



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee

Wednesday 9 December 2020

Session 5



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Wednesday 9 December 2020

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RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

33rd Meeting 2020, Session 5

CONVENER

*Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con)

*John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

*Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)

*Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)

*Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP)

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

*Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD)

*Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab)

*Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con) (Committee Substitute)

Sarah-Jane Laing (Scottish Land & Estates)

Anne Rae-MacDonald (Highland Business Services Ring Ltd)

Paul Maxton (Scottish Government)

Professor Sally Shortall (Newcastle University)

Paul Wheelhouse (Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee

Wednesday 9 December 2020

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Subordinate Legislation

Island Communities Impact Assessments (Publication and Review of Decisions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 [Draft]

The Convener (Edward Mountain): Good morning, and welcome to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee's 33rd meeting in 2020. Everyone should ensure that mobile phones are on silent. The meeting will be conducted in hybrid format with some members participating remotely. We have apologies from Oliver Mundell; Jamie Halcro Johnston is attending as a committee substitute.

The first item of business is subordinate legislation and the consideration of one affirmative instrument. The committee will take evidence on the draft Island Communities Impact Assessments (Publication and Review of Decisions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020. The motion seeking the approval of the affirmative instrument will be considered at item 2. Members should note that there have been no representations to the committee on the instrument.

Before I welcome colleagues from the Scottish Government to the meeting, would any members like to declare any interests?

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): Given today's agenda, particularly items 1 and 2 and part of item 4, I am obliged to declare that I own a private residence and two non-domestic properties in the Western Isles. I derive no income from those properties.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am a partner in an agricultural business in Orkney and I own property in the islands.

The Convener: I welcome the panel from the Scottish Government: Paul Wheelhouse, Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands; Erica Clarkson, head of islands and rural communities at the directorate for agriculture and the rural economy; Paul Maxton, island communities impact assessments lead at the directorate for agriculture and the rural economy; and Jill Turnbull, from the

legal directorate. The minister will make a brief opening statement.

The Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands (Paul Wheelhouse): I am pleased to be here today for the consideration of the draft Island Communities Impact Assessments (Publication and Review of Decisions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020. The draft regulations make provision under section 9(1) of the Islands (Scotland) (Act) 2018 for reviews of decisions by relevant authorities relating to island communities impact assessments under section 8(1) of the 2018 act. They also introduce a requirement for publication of island communities impact assessments by the relevant authorities under section 30(1) of the 2018 act.

Separately, the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 (Commencement No 3) Regulations 2020 will bring into force sections 7 to 10, 11(1) and 12 to 14 of the 2018 act. The commencement regulations are not subject to parliamentary procedure and are not being considered by the committee today.

Section 9(2) of the 2018 act sets out the specific features that may be included in the review provisions. If approved, the regulations will create provision for reviews that satisfy the requirements of the 2018 act.

The regulations are innovative. No other Scottish Government impact assessment process, such as equality impact assessments, has a review procedure.

The committee will be familiar with the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018. It introduced the public sector duty requiring listed relevant authorities to prepare an island communities impact assessment in relation to any policy, strategy, or service that, in the authority's opinion, is likely to have an effect on an island community that is significantly different from its effect on other communities, including on other island communities, in the area in which the authority exercises its functions. As indicated, the commencement regulations will bring that duty into force.

It is worth noting that in the absence of the section 8(1) duty being in force, it has been the expectation that, where possible, the Scottish Government should operate in the spirit of the 2018 act and take island issues into account when developing or reviewing policies, strategies or services.

The regulations will empower island communities to seek a review of decisions made by relevant authorities in relation to island communities impact assessments. The regulations provide a robust and proportionate framework for the review of decisions relating to island

communities impact assessments that is based on transparency and accountability.

Finally, although 2018 act makes no provision for guidance to accompany the regulations, we intend to monitor through our island stakeholders whether guidance would be beneficial. I hope that the committee will recommend that the draft regulations be approved.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I have a question on a technical aspect of the 2018 act. There are a large number of public bodies that have to do an island communities impact assessment, and my understanding is that, at the moment, the requirement is only that they publish on their website the details of when they are undertaking a review and the deadlines process. It is perhaps harder for those on the islands who want to keep up to date with impact assessments that may be relevant to them if they have to check all the different websites, so could there be a central dashboard on the Scottish Government website that would allow somebody who wants to keep an eye on what island impact assessments are being undertaken to go to one central resource? Can you confirm that that is not available at the moment? If it is not, could it be considered?

Paul Wheelhouse: I thank Jamie Halcro Johnston for that useful question. Clearly, there are provisions in the 2018 act and regulations to cover the issue of publication. I certainly identify with what he is saying, not least because we want to avoid duplicate requests. If there is already a request that fulfils the interests of a person who potentially wishes to request a review, and it has been published, they should be able to see that one is already in the system and perhaps support that application rather than creating their own.

Under the 2018 act, a relevant authority has been obliged only to publish its reasons for not carrying out an island communities impact assessment, but now all island communities impact assessments are to be published in the interests of transparency. A supplementary provision is being introduced that is considered to be appropriate for the purpose of giving full effect to the act. It will, we hope, allow the public to access the decision making on whether an ICIA has already been carried out.

On what we expect the relevant authorities to publish on their websites, we hope that the process that has been developed is transparent and will give people confidence. We require relevant authorities to publish the application form for any third-party representations followed by the publication of responses to those third-party representations, any written submissions that were requested by the relevant authority and any decision notice.

Jamie Halcro Johnston makes a good point about having a central place where it would be possible for anyone to see what is being published by any authority, because that could be helpful to a potential applicant. I will ask Paul Maxton to say what our thoughts are on trying to collate all those reports into one place, with your forbearance, convener.

The Convener: Good morning, Paul. Are you there? I think that you are live now—off you go.

Paul Maxton (Scottish Government): The regulations contain an obligation to publish the ICIA and so on. The relevant authority can use its own website; whether it uses another website would be a matter for it, but we could certainly consider that approach.

I do not doubt that we will have a lot to learn, as part of the post-implementation monitoring and review process. I can certainly see the benefit of having one central repository, and we could look at that further in conjunction with our stakeholders.

The Convener: As there are no further questions, we move to item 2, which is formal consideration of motion S5M-23257, in the name of the Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands. I call the minister to make any further comments and to move the motion.

Paul Wheelhouse: I agree with the point that Paul Maxton made. We are happy to look at anything that we can do to make the process of understanding what reviews and island communities impact assessments have taken place as easy as possible for stakeholders, so I will certainly pick up the point that Mr Halcro Johnston raised.

I move,

That the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee recommends that the Island Communities Impact Assessments (Publication and Review of Decisions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

Angus MacDonald: The affirmative instrument strengthens the act, and I particularly welcome the requirement for island communities impact assessments to be published online, in the interests of transparency—it is a positive step forward. I also welcome the comments regarding the possible collation of the reports in one place.

Motion agreed to,

The Convener: That concludes our consideration of this item. I thank the minister and his team.

European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018

Fisheries (Technical Conservation Measures) (EU Exit) (Scotland) (Amendment etc) Regulations 2020

09:42

The Convener: Item 3 is the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, under which we will consider the sift of one Brexit-related Scottish statutory instrument, as detailed on the agenda. The Scottish Government has allocated the negative procedure to the SSI. Is the committee agreed that it is content with the parliamentary procedure allocated to the instrument by the Scottish Government?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Subordinate Legislation

Common Agricultural Policy (Simplifications and Improvements) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Regulations 2020

Fisheries (Technical Conservation Measures) (EU Exit) (Scotland) (Amendment etc) Regulations 2020

Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 (Commencement No 3) Regulations 2020

09:42

The Convener: Item 4 is the consideration of subordinate legislation: two negative instruments and one laid-only instrument, as detailed on the agenda.

No issues were raised by the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee when it considered the two negative instruments. No motions to annul have been received in relation to those instruments. I see that members do not have any comments, and I therefore propose that the committee does not make any recommendations on the negative instruments. Do members agree to that?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: The laid-only instrument, which is the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 (Commencement No 3) Regulations 2020, was included on the agenda for the committee to note only. Given that and the fact that another affirmative instrument relating to the 2018 act has been considered at the meeting, is the committee content to note the laid-only instrument, which commences certain sections of the 2018 act, bringing them into force on 23 December 2020?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Women in Agriculture

09:44

The Convener: Item 5 is women in agriculture. The committee will take evidence from representatives of the women in agriculture task force, focusing on the recommendations in the “Women in Farming and the Agriculture Sector” research report and the reasoning behind them. Those representatives are Sarah-Jane Laing, chief executive, Scottish Land & Estates; Professor Sally Shortall, Duke of Northumberland chair of rural economy, Newcastle University; and Anne Rae-MacDonald, partner of an arable farming business in Easter Ross and a director of Highland Business Services Ring Ltd.

I believe that one member of the witness panel has been allocated a three-minute opening statement. I am not sure who that is, but we are about to find out. I welcome the witnesses, and whoever is going to make the opening statement should please do so. If you all look the other way, I can go straight into questions. I think that Sarah-Jane Laing is starting.

Sarah-Jane Laing (Scottish Land & Estates): Thank you, convener and committee, for asking us to come along today and talk about the work of the task force. As the committee will be aware, the Scottish Government commissioned the “Women in Farming and the Agriculture Sector” research report, which was published by Professor Shortall and colleagues back in June 2017. That research established a baseline position on women in farming and identified a number of key barriers to women’s progress in our sector. The First Minister then announced the establishment of a task force and committed the Scottish Government to taking forward the recommendations that would come from it.

The three of us here today represent the different elements of the task force, which included representatives from industry organisations, academic institutions with specialisms in the rural economy, and men and women working in farming businesses. Our remit was to tackle gender equality in Scottish agriculture and identify a number of actions to ensure that the full potential of women in farming is realised. We see that as a positive for the entire industry, giving women equal opportunities and, in doing so, improving the economic resilience of farming and crofting businesses and securing a strong future for the whole sector.

We sought to make recommendations that would deliver solutions that were practical, effective and future proofed, particularly given the changes that were coming in relation to Brexit. We

also wanted to make sure that we had a number of short-term solutions as well as look at the longer-term, widespread cultural change that was clearly required. For two years, we met every couple of months to discuss and form our recommendations. We consulted with others and we were also involved in events such as the women in agriculture breakfast at the Royal Highland Show.

We published our final report in 2019 and our key findings were structured around eight key themes: leadership, the equality charter for Scottish agriculture, training, childcare in rural areas, succession, new entrants, health and safety, and crofting. The report was therefore wide ranging. When we were making our recommendations, we knew that culture change in Scottish agriculture would take time. However, we also knew that much could be done to support that change by not only the Government but industry bodies and Scottish farmers and crofters in their own families and communities.

Although the remit of the task force did not extend to implementation or review of the progress on recommendations, we as task force members asked the Scottish Government to arrange a one-year review meeting, and it will take place in January. As with many things, Covid-19 has undoubtedly had an impact on progress in certain areas. Some activity, such as the be your best self training, will move online to accommodate the industry’s needs.

Sally Shortall, Anne Rae-MacDonald and I look forward to answering your questions. On behalf of the task force, I thank the committee for its continued interest in our work.

The Convener: Thank you. I was just contemplating whether I made a mistake at the outset by not declaring an interest in agriculture. I therefore declare that I am part of a farming partnership in Moray that very much includes my wife. Peter Chapman, Jamie Halcro Johnston and Stewart Stevenson will also want to make declarations of interests. We will do that before we go into the questions, of which there are quite a few.

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): I am a member of a farming partnership, and my daughter-in-law is an important part of that partnership, so we are well signed up to the women in agriculture theme.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I reiterate that I am a partner in a farming business in Orkney and a member of a number of organisations, including Scottish Land & Estates.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Jointly with my wife, I own a small registered agricultural holding from which neither of us derive any income.

The Convener: Thank you, Stewart. We will now head off on the questions, of which there are quite a few. If any member of the panel wants to come in on a question, please notify the clerks, as I believe you have been told how to do.

The first question comes from Stewart Stevenson. Stewart, if you or any committee member has a particular person that you would like to answer the question, please indicate who it is and we will go to them first.

Stewart Stevenson: I direct my first question, quite arbitrarily in a way, to Anne Rae-MacDonald. Sarah-Jane Laing mentioned that there will be a one-year review meeting in January, and that is welcome. It would be useful to hear, and I am going to Anne simply because she—*[Inaudible.]*—farmer, whether she can report any changes that have taken place during the year since the report was published.

Anne Rae-MacDonald (Highland Business Services Ring Ltd): Can you hear me?

The Convener: Absolutely.

Anne Rae-MacDonald: Thank you, and good morning. As Sarah-Jane Laing said, we have not been responsible for managing the implementation. However, certainly from the grass-roots level, there has been a huge increase in awareness of the issue. A number of high-profile women have come to the fore in the form of Minette Batters and Kate Rowell, who now leads Quality Meat Scotland. They have all helped to shine a light on the issue and act as really good role models.

The Farming Advisory Service has been producing some very good women-only courses. It started off with a pilot in 2018 and the courses have been heavily subscribed and very successful. The Scottish Crofting Federation has also held a number of women-only courses, and again they have been well-attended and received positive feedback.

In addition to that, the women in agriculture Scotland Gogarburn group, headed up by June Geyer, had its annual general meeting last month, which had more than 500 attendees. The group has also been running a number of training opportunities.

Covid has worked in favour of a lot of women—a silver lining to the cloud, if you like—in that a lot of training and events have had to be done virtually, and that has made many meetings and conferences a lot more accessible for women who might well be restricted because of caring responsibilities or their ability to get away from the farm or the croft. It is not just about the logistics; it can be a lot less intimidating to join a meeting or access various training events online rather than

walking into a room where the majority of attendees are male.

There have been a number of improvements in general awareness, which has given us a real step forward over the year, despite the fact that Covid has stopped us from progressing as quickly as we would like to in certain cases. Sarah-Jane Laing or Sally Shortall might have something to add to that.

Stewart Stevenson: I welcome the references to women—I was going to ask about that.

I will move on and ask Professor Shortall about the women in agriculture development programme. Is that sufficient for what needed to be done during the past year? Has there been tangible progress after a year?

Professor Sally Shortall (Newcastle University): I find how Scotland has progressed with the issue interesting. The Government took the research seriously, and it established a task force to consider the recommendations, find out how best to implement the ones that it wanted to and consider those that it did not necessarily think were the best options. It was a collaborative team effort and—as Sarah-Jane Laing and Anne-Rae MacDonald said—we worked intensely on it.

I have done quite a lot of research, for different places, on the question of gender in agriculture. The Scottish Government has committed real resources and is taking a multipronged approach to try to address the issue. It is providing women with skills and addressing questions of unconscious bias.

For parts of the research, we interviewed quite a lot of men on farms as well, who—like all of you—really appreciate the importance of their partner's role to their business and perhaps do not appreciate the lack of women in the farming industry more generally. The task force recommended that the Government should work on that element through the programme.

The task force was independent and made recommendations on what should be progressed. However, how far the programme has progressed is a question for the civil service, not the task force, because that was not our responsibility.

The Convener: Does Sarah-Jane Laing want to come in on that?

Stewart Stevenson: Can I first extend the question slightly, convener? We have heard good news from the first two witnesses, so if Sarah-Jane can tell us about any gaps that there were in the first year's activity, that would help us focus on how we can improve. Once she responds, that will be me finished.

The Convener: Sarah-Jane, you get to give us the bad news—but you can give us some good news if you would like to.

Sarah-Jane Laing: Thank you for that, convener—I was going to ask you to indulge me in giving a bit of good news first.

There are a couple of things to mention. On wider equality issues, one piece of good news—this is not in our recommendation report, but it has happened—is the gender mainstreaming of farming, especially of women in farming. The farming sector was quite separate from the women in business initiatives and other things that were happening, but those have now been mainstreamed and women in farming can access that support.

The organisational change has not happened as quickly, and we should acknowledge that. Although the unconscious bias training and equality charter for Scottish agriculture pilots have been carried out, we hoped to be further on at this stage. However, a lot of the work that is involved in that has not been as easy to do remotely as it would be if there were face-to-face discussions and we could bring people together, because this is all about culture change, establishing relationships and creating new opportunities. That said, although we are not as far on as we wanted to be, there has been progress.

Anne-Rae MacDonald mentioned the impact of Covid and the silver lining to that. At Scottish Land & Estates, we have seen a huge increase in diversity of not only gender but age, geography and knowledge. People are attending events and putting themselves forward for committees. There is a pipeline for board members that we certainly never had previously, and a large proportion of the people in that are women.

We have seen big change even though we are not as far forward as we had hoped to be, especially with the equality charter.

The Convener: The next set of questions are from Richard Lyle.

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): In the next few years, Scotland is likely to have a new agricultural policy to replace the common agricultural policy. What policy changes would support the task force's recommendations? I put that to Anne Rae-MacDonald first.

10:00

Anne Rae-MacDonald: It is a complex area. It is well recognised that a lot of women in farming, particularly in family partnerships, are involved in diversification enterprises and heavily involved in business planning and finance. Anything that helps to support diversification further—which will

undoubtedly be crucial in the next five to 10 years—will naturally help women.

Continued support for the enhancement and development of training and skills benefits not only women, but younger people and men in farming. That is another crucial aspect.

Research has shown that there are significant numbers of women among new entrants to farming. Partnerships that involve women can be positive and work in different ways. Women are also often early adopters of environmental practices.

The Convener: Sally Shortfall wants to come in on that point.

Sally Shortall: That is an interesting question. I am currently working with the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and with the Scottish Government, Women's Enterprise Scotland and women in agriculture Scotland. We are looking at the issues that can arise for women around farm diversification, because women often take the lead on that. We know that diversified farm businesses are far more viable.

As Anne Rae-MacDonald said, women tend to be early adopters of environmental schemes. We also want to look at women's role in organic farming. Across Europe, there seems to be far higher involvement of women in organics than in agriculture in general. That promotes the farm-to-fork agenda, which is very much the direction in which we want to go.

We have our eye on that important question.

The Convener: Back to you, Richard.

Richard Lyle: I would like to hear Sarah-Jane Laing's comments on that question.

The Convener: I thought that you would.

Sarah-Jane Laing: The only point that I would add is to highlight how important it is that any CAP replacement funding adequately supports research, development and the Farm Advisory Service. There is clear evidence that all those involve a higher proportion of women and encourage women to get involved.

Rather than considering what might replace the basic payment scheme, or the less favoured area support scheme, we should realise that it is the other elements of the wider CAP policy that will have an impact in increasing the role of women in agriculture.

Richard Lyle: I will stay with Sarah-Jane Laing for my next question. I support women in agriculture. It is always impressive to go to different schools and see how much involvement women have. Which of the changes that are

necessary to further the role of women in agriculture will be the most difficult to implement?

Sarah-Jane Laing: That will undoubtedly be culture change, because we cannot introduce policy for that or legislate for that; it requires a change in attitudes and behaviour. The most important part of that is succession planning, which is not just about gender diversity. My experience from a family farm has been that it is difficult to have the uncomfortable conversations about bringing other people into the farm and planning for the future. It is unfortunate that the industry has not been great at having those difficult conversations. That is the hardest issue to progress, because it involves families having difficult conversations and doing succession planning to bring the next generation or the wider family into farming businesses.

Anne Rae-MacDonald: I totally agree with Sarah-Jane Laing. Another limiting factor is childcare and other caring responsibilities. Our report has a section on that, because we identified that for many—it was about 54 per cent of respondents to the 2017 research—childcare was a limitation on progressing and fulfilling their role in farm businesses. That is a complex subject, in which a large number of local authorities are involved. It will take time to produce innovative approaches that can fit rural situations, which are often isolated, and an industry that is 24/7 and does not stop at 5 o'clock.

Professor Shortall: I think that we all agree that culture change is the difficult part. Norway, which is committed to gender equality, quickly realised that one reason why fewer women were in agriculture was the result of inheritance. It introduced an allodial law in 1974 that made the eldest child the legal heir to the farm. Even with that legal change, about 14 per cent of farmers in Norway are women.

Even if legislation is passed, cultural barriers are the real difficulty. The Scottish Government is doing extremely well on that. It is not addressing the issue from just one angle; it has multiple prongs, such as dealing with unconscious gender bias, providing training for women and developing the equality charter. I think that all members of the task force agree that culture change is the single biggest barrier.

The Convener: I will admit at this point that, by the end of the panel's time, I will not have kept everyone happy, because I cannot bring in every witness on every question. I apologise if not every witness speaks each time.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I am interested in picking up what Sarah-Jane Laing said about leadership. We have heard about women in leadership roles, such as Minette

Batters and Kate Rowell at QMS. What would you like to happen to continue to advance women into national and regional leadership roles in organisations? Are you tracking and monitoring data to encourage early adopters into leadership positions?

Sarah-Jane Laing: I will answer the second question first, because it is the easiest one. To pick up what Sally Shortall said, the task force is not doing monitoring or evaluation. The Scottish Government will look at progress on the recommendations, so it could answer that question.

On what I would like to see continue, the women in agriculture Scotland network is doing excellent work, including on peer mentoring, with lots of work being done to encourage younger women to be mentored by those of us already in the industry. The way that meetings are held and how we do things as an organisation has changed in the past two years, and even more so in the past 12 months. The continued move to improve diversity and to be more inclusive as an industry through the use of online tools and training that suits participants rather than the training providers are two big things that will really make a difference.

Active encouragement will also make a difference. One of the things that we did as a result of the unconscious bias training pilot was to pick up on the recommendation that some of the language that was used in our recruitment packs for board members and chairs was perhaps a bit too traditional. We had a look at that and made sure that those women who were already involved in our organisation provided testimonials that told their story and encouraged others, rather than it being a dry recruitment process, which we have found puts women off applying. Those are a few of the things that I would like to see continue not only in SLE, but in other organisations.

Professor Shortall: There are two way of looking at the leadership issue. On the one hand, it is about making sure that women are skilled and confident to take leadership posts, and that they are actively encouraged, which is about their agency. On the other hand, it is about looking at the structures and structural change. That will not happen without a policy intervention. Structures have not been welcoming. I have interviewed men and women and both groups said that women would be uncomfortable in and not expected at different kinds of organisations, so we will have to look at structural ways of encouraging that change.

I have been impressed by the Scottish Government's approach to the issue. The task force was co-chaired by a man and a woman and was gender equal, and it was all the more effective for that. We found it very powerful that senior men

on the task force were advocating for the women in agriculture agenda. That is a simple structural leadership trick. We need to ask, "Who are you going to negotiate with? How do you want that industry represented?"

Emma Harper: I will move on to my next question. My background is in healthcare and I have been doing a project—for longer than the past couple of years—to encourage folk to wear helmets when they are on a quad bike, which is a safety issue irrespective of whether you are a man or a woman. I am interested in the health and safety issues that the task force came across. What work needs to be done to continue to promote activities so that women are better protected through approaches to health and safety?

Anne Rae-MacDonald: There is a huge amount to be done in relation to on-going awareness about health and safety issues. It is important that it is discussed from a young age—for example, by encouraging the Health and Safety Executive to go into schools and get the message across about the fundamental importance of health and safety.

The research cited that a number of respondents said that, in a bid to prove that they could do the job practically and physically, there were times when they had to take risks. Having children on the farm and so on is also an issue. It is an aspect that we need to look at, and Sally Shortall led on that work.

There has been a big campaign through Yellow Wellies and other safety groups to highlight that we often get only one chance. We are all aware of the fatalities that occur on farms. Regarding the lifting of heavy machinery and so on, we are encouraging innovation in the use of materials, tools and equipment that are better suited for a variety of physical needs—and not just for women, but for older farmers. Quite significant work can be done in that regard.

10:15

The Convener: Does Sally Shortall want to add anything to that?

Professor Shortall: It is an important question. It was not originally part of the research remit, but I asked the Government whether we could pursue the issue a bit more because it came up quite a lot. There is a perception that women are much more safety conscious on farms than men. However, as Anne Rae-MacDonald said, women talk about having this devil on their shoulder egging them on to take a risk to show that they are able to do something just as well as men. There is also the issue of size. I interviewed a 5 feet 2 inches tall woman veterinarian whose husband worked offshore, so she was doing full-time farm

work four days a week. She talked about the importance of having the right kit—if everything was the right size for her, she could operate safely.

There is an issue about equipment and thinking of women's needs in that regard, and, as Anne Rae-MacDonald said, those of older farmers, too. I grew up on a farm and I look back and think that it was only by the luck of God that we did not all kill ourselves. There is the matter of socialisation in families whereby risk is normalised and not thought about so much. Risk is an issue that will take us a long time to get on top of.

Emma Harper: Do the companies that you purchase your wellies and kit from make a concerted effort to accommodate women's size and shape in order to make kit safer?

The Convener: I am not sure which of the witnesses wants to respond to that. When people give evidence, the last person to look away is usually the one who is nominated. However, Sally Shortall has volunteered to comment.

Professor Shortall: Again, this is something that has not happened because of Covid. I had hoped to do some research on the issue with Yellow Wellies, because we need to look at the companies. If we want to promote and advocate a changing farming industry in the future, we will have to look at the different needs of people of different shapes and sizes.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): Good morning. We have been talking about farming organisations and leadership in those organisations in very general terms, but I want to look at some specific examples. I note that—correct me if I am wrong—the Scottish Crofting Federation is quite successful at this, as three out of nine board members are women. However, it is my impression—correct me if I am wrong—that the National Farmers Union of Scotland is very much a male organisation. The president and the vice-presidents are male, and it strikes me as being a very male-oriented organisation. A number of the staff are women, of course, but why is it that the Scottish Crofting Federation has been relatively successful on the issue and the NFUS has not?

The Convener: Do you want to hear from one of the witnesses in particular?

Mike Rumbles: No. I want to hear from all of them, if I can.

The Convener: Okay. We will hear briefly from all the witnesses on that, starting with Sarah-Jane Laing.

Sarah-Jane Laing: I think that that is a question for the NFUS and the Scottish Crofting Federation rather than for an external organisation. I can tell

you why I think that we have been a bit more successful—we have taken action to actively encourage women to be involved in the organisation. I am sorry, but I cannot speak about the internal workings of the NFUS or the Scottish Crofting Federation.

The Convener: I suspected that that would be your answer, but Mike Rumbles wants to come back in.

Mike Rumbles: Yes. I appreciate that very political and adroit answer. I entirely understand that you do not want to upset any organisation, but I am trying to get away from generalities, and I am looking at two specific organisations that strike me as the most obvious examples. There must be a reason as to—and you must have a view on—why the Scottish Crofting Federation has been relatively successful in increasing the number of women in senior positions and NFUS Scotland has not.

I do not want the other two witnesses to comment on their own organisations. I want to hear their views on the two specific organisations that I mentioned. We will never get anywhere if we keep talking in generalities.

The Convener: I will give Sarah-Jane Laing a moment to think about that and go to Anne Rae-MacDonald. Are you a member of the NFUS? Do you have a view on the issue?

Anne Rae-MacDonald: Yes, my farm business is a member of the NFUS. Over and above what Sarah-Jane Laing said, it is well documented that a significant number of women are actively involved in crofting—Sally Shortall's research touched on that—and they are often recognised as being on the front line of crofting. I suspect that that might be an influential factor. I am also aware that the make-up of the NFUS board is influenced by election procedures, which stem from the grass-roots level. Again, we come back to the need to tackle awareness at a grass-roots level through a bottom-up approach.

Professor Shortall: On Anne Rae-MacDonald's point, when we consider women's position in agriculture across Europe, we see that women's holdings tend to be less commercial and smaller. There are a lot more women crofters, as we detailed in the research. Crofts are smallholdings, and they are more accessible for women to purchase. There are more women involved, and it is a different type of agriculture—it is less intensive and commercial. For all those reasons, there are more women involved in crofting than in other areas of agriculture.

In more traditional farming organisations, there is the traditional cultural component that we have talked about. Following the task force's work, the Irish Farmers Association asked me to launch its

inclusion and diversity strategy, because it was in a similar position and has actively started to look at the types of structural and cultural changes that it might need to adopt. Following all that work, the NFUS is also looking at that issue and undertaking various strategies to see how it can be more diverse. It is talking about it and recognising it as an issue in the way that the organisation is structured.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I am keen to know whether the witnesses believe that there is a role for positive discrimination in recruitment for senior posts in organisations. For example, political parties often use it for selection processes, and it is one of the reasons—in fact, it is probably the main reason—for the Scottish Parliament being more gender balanced than Westminster. Do the witnesses have any views on that? I appreciate that the issue was not detailed in the report, but that approach is one that organisations can legally use.

The Convener: Sarah-Jane Laing, do you have any views on that or the earlier question?

Sarah-Jane Laing: Positive discrimination in recruitment was debated at length by the task force. We went back over the potential use of the stick approach—having a requirement for a certain quota—but the task force agreed that it was not the right move at this time. We wanted to facilitate change through things such as positive culture change, leadership opportunities and unconscious bias training, which are more positive routes to change. In our report and when we spoke to the cabinet secretary, we acknowledged that there might be a need to revisit that if no progress is made on some of those issues. We discussed positive discrimination and acknowledge that it is a route, which the Government might want to revisit at a future date.

To go back to Mike Rumbles's original question, in order to facilitate change, there needs to be an acceptance that change is required. Some organisations bought into the need to change sooner than others.

Mike Rumbles: To follow up on Colin Smyth's point, sex discrimination is, of course, illegal; political parties have been given an exemption from that. There is a view that there is no such thing as positive discrimination; there is only discrimination. I would not be in favour of that, but I would be in favour of making every effort to hit at the historical—"traditional" is the word that witnesses have used—cultural view in farming on the role of men and women.

I wanted to make sure that we were not talking in generalities, so I asked the witnesses for their view of two particular organisations. To an extent, I have had my question answered. If I am correct,

basically, their view is that there are more women involved in crofting than there are in farming. Is that true?

The Convener: I am not sure who to bring in to answer that question. Does Sarah-Jane Laing have a figure on that? I noticed that you all nodded emphatically when cultural change was suggested. Does anyone want to comment on the number of women in crofting and the number of women in farming, which are inextricably linked?

Professor Shortall: We detailed that in the report. In farming, the proportion of women smallholders is 7 per cent, whereas in crofting it is 14 per cent. That gives a baseline to start from.

The Convener: I think that Mike Rumbles's question has been successfully answered, so we will move on to questions from the deputy convener.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Good morning. Some members of the committee were at the launch of the women in agriculture task force report at Ingliston on 27 November 2019. Since then, Emma Harper and I have been trying to get it on to the committee's work programme. You can see how long that has taken. Fergus Ewing described the publication of the report as marking the end of a journey of discovery, which it really was for some members of the task force. One such member was the co-convener, Joyce Campbell, who unfortunately could not be with us today.

I will follow on from previous questions. It has been said—I cannot remember whether this was mentioned in the report or by one of the speakers—that

"Inequality is entrenched and embedded. That simply cannot be allowed to continue."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 2019; c 51.]

There has been some of the unconscious bias training that Sarah-Jane Laing talked about, but—to follow up on what Mike Rumbles said—if there was a real willingness to see change, should some organisations not be setting up such training for their members and not just for the high officials? We saw some definite bias from them when the report was published.

10:30

In other words, NFUS members—that is who we are talking about—should receive unconscious bias training. That training should be provided not just to the elected officials but from the bottom up, at local branch level. Otherwise, we are never going to get a Minette Batters in Scotland. Nobody can take anything away from her. She was on "Newsnight" last night. She is in the media all the

time, representing the NFU in England extremely well.

As we have seen from the work of the task force, it is not as though we do not have women who are able to do the jobs; it just seems that there is a block to it happening. As members of the task force, is there any way in which you think that we can get that cultural change embedded in what is a very important organisation? NFU Scotland representatives come before the committee all the time—its officers rather than its elected officials.

Anne Rae-MacDonald: As we have said, we are coming to the end of the pilot scheme for the unconscious bias training, in which quite a number of co-operatives in particular have taken part. I understand that the feedback has been positive. There was a big training session at a Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society annual general meeting a couple of years ago, which was very well received across the board. It will be important to assess and review that pilot scheme and, from there, to roll it out further, including down to a more regional level.

I understand that the NFUS has undertaken unconscious bias training. Once that message gets out and lots of farming organisations on the ground get involved in that and can see the benefits, that will have a significant impact. When looking for new leaders and participants, it is all too easy simply to ask, "Who do we know who is out there?", but it is often partners beyond the obvious principal farmer at the farm gate who might well have the skills that could benefit the organisation. So often in the past, it has been seen as being just one individual—the principal farmer—when, nine times out of 10, it is a partnership or a team that is involved in the business.

The Convener: Sally, do you want to come in on that?

Professor Shortall: [*Inaudible.*—question, and I will link it to the previous question. It is important to clarify that the women in agriculture task force—or the research, for that matter—has never advocated putting women into positions simply to obtain some balance. Rather, the point, as Maureen Watt has said, is that there are plenty of able and talented women who are able to fulfil the leadership positions, and we have to consider how we enable that to happen. That is the key concern.

As Anne Rae-MacDonald said, there is plenty of capability out there, and we need to stop seeing Minette Batters and Joyce Campbell as the exceptions. They are the exceptions, but there are plenty more people who can fulfil those roles. It is heartening that the task force has recommended that, if we are not there by 2027, we might

reconsider the idea of positive discrimination or quotas.

However, I also think that working with the industry and bringing it with us is the right approach because, in the current climate, rocking up with all-male delegations reduces an organisation's credibility. Perhaps there is a role for Government to say what type of delegations it wants to see and work with.

Maureen Watt: Thank you for those answers. When the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism spoke in Parliament on support for women in agriculture on the day after the launch of the report, he talked about a number of things that were being set up. We have already talked about some of them, such as the equality charter. However, it is clearly not up to the task force to take that forward. If we use the equality charter as an example; who is taking it forward and what progress has there been on it?

Sarah-Jane Laing: It is being taken forward by the Scottish Government, and the first phase of the pilot has been completed. Ten businesses and organisations took part in that. The charter will then be reviewed, refined, fully tested and mainstreamed. We do not want there to be a delay with that. The plan was that there would be a short pilot and we would then tweak the charter and roll it out, not only to organisations but to agricultural businesses as well.

As you rightly say, the charter for equality has to be about change from the bottom up. That is why it is not only about the NFUS and SLE boards; it is about equality for anyone who is involved in Scottish agriculture.

Maureen Watt: It was announced that Sheila Campbell-Lloyd of Inner Works Coaching was to deliver the "be your best self" training pilot. Do we have any idea how that is going?

Sarah-Jane Laing: I am happy to give a quick update on that. The intention was to hold four workshops across Scotland during 2020, but unfortunately that has not happened. The workshops have now been changed into online offerings, and the first workshop will take place in January. As far as I know, there is a huge amount of interest in them. There will be further workshops in February, May and June 2021.

The Scottish Government is about to finalise the longer-term "be your best self" training programme for delivery in 2021. That is one of the programmes that has not progressed within the timescale that the task force hoped it would have.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: One of the first issues that came up was the impact of Covid on training and skills, which Anne Rae-MacDonald spoke about. There have been a huge amount of

negatives to Covid, but the ability to do more online training is perhaps a positive, as it has benefits in terms of timescale and logistics for those who want to access it.

Based on the general skills offering, what are the greatest barriers to women accessing key skills? What action is needed from key educational institutions and training bodies such as Lantra and SRUC to ensure that there is better access to courses and workshops?

Anne Rae-MacDonald: That is a huge part of women's progress. There are a number of limitations, as identified in the research. Respondents said that the availability of time was one of them. I know that that applies to everybody these days, but it is a critical factor, particularly for women, who often juggle caring responsibilities and many other things. That impacts on their ability to go away for residential courses or courses that are held some distance away. Along with that, there is the normal process of juggling things with the seasonal workload of practical farming.

Although I think that, in general, things are improving in that respect, there is no doubt that training in a practical farm setting, especially if it is training such as personal development training, has not always been regarded as having as much merit as it should. We might be slow to put ourselves forward because we wonder whether we can justify the time and the cost. I would like to think that, through the work of the task force and our promotion of our development programme, we are actively showing that such development is a valuable investment, not just on a personal level for the women concerned, but for the businesses.

We produced a small leaflet for use by many of the training providers to highlight to them what we feel are some basic considerations that they should take into account to make it easier for women to attend. They include the timing and location of meetings and the need to ensure that suitable facilities are available. The likes of the Farm Advisory Service and other major providers such as Lantra are very much on board with that. It is evident from the women-only courses, among others that they have promoted over the past few years, that they are seeking to take such factors into account.

Professor Shortall: I will follow up on what Anne Rae-MacDonald said. The research found that women feel self-conscious going to continuing professional development courses when they are the only woman, or one of only two women, there.

Another issue relates to how women enter farming. We found that there were two distinct groups. There were the women who had chosen to go into farming, because the Government

specifically asked us to look at new-entrant women. They were a small group. The second group was made up of those women who “fell through the trapdoor”, as one woman described it, and found themselves in farming because they had married a farmer. One of the difficulties for that group of women is that they come to farming without the language or innate knowledge of the business, so they are quite unsure of themselves, which adds to a feeling of self-consciousness.

As Anne Rae-MacDonald said, while the task force was meeting, the FAS offered some women-only training programmes, and they were heavily subscribed. I think that 248 women attended them. We need to think about how we can give women access to the training that they need in the first instance. Another woman whom we interviewed said that, for her, the problem was not so much the glass ceiling, but the sticky floor. I think that online courses might be the way round that.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Those answers, and especially what Professor Shortall has just said, are very interesting. Is the offering of courses wide enough, particularly for new entrants? There needs to be a wide variety of courses, including on areas such as the specifics of diversification and perhaps even the models of farming and the ways in which farming can be conducted now that might be of benefit to women who come in as new entrants.

The Convener: I think that Emma Harper has a supplementary question that will meld neatly into that, if I have got the gist of it correctly. I ask her to put her question now, and then Sally Shortall can answer both questions at once.

Emma Harper: The national health service has e-learning programmes that are made up of little modules that take 10 minutes to do. They include modules on conflict resolution, equality and diversity, fire safety, hazardous substances, managing chemicals and infection control. Has any work been done to consider what already exists that could be tailored a wee bit to support online learning? The NHS has done that successfully for a while—I know that because I am a former NHS employee.

10:45

Professor Shortall: I will answer the question about new entrants to farming first. The new entrant group of women who were interviewed were super-dynamic. A lot of them were really interested in agriculture but knew that they would not inherit the farm because they had a brother, so they went into agriculture-related employment. They had a lot of knowledge of environmental schemes and were very digitally skilled. Often, they had left their husbands and had capital

available for rent. Those are the kind of cutting-edge, dynamic future farmers that we want, and they work really hard. Irish research has suggested that part-time farmers can be as productive as full-time, large-scale farmers.

That new entrant group were really innovative and imaginative in how they were approaching their businesses. Many of them said that they got their training through work or through programmes that were able to develop them in that way. There is a question about the fact that they access a lot of skills through their other employment.

Emma Harper's question is an excellent one. I know that the Scottish Government is looking at building partnerships to maximise resources and use the types of activities that are going on in other organisations. It is probably a question for the civil servants, but I know that they are working across and developing those sorts of partnerships on farm safety, childcare issues and so on.

Sarah-Jane Laing: I will give a bit more detail. Work is on-going on an app for a rural training platform, because one thing that was identified, as Emma Harper mentioned, was the need and demand in the sector for easy access to online training tools. The Scottish Government has been working with Lantra and it is speaking to training providers and end users to further the development of that rural training platform app. We hope that we will get an update on that at our progress meeting in January.

Colin Smyth: I have a question on an issue that Anne Rae-MacDonald mentioned, which is the barriers that women face as a result of caring responsibilities. The figures clearly show that women take on a far bigger proportion of childcare responsibilities than men, and one of the key recommendations in the report is that access to childcare should be increased. Will you say a bit more about what that would look like in rural areas? What particular changes are required to the current access in order to support women in agriculture?

Anne Rae-MacDonald: It is a hugely complex area. We are aware that the Scottish Government has done a huge amount of work recently on early learning provision and increasing the amount of funded hours. As we have said, for women who are involved in practical farming in rural areas, the work does not stop at 5 o'clock. They combine late into the night and there is lambing and calving in the early hours.

There is a difference between early learning and childcare and child-sitting, for want of a better term. We felt that the way forward was to map out services visually, both to quantify existing ones and to identify any clear gaps. We need to see what can be done to marry up the provision of

good, qualified staff with people who have the respective needs. It might be that it is not early learning care that is required, but more child-sitting facilities.

As I am sure that most committee members will appreciate, the reality at the moment is that huge reliance is placed on family members being able to step in. Clearly, if members of the older generation are not available, or are not fit or of an age that enables them to do so, or those who are involved in farming are not in the same locality—that is often an issue for new entrants who are trying to take up land opportunities as they become available—there can be a huge gap that becomes a significant limitation, particularly for women.

Another issue, which is more on the domestic side, is how we can improve the ability, through awareness and encouragement, to have sometimes difficult conversations in the home environment, and to see how balancing responsibilities and immediate childcare demands can be worked to suit all partners.

Sarah-Jane Laing: As Anne Rae-MacDonald said, the main barrier is flexibility. As she and others who are involved in farming businesses will know—we have all had such experiences—someone might be in the middle of a difficult lambing or out working on a tractor, then look at their watch and realise that they are late to pick up the kids from school. Flexible emergency childcare is just not available.

I was able to share my experience of a scheme in which I was involved when I was a student in Edinburgh, which was a few decades ago now. It was called emergency mums and nannies, and it was available to professional women in Edinburgh. It involved a bank of students who had gone through training and were deemed to be safe, good-quality babysitters. At half an hour's notice, we could be called on to pick up children from school or to sit with them until their mums or dads finished their surgery or other work.

We wondered whether such a model could work in a rural area. There would be quite a few barriers. One is the scale and whether it could be a viable business. Quite rightly, there are also the requirements to provide good-quality childcare and everything else that has to be in place before a person can go into someone else's home and care for their children. However, we have asked the Scottish Government to speak to its colleagues in early learning and childcare to consider the provision of such a service. Our formal provision in Scotland is very good, but many working and farming families—not just working women—really need wraparound and emergency care.

Colin Smyth: It is obviously a complex issue, but it represents a massive barrier for many

women. Do barriers to accessing other essential services impact on women in agriculture, particularly in rural areas?

Sarah-Jane Laing: Connectivity—having access to good broadband—remains a massive barrier. We noted earlier that the recent increase in remote meetings and webinars has opened up opportunities for women, but they can happen in rural areas only when people have good connectivity.

The Convener: Colin, are you happy with that answer?

Colin Smyth: You will be pleased to know that I am happy with that, convener. If panel members could look into MSPs' inboxes, they would see concerns about childcare and broadband. We know that those are huge challenges that we must fix.

Peter Chapman: From almost the start of time, the expectation has been that the son—if there is one—would inherit the farm. That is a barrier for women. The task force recommends that that must be challenged and that businesses and organisations must make more comprehensive, and earlier, succession plans. Sarah-Jane Laing touched on that earlier. Succession planning is a difficult issue.

How do you envisage that succession norms can and should be challenged? Are there any policy or institutional barriers to overcoming restrictive succession practices?

I would like Anne Rae-MacDonald to answer first: she is a partner in a business and has gone through that process. Anne, what are your thoughts on how we could change the perception that the son must always inherit the farm?

Anne Rae-MacDonald: I should state from the outset that I do not have any brothers, which may have been fortunate.

The research recognises that succession is a major issue. Things have progressed as time has moved on. Far fewer women were involved when I started my career in agriculture, whereas now almost 50 per cent of students studying agriculture are girls. I like to think that the picture for the coming generation is brighter.

As Sally Shortall said, the research shows that succession is a cultural issue, not a legal one. It also shows that discussions and clear planning create a greater chance for women to be involved. Any promotion or discussion that encourages farming businesses to actively consider succession and get on the front foot on that would be a key way forward in reaching that goal.

Succession can be a sensitive issue for family partnerships. I am aware that the subject was

discussed at a monitor farm meeting last year. Where business plans are required, the topic will come up more and more, not just from the point of view of succession but from the point of view of resilience of the business.

Professor Shortall: Unlike Anne Rae-MacDonald, I have six brothers. I grew up on what is by Irish standards a large farm south of Dublin. My brothers maintain that my interest in women in agriculture is sour grapes, because I am never going to get the farm.

Inheritance is a cultural issue, and for historical reasons. Land was power, and people were tied to the king. There are entrenched reasons. Engineering, law, medicine and a number of other occupations were also stereotyped in a way that limited women's aspirations and choices. That is not necessarily good for an industry. We know that more diverse industries are more successful.

11:00

There are many reasons for looking at how to address this. At a European level, there have been many programmes looking at how to increase the number of women entering engineering. However, the transport industry is the big one at the moment. As Anne Rae-MacDonald said, there will have to be a multipronged approach. The issue needs to be understood as not just a gender equality issue, which it is, but an issue that will assist the future success of the industry. It is important to have those difficult discussions around succession. That is not only a gender issue; a lot of agriculture businesses do not have a succession plan in place, which is problematic for the future, and often hurts the industry.

Peter Chapman: A year or so ago, the Scottish Government introduced a land-matching service to support new entrants into farming and identify farmers who might want to semi-retire and get a youngster involved in their business. That was a key opportunity for new entrants to get a start in farming. Has that had results in terms of enabling more women to get a foothold in farming? Sarah-Jane Laing might be best placed to give us an idea of whether that service has had that effect.

Sarah-Jane Laing: I am afraid that I have no up-to-date information on the progress of the land-matching service but, from the applications that I saw early on, I can say that there seemed to be a number of women involved, especially in partnerships.

A lot of new entrants are looking at different models of ownership or tenancy. They are considering joint ventures, which tend to involve partners of different genders, in the case of married couples. We are starting to see a lot of that coming through. I think that I am right in

saying that research that Sally Shortall and others have done has shown that such routes are more likely to increase the number of women coming forward than the traditional succession routes. Anything that is put in place to encourage new entrants routinely results in that.

We can ask for an update on the land-matching service as part of our progress report.

The Convener: I do not see Anne Rae-MacDonald or Sally Shortall indicating that they wish to say anything about the land-matching service, so we will move to the next question, which is from Angus MacDonald.

Angus MacDonald: I want to follow up on Peter Chapman's questions about new entrants. Are there any further policy changes that need to be made to support new entrants?

Sarah-Jane Laing: My goodness. I think that we need to have a move towards a long-term vision for Scottish agriculture that does not include a barrier to new entrants. We know that, for some new entrants, the biggest issues are access to capital, access to land and access to support. All those issues have to be addressed in the replacement for common agricultural policy funding. Although the industry welcomes some of the stability that we have at the moment, we have to crack on with the replacement for the CAP and ensure that our new entrants are no longer disadvantaged.

Anne Rae-MacDonald: I agree with Sarah-Jane Laing. In addition, I think that we need to actively ensure that we have appropriate mentoring support in place. That can take the form of farmers who are retiring actively supporting people who are just coming in and handing on crucial advice and experience that you cannot put a value on.

Things like that can play a huge and important part. As we say in our report, it is important to enable as wide a range of systems as possible to be used, whether that involves contract farming, land sharing or the sharing of machinery. All those things can be added together to make the road a little easier.

The Convener: Would Angus MacDonald like to come back in on that?

Angus MacDonald: I am curious to know whether Sally Shortall may wish to answer the question.

The Convener: Certainly. As I said at the outset, we might not get round to every witness on each question, but I am happy to let Sally Shortall in briefly before you move to your next question.

Professor Shortall: It is an important question. I have just finished some research on that area for

the European Court of Auditors. One of the issues that we identified at the European level was that the new entrant scheme is not really broken down by gender, and that it is not seen as an important route to addressing gender imbalance in the industry. The committee might want to keep an eye on that.

As Anne Rae-MacDonald and Sarah-Jane Laing said, there are issues such as access to finance and credit—it is not just that land is expensive. Different ways of providing funds and sharing equipment will make it easier for people to gain entry. Nevertheless, we need to recognise that there are gender differences in respect of access to the industry.

The Convener: We have a few minutes in hand, if any committee member would like to ask a further question. John Finnie has not asked a question, so I would be happy to bring him in. I will go to Maureen Watt first, and then back to John if he has a question.

Maureen Watt: One problem in agriculture is that, often, even where a woman is involved in the partnership, a salary is not paid, and as a result no national insurance or pension contributions are made. Partnerships and families can break down in agriculture just as they do among the wider public. Is there any evidence that women are actually getting paid for the work that they do to a greater extent than they have been in the past?

The Convener: That is a difficult question.

Professor Shortall: It is a good question. Again, it comes back to the fact that farming is a family business and everybody who is involved is committed to the survival of that business. I have seen research that says that the more viable farm businesses are those that are able to rely on unpaid family labour. It is unusual—[*Inaudible.*]—when family members—[*Inaudible.*]—they may be paid a nominal amount, but it is a family business. Maureen Watt is right to highlight the issue; it is a complex, difficult question, and it is very messy, if there is a divorce, to resolve the issue of people's contributions to the business.

The Convener: Does John Finnie have a question? I did not see whether he nodded. I do not want to put him on the spot.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): You are not putting me on the spot, convener. Good morning, panel—I have listened with great interest to what you have said.

I have a question on opportunities. Of late, there has been a lot of public interest in issues around food security and food sources, given the climate breakdown. Are there opportunities associated with education in that regard? Could more be done through schooling, as has happened with the

science, technology, engineering and mathematics industry? I am thinking about how we encourage an understanding that food production is not about a single gender, but is about us all working together.

The Convener: Sally Shortall can probably start off on that.

Professor Shortall: I am afraid that I will have to leave the meeting after this question, because I have a dental appointment.

It is a really good question. There are multiple ways in which we can use schools. Northern Ireland has had a successful and positive campaign around talking to primary school children on farm safety, including getting them to draw what they do on the farm and advising them against getting on tractors with granddad and such like.

In relation to the engineering and transport system, that whole approach of doing promotion work with girls in secondary schools is important. I completely agree that there is a lot more to do. I work in a university department that offers agricultural degrees and we have no module on farm safety. There are lots of different ways that we can address different types of concerns at various levels of the education system. That is a really good point.

The Convener: I know that you have to slip away, as you said, Sally. I will thank the others at the end, but I thank you at this stage for your attendance, which has been very illuminating—thank you very much for finding the time.

Sarah-Jane Laing: To answer John Finnie's question, we have found that one of the issues is that many people still have a very traditional view of what jobs in farming are. Over the past couple of years, Lantra has worked hard to raise awareness of all the different career opportunities that exist in the wider farming sector. Food and drink, food security and climate change have been mentioned, and it is about changing the next generation's idea of what being a farmer is all about. So many people still have a very traditional view that all you do is either drive a tractor or work with sheep and beef but, although those are fantastic and are a key part of it, there is so much more to modern agriculture than that traditional view.

That is where Lantra has a role to play, as does the industry. Partnerships through the Royal Highland Education Trust and work that has been done with other organisations have been about getting into schools to explain the realities of farming and to show that it is a valued career, and a career choice that more people should consider.

Anne Rae-MacDonald: It is an excellent question. There is no doubt that, in times gone by, there was a much greater connection for children living in rural environments and going to rural schools than there is now, unless their families are directly involved. There is a huge amount to be gained from making that connection again, not just in demonstrating clearly the career opportunities that are out there for girls, but in encouraging the production of local good-quality food, which impacts on health and diet, and on mental and physical wellbeing. There is therefore a massive gain there.

Sarah-Jane Laing mentioned the huge range and expanse of career opportunities that are now associated with agriculture, and information technology has to be top of the list. For example, drones and global positioning system technology are being used at a practical farm level. There is a huge awareness exercise to be done there.

Clearly, young farmers clubs do a massive amount in that regard, as does RHET, which Sarah-Jane Laing mentioned. However, they tend to come in at a slightly older age group. Getting those messages across at primary school can pay huge dividends, because that is where the interest starts. I therefore thank John Finnie for that question.

John Finnie: I thank the participants for their answers and for all their work.

The Convener: We will have a brief final question from Emma Harper—in fact, a penultimate rather than a final question.

Emma Harper: I wish to pick up on what Sarah-Jane Laing said about the Royal Highland Education Trust. I know that Fiona Jamieson has done great work for RHET Dumfries and Galloway, which has kids from school going on to the SRUC's Crichton campus and to the auction mart at Castle Douglas. Does more support need to be provided for RHET under a wider Scottish approach, so that kids get more access to what farming and agriculture are all about?

11:15

Sarah-Jane Laing: I would always advocate more support for RHET, which is fantastic. As Anne Rae-MacDonald has said, it is trying to get to more and more children in Scotland. Many of the regional RHETs have provided online and virtual offerings so that the connection has not been entirely lost during Covid. As an organisation, RHET punches well above its weight, and I would certainly advocate more support and more funding for it.

The Convener: Do you wish to add anything, Anne?

Anne Rae-MacDonald: I have nothing further to add on that: Sarah-Jane Laing has fully covered the point, and I totally endorse what she has said.

The Convener: Brilliant. I get the last question so, if I may, I would ask you to clarify something. Could you succinctly tell me what you think the next steps should be? That is an easy question to answer, and no doubt we will have short answers—neither of which is true.

Sarah-Jane Laing: The charter has to happen: we have to roll it out. The charter principles must be embedded in every organisation and every business in agriculture. I would really like that to happen sooner rather than later.

Anne Rae-MacDonald: We need to push on growing awareness of this issue. The bottom line is that fully involving all partners and women in the industry is not a luxury; it is fundamental. If the industry is to survive the many challenges that it is facing—Brexit, climate change and many others—everybody has to be on board and we have to fully utilise the skills that are available.

The Convener: That is probably a good point at which to leave the discussion. I totally endorse everything that you say there—that is entirely right. The committee will monitor the women in agriculture recommendations as it engages with the Scottish Government and agricultural stakeholders, as we do on an on-going basis.

Suffice to say, and as the deputy convener pointed out, this has been a long-awaited session, and it did not disappoint when we got here. I thank Sarah-Jane Laing, Anne Rae-MacDonald and Sally Shortall—who is no longer present, as she had to go to a meeting—for their attendance and for their evidence. This has been a really worthwhile and illuminating session. Thank you for your time and your contributions.

11:18

Meeting continued in private until 11:54.

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