we demonstrated in the report. Government policies are a result of an interaction between the two. For example, the race relations legislation of the 1960s partly led public opinion at that stage. However, the degree to which politicians feel able to make legislation that tries to advance public opinion is often limited. That was demonstrated in the background to the legislation on civil partnerships.

The state can influence attitudes by making legislation and saying that things are wrong but, whenever the state makes legislation in areas where there is substantial disagreement in public opinion, there is a risk that the law will be flouted. It is always a matter of judgment whether one can do something that will help to push a situation on. We take the view that, given the history of such matters, both legislation and changes in public opinion make a difference. Of course, it is not just about legislation; it is also about what politicians

and the Equality and Human Rights Commission say. Although all that is true, as I said in response to Bill Kidd, things can also happen that the state does not control. On occasion, politicians might react to developments in a way that does not necessarily help matters and might lead to things going in the opposite direction.

Sandra White: I suppose that we are at a stage where we do not know whether legislation will help.

Professor Curtice: Sure. It is also true that legislation is often an indication that our society is changing. However, controversy often develops when society changes. You can see that clearly in attitudes towards gay men and lesbians. There are sharp divisions in attitude between different sections of Scottish society. Most older people—along with people who adhere to a variety of faiths—are still inclined to think that such relationships are wrong, whereas most younger people wonder what there is to worry about. Given that opinion on the subject is often quite heavily divided, there will be sections of society that are strongly opposed to legislation in that area.

Last week, I looked at some work that had been done on attitudes towards racial prejudice, which demonstrates that, although it is true that the incidence of racial prejudice has declined over time, it is also true that some of the divisions in our society—for example, between people who have been to university and people who have not, or between younger people and older people—have become starker. Greater divisiveness can develop as attitudes in society change. The problem that politicians face is that they must negotiate their way through those different shoals.

11:45

Sandra White: My second question is about the people who deal with such discrimination under the law—the Scottish Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which you have mentioned. How do you expect them to use your research to inform their policies? What key findings will it be important for them to focus on?

Professor Curtice: I will make a few suggestions, to which I suspect that Catherine Bromley will want to add. First, it is not true that attitudes towards all groups are the same. The research shows that, for the most part, the pattern of attitudes towards people who have learning disabilities fails to fit the pattern of attitudes towards other groups. With that group, the issue at stake does not seem to be about people feeling threatened; in contrast, it might be more to do with a lack of appreciation of what such people might be able to achieve. People who have learning disabilities might not be regarded as equal citizens in our society because they are not regarded as being capable. Other groups lie at varying points on the threat-competence spectrum.

The first key point that I would make to the Scottish Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission would be to beware of the one-size-fits-all model in their efforts to change attitudes, because different concerns and different issues apply to different equalities groups.

Secondly, I would ask those organisations to be aware that the source of discriminatory attitudes can vary from context to context. A puzzle that we discover but do not unravel in the research is that it appears that the source of the viewpoint of those people who say that someone who runs a bed-and-breakfast in their own home should be allowed not to take a gay man or a lesbian or someone has had a sex-change operation as a customer is not the same as the source of the viewpoint whereby someone would be uncomfortable if a relative of theirs were to marry someone who belonged to such a group. In our research, we do not find a link between the measures of cultural threat that I discussed with the convener and the likelihood of people expressing the view that a bed-and-breakfast owner should be allowed to bar someone of a particular sexual orientation.

In other words, there is something else going on in that situation. It might be to do with people feeling that someone should be allowed to do what they like in their own home. The research uncovers the fact that the group of people who express that view is rather different from the group of people who express concern about a relative becoming involved in a gay relationship, which indicates that different contexts and situations might uncover discriminatory attitudes and, by implication, behaviour for somewhat different reasons. It is problematic that we are partly saying, "The world is complicated, so you must be sensitive," because that is not an easy message for policy makers to take on board. Although a campaign such as one Scotland, many cultures may or may not be able to do quite a lot of good, a single campaign with a single message will probably not be sufficient on its own.

Sandra White: I put the same question to Catherine Bromley. What key findings of the report should the Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission focus on?

Catherine Bromley: It is difficult to propose that certain groups should be made priorities. The coming together of people from many different backgrounds in the commission will have thrown up many such issues and there will have been internal debates about what to focus on.

The research was the first time that we asked questions on age discrimination, the transgender community and the Gypsy Traveller community. Apart from what we found in the research, little is known about attitudes to those groups. The research questions produced not only stark but contradictory findings. For example, people were generally in favour of the principle that someone should not have to retire at a certain age. However, they were not so sure about that when they were asked whether someone of 70 could be a primary schoolteacher.

The responses were partly a reflection of the level of public knowledge. An area that the research did not go into, but which future research should address, is what the level of public understanding is of issues to do with older people in the workplace. Other questions to address are what people understand by the term Gypsy Traveller and what they know about that community. If people know little or nothing about a community—for example, the transgender community—they will probably form stereotypical opinions about it.

Before we ran the survey, we did a lot of development work on designing the questions. We had to design questions on various groups carefully because people at first did not know what we were talking about. That revealed that, partly because of the history of past campaigns and commissions, there is probably a lot of public knowledge about issues to do with asylum seekers, gay men and lesbians but much less public knowledge about other communities that face discriminatory attitudes.

Professor Curtice: I want to make another point that may be slightly more controversial. A possible implication of not only our research but other research is that, although it undoubtedly may be helpful to try to change people's conception of, for example, what it is to be Scottish or British so that they can espouse concepts such as multicultural Britain or one Scotland, many cultures, it is difficult for people to avoid expressing discriminatory attitudes if they do not feel that members of another group have something in common with them. The people who are most liberal seem to be those who say that people should not have to lose all their customs and traditions, and that they do not have to integrate fully but can be kind of in the middle. However, it seems to be important to persuade people that those in an equality group have something in common with them.

That obviously raises the question of how far that can be done by ensuring that members of a group demonstrate that they have something in common with those outside the group. For immigrant populations, that is what the row about speaking English and social cohesion is about—that is one strategy. However, the other strategy is simply to persuade people that, for example, a transgender person does have something in common with them. We can argue about how that can be achieved, but the key point is that it is difficult to persuade people that they should not have a discriminatory view of others if they do not feel that they have something in common with them.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I would like to go back to Sandra White's question about how the Government and the commission could use the research. Was the research done anonymously? Could the Government, if it were so inclined, approach the people whom you interviewed to ascertain whether they would be willing to be used as a group on which to test how attitudes can be changed? You could resurvey people who had previously shown particular attitudes to find out whether their attitudes had changed.

I ask about this because, when we start to get beneath things—I think this is partly what the convener was referring to earlier—we find that there are different reasons for people holding certain attitudes or giving the kind of answers that some people gave to you. What sometimes happens in my constituency work is that if there is suddenly a shortage of housing in a particular area, and there has been a lot of media attention on economic migrants coming to the country, people will phone up and say, "My son can't get a house because of all these people coming in." If I start to get beneath that and ask them why they hold those attitudes, and if I explain that those views are not correct, quite often the same person will say, "Actually I know that, but it's all in the news and I felt that it was an issue." Could you use the group of people on whom you have conducted the research to see what would change those attitudes and that behaviour?

Catherine Bromley: Yes. We asked everybody who was interviewed whether they would be prepared to be contacted again. You are right—that is a rich source, certainly for researchers, because we can pre-identify certain groups, and speak to the people who expressed certain views and uncover a bit more about those views. We would be quite keen to do that. We could convene group discussions with people whom we have identified as having certain views, and speak to them about the issues you mentioned. There are no plans to do that at the moment, but the potential is there.

Elaine Smith: My reason for asking is that you could test how different ways of changing attitudes would work. It was mentioned earlier that advertising campaigns do not necessarily work—

they may not be tackling the issue in the right way. You could use this group of people to test how different approaches work, which would help to inform how we tackle discriminatory attitudes and behaviour in future.

Catherine Bromley: Certainly.

Professor Curtice: Well, attitudes at least—behaviour maybe.

Elaine Smith: But the Government could use your attitudes research to think about how to tackle behaviour too.

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): From the outset, the two main questions were what and why. Regardless of how well they are put together, structured interviews are not necessarily the best methodology by which to approach that. I guess that it is very expensive to do it any other way, but we need to consider the "why" more. Government can modify behaviour through legislation, but it is much more difficult to modify attitudes through legislation. You mentioned in paragraph 1.4 of the report that different education strategies may be needed, depending on the prevalence or character of any discriminatory attitudes. Can you be more precise about how that different education could be provided, and for whom?

Professor Curtice: I partly return to territory that we have already covered. As I suggested, a key finding of the research is that discriminatory attitudes are often expressed by people who are concerned about cultural threat and, by implication, who are inclined to feel that members of different groups are different from themselves. We can probably take that a bit further, using research that was done for the Cabinet Office, and say that those different groups evoke negative reactions and emotions, such as fear, disgust and anger. For a number of the groups that we are looking at, those negative emotions are an important source of feelings of cultural threat. Therefore, education strategies must emphasise the development of a common bond between various groups in Scottish society. That could be done by informing—for example, about the life of a transgender person—or by promoting positive images of those groups. In the case of some sections of society, such as immigrants to Scotland, it can be done by ensuring that there is adequate English language instruction, in order to reduce barriers on the other side of the equation as well. That is the main thing that I would take out of the report in terms of Government strategies. The Government must develop strategies that persuade people that they have something in common with other sections of Scottish society.

Hugh O'Donnell: Do you think that the various education solutions are a solution at all?

12:00

Professor Curtice: Not necessarily, in the narrow sense of education. Education campaigns may help as part of wider developments, in so far as we have a society in which people increasingly find themselves in contact with members of different groups. One of the findings of the research is that, if people know somebody from one of those groups, they are more likely to know them well.

In recent years attitudes to gay men and lesbians have become more liberal, so it has become easier for gay men and lesbians to come out. That has also meant that, in popular culture as well as in sub-cultures, images are portrayed of gay men and lesbians leading ordinary lives. There is a place for education, but wider social developments in which members of groups come to be known both directly, through personal contact, and indirectly, through media images, will also be important. To some degree, it lies outside the ability of the state to engineer such things. Government can help and can try to persuade, but wider social developments in which groups are portrayed positively or portrayed simply as an ordinary part of our lives will also make a difference.

It comes back to my point about the extent to which broadcasting organisations feel able to do that. At the moment, the BBC is doing some historical work about the development of its policy on the portrayal of gay men and lesbians and the way in which gay men and lesbians have been talked about in BBC programmes. Thirty years ago, the attitude was that it dared not do that. The committee may remember the great controversy associated with the first lesbian kiss on "Brookside". Broadcasters decide when to portray such images, but they are a reflection of changes in our society and how we have to push society on.

You can pursue the idea of education programmes and consider what they should consist of, but an education programme will find it difficult to succeed unless the wider social climate is operating in its favour. One can think of some things that help in that respect. Equally, if allegations are made with respect to members of the Muslim community or if there are increased levels of immigration, there can be wider social developments in the other direction and it may be difficult to establish an education campaign. We have had the one Scotland, many cultures campaign, but attitudes towards Muslims have become more hostile because of developments in wider society.

Bill Wilson: We have talked a lot about cultural threat, but I am prepared to bet that if I asked everybody in this room to define Scottish culture I

would be lucky to find two people who would contrive to give the same answer. When we talk about cultural threat, is it some particular aspect of culture that is generally "threatened"? Or is the term used so generally that we do not know what people mean when they refer to cultural threat?

Professor Curtice: The truth is closer to the second than to the first of those propositions.

Bill Wilson: I thought that you were going to say yes again.

Professor Curtice: I thought that I would give you a slightly fuller answer this time.

We obviously do not define what people mean. The proposition that we put to people is:

"Scotland would begin to lose its identity".

We regard their answers as being their understanding of what would change about their country.

As you say, people may have different understandings but the crucial thing is whether they regard their understanding of the society in which they live as being under threat as a result of developments in society. In a sense, it does not matter what conception they hold if they feel that it is under threat. The research does not attempt to uncover what vision people have of Scotland and what they think it consists of.

Bill Wilson: What if we have completely different ideas of what is threatened? If I think that Scotland is a highly tolerant country, my view of whether Scottish culture is threatened might be different to that of somebody else who has a less tolerant view of a particular aspect of our society. Therefore, education could be counter-productive, because we do not know the base from which we are educating.

Professor Curtice: I take two lessons from the findings on cultural threat. In so far as someone who assents to the proposition that Scottish culture is threatened is more likely to say that they are not too sure about a gay man, a lesbian or somebody from an ethnic minority being a primary school teacher, we have a clue that their conception of Scotland might not necessarily be the tolerant image that you may have. However, that is quite an important clue and suggests that it might be helpful to have a strategy that suggests to people that Scotland is a society that embraces those groups. Equally, I accept that people are partly saying, "Those people are different from me. I'm Scottish, but those people are not; they are different." Therefore, you must also try to deal with what makes people feel different and present a sense of commonality. I can give you some clues about beneficial messages even without necessarily fully unpacking what every respondent understands by Scottish culture and identity.

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): I am always interested in how the media respond to the power of soap operas, drama and shock value. However, my question is about legislation. The report states that the definition of discrimination that you use in your research

"is not embedded in current legal definitions".

Given that legislation has played a significant role in tackling discrimination, how useful is your definition for policy makers and legislators?

Professor Curtice: I would say that it is far more useful than if it were embedded in legal definitions. The first thing to remember is that we are talking about discriminatory attitudes. I take the view that the state is capable of discriminating. Historically, it has discriminated against the various groups that I mentioned and, for gay men and lesbians, it still discriminates as far as marriage is concerned. Therefore, taking legal definitions does not necessarily provide a clear understanding of discrimination.

Our definition is essentially that someone says that certain people are not entitled to engage in a practice, behaviour or activity that they would regard as acceptable for most people. Using such a conceptual definition means that we can examine, for example, attitudes to marriage partners. That is an area on which the state may never want or feel able to legislate, but it provides some important clues about attitudes in our society. If we regard it as an indicator of the degree to which people feel able or unable to marry across social groups in our society, it gives us some clues about some of the barriers that may stand in the way of that. Using a non-legal definition means that we are free to examine attitudes in such a way that we may be better placed to understand their origins. It also means that we do not confine ourselves to what the state, at any one point in time, regards as acceptable or unacceptable.

One of the groups that we cover is asylum seekers, against whom the state clearly discriminates on the ground that, until they are accepted by the state, they do not have the right to reside in this country. If we were to use a state definition of discrimination, we would not cover asylum seekers. Some of our findings and the statements that people make about asylum seekers clearly reflect the way in which the state acts towards asylum seekers and the way in which they are portrayed in the media. At the end of the day, the state does not take the view that all discrimination is wrong. It says that some people have the right to reside in this country and some do not. When deciding who does and does not have that right, it has to discriminate.

Marlyn Glen: You do not use the legal definition of discrimination. Do you think that it would be

useful for policy makers and legislators to use the definition that you have established?

Professor Curtice: The advantage of our using that definition is that it enables us to look at attitudes to behaviours on which the state does not currently legislate and on which it may or may not legislate in future. It also allows us to look at attitudes to areas in which the state discriminates at the moment. Instead of asking about civil partnerships, we deliberately asked whether gay men and lesbians should be allowed to marry, because that is an area in which the state discriminates at the moment. That approach is crucial if you are trying to identify areas in which the state may need to change policy—issues with which it is currently not dealing.

One of the implications that could be drawn from the research is that there is not majority support in Scottish society for the distinction between civil partnerships and marriage. The legislation that established that distinction may well be revisited, both by the Scottish Parliament and by Westminster. That will certainly happen if attitudes continue to move in the direction in which they are moving at present. You may also decide that more needs to done for transgender people, either through legislation or through education. If the state is to learn, it is crucial for us to look outside what the state currently does.

The Convener: I want to press you further on that issue. Is it possible that the state discriminates under your non-legal definition of discrimination not because it possesses a discriminatory attitude but because the overriding objective of the policy that it is pursuing is to secure the public interest?

Professor Curtice: I have acknowledged that is inconceivable for there to be a situation in which the state does not decide to discriminate. Residence, citizenship and immigration control are an area in which discrimination by the state is central. I have said nothing about whether that is right or wrong—that is a judgment—but it is clear that the state discriminates in that area.

We can argue about whether it is right or wrong for the state to make a distinction between civil partnerships and marriage. I am not arguing one side of the case or the other—I am simply pointing out that such a distinction is made and that we may or may not wish to justify it on other criteria. The point that I am making is that, because we do not simply follow the state's current definition of what is and is not acceptable, we can help to inform public policy in a way that would not otherwise be possible.

The Convener: That is an interesting point. It raises a number of justice issues that, sadly, we do not have time to pursue today.

12:15

Hugh O'Donnell: Professor Curtice, I will return to some of your observations on the role of the Government and the media and the profile that they give to the Muslim community. Your research found that there was an almost equal distribution of concern in relation to eastern European people and Muslims. However, when your research was published, much of the focus both in governmental response and media interest was on Muslims.

I have two questions as a result of that. First, was there any thought of highlighting particular findings on the publication of the research findings? Secondly, why do you think that the media focused on the Muslim community?

Professor Curtice: The answer to your first question is that the responsibility for what was put out in the press release, and when, lay with the Scottish Government—you can ask it about that. I cannot remember exactly what was in the press release, although from memory I do not think that it particularly highlighted the issue of Muslims.

However, it is true that the press found interesting the two changes over time—attitudes to gay men and lesbians becoming more liberal while attitudes to Muslims went in the opposite direction. Why did the press focus on Muslims? It is a current subject of considerable controversy. After all, some people have alleged that various members of that community have been engaged in acts of terrorism. That has raised questions among politicians and the wider community about the relationship between at least certain sections of Muslim society and the rest of UK society. Given that backdrop, it is not surprising that the media decided to focus on the issue.

News values tend to emphasise bad rather than good news. If we had written a report in which we said, "You know what? There are no discriminatory attitudes in Scotland: people think that transgender people are fine and that Gypsies/Travellers should of course be primary schoolteachers," we would have got only a column inch. That would have been a good news story. The finding about Muslims was the apparent bad news story and it fitted in with current news values. As such, the press picked up on it.

Another point is that it is not uncommonly argued that Scotland is a relatively tolerant society. If we come up with research that to some extent appears to challenge that conception, the media will pick up on that, saying that the politicians who make that argument are getting it wrong. Those are all potential motives that make the research a newsworthy story. Conversely, relatively complex arguments about why discriminatory attitudes are held and might arise inevitably do not get a great deal of publicity.

Hugh O'Donnell: That answer is comprehensive and, I think, substantially correct—it is good to have it on record.

You seem to be suggesting that all parties involved in the scenario that you have just depicted have degrees of responsibility for how they tackle such news stories and research findings. How would you propose that those institutions and organisations get together to find a more positive way of working for the communities that make up Scotland in the 21st century?

Professor Curtice: Let me hang back here. If you start from the point of view that you want to reduce the instance of discriminatory attitudes, is it necessarily bad for the media to focus on where that is not happening? The media are varied in how they approach the issues. Certain sections of the media are still relatively hostile to gay men and lesbians, and they will report similar attitudes by saying that people in Scotland are more sensible than some of their rulers.

On the other hand, the tone of most of the media's coverage of the report—at least what I saw—was, "Shock, horror—people's attitudes towards Muslims have become less favourable. Hang on, perhaps we are looking at things too much through rose-coloured spectacles in thinking that Scotland is a tolerant society." Many sections of the media presented that change as a problem rather than news that showed that politicians had got it wrong. It is not necessarily unhelpful if the media focus on what must be achieved to reduce the incidence of such attitudes.

You asked about how to bring groups together.

Catherine Bromley: That is the Equality and Human Rights Commission's job—that is one of its roles.

Professor Curtice: That is a job for the commission. As a result of the report, the media interviewed representatives of the Muslim community and asked them to write newspaper articles, which was not unhelpful. In so far as the media will help, they will do so by giving the community a voice and making it more visible. However, the state cannot tell the media what to do. For other reasons, some of us would say that that is a good thing.

Hugh O'Donnell: Absolutely.

Professor Curtice: You as politicians can try to tell the media what would help and what you would like them to do, but you are limited in how far you can direct them.

Hugh O'Donnell: Of course.

My final observation is that perhaps some quarters of the media, to which you have referred, should look at themselves as well as at what else is happening, because they are part of our society.

Professor Curtice: Sure.

Catherine Bromley: This was the eighth year in which the Scottish social attitudes survey had been carried out and it generated the most media coverage that we have ever had for any of our studies. I had to do a double-take in the shops—was it really my survey on the front pages of the *Mail*, *The Sun* and *The Herald*? Equal opportunities and equalities issues do not always receive such extensive coverage. There was not simply a front page about attitudes towards Muslims; the *Daily Record*, for instance, contained a two-page spread on the range of topics that had been covered. That is an interesting reflection on the issue. The newspapers did not simply focus on the one negative finding about Muslims; they expanded on the majority of the report. It is clear that the topic hit a few nerves.

Professor Curtice: There is a slight difference with England. The history of sectarianism in Scotland means that sensitivity to issues of discrimination and prejudice is felt here and in the Scottish media that perhaps is not true to the same degree down south. I do not know whether Bill Wilson would regard it as part of the Scottish identity, but perhaps because of some aspects of Scotland's history a slight sense of guilt is felt that is not felt down south. Perhaps not everybody would agree with that.

The Convener: We have several subjects still to cover and the clock is ticking. We aim to complete the session by 12:30, so I ask members and witnesses to be as brief as possible. I call Bill Wilson.

Bill Wilson: I have just found my question—I was listening to the answers and not keeping track of where we were on the question paper.

Most of your questions were subjective. You found that 30 per cent of respondents said that ethnic minorities and people from eastern Europe take jobs away from other people in Scotland, which could perhaps be objectively measured. Why did you include that type of question?

Professor Curtice: Because perceptions matter. People's behaviour is guided as much by perceptions as by reality. If someone thinks that people from eastern Europe are taking jobs away from other people, that may affect their behaviour. Their answers certainly indicate their attitudes towards that group.

Bill Wilson: Do you know of any study that might enable you to tie the two issues together, so that you could compare people's views of such groups with what is happening?

Professor Curtice: You would have to ask an economist to examine the economic consequences of immigration. I know enough

about that field to know that it is relatively controversial—there are arguments about the degree to which the benefits of immigration to the UK are exceeded by the costs. There seems to be a certain amount of research to suggest that the benefits are exceeded by the costs, but not by such a degree that the estimates are uncontroversial. That is just my layman's reading of the subject.

Bill Wilson: Did you ever consider asking the question, "Have you applied for a job that you know somebody from—"? I suspect that most people think of the issue in terms of what happened to a friend's friend, for example, but that personal experience of losing out uncompetitively is uncommon.

Professor Curtice: As I said, we deliberately focused on attitudes, not least because dealing with that subject adequately within the resources that were available to us would have been a considerable challenge. The more that we start getting into the area of behaviour, the more that we dilute what we are trying to achieve.

Bill Wilson: I understand that—I am thinking more of possible future studies or follow-ups that might be useful.

Professor Curtice: Sure—you have suggested different ways in which we could study discriminatory behaviour as opposed to the incidence of attitudes.

The Convener: Thank you for that—we have to move on. I ask Sandra White to be quite brief.

Sandra White: I will be as quick as I can.

I am interested in the question on employing older people—and people with depression—as primary teachers. I note that 76 per cent of respondents said that it was wrong to make people retire at a certain age, and yet more than half the respondents said that older people would be unsuitable to be primary school teachers.

Were the responses evidence of discrimination or were they born out of ignorance, or were there other reasons why people responded in that way? The responses reflect the perceptions of older people as primary school teachers. I am intrigued to find out why you asked the question about primary school teachers. Some people might say that it is a very difficult job. Like you, John, I remember being at primary school many years ago. I had a teacher who was 70, and she was one of the best teachers in the whole school. Perhaps the attitudes in the findings reflect the way in which things have moved on.

Professor Curtice: One thing that we were trying to do was to ask the same question about different groups, so that we could compare attitudes across the groups. That meant that sometimes the questions were more pertinent to one group than another, but in order to understand the differences between groups—which I argue is one of the strengths of this research—that had to be done.

We chose primary school teachers, primarily—sorry, that was not a pun—because we were looking for a form of employment that might to some degree be regarded as sensitive. In particular, given that we were also talking about gay men and lesbians, transgender people and people with depression, we were partly asking, "Is this somebody who is safe to have around children?" and whether people feel that it is morally unacceptable for a gay man or lesbian to teach a child of five or six. The question on the older person was placed within that wider issue.

You are right: the answer seems to be that, in general, people do not think that people should be forced to retire but, on the other hand, it seems as though, in respect of primary school teachers at least, people had a different opinion. Perhaps they thought that dealing with a bunch of five or six-year-olds all day long would be physically demanding, and they wondered whether someone aged 70 would cope. I suppose the warning is that although it may be true in general that we all say that people should not be forced to retire, it is different if we are given a specific situation and specific contexts.

Catherine Bromley: In the absence of knowledge, people might bring with them various stereotypes—the stereotype of an older person in this case was not of a fit, active 70-year-old who is very good at teaching, but of someone who might not be able to cope. The answers also revealed a stigmatised view of people with depression, and the thought that such people would not be able to cope. Often, the discriminatory behaviour that people face from others is because of such stereotypes and schemes that people develop.

The research is revealing, because we have picked up on people's underlying views. They do not necessarily see their views as discriminatory, but by believing that people can only do certain types of work, they are likely to narrow people's opportunities by putting them in boxes.

12:30

Sandra White: If a question had been asked about being a lollipop person—or a school patroller—the answer might have been different, which would be discriminatory. That is what I am trying to get at.

Catherine Bromley: It is something that—

Sandra White: I know that we are in a hurry. Sorry about that.

The Convener: We have covered that point. We understand it fully from your replies.

Professor Curtice: The answer is yes, Sandra.

Marlyn Glen: What are your key messages for policy makers and opinion shapers to help them answer why people hold discriminatory attitudes?

Professor Curtice: Our research in 2002 indicated that although to some extent concerns about economic threat underlie attitudes—that is particularly true in relation to certain areas, such as the labour market—social psychology is also important. In the 2006 research, we have tried to unpack that a bit further: we say that what seems to be particularly important is the extent to which people feel that people in other groups are different and pose a threat to their conception of what their society is about. One of the messages of our research is that it is difficult to reduce the expression of discriminatory attitudes unless we overcome that sense of difference. As we said, there is perhaps more than one way of trying to deal with that.

Catherine Bromley: My key message is that we do not have all the answers yet: this is a starting point. Even though we have done the research twice, there are limits to survey research. As we said, it is perfect for picking up the "what" as you are looking for a figure, but if you want to understand the "why" you should pursue other approaches.

Bill Wilson: I suspect that you will not be able to answer this question, but I will give it a go anyway. You mentioned that some respondents prefer not to live near other groups, if you like—they like to live near people who are similar to themselves. To what degree is that theoretical—people say that they would prefer to live near people similar to themselves—and to what degree it is actual, in that a person would physically move if they found themselves in an area where there were not enough people who were similar to themselves? Does that issue arise?

Professor Curtice: I suggest that we pursue the issue later—I do not quite get the question and I am aware that we are running out of time. Do you want to send that question to me?

Bill Wilson: I am happy to do that.

The Convener: We will write to you specifically on that question.

Elaine Smith: On the "why", could we also write to the witnesses to follow up the issue that I was exploring?

The Convener: We will discuss the evidence and see what we can do.

Elaine Smith: In respect of the "what", do you intend to conduct similar research in the future? Would there be scope for questions to be adapted to address other matters, such as attitudes towards domestic violence against women, attitudes towards English people who live in Scotland and attitudes towards sectarianism? On violence against women, I would have a particular interest in whether such research could consider pornography and attitudes towards it.

Professor Curtice: Whoa! That is a large research agenda.

Hugh O'Donnell: We look forward to trying to get the money for that research.

Professor Curtice: I look forward to getting the money for it.

Having done this survey twice and having discovered that there is a lot of interest in it, we would certainly be interested in doing something again in two or three years' time—not least because we would get an idea of how things are changing.

On the other issues that Elaine Smith mentioned, attitudes towards England and Scotland were investigated as part of Professor Miller's research in 2003, although obviously he might want to extend that work. As you might have gathered, given our remit we could have covered both attitudes towards English people in Scotland and relations betweens Protestants and Catholics. We made some choices and decided that research on attitudes towards different religions as opposed to different denominations was more interesting. Previous research has discovered that there are no major issues of discriminatory attitudes towards English people in Scotland, so that was also left to one side. I would be delighted to research those two issues while repeating some of the other questions, so that we could examine their interrelationships.

I am happy for Elaine Smith to persuade me outside the committee room, but I do not immediately see the link between pornography and domestic violence and the agenda that we are pursuing—unless you want to argue that discriminatory attitudes towards women are in some way linked to exposure to pornography, although I am not sure that that was your point.

The Convener: This has been a stimulating and interesting evidence session. I was particularly struck by the novel idea that it is not always helpful to have interventions from politicians.

Professor Curtice: Except the members of this committee, of course.

The Convener: We will discuss the evidence that we have received and consider how we can follow it up. I thank you for appearing before the committee.

Professor Curtice: Thank you.

Mainstreaming Equal Opportunities

12:35

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is on mainstreaming equal opportunities in the work of the Scottish Parliament's committees. Members will see from their papers that we have received correspondence from the convener of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. He has asked our committee, as the successor of the session 2 Equal Opportunities Committee, for our views on the proposed revision to standing orders that would require committees to report each session on the equality work that they have carried out. As members are aware, such a change to standing orders was proposed by the previous Equal Opportunities Committee and agreed to by the previous Conveners Group. The proposal was then forwarded to the Procedures Committee's successor committee in session 3. Do members have any general comments on the paper?

Elaine Smith: I was a member of the previous Equal Opportunities Committee. Technically, session 3 committees can change decisions that their predecessor committee made but, in my opinion, that would not be in keeping with the spirit of the matter. In paragraph 9 of the report on mainstreaming—on page 6 of paper EO.S3.08.02.02—the previous Equal Opportunities Committee's convener, Cathy Peattie, recommends that the proposed change be put off to allow more time; it was not put off so that it would not happen. Paragraph 9 states:

"appropriate steps should be taken to ensure that this exercise is carried out at the end of the next session."

The intention was to allow for detailed consideration rather than rush into things. I do not think that it was envisaged that the principle of having such reviews would be reversed, although that is technically possible.

Why not have a rule rather than a voluntary agreement for such reviews? It could be argued that if we do not, committees might end up just ticking boxes, which most of us would agree would be unacceptable. However, a requirement would allow committees to start thinking about the issue. If we proceed only on a voluntary basis, we will not get a good response. As paragraph 14 of page 3 of the paper points out,

"only two committees' reports contained a specific equal opportunities section."

That seems to be the outcome of the reports being voluntary.

The crux of the matter is given in paragraph 44 of Cathy Peattie's paper—on page 11—which is worth putting on the record:

"The production of a report on equalities work every four years will not place a heavy resource burden on committees and will provide significant benefits both internally and externally. The internal benefits include increased awareness for committees of the need to mainstream and monitor equalities issues in their work and the provision of both a mechanism for the sharing and encouragement of good practice and a useful resource for successor committees."

That makes the case for having such a requirement in standing orders.

In any case, I understand that if we agree to the proposal today, the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee will conduct a formal inquiry and take evidence on the proposed change, the outcome of which we could consider. For today's purposes, we should go with the status quo, which is that the issue should be taken forward and given detailed consideration.

The Convener: I should make it quite clear at the outset that we are not bound by the previous committee, so it is legitimate to reconsider the issue even though members might think it unlikely that they would want to change the decision.

Sandra White: Normally, I am in favour of a carrot approach rather than a stick approach, but I agreed with the proposal of the previous committee—of which I was a member—about the need for the rule change. I appreciate the difficulties that are involved, but I echo what Elaine Smith said. Some committees reported back on equalities, but they are few—almost none.

In the previous evidence-taking session, we heard about people in the educational hierarchy who are responsible for rolling out projects but are unaware of equalities issues. That makes me even more convinced of the need to use the stick approach. It is important that Parliament does this work. The Scottish Parliament has an excellent reputation for equalities: we were one of the first Parliaments to bring equalities to the fore. The Equal Opportunities Committee's agreeing that reporting should be mainstreamed in all the committees of the Parliament would say that we take the matter seriously. Parliament must take it seriously, too. Equalities should filter through not only our work but the work of everyone in all walks of life. I am persuaded that we should go for the rule change.

Hugh O'Donnell: We have to send out a signal. As Sandra White said, we are talking about carrot and stick. The figures in the paper show that the carrot that was held out to committees in the previous session of the Parliament was not big enough, so perhaps a stick is needed. That view is reinforced by the apparent absence of an equalities section in the latest Scottish

Government budget document, although references are made to equalities throughout the document. Perhaps we need to send out a firm signal. I support a change in the standing orders.

Bill Kidd: The table on page 15 shows the contribution that committees have made to equal opportunities reporting. It shows how seriously committees take the matter and which committees made specific reference to equal opportunities in their reports. The table shows how weak the situation was last session: only two committees included an equal opportunities section in their reports, and one made reference to equality. The rule change would be significant. It would ensure that the Parliament was following through on the original ideal of mainstreaming equality throughout its committees. Also, as the paper says, the proposal is neither onerous nor expensive in budgetary terms for committees. Committees can manage it.

The Convener: There seems to be a clear consensus in favour of the proposal—there certainly is in favour of mainstreaming. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Convener: The next question is whether standing orders require to be changed or whether reporting should be done voluntarily. My preference is for committees to report on a voluntary basis. My fear is that committees may not pay a lot of attention until the very end of the four-year session. It could become merely the proverbial ticking and bumping exercise. Even if we go down that route, there is nothing to prevent the Equal Opportunities Committee from using the powers that we have at present to require committees to carry out equalities reviews and to report to us. We can use our discretion to do that on issues about which we are concerned and I would like to see us being a little bit more proactive in that regard. We should look for issues, flag them up as being important and say to committees that we think they are of relevance to them.

I ask for a show of hands from those who are in favour of the standing orders being changed to make reporting compulsory.

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Convener: That is unanimous. I will go with my committee on the matter.

In the event that the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee says that that is not how it wishes to proceed, do members want to discuss at a later date a voluntary equalities review strategy and how that could be undertaken in terms of the guidance and training that would be required?

Marlyn Glen: Yes. I speak as a member of the other committee to which the convener referred. If we do not persuade the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee to go along with the proposal, we should follow up on that proposal as a second option. Neither option rules out the possibility of the Equal Opportunities Committee being proactive in encouraging other committees to cover equal opportunities in their committee inquiries.

The Convener: Thank you. We will convey the information to the Standards and Public Appointments Committee.

12:45

Meeting continued in private until 13:06.

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