

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 26 October 2004

Session 2

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EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE 17th 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)

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP)

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Sandra Kinnear (Scottish Women's Rugby Union)

Ken Miller (sportscotland)

Alasdair Russell (Scottish Rugby Union)

David Williams (EventScotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Imrie

ASSISTANT CLERKS

Nick Hawthorne

David Simpson

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

European and External Relations Committee

Tuesday 26 October 2004

[THE CONVENER opened the meeting at 14:02]

Promoting Scotland Worldwide Inquiry

The Convener (John Swinney): Good afternoon and welcome to the 17th meeting in 2004 of the European and External Relations Committee. We have received apologies from Dennis Canavan, who cannot be with us today, and John Home Robertson is on his way back through from a committee meeting that was held in Glasgow this morning. There are no notified substitutes for the meeting.

The first item on the agenda is the continuation of our promoting Scotland worldwide inquiry, which the committee has conducted over the past nine months or so. We are coming to the latter stages of the inquiry.

We have with us Ken Miller, from sportscotland; David Williams, from EventScotland; Alasdair Russell, from the Scottish Rugby Union; and Sandra Kinnear, from the Scottish Women's Rugby Union. We had invited, and had hoped to have with us, a representative of the Scottish Football Association, but we were notified at the tail end of last week that the SFA had declined our invitation to attend at this opportunity.

We have in front of us written submissions from each of the organisations and a news brief from EventScotland. I invite each of our four witnesses, starting with Mr Miller, to say a brief word of introduction before we commence the questioning.

Ken Miller (sportscotland): Good afternoon. I am the head of marketing at sportscotland. We are the national agency for sport in Scotland and our main remit is to increase participation in sport at every level. We are funded both from lottery funds and from the Exchequer. Last year, we invested about £45 million in sport in Scotland. Our main areas of investment are sport and physical activity in schools; investing in medal success through our athletes and governing bodies; and investing in the governing bodies of sport and in sport facilities. We also play a leading role in co-ordinating the national strategy for sport in Scotland, which is sport 21.

David Williams (EventScotland): I am the chief executive of EventScotland, which is a new entity

and a joint venture between the Scottish Executive and VisitScotland. EventScotland was created with three main roles in its remit. One role is identifying major international events and attracting them to Scotland. Those events must have the capacity to provide international television coverage or media promotion of Scotland, or to attract spectators or participants from overseas. The second role is consideration of existing events in Scotland that have the capacity to be world-class events, and supporting those events to take that next step. The third role is creating new events that can be held annually or biannually in Scotland, again with the primary target of international media coverage or international participation.

Alasdair Russell (Scottish Rugby Union): I am the head of marketing at the Scottish Rugby Union. I have worked with everyone here, including Dave Williams from EventScotland and Ken Miller from sportscotland, which is nice.

On delivering international tournaments, we have had the under-21 International Rugby Board rugby world championships, which were held in this country earlier this year. They were enabled by our working with agencies whose representatives are around this table. It is nice that familiar faces are here. Our role is to establish Scotland as one of the leading world-class rugby nations in the next 10 years in respect of participation and interest, and for rugby to grow faster than any other sport in Scotland.

I hope that that gives members a wee update.

Sandra Kinnear (Scottish Women's Rugby Union): I am chairperson of the Scottish Women's Rugby Union, which has been a volunteer organisation since 1993. In 1999, we entered discussions with the SRU, and we are pleased to say that we are currently considering complete integration with the SRU in order to promote rugby abroad, as we have done in the past few years. At the moment, we do not have a marketing department and so on because of our human resources. Integration with the SRU would therefore help us a great deal.

The SWRU has played and promoted rugby abroad since 1993, with participation in the European championships and the women's world cup competitions. Our aspiration for the future is to become a major contender, so that we can host either the European championships in 2008 or the women's world cup in 2010.

The Convener: I thank you all for your initial remarks.

As David Williams said, EventScotland is a new organisation—a new player—in the debate. One point that has emerged from the evidence that the committee has taken so far on the promotion of Scotland overseas is that a tremendous number of

players are involved in that exercise. Looking at things from another perspective, it strikes me that the model of EventScotland as a single body that has an obligation to try to bring major events into Scotland provides lessons or ideas about how the promotion of Scotland might be structured in process terms. I am looking at the promotion of Scotland to other markets from the other end of the telescope. Will you comment on that proposition and tell me the extent to which your work is different from promoting Scotland overseas? Is EventScotland as a whole, by trying to bring events to this country, doing some of the work that the inquiry is focused on, in effect, in trying to promote Scotland to a wider market?

David Williams: EventScotland does not operate as a silo. We have very much a co-ordinating and leadership role in securing and supporting events. We will not support events on our own. If we cannot bring local government and other funding agencies along with us—if they are not sufficiently enthusiastic about an event—we will not support it. Our role is about providing a high level of expertise on and intellectual knowledge about events, identifying the right outlets, doing the business planning, bringing together the partners and being there or supporting the event. Therefore, we work with a range of partner organisations.

The Convener: You said that your organisation was not a silo, but would you characterise it as a facilitator of events?

David Williams: Yes, very much so—as a facilitator or as a provider of leadership. Before our organisation was created, there was a lot of consultation among a range of agencies as to whether an organisation like EventScotland was needed. Lots of agencies were providing funding for events but there was no co-ordination and no particular expertise in, or targeting of, specific types of event. In the end, it was felt strongly that an organisation was needed to co-ordinate and lead in the area of major events, which is now a huge global industry. To be competitive, a high level of expertise is needed.

There is one thing that we will not do: if there is an arts event and the Scottish Arts Council is not supportive, or if there is a sports event and sportscotland is not supportive, we will not support the event either. We do not operate separately; we need the engagement and participation of other agencies. We provide a leadership role, although we also provide substantial financial support.

A point of difference between us and other agencies is that events provide a very good window into a country. Many countries around the world are trying to promote themselves as tourist destinations or for investment, and the costs of using the traditional means of television or the

media are very high. Events provide a window into a country.

The great case study is probably Australia. Australia is a long way from anywhere and 20 years ago it was trying desperately to find an identity and a way of promoting itself. It could not afford to do so by traditional means, tourism means or investment means, so it used events as a window. After 20 years, people no longer regard Australia as just a great big dusty country—a place with nice people but one that does not register on the radar. People have seen that we have sophisticated, cosmopolitan cities, but, more than that, they have seen the high capability of Australians. I do not think that any medium other than events could have done that.

Events can change perceptions and reveal a place to be a place where things happen. There are tangible benefits, such as the measurable economic impacts and the media profile, and there are intangible benefits, such as the fact that a place can seem much more attractive. Things are always happening in a country with events. Australia is a good case study; I hope that within the next 10 years it will be Scotland.

The Convener: In essence, you are saying that EventScotland has a role in attracting events to come here and in professionalising and co-ordinating the way in which various agencies work, so that agencies with discrete responsibilities can work together to be part of the promotion of Scotland overseas. That model may be relevant to our inquiry.

David Williams: I am fairly new here and the organisation has been going for only about 12 months. My view is that partnership is the key to everything in overseas promotion. I have learned that lesson over many years of working with Governments that tend to set up lots of organisations that have set roles but do not talk to one another. We talk. We talk to everyone we can find. We need partners. I re-emphasise the need for partnership and co-ordination.

The Convener: So, your argument is not about reducing or streamlining the number of organisations; your view is that it does not matter how many organisations there are, as long as they work effectively together.

David Williams: I do not think that I can comment on the number of organisations; I have not been here long enough to do that. My view is that co-ordination and partnership, and each organisation understanding what the others are doing, will be very important for Scotland.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I have a question for Mr Williams, although I am sure that it can also be asked of the other witnesses. Your remit is restricted to sporting and

cultural events. Is that too narrow? I am thinking about Scotland's ability to attract international conferences. This summer, a major conference that took place in south-east Asia attracted 19,500 delegates from all over the world. Why is your remit as narrow as it is?

David Williams: The remit may change over the years. At the moment, VisitScotland has a business unit that deals with conventions; the convention bureaux and the convention centres have a role in that, too. When I occupied a previous position in Australia, the events corporation did strategic business events, but they were among the top 1 per cent of conventions, which were for more than 5,000 people, or they were for industries that the Queensland Government at the time thought would be important to Queensland in the future. We targeted such events. At the moment, EventScotland's role covers sport, culture, the arts and so on. Although that role may change over the years, at the moment it is set. Other bodies are doing the business events side.

14:15

Mr Raffan: I do not want to be hard on you, because you have been in post for only just over a year, but your written submission continually mentions two "icon" events, the Edinburgh festival and the open championship. That phrase is repeated to the extent that one realises that we do not have many other icon events.

I have just glanced through "EventScotland News", a copy of which you were kind enough to give us just before the meeting started. It contains mention of a large number of events that I have never heard of. If I have never heard of them, I doubt that people internationally have ever heard of them. Why is that? I have studied your remit carefully and read two or three times about what you are trying to do. Do some of those events have the potential to be built up into international events and, if so, how long do you think that it will take to do that with the Edinbane festival in Skye, for example?

David Williams: We have a regional events programme. When EventScotland was set up, its primary focus was to promote Scotland overseas through international events, but the Government gave it the mandate of supporting events throughout Scotland. To an extent, that is impossible, because there are more than 10,000 events throughout Scotland, so we created a regional events programme, to which we allocate £500,000 a year. The programme deals with smaller events that take place outside the metropolitan areas of Edinburgh and Glasgow and which will drive up domestic tourism. We can support such events by giving them an allocation

of between £2,000 and £25,000, if the organisers can prove to us that the event can grow. The small community of Edinbane on Skye has a population of 150 and its festival brings in 2,000 people. Our support takes the form of a one-off grant that is aimed at growing the event. Those small regional events are not our core business; our core business is international events.

Mr Raffan: My final point is about not just how you build up those small events, but what you do about significant future events. For example, do you intend to piggyback on events such as the G8 summit in early July? That is one of next year's major happenings, even though it is a political event. The focus of the world's media will be on us for about five or six days, as Perth and Kinross Council is acutely aware. The summit is being held in my region. Does the potential exist for you to piggyback on that event in a sporting or cultural way, so that we can expand the promotion of Scotland that that event will obviously result in?

David Williams: One could say that the G8 summit is a big event in its own right, which has a global market. My view is that, instead of creating events, we should put together a portfolio of events that are happening while the G8 summit is on—many major events will be taking place all round Scotland at that time—and ensure that the media and the delegates all have that information. The G8 festival is not about creating new events on top of what is already there, but about putting together a package of events that are on in the Gleneagles region and in Edinburgh and Glasgow at the time. VisitScotland has a big role to play with the media.

Mr Raffan: I want to bring in Mr Russell. One of the centrepieces of the G8 summit will be the report from the Prime Minister's commission for Africa. An interesting aspect of your submission and of Mr Miller's was the business of coaching and getting sporting figures to do coaching ventures with kids in places where they have competed. I raised that issue in the debate on Scotland's international image that was held before the recess, in relation to building up our reputation overseas. I ask Mr Miller and Mr Russell to what extent they think that an opportunity exists for piggybacking on what will happen at the G8, when the commission for Africa will report. Can sporting figures in Scotland play their part in other countries, especially sub-Saharan Africa?

Alasdair Russell: We are certainly getting behind such initiatives. We linked the fact that Scotland is playing Japan on 13 November this year to Perth and Kinross Council's bid to take away the international from Murrayfield, perhaps for the first time. In doing that, we had the strategic aim of taking rugby further afield and broadening

the appeal of rugby by allowing for the Japanese to train in the local Perth and Kinross schools. We regard that as central to our objectives. The G8 summit coming to Perth and Kinross has enabled us to do that, with the support of the local council.

Mr Raffan: I was thinking more about what you can do over in Africa with your teams—for example, coaching.

Alasdair Russell: We do that continually during all events abroad. For example, during the rugby world cup I think that we were the only British team to do any coaching sessions. We continually promote the Scotland brand abroad. There is a huge marketplace of expatriate Scots and we continually try to maximise that. We would also like to do it in a more integrated way by bringing together sporting and cultural events. For example, Scottish rugby would be interested in having a sporting aspect to the tartan day in New York.

Ken Miller: There is always the potential for Scots who compete on the international stage to promote Scotland. However, to put a caveat on that, those who compete at a high level have strict training schedules and we would have to be able to incorporate any message promotion into their training plans. There is the potential for athletes, particularly those who receive lottery funding, to be used in promoting Scotland when they compete abroad.

People would have to be trained in how to promote Scotland abroad. It is not enough, for example, just to ask an athlete to represent Scotland in a media call. Specific training would be required for that. If we go down that route, I would recommend having a training programme for a small number of athletes who could be used over and over again so that they would be used to promoting the message and would be comfortable with it. If we do not go down that route, we might not get out the right message.

The Convener: To what extent is sportscotland involved in identifying lottery or state-funded athletes or sportspeople who can perform a promotional role? Is sportscotland asked to do that?

Ken Miller: Not at the moment. However, we have a programme in Scotland called sporting champions, in which we use athletes who are achieving, or are about to achieve, on the world stage to go into schools in Scotland and encourage schoolchildren to follow their dreams, whether those are sporting, arts or whatever. The principle is similar to athletes going abroad and delivering a message. We do not encourage athletes to go out and promote Scotland per se, but there is the potential for doing so. We can ask an athlete who receives lottery funds to perform an

ambassadorial role abroad, but we currently do not do that to promote Scotland abroad.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): I had similar thoughts about the principle of a model. The committee has been grappling with that idea. People have said in evidence to the committee that they feel that there is a leadership vacuum and a lack of pulling things together. I am interested in the points that David Williams raised. You stated in your written submission that your budget is £10 million over three years. Can you say a bit about your staffing and the proportion of your budget that is taken up by staffing compared with the proportion that you spend on marketing and the promotion of Scotland?

David Williams: The £10 million budget was divided into £2 million for the first year, £3 million for this year and £5 million for next year. Our organisation is small. We have nine full-time staff and four contract, part-time staff. We work in a small, highly specialised area. The organisation's staff and administration costs are probably around £700,000 a year, which reduces as a percentage of the budget as the budget increases. However, we need a certain minimal level of resources internally.

Irene Oldfather: Can you put any kind of figure on the economic development potential that you have brought into Scotland as a result of the events that you have secured and promoted?

David Williams: I have not got a total, but every event that we do has an economic impact. For example, the MTV awards had a £9 million impact and that event's media value was another £6 million. There is always a media value to events.

We have done a lot of work on adventure sports, which is a niche market in tourism in which Scotland has great strategic advantages. We have supported a number of television events because of their economic impact. For example, the Tiree wave classic, which was held off Tiree last weekend, was a fantastic event with 40 of the world's top windsurfers. A programme on the event will go out to an audience of about 200 million homes through TV networks. We have supported adventure races at Loch Lomond and Loch Tay that were made for television—they will appear on Channel 4 and on international television next year. This year's downhill mountain bike world cup event at Fort William had a huge economic impact—it brought about £1 million into the area. The event brought 17,000 people to Fort William, and it was impossible to get accommodation in the area.

With other agencies, we are developing a uniform econometric model so that we can agree on the methodology for doing economic-impact studies for future events. At present, we estimate

what the economic or media impact of events will be, but I do not have a rolling total on the value of the events that we have supported. We will obviously need to have such a total.

Irene Oldfather: If that information became available, I am sure that the committee would like to see it.

I want to follow up Keith Raffan's point about how you decide what to promote. Would you consider supporting an event such as T in the Park, which attracts major international bands to Scotland and is covered on television? You obviously gained a great deal of experience from the MTV awards ceremony.

David Williams: T in the Park is promoted by a private promoter and sells out months in advance—it is a profit-making venture, for which it would not be appropriate to use Government funds. We support events that would not be hosted in Scotland without Government support. I have spoken to Geoff Ellis about T in the Park. He wants a more international audience—that is a big bottom line for his company—but I doubt whether it would be appropriate to use public money for that. However, I acknowledge that it is a fantastic event. If T in the Park had problems and needed a marketing boost to get people there from overseas, we might get involved, but it does not. It is an extraordinarily successful event.

Irene Oldfather: It seems to me that the event has international potential, but I take your point that perhaps that should be explored in other ways.

David Williams: I know that Geoff Ellis has spoken to VisitScotland about more promotion in northern Europe, which is a key market for VisitScotland.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I want to return to Mr Williams's comments about the Queensland Government and the economic impact of the events that have been set up there. Does he believe that Australia's sporting image—the country is good at many sports despite its small population—does more than anything to promote Australia worldwide?

David Williams: That is undoubtedly one of the mediums for promoting the country. The change in Australian sport started in 1976, when Australians won two medals at the Montreal Olympic games. The structures of sport were changed and institutes were developed. For 20 years, Australians have performed well on the world stage. Australians feel proud of the performance of their teams and people certainly look on Australia as a sporting nation. Sport and events have been great platforms for the promotion of Australia.

Phil Gallie: I wonder whether Mr Miller has any comment on that. Greater investment in the promotion of sport in Scotland, which is not entirely within his control, could have a positive impact on our economic situation. At present, Scottish rugby is sadly not as good as we would like and Scottish football is in an abysmal state. Does Mr Miller feel that we should invest in sport?

Ken Miller: You are correct that sporting success portrays a positive image of the nation. That is one part of portraying a successful Scotland. We have invested in the Scottish Institute of Sport—I believe that it was instituted in 1998. In Australia, it took a number of years before success came about as a result of the investment. We are at the beginning of a long-term process and we cannot expect success within four or eight years. Only after that will we begin to see the fruits of the labours of the Scottish Institute of Sport.

The other thing to point out is that we are investing in participation in schools. Again, that is not a short-term fix, because there is no short-term fix in Scottish sport. A lot of the investment that we are helping the Scottish Executive with is not just in sport, but in physical activity at grass-roots level and educating kids in basic movement. That may seem a far cry from sporting success at the other end of the spectrum, but it is essential, because without basic motor skills kids cannot move on to particular sports and increase their prowess. We have an extensive programme in Scottish schools, through a co-ordinators programme. That will bear fruit, but we will not get the benefits in the next two, three or four years. It is a long-term programme.

14:30

Phil Gallie: That is welcome. I know that you get quite a bit of support from the SRU.

I have a question for Alasdair Russell. This is perhaps unfair given the number of foreign players that we have in soccer, but it seems that rugby is still going down the line of bringing in people from other countries. Does that have an adverse effect on the promotion of Scottish sport, by depriving our own youngsters of the opportunity to play, or is it positive in that, by playing with others, our players' knowledge and experience is increased?

Alasdair Russell: The second point is true. Look at a player like Todd Blackadder. He has not represented Scotland, but he has had a massive impact on the players around him. He was an iconic All Black captain who has come over here to share best practice and knowledge of what it is to be an All Black and at the height of your sport. That has had a positive effect on everyone he deals with on a daily basis. Not only do the players around him benefit, but the next generation of

Scottish youngsters benefit from school visits from such icons of world sport who come to Scotland.

The Convener: But by their nature such measures are long term.

Alasdair Russell: Yes.

The Convener: I have a question for Sandra Kinnear. Has sportscotland been effective in promoting the long-term development of your newly recognised sport over the past 10 years? Has the development of women's rugby in this country led to further international focus on Scotland?

Sandra Kinnear: We have received support from sportscotland since about 1998. Lately, we have been given a substantial amount of support from other organisations to help us to see whether we have the pathways for people to get from one level of rugby to international level. We did not have a strategic plan in place with a pathway for young people, but sportscotland has helped us to produce a strategic plan. It has also helped us to link in to the SRU. Like the SRU, we hope to promote rugby in schools. Young girls play rugby in schools up to the age of 12, but there is no pathway for them between the ages of 12 and 16—they cannot play rugby until they are 16—so quite a lot of girls are lost. Through the integration process, we hope to establish with the SRU and sportscotland a pathway that will lead to more international success and more people participating in the game both at full, international level and as volunteers.

The Convener: But that strikes me as a long-term process.

Sandra Kinnear: Yes. It will take a few years, but we can establish a pathway in the first year that will increase participation by at least 50 per cent, because so many people want to play rugby. We do not have the resources to do that at the minute, but with the help of the SRU and the strategic plan that we will put in place, that will happen. In the first year, we should see results that will have a knock-on effect in future years.

The Convener: I call Margaret Ewing. It is lovely to see Margaret back with us.

Members: Hear, hear.

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): There are lots of questions I would like to ask. All the witnesses have mentioned in written and oral evidence the importance that is attached to television coverage; it is important for the participants as well as for promoting Scotland, which is what our inquiry is about. How do you deal with television companies? I am conscious that, in soccer, there is always a great stramash at the beginning of every season about who gets the coverage. Are there difficulties there? I think that

EventScotland said that there might be funding available from it to meet television production costs. How do you see that developing? There could be difficulties in ensuring the level of coverage that we would want from the funding.

I enjoyed the reference to someone from EventScotland identifying “cool” destinations in Edinburgh for the MTV awards—that was a wonderful phrase that cropped up in the EventScotland submission.

The Convener: Perhaps you will share the list with us so that we all know where they are.

Mrs Ewing: Ken Miller talked about £45.4 million in 2003-04, some of which was from the Scottish Executive and some of which was from national lottery funds. What is the exact division of funds?

I was concerned to read that sportscotland is determined to use retired Scottish champions such as Allan Wells, Sir Jackie Stewart and David Wilkie. Sportscotland, the SRU and the Scottish Women's Rugby Union are all interested in bringing young people into sport. How can they link in with more recent excellent participants, such as the young man from Dunblane playing tennis in America and the young man from Elgin competing in ice-skating? Also, how do the witnesses envisage us maintaining a specific Scottish identity when we participate in international events under the banner of the United Kingdom or Great Britain?

Ken Miller: I will deal with each point in turn. On the division of funds, last year we invested £31.6 million of lottery funds and £13.7 million of Exchequer funding. Those totals vary year on year, but that is what we invested in 2003-04.

We use athletes who have recently retired purely to counter the fact that athletes who are currently competing sometimes have tight schedules and are focused on their events. Our experience so far in the sporting champions scheme in Scotland is that it is difficult to work around athletes' training and competition schedules. By using athletes who have recently retired, we can get the best of both worlds. They are still well known, because they have retired only recently, and their time is slightly more readily available. You asked how we can use young talent. In promoting ourselves abroad, we have to face the fact that the people who will be more easily recognised are the people who are established. We have a better chance of getting air time with athletes who have already achieved and who have a greater reputation. However, that is not to say that we cannot train our up-and-coming athletes to be able to represent Scotland when they are in front of a television camera or a radio mike.

The Convener: Are there other comments on the points that Margaret Ewing raised?

David Williams: One of the biggest challenges for any sport or event is getting television coverage. It is rare for television companies to pay for coverage unless it is of football or rugby, so most events have the challenge of paying for it. We see events as one of the windows into Scotland, so quite often we pay for independent TV production of events as long as the coverage is being picked up by another network or being distributed overseas. A good example is the world bowls championship, which was held in Ayrshire just before the Olympic games. The organisers had a real problem because even though they won the event four or five years ago, they scheduled it for one week before the Olympic games, so none of the TV networks were interested in televising it. In the end we brought in consultants and a private TV company and we got the finals covered in New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, which are major markets.

Many of the events that we do, such as adventure racing and the Tiree wave classic, are purely television events. We pay for the television. Indeed, one of our fundamental roles is to ensure that we get television exposure for events.

Mrs Ewing: Is that a drain on your funds, though? Are you breaking even?

David Williams: It is a core function. There is no money in television rights unless we are talking about football and rugby. Outside such sports, people pay for coverage. Coverage from BBC Scotland, ITV and so on costs a large sum of money. Independent television production companies are quite good and much cheaper, as long as we can place events on networks or secure international distribution of the harness packages.

The Convener: When you arrange television coverage for an event such as the Tiree wave classic surfing championships, what efforts are made through the television package—if we can call it that—to promote a strong identity of Scotland and its attractive features, other than by showing the area's fabulous scenery? For example, would the coverage include adverts from VisitScotland or other organisations?

David Williams: If we are paying for television coverage, we talk to the companies about showing not just the event but the highlights of the region in which the event is taking place. To secure more media coverage at the Tiree event, Miss Scotland and Miss UK were brought in to add to the attraction of the event and to make it more interesting to the networks.

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): I hope that they were warmly wrapped up.

The Convener: They would have to be.

David Williams: At the European cross-country championships in Holyrood park, we tried to ensure that cameras panned out to show not just the park and the event but Edinburgh. We pay for television production—

The Convener: So you can control it.

David Williams: We can control it and ensure that the assets of the region are shown.

Mr Home Robertson: Will the witnesses comment on the infrastructure to support major, world-class events? When a large number of people are attracted to an area, it is always a worry that although the event might be wonderful, if people's experiences of transport and accommodation are appalling, they drag everything down. David Williams said that during the mountain bike world cup at Lochaber people could not find accommodation for miles around. Can organisations such as yours liaise with Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Executive to try to plan in the medium and long term, to ensure that the infrastructure for transport and accommodation is developed in strategic areas to support events?

David Williams: That is a supply and demand issue. There must be sufficient demand. Events can create demand year round. The challenge for organisers of events in remote locations is to provide efficient transport so that competitors and spectators can get to their accommodation. The world mountain bike championships in 2007 will present a real challenge, because the event is already twice the size of the world cup. Very good transport infrastructure will have to be in place to ensure that people can get to and from their accommodation. Obviously we cannot create new accommodation unless there is a demand for it, but we can help organisers to consider transport planning for events in remote locations.

In general, the major cities host the bulk of the major events. Major events that require major infrastructure obviously have to take place in significant population centres that have enough hotels to support them. We have certainly been involved in events outside the major metropolitan areas and the challenge is to supply effective transport and to locate accommodation. We cannot create accommodation without there being a huge demand, but events—especially annual events—increase demand.

The Convener: I am thinking about your ability to market Scotland effectively as a location. To what extent do you have to pass a tick-box test of the infrastructure that is in place? When you are trying to secure an event, are you asked whether people can catch a train from Edinburgh airport directly into the city centre?

David Williams: There is no question about it. If several cities are competing to secure a major international event, the international federation that owns the event considers all sorts of matters, such as the different classes of accommodation that are available, the accommodation's distance from the venue and transport links. Direct air services are key for Scotland, whether we are talking about business events or tourism, and there have been substantial improvements in direct air links during the past few years. All those matters count.

Another important matter that counts is the capability of the country that hosts the event. We have a great advantage in Scotland because we have fantastic cultural events. The Edinburgh festivals, Edinburgh's hogmanay and the open championship are run as well as events are run anywhere in the world. We host the biggest arts and cultural events, so we have a level of expertise that is a real selling point. However, we must be competitive on venues, accommodation and transport.

14:45

The Convener: Based on your international experience—perhaps your colleagues could comment, too—is Scotland's infrastructure a disadvantage in securing major events?

David Williams: No. We think outside the box. We would not go for an event that requires a 15,000-seat indoor venue, because we cannot do that. We focus on activities for which Scotland has strategic assets or advantages. Adventure sports are a great example of that. We probably have some of the greatest natural assets in the world for adventure sports, which represent a growing niche market. On a drive up to the Highlands, many people will be seen with mountain bikes on top of their cars. We consider those of Scotland's strategic assets that allow us to run events for which we have advantages over other countries.

Sometimes a major event is the catalyst for new infrastructure, as for the Commonwealth games. If that bid succeeds, we will have some fantastic new infrastructure. I know that sportscotland has invested substantially in infrastructure. In the next few years, radical improvements in sport infrastructure will be made.

Ken Miller: I will comment on the infrastructure that David Williams talked about. Under a partnership that involves the Scottish Executive and local authorities, the Scottish Executive and sportscotland are investing about £50 million in infrastructure. When that is combined with local authority investment, about £230 million is going into a network of regional sporting facilities, which include indoor football and rugby training areas

and municipal stadia. A fair amount of investment is going on.

The Convener: What was that figure?

Ken Miller: It is about £230 million.

The Convener: Over what length of time will that amount be invested?

Ken Miller: The facilities are planned to be developed by 2007.

The Convener: Do you have any analysis of how that scale of investment compares with that in any of the peer countries against which we might compete for some events?

Ken Miller: I do not have that analysis at the moment—perhaps some of my colleagues do.

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): My question relates to infrastructure and the ability to market a country worldwide. With the exception of the world cup finals, the Olympic games are arguably the biggest opportunity to promote a country. The experience from Greece and Australia is that the Olympic games are a catalyst for massive infrastructure investment. How are you tied into discussion of the exciting efforts to secure the Olympics for London, the trickle-down effect of securing the Olympic games for the UK and London and how Scotland could pitch into that?

Ken Miller: I will say a little about that. First, all our competing athletes would treat Olympic games that were held in London as a home game. They would regard a London Olympics as the equivalent of being on their own doorstep, in comparison with some international events, so we would very much welcome the games to the UK.

As for investing to support the bid, we have given guidance on what we should invest in to support the games. We are already investing in those matters, which include supporting athletes in the build-up to the games and helping governing bodies with infrastructure to put coaches in place to help to develop athletes.

Athletes and—I hope—performances would benefit from a successful London 2012 bid. I am probably speaking about a subject that I am not entirely sure about, but tourism benefits would certainly accrue from people who attended the games. I hope that they would come to Scotland and that we would have an opportunity to promote Scotland to visitors to the games.

David Williams: We have a steering committee in the Executive, which I am heading at the moment, that is liaising with London 2012. We want to secure as much support as we can for the London bid. My personal view is that, when it started off, the bid was very London-centric and that London was failing to articulate the benefits of

the Olympics to Britain. When Australia won the bid for the Olympics in 2000, I was the director general of tourism, sport and a number of other portfolios in Queensland. Straight away, we created an Olympic task force and installed a full-time secretariat. We developed strategies for pre-Olympic training, business, tourism and culture. At the end of it, we estimated that the benefits to Queensland were about 1 billion Australian dollars.

We opened an office in Sydney to ensure that every Queensland company in an arts industry was aware of the contracts that were being put out by the Sydney organising committee. We got 400 million Australian dollars in contracts alone. We hosted Olympic soccer—pool games and a quarter-final—and the tourism benefits were astronomical for Australia and Queensland. The Olympics are a four-year cultural period, and we wanted to ensure that Queenslanders were well represented in the four years of cultural festivals. The performers from overseas came to Queensland as well.

I think that there will be enormous benefits to Scotland if London secures the games. The investment in the development of sport in the UK will be enormous. A key issue is that, although a country might host a successful games, if that country is not successful on the field, the games are seen as unsuccessful. I think that we will see unparalleled investment in elite development, followed by greater participation and the improved profile of sports. My view is that we have to do everything that we can in Scotland to support London's bid to maximise the benefits to Scotland.

Mr Morrison: What is being done to promote Scotland's strategic assets—to use your phrase—in relation to the 2012 bid?

David Williams: We are collating a list of all the venues in Scotland that can be used for pre-Olympic training. The London bid committee is putting together a dossier for the International Olympic Committee on international-standard venues for pre-Olympic training. We are talking a lot about how we can assist the London bid, although it is unclear what the organisers want. There are some great Scottish sportspeople who could be ambassadors for the bid. We hope to get Sebastian Coe up here sometime to make presentations to industry and political leaders here about the benefits to Britain—not just to London—of the games. If London wins the bid, we must be ready straight away to start ensuring that we have developed those strategies and that we are active. There will be huge benefits to the UK and Scotland if London's bid wins, and we must publicly be very supportive of it.

Mr Raffan: I have three brief points. First, have you done any kind of comparative study?

Catalonia and Barcelona have been very successful at building, attracting and developing indigenously sporting and cultural events. I am thinking especially of what Barcelona did this year for the Forum festival. I am not sure how successful it was, but there was blue-skies thinking and people from all parts of Europe were brought in on a range of cultural, scientific and other issues. There is the potential to do that here, in the capital of the Enlightenment.

Secondly, when you see Edinburgh being designated as a city for literature, do you begin to ask how that can be built on—apart from through the Edinburgh international book festival—especially outside the high season? I see that that is a specific task of yours, yet few of your events are held outside the high season, according to the list that we have.

Thirdly, a sport at which we have become quite successful recently is sailing. One of the things that put Australia—where you were based for so long—on the map was the Sydney Hobart race. Do you see potential for Scotland in that area?

David Williams: On the question of cities, Barcelona is a very different city from Edinburgh or Glasgow.

Mr Raffan: That is why I mentioned Catalonia. I was talking about the development in the region, which I admit is centred on Barcelona.

David Williams: We consistently look globally at what cities or countries are doing in respect of events. However, you must bear in mind the fact that we are a small organisation that has only just been set up.

Mr Raffan: Are you at a disadvantage because EventScotland does not have the resources that Barcelona has?

David Williams: No, we have other resources that give us advantages over it. It has the high upkeep cost of the major venues that they built for the Olympic games, which—although they are fantastic—have major usage, maintenance and operating costs.

I was asked for some blue-skies thinking. My view is that events are about blue-skies thinking. The only possibilities that we have ruled out are the Olympics or world cup football bids—they are too big for us. We engage in blue-skies thinking all the time about what is possible. One of our problems is that everything that we do has to be done in a confidential environment. We are discussing a range of possibilities at present, but I would hate to make any of them public—I do not want to let anyone down. Although I cannot discuss them, I assure the committee that blue-skies thinking is going on.

Mr Raffan: I was thinking of the blue-skies thinking event that was held in the summer in Barcelona, as part of Forum 2004. It was held in a new arena down by the bay. The event, which opened up the subject to the public, brought together academics and writers from all over the world to talk about the future, not just the next 15 to 20 years but the next century. I thought that a blue-skies thinking event like that would be an obvious idea for Edinburgh with its historic reputation in economics and every field of academia.

David Williams: I will move on to sailing. North Ayrshire Council is keen on sailing—

Irene Oldfather: Yes, we are.

David Williams: It has the sailing institute. The problem with major sailing events is the on-land infrastructure that they require. The Genesis Consulting Group is currently preparing a sailing strategy into which we have input information on infrastructure and potential options. Sailing is a big opportunity area and we need to identify the right events. It would be nice to have a major international sailing event each year in Scotland. Hobart is a small place and yet the Sydney Hobart yacht race has been a great success. We will wait for the Genesis report to come out before we develop the possibilities for sailing events.

The Convener: I return to the question of the Olympics. What level of Scottish involvement do you expect there to be in the London Olympic bid? What is the likely impact on Scotland of a successful bid? Will it be seen in terms of infrastructure or in the potential for certain events to be run in Scotland?

David Williams: As I said, more money will go into sports development than ever before, especially elite development—

The Convener: Perhaps that is because investment in the development of competing athletes will ensure domestic success.

David Williams: Absolutely. As a country, we want to see as many Scottish athletes as possible in the British team. There will be a huge focus on the investment in elite development and sport participation.

Edinburgh will be the major winner in tourism terms after London. When people from overseas think about the places in the UK that they want to visit, they think of London and Edinburgh. Coming from overseas, I can say that those two cities seem to be the natural cities of choice for overseas visitors to the UK. When people travel to events, they rarely go to the event, stay in the one place for 10 days or two weeks and then go home. People tend to use events as a catalyst for their

holiday planning. Scotland would be a major winner in tourism terms.

The Convener: Surely we must prepare for that in our planning. I do not disagree with what you say, but surely we have to ensure that the media and marketing campaigns and initiatives are in place to make that a reality.

David Williams: Absolutely and, if London wins, we would move straight to an Olympic strategy for tourism.

The business case was also raised. If London wins, billions of dollars would go into the contracts for construction, services, produce, consultancies and so on. We would want to ensure that Scottish businesses were aware of all of the tenders. There is enormous potential in that area.

Scotland has one of the strongest cultural histories in the UK and we would want to ensure that we were to the fore of any cultural festivals that might be planned. Given that there is a four-year festival period in the pre-Olympic period, the cultural side is bigger than the sports side.

If London wins, we would develop strategies around sport, pre-Olympic training, tourism, business and culture, and we would implement them to ensure that the benefits for Scotland were maximised.

The Convener: Do you think that EventScotland should lead that preparatory work?

David Williams: Yes it should, but with other agencies. For example, the sports strategy would be worked on with sportscotland, the tourism strategy would be worked on with VisitScotland and so on. The key agencies should be brought together on a steering committee to develop the strategy and we should have a small, full-time secretariat to work on the development of the strategies and their implementation.

The Convener: From a sportscotland perspective, what is the likelihood of enhancing sporting infrastructure in Scotland as a result of any Olympic bid?

Ken Miller: Significant investment is already being made, but I envisage our making a case for increased investment in athletes in particular.

The Convener: Is there any question of existing sporting infrastructure plans being scaled down?

Ken Miller: We were originally concerned about lottery funding going towards a London bid and taking away from our existing resources, but subsequent communications from London about the 2012 bid have assured us that we would not lose funds, because the areas to which we would be expected to contribute are areas to which we already contribute, such as athlete support.

The Convener: How definitive are the guarantees that you have received on that point?

Ken Miller: I cannot answer that because I have not been directly involved. From the communications that we have had so far, I am confident in the guarantees that the plans would not be detrimental to our current funding sources.

The Convener: If there are no final comments from the panel, I thank the witnesses for appearing before the committee today. You have helped to inform the conclusions that we will arrive at and I am grateful for your input.

I suspend the meeting for 10 minutes.

15:01

Meeting suspended.

15:11

On resuming—

Low-cost Airlines (European Commission Decision)

The Convener: Item 2 on the agenda is the Executive's response to the report—

Mr Morrison: I am sorry to interrupt you, convener. I was delayed in getting here early this afternoon and I would like to tender Gordon Jackson's apologies—a member of his family has been taken into hospital.

The Convener: I am happy to note that, thank you.

Item 2 is the Executive's response to the report on low-cost airlines and the European Commission's decision. The response, which has been circulated to members, contains the Executive's comments on the report that was produced in July by Phil Gallie on behalf of the committee.

Phil Gallie: I am happy with the response from the Minister for Transport. He seems to take a positive approach to what was said in the report, but he does not pick up on a couple of points. He refers to the importance of competition and avoiding bias against one company or another, with which I agree whole-heartedly. However, the fact is that Ryanair made a volume deal with Charleroi and any other company could have made that same deal. I would like to pick up that point with the minister.

In the past few days, another adverse issue has arisen, namely the threat to regional air services in the UK in the form of changes to air traffic control charges. The intention is to change the formula for the sums that are paid by companies. At present, operators of small planes are charged a higher rate per passenger than operators of larger planes are charged, although the operators of smaller planes probably pay less per route than do the operators of larger planes.

The UK Government has responded to the European consultation document to suggest that that formula should change. If it does, it could well have a bad effect on the new low-cost airlines that operate from Scotland, as most of them use smaller planes. There could be an adverse effect in the Western Isles in particular if charges were to change. In whatever reply we make to the minister, we could perhaps draw his attention to that new threat and ask him to comment on it.

The Convener: Just for the benefit of members, is it a European proposal that the UK Government has commented on?

Phil Gallie: No, it is a European consultation paper to which the Department for Transport has responded by suggesting that current charging methods for corridor control costs should change. The Department for Transport's response seems to go against the operators of small planes on the basis that it believes that if bigger planes use those corridors, there will be fewer of them, but that does not necessarily follow.

The Convener: Are there any other comments?

Mr Raffan: My comment is only indirectly relevant, but I am fed up with the phrase "low-cost airlines" when anyone who flies up and down from here to London, let alone to Brussels, knows just how expensive flights are. That pertains to the inquiry into promoting Scotland worldwide on which we have just been taking evidence, as well as to the issue of Scotland's accessibility. Often, even if you book a flight within a week of departure, you pay a fare that would get you from London to New York on a genuinely low-cost airline.

15:15

Phil Gallie: I want to come back on that because in the past if people booked a little bit ahead on Ryanair flights from Charleroi to London, they could easily pick up tickets for as little as one penny per trip. Air fares to London are regularly available at £15, with added taxes of £18. Low-fare airlines offer a genuine product. Rather than leave it to the last minute, Keith Raffan should book a bit earlier and—

Mr Raffan: That is absolute rubbish as far as Edinburgh is concerned.

The Convener: We are beginning to stray from the point.

Mr Raffan: This is pertinent to our inquiry into promoting Scotland worldwide. We should ask the minister directly what action he is taking on the Edinburgh to London route and how we can lower the fares. The issue is important for the whole country.

The Convener: In drawing the matter to a close, I have two points to make. First, it is implicit in the committee's conclusions that—and the minister has accepted this—in the context of our inquiry into the promotion of Scotland to the world, direct air links are fundamental to the accessibility of the Scottish marketplace. Therefore, any diminution of our existing direct air contacts and routes would be damaging to the health of the Scottish economy. All of us who have studied the issues over the years have been encouraged by the increased number of direct flights that we now have, but the situation is nowhere near perfect in terms of costs or the range of routes. Those are

points that we can make in response to the minister and in the context of our inquiry.

Secondly, if there are issues that affect charging structures and which might affect the point of principle—that is, the importance of direct flight connections into Scotland and their sustainability from a cost point of view—we should draw those issues to the attention of the minister and seek his comments. That is particularly true of the points that Mr Gallie has raised. The clerks will take forward those two points as the result of our discussion.

Mr Raffan: I have a further point. The Executive's reply mentions Dundee airport being publicly owned. I am interested to know why no low-cost airlines fly out of Dundee airport. I know that they used to, but I do not think that they do now.

The Convener: Without wishing to engage in a discussion about the technical attributes of Dundee airport, I suspect that it is something to do with runway length. I am sure that a visit to Dundee airport would answer those questions.

Mr Raffan: I have been there, seen it and flown from it.

The Convener: Let us move on.

Convener's Report

15:18

The Convener: Item 3 is the convener's report, which has been circulated to members. There are four specific issues and we will take them one by one. The first is a letter from the Scottish Executive on the UK presidency of the European Union from 1 July 2005 and the proposed involvement of the Scottish Executive. The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform is giving us advance notice of several events that are planned around the UK presidency.

I have two points. First, we should have the opportunity to question the minister. I will take the committee's views on whether that would be appropriate, as I understand that there have been discussions about the appearance of UK Government ministers at the committee. We should at least hear from Mr McCabe on the issue as we get closer to 1 July 2005, but it might be appropriate to hear from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office about what it is anticipated will happen during the presidency.

Secondly, following on from our discussion at the previous meeting about our concern that the annual report of the Scottish Executive's EU office was more of an action list than a strategy, we want to hear from the minister about some of the Executive's strategic perspectives on the UK presidency and what we might expect from ministers.

Mr Raffan: It would be good to have the minister before the committee sooner rather than later. He makes the point that the UK presidency coincides with the G8 summit and it would be interesting to question him about that, particularly because I understand that a cross-cutting committee of the Executive is considering how to showcase Scotland at the G8 summit and during the presidency. What kind of events is the Executive planning? Perth and Kinross Council has been planning, as has the Executive, and it would be interesting to hear about that work at an early stage.

The minister has helpfully listed the UK presidency events in Scotland, which seem to be concentrated in Edinburgh and Glasgow. We should be holding those events outside the cities. There are a couple in Stirling, one in Aberdeen, one in the Borders and one in St Andrews—by my reckoning, anyway—but otherwise they seem far too centred on Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Irene Oldfather: Following on from the points that Keith Raffan has made, it is important to recognise that some of the events are fairly major, and that there can be logistical difficulties with hosting them outwith Edinburgh.

The commission of the Committee of the Regions of which I am a member is very open to holding a meeting here during the UK presidency in the second half of next year. The UK delegation is willing to come to Edinburgh, which is noted at the bottom of page 2 of the list before us, and the Commission for Economic and Social Policy is also willing to come here. A formal bid has to be made for that and I have been in discussion with the Presiding Officer about the matter. We have a note of the requirements of any external commission meeting. One of the difficulties is that a significant number of interpreting booths is needed. Following enlargement, there are now about 19 or 20 Community languages and a venue that can supply that number of interpreting booths is required. Therefore, as I said, there are some logistical difficulties with going outside Edinburgh. Like Keith Raffan, I am very much in favour of taking politics and government out to people, and I would love to propose Ayrshire for the venue. However, I do not think that, technically, we could handle the event there.

I am very much in favour of bringing a commission of the Committee of the Regions to Scotland. I am certainly pushing hard to bring that meeting here and I hope that the European and External Relations Committee will support the bid. It is currently with the Presiding Officer and the Parliament's external liaison unit, which could consider whether we can accommodate the event with respect to the logistics and to the number of people who would attend. It would be tremendous to host such a meeting here in our new Scottish Parliament building.

Mr Home Robertson: The Executive's letter is a helpful reply. The list of meetings and events in Scotland during the UK presidency is impressive, up to a point. What is missing is anything in the way of ministerial-level or Council of the EU meetings in Scotland. I may be out of date but, as I recall—certainly, as far as some portfolios were concerned, this used to be the practice—during the course of each presidency, British ministers who chaired the various council meetings during the six months would hold an informal council in their home areas. I was parliamentary private secretary to Jack Cunningham when he was Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and I remember that he took the opportunity to hold an informal meeting of agriculture ministers in the north of England. That was quite useful at the time in various ways.

Alistair Darling, the UK Secretary of State for Transport, could therefore have a heaven-sent opportunity to make colleagues in other parts of the European Union more aware of, for example, the situation with ferry transport in Scotland or the problems of remoteness. It may be too late to start inserting things into the diary at this stage, but I

would like to hope that such ideas could be explored.

The Convener: There was a heads of Government summit at the Palace of Holyroodhouse in 1992—I seem to remember that many of us demonstrated outside, but those days are long gone.

Mr Home Robertson: Was that not a Commonwealth event?

The Convener: No, it was the EU heads of Government summit.

Mrs Ewing: I agree that the Executive's reply is helpful, although I notice that a lot of the proposals are still to be confirmed. I endorse the feeling that there appears to be an emphasis on the central belt. There are direct links from Edinburgh, Glasgow and London to places such as Inverness and Aberdeen and I do not see why we could not do more up in those areas. That would be worth while, especially given what is happening with regional development and so on. The economies in those areas are important to any discussions. I think that we should submit a bid for one council meeting in Scotland.

Given that Scotland is supposed to lead for the UK in the agriculture and fisheries council—the meetings of which fall in December each year—it would be excellent if we could bring that council to Scotland. The meeting might attract many demonstrations outside, but hosting it would be important for Scotland as it would highlight the issues that exist.

In the run-up to holding the presidency, there are usually inward visits from delegations from other Parliaments in the European Union. I know that from having served for so long on the European Scrutiny Committee at Westminster. I wonder whether approaches have been made to such delegations to suggest that they might visit the Scottish Parliament while they are visiting the UK. That could be helpful, in particular for some of the accession states that have long-standing connections with Scotland.

Phil Gallie: I go along entirely with Margaret Ewing's point about the agriculture and fisheries council. I had intended to pick up on several other points, but if Mr McCabe is to give oral evidence to the committee, it might be better if I ask him to expand on the issues then, rather than waste time going into the details just now. I back the convener's opening suggestion that we should invite Mr McCabe to come before the committee.

The Convener: Let me draw our discussion to a conclusion. We should invite Mr McCabe to appear before the committee to set out further the thinking on the Scottish Executive's input into the UK presidency of the EU. We probably want to

hear from him no later than March of next year, but we will bid for him to come before us as early in the new year as is practicable. I suspect that our work programme is such that we will draw the report on our inquiry to a conclusion in January, so it will be the turn of the year before we can call him to give evidence on the UK presidency. He will, of course, appear before us for our current inquiry.

In advance of the minister's appearance before us, I will write to him to highlight the other three points that members have raised. First, I will ask about the possibility that further council meetings, whether formal or informal, might be added to the programme. Secondly, I will question the central-belt dominance in the geographical location of the meetings that have been proposed. Thirdly, I will try to determine the extent to which events planned around the G8 summit have been synchronised with the events surrounding the UK presidency of the EU.

On the parliamentary dimension, I understand that the Presiding Officer is dealing with the matter of the proposed meeting of one of the commissions of the Committee of the Regions. Obviously, he will advise us about his discussions and deliberations. The final point concerns inward visits of other parliamentarians. The Parliament's external liaison unit has a generally positive attitude towards welcoming delegations, and we would certainly want to play a part in welcoming them.

Mr Raffan: I agree, but am concerned about the minister appearing in March. You said "no later than March", but I think that he should appear no later than December, as it would be unfair to have him before the committee and expect him to take on board our views and to make changes at such a late stage. The more time we can give him, the greater flexibility he will have in taking on board our views and perhaps effecting some minor changes. Making major changes might be difficult. Seeing him should take no more than 30 or 40 minutes, so I do not see a reason for delaying meeting him until the new year.

15:30

The Convener: Okay. I am happy to try to accelerate the timescale and to have Mr McCabe in front of us between now and then.

The second issue under the convener's report predates my convenership of the committee. A letter has been received from the Executive concerning a request by the committee for information on the review of concordats. I did not think that the reply was particularly informative, if I may be as generous as that.

Mr Home Robertson: That was probably the whole idea.

The Convener: It might well have been. I think that we should ask for considerably more detail from Margaret Curran, particularly on which concordats have been reviewed and which have not.

Mrs Ewing: And at whose request.

The Convener: Indeed. We should also ask what material changes have been made to the concordats, so that we can continue to have some form of parliamentary understanding of those matters. From my recollection, the concordats are generally published.

Stephen Imrie (Clerk): Yes. The concordats are publicly available documents. The overarching memorandum of understanding is also publicly available.

The Convener: It would be helpful to have all of that set out for us by ministers in order to clarify matters for the committee.

Mr Raffan: I totally agree. However, nearly half of the concordats have not been reviewed for four years, so I am not sure what the minister's definition of "periodically" is. It might be helpful for her to say how often they are reviewed, as it is clear that nine of them have not been reviewed since 2001. It would also be useful to have detailed background information on the routine and format of the reviews.

The Convener: As there are no other comments, we will seek that information from the minister.

The third item under the convener's report is a letter that again follows up on an issue that was raised prior to my becoming convener of the committee—the European Commission's "political project". A reply has been received from Elizabeth Holt of the European Commission, which gives some clarification on the points that were raised.

Phil Gallie: I raised the matter and I am grateful to Irene Oldfather for writing to the Commission about it. The response is illuminating. Apparently, the term "political project" should never have been used. That was the fault of the translators, who perhaps should have used the term "policy project". However, I am greatly concerned by that policy project.

The Convener: I thought that you had reached a point of comfort on a European issue at long last, Mr Gallie.

Phil Gallie: Not at all.

The Convener: I should not have allowed myself that piece of comfort.

Phil Gallie: The letter says that

"COM (2004) 487 ... is a Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the Financial Perspectives 2007 - 2013."

Perhaps the convener does not recall this, but all other committee members will be well aware that there is an intention in that document to impose taxes on the nation states from the centre—from the Commission. In itself, that creates a major political problem, particularly as the Commission now appears to want a blank cheque for its final budget. That cuts across the Government's policy. The Government—and Mr Brown in particular—wants to ensure that there is a ceiling on the amount of money that is committed to European coffers. Given Elizabeth Holt's clarification—for which I am grateful—we should pass the letter on to the Scottish Executive, as it has now made it clear that it backs the UK Government on funding issues.

The Convener: We are back to that issue, are we?

Irene Oldfather: I must disagree with Phil Gallie. The objective of writing the letter in the first place was to clarify a particular point that Phil Gallie raised about the Commission having a political dimension. To be fair, Liz Holt has answered the question clearly. Phil Gallie's points about the financial perspectives are a different matter. I think that we have already agreed to keep a careful watching brief on that matter, to which we will no doubt continually return. We should therefore lay the matter to rest.

The Convener: The committee has already agreed that a paper on developments within the EU financial framework will be prepared. The clerks are working on that paper, which will come back to the committee for our consideration. Elizabeth Holt's letter certainly clarifies the point. It might not necessarily address all Mr Gallie's political concerns, but that would be a big task.

Mr Raffan: Mr Gallie is always intent on scaremongering on such issues, but I thought that he would have been reassured by Liz Holt's comment in the third last paragraph of the letter that the content of the policy-based programme should not be

"pulled out of the blue by the Commission but"

should reflect

"a consensus based on the treaties, European Council conclusions, EP resolutions and so on."

It is clear that there is no basis for Phil Gallie's continuing paranoia.

Phil Gallie: The last time I was told that I was scaremongering was when I said that there would be no change out of £100 million for the Scottish Parliament building, and we all know what happened with that. Therefore, scaremongering is perhaps justified.

I would like to return to the point of the letter. Elizabeth Holt's response to the term "political

project" is somewhat surprising. There are, I think, 19 languages that are translated in the European Union and it is unacceptable that a mistake has been made in translation on such a sensitive issue. I note Elizabeth Holt's comments but, given the taxation aspects, "political project" was perhaps nearer to the truth than the new translation of "policy project".

Mr Morrison: Convener, given Mr Gallie's traumatic experience, would it be appropriate to arrange counselling for him?

The Convener: I think that we will simply draw the matter to a close. We have said enough on this particular point.

The final point in the convener's report is the reply from Mr McCabe to my letter to his predecessor on the annual report of the Scottish Executive's EU office. The committee was concerned that the report was not especially informative—it was just an outline of events and did not really set out a perspective on the office's strategy, operation and performance.

As I was with the letter from Margaret Curran, I was a little concerned about the letter from Tom McCabe. It does not tell us terribly much and does not address the issues that I raised on behalf of the committee in my letter of 29 September. We asked for a more comprehensive perspective on what was planned and what strategic approach was to be adopted by the Executive's EU office, and we wanted the head of the office to appear before the committee to explain some of the priorities. Neither of those points has been addressed. With the committee's agreement, I propose to write back to the minister, reiterating the points and asking for a specific answer.

Irene Oldfather: In fairness, Mr McCabe is volunteering to come to the committee to discuss these issues. It is a matter for committee members whether they prefer the original idea—which was that the head of the Brussels office who was responsible for the report should come to the committee—or whether they would prefer to hear from the minister. I am willing to hear what other committee members think. Initially, I thought that I would like to hear from the head of the Brussels office, but now the minister is willing to appear.

Mr Home Robertson: The minister might want to bring the head of the Brussels office with him. We could have two for the price of one.

The Convener: That would be helpful. We will pursue that suggestion with the minister.

Mr Raffan: The minister says that the committee is briefed fully by the regular presidency forward look and ministerial appearances. However, my experience is that the committee has not been fully briefed on the Executive's forward priority

policy dossiers by ministerial appearances. I understand why—one minister cannot be expected to have a full command of every minister's brief. However, I am concerned that we have still not received replies to some questions that we asked Mr Kerr on his last appearance and which he said that he would pass to other ministers.

The situation is a bit inadequate, because often when a minister appears before us to take questions on the next six months, the answers are shallow, as he cannot give detailed answers when he is not the minister who is responsible for a subject. We must reconsider our system, because it is not adequate.

The Convener: The point of asking for the head of the EU office to appear was to have that detailed dialogue. I propose to assert that to the minister; we will see what response we get.

Mr Home Robertson: That is fair enough, but I urge caution if we are to invite representatives of the Executive's Finance and Central Services Department to give us comprehensive information. I doubt whether our clerks' word-processors have the capacity to download all that stuff.

The Convener: We are looking for an idea of what the Executive intends to do on the front foot.

Mr Home Robertson: That is fair enough.

The Convener: I do not want trees to be culled to put that into practice, but it would be nice to have an idea of what the Executive proposes to achieve.

Mr Home Robertson: The slight risk of entering a war of attrition exists. That would not be useful to the committee or anybody else.

Pre and Post-council Scrutiny

15:41

The Convener: For item 4, a summary table is available at annex A. I will take points that members wish to raise.

Do issues that arise from the justice and home affairs council that took place yesterday have an effect on the Government's fresh talent initiative and on arrangements that have been put in place to support that? I support the fresh talent initiative very much, but I am concerned about the extent to which it is bedding down in Government departments so that they all take a coherent approach to acting to support the First Minister's objectives. I would be concerned if anything from the justice and home affairs council affected the position.

Mrs Ewing: Has a new date been set for the cancelled agriculture and fisheries council meeting, or will it be December before that happens?

The Convener: The clerks will find out about that for all members.

Mr Raffan: There is no rush, but will the clerks obtain more information about the proposal for a decision on the information exchange on, and the risk assessment and control of, new narcotic drugs and new synthetic drugs, which was on the justice and home affairs council's agenda for 25 October? Could we also have more information about industrial policy and structural change, which the competitiveness council discussed on 24 September?

The Convener: Okay.

Phil Gallie: Better regulation is referred to in the general affairs and external relations council report. I was late for today's meeting because I attended a Scottish Financial Enterprise lunch at which a UK Treasury official explained regulation issues and obtained responses from the financial services industry. Comments were made time and again about the maleffect of much regulation on that industry in Scotland. I have no doubt that that is replicated in other businesses. It is worth emphasising that we need not only better regulation, but consolidation and less regulation.

I am also interested in the competitiveness council on 24 September, which talked about compliance on internal market regulations. Our briefing states that only the UK and two other countries come anywhere near meeting European Union targets on compliance with the regulations. I would be obliged if the clerks could obtain, on behalf of the committee, details of that, so that we can see where the UK and other EU nations stand on compliance.

The Convener: Okay. We will certainly obtain that information and issue it to members.

Irene Oldfather: I do not want to enter into a debate with Phil Gallie on better regulation, but there is a slight misunderstanding about the terminology. The whole principle is to have greater transparency and simpler framework legislation so that the flesh can be put on the bones of the framework at regional level. The aim is to improve transparency. It is misleading to talk about regulation in the terms that Phil Gallie uses.

Phil Gallie: Perhaps "better regulation" was a translation problem.

The Convener: Thank you for that. There are no other issues on that report. I await the reply on the working time directive from the Minister for Health and Community Care.

EC/EU Legislation (Transposition and Implementation)

15:46

The Convener: The fifth item on the agenda is monitoring of the transposition and implementation of EU legislation. Paper EU/S2/04/17/6 gives a comprehensive outline of the legislative instruments that have come forward from the EU to be translated and transposed into Scottish legislation. There is an extensive list of processes that have been completed and ones that are under way. We receive such reports periodically so that we can determine the progress of legislative instruments.

The report is also part of the scrutiny of an issue of concern that Phil Gallie has mentioned, which is the idea that, within the process, legislative instruments can be gold plated to increase the degree of responsibility that is placed on Scottish organisations. The report, which is extensive, is there for information. I do not know whether members have comments on the contents of the report.

Mr Raffan: How often do we receive the report? I have never seen this type of report before.

Stephen Imrie: We usually receive the report every two months. This report has been ever so slightly delayed because Executive officials have been streamlining some of their services and producing new databases. We have worked alongside the Executive to articulate what information the committee might want. The committee should receive the report every two months.

Mr Raffan: When did we last receive the report? I do not remember seeing one in the past year.

Stephen Imrie: I believe that we received a report in December 2003. I suspect that the elections to the European Parliament and so on delayed the production of new databases. The report should be on stream every two months now.

The Convener: That would obviously give us a more manageable list into the bargain.

Phil Gallie: Having looked at the list, I can understand the concerns that have been expressed about regulation. I must admit that I have not gone through the list in detail. I got lost when I got to

"hormonal or thyrostatic action and of beta-agonists".

I then moved on to issues about fruit growing. I assume that that legislation could be important for the Blairgowrie area and I wonder what consideration the convener has given to it.

The Convener: Mr Gallie is always a man for detailed questions. Believe you me, the Blairgowrie fruit industry is in safe hands—much safer hands than it used to be in.

Mr Home Robertson: The item that I like is the Food (Chilli and Chilli Products) (Emergency Control) (Scotland) Regulations 2004.

The Convener: The key point of the exercise is that, if we receive a manageable list every two months, that gives us an opportunity to monitor whether additional regulations are being applied. That enables us to test the point that is often raised about whether such instruments are used as a device to increase regulatory burdens on businesses and organisations in Scotland. The report is helpful to the committee.

Mrs Ewing: I would like clarification of a couple of points, as this is the first time that we have seen this type of report. What does "Secondary" mean in this context? Everything is listed as "Secondary" throughout the document. What is the

"Reason for Use of S.57"?

Can you explain what that means so that, when I get such documents in future, I know exactly what is happening?

Stephen Imrie: I am happy to advise the member on those two issues and I will provide a point of information that might be helpful for the long term. "Secondary" means that the legal instrument that will be used to give effect to a directive will be a Scottish statutory instrument; the terminology refers to secondary legislation as opposed to primary legislation. The Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003 is an example of primary legislation being used to give effect to a directive, but the bulk of the instruments used are secondary legislation.

The section 57 reference is to the provision in the Scotland Act 1998 that enables the Scottish Executive to ask Westminster to pass legislation at either a UK or Great Britain level that would cover devolved responsibilities in so far as they relate to the EU. If I could paraphrase, it is a Sewel-type process.

Mr Home Robertson: A Euro-Sewel.

Stephen Imrie: I could not possibly comment.

The committee has looked at those two aspects—section 57 and adherence to timetables—in the past, because of the potential for fines if the Scottish Executive does not pass legislation on time.

Gold plating has also been a political priority. I am sure that the committee will recall that it asked for the issue to be reviewed and for a paper to be produced on what the committee could do with the raw information. There may be ways of making

that information user friendly. We will work on that and produce a paper using some of the new resources in the Parliament.

Irene Oldfather: I recall that the list of legislative instruments used to come before the committee regularly, although it has appeared less frequently recently. To pick up the points that Margaret Ewing raised about secondary legislation, there seems to be a significant amount of overlap between our work of examining the list and the work of the Subordinate Legislation Committee. It might be helpful for either the clerks or the conveners of the two committees to work out what added value our committee can bring to the issue without duplicating work—we might be able to do something different.

The Convener: That issue will be borne in mind as the clerks produce the paper to review that area of scrutiny. It is important that the European and External Relations Committee examines some of the broader political issues that arise, such as gold plating, whereas the Subordinate Legislation Committee examines each instrument in turn to ensure that issues are properly considered. The broad issue that you raise will be included in the review and a paper will be brought back to the committee in due course.

Sift

15:53

The Convener: The final agenda item is the sift paper. I ask members to consider the summary of documents of special importance, which is at the beginning of the paper. It is suggested that the proposed amendment to the working time directive be referred to the Enterprise and Culture Committee and the Health Committee because of the specific relevance of that directive to the work of those committees. Obviously, in the debate on health that has been on-going for some time, the working time directive is by far the sharpest instrument with which we have wrestled. Is it agreed to refer that issue to those committees?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The second proposal is that the regulation on the environment be passed to the Environment and Rural Development Committee, so that it can take a view on the contents of that legislation. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Before I bring the meeting to a close, I invite members to stay behind for a few minutes so that we can address some practicalities. I believe that Mr Raffan wants to raise some issues under any other business. However, before we get to that, I should say that this is the last meeting at which our clerk, Stephen Imrie, will be present. He has steadfastly clerked the proceedings of the committee since 1999 and is now moving on as part of the clerking reshuffle—it is good to see that clerks can get reshuffled as well as ministers—to work with the Enterprise and Culture Committee.

Although I have been working with Stephen only over the past few weeks, I have greatly appreciated the strength of his input to the committee's work. I know from my predecessor's comments, and from the comments of my predecessor's predecessors, that Stephen has contributed enormously to the development of the work of the European and External Relations Committee and to the significant input that it has made to the work of the Parliament. Thank you, Stephen, for all your efforts, and we offer you our good wishes in your new post. [*Applause.*]

I believe that Keith Raffan had some points to raise.

Mr Raffan: I have two items that could perhaps be put on a future agenda. The first is the international strategy that was published just before the recess, which obviously falls within the committee's remit. The strategy was debated in the chamber, but I think that we might want to take

some evidence on it, as we did on the European strategy.

My second point relates to an e-mail that I sent to you the day before yesterday—I was working on a Sunday—concerning the visits of foreign parliamentarians and others to the Parliament. My concern is that it seems that a trend is being established whereby those visitors largely see officials, rather than members. I know that there are reasons for that, but I think that the committee needs to examine the issue.

The Convener: I would like to respond to those two points. I took the view that the international strategy that the Government published would be the subject of our questioning of ministers, as part of our inquiry into promoting Scotland. That meeting is scheduled to take place on 9 November, I think.

Stephen Imrie: Evidence from various ministers is planned for either 9 November or 23 November.

The Convener: I shall share with the committee my thinking on the inquiry. I am anxious to draw the inquiry to a close in the early new year. I do not want it to drag on any further, so we have a fixed timescale for the appearance of ministers on 9 November or 23 November. I took the view that scrutiny of the international strategy would be most appropriately conducted on those occasions. Given the answers that the First Minister has given me in Parliament on who has responsibility for those issues, it is relevant for us to see Tom McCabe, Patricia Ferguson and Jim Wallace. We have invited those ministers to come and have advised them of the dates when we expect them to be here. The clerks are working with ministers to secure their appearances on those occasions. I certainly want to see ministers here on those dates. Without their evidence, we cannot conclude our inquiry in January, as planned. That is how I intend to handle the international strategy.

On the point about visits of parliamentarians, I feel that one of the privileges of being a member of this committee is that we are able to meet people from different Parliaments who come to the Scottish Parliament. In advance of the official opening of the building on 9 October, I met a number of visitors from other countries. I take the point that Keith Raffan is making and I shall take it up with the parliamentary authorities, to ensure that visiting dignitaries from other Parliaments are able to meet members. It is important that that dialogue takes place.

Mr Raffan: I am happy with what you said about the international strategy. The Deputy First Minister has said that there are now actually six ministers involved in implementing the strategy, three of whom we shall be seeing. I am happy to play it by ear and see how we go at those

evidence sessions and whether we will need to speak to the others.

As for the second point, the issue has arisen recently, particularly in light of the forthcoming visit of the Speaker of the Western Cape Provincial Parliament. That visit is on a Monday and Tuesday, but I think that it is important that he does not just meet officials of the Parliament. There will be an opportunity for him to meet members, but a look at his programme shows that 80 per cent of his time will be spent with officials. That trend, which seems to be setting in, is quite wrong and needs to be reversed.

The Convener: Thank you for that. My view is that the evidence sessions that we have scheduled with ministers will be adequate to deal with the international strategy, but we can obviously reflect on that once we have heard the evidence.

Meeting closed at 15:59.

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