

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 22 June 2004
(*Afternoon*)

Session 2

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EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

14th Meeting 2004, Session 2

CONVENER

*Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind)
*Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP)
*Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con)
*Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab)
*Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
*Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab)
*Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab)
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)
Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Professor John Archer (Universities Scotland)
Michael Bird (British Council Scotland)
Lucy Butters (Scottish Networks International)
Mark Simmons (British Council Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Imrie

ASSISTANT CLERKS

Nick Hawthorne
David Simpson

LOCATION

The Chamber

Scottish Parliament

European and External Relations Committee

Tuesday 22 June 2004

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:04*]

Promoting Scotland Worldwide Inquiry

The Convener (Richard Lochhead): Good afternoon, everyone. I welcome you to the 14th meeting in 2004 of the European and External Relations Committee. I will kick off by saying that we have received no apologies from members. At about 20 past 2, I will nip out for 10 or 15 minutes and the deputy convener, Irene Oldfather, will take over the chair while I represent the committee at the Parliamentary Bureau.

Our first item is evidence in our on-going flagship inquiry into the promotion of Scotland overseas. Today, our theme is education and international promotion. Our witnesses are Professor John Archer, who is convener elect of Universities Scotland as well as principal and vice-chancellor of Heriot-Watt University; Michael Bird, the director of the British Council Scotland; Mark Simmons, a manager of education UK Scotland, which is part of the British Council Scotland; and Lucy Butters, also from the British Council Scotland, but who is representing Scottish Networks International. We do not have time for long statements from the witnesses, but we would welcome a brief introduction from each of you before we proceed to questions. I ask Professor John Archer to begin.

Professor John Archer (Universities Scotland): As you have heard, my interest in international students arises partly through my being convener elect of Universities Scotland and the chair of education UK Scotland. I am happy to take questions on all sorts of areas, but I would be particularly interested in talking about fresh talent and the enlargement of the European Union if we have the opportunity to do so.

The Convener: Thank you. I am sure that we will take you up on that offer.

Michael Bird (British Council Scotland): Good afternoon. I lead a team of 50 British Council colleagues that is based at the Tun. We are looking forward to being your neighbours in October. The British Council has expanded

significantly in Scotland since devolution. It has a policy on devolution that is explicit about the fact that the British Council represents the United Kingdom as a whole as well as each of the countries of the UK. As you know, we work in education, the arts, science, governance, law and human rights in 110 countries around the world. It is our job to make that network work for Scotland.

Mark Simmons (British Council Scotland): Good afternoon. I am the market development manager for education UK Scotland, an initiative that is managed by the British Council Scotland, although we receive significant funding from the Scottish Executive and the Scottish funding councils. We are very much driven by the education sector and our two primary areas of activity are raising awareness of Scottish education and training opportunities worldwide—specifically in eight priority markets—and supporting the international promotion activity of the Scottish education sector in trying to develop greater collaborative activity and cross-sectoral collaboration.

Lucy Butters (Scottish Networks International): Good afternoon. I manage Scottish Networks International, which is another programme that is managed by the British Council Scotland. We work in partnership with, and with some funding from, Scottish Development International through Scottish Enterprise. The aims of Scottish Networks International are to enhance the educational experience of carefully selected international postgraduates, to promote and manage work placements for them and to maintain international business networks with them when they leave Scotland.

The Convener: Thank you very much. Committee members will say to whom their questions are addressed, but if there is anything that you wish to add I will let you do so if you indicate that to me.

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): My question is to Professor Archer. I have read your written submission to the committee in which you state that, in 2001,

“almost 22,000 students from other countries came to Scotland and the number of overseas applications to Scottish universities has risen by almost a quarter since 2000.”

Which countries in particular are involved and what are the implications of the different policies on student funding that exist north and south of the border?

Professor Archer: There are some big issues in that question. Perhaps my colleagues from the education UK Scotland initiative would give a better overview of where the students come from,

because they are monitoring that. We can come back to that issue.

Of the 22,000 or 23,000 international students in Scotland, about 85 per cent are in the higher education sector. Education UK Scotland is building on special relationships with particular countries to enhance the movement of students from there to Scotland. My colleagues from that initiative will provide later the detail of where the students come from.

Whether the policies that are being adopted both south of the border and north of the border will impact on international student recruitment is an important issue. I have two particular points to make. First, the state of the universities in Scotland and their ability to teach and do research will depend very much on the level of funding that they get. If there is a differential in funding that favours universities south of the border, the whole infrastructure in Scotland for opening up opportunities to students—international or otherwise—will be damaged. Therefore, we must get the funding right.

Secondly, the visa issue is still vexatious for international students coming to the UK from non-EU countries, who need visas in different ways. We can expand on that if the committee wishes us to do so. Basically, the policy of the Foreign Office and the universities is to get international students into the country, but the Home Office's efforts are sometimes counterproductive in that it does not provide a welcoming environment for students coming in from overseas.

The Convener: Can you give us an example of when the Home Office is not welcoming?

Professor Archer: The issue is about immigration officers at airports and ports of entry. There were situations last year in which students who were coming into the UK were given a hard time about why they wanted to come here to study. I know of occasions when students have just turned round and gone back to their home country.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I want to come in on that point. There is news on the wires today that the Home Office suggests that many of the 300 to 400 colleges—rather than universities—that encourage students to come to this country are bogus. Does that complicate the situation for you?

Professor Archer: I am sure that it does. The phrase "bogus students" is unhelpful in our efforts to recruit bona fide international students. The matter to which you referred—I read about it in a newspaper rather than heard it on the radio—is associated particularly with private language schools, which is a different issue.

Mark Simmons: Education UK Scotland is the Scottish wing of the education UK initiative, which is a partnership between the British Council, particularly the Department for Education and Skills, and the Scottish Executive to raise awareness of educational opportunities in the UK generally. Through that partnership, we have been working hard over the past five years to try to streamline requirements for entry to the UK. We have worked with visa offices overseas and with the Home Office to improve the approach for students who apply for visas to gain entry to the UK.

Over the past five years, we have also introduced the right for international students to work part-time in the UK. They can now work for 20 hours a week part time, which they do partly to fund their studies in the UK. That initiative was introduced to increase the UK's share of the international student market from about 17 per cent in 1998-99 to 25 per cent by 2005.

Mrs Ewing: Various points have come up in the witnesses' evidence. Obviously, they could write to the committee with information about the countries of origin of the international student intake. That information would be interesting, particularly in respect of students from non-EU countries, which is where some of the difficulties lie.

Mark Simmons mentioned the British Council. A lot of the work of the British Council gets little publicity. I have worked with the British Council for many years and have been involved in various trips. I know that you send out e-mails and so on, but do you think that the work that you undertake is given due publicity in the Scottish media outwith specialist magazines? We want to promote the role of the Scottish Parliament in international dimensions—leaving aside the issue of what is and is not reserved—because we are one of the newest democracies in Europe.

14:15

Michael Bird: I thank you for your comments. You are quite right that there is a paradox. In 110 countries around the world, the British Council is incredibly well known, but it is not as well known in its own country as it deserves to be. We are doing something about that—specifically in Scotland—because we believe that we have good stories to tell. We want people in Scotland to know about our work because we want them to be aware of the opportunities that the British Council offers to people in Scotland. A range of initiatives is under way and the Scottish Parliament's move to its new building will be helpful in that respect. We are looking forward to conducting British Council international events in the new Parliament building, starting with an international conference on the state of democracy, which will bring

together 100 participants from around the world. In itself, that kind of platform will do things for our profile in Scotland.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):

Your written evidence was so interesting that, to be honest, I could have done with more of it. Perhaps I could follow up some points with you in writing. Your submission says that the Scottish Executive and other organisations should feature higher education more prominently in their overseas promotional activity. That implies that you think that they do not do enough at the moment.

Professor Archer: Higher education is extremely important to the Scottish economy. If you consider factors such as its impact on gross domestic product and spending power, you can see that it is one of Scotland's major business activities. With regard to international students and their impact on Scotland, it would be nice to think that the targets that the universities set for themselves would in some way be targets that are shared by the Scottish Executive, for example, and that they become part of something that we could shoot for in terms of our trying to achieve more than we do at the moment.

The worldwide international student market for education—which can be delivered either in Scotland or abroad—is a big market. Projections suggest that it is potentially worth many hundreds of billions of pounds. It would be nice if we had a policy that underpinned an aspiration to increase significantly the number of international students who come to Scotland. How can we get the opportunity to talk about that other than in terrific events such as this one today, when I can speak to members about how important the matter is and stress the need to ensure that its importance be made better understood?

Mr Raffan: The market is hugely competitive. Having lived in the United States of America for a few years, I am aware of the fact that Harvard University, Yale University and the other ivy league universities have huge endowments that are worth several billions of dollars. As you say, more than 200 university departments in Scotland are working on research that is of international excellence. You talked about the commercial application of that research in terms of contracts and so on, but I am worried about an aspect that occurs to me because of experience that I gained when I lived in the States and which was part of the fundraising campaign for my former university, the University of Cambridge. The point is that we are highly competitive, but it worries me that we are not sufficiently resourced to take on the ambitious role—it is right to be ambitious—of attracting overseas university students and being a focus of international excellence.

Professor Archer: I agree with all that you say.

Mr Raffan: How should we address those issues?

Professor Archer: One of the things that Scottish universities do is lever up public funding approximately twofold. You can imagine that if we had more public funding we would be able to lever up that funding even further. It is not always terribly helpful to compare us with the ivy league universities in the United States and their fundraising and financial positions because we have such a different economic system that does not allow some of the things that they have been able to do. However, in terms of our international competitiveness, you are absolutely right when you talk about the research and teaching capabilities that exist in Scotland.

Mr Raffan: There is a role for lobbying for donations from individuals, but obviously the tax situation is much more advantageous to people in the States.

I move on to another point about the increase in the number of universities that are setting up campuses abroad. Again, the Americans are way ahead of us on that. Your submission talks about e-learning, but has consideration been given to Universities Scotland setting up a campus in India, where the market for higher education will boom during the next 20 years, with a 10 per cent annual growth rate and a potential 200 million graduates by 2020? That could be a huge market for us and it is one with which we have a historical connection.

Professor Archer: There are many different ways into those markets. I am sure that my colleagues would talk about what is happening in China and Hong Kong, particularly the joint campus opportunities that are being taken up at the moment.

Opportunities in distributed e-learning are very exciting for Scotland. As you know, Scotland uses an interactive university as the vehicle for Scottish universities. That depends on a partnership process and it is picking out a part of the market that is not particularly addressed by America and other countries. It focuses more on, for example, the foundation and undergraduate markets than on the postgraduate market, which is very crowded.

In the undergraduate market, an institution gets the edge when it partners another organisation in another country to deliver the educational programme so that there are teachers in addition to the material, which could be e-based learning. There is added value in working in-country with a partner and in supporting educational content—the Scottish content—and the universities that have provided that content, and in providing quality

assurance and qualifications. The opportunities are great.

The interactive university has a bid in under the spending review to try to take that to another dimension.

Mr Raffan: India is one of the top four or five countries in terms of economic growth; its higher education market has huge potential and Scotland has a long-standing historical connection with India. Are we targeting it and if so, how?

Professor Archer: India is one of the targets, as is China. I am sure that Mark Simmons will be able to talk about those places.

Mark Simmons: You asked about our priority markets and the countries that have the largest growth. Our largest market is the United States, followed by China and India. In the States, we have 2,500 students this year and there are slightly fewer than that in China. India has shown the most significant growth in the past two years; last year there was a 78 per cent increase in the number of Indians coming to study in Scotland. We predict that that figure will overtake the figures for students coming from China and the United States during the next four to five years. We are active in India.

In my team of three in Edinburgh I have a colleague who is responsible for the Indian market. We recently had an inward mission to Scotland of 15 high-school principals from northern India, who visited universities in Scotland. An outward mission will go high schools in southern India in November. We attend education fairs throughout India and we produce newsletters and magazines from Scotland that are sent out to our offices in India for distribution. India is one of the primary markets for the sector in Scotland, particularly in higher education. India, China and the United States are our primary markets overseas.

The Convener: I need to leave in two seconds, so I will just ask a quick question of Universities Scotland and the British Council. The Scottish Executive and the Scotland Office have been involved in various initiatives, including friends of Scotland and globalscot, which bring together people from overseas who could help Scotland. It strikes me that universities must have a wealth of overseas contacts, including graduates who have made it big overseas and overseas-based academics. Has anyone been tapping into that resource? Is work going on between the Scottish Executive and universities? The British Council obviously has lots of contacts, too.

Professor Archer: I will tell you about one initiative that is going through Scottish Enterprise. With the support of the universities, international advisory boards have been brought together and

have been sharing information and knowledge about people. We have submitted the names of people who we think would be very useful in that regard; some of them have come and worked on those boards. I chair Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothian, so I know a little about the way some of the interactions are working—they are turning out quite well.

Lucy Butters: Scottish Networks International maintains a list of alumni that comprises more than 1,000 students who have gone back overseas. We work quite closely with globalscot. In fact, one of our students is on placement with globalscot at the moment. Such students have linked up with Scottish Development International offices on areas such as promotion of Scotland's economy. Within the British Council is education UK Scotland, through which we aim to increase collaboration. We hope to bring together over the next year some sort of alumni working group from the universities. I agree that there is a huge potential resource to tap into.

Mark Simmons: My work tends to involve the international recruitment side in universities. It is a matter of encouraging greater collaboration between the recruitment of international students and the work of the alumni offices of institutions, although those tend to involve different activity streams. The alumni side is very much about business development and fundraising; the international offices tend to be about recruitment and marketing. It is often hard to get those two groups to work together within institutions because they have different objectives. Our plan is to bring the two sides closer together to collaborate.

Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab): I have two things to put to Professor Archer—although I suspect that they are contradictory, in a sense. I would like you to be more specific about the Scottish Executive's role. You appreciate that we are examining not you, but how the Scottish Executive works. Keith Raffan picked up on your saying that higher education should feature more prominently. You said that you have your targets, and that it would be nice if the Executive shared those targets. Perhaps I have just not got this yet, but what specifically do you think the Executive should be doing that it is not doing now? It might be suggested that it is good to have more targets, and that that is a nice aspiration, but I would like to get to the nuts and bolts.

14:30

Professor Archer: Let us try to follow through what would need to happen for twice as many international students to be brought into Scotland. What are the consequences of that, and what policies would need to be developed for that to be successful? We need to understand that bringing

students into Scotland will raise aspirations. If some of them are encouraged to stay in Scotland, then issues around visas, the right to work and so on will need to be developed further.

Within institutions, the costs associated with providing educational opportunities for students are not insignificant. The funding that would be required for universities if they were to deliver the aspiration to have more students would need to cover the associated infrastructural, teaching and staff costs. Nothing comes for nothing; those kinds of aspiration cost.

If we want to target particular countries—we have talked about countries such as India and China—we should talk about European students and the opportunities that an expanded European Union offers. As far as the universities are concerned, European students come at the same per-head income as home students. The number of home students is presently capped by the funding councils because of the amount of money that they have. If we want to increase the number of European Union students—whether they come from the expansion countries or from the other 15 countries—we will need some opportunity of raising the budget head. That would mean a greater cost to the Scottish Executive in funding through the funding councils, which would be a policy issue. The Executive would have to decide that that was what it wanted to do. However, it is worth exploring.

If we want to play our part in the European research area—and we have spoken about the importance to Scotland of the international standard of research in its universities—the ticket will be a commitment to spending 3 per cent of GDP on research and development by 2010. That is what the European research area is all about. The Executive has been pretty silent on its aspirations for playing in that European game, which is regarded as a United Kingdom policy issue. “A Smart, Successful Scotland” says nothing at all about the European strategy. It is an important strategy, and it is on our doorstep.

Gordon Jackson: I hear what you are saying and I do not mean to criticise, but much of it sounds like, “We need more resources.” Is it as simple as that? Do you feel that the Executive has clear ideas and agrees with your aspirations, but just does not have the money, or is not providing the money, or is it more complex? Do you feel that the Executive is not really on your wavelength?

Professor Archer: I do not think that there is a policy on where we want to get to in terms of the numbers and the areas in which we want to play. If we want to be part of the European research area, we have to say so. If we do, we will be on a route on which we will be encouraged to spend more on research and development, in line with the

aspirations of the European research area. The consequences for the universities would be great. The framework programmes and the network programmes offer many opportunities. Of course, the network programmes are not fully funded. The universities have been working towards fully-funded research, but the European programmes do not allow for that to happen. There is a gap. If we want to play in the European area, a consequence will be that the Parliament will have to understand the nature of that gap and consider how it might be filled. We cannot say that we want to do and be all these different things unless we understand the consequences.

Gordon Jackson: You say that there is no policy, but do you have any feel for why that is? Obviously, people in Universities Scotland—you, your present convener and your predecessors—speak to the Executive. Have you any feel for where the policy logjam is?

Professor Archer: In these early days of the Parliament, the logjam has been caused by the fact that European policies have tended to be reserved. There is no natural place to express views on Europe.

The Deputy Convener (Irene Oldfather): Could effective discussion take place at the Scottish international forum?

Professor Archer: I cannot comment on how effective the Scottish international forum is. I do not know.

The Deputy Convener: In its submission, British Council Scotland says that it is a member of the Scottish international forum. I note too that it says that it works together with the Executive and feels that Scotland is most effectively promoted when there is that partnership. Does the Scottish international forum provide a useful voice, or is there a better way to address the issues that Gordon Jackson raised?

Michael Bird: I have been to all the meetings of the Scottish international forum so far—I think that yesterday's meeting was the seventh. The jury is out on the forum's effectiveness and even on what its ultimate focus and purpose are. The forum has grown over its seven meetings and I think that there were 60 people around the table in the Edinburgh International Conference Centre yesterday. The Executive gave an encouraging presentation that suggested that it is moving towards an all-embracing international strategy. However, such a strategy is not yet in place, which is why I think that all the witnesses would say that our engagement with the Executive is bitty—it is good as far as it goes, but we keep asking how it fits into a bigger picture. The good news is that I can see from where an international strategy is beginning to emerge. I am not certain about the

role of the Scottish international forum in the strategy, but my experience suggests that the forum is not the place to resolve the issues that Professor Archer and Mr Jackson discussed.

The Deputy Convener: Where might that place be?

Michael Bird: I cannot answer that in relation to the universities. The forum offers a valuable networking venue because it brings together individuals from the many institutions that—one way or another—represent Scotland internationally.

Mark Simmons: I work closely with the Scottish Executive Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Department and we have a good working relationship. Last autumn we linked in with Lewis Macdonald's visit to Beijing. The visit was planned to coincide with the major exhibition fairs in the city, which attract more than 40,000 students. The minister hosted a Sino-Scottish evening reception, which generated incredible publicity and was reported on the Chinese national news at 10 pm. When we work together at that level we can have a major impact.

The Deputy Convener: You give a good example.

Gordon Jackson: Mark Simmons says that we should attract far more overseas students and that the Executive should share that aspiration, but I have been putting an opposing view, because it has been suggested to me that the down side to that aspiration is that we end up not doing what we should be doing, which is training people for our own market. I use medicine as an example. Consultants tell me that our centres of excellence in medical training—in Aberdeen, Edinburgh or wherever—attract students from all over the world, in particular from the United Kingdom, south of the border. However, those students end up working outside Scotland, so we do not train enough people to staff our own hospitals. To put it crudely, young people in Scotland who would be happy to study medicine in a Scottish university and who have the basic qualifications cannot get a place, because our centres of excellence are so internationally oriented. Those young people move down south and do not come back to Scotland, while the people whom we train do not stay here. That leaves us with a serious skills shortage in Scotland, in particular in medicine. Historically, we trained doctors in our marvellous universities who worked in our marvellous hospitals, but now we have a problem, which has been caused in part by the huge emphasis on attracting students from other jurisdictions.

Professor Archer: I suspect that your example from the medical field does not actually work in the way that you describe. I understand that medical

schools have a very limited number of places for international students and that entry is controlled—I do not know the exact number, but I think that fewer than 5 per cent of places go to international students. The students who come to Scottish medical schools at undergraduate level are largely UK-based, although the situation is slightly different at postgraduate level.

Gordon Jackson: I was classifying the rest of the UK as abroad in relation to our Scottish hospitals. I am not being a Scottish nationalist, but I think that what I mentioned is part of the problem.

Professor Archer: At the undergraduate level, medicine has rather restricted entry for people from overseas. In almost every other discipline, the opportunity is available for international students to participate in whatever numbers an institution feels are manageable. The question in Scotland is how we retain those students against a background of demographic projection that the number of Scottish students will decline in the next 10 years.

Gordon Jackson: I mentioned medicine. Is what I have suggested not a problem in any discipline? I am not particularly saying that it is. Do we have no problem of having too many international students at some levels? Someone has mentioned pharmacy to me as an example—I do not know where that idea came into my ear from. Do we have the problem at any level?

Mark Simmons: As Professor Archer said, medicine is a restricted area of activity, as are dentistry and veterinary studies. Restrictions are placed on international students entering those fields.

Most international students who come to Scotland study at postgraduate rather than undergraduate level and they tend to focus on business and management. We and most institutions are keen for diversification away from business and management. That is starting to happen, but at the moment, nearly 40 per cent of international students come for business and management courses. Universities are keen for more people from overseas to participate in engineering, science and technology, for which Scotland has a shortage of applicants and needs international students to allow those departments to survive.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): Margaret Ewing asked about the countries of origin of students who study in Scotland but I do not think that we received an answer. Could a detailed breakdown of countries of origin please be forwarded to us in due course? It would also help to have information on the subjects that are studied, the universities at which students study and whether students are postgraduates or

undergraduates. I would also welcome an accurate breakdown of the students' socioeconomic backgrounds.

The importance of a European strategy has been referred to and I understand the desirability of attracting more students from other European countries, including the countries that have recently joined the European Union. However, the European Union is not the world. Some Scottish universities have long-standing and strong links with some of the poorest countries in the world—especially Commonwealth countries in Africa and Asia. Do students from such countries have a fair deal in terms of an opportunity to come to Scotland?

There is a system of Commonwealth scholarships. Do they succeed in bringing students from poorer backgrounds to Scotland? Should we do more? Should the Parliament and the Executive do something to attract students from poorer countries and from poorer backgrounds—in particular, Commonwealth countries?

Michael Bird: We manage several scholarship schemes on behalf of various clients, including the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's scholarship scheme, which has in Scotland scholars from more than 70 countries. It follows that that scheme involves a wide range of countries.

We are discussing a new scholarship scheme with the Executive, which arises from the fresh talent initiative. That scheme will be a first—it will be a Scottish Executive scholarship scheme. It is intended to trail blaze for the fresh talent initiative and to raise awareness of Scotland as an international study destination. We and the Executive are nailing down which countries we will target for the scheme. Under discussion at various stages have been the east European accession countries and education UK Scotland markets. It would help to have a quick rundown of the education UK Scotland priority markets.

Mark Simmons: Our priority markets, which were selected by the Scottish education sector, are the United States, China, India, the Gulf states—specifically the United Arab Emirates—Kenya, Russia, Mexico and Vietnam. We evaluate the matter each year, and will be working in those countries for the next three years.

14:45

The Deputy Convener: Picking up Dennis Canavan's point about the Commonwealth, I wonder whether there are any plans to support scholarships from countries such as Malawi, which has very strong links with Scotland.

Michael Bird: I do not have the details about our Commonwealth fellowship scheme in front of me, but I will send them to the committee.

Members will recall that, last year, Edinburgh hosted the 15th conference of Commonwealth education ministers. At the Executive's invitation, the British Council organised a parallel symposium for educationalists, which was a worthwhile—indeed, inspiring—exercise. I am very happy to send the committee more information about what we are doing with the Commonwealth.

The Deputy Convener: That would be helpful.

Dennis Canavan: Has any analysis been carried out into why overseas students come to study in Scotland? I take it that the reason has nothing to do with the weather. Has it more to do with the academic reputation of Scottish universities and colleges, their financial arrangements, the natural environment, the language or the friendliness of the people?

Mark Simmons: About five years ago, under education UK Scotland, we commissioned the Scottish Council for Research and Education to carry out that analysis. We will commission another report on the issue towards the end of this financial year.

That research clearly showed that word of mouth was the primary reason why students came to Scotland. Their families, friends or employers might have studied here, and recommended it as a study destination. As a result, another area that we are keen to promote is support for and welfare of people who have been recruited to study in Scotland. After all, we want them to feel that their stay here was a positive experience. Although the research will be undertaken again, anecdotal evidence suggests that word of mouth is still the primary reason for people coming to study here.

Lucy Butters: As part of this year's selection process, we interviewed about 150 international postgraduates about their reasons for choosing to come here and their awareness of Scotland before they arrived in the country. Roughly two thirds of the students, if not more, said that they chose the UK, not Scotland. In other words, they chose the UK name and then the institution where they could take their preferred course. Word of mouth was also a factor. I should also say that many of the people whom I interviewed between last October and January had a quite limited awareness of Scotland. The fact that these students chose the UK and not Scotland itself is something that we should consider in our promotional work.

Michael Bird: The English language is very strong. In a competitive international market, the ease or otherwise of getting visas is a key issue for international students who are choosing between different English-language destinations.

I am very interested to find out how the Executive thinks we should promote Scotland's international image. In fact, yesterday we received a presentation on that very issue in the Scottish international forum. Some really serious research has been conducted into how a wide range of countries perceive Scotland, and I agree with its findings that we have a blank canvas to paint on in this respect. It is clear that people around the world have positive perceptions of Scotland; however, when we drill down into that, we find that in many cases those perceptions are not up to date. That said, almost none of those perceptions is negative. It will be exciting to see what comes from the Executive's work on both the international image of Scotland and the fresh talent initiative, which is closely related. There is a lot to say about the fresh talent initiative, which has the potential to be very positive, not least for the promotion of Scottish education.

Mrs Ewing: One of the issues that most of us hear about frequently is that people who come to study in our country usually have qualifications from their country of origin. Do you have any difficulty with recognising such qualifications? Conversely, if people graduate here and go back to their country of origin, is there any difficulty with having Scottish qualifications recognised there?

Professor Archer: I do not think that the issue is only about Scottish qualifications—it is a UK issue. A lot of information is shared between institutions around the UK and that allows us properly to benchmark the qualifications that are offered at the point of entry. That has not been a problem.

On exit qualifications, Scottish education is still perceived as high-quality education. The evidence from interviews of international students at my university shows that they come to Scotland—and to my university in particular—because of the perceived quality of the degree. In some areas, particularly professional areas, the opportunity for graduates to be able to work in the UK for a while before they go back to their countries is a big plus in relation to recruitment. We have many students from Singapore in areas such as the built environment and civil engineering and those students have the opportunity to work in Scotland before they go back. That work experience gives them a professional standing in their countries that they would not otherwise be able to get as easily. Our ability to bring such students to Scotland has been much enhanced by the opportunity of work experience.

In many areas, there are big questions about whether work experience can be offered and about the cost of work permits. Employers have to pick up the cost of work permits, and in some

cases that is an impediment to the ability to offer employment opportunities.

Phil Gallie: On quality, your submission says:

"It is probably fair to say that Scotland only has three industries which would be considered among the best of their type in the world; financial services, the production of luxury goods ... and higher education."

Industries flourish when they are earners. Does the higher education system in Scotland earn and add to the economy of Scotland?

Professor Archer: I do not know whether the submission gives details of added value in terms of GDP multipliers; if not, we will provide that information. Work that is done on behalf of Universities Scotland by the Fraser of Allander Institute regularly updates information on earning powers. The multiplier on the spend is about 1.8. As far as the economics are concerned, we divide the figures into, first, spending on salaries, employment, fees and the things that students bring in and, second, the impact that is created when they spend those things. The multipliers are standard economic monitoring.

Phil Gallie: It is fair to say that your submission gives details of off-campus earnings, but I wonder how that compares with the cost of taking students through universities. What support is given by the British Government, or by their own governments, to students who come from countries such as India and China?

Professor Archer: The support is variable. There are two groups of students—from one of the countries you mentioned, or any other. One group comes sponsored by the state. The other group comes privately sponsored. The privately sponsored students do not bring anything else with them. Overseas students may or may not have a UK scholarship. In fact, one of the things that is a big attractor is the availability of the number of scholarships for students to come to the UK. Sometimes students come with a scholarship from their own country, which provides for tuition fees and the cost of living. However, we are increasingly finding that, because the cost-of-living element has been underestimated, overseas students are calling on the resources of individual universities to help them out with welfare issues.

Phil Gallie: On research, which is an important part of university work, it seems that you have had a fair amount of success in attracting cash from countries outside the EU—and, indeed, within the EU—into Scottish universities.

You talked earlier about a requirement for funding at a level of 3 per cent of GDP. Do you envisage that figure coming from central Government or does part of the funding that universities require for research include the money that you attract through other sources?

Professor Archer: There is a broad assumption in the concept of the European research area that an amount that is equivalent to about 1 per cent of GDP comes from the public sector, with 2 per cent coming from the private sector—business or industry—or whatever other route. The position in the UK is that about 1.8 per cent of GDP is spent on research and development. Within that figure, about 0.9 per cent comes from the public sector, with the remainder coming from the business sector. Scotland has about half the GDP earnings and our spend is different—we do not have the business and industry sector component that the rest of the UK has. If we are to undertake work at the same level, our dependency on the public sector is disproportionate.

Phil Gallie: Have you any ideas about how to change that? What can your British Council colleagues do to assist?

Professor Archer: The fundamental issue that Scotland is trying to address on many fronts is that of increasing the number of businesses that can help the country to grow its GDP to at least the same rate as that of the rest of the UK, or—I would hope—to a greater level. I do not need to tell the committee about the variety of policies involved in that, but Scottish Enterprise is one of the organisations that is trying to help the process along.

On how that relates to the universities and to our ability to continue to attract students, the big research game in town at the moment is the development of the intermediary technology institutes. In a way, they are a surrogate for business research and development centres. The idea is that the ITIs can conduct medium-term research on behalf of a sector that does not have a sufficient number of businesses to be able to do its own research. The jury is out on the ITIs at the moment and we will have to wait for quite a long time before we can see whether the game has worked and whether the ITIs have helped.

Phil Gallie: I have a final, personal question. I notice that you have an engineering background. Why have engineering courses in Scottish universities lost their impact? Is there a recognition across the world that that has happened or is Scottish engineering still perceived to be a top product?

Professor Archer: That is a tricky question. The concept of engineering has moved on from the heavy engineering with which Scotland was associated and into design. That development has not been picked up yet by communities at large. We have a job still to do to explain what new engineering is.

Certainly, engineering is tough: it requires a good background in science and mathematics.

The turn-off back in school for young people who study science and mathematics is part of a story that flows through into the university area.

One of the interesting things about European expansion is that many of the accession states still have a better concept of subjects such as engineering. Their kids have a background in science and engineering that could enable some of them to come to Scotland to start a new wave of activity. However, engineering is generally perceived to be a tough area. The perception is that it is associated with manufacturing. We have not yet managed to change the public's outdated ideas.

15:00

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian)

(Lab): I want to move the discussion on from engineering to science. For a long time, Scotland had a big reputation for innovation in science. Many people had high hopes that bioscience could do a lot in Scotland, both for us and for the rest of the world. It is well known that there is a climate of public hostility to some bits of bioscience, such as those to do with genetic modification. To what extent is that a problem? Conversely, if the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament could lead public opinion to view that area of science as something that should be supported—that is a big “if”—could that be an advantage for research institutes, companies and universities in Scotland? Could we become known as the place to which people come to work in that field?

Professor Archer: I think that Scotland has some of the best life-science, bioscience and bioengineering work in the UK. That is consistently underpinned by its ability to win new opportunities. The new pro-bio initiative, which is coming to Scotland against all sorts of competition from different parts of the UK, is an example of that.

The public's attitude to the support that the Parliament might be able to give to the growth opportunities is important. There will be sensitivity about whether there is public backing for the Parliament to support the initiatives that the scientists and engineers think are seriously worth growing and which have enormous growth potential in the research parks around the universities in Scotland.

In the area of life sciences and biosciences, we are playing a long game. The life cycle of projects that deliver economic benefit is probably about 10 years. It is a question of being prepared to play a long game to get the benefits. We certainly have the capabilities, but if we twitch too soon and withdraw from the game, we will lose the opportunities.

Mark Simmons: The number of international students who come to Scotland to study biological science perhaps reflects that. They represent the third largest block of overseas students; the largest blocks study business and information technology. Biological science is very important to international recruitment.

Professor Archer: Those students are mainly postgraduates.

Mark Simmons: That is right.

Mr Raffan: I have an anecdote. The convener, Gordon Jackson and I were in Paris recently, as part of our work on the inquiry. We got the strong impression that the Irish Republic had a higher profile in Paris than Scotland had—although I can talk only about the people to whom we spoke.

Three weeks later, I went back to Paris and visited the Irish education and cultural centre, which is in a magnificent seminary building behind the Panthéon. The building has strong Irish connections—in case you cannot find it, it is on a street called Rue d'Irlande. The wonderful set-up helped me to understand why Ireland has such a high profile in the French capital.

I thought that I should be fair, so I went to the British Council building, which is near Les Invalides. It is not nearly as impressive as the Irish centre, but that might be just a one-off. When I went inside, I found that there was no mention of Scotland; we are subsumed under the general title "British Council". The entry and reception area is rather unimpressive and very little written material is provided. Despite what is available on websites, such material should be provided. I am worried by the name "British Council". Why do we call it that instead of just saying what it is—an education and cultural centre—as every other country does? It worries me that we are subsumed under a general British title. I am not a member of the SNP, but such experiences make me more nationalist with a small n. Is my experience typical? How can we raise the profile of Scotland, because that is the point?

Michael Bird: We have had serious discussions in the British Council about the name, but we return again and again to the fact that it is such a well-known brand name for us in 110 countries.

I am familiar with the British Council building in Paris and I agree that when one goes inside, there is no visible statement about Scotland. However, our colleagues in the British Council in France have been fantastic in supporting the Executive's year-long promotion of Scotland in France as part of the 100th anniversary of the entente cordiale. We feel that we have worked effectively with British Council France, which is one of our directorates that is very on board as far as the Scottish agenda is concerned. If you go back in

about a month, I am pretty confident that you will see visible statements of the British Council's commitment to Scotland because we in British Council Scotland have just produced an attractive set of posters that is going out today to every British Council office in the world. The posters highlight areas of excellence in Scotland and signpost websites as well as information sources in our office. The poster campaign is part of our communications effort and part of mobilising the British Council global network still further to work for Scotland.

Mr Raffan: It is not just a matter of the buildings: as I went round Paris, I kept seeing the magazine "Irish Connections", and there is another Irish magazine, too. Outside Shakespeare and Company—that well-known tourist attraction and bookshop—there are piles of "Irish Connections". We do not seem to have anything similar. The Irish seem to be on the ball and we do not.

Michael Bird: The Irish have a much smaller international network than we do.

Mr Raffan: When they are present, one knows that they are present.

Michael Bird: Sure. To state the obvious, Ireland currently holds the presidency of the European Union. We have many conversations about international models for Scotland and the effectiveness or otherwise of Ireland in promoting itself. Again, we come back to the ways in which there is a valid comparison between the two and, as regards an international network, Ireland simply does not have the network that the British Council has for the UK and Scotland.

The Convener: I will follow on from Keith Raffan's question. The title "British Council Scotland" is a bit of a mouthful. The organisation education UK Scotland is anomalous as well, given that the education system in Scotland is different from that in the rest of the UK. It is difficult to see how that sends out a clear-cut message. Virtually all the British Council's activities are in devolved areas—I presume that you deal mainly with education and culture, which are devolved responsibilities. Post-devolution, we have the British Council, which is linked to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London, from where the funding comes, and you are built into that network—

Michael Bird: Yes and no.

The Convener: Why cannot we have a Scottish council post-devolution?

Michael Bird: We have a core grant from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. At present, that is less than 50 per cent of the total turnover in Scotland because of the increasing buy-in from the Executive, the funding councils, our

partnerships with the Scottish Arts Council, the Royal Society of Edinburgh and so on. We believe that, since devolution, the British Council has demonstrated that it delivers for Scotland—it ain't broke, so don't fix it.

I think that you mentioned Scottish networks international and education UK Scotland. Education UK Scotland works brilliantly in an international context, which might not be apparent from here. It was designed to lever off the education UK brand, which has been established incredibly successfully in many countries throughout the world—it capitalises on an existing UK brand for the benefit of Scotland.

The Convener: Such successes are difficult for the committee to measure. However, from all the research of which you are aware, how does Scotland's image compare to that of other countries and, in particular, that of the rest of the UK? I know that the British Council commissioned research in Ireland—I think that it was called "Through Irish Eyes"—to find out how Scotland and the UK are perceived in Ireland. Have you done similar exercises in other countries? How does Scotland compare with the rest of the UK, given that you say that the UK brand is a great lever for Scotland?

Michael Bird: You may have seen reference in the newspapers last week to a research exercise that the British Council conducted in the USA, in which young high achievers were interviewed in southern California and Texas. Specifically, Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans and African-Americans were interviewed. It is clear why those states and that section of the population were chosen. The research report, which was entitled "Pale People in the Rain", looked at the future leadership generation in the south of the USA, and its conclusions were widely reported in the press, because on one level they were quite funny.

The report revealed that among the young people who were interviewed there were very low levels of knowledge and awareness of the UK. Less than 1 per cent of those who were questioned wanted to come to Scotland and not a single one could identify a recent UK scientific achievement. However, I feel—and I felt this yesterday at the Scottish international forum when we were looking at the international image of Scotland—that that is a huge opportunity. That level of ignorance and the lack of positive—or negative—perceptions actually mean that clearly there is a lot to play for in the marketplace in America.

The Convener: Your argument that Scotland has a positive image around the world and that we have to lever off the UK brand—despite the fact that, post-devolution, the British Council's

responsibilities are in devolved areas—was interesting.

Michael Bird: We take a pragmatic view. We lever off the UK brand when there is advantage for Scotland in so doing, and we play the Scottish card when it works. Since devolution, I and many British Council colleagues in many countries have been struck by the real level of interest and the potential level of interest in Scotland, which is reflected in visitor numbers. It is a problem and a pleasure that is shared between the committee, the Parliament, the Executive and the British Council in Scotland. One of the things that makes our work so enjoyable is the number of people who are interested in coming to Scotland to find out what is really going on.

Dennis Canavan: The British Council briefing lists four projects in which the council has been involved to promote Scotland internationally. It refers to Scotland in Sweden in 2002, the Venice biennale in 2003 and the 100th anniversary of the entente cordiale this year, and there is the inevitable reference to tartan day, whatever we might think of it. Would it be asking too much for the council to send to the committee a comprehensive list of all the projects in which it has been involved since the Scottish Parliament was set up? I am thinking of projects that could be described as promoting Scotland abroad, whether they were big events, such as those to which you referred, or small cultural groups that went overseas on tour with some assistance—financial or otherwise—from the British Council.

Michael Bird: I will do my best. You are asking quite a lot, because there has been so much activity in so many different fields. I have with me some information that I will leave with the clerk on those specific promotions in New York, Stockholm and France. I will put my mind to following up your question. The list will not be comprehensive, simply because there has been so much activity every month, let alone since devolution. However, I am certainly happy to add to the examples that I gave in the written submission.

Mark Simmons: You asked for comprehensive information and statistics. Our annual UK and Scotland education report comes out next week, and all members will receive a copy. As an example, my small team in the British Council has involved more than 50 education institutions in Scotland in international activity consisting of both outward missions overseas and inward missions to Scotland. The activities that we undertake are comprehensive.

The Convener: I was going to bring this part of the meeting to a close, but your answers have sparked a quick question from Keith Raffan.

Mr Raffan: Can we hear more from you? I make that request as an individual member of the Scottish Parliament, because I had much more to do with the British Council as a member at Westminster than I do here. You are hiding your light under a bushel, so perhaps it could be made more visible. Lots of things are happening but, for example, the Royal Society of Edinburgh's conference on hepatitis got no coverage in the media at all. You would think we were trying to hide our international scientific and medical excellence. We need to broadcast those things and we need to know what you are up to.

Michael Bird: Thank you. I could have talked for the whole hour about what we are doing in partnership with the Royal Society of Edinburgh alone to showcase the international excellence of science in Scotland, because it is brilliant. I will take you up on your request. We are going to be neighbours from October onwards. One practical thing I would like to do is invite the committee to visit us in the Tun, so that we can tell you as much as you would like to hear about our work.

The Convener: I know that the committee echoes Keith Raffan's sentiments and welcomes your offer. We look forward to being neighbours at Holyrood—we will try not to be too noisy. We will keep our eye on you, as the themes that we have discussed will continue for years to come. Thank you for coming along to the committee today, for giving us your time and for your succinct and helpful written submission, which helped us to prepare questions.

15:15

Meeting suspended.

15:24

On resuming—

Low-cost Carriers (European Commission Decision)

The Convener: The next item is the report compiled by Phil Gallie on the European Commission's findings in the case of Ryanair and Charleroi airport. The committee will recall that we agreed to appoint Phil Gallie as a reporter on the issue and I record the committee's thanks for the succinct report that he has brought to us today. I am sure that we have all had the chance to read it, but I shall give him the opportunity to say a few words to introduce it.

Phil Gallie: We stayed very much within the guidelines that were set out, although those guidelines were slightly expanded in respect of phases 1 and 2. We apologise for not going forward into a wider review, which we did not do simply because of the time and effort that that would have taken and because of the fact that, to some degree, the report becomes sub judice, as Ryanair has appealed the Charleroi decision. Apart from that, in connection with the original phase 2 comments, it has come to our attention since our report was compiled that a report has been prepared for the Committee of the Regions. Members might like to amend our report to make some reference to that.

The Convener: Who is that report by?

Phil Gallie: It has been written by an English councillor for the Committee of the Regions. I do not have the details of the paper with me, but the clerks are well aware of it. It is something that we could perhaps refer to under sections 31 and 32 of the report. If the committee decides to go along with the conclusions and recommendations, we could simply add a reference to the existence of that report to the recommendation in paragraph 63.

The Convener: Thank you. Do other members have comments?

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): I thank Phil Gallie for his hard work. It is a good report and contains a lot of useful information, facts and figures. I would be happy to include the additional references that Phil suggested in the body of the report and in the recommendations, and I am happy to go along with the recommendations. He was right to highlight the slight difficulty of the sub judice nature of the matter while we await news of the final appeal, and it would be proper for us to bear that in mind.

The Convener: I know that the committee will want to thank the clerks and the Scottish Parliament information centre researchers.

Phil Gallie: We added that into the report. I had hoped to list people's names, but I would certainly like to thank Nick Hawthorne and Alan Rehfish, who were excellent and provided much of the meat of the report.

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): As other colleagues have said, Phil Gallie's report is a useful and comprehensive document. The recommendation in paragraph 63 in particular, which concerns Inverness airport, is a salient point well made. We obviously cannot highlight any recommendation above any other, but that is certainly an important point and one that I hope the Executive and its agencies will address with a degree of urgency.

Mrs Ewing: I congratulate Phil Gallie on his report. I hope that it did not take him away from memorising the EU constitution. It is an excellent report and I was delighted when I read through it, and I have no difficulty with adding a reference to the Committee of the Regions report to the recommendations.

Paragraph 14 makes a brief reference to public service obligations, and that is a point that could perhaps have been developed slightly more in the context of which other European countries have PSOs. There certainly seems to be confusion in this Parliament as to which countries operate PSOs. Like Alasdair Morrison, I am concerned about Inverness Dalcross airport. We want PSOs to be implemented. Therefore, I think that we should add the issue of PSOs to paragraph 62, as well as a recommendation that the private finance initiative at Inverness airport be considered further. I believe that there is the prospect of the private ownership of Inverness airport being bought out and brought into public ownership. Inverness airport was one of the first PFI projects in Scotland and I believe that to buy it out would cost in the region of only £13 million. If it were being bought out, that would make our recommendations firmer. Obviously, the committee can consider that point.

15:30

The Convener: Can you just elaborate, Margaret, on what you want to add to paragraph 62?

Mrs Ewing: I want the recommendations to place more emphasis on PSOs so that the routes from Dalcross airport can be not only maintained but expanded. British Airways and bmi currently run the routes, which give access to Heathrow and Gatwick airports. The list of low-cost airlines—for example, Snowflake—that are closing their routes shows that international communications from

Dalcross are being restricted. We should consider—I have not worked this out as a sentence, as you have probably gathered—the possibility of buying out Dalcross airport, which would cost, I believe, in the region of £13 million. However, SPICe could check that figure. I hope that that makes sense.

Mr Home Robertson: I join colleagues in complimenting Phil Gallie and the others who were involved in drafting the report, which is very useful. I suppose that it is inevitable and quite proper that anything that Phil drafts will pay a lot of attention to Prestwick. Equally, my colleagues from the north have referred to Inverness airport. I hope that it will be possible somewhere in the report's conclusions to make a passing reference to the fact that we are all keen on encouraging opportunities for low-cost flights to and from other Scottish destinations, whether Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow or anywhere else in Scotland where the opportunity may arise.

Mr Raffan: I, too, congratulate Phil Gallie on a comprehensive report, which I believe is not unconnected to the inquiry that we are undertaking, certainly in terms of the future of the Scottish Executive's interim route development fund. The report has helpful information on that. Clearly, that fund is a hit-and-miss one, given that there are flights or routes that are supported but then cease to operate. That is inevitable with such things, but it is certainly something that we must acknowledge and pay attention to in our final report on the promoting Scotland inquiry.

There is not much point in promoting Scotland if we cannot connect Scotland in the easiest way. I am concerned about direct flights and the nature and comfort of them, particularly those to Europe. They seem to be reverting to almost Neville Chamberlain-type planes, bouncing across the North sea. All that is missing is Neville Chamberlain curtains to match.

Mrs Ewing: And umbrellas.

Mr Raffan: Anyway, I will leave it there.

The Convener: Thank you for the comments. We must reach a conclusion on two issues. First, we must decide what we do with Phil Gallie's report; and secondly, we must decide whether we agree to make the changes that members suggested. Given that this is our last meeting before the recess, I suggest that, unless members have proposed wordings now, we do not make any changes just now. We can do that by e-mail or other correspondence over the next couple of days.

Irene Oldfather: We can get the clerks to e-mail us.

The Convener: Yes, we can get the clerks to do that and ensure that members are happy with

what is proposed. Are members happy with the suggested course of action? Does Phil Gallie want to respond to that?

Phil Gallie: Yes. I would certainly go along with what is suggested. I think that Margaret Ewing's proposed change can be relatively easily accommodated by just adding a few words towards the end of paragraph 62 suggesting that the Scottish Executive consider the position.

I understand the point that John Home Robertson makes, but the case of Ryanair and Charleroi initiated the report, so we inevitably highlighted that issue in the report. However, the desirability of low-cost flights is emphasised in the recommendations and conclusions and the real threat to Edinburgh airport, Glasgow airport and any of the other airports would be those low-cost flights going to publicly owned airports elsewhere. I understand why John Home Robertson would like such a reference to be in the report and I have no objection to that, but it was not included because I was concentrating on a particular issue.

Mr Home Robertson: Fair enough.

The Convener: The rest of the committee might be happy if Margaret Ewing, John Home Robertson, Phil Gallie and the clerks came up with wording. Are members happy with that way forward?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The second issue that we should discuss is what to do with the report. Perhaps we could send a copy to the Executive for comment and copies to the Parliament's Local Government and Transport Committee and the European Commission. Are there any other suggestions? I am looking for ideas.

Mrs Ewing: What about sending a copy to the Finance Committee?

The Convener: We could send copies to the Finance Committee as well as the Local Government and Transport Committee.

Mr Raffan: Phil Gallie's first recommendation is that

"the Committee ... suspends further action and investigations into the Charleroi Decision, pending the outcome of the appeal to the European Courts."

Should we hold on to the report until we find out what that decision is, or should we send it now anyway? What does Phil Gallie recommend?

Phil Gallie: It is worth sending the report now because it makes several points, not least about Inverness, and there is additional information that is contained in the material that SPICe provided that could be of use to others. Passing the report on now would be useful, but I would like to think

that the committee will want to return to the matter after it hears the results of the appeal.

The Convener: That could be the way forward. The committee is happy to endorse the report and we again thank Phil Gallie and those who helped him for all their efforts. The report vindicates our decision to appoint reporters. This is the first time that we have done so and I hope that the committee will be more inclined to appoint reporters when specific issues arise in future.

Irene Oldfather: There were a number of reporters in the previous parliamentary session, but you are right to say that this is the first time that there has been a reporter in this session.

The Convener: Thanks for rubbing that in—we will take that on board. Appointing a reporter was the committee's decision and I hope that we can use the mechanism again in the future.

Convener's Report

15:37

The Convener: The next agenda item is the convener's report.

The first matter in the convener's report is the progress—or lack of progress—with our invitation to the Executive to brief us on the work of Regleg. As things stand, we are no further forward with our invitation to the First Minister, and the questions that we have asked once or twice have not been answered. I invite comments on the subject.

Mr Raffan: I have previously expressed concern about the matter. All that happens each time that we discuss the matter is that I get increasingly concerned that we seem to be getting into a game of ping-pong, without there being any score. Obviously, the First Minister has passed the buck to the Minister for Finance and Public Services, external relations and everything else, and we should certainly get him along to the committee. We must get comprehensive answers. The matter has gone on and the First Minister has apologised. One letter said:

"Thank you for your letters of 18 November and 25 February".

That was in a response from the First Minister in May—frankly, I think that such a delay is outrageous. We must get to the bottom of what is going on, as the Scottish presidency is more than halfway through.

The Convener: I know that more members want to speak, but I remind the committee that there are options. The committee has the power to summon ministers, of course, but other options are continuing to write back or continuing to seek a date on which Andy Kerr can appear before the committee.

Irene Oldfather: I am in favour of seeking a date on which Andy Kerr can come to the committee. To be honest, I thought that what was proposed last time was a bit counter-productive, but I went along with the committee's wishes. The previous letter was quite clear in saying that responsibility lies with Andy Kerr. We could have got on with the business and we could have had a date, which would have been my personal preference. We should not waste any more time in playing ping-pong on this. We should just get on with the business and invite the minister with responsibility along to the committee so that we can get answers to the questions that members of the committee rightly have.

The Convener: We attempted to get Andy Kerr for today's meeting, but that did not prove

possible. At our previous meeting, John Home Robertson suggested that we write back to the First Minister.

Dennis Canavan: Convener, I wonder whether you or the clerk could enlighten us on our power to summon ministers to give evidence. Do we have the power to summon a specific minister, including the First Minister, or do we simply have the power to summon an unspecified minister?

The Convener: My understanding is that we have the power to summon any minister to appear before the committee. I will ask the clerk to elaborate on the guidelines in the standing orders.

Stephen Imrie (Clerk): I would be reluctant to give a full explanation of section 23 of the Scotland Act 1998 without looking into the detail. Parliamentary committees have the power to summon individual ministers who have specific responsibilities in their portfolios. If the committee wants further explanation of the power, I will get back to it on that.

Dennis Canavan: We should at least leave open the possibility of summoning the First Minister on this specific matter, bearing in mind his responsibility in chairing Regleg.

Mr Home Robertson: It might be clever to let the First Minister's private secretary know that this discussion has taken place and that it would be helpful if the First Minister could let us have a reply and come to give evidence to us as soon as possible. There is no need for us to press that particular button—that should not be necessary.

Mrs Ewing: Last week, the committee received quite a lot of publicity for its report on structural funds. Articles have appeared in the press saying why the UK Government ministers were wrong to snub the committee. That should be drawn to the attention of the First Minister, as he could similarly be seen to be snubbing the committee. He, not Andy Kerr, is the president of Regleg and he should come and tell us what he is doing in that role.

The Convener: I fear that if we invite Andy Kerr to the committee, he will offer to write back to us a few times as he does not attend the Regleg meetings in place of the First Minister.

Mr Raffan: John Home Robertson has pointed to a way out. This discussion is on the record, and perhaps a copy of the *Official Report* should be sent to the First Minister's office. We should not have to press the button. Frankly, I hope that an amber warning light will be flashing in the First Minister's head when he reads some of the comments that have been made today. If it is not flashing in his head, we will have to press the red button, but I would rather that the amber one worked.

The Convener: Okay. We will do that if the committee is happy with that way forward. We will not meet again until after the summer recess. If we wanted to have Andy Kerr before the committee because the First Minister, for one reason or another, could not attend or because we made a different decision, we would have plenty of time to arrange that. In the first instance, we will write to the First Minister, asking for information and enclosing a copy of the *Official Report* of today's meeting. We will have the whole summer in which to make progress on the matter.

Mr Raffan: We have all these questions—when are we going to get answers to them? They are pretty routine. I am beginning to wonder whether anything has been done with Regleg. Before any minister comes before us to give evidence, we need a full briefing and answers to some of the questions so that we can pursue them further.

Irene Oldfather: I am not in favour of writing to the First Minister again. Keith Raffan has put his finger on the issue: they are pretty routine questions. We would be summoning the First Minister to a committee meeting to answer pretty routine questions. I do not see what the difficulty would be with our inviting Andy Kerr. I am really not in favour of ping-pong; it has gone far enough with the letters going backwards and forwards. I was not in favour of sending a letter the last time, but I went along with the committee's wishes and I am certainly not in favour of sending another letter, because sending letters is not getting us anywhere. I agree that time is wearing on and that we should get the answers to the questions, but the way to do that with routine questions is to summon the minister who has responsibility for the relevant area.

15:45

The Convener: I clarify that my understanding of John Home Robertson's proposal, which is supported by a number of other members, is that we copy the *Official Report* of this meeting to the First Minister's office and, after the summer recess—

Mr Home Robertson: I would not copy anything to anywhere; we should just pick up the telephone.

The Convener: We can do either.

Mr Morrison: I agree with Keith Raffan that the questions are routine and that such routine questions should be easily answered, whether they are answered verbally before the committee or in writing, which would mean that we would have the answers before we resume after the recess. I would appreciate it if we could have the answers sometime during the recess rather than having to wait until the autumn. That would give us a way forward without escalating the matter's

importance, although it is important. I am sure that our clerks are capable of using a telephone and reminding the First Minister's office and Andy Kerr's office that we have a number of outstanding routine questions and that they would appreciate a letter that could be sent to committee members during the recess.

The Convener: There is no huge gulf between what Alasdair Morrison proposes and what was proposed before.

Mr Raffan: I am glad that Alasdair Morrison agrees with me that the questions are routine and I agree with him that they are important, so what is the problem? Why are ministers not replying to the questions, which are simple? The First Minister is chairing Regleg for the first time ever and it is likely to be the last time for 50 years or whatever—I do not know when the presidency will come round to us again—so why is he so reluctant to come to the committee to raise Scotland's profile and talk about what he is doing on the international stage?

Mr Morrison: The other thing—[*Interruption.*] Sorry, convener.

The Convener: I was just going to try to summarise what we have consensus on.

Mr Morrison: Just to help you in that summary, I am saying that we are asking routine questions with straightforward answers and that we should get those answers in writing before the beginning of the next term.

The Convener: There is clearly a lot of frustration on the committee that we have asked the questions before, but on the basis of a combination of the suggestions from John Home Robertson and Alasdair Morrison, I suggest that we ask the clerks to pursue with the First Minister's office the answers to the questions and the outstanding invitation. We will revisit the matter after the summer recess, because there is nothing that we can do before then anyway. It will be on the agenda when we come back after the summer recess and other members will no doubt want to contribute at that point.

Mr Raffan: Can we give the clerk the go-ahead to get a minister at our first meeting after the summer recess so that we do not waste any more time?

The Convener: That is happening anyway. It was supposed to happen for this meeting, but we could not get a minister. That will continue, but we will pursue the answers to the questions with the First Minister's office. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The next item in the convener's report is the proposed co-operation agreement

between the Scottish Executive Education Department and the French ministry of youth, education and research. As committee members can see from their papers, I have received a letter from Euan Robson outlining the potential for an agreement between France and Scotland. Do members have any comments?

Irene Oldfather: I very much welcome the agreement, which is great news. A tremendous amount of work is going on at local authority level on exchanges between young people from regions and local authority areas throughout Scotland and France, but it is good to have that work formalised in the agreement. My local authority, North Ayrshire Council, has a number of exchanges with schools in France and we regularly have young people coming from France to Scotland and going in the other direction. To my mind, that is one of the building blocks of the European Union; investments in enthusing and motivating our young people and giving them such experiences are investments in the future of the EU.

Mr Raffan: I am thankful to Euan Robson for letting us know about the agreement, but I would like more detail on the substance of it. I note that the French approached us, not the other way round, so I would also like to ask the Education Department whether it intends to follow the initiative, which is the first such agreement, by pursuing agreements with any other countries in Europe or whether it is waiting to be approached.

The Convener: Are you suggesting that we write to the Executive to find out about that?

Mr Raffan: Yes, I would like some more detail. The minister might not have much more information at the moment but we should ask to be kept posted of any developments and whether the Executive intends to replicate the initiative with any other country in the European Union.

Dennis Canavan: I agree, but I think that we should express strong support for the idea in principle.

The Convener: Do we agree to accept the recommendation but to write to the Executive for more information?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Members have before them quite a big document, which is the briefing paper on the proposed early-warning system in relation to subsidiarity, following on from the agreement of the EU constitution—by the heads of state, that is, rather than by the member states as such. I suggest that we do not spend too much time on the matter at the moment as this is quite a big issue. We will discuss future inquiries at the away days that we will hold over the recess, and the EU

constitution will creep up in those discussions in some shape or form.

Irene Oldfather: I agree with your suggestion. This is a complex issue that I have a number of questions about and it merits greater attention than we can give it at the moment. I welcome the clerks' work in putting down some initial thoughts on the matter. I agree that we should deal with this at one of our away days. We could take the time to go into the detail of the matter during one of our future inquiries. It is important that we get this right.

The Convener: For clarification, the reason why the matter is in our papers today is that this is our last meeting before the recess. That is why we asked the clerks to produce the paper, for which we thank them.

Phil Gallie: I welcome the fact that the paper has been produced. I am sorry, convener, but I think that it is worth discussing the issue. The subject with which the paper deals is central to the European constitution and its effect on the Scottish Parliament. We are told that the constitution has massive benefits for parliaments such as the Scottish Parliament and the United Kingdom Parliament. However, the report before us demonstrates that article 9 of the constitution is, in effect, nothing more than meaningless guff. There is no possibility of us carrying out meaningful communication in the six-week period that is laid down in the constitution. We are talking about, at best, a two to three-week consultation period for the Scottish Parliament's involvement. Given that we all know that we cannot even get out of ministers letters that we have been waiting for since last November, as Keith Raffan pointed out, what chance does article 9 have of providing any benefit at all to the Scottish Parliament?

I welcome the paper that has been produced but, as far as I am concerned, the matter smacks of Whitehall farce, as does much of the European constitution.

The Convener: I am sure that there is some sympathy for your view, but there will be plenty of opportunities for you to air your concerns at a later point.

Mr Raffan: I strongly disagree with Phil Gallie. An early-warning system, even if the period involved is short, is better than no warning system at all. The issue concerns one of the areas in which there is potential for greater co-operation between the national and regional parliaments.

Phil Gallie is right to highlight the inadequacy of the six-week period. I like the four assessment criteria and I pay tribute to the clerks and Professor Drew Scott for producing this useful paper. I also liked the traffic-light grading system, which is perhaps where I got my reference to

amber from—the system goes green, amber and red.

I do not want to go into the options at the moment, but if we start consulting other committees, we will run out of time. In the confined two to three-week period that we might ultimately have—and which we must try to extend—we cannot consult other committees properly. Having served on the Finance Committee, I know how difficult it was to get anything out of other committees when we tried to consult them on the budget. They were either in the middle of an inquiry, overwhelmed with work or dealing with a piece of legislation. We will have to do the work and ask the clerks to talk to clerks and conveners of other committees to try to get some helpful feedback. I like the clerks' paper as it stands, but Irene Oldfather is right to say that more detailed discussion is needed.

The Convener: If there are no further comments, we will put the matter back on our agenda for consideration after the committee has discussed how it will handle the whole issue of the EU constitution, which has taken a step forwards.

The next item in the report flags up an on-going issue for the committee, which is the proposed establishment of a Scottish institute or forum for EU affairs. The concept has support in this committee and in Scotland's academic community and there is no doubt support for it elsewhere. I would have liked there to have been more progress on the matter. Professor Drew Scott, who was helpful in relation to the item that we have just discussed, has issued us with a standing invitation for dinner at the Europa institute in the near future to discuss the matter. I suggest that if we still want to progress the matter, we should arrange that dinner as soon as possible. I understand that academics from the University of Edinburgh and elsewhere who are involved in EU affairs will attend, so the dinner would present a good opportunity to chat to academics about how to take the plans forward. I invite members' comments.

Mr Raffan: If we are to take the matter forward, a lot more preparatory work will be needed. I am new to the committee in this parliamentary session, so I am not aware of previous discussions, but it seems to me that anything that is called a forum in Scotland has problems. The Scottish Civic Forum was very slow to get off the ground and earlier today Mr Bird said that the jury is out on the effectiveness of the Scottish international forum. We should be careful about setting up another forum unless we know that it can work and we should consider the experience from elsewhere, such as that of the Institute of European Affairs in the Republic of Ireland, which is mentioned in the convener's report. The idea is

certainly worth progressing, but we should hasten slowly and ensure that preparatory work is done so that the forum is not a damp squib, but has clear objectives and is effective.

The Convener: I suggest that we arrange the informal dinner with academics, at which I hope that we will reach agreement on how to take the matter forward.

Phil Gallie: What could such a forum achieve? To be honest, it strikes me that it would be another talking shop and I wonder whether the academics would be talking to the right people anyway. Members of the Scottish Parliament have no influence whatever over the issues that the proposed forum would address, as we are all well aware. Perhaps the academics should talk to Westminster members of Parliament or members of the European Parliament. I cannot envisage any benefits that would come from the forum.

The Convener: I understand that a Scottish institute or forum would be a broad church in which anyone who is interested in European affairs could be involved. For example, academics in Scotland would no doubt undertake research, work with parliamentarians and other interested organisations and invite prominent speakers to Scotland from around the world to speak on EU affairs. That is why the committee has supported the idea in the past and why there is support for it elsewhere, too. Phil Gallie will have an opportunity to contribute to the discussion—

Phil Gallie: Would there be a cost, convener? You know quite a lot about the matter.

The Convener: No costs are involved at the moment.

Phil Gallie: Would there be a cost to the Scottish Executive?

The Convener: The idea is not a Government initiative. There would no doubt be discussions about who would fund the forum.

Phil Gallie: If someone wants to fund it.

Gordon Jackson: I could not disagree more with Phil Gallie. I accept that things become talking shops and I do not like the word "forum" for that reason, because it is suggestive of a talking shop, whereas "institute" sounds different—although it is a question of "What's in a name? A rose by any other name" and so on.

The committee is considering how Scotland promotes itself abroad and members will no doubt mention the experiences that some of us have had on trips abroad. It would be a good idea for people to get together in the way that the convener describes with an agenda to promote Scotland in Europe. I am up for a meeting with academics to discuss taking the idea forward.

Irene Oldfather: I was involved in discussions about the proposed forum in the European Committee in the first session of the Parliament and I was very much in favour of the idea. Drew Scott has long supported the idea, which is about the academic community and others working in partnership with elected members to try to advance a stimulating agenda on Europe, harness ideas and tap into the thinking and research that are happening, not just in Scotland but throughout Europe.

Sometimes elected members can live in too small a community and not be open to the wider research that is going on within the academic world, which, if it influenced our thinking, could help us to develop better and more succinct policies and strategies. I am open to this and I hope that the committee will get involved in developing it.

16:00

The Convener: Okay; thank you.

We move on to the final item, which is the monthly report on inward and outward visits and events from the external liaison unit of the Parliament.

Mr Raffan: I just noted down here that our visits overseas for the current inquiry have not been noted in the outward visits. I think that they should be. Any outward committee visits should be on the record.

The Convener: I will ensure that the clerks give that information to the people who put together the report.

As there are no further comments, we will move on—

Mr Raffan: I am sorry. I know that the United Nations secretary general's executive co-ordinator for the millennium development goals campaign—that is quite a mouthful—is visiting on 30 June to speak to the international development group. It might be helpful if even just two or three members of the committee met someone like that on such visits. It is part of our remit and it has come up in the current inquiry. The whole point of being given these lists of visits is so that we can participate in them.

The Convener: Anyone who wants to go along to such events is welcome to do so. They should give their details to the clerk.

Mr Raffan: It might be useful for members of the committee to have a separate meeting, especially when someone as important as this is coming to the Parliament.

The Convener: That is a fair point. I just remind the committee that the visitor is a speaker who is

visiting a cross-party group and who has expressed an interest in speaking to members of the Finance Committee, so the ball was in their court to a certain extent. I will certainly take your comments on board.

Mr Raffan: Perhaps such visitors should be redirected towards us.

Petition

Food Supplements (European Directive) (PE738)

16:02

The Convener: We move on to the next item on the agenda, PE738. There is some background to the petition in the papers. The petition is to press the European Commission to establish maximum permitted levels of nutrients based on science rather than nutritional need. It relates to the food supplements directive and the desire of some people in the industry for the regulations to maintain the maximum strengths that currently exist.

Phil Gallie: I go along with option D in the paper, which I believe is in line with discussions that we have had in the committee over a fair period of time since I became a member. Option D seems to cover everything that we have said before.

Mr Raffan: I go along with that, although perhaps we should go with a combination of options D and B. We should use option D as the contents of a letter to the Executive in which we urge the Executive to provide a prompt reply. I think that the work has been done. I do not see any point in the committee doing any more at this stage.

The Convener: Is everyone happy to go ahead and to agree with the points raised by the petitioners and write to the Executive ministers?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: We will proceed on that basis and notify the petitioners. We will also ensure that the petitioners receive a copy of our letter to the Executive.

Scottish Executive (Scrutiny)

16:04

The Convener: The next agenda item is pre and post-council scrutiny. As ever, I invite comments from the committee on any of the items that are mentioned.

Phil Gallie: I have a comment on the notes and recommendations. I accept the compliments that have been offered about the environmental council report, but their representatives have not been detailed. We have criticised all the other reports, but that particular report does not detail the representatives.

The Convener: I am sorry; I am not quite following your point. You said that there are no details of the representatives—

Phil Gallie: I was pointing out that the report that we have been complimenting contains no details of any representatives. After all, we criticise other reports for lacking those very same details. I just wanted to take a balanced view; I agree that the report is excellent.

Stephen Imrie: Just for clarification, the environment council will not take place until 28 June, whereas the other five councils listed in the report have already taken place. The Executive has agreed with the committee that it will indicate ministerial attendance in its post-council reports; however, it need not necessarily provide that information in its pre-council reports. That is the reason for the difference.

Mr Raffan: I totally agree with the assessment that the pre-council scrutiny report for the environment council is very comprehensive. I must say that I am getting increasingly fed up with some of the post-council scrutiny reports. For example, the general affairs and external relations council report tells us hardly anything. For example, although it mentions

“Preparation for The 17-18 June European Council”,

it does not even refer to the European constitution. It mentions only the elections of various people such as the president of the Commission—and those did not even take place. I just find it inadequate. We should be pressing for more detailed information in post-council reports.

The Convener: I thought that we had pressed for that information before. We will double check to find out what has happened.

Phil Gallie: On paragraph 4 of the 28 June environment council report, I raised at our previous meeting the question whether the air-conditioning system in the new Scottish

Parliament building complies with the registration, evaluation, and authorisation of chemicals—or REACH—regulations. The issue is important, but I have received no feedback on it.

Mr Home Robertson: The answer is that it almost certainly does. However, I am sure that the clerk would be able to clarify that very quickly with someone from the Holyrood project team.

The Convener: The clerks will seek clarification on that.

I draw the committee's attention to the post-council report on the 24 and 25 May agriculture and fisheries council, which says:

"Discussions in Council centred on proposed changes to the regulation concerning circumstances for socio-economic assistance, support for environmentally friendly fishing methods, the appropriate level of private contribution rates, compensation for shellfish farmers and available assistance to vessels affected by stock recovery plans. The United Kingdom raised concerns that interventions could lead to unfair competition".

It would be useful to receive more clarification about the UK's concerns and whether they might have any implications for Scotland. Are members agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Mr Home Robertson: From memory, I suspect that this is another attempt by the Greek delegation to stop other countries using European money to subsidise their fleets at a time when there is a need to scale fleets down. However, I am sure that that could be clarified.

The Convener: That could well be the case, but it would be good to receive that information.

Irene Oldfather: We should also welcome the fact that agreement has been reached on the regulation to establish regional advisory councils. The measure is being financed by the EU and the UK supported the decision to work transparently and publicly on these matters. Our predecessor committee published a report on the issue, much of which informed our recommendations.

Phil Gallie: On transparency, have any of the details of these agreements been published? I realise that time might have been needed to prepare translations for some countries, but the details have been determined. Do the clerks have any information on that?

The Convener: The clerks will find out that information. Are you talking about the regional advisory councils?

Phil Gallie: Yes.

The Convener: I know that the North Sea Commission's website contains some information.

Phil Gallie: We should ensure that interested parties in Scotland receive those details as early as possible.

The Convener: I point out that the European Commission has also published regulations on the matter.

Mr Home Robertson: Item 7 in the paper for the environment council is about the groundwater daughter directive. I do not know what the "daughter" has to do with it, but I am a little concerned that the directive might be another example of something that will be increasingly onerous for Scotland. The figure quoted shows that only 5 per cent of drinking water in Scotland comes from groundwater. Elsewhere in the United Kingdom, and probably elsewhere in Europe, the figure is much higher. In those circumstances, it would be a bit ridiculous if industries in Scotland were subjected to onerous groundwater purity conditions when there is no risk to the environment and no risk to water that is for human consumption. It might be worth ensuring that the Executive and the UK Government exercise some caution and avoid unnecessary and unproductive costs for Scottish industries.

The Convener: Are you happy for us to write to Ross Finnie and to copy the letter to Sarah Boyack, the convener of the Environment and Rural Development Committee?

Mr Home Robertson: I would like inquiries to be made, because we risk drifting into something that could be very expensive for Scotland but serve no useful purpose.

The Convener: That is a good point.

Mr Raffan: I would like more information on the whole business of merging the Socrates and Leonardo programmes and on the greater emphasis on vocational training. There is also a reference in our papers to

"some coherence between Tempus and Erasmus Mundus".

The reference is slightly lost on me but I am interested in that area. I am also interested in the EU drug strategy 2005-12. I would like more information, but it will help if I am simply pointed in the right direction. I do not want to burden the clerks.

The Convener: I will ask the clerks to get back to individual members on these issues. I remind members that, if they require more information, they can approach the clerks at any time before meetings.

The only point that I want to raise relates to paragraph 9 of the section on the environment council, which contains an Executive comment that

“product design can only be influenced effectively at EU level.”

I would like to think that product design could be higher up the list of priorities in Scotland, and I would be interested to find out why the Executive has said what it has said. I am sure that many companies in Scotland could play a role in influencing product design.

EC Legislation (Implementation)

16:12

The Convener: The next item on our agenda is the implementation of European Community legislation. We have received letters on the end-of-life vehicles directive and the statutory instrument on organic products, which the Executive is allowing to be introduced across Great Britain. Is the committee happy that both those pieces of legislation should go through London?

Gordon Jackson: I am—and I say that as someone who is sometimes hesitant about using Westminster overmuch. Even though I sit on the Labour benches, I am sometimes a little uneasy about using Westminster for Scottish matters. However, the explanation given in our papers is okay for me.

Dennis Canavan: Do we know what line the Environment and Rural Development Committee is taking?

The Convener: No. I feel that we might want to ask questions on the organic products SI, but that should be for the Environment and Rural Development Committee.

Irene Oldfather: I think that members are saying that this committee is content. We can only really answer for ourselves; if the Environment and Rural Development Committee has any issues to raise, I am sure that it will raise them.

Mr Raffan: Is there a mechanism by which another committee can keep our clerks informed if it is unhappy?

The Convener: Our clerks are nodding, so the answer is yes.

Can we move on to the final item on our agenda, which is the sift paper?

Mr Raffan: Before we do so, I want to ask about correspondence with ministers. Obviously, Andy Kerr has yet to get back to you on the fisheries control agency. I imagine that correspondence will arrive during the recess and will be included among our papers for the next meeting. It does not matter much, I suppose.

The Convener: On correspondence, it is worth noting that, although we received a letter from Andy Kerr on the location of EU agencies, which we discussed at the previous meeting, another agency—the EU defence agency—was discussed by Brussels but was not mentioned in the Executive’s correspondence, which is surprising. There was no mention of it in the Executive’s response on the issue. I suggest that, for the time

being, we simply note the matter, because we have agreed to discuss EU agencies as a separate agenda item after the summer recess. We can raise the issue at that point; I simply wanted to make members aware of it.

Sift

16:15

The Convener: The final agenda item is the sift paper. Do members have any comments on the paper?

Mr Raffan: I note that the consultation on the green paper on “Equality and non-discrimination in an enlarged European Union” began at the beginning of this month and ends on 31 August. I presume that the information has already been sent to the Equal Opportunities Committee. The issue is important but, unfortunately, the consultation period coincides largely with the summer recess.

I would like information on paper 1173, which is entitled “The Social Dimension of Globalisation: the EU's policy contribution on extending the benefits to all”, which is mentioned a couple of times in the sift paper under different headings because it affects different committees.

The Convener: The report is available in the Parliament library, although I may have it out at the moment—I will return it in due course.

Mr Raffan: Thank you for that pointer in the right direction.

The Convener: As there are no further comments, I bring the meeting to a close. I wish members a happy, prosperous and enjoyable summer recess. Of course, we will meet several times informally before we next meet officially after the recess.

Meeting closed at 16:16.

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