

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 28 September 2004

Session 2

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EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

16th Meeting 2004, Session 2

CONVENER

*Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (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:

Shirley Bell (Robert Burns World Federation)

Graham Berry (Scottish Arts Council)

Lorraine Fannin (Scottish Publishers Association)

Dominic Hill (Dundee Rep Theatre)

Maureen Sprott (Scottish Screen)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Imrie

ASSISTANT CLERKS

Nick Hawthorne

David Simpson

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

European and External Relations Committee

Tuesday 28 September 2004

[THE DEPUTY CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:03*]

Interests

The Deputy Convener (Irene Oldfather): Good afternoon, colleagues. I welcome you all to the 16th meeting in 2004 of the European and External Relations Committee. I am in the chair today as deputy convener—I clarify that point because Dennis Canavan has just asked whether I am the oldest member and I want to make it clear that I am not.

I have apologies today from Margaret Ewing, but I have not been notified of any substitutions.

I remind committee members to place their cards in their machines so that they will be able to speak; I understand that the microphones are activated automatically.

Our first item of business is to welcome to the committee our newest recruit, John Swinney. I ask him whether he has any interests to declare that are relevant to the committee's work.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): I have no interests to declare other than those relevant to the committee that are specified in my register of interests.

Convener

14:04

The Deputy Convener: I am pleased to say that item 2 is the selection of a new convener for the committee. The Parliamentary Bureau has agreed that the convener of the European and External Relations Committee will be a Scottish National Party nominee, and I understand that the nominee is Mr Swinney.

Mr John Swinney was chosen as convener.

The Deputy Convener: I congratulate Mr Swinney and hand the chair over to him.

The Convener (Mr John Swinney): Thank you very much, Irene. I thank committee members for their support. I understand that the subject of my nomination was discussed a fortnight ago, when Mr Canavan and others had a great deal to say about it.

I am pleased to be here and look forward to enjoying the experience of convening the Parliament's European and External Relations Committee. It will be a formidable change from the terrain that I have occupied for the past four years of my life, but I look forward to convening the committee in a fashion that will bring together the strengths that I see within its membership in respect of subjects of importance to Scotland and a wider community.

I noticed that, at the conclusion of the committee's previous meeting, there was what was described as a bit of mutual back-slapping to congratulate Richard Lochhead on his term as convener, and I echo the remarks that were made by paying tribute to the work that he undertook as convener of the committee. My objective will be to ensure that that work is continued by drawing on the strengths of all members of the committee and ensuring that we make a substantial contribution to the debate about the roles of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government in the world, particularly in the European sphere that interests so many of us.

Promoting Scotland Worldwide Inquiry

14:06

The Convener: The third item on the agenda is the continuation of the committee's inquiry into the promotion of Scotland. As members and observers know, the inquiry has been under way for the best part of nine months. Today, we will hear from a panel of witnesses from the arts and cultural sectors of Scotland.

I invite each of the witnesses to introduce themselves briefly, and we will then ask questions based on their written submissions and other points that have arisen in the inquiry.

Graham Berry (Scottish Arts Council): I welcome the opportunity to address the committee. I believe that the arts and culture can play a hugely important part in presenting a positive image of Scotland abroad. I represent the Scottish Arts Council, which is the national body for the promotion of the arts in Scotland. We distribute funds and advocate for the arts. We cover all the art forms and support a range of core-funded organisations throughout Scotland and across all arts activity. We also support individual artists with, for example, bursaries and assistance with travel. Much of the arts activity that we support results in artists going abroad and in our receiving artists from abroad, because the arts are an international language.

A huge amount of benefit can be obtained from the fact that the arts represent Scotland in a positive light. They foster warmth towards Scotland in a non-competitive way and promote a contemporary image of the country that also links with the traditional arts and activities of the Scotland of the past. There is a huge link between the arts and the creative industries, in which Scotland has the lead in some small aspects. Moreover, a thriving cultural scene in Scotland can encourage inward investment. It can also foster business start-ups and, on the less tangible side, it can promote the diversity of culture that we want in Scotland today and help us to welcome new people to our society. Of course, it also encourages fresh talent.

We support all those things through a huge range of activity. We support specific organisations and individuals to travel abroad—we co-operate on that with the British Council in Scotland, VisitScotland and EventScotland—and we also support artists coming into the country through a strong relationship with Visiting Arts, which is based in London but is supported by the Scottish Arts Council and does a tremendous job in bringing arts activity into the country, notably

during the Edinburgh festival. With our help and help from the Scottish Executive, Visiting Arts has recently completed a directory of Scottish arts, which is of huge help to anyone from anywhere on the globe who wants to find out what is going on in the Scottish arts. It is a huge development and is available online.

Dominic Hill (Dundee Rep Theatre): Hi. I am one of the artistic directors of Dundee Rep Theatre. We are one of Scotland's leading producing theatres and home to the Dundee Rep Ensemble, which is a permanent company of actors. We tour nationally and, to a small extent, internationally. We want to do more of the latter. We are also the home of the Scottish Dance Theatre, which is Scotland's principal contemporary dance company. It is predominantly a touring company, which tours six months of the year in Scotland and has a few dates every year in Europe, usually.

Shirley Bell (Robert Burns World Federation): I am chief executive of the Robert Burns World Federation, which was established in 1885. It is the umbrella organisation for clubs and individuals throughout the world who wish to honour the works and philosophies of Robert Burns. We have approximately 350 clubs, 70 per cent of which are in the United Kingdom. We also have 45 clubs in the United States of America and Canada, and clubs in South Africa, Fiji, Jakarta, Hong Kong, Dubai, Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany and Hungary. We also have approximately 400 individual members throughout the world.

We have a board of directors, which is made up of the conveners of various committees. We have marketing, literature, heritage and conference conveners, but our flagship is the convener of schools and school competitions. The annual number of entrants to the competitions is approximately 150,000 throughout Scotland. This year it was 145,000, but as many as 163,000 children have taken part. We also provide prizes for schools in St Petersburg, which take part in written work.

We are not a core-funded organisation, although I received money to go overseas to the Robert Burns Association of North America conference, which was most successful and which has encouraged people to visit Scotland. We had our own conference in Dumfries this year and a number of those who were at the conference in Merrickville in Ottawa came over to our conference.

The Robert Burns World Federation is the first point of contact for all matters relating to Robert Burns. Between December and February we are inundated with people asking about a range of matters, from silly things such as where they can get Scotch mist to details about Robert Burns and

his works. We feel that our organisation does a great service for Scotland and we are extremely disappointed that, despite numerous pleas to the Scottish Executive, we still have not received one penny of help. It has got to the stage where, if we do not receive help, there will be a dramatic difference in how we can do our business and help to promote Scotland. We will not be able to afford to do that in the future, unless we receive funding.

Maureen Sprott (Scottish Screen): Hello. I am Maureen Sprott and I am head of marketing for Scottish Screen, which has a wide remit in supporting all aspects of the screen industries in Scotland, from production development, in which we let people get involved in film at the basic levels, right through to making feature films. In that respect, we are a distributor of national lottery funding. We are also involved in training in the industry, company development and education. We work in schools to try to embed an interest in and an understanding of the culture of the moving image.

We also look after the Scottish Screen archive, which contains bodies of screen work—mostly factual—going back more than 100 years. We also run Scottish Screen locations, which tries to encourage mobile productions to come into Scotland. That area of our business has an economic impact.

Lorraine Fannin (Scottish Publishers Association): I represent the Scottish Publishers Association, which consists of the 80-plus publishers who work in Scotland today. We exist to provide a wide range of services to them, including training, advice and general marketing possibilities. We also exist to develop not only creative writing in the industry, but other literary work, educational material and culturally significant studies.

The committee will perhaps be mainly interested in the fact that we do a lot of work abroad on export. As a whole, our publishers export something like 24 per cent of their total turnover, which is considerable. We work on overseas book fairs, overseas contacts, selling rights, et cetera, and we travel a lot through the year to a number of countries where people come along and look at Scotland through its literature.

Our strong belief is that Scotland's books output, through its publishing industry, provides a window on Scotland for the rest of the world, which we believe can impact significantly on how people view Scotland as a country to trade with, as a place to visit and as a country to be interested in. I am involved in the project that is proposing Edinburgh as a world city of literature to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. We very much see interest in the country as a result of its literary output.

14:15

The Convener: I thank all the panellists for their brief introductions. We have heard a range of views about the role that individual organisations perform within the arts and cultural sectors; however, the common theme is that every one of you has an involvement that extends your work beyond Scotland into the international community. I would like a brief answer from each of the panellists. Do you feel that, in the work that you undertake, you are part of a cohesive, Scotland-wide effort to promote Scotland, or are you operating individually within your own silos—for want of a better word—and not really being cross-supported by a range of organisations or others?

Graham Berry: We are somewhere between the two extremes that you mention. We are not working in isolation, but nor do I feel that there is total cohesion about what people are trying to achieve in Scotland. As I mentioned in my opening statement, we work collaboratively with a range of organisations. We work closely with the British Council in Scotland, and we recently appointed a joint officer who will work with us in developing our international policy, which we hope will be the same as that of the British Council in Scotland. We also work closely with VisitScotland and EventScotland, and we are members of the Scottish international forum. The forum, which will meet next week, brings together not only all the cultural organisations, but many other representative bodies in Scotland. Gradually things are becoming a bit more cohesive, but I do not think that we are there yet.

The Convener: In your written submission, there is an issue about whether the Executive's priorities are those of the British Council. Will you say a bit more about whether there is any cohesion?

Graham Berry: The British Council is a UK organisation that takes its lead largely from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, so it has a slightly different steer. The Scottish office of the British Council, although not autonomous, has been given a little bit more freedom to operate in Scotland. That is why, over the past year or two, we have been able to work with it closely to develop some common initiatives. The Scottish Executive is building up a slightly different approach to where it feels the priorities should be. My aim is to work jointly with the British Council in a way that will influence the Scottish Executive and others in deciding what cohesive policy is needed to move forward in the arts. Your inquiry will obviously take other issues into account.

The Convener: Do other members of the panel have any response to my question about whether they operate individually or collectively?

Dominic Hill: We certainly feel as though we are operating individually. However, as Graham Berry says, there have been some slight changes. The difficulty for us is in finding the mechanism for getting our work seen abroad and letting people abroad know what is going on at Dundee Rep. At the moment, the only mechanism for that seems to be the British Council. When we took a show to Iran last year, it was because the British Council organised it; that was the sole channel in which that worked. I think that things will change following the appointment of the international development officer whom Graham mentioned, but at the moment we feel pretty isolated.

Shirley Bell: Because of our broad database, we can facilitate a number of initiatives to take the message overseas. However—although I do not want to harp on about this—it all comes down to having support and core funding. We would be more than delighted to offer our database to any organisation that wants to make contact. That happens all the time: people come to us and ask whether there is a Burns club in whatever town, we tell them and then they make contact. For example, the person who was dealing with the Kofi Annan lecture came to the federation to ask for contacts in New York and we were able to provide them. We are a facilitator for many organisations.

Maureen Sprott: I would echo what Graham Berry said. I used to work at VisitScotland and we were involved in international marketing with other organisations. Things have improved dramatically in terms of companies and organisations working together, but there is quite a way to go in finding objectives that everyone can share. International marketing is expensive, especially for a small organisation such as ours. There is no commercial output; we are simply promoting our culture in a way that will benefit organisations that may have something to sell on the back of it. The question that arises is whether we should be funding ourselves when we do that sort of work.

Things are moving forward and we work closely with other organisations. We work with the British Council and the UK Film Council, although sometimes their focus does not match the cultural Scotland focus of the Scottish Executive. However, in general, I welcome the improvements that have been made.

Lorraine Fannin: I agree that the situation is better than it was a number of years ago. It is now possible to link up with many different people in the arts sector. However, there can be problems if we are not part of a network. For example, we might want to consider something from a books point of view, but VisitScotland—which Maureen Sprott mentioned—might have a particular agenda and might want to go along particular promotional lines. Therefore, we need to link up across

different spheres. We need to join up the thinking and have a forum that looks at abroad as a totality. We should recognise that different parts of what we all do can contribute to the view of Scotland that people abroad have. That view should not be formed simply from the images that one or two organisations choose.

The Convener: Does anyone want to pursue that particular point?

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): In response to Ms Fannin, I would say that I find it amazing that there is a Bollywood map of Scotland but not, as far as I know, a literary map promoted by VisitScotland to anything like the same extent.

The British Council has stepped up its activity over the past two or three years and has increased its staff here in Edinburgh. I wonder whether Mr Berry has noticed any difference. It is a pity that we took evidence from the British Council before and not after we heard from you, although we can always go back to it, I suppose.

Graham Berry: I have noticed a huge difference. The difference is that the British Council office in Scotland seems to be able to operate more on its own account than might have been the case in earlier years. It is extremely supportive of the work that we do, and vice versa.

Mr Raffan: You say that the difference is huge, but can you give us concrete examples?

Graham Berry: Two years ago, we took three visual artists—Claire Barclay, Jim Lambie and Simon Starling—to the Venice Biennale. That was a great success and it would not have been possible without the co-operation of the British Council, because of its contacts in Italy and, of course, because of the sheer amount of resource that it could put in—in people, time and money.

There have been various “Scotland in” initiatives. For example, Scotland in Sweden was a collaborative venture between the British Council and the Scottish Arts Council. More and more initiatives of that sort are coming up.

Next year there is a drama festival in Florence called Intercity—Intercitta. Again, we are collaborating with the British Council in delivering some activity; the Traverse Theatre will present some new work. I grant you that such initiatives are specific and individual, but their number is increasing because of the closer contacts that are being developed.

Mr Raffan: Has Mr Hill noticed a difference? For example, his visit to Tehran was through the British Council.

Dominic Hill: It was, but it was through the British Council in London; it had very little to do with the British Council in Edinburgh.

Mr Raffan: Have you seen hide or hair of the British Council in Edinburgh? Have they come out to see you in remote Dundee?

Dominic Hill: Michael Bird came to a production a year ago. That was the last time that we saw him. We have not had much contact with them.

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): I begin by welcoming John Swinney to the committee. I look forward to working with him constructively.

The panellists may have heard that the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill has been published. Given my constituency and the fact that I am using my second language at the committee, I want to ask the panellists—perhaps beginning with Graham Berry; I am certainly conscious of what the Scottish Arts Council does in relation to the Gaelic language—whether they have any concept of the extent to which Gaelic is used by their various organisations and whether there is any way of quantifying or assessing its impact or value.

Graham Berry: We support a range of Gaelic language activities. We have a Gaelic policy, which was developed before the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill was introduced, so we were quite well ahead of the game on that one.

We are deeply committed to promoting that area of the arts. The organisations that we support include Fèisean nan Gaidheal, Pròiseact nan Ealan, a whole range of individual fèisean in the north-west and the islands, and the Gaelic Books Council.

Mr Morrison: The question is more to do with Gaelic's international impact and how you are able to use it as another mechanism in your work.

Graham Berry: I was going to come to the point that to achieve any kind of impact abroad, it is necessary to have a sound foundation to work from. Unless there is something positive and well resourced in this country, we cannot take anything abroad. That is probably more important for the Gaelic activities than it is for anything else. Dominic Hill has already mentioned going to Tehran, which was specifically facilitated by the British Council. However, if the core grant from the Scottish Arts Council was not available to Dundee Rep to allow it to perform work of a particularly high standard, it would not be invited abroad. The same goes for the Gaelic activities—they, as well as all the other activities that we support, need to be brought on and nurtured.

Whether Gaelic's impact can be quantified is arguable; if one examined the matter in detail, one could determine some measures and make a judgment, but I do not know the answer straight off.

Lorraine Fannin: We are involved in Gaelic publishing in so far as we deal with the Gaelic Books Council. Next week we will go to the Frankfurt book fair, at which we will have a display and catalogues from the Gaelic Books Council, because in Germany there is a great deal of interest in the Gaelic language. There is a member of the SPA's staff whose first language is Gaelic, who can consider issues to do with Gaelic publishing and can offer assistance. Therefore, a lot of attention is given to Gaelic as well as to emerging imprints in Scots, which at the moment are more for Scotland.

We are trying to take Gaelic overseas where there is interest, but we cannot take Gaelic books to somewhere where they have no idea about it, which happens in some markets. There is certainly a lot of interest in Europe, and we should push Gaelic quite hard.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): The promotion of Scottish culture abroad can be done by Scottish artists touring overseas. Do you agree that it can also be done by attracting international audiences to events here in Scotland? Does the Scottish Arts Council, or any other body, have figures for the number of overseas visitors who come to Scotland both for big cultural events, such as the Edinburgh festival or, to a lesser extent, Celtic Connections, and for other cultural events that might not attract huge audiences but which are important collectively and make a big contribution to the promotion of Scottish culture and the Scottish economy?

14:30

Graham Berry: Audience figures are not terribly good on those sorts of things, but certainly data are collected on where the Edinburgh festival audience comes from. Celtic Connections might well also do that, so I am sure that we can estimate the benefit of tourists coming to experience Scotland's arts. VisitScotland also has some data that would be useful in that regard.

Of course we want visitors to come to Scotland, but that requires the infrastructure of arts activities in Scotland to be very strong. There is a good deal of evidence to show that visitors come because of cultural activities. The obvious example is the Edinburgh festival, but there are activities across the country that draw an international audience.

Dennis Canavan: Would the celebration of St Andrew's day as Scotland's national holiday at home and abroad create an opportunity to promote Scotland and an appreciation of Scottish culture on the international stage?

Dominic Hill: Any kind of event or celebration such as that could be used. For us, it would be about finding the appropriate piece or work to pin

on that particular day. However, if that could be found, it could work very well.

Maureen Sprott: My only caveat is that quite a bit of work has already been done to build up the concept of tartan day in New York. We need to think very carefully about the amount of resources that is available. Would there be enough resources to build internationally on two days or would we just go for one of them? As a small organisation, it would be difficult for us to put on something at that level on two different days of the year and in more than one country. It would be a good idea, but I would like it to be properly resourced and marketed.

The Convener: I get the impression that whenever anything like this is mentioned, people say that because we have tartan day, which happens on one particular day of the year in the United States, that is it; that is all that we need to do. I do not think that that gets to the nub of much of the evidence that I have read in the inquiry so far. We should not allow ourselves to be diverted by the thought that we have tartan day in the States—it lasts for a day. There is a sense that we get a big parade through New York so we can tick the box and move on. Is that a sense that you recognise?

Graham Berry: I certainly recognise that. It is also right that we cannot split our resources across too many places. The problem is that there is not a day in Scotland that is celebrated as widely as it ought to be. We cannot export something that does not exist domestically. If we decide that we want to promote Scotland abroad on a particular day or concentrate on a particular day, we cannot do just the one day; it would have to be the pinnacle of a range of activities that are going on. There needs to be a base from which to work. If Scots themselves celebrated St Andrew's day in grand fashion, as I am sure we could, given the opportunity, we could then begin to export that form of celebration. We cannot create something abroad that does not exist here.

Shirley Bell: St Andrew's day is well celebrated overseas and many events happen throughout the year, not just on Burns night. Burns is a man for all seasons; he should not just be celebrated in January. I am talking about not just the Burns supper. In fact, I wish that people would take the Burns supper out of Burns. I find that people concentrate on the Burns supper; they think that that is all that Burns is about, but it is not. There is the whole ethos of Burns—what he was about and his Scottishness. I get really annoyed when all I hear about is January and Burns suppers. Last year, I was over in Houston, Texas, speaking at a Burns supper with 750 people in attendance. That would be an ideal opportunity for the Scottish Executive to reach those people. I got the First

Minister to produce a videotape, which was sent to our club in South Africa and broadcast to 600 people at a Burns event. We must use such events to get the message across that this is the place to be.

The Convener: You cited an example in which you enlisted the First Minister to appear in a video clip for an event. I am sure that that was welcome, but is such work done in a cohesive and proactive way or—to return to the point that I raised earlier—is it that different organisations decide what they want to do and try to gather together support? Am I correct to say that that work is not part of a cohesive strategy for promoting Scotland overseas?

Shirley Bell: That is correct. There is no joined-up thinking, and that is where we have a problem. We need to seize opportunities. For example, the Caledonian Club of San Francisco runs a Scottish gathering that attracts 30,000 people—that is just one example. There should be a presence at all such events; many events happen overseas throughout the year but we do not take the opportunity to have a presence at them.

The Convener: That is an important point. I have been at a couple of those events in the United States; one gets a feeling of the enormity of what is going on, but there is a disconnection with input from Scotland.

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): I am not sure that 30 November or Burns night in January are necessarily the best times to hold street parties in Scotland because of the weather, although they might work in the southern hemisphere. Seriously, to return to Mrs Bell's point about Burns, this is an area in which we have a head start because there is an international awareness, as well as a national awareness, of the importance and significance of Robert Burns. In your introductory statement you raised questions about the lack of support from the Executive—you might want to return to that. Unfortunately, you have not given the committee a written submission. If there is something specific in which you would like us to take an interest, please take this opportunity to expand on it, or perhaps give us a paper later.

Shirley Bell: I am happy to give you a paper. I spoke with Mr Morrison and Allan Wilson three years ago and I brought to their attention the dire straits that we are in. We are a voluntary organisation with two paid employees. We service all the clubs and do our best to promote Scotland with absolutely no core funding. Despite going to various arts associations and the Scottish Arts Council, we just do not get the core funding support that we need.

Mr Home Robertson: All right, but we are talking about different things. The Executive will understandably be worried about setting precedents by giving core funding to various types of voluntary organisations, although I know that it does so sometimes. We are talking about the promotion of Scotland abroad. If there are opportunities to take initiatives in other parts of the world and the Executive and the Parliament could support and take part in those initiatives, we want to explore them further.

Shirley Bell: I would be more than delighted to meet anyone who wishes to promote Scotland overseas, which is something that we have been doing for many years. Just last week, I had a phone call from someone who is putting together a paper to put to the Scottish Executive. The paper is about how to attract people to Scotland and they asked whether they could use our name and whether we would give them information. That happens all the time. I am on the steering committee of the Burns an' a' that festival—it gets the money, while we give the information. That happens constantly, which is why I am extremely frustrated about the disbursement of funds. We have shown that we are more than happy to help and we have more than proved what we can do overseas. We are willing to help in any way.

The Convener: What proportion of your activity is Scottish and what proportion is overseas?

Shirley Bell: Some 70 per cent of our clubs are in the UK and 30 per cent are overseas. One third of our revenue comes from subscriptions—we cannot keep putting them up—and the other two-thirds comes from sales of goods and some sponsorship. We are running around like headless chickens trying to get sponsorship for the schools competition, from which I am sure that some people here today received certificates in the past. It is very much a core activity. The children who learn about Burns at school are the same people who, when they go overseas, start up Burns clubs and St Andrew's societies. We have to acknowledge what is—and what is not—being done on our own doorstep.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I will come back to Mrs Bell in a moment or two. However, I want to point out that we are discussing the promotion of Scotland. I wonder where Mr Berry's priorities lie in that respect. I am not making a veiled criticism, but do you think that advancing arts and involving people is more of a priority for you than promoting Scotland through the arts?

Graham Berry: I think that we do both. Our key responsibility is to support and develop the arts; however, a range of other benefits flow from supporting a healthy arts sector. One benefit is the creation of a confident and cultured society that

can act as a strong example for people abroad and allows artists to travel to other countries or to come back to Scotland from overseas. It is quite difficult to separate out those matters, but our core function is to support the arts. Without that and the creative spark that individual artists bring to life, none of those other instrumental benefits will occur.

Phil Gallie: What is Burns's position in Scottish arts and in promoting Scotland abroad? Compared with other Scottish artistic factions, is he not an easy product to sell abroad?

Graham Berry: Burns is extremely easy to sell abroad. As we have said, he is one of Scotland's global icons. "Auld Lang Syne" is known by everyone and sung everywhere, and we ignore such traditional aspects of Scottish arts at our peril. However, the key work of the Scottish Arts Council relates to contemporary arts and how they are presented and interpreted. I should say that we also support the presentation of the Burns an' a' that festival and other festivals in Ayr that use Burns as a basis for developing and interpreting arts.

Phil Gallie: That support is very welcome. However, Mrs Bell seems to have highlighted an area that the Scottish Arts Council should take into account when promoting Scotland in future.

How much impact does Burns have on Scottish publishing exports?

Lorraine Fannin: He has a certain amount. For example, a couple of years ago, we encouraged a Slovenian publisher to bring out an edition of Burns and provided the network for that to happen.

However, we also need to look at the contemporary scene. It would be a mistake to focus too much on one historical icon. I realise that everyone knows about Burns, but we also need to build on the contemporary creative work that is on offer to people who come to Scotland. Taking a step back, I feel that we should think very carefully about what we want to achieve from promoting Scotland. What outcomes and results do we want it to deliver, for example, in tourism? Do we want our books to be translated or do we want people to come here and buy them instead? What are we selling? What are we exchanging? We should not undersell ourselves or underestimate the intellectual capacity of the people who are interested in Scotland to assimilate a whole raft of the other interesting things that we have to offer. The quality product that we are offering is more important for Scotland than getting people to wear tartan and march down 5th Avenue.

Phil Gallie: I think that publishers have a major role to play as far as Burns is concerned. People in other countries have a natural interest in him

that attracts them to Scotland. What impact does Burns's birthplace have these days on the Burns scene worldwide? Is it an icon? Is it a place that federation members worldwide want to visit? If so, what do you feel about the current situation in Alloway, where it seems that the Burns Trust is in some difficulty with respect to the buildings in its care?

14:45

The Convener: I do not want to detract in any way from the importance of Robert Burns's iconic status, but we are not conducting a Robert Burns inquiry here. I will allow a brief response, if that is possible, to the final point that Mr Gallie made.

Shirley Bell: I am concerned about the Alloway situation and about Burns's house in Dumfries. If we want to encourage people from overseas to see those national memorials, we have to get them in shape, but we are not doing that. We have to give the visitor a pleasant experience, and we are not good at doing that.

The Convener: In the course of that last exchange the clear line coming out was that we have to be certain about what it is we are promoting about Scotland. There is some divergence of opinion about whether it is Burns or modern icons or whatever. To what extent do all the organisations in the arts and cultural sector that have an interest in promoting Scotland overseas share a concept of a clear product offering—to use the marketing term—from Scotland? Could you put your hands on a piece of paper that encapsulates the sense of what such organisations are trying to do to promote Scotland?

Maureen Sprott: That is the real difficulty and it is where the work needs to be done to get some co-operation. I have had experience of two organisations that market abroad, and the target audience for one aspect of marketing Scotland can be very different from another—there can be no common ground between them. Therefore, although there can be overriding objectives, when it comes to getting the involvement of different organisations it can be difficult for those organisations to see what they will get out of a particular promotion if it is not aimed at their target audience and does not promote their message about Scotland. There are a number of different messages that we can give.

The Convener: Are the processes in place that would allow us to get to that message?

Maureen Sprott: Some work is being done towards that with the international forum, but we are not there yet.

The Convener: How far along the road are we? Five per cent? Fifty per cent? Seventy per cent?

Maureen Sprott: I would hope that we would get there by this time next year. It is difficult. I have taken the approach that I will try to get for my organisation any benefit I can from anything that is being done internationally by the Scottish Executive and/or other organisations. I have to think carefully about the resource issue. How much is that work worth, vis-à-vis what I get back from it? I quite often feel that the film side is the facilitator for other organisations—that they can use film to pique interest in Scotland. From that point of view, although it fills my cultural remit to promote Scottish film culture abroad, that audience will not give me inward investment in film or the chance to have the film picked up by the industry rather than the public.

The Convener: How many of you are involved in the Scottish international forum? I know that the Scottish Arts Council is.

Graham Berry: Yes.

Maureen Sprott: We are just about to join it.

The Convener: Is it a gathering of agencies?

Graham Berry: Yes, effectively. It is a good idea to bring together all the agencies and organisations that have any overseas links, but it is probably too large to be immediately effective. It is a good start, but it needs to have a clearer, more defined purpose and beneath that there are possibly different forms of forum that need to be created. I hate to suggest the creation of more organisations and bodies, but the single forum is too large. From our point of view, the end product of supporting and developing the arts is to demonstrate that we have a confident, creative, cultured and open society in Scotland. In turn, that will deliver all the various instrumental benefits. If that was the overall message that was being delivered, you could begin to break it down and ask how we can achieve that goal, what it actually means and who will deliver which part. However, there needs to be an overarching body to examine it, within which other sections can deliver specific parts.

Lorraine Fannin: I agree with Graham Berry that there has to be an overarching body. We are setting down policy ideals, which we must do, but when we drill down we have to ensure that the systems are in place so that everyone can deal with them in the way they need to. For example—and this stretches into other people's areas—people visit VisitScotland tourist information centres and Historic Scotland locations. We have a lot of books that people abroad read to tell them about places in Scotland, but we cannot get them into those places because VisitScotland's and Historic Scotland's systems and policies say that we have to have a different product offering, which often does not give a terrific view.

Rosemary Goring in *The Herald* said that she sat down and wept on the steps of Edinburgh Castle because she had looked at the books on offer, which were bargain-basement remainders in a 50p dump. I am not saying that it was all like that, but it was largely like that. For ages, we have been battling away, saying that tourists who come here are interested and want to be allowed to see the sort of Scotland that we are trying to present, but on the other hand the retail services are more interested in whether the van can come at 8.30 in the morning.

The Convener: The book festival that recently concluded in Edinburgh was a fabulous advert for Scottish literature. I would have thought that it would be an outstanding event in terms of iconic marketing potential, but is it in there? Is the book festival being actively promoted as a device to lure people to Scotland?

Lorraine Fannin: The book festival can formulate its own policy. Scottish literature within the book festival probably outsold a lot of other areas.

The Convener: I am sure that it did.

Lorraine Fannin: There was fantastic co-operation. We work with the book festival closely. Other bodies and, indeed, Executive non-departmental public bodies work in a lumbering, elephantine way and cannot think like that. I am sorry to sound critical. I am sure that no particular NDPB is at fault, but the message needs to come down and translate into actions that work on the ground, rather than stay up in the air.

Mr Raffan: Canongate Books had a Booker prize victory. It is important to have companies that are publishing at the cutting edge and supporting contemporary writing, and not necessarily just Scottish writing. They should be up there at the cutting edge, publishing material of the highest quality. Do you agree? We can get stuck in the past, which worries me greatly.

Lorraine Fannin: I totally agree. We go to Frankfurt next week, where we will have a large stand. We have support from the Scottish Arts Council for a lot of the work that we do. Thank goodness that we do, because we can take a huge Scottish presence, such as Canongate Books and many writers. We have sponsorship from a whisky company, and we run a reception with the Robert Burns whisky that it brings along. Between 250 and 300 people from 50 or 60 countries look at the books. That is a phenomenal advert for what is going on in Scotland. Those people do not just publish; they visit, they tell people and they take back the work. It is very much about contemporary Scotland and the exciting place that it is, because people want that as well.

Mr Raffan: Mr Berry, you address funding in the paragraph at the top of page 5 of our papers. Funding worries me greatly. You have £500,000 of dedicated funding for international initiatives, but it is being lopped in half this year. You refer to the various things that you have supported. You did not support the Scotland in Catalunya week, but you are going to support the Scotland in the Netherlands event. You have been to the Smithsonian, and there was something else as well. What sort of sum would comparator organisations, such as those in the Irish Republic, have to work with?

Graham Berry: Believe it or not, we are probably quite far ahead of the game. In the past couple of years, we have made a major effort to spend more money on international activity. More important, we try to encourage the organisations that we support, such as Dundee Rep Theatre and the Scottish Publishers Association, to engage in overseas activity.

Mr Raffan: But your budget has been cut in half, because of the loss of lottery funding. It is going down from £500,000 to £300,000. That is a huge cut.

Graham Berry: Of course, but we have no control over lottery funding.

Mr Raffan: Sure, but how will that affect your activity?

Graham Berry: It has affected our activity in that we have taken out a small fund that the lottery fund supported, but it has not affected our broader work of helping organisations to go abroad. We are trying to increase that work through the appointment of an officer who will generate funding from other sources and ideas, which are often more important than just the money.

Our efforts in that area are under-resourced and I would dearly love to spend more on them. Only in recent years has it been understood that we should be supporting organisations to go abroad. As has been mentioned, it is hugely expensive for performing arts companies to tour abroad. They need money not only for the simple things such as getting there and back, but for the more complex aspects such as marketing, logistics and scheduling. That is a big issue.

The Convener: I think that Mr Raffan's point is that, if we are much more enthusiastically interested in promoting Scotland overseas, to cut by £200,000 the budget of one of the key organisations involved in that area—an organisation that probably has more money to spend on such activity than any other—does not send out a healthy signal.

Graham Berry: Yes, but as I said, that affects just a minor part of the funding. That money went

to a very small fund that supported pretty minor initiatives, which were mainly to do with organisations such as overseas touring companies that came into Scotland. The cut will not have a significant impact on our broader thrust of trying to get more artists abroad.

Mr Raffan: Can you let us have a breakdown of the amounts that you are spending on sending companies abroad and so on? You say that the cut affects a relatively small fund. Perhaps you could give us some figures in writing.

Graham Berry: We could certainly give you a more detailed breakdown.

The Convener: Keith Raffan asked about how the budget of the Scottish Arts Council compared with that of its Irish counterpart. In relation to the film industry, how does the budget of Scottish Screen compare with that of its Irish counterpart?

Maureen Sprott: We have pretty comparable budgets when it comes to the cultural side of things and marketing, but when it comes to industry incentives such as tax breaks and location incentive funds, our position is not as good as that of Ireland or of other parts of the British Isles, such as the Isle of Man. From the overseas marketing point of view, if we make a very good short film or a very good feature, that is an advertisement for Scotland in itself, but because places such as Ireland and the Isle of Man are able to attract more business, they can perhaps make more films than we can.

The budgets for the marketing of talent are comparable, except that we do not have a lot of money for the international marketing that we undertake on our own. Marketing that is not part of a wider Scottish Executive initiative is targeted specifically at film industry personnel and film festivals.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): I want to follow up on that point. I am aware that Ayrshire Film Focus has been tremendously successful. Although it gets some grant funding, it generates significant revenues for local communities in Scotland. I think that it has attracted more than 29 or 30 film productions into Ayrshire alone. Do you have comparable national figures?

Maureen Sprott: The location work that Scottish Screen performs is important to Scotland culturally, because if people come here, make a film and use our scenery wisely, that film goes back as an advert for Scotland, even if it was not made by Scottish artists and film makers. That is known as the "Braveheart" effect. Last year was a very good year: the number of inquiries went up, the conversion rate was 70 per cent and the value to Scotland was £24 million. It is difficult to bring consideration of our location work into inquiries

such as that which the committee is conducting, because it is an inward investment issue. Films that are located here can promote Scotland. We would very much like to have more opportunities to promote inward investment through film locations, but we operate on quite tight budgets.

15:00

Irene Oldfather: It is important to put that on record because I think that you said earlier that there is no commercial output from what you did. Clearly, however, there is a wider—

Maureen Sprott: What I meant was that when we go to events such as the Association of Film Commissioners International locations trade fair in Santa Monica and meet producers and location managers from all over the world—mainly the United States of America—in order to get them to put Scotland on their shopping list, that is a specific promotion of something to do with Scotland. However, the audience that we reach through tartan day is made up not of film makers but of the wider American public, who might be interested in buying a book of a film or coming to visit Scotland. Although it is not directly related to our remit, we see the importance of getting involved in that work.

Irene Oldfather: I suppose that both aspects could be seen as future investment opportunities, in a way.

Maureen Sprott: It would be interesting if we were able to do something on a Scotland-wide level that was also able to target my commercial clients. Tartan day does not do that because it takes place on the other side of America from the clients I want to reach. That means that I approach tartan day as something that supports Scottish culture generally. You never know how such things affect people. It might be that the dad of a child who saw a film in central park this year happens to be a film maker, but that is not the sort of thing that I can track.

Irene Oldfather: We have identified a number of problems, difficulties and initiatives and have had a wide discussion about funding, which is particularly relevant to Graham Berry and Shirley Bell. However, leaving funding aside, what would assist your organisations to promote Scotland better? For example, there could be a network, organisational assistance, more involvement of ministers in the work that you do, more involvement of the Parliament and so on.

Dominic Hill: I was recently talking to some people from Holland who told me that they have an international development officer whose job was to get people together, bring people from abroad to see the theatrical work that was being done, set up networks and so on. That might be

happening here, through the new post that Graham Berry was talking about, but an important step is having in place the infrastructure that would enable such links to be made and would allow people to see the work that we are producing and understand that that is work that is made in Scotland by Scottish artists.

Irene Oldfather: Do you think that that might link into the Scottish international forum?

Dominic Hill: It certainly could.

Lorraine Fannin: As I said, I think that the network should be expanded to include VisitScotland and all the other people who are working to promote Scotland. I would quite like to have somewhere that was not a huge international forum but which would allow people to sit down and set out what they want to do and determine where it crosses over with what other people want to do with a view to finding out what they can add to one another's projects. That would be a simple forum for co-operative work. It might need funding at some point but, at the beginning, it just needs some talking. We need to be brought together in a way that enables people to feel that everyone can contribute, that no one is there in a begging capacity or as a supplicant and that we can all work together.

Maureen Sprott: I agree. There is a willingness for co-operation between various organisations but because we have different targets and objectives we are often too busy focusing on what we do to focus on anything outside our box. It might be that some funding should be supplied to employ a networker who has an understanding of all our organisations and could take a lead in networking the organisations rather than our having to try to make the time to meet and find areas for co-operative working.

The Convener: Is that a suitable role for the Scottish Arts Council to perform? I should have thought that it falls within the council's sphere.

Graham Berry: In the cultural sector, we would be delighted to examine issues broadly and to try to co-ordinate the long-term strategy that is needed. Much of the time we are driven by short-term issues—anniversaries, visits from various countries and so on—and asked to respond to those. We need to have a long-term view and to be aware that the returns on any international initiative are long term. We should not expect immediate results, which would be unrealistic. There should be a long-term strategy, with a few milestones along the way. I echo Dominic Hill's point about the showcasing that is needed to allow overseas promoters and others to come to Scotland to see what is on offer. We support some of that work during the Edinburgh festival, but there are other occasions when overseas

promoters could come to see the easily exportable activities that are available in Scotland.

Irene Oldfather: I was going to ask where the post would be located, but Graham Berry has answered that question.

The Convener: The discussion has revealed that no one disagrees with the proposition that it is important to promote Scotland overseas, but we need to examine the mechanisms for doing that. The issues that seem to require further exploration are the messages that we are putting out and how they are drawn together. Those issues will be touched on in other parts of the inquiry and, I am sure, in the rest of this evidence-taking session.

Mr Raffan: I return to the point that Lorraine Fannin and Graham Berry made. I hear that the Scottish international forum is largely a talking shop and that it is too big, but a lot of work can be done through bilaterals—a ghastly word—or one-on-ones. For example, if a representative of the Scottish Arts Council or Dominic Hill is visiting Tehran, they may link in with VisitScotland.

Towards the end of his submission, Mr Berry says that it is difficult to estimate how many tourists will come to Scotland after seeing the work of Scottish artists in New York. Stephen Conroy, one of the young Glasgow boys, is a successful artist who has exhibited at the Marlborough Gallery in midtown Manhattan in New York. When you know that someone is having an important vernissage in New York, to what extent do you piggy back on that to promote Scotland, or do you not have the necessary resources to do so?

Graham Berry: We try to co-operate as much as we can with anyone. If an initiative is happening abroad, we will see whether we can become involved in it. Ultimately, however, it comes down to resources.

Mr Raffan: Even promoting malt whiskies at the opening of the exhibition would be a start.

Graham Berry: Indeed. As long as 12 or even 15 years ago, Scottish Ballet went on a tour of Japan supported by a whisky company. Sales of the brand increased by an extraordinary amount—something like 90 per cent. There are huge benefits to be gained in this area from a business point of view.

The Convener: I thank our panel of witnesses for coming to give us the benefit of their knowledge and advice. As I said at the outset, the committee is taking some time over this inquiry. The points that you have made today will help us to formulate our conclusions.

I suspend the meeting until a quarter past 3.

15:08

Meeting suspended.

15:15

On resuming—

Regional Development Funding Inquiry

The Convener: Item 4 on our agenda is consideration of the Executive's response to the committee's report on the United Kingdom Government's proposals on repatriation of European regional development funding. The Executive's response to the committee's recommendations in its report has been circulated to members.

Mr Raffan: There are three brief points on which I would like to get further information. The first relates to paragraph 3 of the response, in which the Executive states:

"Through twinning support and the work of Scottish partners in disseminating Scottish good practice to several new Member States, Scotland has been very active".

Could we have more detail on that?

The second point relates to paragraph 6, in which the Executive addresses the 50:50 split that we suggest between new and longer-standing member states. The Executive seems to imply that the split should favour the new member states much more. If the Executive is so opposed to a 50:50 split, what does it favour? I would like to know roughly what it thinks the split should be.

My final point relates to paragraph 13, which states:

"The Executive plans to set up a series of consultation workshops with partnerships across Scotland."

It would be useful to have further information about where and when those will be held; some of us might like to attend them. The same applies to the analytical working group. I realise that the convener and deputy convener are members of the forum that will receive the working group's reports, but it would be good for us to hear reports back on that work—even just oral reports—as progress is made.

Phil Gallie: I congratulate the Executive on a very reasonable response. I point in particular to paragraphs 5 and 6, in which its remarks are almost identical to comments I made when I failed to support the committee's report. I suggest that all members of the committee recognise that when we make decisions we should do so with an air of responsibility, especially financial responsibility. It was an absolute disgrace that the committee agreed to pour another £18 billion of UK money into the European coffers. Once again, I make no apologies for being a lone voice against the report that we published. I am delighted that the

Executive has seen through it and that it has given me the support that I truly deserve.

The Convener: That was communicated with remarkable candour, in keeping with the tradition that was established in the old days by Mr Gallie and my honourable predecessor as member of the United Kingdom Parliament for North Tayside. I am sure that the committee has noted the member's comments.

Mr Morrison: Had it not been for Phil Gallie's innate modesty, he would have gone much further in his political career.

Irene Oldfather: I draw attention to paragraphs 8, 9 and 10 of the response. In its deliberations and its report, the committee made clear the importance of recognising that certain nomenclatures of territorial units for statistics do not reflect the difficulty and poverty that we face in some pockets of deprivation in Scotland. During the summer, more detail of the financial perspective has been made available. I will make two comments that would probably be echoed by lobby groups throughout Scotland. The first relates to a difficulty with the geographic units that the Commission appears to be proposing, which would leave Scotland in some difficulty. The second concerns the indicators, which I understand are based solely, and significantly, on gross domestic product.

It is important that we raise those two points, because if things go ahead as looks likely, and given the detail that has emerged over the summer as the committee has written the report, the committee would want to follow up on those issues with the Commission. I am sure that in having discussions with the Commission I would have the support of my colleague Phil Gallie, who would want to ask difficult questions about the detail of the submission. It is worth our having another look at that.

Perhaps we could task the clerks with producing a paper that analyses some of the responses. I know that we received today a report from the south of Scotland alliance; the West of Scotland European Consortium has also produced a paper. I echo Keith Raffan's point about the importance of keeping in touch with the analytical working group. I would be happy to report back to the committee. I believe that the group has not met since early May—perhaps the clerk can confirm that. Background research is being done, but I believe that the analytical group is doing work on the basis of a 1.24 per cent budget. I have concerns that if the agricultural budget is fairly settled—it appears that it might be—and there is agreement between the member states and the Commission to reduce the 1.24 per cent, the squeeze could be on regional funding and structural funds, which would have a significant impact on Scotland. A number

of issues arise from the paper and from developments over the summer, which it would be helpful for the committee to have another look at and to keep a close eye on.

The Convener: Mr Gallie—round two.

Phil Gallie: It is not round two this time. What I said was slightly tongue in cheek, although the comments that I made previously and to which I referred were serious. I fully appreciate what Irene Oldfather said, but at the same time the paper that we considered showed that the UK Government made a commitment in respect of the funding that is available in Scotland and other areas of the UK. I remind members that we were talking about repatriation of funds, which it was said could result in internal money being used in relation to the issues that Irene Oldfather raised. Perhaps we could take that up with the Executive and ask it to pursue the matter.

The Convener: Does anyone else want to say anything before I close the discussion?

Mr Raffan: Paragraph 10 of the paper refutes the point about repatriated funding. The main point that I meant to raise earlier relates to the issue in paragraph 5—about which the Executive is vague—about the difference between 1 per cent and 1.24 per cent of EU gross national income. The paper states:

“the higher UK contributions might be partly borne through reductions in the Scottish block.”

We need to question the Executive about the word “might”. It says that it has no influence over the UK Treasury, but it does not seem to know whether the cost would be borne through reductions in the Scottish block.

The Convener: I want to draw the discussion to a close. When I read the paper, I did not feel that we had got much further forward in understanding how the issues had been addressed. Some of that might be to do with the point that Irene Oldfather made, to the effect that we are talking about a moveable feast, because different things were happening at European level over the summer. We have to keep a watching brief in relation to what is going on in order to ensure that structural funding in Scotland is not reduced without our knowing exactly what is going on and what representations the Scottish Executive is making.

It would be helpful for us to get more information from the clerks. I do not think that we should rule out asking for a formal response from the Executive as negotiations take their course, particularly if there is a change in the dynamics of the negotiations over the coming period.

I am happy to share with the committee any information that comes out of the analytical working group. In the first instance, we should take

the points that Keith Raffan raised, together with the general comments that I have just made, and formulate them as a letter to the Executive, asking for its response. Is that acceptable?

Dennis Canavan: I have a couple of points to raise. Paragraph 17 of the response mentions

“the ability of those states to absorb efficiently and effectively such large injections of aid.”

We were quite critical of the idea of a flat 4 per cent cap that would be applicable to all new members, and we called for flexibility based on countries’ ability to absorb the sums involved. I do not accept the reasons why the Executive has rejected our recommendation. It claims that it could be “politically invidious”, that it could “introduce considerable complexity” and that it would

“lead to a much higher overall budget”.

I do not think that the Executive has given any justification for those claims.

My other point relates to paragraph 34. It states:

“We recommend that the Scottish Executive discuss this matter with UK Ministers to find ways of encouraging UK Ministers to explain these views to Scottish parliamentary committees.”

You will not recall this, convener, as you were not on the committee at the time, but we made several invitations to UK ministers to come to the committee and give evidence, formally or even informally. They refused. That contrasts starkly with, for example, Malcolm Chisholm, a Scottish Executive minister who went down to London recently. He was almost summoned, not by a parliamentary committee but by a group of Labour MPs and was almost publicly humiliated in the press the following day. That was about a devolved matter—it was utterly ridiculous.

Refusals by UK ministers also contrast starkly with the very polite reception that was given to Hilary Benn, the Secretary of State for International Development, who gave an excellent address to all interested MSPs and to other members of the cross-party international development group. I believe that that is the first time that a UK Cabinet minister has spoken to such a gathering in the Scottish Parliament. I commend Mr Benn for that. We should try to pursue the matter, bearing in mind the fact that we are a European and External Relations Committee whose remit includes relations with the Westminster Government. We should try to pursue such matters so that UK ministers can be persuaded to give evidence to us, or at least to meet us informally on matters of mutual concern.

Mr Morrison: I listened carefully to what my friend, Dennis Canavan, had to say. I am sure that Dennis will recall that two UK ministers have

appeared before Scottish parliamentary committees: Dennis MacShane and Peter Hain. I believe that Peter Hain was the first UK minister to appear. Mr Benn was here last week. It is worth reminding ourselves that UK ministers are elected to the UK Parliament, and that it is their duty to answer to that Parliament and its elected members, not to be subjected to the demands or wishes of this or any other committee of the Scottish Parliament.

That said, in the context of what Dennis Canavan said in relation to our investigation, I agreed with and signed up to the part of our report that said that it was less than helpful that ministers do not co-operate. I reiterate, however, that it is always worth remembering that UK ministers are elected to and answerable to a different Parliament.

The Convener: Let me draw this discussion to a close. We have put on record the points that we will pursue in relation to our report. On the last issue, which has been discussed by Dennis Canavan and Alasdair Morrison, I would say from what I have observed of the committee's practices that when it is relevant that we make a request to a United Kingdom minister to come here to inform our deliberations on such issues, we can do so.

The Executive will not be the sole decision maker on an issue like European funding; the Treasury will be enormously involved, as will ministers from other departments including the Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It is relevant for us to make that pitch, if that is the wish of the committee. Indeed, it is a practice that I want to continue.

As time goes on, I hope that the UK Government forms the view that, if there is to be proper discussion and debate of such important and complex issues, committees of the Scottish Parliament must be informed effectively. I am sure that that is a view with which most members would be comfortable.

15:30

Mr Home Robertson: I agree with Alasdair Morrison and other members that it was disappointing that we failed to have that dialogue—it would have improved our report. We did not only invite UK ministers to come to Parliament to speak to us; we also suggested various compromise solutions whereby one or two committee members could travel to London. Even those suggestions were rejected, which was disappointing.

The Convener: Although I was not party to the discussions, I have read the committee report and the Executive response. I get the feeling that a

great deal more is required to bring about an informed view of the issue. The actions that we have agreed to take will help in that respect.

Irene Oldfather made reference to the south of Scotland alliance papers that were tabled today. The papers address a slightly different issue, which is the south of Scotland's qualification for European structural funding. Although the papers were made available to members only today, we can reflect on them in the course of our future deliberations.

Scottish Executive European Union Office (Annual Report)

15:31

The Convener: We move on to item 5, which is on the “Scottish Executive EU Office: Annual Report for 2003-04”. The report gives us detail on the involvements and activities of the EU office. I note in the letter from the minister that we requested the report earlier in the year. Does any member have a comment on the report?

Irene Oldfather: I am one of the committee members who took initial evidence from the Scottish Executive European Union office and who made the request for the report at the time, which was around February 2003. I am very disappointed about the time that it has taken to bring the matter back before the committee. Given the delay, I would have liked to have seen a fuller report. I will be interested to hear colleagues’ views on the subject.

If we are to expand on the issue, it might be helpful to invite someone from the Executive’s EU office to come to committee. That would give us the opportunity of further discussion on some of the issues. I have noted some points, but instead of expanding on them today, I would like to hear colleagues’ views on my suggestion. If we agree to pursue that road, I will reserve my questions for the time when an appropriate official can come before us.

Mr Raffan: I disagree slightly with Irene Oldfather; the report is quite useful. What worries me about it, however, is that we seem to be operating in compartments. We get the report and then all of a sudden we know about things like the fourth annual Belgo-British conference that the SEEUO helped to bring to Edinburgh last October. I did not have a clue that that was going on.

We also get to hear that the

“Districts of Creativity meet in Flanders”.

Although those of us who went to Flanders knew about the forum, it would be useful to have a report back on it. A bizarre—almost a random—collection of regions seems to have been included. It would be interesting to know more about the forum.

Similarly—this is a personal interest—I note Baroness Helena Kennedy’s St Andrew’s day lecture. Although I understand that she is now the former chairman of the British Council, she could make a good additional witness in our promotion of Scotland inquiry. It might be helpful to invite her, not only because of her experience of an important role in the British Council but because she is a Scot.

Although the report contains useful information, one sometimes feels that we hear about events only after they have happened. Who knows? Some of us might have been in Brussels at the time of some of the events.

I commend the SEEUO on the film festival. I have had feedback on it and understand that it was very successful. Perhaps there should be a Scottish weekend in Brussels with Dundee Rep Theatre one night and a whisky tasting on another night. That could act as a huge showcase for Scotland—we could invite representatives from all the member states.

Mr Morrison: I reinforce some of what Keith Raffan and Irene Oldfather have said and congratulate the diary secretary at Scotland House on compiling the paper and sending it to us. However, to grant the paper the status of a report would be a misuse of language.

That said, I agree with the recommendation in paragraph 4 of paper EU/S2/04/16/3. The Executive’s head of office at Scotland House should appear before the committee once or twice a year to discuss past events and events that are about to happen, as Keith Raffan said. Perhaps a 12-month forward look could be given.

Phil Gallie: I simply want to underline another thing that has gone ahead, which is now water under the bridge. From what I have seen of what the office is up to in Brussels, it is still beyond me why it could not have considered Scottish parliamentary affairs in Brussels too, rather than only Executive affairs. The convener might recall that the Scottish Parliament is setting up yet another office in Brussels for Scottish parliamentarians. It seems to me that that office could have come under the umbrella of the office that we are discussing.

Dennis Canavan: I strongly object to Phil Gallie’s suggestion. There is a big distinction between the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament. Part of the job of the Parliament and the committee is to bring the Executive to account rather than to climb into the same bed.

The Convener: On that last provocative remark from Mr Canavan, I want to draw consideration of the item to a close. Distinctions between Parliament and the Executive are important, and it is important to preserve them. In that respect, I sympathise with Mr Canavan.

I was struck by what Alasdair Morrison said about the report, which seems to be a downloading of the diary secretary’s output. It is also terribly reactive—it is all about what has happened and about responding to things.

To hear about what the office intends to achieve over a 12-month, 24-month or 36-month period to

advance the Scottish Executive's arguments would be helpful, and we should certainly hear about that from the head of the SEEUO. That office cannot look into a crystal ball and tell us absolutely everything that is likely to come up, but we should be able to scrutinise whether the office is appropriately resourced to provide the type of interrogative facilities that are required to ensure that our interests are being protected in the European Union.

I will convey members' comments in my reply to the minister. In particular, I will say that we want to question the head of office about the report in the future, and that we want much more explanation of the functions and roles of the office so that we can determine in advance whether it can deliver our expectations.

Mr Raffan: You mention questioning the head of office in the future. Do you mean for the next report? It would be good to see the head of office about the report that we are discussing. Perhaps he would then have a clear idea of what we want.

The Convener: I mentioned seeing the head of office in the future in order not to pin things down to a particular debate. Ideally, I would like an early explanation from the head of office about the office's current priorities, what it is resourced to deal with and its expectations of its role. We could then judge whether it is sufficient to protect the interests of Scotland in the European Union.

Irene Oldfather: I was going to raise the point that Keith Raffan raised. It is important that we have a reasonably early meeting at some point in the next few months. My understanding from the discussions that we had some years ago was that, as a result of questioning at that time, we asked the office to put down on paper the forward look—the vision of where we are going. Therefore, it would be helpful if someone came along to the committee sooner rather than later.

The Convener: We will set an early timescale on the matter and request a different type of report from the one that we received on this occasion.

Deputy Convener's Report

15:39

The Convener: Item 6 is consideration of what would normally be described as the convener's report, which has been formulated as the deputy convener's report in the absence of a convener during the past two weeks.

Irene Oldfather: There are two items in the report. First, members will recall that we have raised issues with the Food Standards Agency Scotland on a number of occasions. We have received a response from the minister and it is for members to decide how to progress the matter.

The Convener: Will you mention the second item? We can then discuss the issues.

Irene Oldfather: Okay. The second item relates to the biofuels directive. The committee has a responsibility to check whether European legislation is correctly transposed by the Scottish Executive. We also consider whether such legislation should be transposed on a UK basis or requires a particularly Scottish response.

We have received a letter from Ross Finnie about the biofuels directive, which refers to

"a proposed target that biofuels should form 0.3% of all fuel sales by volume by 31 December 2005".

The target appears to comply with the terms of the directive, but it is for the committee to decide whether it is appropriate that Scotland should implement the directive in the same way as the rest of the UK does. No doubt members want to express views on the matter.

Mr Raffan: On the food supplements issue, the penultimate paragraph of Malcolm Chisholm's letter sums up the situation. I have sympathy with the minister's position. He says:

"it would not be appropriate for a Minister to seek to intervene in the independent process of scientific risk assessment that EFSA is currently undertaking"—

that is, provided that he is satisfied that the scientific process is rigorous. The minister makes the point that the FSA argues strongly for a balance between the setting of maximum safe limits and the imposition of unnecessary limits on consumer choice. The minister and the FSA are clearly trying to strike that balance and it would be inappropriate for the minister to intervene in the European Food Safety Authority's work.

Phil Gallie: My concern is that scientists in the UK have in the past reached different conclusions on the matter from scientists elsewhere. As Keith Raffan said, I understand that the minister does not want to become involved in an argument with the scientists whom he employs. However, those

scientists went along with the limits that were considered safe in the past, but now we have to listen to scientists from elsewhere. Why are the limits no longer considered safe? Is there evidence that they are not safe? The minister has a role to play in establishing that. Before he takes a view on the matter, he should be convinced that the EFSA is right and that our scientists have been wrong.

Mr Home Robertson: We have been round that course already. It is obvious that it is most appropriate to leave it to the scientists to find a conclusive position on the issue. In any case, I suppose that the matter would be better dealt with by the Health Committee.

The biofuels directive should probably be considered by the Local Government and Transport Committee. I do not know whether the 0.3 per cent figure represents a lot of fuel—perhaps it is a lot. It would be interesting to know how the Scottish component of the UK target will be achieved and how much fuel the figure represents. Will the fuel be manufactured in Scotland or elsewhere? How will Scotland's part in the policy be achieved? Perhaps we could set a target that is a little more ambitious than 0.3 per cent.

15:45

Irene Oldfather: I have a comment on the dossier preparation costs, which was one of the substantial points that petitioners raised at an early stage. The minister's letter states that discussions at a meeting on 14 October 2003

"suggested dossier preparation costs for many of the 'missing' substances would be significantly lower than previously estimated."

It is important to put that on the public record because it was one of the petitioners' original areas of concern.

I note that the minister's letter also states:

"The European Food Safety Authority is continuing the work on safe upper levels for intakes of vitamins".

Our committee has done a substantial amount of work on the instrument, but my understanding is that the instrument would go back to the Health Committee and, if there were remaining concerns, it would be for that committee to take them up.

The Convener: I will draw the discussion to a close. The first point falls into the category of the difficult matters involving scientific advice. The issue is whether to follow such advice or to question it. I understand Phil Gallie's position. Within the current policy framework, the FSA was established to give an independent imprimatur to issues. The committee's consensus is to accept

that and to recognise that, if any new information arises, we can reflect on it in due course.

On the second point, John Home Robertson asked for further information on the detail of the target. We will secure that information and report to the committee on it in due course.

Fisheries Control Agency

15:46

The Convener: We move on to item 7, which is on the remit and function of the EU's Fisheries Control Agency. The committee asked the clerks to prepare a briefing paper on the formulation of the agency, which Stephen Imrie will say a few words about.

Stephen Imrie (Clerk): We prepared the paper in a somewhat short timescale, so it might not be as comprehensive as it could have been if we had had slightly longer. We are indebted to colleagues in the European Parliament who assisted us with the core questions. We accept that members might have other questions on the Fisheries Control Agency, but the questions in annex A are those that we thought the committee might want to consider.

Irene Oldfather: I welcome the paper's helpful detail. The clerks have set out three possible options. My preference is for option B. We have a current inquiry on promoting Scotland, so I do not think that we have the time for a full committee inquiry into the Fisheries Control Agency, as option C proposes. However, the issue is too important to leave to a further research paper, as option A proposes. It would be helpful if there was political direction from the committee, in the form of a committee member acting as a rapporteur—or reporter—and drafting a paper for the committee, as option B proposes.

Dennis Canavan: I propose John Home Robertson as our rapporteur.

The Convener: Let us wait until we get to that point.

Mr Raffan: My initial preference was for option A, then going on to option B. I agree with Irene Oldfather that we need more information. It would be useful for the committee to work with the European Parliament's rapporteur on the issue, particularly as she is a Scottish MEP. That would perhaps improve our relations with our members of the European Parliament, particularly that one. The work would be helpful to one of our major industries and we could learn a lot from working with the rapporteur on her respective committee. Option B is a good idea and is probably how we should go forward.

Phil Gallie: My view does not differ from that of my colleagues on this occasion and I am horrified by the contents of what we have before us. Keith Raffan referred to Elspeth Attwooll MEP, who is due to report on the issue by the end of October. Therefore, whatever we do must be done with a sense of urgency. Whatever we do, it will be well worth doing.

Dennis Canavan: The committee's present commitments and time constraints make option C very difficult, if not impossible. If any committee member is willing to be a reporter, we should go for option B. If no one volunteers, we should go for option A.

The Convener: In closing the discussion, I say that I am troubled by what the paper says about the direction of the initiative in contrast to where the Executive is going on the regional management of fisheries. The initiative does not sit comfortably with the Government's thinking. The political exercise must be undertaken. My view is that we need to pursue option B. It is important not to be diverted from completing the inquiry into the promotion of Scotland overseas but, equally, we should undertake that job of work. Mr Home Robertson's name was mentioned.

Mr Home Robertson: I am deeply flattered—if that is the right adverb or adjective; I am not sure—by Canavan's kind and generous thoughts. Option B is the right way to proceed, but I pass the buck to my colleague from the Western Isles.

Mr Morrison: I accept it.

The Convener: I thank you for that. We will have the report by next Monday, if you do not mind.

Mr Raffan: We will have the draft by Friday evening.

The Convener: I know that you lads from the Western Isles move at a cracking pace.

Dennis Canavan: You will get the belt if you are late.

Pre and Post-council Scrutiny

15:52

The Convener: Agenda item 8 is the paper on pre and post-council scrutiny, which was circulated last week. We have two additional documents. One relates to the employment, social policy, health and consumer affairs council on 4 October and the other concerns the agriculture and fisheries council on 18 and 19 October. Do members have any comments?

Irene Oldfather: I have not had time to read in detail the paper on the employment, social policy, health and consumer affairs council, but I note that item 1 is a proposal for a directive of the Parliament and the Council to amend the directive on the organisation of working time. Am I correct in thinking that that could have a significant impact on junior doctors in this country? I note that the Department of Trade and Industry is leading and that the Executive is fully engaged in the issue, but if the proposal is likely to affect the situation in our hospitals, we should at least refer it to the Health Committee or examine it more closely.

Mr Raffan: I support that. We have covered before—perhaps elsewhere in the Parliament—the two recent European Court of Justice judgments concerning SIMAP and Jaeger, which will have consequences for junior hospital doctors' working hours. More consultant overtime will be necessary, which will probably have large cost implications. It is important to consider the subject further and we should certainly draw it to the Health Committee's attention.

Phil Gallie: On junior hospital doctors' hours, the horse has already bolted to a degree. However, it is worth re-examining the matter.

A proposal in the transport paper also gives me considerable concern. It will have a major impact on our transport industry, because we are on the periphery of Europe and we have drivers going all over Europe from the UK. The implications for our transport industry could be costly.

I query the point in the paper on the agriculture and fisheries council about significant cuts in deep-sea total allowable catches. I would like to know what species we are talking about and which fishing fleets are affected. It seems to me that the issue could be pretty significant.

Mr Home Robertson: On Phil Gallie's last point about deep-sea total allowable catches, I presume that the issue relates to north-east Atlantic fisheries.

The Convener: This will be the start of the build-up to the annual fishery talks in December, I presume.

Mr Home Robertson: No. If it is deep water off the west coast, we might be talking about an area outside European waters. Although it is possible to enforce TACs on European Union fishing vessels, including our own, the big problem in deep-sea waters is non-EU fishing fleets from Russia, Poland and other countries, where it might not be possible to enforce the TACs. That is important, because deep-sea species can be fished out rapidly and have a slow recovery time. We are seeking to control the fisheries effort by our own fishermen and by other EU fishermen, but the big question concerns what is being done about other fishermen. If we do not address that question, those deep-water species will be fished out very quickly.

Phil Gallie: Thank you, John. That was really what concerned me, but I am more concerned about what specifically is being referred to. The information that we have is not clear, and it has to be specific.

The Convener: We can certainly take up the two points that have been raised. I will ask the clerks to investigate the detail of the issue relating to the agriculture and fisheries council, so that we can see more information on that and find out whether it is part of the annual round of discussions about fisheries management that have historically caused so much distress.

On the working time directive, we will ask the Executive for further information on the issues that are to be raised and we will ask it for information on the outcome of the discussions into the bargain.

The paper that was issued contains a table of recommendations relating to the documents. I ask members to agree to take the steps that have been requested. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Phil Gallie: I would like to ask about the transport paper. I do not fully understand it and it frightens me. Would it be possible to pass that to the Local Government and Transport Committee?

The Convener: We can certainly do so, if that is the desire of the committee. Are there specific points that concern you? Is it the heavy goods vehicle section that you are worried about?

Phil Gallie: It concerns road tolling and a whole range of aspects. That is why I wanted to ask about it.

The Convener: That is the first part, is it not?

Phil Gallie: Yes.

The Convener: Okay. We shall pass that to the Local Government and Transport Committee and ask whether there are issues of concern that it wants to consider in further detail.

Sift

15:58

The Convener: The final item on the agenda is the sift of EC and EU documents and draft legislation. I ask members to look at the section on documents of special importance, where the clerks have listed for us a number of points that arise from the documents.

Irene Oldfather: I note the recommendation relating to the mid-term review of the Commission's legislative and work programme for 2004, and also the comment that, in fact, we might want to track documents from 2005 onwards. The 2004 Commission document is already passé; that has gone. The Commission has already held discussions with other institutions, including the European Parliament, about what is going to be in the programme for 2005. It would be much better for us to have early intelligence on what people are saying in the European Parliament, in the Committee of the Regions and elsewhere about input to the legislative programme for 2005, than it would be to waste any time having a Commission official here to discuss this year's programme.

The Convener: The point that the clerks are making is that we would have that person here later in 2004 to discuss the 2005 issues.

Irene Oldfather: Right.

The Convener: I am certainly comfortable with that and I feel that we should have that early sight of what the Commission's priorities are for 2005.

Are there any other points that members want to raise about the recommendations?

Phil Gallie: Returning to fishing issues, there is one point that intrigues me. Paper 1433, which is relevant to the Environment and Rural Development Committee, is a proposal for a Council decision on the withdrawal by the European Community from the Convention on Fishing and Conservation of the Living Resources in the Baltic Sea and Belts. I wonder if there is any knock-on effect if we pull out. I do not know and I do not understand it. I do not know what it is about, but I am always worried about such proposals in case there is a knock-on effect somewhere along the line. If we pull out of that convention, could waters that we are interested in be affected?

Mr Home Robertson: I can safely assure Phil Gallie that there are no Scottish fishing interests in the Baltic, and not even in the Belts.

Phil Gallie: That is not the point, convener.

The Convener: The point is that we need to know the implications of a change of that nature. I

shall get the clerks to investigate and ask them to advise Mr Gallie if any issues arise.

If there are no other questions, we shall agree to the recommendations in the sift paper.

Mr Raffan: Very briefly, convener—

The Convener: I hope that you are not trying to catch my eye with some any other business, Mr Raffan.

Mr Raffan: I just wonder what we are doing about the south of Scotland alliance.

The Convener: I am sorry. I mentioned when we were discussing the paper on European funding that we had had representation from the south of Scotland alliance. It is not exactly a tangential issue, but it is a slightly different issue. When we get a further response from the Executive, we will reflect on the contents of the south of Scotland alliance representation into the bargain.

Meeting closed at 16:01.

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