

# **EUROPEAN COMMITTEE**

Tuesday 4 April 2000  
(*Afternoon*)

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## **EUROPEAN COMMITTEE** 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2000, Session 1

### **CONVENER**

\*Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab)

### **DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)

### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West)  
\*Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
\*Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab)  
Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP)  
\*Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
\*David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con)  
\*Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD)  
Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
\*Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

\*attended

### **WITNESSES**

Mr Jack McConnell (Minister for Finance)  
Mr Colin Imrie (Scottish Executive Development Department)  
Mrs Hope Johnston (Scottish Executive Education Department)  
Nicol Stephen (Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning)  
David Stewart (Scottish Executive Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Department)

### **CLERK TEAM LEADER**

Stephen Imrie

### **ASSISTANT CLERK**

David Simpson

### **LOCATION**

Chamber



## Scottish Parliament

### European Committee

Tuesday 4 April 2000

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:10*]

**The Convener (Hugh Henry):** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the European Committee in 2000. Apologies have been received from Ben Wallace, Tavish Scott and Winnie Ewing. I have also had an indication from Jack McConnell, the Minister for Finance that, due to an extended Cabinet meeting, he will be delayed. I propose to start with item 4 on the agenda and revert to the original order once the minister arrives.

### Petition

**The Convener:** Item 4 is on petition PE97, from Mr Thomas Gray. It has been referred to us and to the Rural Affairs Committee by the Public Petitions Committee.

I recommend that we note the petition. The petitioner has set out his views and supplied supplementary material. I think that the Rural Affairs Committee is probably better placed to give the petition the scrutiny it deserves, so I am merely asking that this committee notes it. Are we agreed?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Convener's Report

**The Convener:** We now come to item 5. I would like to comment on the European Committee's visit to Brussels last week. We met representatives of a number of European institutions. I would also like to ask a representative from each political group to make some comment about it later.

As convener of this committee, I think that the visit was very worth while. It was historic: it was the first time a committee representing this Parliament had visited Brussels. We were extremely well received and there was a significant level of interest from representatives of the European Parliament. There was also huge interest and support from representatives of the European Commission.

We also had a very long, well received meeting with the President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, who gave us much more of his time than we had agreed. I think that that was a good reflection of the interest that the Scottish Parliament has created.

We met a number of senior officials of the Commission and had very good contact and meetings with the UK Government representatives in Brussels. We received good support from the staff at Scotland House, who did a lot to help us.

I would like to thank our committee clerks, who put a huge amount of effort and work into preparing the visit and facilitating the work that we did while we were there. Without their work, the visit would not have been productive. I would like to give special mention to Liz Holt, the European Commission's representative in Edinburgh, and to Dermot Scott, the European Parliament's representative in Edinburgh. They were very helpful in ensuring that we had contacts with the right people and in making the arrangements.

Many committee members found the visit a learning experience and useful contacts have been made for various committee reports. Beyond that, I was struck by the interest that people in Europe expressed about what is going on in Scotland and their willingness to make contact and work jointly with the Scottish Parliament. That sentiment was expressed not just by people based in Brussels but by people who represented areas throughout Europe. All in all, it was a very productive meeting that will stand the Parliament and its committees in good stead.

14:15

**Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab):** I echo most of your

comments, convener. We all felt that it was a very worthwhile experience: we were introduced to the relevant officials and met European politicians. We are now aware of the importance of such contacts. The visit reinforced the need for the committee to get in early enough to influence what is happening in Europe, and not to wait until processes are under way when it is too late to do anything. Furthermore, we should recognise what the Scottish Parliament is doing well. I think that the work of the Equal Opportunities Committee and the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee stands up beside comparable work in Europe. I hope that we can continue to build on such work.

**The Convener:** Bruce Crawford will comment on behalf of the SNP.

**Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** Anyone will clearly recognise that the outcome of our visit at least matched—and probably surpassed—our initial expectations and objectives.

We received some real nuggets about how the European system works; in particular, we were all surprised to find that the EC meets and votes weekly, which underlines the powerful nature of that part of the organisation and its effect on European legislation and indeed on Scotland, given the fact that 80 per cent of such legislation will influence domestic policy.

It was also interesting to have much more detail about the operation of the Council of Ministers and other ministerial meetings. Because of my interest in the euro, I found it particularly fascinating that 11 euro zone countries are having informal meetings to examine the issue; although it was emphasised that the meetings are informal, the danger of a two-stream Europe for the economy is clear.

We cannot overemphasise the need for Scotland to do its own networking in Europe; it is important that not only the European Committee but the committees that are concerned with rural affairs and environment issues understand the European decision-making framework and the necessity for networking. For example, it was constantly pointed out that the Irish are able to network and get involved in decision making; and, by God, if Scotland needs to learn any lessons from anyone, perhaps that is one.

Finally, at a luncheon engagement, the director general gave us a very striking signal that we should take this Parliament and its committees seriously; he said that on rural affairs issues such as hill farming and fisheries in general, our committees will be as important to Europe as Westminster committees. From my perspective, the visit was very worth while.

**The Convener:** David Mundell will speak on behalf of the Conservatives.

**David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):** I would like to echo the convener's thanks to Stephen Imrie, David Simpson and Christine Boch, and to Liz Holt and Dermot Scott. The visit was excellently put together and nobody could suggest that we did not gain the maximum possible benefit from our time in Brussels.

I found the trip extremely worth while. The Parliament—and people in business and other activities across Scotland—should understand the level of European interest in Scotland. This is a unique time and, in many ways, Scotland is flavour of the month just now. We have to gain the maximum benefit from that and take advantage of all the opportunities that will flow from it.

I welcome Mr McConnell's initiative in bringing together MEPs, this committee and others. I was pleased to meet our MEPs from all parties. It was clear that they genuinely work together in the interests of Scotland. This committee has to work very closely with them in future.

If we are to have any genuine influence in the process, we have to get in early. We gained a lot of information during our visit—for example, we learned about European freight railway services and were able to talk about such issues in a productive way. We will have to interact closely with the other committees of this Parliament so that they too can become involved in the process and benefit from receiving early information.

I was pleased to meet Franz Fischler, the agriculture, rural development and fisheries commissioner. It was a productive, useful and open meeting. That surprised me and was very refreshing. This Parliament would benefit from having similarly open exchanges with civil servants. Individual MSPs would appreciate that. If we are to develop a modern system of government in Scotland, we have to have a much more open dialogue between elected members, the Scottish Executive and civil servants.

During our discussions with President Prodi and others, it became clear that the e-Europe initiative will be a major part of the work of the Commission, the Council and the Parliament. The Scottish Parliament and Executive, and this committee, need to address that. In many ways, the Parliament and Executive are already doing so. It seems to me that e-Europe is missing from the committee's current work programme. Given the emphasis that is being put on that initiative, it is important that this committee focuses on it.

**The Convener:** That is a useful suggestion. Perhaps we can consider it when we review our work programme.

**Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West):** I will be brief because most of the points that I wanted to mention have already been covered. The visit was useful and informative. I recall that, during the reception at Scotland House, we were asked on several occasions why on earth it had taken us so long to arrange a visit. After all, we will soon have reached the first anniversary of the elections to this Parliament.

I suppose there is always the fear that the public perception of politicians who go on overseas trips is that they are participating in expensive junketing. If we behave as responsible members of this committee and if our visits are seen to bear fruit in the future work of our committee and the service to the people we represent, I think that those same people—and perhaps some of the media critics—will see that the visit was well planned, was hard work and was essential for us to find out what is going on in the corridors of power in the European Union.

We were privileged to meet distinguished commissioners—indeed, the head of the Commission, Romano Prodi—and the agriculture, rural development and fisheries commissioner, Franz Fischler.

I found that the most informative meeting was with Mr Currie, the environment director-general. He emphasised—as the director-general and as a fellow Scot—that, whether we like it or not, many of the decisions that affect the people of Scotland are taken in Brussels. We, as parliamentarians, have a duty not only to monitor those decisions but—he emphasised this point—to make some input before decisions are taken. He emphasised the importance of what some people call networking—or making personal contacts—and getting our views across to the people who will make the decisions.

I found that the woman from Neil Kinnock's cabinet was good value. She gave us an informative talk about what they are doing about the much needed reform to make the Commission more open, transparent and accountable following revelations last year and the year before.

The round-table discussion over lunch with David Martin, the president of the Parliament, was also very interesting. I found out in the subsequent briefing about human rights aspects, which I deliberately sought out because the committee has agreed that I be a reporter on that subject, that there is no guarantee that the charter of fundamental rights will be on the agenda of the forthcoming intergovernmental conference. Many people, including me, hope that it will be on the agenda; I hope that we, as a committee, can play some part in achieving that. I also found out that David Martin is a member of a working group that is preparing some material on the proposed

charter of fundamental rights. I hope to arrange a meeting with David to discuss the work of that group.

Finally, convener—I hope that this does not cause you to fall out of your seat—I thank you and Cathy Jamieson, as vice convener, for the fair way in which you chaired the proceedings and allowed all of us to ask the questions that we wanted to ask. That was a good example of a parliamentary committee at work.

**The Convener:** Thanks Dennis. Your point is well noted.

## Objective 2 Draft Plans

**The Convener:** We will now revert to the agenda as printed. Jack McConnell, the Minister for Finance, is now here to talk to the committee about the objective 2 draft plans.

Last time Jack was about to address a gathering at which the committee was present, the fire alarm went off. I do not know whether any of his speech will trigger the system this afternoon. We are delighted to have the minister here again, and are appreciative of the time that he is taking to consult the committee on many of the issues that we are considering.

**The Minister for Finance (Mr Jack McConnell):** Thank you. I concur with the comments that were made around the table about the visit last week. It seemed to me to be a success and an indication of what we can achieve when MEPs, the committee, the Executive and other colleagues work together to influence what is happening in Brussels at an early stage rather than being left to react to issues. I hope that it will be the start of a regular dialogue involving members of the committee at the European end, as well as here.

14:30

I am here today to discuss the draft objective 2 plans. As I have already stated in a letter to the committee, I think that the plans are very much on the right lines. They have been put together by the local partnerships, which we all recognise are important, and reflect both regional and local priorities and the Scottish priorities that we wanted to ensure were included. A great deal of good work has gone into the documents and I would like to put on record my thanks to everybody who has been involved. The time scale was tight and the task was difficult, but it was carried out with some skill at all levels.

I have studied carefully the committee's draft report on the plans and am very happy to answer questions on the issues that it raises. The points that the committee has made are very helpful and I am already taking them into account. I would be very happy to produce a formal response to the report after today's discussion—I suspect early next week. We should be able to submit the plans to the Commission before the end of the month—probably before Easter.

I would like to make three introductory points, all of which will, I believe, be welcomed by the committee. The first relates to the objective 2 map. As members know, before Christmas the Commission agreed in principle that the objective 2 map from Scotland and the rest of the UK would

be acceptable. It has now officially confirmed its approval of the UK's objective 2 map. That means that the details of the Scottish map and the percentage of the population it covers are set in stone and we can submit the plans. We expect to be able formally to notify the committee next week of the final position in relation to funding, which may be more favourable to Scotland than we had originally expected—particularly in the transitional areas. I will clarify that within the next few days and notify the committee properly next week. Although we will be in recess, I will write to the convener about that. I may also provide the information in a written answer, so that members can be made aware of the final position. It will certainly not be worse than was previously suggested and there may be additional money, which would be helpful.

My second point concerns the link with European social fund programmes. As members know, we were involved in discussions with the Commission about how much ESF money could be included in the objective 2 plans. Last Friday, officials met the Commission again. The position that they agreed reflects what is set out in my letter to the committee—that the prime programme for delivering ESF money is objective 3 and that there need to be effective co-ordinating mechanisms between objective 2 and objective 3. Where the case has been properly established, it is possible to include ESF money in objective 2 programmes.

However—perhaps not surprisingly—the Commission has questioned the rationale behind the proposal for small amounts of ESF money in the plans for East of Scotland and South of Scotland, given the heavy administrative burden that is involved in managing programmes with an ESF component. It is suggested that we build the elements of ESF funding for those areas that are proposed under objective 2 into the objective 3 programme. As there is already provision for higher-level skills and social inclusion activities in objective 3, I do not believe that that will be difficult. I have asked officials to discuss with the plan teams over the next two weeks how that can be achieved.

My final point arises from a question, which I was asked at the committee's meeting of 21 March, about the gap in funding for programmes, particularly those involving the voluntary sector. I said that we had to be clear that any support that we provided to fill the gap between the old programmes and the new ones should not substitute for the core funding of organisations. All the organisations that were involved in Europe-funded projects were aware that the gap was a possibility. The projects have to have added value and make maximum impact, so I do not want to dilute the funds that are available for that.



I recognise that there are a number of vulnerable community-based projects—perhaps up to 100—that are organised by voluntary sector groups and do not necessarily have the core funding to allow them to continue across that gap period, which may run from June to October. In particular, there are genuine concerns about work-related training for particular target groups. I have received genuine and well-considered representations from a good number of organisations, which say that they may have to scale back their activities and make redundant some of the trainers and care workers for that short period, which would create a serious break in programmes.

It is important that, if that gap is to be filled, those projects also receive funding from some of the match funders, as there are wider obligations than those on the Executive. However, I intend to guarantee funding for projects for vulnerable community groups over the summer period, while the applications for objective 3 are being considered. The most likely option is that the organisations that would like to continue their activity over the summer and believe that their projects meet the terms of the new objective 3 programme would be guaranteed funding at about the level of the ESF grant, whether or not their applications for ESF support succeed in the autumn. If they succeed in getting that funding, perhaps that funding can be back-dated, but I am prepared to set aside funds to cover their costs if they do not succeed in getting funding in the new programmes and are in difficulties. The element of risk for those groups will be taken out of the equation.

I have asked officials to meet representatives of the voluntary sector and the plan teams as a matter of urgency and to give me recommendations on how best to implement that guarantee. There is the fundamental point that several local training projects are geared towards some of the most vulnerable members of our community. It would be wrong to leave them uncertain between now and June or to leave them without training or other activities in the gap period, just because the new programmes are not quite ready. I want to be as helpful as I can. There will have to be a rigorous system to ensure that we do not hand out money willy-nilly, but it is important that the principles are established and that we start work on that urgently.

The most likely possibility is that people might prepare their new application. The discipline of working on the new application will be good for projects. As soon as we have more details, I will give them to the committee—again by parliamentary answer and a letter to the convener.

I hope that that has been helpful and that it

deals with a major concern that the committee expressed at its previous meeting. The action that the Executive has taken in conjunction with its partners is important, and I hope that it will be widely welcomed by voluntary groups across Scotland. I am happy to take questions on that or on the plans for the objective 2 programmes.

**The Convener:** I welcome your response to the committee's concerns on gap funding. I do not want all our discussion to concentrate on that because we cannot lose sight of the important issues relating to the plans, on which I welcome your general comments. It is important that we cover the statement, because of the concern that has been expressed not only to you, but to committee members.

**Cathy Jamieson:** I certainly welcome a number of the minister's points. I have, like other committee members, received a number of representations from the voluntary sector. The minister will be aware that, in a previous life, I worked in the voluntary sector and therefore have some knowledge of the realities of life, which can sometimes be somewhat different from what may appear to be the case on paper.

I welcome the identification of opportunities to fill some of the gaps. This problem was not highlighted recently; it was identified around 18 months ago, when a number of the projects identified that there were likely to be problems. Can we have assurances that all the projects which were vulnerable have now been brought into the equation?

I am concerned that some redundancy or 90-day notices have already gone out, creating anxiety and problems in the voluntary sector. If those workers then decide to seek other employment, exactly the work that the minister has suggested on on-going applications might not come to fruition. I wondered whether we could have some assurances on that point.

I also seek assurance on the time scale. The minister suggested that some of the organisations involved are concerned that the summer might not be sufficient, and that some flexibility might be required for the rest of this year, to allow all the organisations to complete the process and secure the appropriate funding.

**Mr McConnell:** I have to be very clear. This concerns all projects that clearly intend to apply for the new programmes. I do not think that we can fund projects that will not be running between June and September, or even between June and December—when the new programmes will not even apply. We have to start from that basis.

There might also be projects in the same category that do not require such an emergency guarantee. It is important that we target any

money that might be available on the projects that need it most. The intention would be to ensure that people who come forward to use the guarantee are people who will apply—preferably those who have a chance of success with their applications.

I was deliberately vague on the time scale. We are not too clear on that because there will be some projects for which funding between July and September is perfectly sufficient; others might need more or less. We should be a little bit flexible at the edges.

The purpose is to ensure that no project closes unnecessarily between programmes. If we keep that purpose in mind, I hope that we can be sufficiently flexible at the margins to ensure that we provide the necessary support. At least one organisation has submitted some redundancy letters—or potential redundancy letters—to members of staff in the past week. I would have preferred to have made this announcement before last Friday, but it was important to ensure that we could deliver on such a guarantee. I can put that forward to the committee today with all surety.

It is important that we now move quickly to firm up the details of how this will work in practice, and to advise those concerned on how best to secure their position. It is a difficult time, but we can provide some assistance.

**The Convener:** I ask members to stick with this issue for now before moving on.

**Bruce Crawford:** I am glad that you said that, because I want to return to one particular point concerning rural areas and objective 2.

Thank you for making your position plain at the beginning, minister, on transitional funding for some major organisations in the voluntary sector. The timing is vital for such organisations. I am sure that there will be initial relief at your announcement today—which we welcome. I understand that you couched it in very careful terms, and that initial relief might not always become long-term relief for some organisations.

A number of organisations have written to Hugh Henry, and the Scottish Association for Mental Health has written a round robin letter to all members of the committee. The urgency for that organisation cannot be stressed enough; its letter said that 54 redundancies were possible and that 500 vocational training places were in jeopardy. Although an announcement has been made today, I would like the minister to tell us when we will be able to let such organisations know what they can expect and when they can expect it. They must have some assurance that their training programmes can continue, so that they can retain the staff required to deliver those programmes. Urgency is required.

14:45

**Mr McConnell:** We can react immediately. It might take until May to firm up the details, but early discussions with the SAMH and other organisations will be helpful. I am well aware of the urgency of the situation and of the importance of the SAMH's local projects. I visited its project at the Etna training centre in Wishaw two weeks ago. The quality of work being done there is significant and life enhancing. It is important that no threat, uncertainty or unnecessary pressure should be put on vulnerable projects, and I want to ensure that the staff and trainees can feel secure.

We will involve those people in discussions as soon as possible, to ensure that the guarantees that we can provide will give them maximum assistance. Given the reduced amount of European funding available to Scotland in the new programme, they will have to make a judgment about whether they are likely to have such a wide range of projects in the new programme, and will have to consider the extent to which the guarantee might cover them. However, anybody who intends to apply, preferably with good reason, for the new programme should be covered by that guarantee.

**Bruce Crawford:** May I ask a supplementary question?

**The Convener:** I shall take Irene Oldfather's question and then come back to you.

**Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab):** I appreciate today's announcement, but I feel that it has come awfully late. When you came to the committee on 31 August last year, I raised the issue of a possible gap in funding. That has now come to fruition in my constituency, where redundancy notices have been issued for a SAMH project. I am concerned that those redundancy notices have already been issued and about the vagueness of the period of cover. Can you give me an assurance that those organisations will be covered from the end of June until the end of September?

**Mr McConnell:** I can give an assurance that no vulnerable group or local project will close unnecessarily before the start of the new programme. That is a better assurance than putting a date on it. That could mean September or October, or slightly later, depending on what happens between now and then. The important thing is that a vulnerable group, especially one that is likely to succeed in the new programme, should not have to close over the summer. That is an important principle and we shall work out the details around that.

The committee first discussed the matter on 31 August last year. Since then, we have made two announcements about providing funding to cover the gap—one for a short period and one for a

longer period until June. The gap is now longer than we had anticipated, and the original target of resolving the matter before the end of March has been slightly missed. However, I hope that today's announcement has come early enough to ensure that nobody is left in severe difficulty.

**David Mundell:** I wish to clarify how proactive the process is. Will groups have to come to you, or will you, either separately or through the existing partnerships, seek to identify effective groups? I have been contacted by smaller groups, operating in Dumfries and Galloway. Some of the larger groups that we deal with are much more switched on to the process.

**Mr McConnell:** I am happy to give the guarantee and I am happy to deal with the correspondence, but the groups would be more successful if they did not apply directly to me. To be serious, as well as there being direct discussions with the national group, the partnerships are the right vehicle for this. People will presumably be notified with the details as soon as they are available. In the meantime, they should get in touch with their normal contacts, to find out what is happening.

**Bruce Crawford:** This is a small point—I am trying to be helpful. Adam Ingram, Michael Russell and Margo MacDonald all spoke to me about this on my way here today. I am sure that the same will be happening to committee members within their own parties. Committee members are often contacted in relation to people who wish to know how to secure their positions. It would be useful if you could inform MSPs, especially those in the eight areas that the Scottish Association for Mental Health has made me aware of, about the outcomes from your announcement today. We have to find some way to get the information to those MSPs, so that they can respond in a more positive tone than they might otherwise have done. It might be useful—I am not trying to tell you how to do your job.

**Mr McConnell:** That is not a bad idea. The convener could ask me a parliamentary question and I could provide the right answer; if that were published this week, it would mean that everybody would have the information that is helpful and is desired.

**The Convener:** Or, if we anticipate that that will cause delays, a letter could be circulated. At the end of the meeting, we could discuss the quickest way of circulating the information.

**Mr McConnell:** I am happy to do that.

**Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab):** Following David Mundell's point, can we be assured that all those groups will get to know about your new announcement?

**Mr McConnell:** Yes.

**Dennis Canavan:** You referred to a financial announcement that will be made fairly soon. You initially referred to the submission of a parliamentary answer to make the announcement, then you changed that to a response to a parliamentary question. That seems to be letting the cat out of the bag, in the sense that you have in mind the planting of a question, possibly through some friendly Labour or Liberal Democrat MSP. In future, would it not be better, when you have an important announcement to make on European Union funding, for it to be made to the committee? That would give the committee the status that it deserves and it would give committee members the opportunity to ask questions about your funding announcement.

**Mr McConnell:** At the end of the Parliament's first year, the records of this committee will probably show that there have been more announcements, more details given and more ministerial discussions here than in any other part of the Parliament. I am prepared to stand by that.

The reason I even hint at the possibility of clarifying the funding today is so that the committee is notified before anybody else is. I cannot provide the committee with a firm decision on the allocations today, but I will be able to do so. I have said very carefully that I would write to the convener, as well as answer a parliamentary question. In fact, when that has happened in the past on European matters, the convener and I have sometimes liaised to ensure that the right and proper person—either the convener or deputy convener of the committee—asks the question and is provided with the answer. I have tried to use that model—it is a good way to do it.

As I understand it, the committee is not meeting next Monday or Tuesday; therefore, it would be difficult for me to make an announcement to the committee. It would be good if the information were in the parliamentary domain as quickly as possible. I will do it in writing, rather than verbally.

**The Convener:** In our discussion today, I believe that the Executive has announced a significant change, and I welcome that. We wish to have further details as soon as possible. Before Dennis Canavan asked his question, I made the point that I want the details to be firmed up as quickly as possible.

**Dennis Canavan:** May I make one point?

**The Convener:** Nicol Stephen is supposed to be coming at 3 o'clock, and we still have to address the objective 2 plan, so we should move on to that part of the discussion, because we have covered most of the points on gap funding.

There is a huge amount of detail in the objective

2 plan. I welcome the points that the minister made about the committee's work. We have our own draft report, and we can decide today whether to confirm, amend or update it as we see fit. The minister has already commented on some of the content of that report. I will throw open the discussion to the committee, either to comment on the report in the light of the minister's statements, or to ask questions of the minister. Does the minister wish to say something first?

**Mr McConnell:** I am listening to what you are saying about time. Would it—

**The Convener:** I would like to finish this item today if we can, rather than allow it to drag on.

**Bruce Crawford:** I have seen a copy of the letter that was sent to the convener in March, on objective 2 funding. Was it dated 30 March?

**Mr McConnell:** Yes.

**Bruce Crawford:** At the first meeting that we had with officials on objective 2 funding, a number of committee members referred to the development of area strategies and area targets. While I accept that those are appropriate ways in which to deal with, for example, social inclusion partnerships in urban areas, I have some difficulty with area targeting and area-based strategies for rural areas. From your background, you will know that Stirling in particular has been successful in accessing European funding for rural areas.

You tried to put some flesh on that in your letter, particularly with regard to the role of area-based strategies. You said that in rural areas, for

"strategic economic development, reference can be made to the structure plan and enterprise network and local authority economic development strategies."

That is a reasonable attempt to help people in those areas, and I understand what you are trying to do, but economic development in rural communities does not always come from those types of strategies. It tends to come from community organisations that are set up either by individuals acting in their own right, or through limited companies for rural partnerships. Some of the kernel work does not find its way into local authority structure plans or economic development strategies. As the former leader of a council, I would be the first to concede that.

While I appreciate what you are trying to achieve by building in another step—which I hope will not contravene European structural funding rules—we need to go further to ensure that we get innovative projects and that the seeds that we find are able to grow. I am far from convinced that we have the right framework to achieve those aims for objective 2 funding in rural areas. The matter must be looked at again.

**Mr McConnell:** I agree. Before the end of the month, the East of Scotland plan team will look at the possibility of another, more thematic strand to run alongside the area-based strategies, particularly in the East of Scotland where it might be a challenge. I know that you represent that area and that that is behind your question. It is important that we have a degree of flexibility in area-based strategies to build upon. That is reflected in my letter.

Since I sent the letter to the committee, I have seen the committee's draft report, and the East of Scotland plan team, in its consultation, also received a number of comments on the matters that were raised. It is working on the possibility of a more thematic strand to run alongside the area-based strategies in the final programme, but to some extent it will have to be developed as the process develops. It is important to have an element of that strand in the plan, but it is also important that the committee, the Commission and I recognise that the monitoring committees and implementation teams will need to keep a careful eye on the matter and carry out developments as the programmes get under way.

15:00

**Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab):** On much the same theme, but perhaps from a different perspective, I am not 100 per cent sure that I agree with much of what has been said about transitional areas. You said that more money was to be allocated to those areas, but while I understand the concerns of a number of members, it could be argued that the case for rural areas is overstated and misunderstands what the new objective 2 programmes are designed to do.

In the East and West programmes, the urban industrial areas are fully eligible and will have the highest level of grant, whereas the majority of rural areas are in transition because they do not meet the criteria for full eligibility and will have substantially fewer resources allocated over a shorter period. In reality, the rural areas are not priority areas. The programmes are regional and cover both fully eligible and transitional areas, but the policy focus has to be on the fully eligible areas, because the programmes are required to keep the financing of the fully eligible and transitional areas separate. That requirement, together with the greater financial controls that have been exercised, means that if the programmes' priorities are dominated by the transitional areas, they are not able to spend the resources. In other words, if they are out of synchronisation with the priorities of the priority urban areas, they will not be able to spend and the resources will be lost to the programmes as a whole.

Some of the academic argument on the hidden nature of rural poverty has to be treated with caution; at least, I understand that when the rural areas were asked to give evidence of their concerns, they were unable to provide the relevant indicators that would substantiate their case.

Will those concerns be addressed in the distribution of transitional funding?

**Mr McConnell:** On your final point, work is continuing to try to improve—or create—information on the indicators of rural poverty; that might be helpful for the Executive as well as for the European programmes.

We must recognise that there are different issues in different parts of Scotland; the position on fully eligible and transitional areas—in terms of the balance, and even area-based strategies—is not the same in the west as in the east. For example, some transitional areas in the west have SIPs, or are linked closely to such arrangements, whereas transitional areas in the east are spread across a large area, and a relatively small amount of money is involved, so area-based targeting might be counter-productive and a more thematic approach might work better.

We can try to be prescriptive at the beginning of a programme; we can try to tie down full areas as more eligible than transitional areas and some spending priorities as more important than others, but sometimes those balances will be mixed. Sometimes there will be opportunities just outside the geographical boundary of a full area—or inside a transitional area—that would provide real training or work opportunities for people who live inside the full eligibility area. We must be careful to monitor the impact of all that as we go along.

The design of the programmes is important because it sets a framework, but what is really important is what we get at the end of the day for the money that we spend. That requires flexibility and co-ordination; it requires, if I dare use the phrase, the cross-cutting or joined-up operation that would allow us, in the end, to get maximum impact. The key thing is to get that maximum impact in the next seven years, because the money will not all be there in seven years' time.

**Allan Wilson:** I accept that, but the obvious point to be made is that if the balance is wrong, the impact will be minimised, because the funds that would otherwise be available to meet the priority need will be lost. It is crucial that the priority of those who spend the money is that they get the balance right.

**Mr McConnell:** I think that the balance in the plans is right, but during the consultation there will be comments about implementation, which we need to tweak.

**The Convener:** Is it correct that, in finalising the plans, nothing will be done that will inhibit the ability to spend money in the areas to which that money has been allocated by, for example, getting priorities out of kilter?

**Mr McConnell:** That will not happen.

**The Convener:** You are right to address through a thematic approach the concerns that Bruce Crawford raised. I think that Allan Wilson is saying that he feels that there is the potential for imbalance if criteria are set that do not allow us to spend the money.

**Mr McConnell:** Nothing of that sort will be done. It is my firm intention that the plans that are submitted before the end of the month should be robust and able to stand the tests that will be applied to them by the Commission. The more robust they are, the more likely it is that they will be approved quickly, so that we can get the programmes under way.

**David Mundell:** I am reassured by that answer, because I accept the premise that underlies a number of things that Allan Wilson said. In our previous discussions with Mr Imrie, we accepted that the current rural deprivation analysis factors were not adequate for their purpose; you seem to be aware of that. In respect of funding, Dumfries and Galloway Council applied for funding from another source for which it was ineligible because the criteria did not match.

On joined-up government, I am still not clear—in relation to each of the plans, but particularly the plan for the South of Scotland—how the Executive's activities will dovetail with those plans to ensure that we get the most from the funding. Is there a process whereby the Executive examines the plans? I do not expect you to commit to upgrading the A75 today, but I would like to know that there is a process by which the Executive examines the plans and the requirements identified in the plans. Does the Executive consider such examination to be part of a joined-up process?

**Mr McConnell:** Local authorities also have a responsibility because they are part of the planning process. They write things into the plans that they consider important. That should join up with the ways in which they spend their money—it is important that they think about that now. They must not use the plans as a lever to press for money at a later date. If there are local roads issues that would link with some of the initiatives that are given priority in the plans, it is important that the authorities that are responsible for those roads treat them as priorities in their programmes. They should not come back at a later date to say, "You agreed with the European plan—now we need money for that local road."

It is incumbent on the Executive to ensure that the plans tie in with our priorities and that they relate closely to them. Partnerships must work at a local level, because local authorities and local public bodies must link the plans to their priorities.

I stress that the European programmes—however important they might be—are only a small part of the activities of the public sector in Scotland's economic and social development. To some extent they are the tail and we are the dove, if there is dovetailing to be done. We must be seen to ensure that the overall priorities on policies and initiatives throughout Scotland are complemented and have value added to them by European plans—those priorities must not be diverted by them.

There are two ways in which we will do that. The first is the annual review process, in which the committee will now also be involved, along with the Executive. That is an important change to the way in which plans are monitored. Secondly, the more day-to-day approach is that the Executive, which is the body through which funds are channelled in Scotland, will chair the bodies that administer the funds. The Executive therefore has a direct role in ensuring that the way in which funds are implemented ties in with what is happening elsewhere in the public sector in Scotland.

**David Mundell:** The Scottish Executive's responsibilities are identified in the plans. If some of those things are never going to happen and are contrary to your policy and forward planning, it would only be fair to make that clear at this stage. My concern is that there are things in the plan with which the Executive—for legitimate policy reasons—may not want to proceed, despite the fact that part of the plan is predicated on their happening.

**Mr McConnell:** There is nothing in the plans that conflicts with the policies of the Executive. However, one of the things that is built into the South of Scotland plan, for example, is a presumption of economic development. It would be possible to argue that the potential for economic development in South of Scotland would be improved if there were a railway through the eastern side of South of Scotland. The fact that we are committing ourselves to economic development in South of Scotland is not the same as committing ourselves to funding a Borders railway. It is important that nothing in the plans conflicts with the Executive's policies, but there is a responsibility on the people at a local level—who agree the plans that are submitted to us—to accept that their priorities must tie in. It cannot all be left to the Executive; this is a real partnership and that works both ways.

**Irene Oldfather:** Urban dereliction in West of

Scotland is correctly identified as a weakness in the revised SWOT—strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats—analysis. It affects my area. Given that this could be our last opportunity to access funds, will the minister give a commitment to recognising the importance of using this opportunity to attempt to increase the impact and leave a better legacy? We have an opportunity to enter into land reclamation. Some of the German Länder have successfully used structural funds to do that. I note that in his letter to the convener, the minister said that he sees urban dereliction as an important problem that may require a slight increase in the financial allocation to the sector. Can he give a commitment on that today?

**Mr McConnell:** There is no decision yet, but I gave a firm steer that that may be required in that letter and to the plan team. Last Monday, when the committee had its early events in Brussels, I had a good discussion with the Brussels office of North Rhine Westphalia. Its land reclamation work, much of which involved structural funds, has been very impressive. We discussed holding a seminar to exchange ideas and best practice some time in the future. As the member with the biggest brownfield site in the whole of Europe in his constituency, I have more than a slight interest in the matter. I can assure the member that I am on the case.

**Dr Sylvia Jackson:** I cannot not come back on what Allan Wilson said. We need rural deprivation indicators. The sooner we get them, the sooner they will help the European Committee in this exercise—and the Local Government Committee when it considers the independent review. One of the key issues is access in rural communities.

It is interesting that the report mentions the possibility of providing money—perhaps European money—to encourage forestry, but notes that there is a distinct problem with the infrastructure for that. Although there is no doubt that infrastructure is a problem, another issue is that if many forestry lorries are pounding the roads, we may create a lot of expense for local authorities, which many will be unable to meet. The partnership and the arrangement you mentioned, whereby local councils work together to think through their objectives, are not, therefore, easy to achieve. That is starkly so in relation to forestry.

15:15

I took exception to what Allan Wilson said—I do not usually—about the most needy objective 2 areas. We fought hard in the committee and the Parliament to show that some of the most disadvantaged wards in Scotland do not get objective 2 funding because of the clustering ward arrangement. That is what happened in my constituency. I would like to put that on record

because I am very angry about Allan Wilson's statement.

**Mr McConnell:** Far be it from me to come between the member for Cunninghame North and the member for Stirling, given my connection with both places. I will stick to the forward plans rather than comment on the committee's debates.

Forestry is a good example of where those who are involved in the plan teams have to take account of the local resources that are available to deliver other elements of the package. If the development of the timber industry requires road improvements, the local authorities that are in the plan teams have to be aware of that when the plans are put together and take it into account. I do not suggest that anyone is doing this, but I can imagine circumstances in which it might suit some of the bodies that are largely funded by the Executive to include things in the plans and then, two years down the line, tell the Executive that, as it agreed to the plan, it has to come up with the money. I hope that all the partners involved ensure that funding ties in with what they have said are the local priorities.

**The Convener:** I will draw the discussion to a conclusion. I thank the minister again for taking time to meet us. His comments have been helpful. If, following this discussion, any member wishes to alter anything in the report or submit something to it, they should speak to Stephen Imrie as soon as possible so that we can reflect what we have heard today. Broadly, the thrust of the report seems to be going in the right direction.

**Mr McConnell:** I want to put on record my thanks to the committee for all the discussions that we have had over the past six months. The committee's input has been particularly important for producing the best plans for Scotland. We have a good story to tell on the work that has been done nationally and locally. This is an example of the Parliament working well in practice. I hope that—as your report says—in the implementation phase, as we consider the annual reviews and monitor the progress of the programmes, we can keep our constructive relationship. I look forward to that and I am sure that you do too.

## European Union Funding

**The Convener:** The next agenda item is a discussion on European funding for education, training and youth—the Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Youth programmes. Nicol Stephen, the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, will give us a briefing on the Council of Ministers meeting.

The new programmes were launched at the informal Council of Ministers meeting in Lisbon last month. This is our first opportunity to hear from the minister about the Scottish Executive's contribution to that process and about the contact that it has had with other European institutions. We firmly believe that we should have the opportunity to hear from ministers about what they are doing in this area on our behalf.

I welcome Nicol Stephen, who makes his first appearance before the committee. I hope that it will not be the last. Programmes such as Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Youth are often overlooked, yet from experience we know that they make a significant contribution to local projects and that they have been used imaginatively by organisations throughout Scotland.

**The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen):** It is a great pleasure to be here. This is my first full appearance before a committee of the Scottish Parliament; I have sat beside Henry McLeish at other committee meetings. Yesterday, I made my first appearance as a minister before the House of Commons Education and Employment Committee, so it will be interesting to compare and contrast the two experiences.

I have been asked to prepare some introductory remarks, but I hope that there will be a reasonable time for questions. I am grateful for the invitation to the committee. It is important that Scottish Executive ministers, and others, participate in European meetings and events. The Lisbon visit had two elements: the first was the conference to launch the Community programmes Socrates II, Leonardo da Vinci II, and Youth; the second was a meeting of the European education ministers in preparation for the heads of state summit, which happened a few days after the visit.

I took part in discussions on the impact of the programmes on the promotion of lifelong learning and on the strengthening of employment in the EU. I was joined in the UK delegation by Baroness Blackstone, who is Minister of State at the Department for Education and Employment. It was an honour for me to represent the Scottish Executive on my first visit of this type to Europe.

It was encouraging that a number of other delegations understood what is happening with devolution in the UK. I was interested by the contrast between my presence as a Scottish minister in the UK delegation and the attendance at the conference of a large number of delegates from countries that want to become members states, such as Estonia, Latvia and Hungary—there was a very large gathering around the EU table. We had a good opportunity to discuss the wider issue of lifelong learning. Very little time was spent in the workshops discussing the programmes; longer was spent on lifelong learning and the issues that were going to be addressed at the heads of state summit.

First, I will talk about the launch of the three programmes. The Scottish Executive has been much involved in the launch of the three major European Union programmes in the next phase of their funding, which will stretch until the end of 2006. Sam Galbraith spoke at the UK launch of Socrates, in Birmingham on 20 March, which was the Monday after the event in Lisbon that I attended. There will be a Scottish information day on Socrates in Edinburgh on 15 June. The Leonardo da Vinci programme in Scotland was launched at information days on 8 February and 24 February, and surgeries for prospective project leaders were held on 6 March. The Youth programme will be launched at several meetings throughout the UK this year. In Scotland it has been agreed that the launch of Youth will take place in Edinburgh in September and will be attended by representatives of community education and youth groups from all over Scotland. The details of ministerial attendance at that meeting and so on have still to be agreed.

All the programmes run for seven years. Over the next seven years—from 2000 to the end of 2006 inclusive—the three programmes will continue to be promoted by the bodies that are contracted to manage them. For example, the main body responsible for Youth is the Youth Exchange Centre, which is part of the British Council. For Socrates and for significant elements of Leonardo da Vinci, the body responsible is the Central Bureau for International Education and Training, which is also part of the British Council. Those bodies will send publications to institutions and organisations throughout Scotland. There will be local contact and, probably on an annual basis, local events to highlight the programmes and some of our success stories. That will help with any difficulties in developing or promoting the programmes.

Through the normal means of communication, and now through the internet, those bodies will be in regular contact with the practitioners who are involved in delivering on the ground, to alert them to deadlines and other developments. A lot of

administration is involved in these programmes and all countries accept that it would be good to lessen the administration and make it easier to access the programmes.

The bodies I have mentioned will be supported by Eurodesk and Scotland Europa, which offer a very effective alerting service to help users in Scotland to get the most out of these opportunities. Funding is important. Members will get a sense of the importance to Scotland of the programmes when I tell them that, in the past five years, Scotland's share of the overall United Kingdom funding has tended to be somewhat above the expected 9 or 10 per cent. The figure has to rise to 15 per cent in one year for Youth. I have more information on funding that we may discuss during questions.

The impact of the programmes has been significant. The energy with which schoolchildren, in particular, enter into partnership with others across Europe has been evident. Socrates has been especially successful, as has Youth. We in the Executive regard that as important groundwork for young people's awareness of external events and of Scotland and the UK's place in Europe. The programmes are a good and effective means of promoting both the idea of European citizenship and an understanding of other European cultures and values.

For people in training and for adults, it is fair to say that things have been slower. It has been more difficult for the programmes to achieve their full potential. However, opportunities for placements and work experience have been invaluable. At the UK launch of Socrates, two Erasmus students spoke of the programme in glowing terms and said how much their experience abroad had helped them to mature personally as well as to gain new skills, especially language skills. Language skills were spoken about often at the Lisbon conference. The Spanish and Italian representatives were less than happy that there were, in their view, inadequate translation facilities. The main languages were German, English and French, so they lodged a formal protest, which was interesting.

The new Socrates will extend opportunities to older learners and will encourage true lifelong learning and a sharing of experience among people already in work. Leonardo da Vinci II will do the same. Youth will extend its European voluntary scheme to the disadvantaged and the unemployed, which should offer exciting openings to young people to broaden their personal and professional horizons.

We consider the impact of the programmes to have been very positive at an individual and a national level. However, streamlining remains an important issue.



The new programmes offer Scotland an opportunity to make itself known across Europe and beyond, and to share its expertise with others while learning from them. We want to encourage greater participation in the projects. The funds are likely to have to be spread across more member states, so maintaining the levels of funding will be a challenge for us.

15:30

The three programmes were not discussed in huge detail at the conference. There were six introductory speeches to launch the programmes. They were from the Deputy Minister to the Prime Minister of Portugal; the Minister of Education of Portugal; the Minister of Labour and Welfare of Portugal; Viviane Reding, the EU education and culture commissioner; the Vice-President of the European Parliament, on behalf of the President of the European Parliament; and the President of the Republic of Portugal.

We then went into workshops, which focused on lifelong learning. There was consensus on the importance of lifelong learning and the availability of learning opportunities for all if we are to boost the competitiveness of Europe and promote social inclusion. There were different balances in the importance different member states attached to education and learning in its own right and the importance of education and learning in economic and competitive terms.

The working group that I attended, which was the main one out of five, focused on the future of lifelong learning. The Swedish representative spent a lot of time talking about nursery education and emphasised the importance of lifelong learning starting at age three or four, whereas our enterprise and lifelong learning department tends to emphasise lifelong learning starting at age 16 and the importance of lifelong learning in the economic or enterprise context.

Finland stressed the importance of employers investing in staff development and considered it essential to promote the recognition of qualifications across Europe. Transparency and transferability were two key words—transparency meaning that you should understand the qualifications in other member states and transferability taking that a stage forward and meaning that you would then be able to use those qualifications in whatever member state you wished to work in. At the moment, we do not even have transferability throughout the UK—far less throughout Europe—although we are working on it.

The Netherlands had provided fiscal incentives for learning along the lines of the individual learning accounts that we are developing here.

Spain pointed out the importance of recognising competence gained at work, as we do here through Scottish vocational qualifications. France pointed out that teaching adults in formal classes might be more appropriate for initial training but was not convenient for those working in small businesses or in remote or rural areas or for women with family constraints, so steps had to be taken to address that matter.

I made my first speech at one of these events addressing the first of a series of questions the workshop was asked to consider. I focused my comments on the first question, but realised that that was a mistake because what seems to happen at these conferences is that they go round the table and everyone gets the chance to speak once. You must therefore seize your opportunity, as you will not get another one; that was a lesson for me.

I explained Scotland's involvement at the meeting and gave some background about the establishment of the Scottish Parliament. I described the enterprise and lifelong learning department and said that, as far as we are aware, it is unique in Europe as it brings together enterprise and the post-16 element of lifelong learning, including university and college education as well as all other aspects of lifelong learning. I spoke about the importance of the new Scottish university for industry and drew comparisons with some of the comments that had been made by other delegations.

I mentioned taking learning from traditional institutions and making it available in deprived areas, shopping centres, learning centres in football stadiums and learning houses in deprived housing estates. It is important for small businesses to access learning at the right place, at the right time, at the right cost and in a much more flexible way. It is interesting that Germany is considering a similar initiative as part of its alliance for work, education and training programme.

I also explained our target of 100,000 individual learning accounts by 2002 and that the Government would contribute £150 towards learning costs if the learner contributed £25. I was encouraged by other countries' interest in that and by the fact that some countries had similar initiatives. In my closing comments, I will say more about the new qualifications framework that we are developing with the Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals, the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

On Saturday morning, EU education ministers met to agree the wording of a four-page presidency note which Portugal was trying to steer through. The meeting's format was similar to that of the workshop: every nation has one bite at the

cherry and people who do not get their points across might not get another chance to do so. Baroness Blackstone spoke for the UK; I sat alongside her. The issue was the extent to which Europe should impose a core approach on these issues and its right to be involved in doing so. Some people were keen for Europe to become more involved; others argued that although some general principles could be agreed, the EU must not be too interventionist. There was broad consensus on the importance of education, training and lifelong learning. Interestingly, the discussion did not touch on the internet and e-commerce; those aspects were inserted into the document when it progressed to the heads of state summit the following week.

At the meeting of education ministers, the Portuguese presidency highlighted a range of key issues, including the importance of education and training to employment and the need for EU education ministers to be involved in the Luxembourg process; improving access to lifelong learning; the possible establishment of a framework of basic skills; and the need to recognise the validity of certification across Europe. On that last point, the Scottish credit and qualifications framework will set out the relationships between all Scottish qualifications and help learners to transfer relevant credits from one qualification to another. We will want to encourage mutual recognition by linking the Scottish framework to similar frameworks being developed in other countries.

There was broad overall consensus. It was agreed that education ministers should participate in the Luxembourg process, by which each member state produces annual employment action plans. At the moment, we are liaising with the Department for Education and Employment on the 2000 action plan.

The Commission acknowledged that convergence, not unification, should be the aim. Lifelong learning should not be implemented though European directives and initiatives are best developed nationally or regionally. However, there is much to be gained by sharing best practice in widening access, accrediting qualifications and developing core skills. The Commission undertook to publish by the end of the year a memorandum that would outline what is happening in each member state and to suggest proposals to assist lifelong learning.

It is important for Scotland to be present at as many EU conferences as possible; it is very interesting to see how these issues are discussed and to read the documents that are produced. I was pleased to hear that every other member state felt that some of the document's wording and complexity left something to be desired. It can be

pretty tough going to understand some of the documents in the language in which they were produced; the committee can imagine how such documents end up by the time they are translated into Estonian, Hungarian or the language of other prospective member states. Understanding those documents was as much a challenge for me as for others who attended; no doubt, with Scotland's participation, that situation might improve over time.

**The Convener:** Thank you, minister. Your comments suggest that the Council of Ministers meeting in Lisbon was a success—for some of us, the words "Lisbon" and "success" have a very nostalgic resonance. Your report was comprehensive and will have stimulated the committee's interest. As I was listening to you, one thing that struck me was that it would be useful for the committee to have some contact with you as these European initiatives are launched. Perhaps we should examine how the committee can promote better understanding and awareness of these and other initiatives.

**Irene Oldfather:** I greatly welcome the extension of this initiative. I am pleased that there has been a high take-up of the Comenius strand of the Socrates programme in North Ayrshire because the benefits extend beyond the learning experience by providing greater opportunities for otherwise socially disadvantaged children. These experiences have partly encouraged my area to participate in the partners in excellence modern language initiative, which combines modern language teaching with IT. I hope that such good practice can be developed and shared throughout Scotland.

As for the minister's comments, I welcome the simplification of procedures. My area has been very fortunate in having many applications approved; however, I recognise that there is a knack to accessing such funding and that the process is much easier after the first couple of times. I hope that the simplification of procedures will encourage other areas in Scotland to apply for that funding.

Will the minister comment on whether, as the result of his discussions in Lisbon, the Scottish Executive has any plans—either on its own or with the committee—to promote the European year of languages next year? The minister said that the Youth programme will be launched in September. I understood that there were difficulties with agreeing the final budget figure for the programme; the Socrates project had caused problems between the Scottish Parliament and the British Council that have now been sorted out with conciliation. Can he update us on the Youth programme?

15:45

**Nicol Stephen:** First, I apologise for not introducing David Stewart, head of the opportunities for learning division in the Scottish Executive enterprise and lifelong learning department, and Hope Johnston, head of the international relations branch of the Scottish Executive education department.

David Stewart accompanied me to the conference, but Hope Johnstone is also involved in EU initiatives and takes the lead role; I shall ask her to answer the two specific points that were raised. You asked about the involvement of the committee. We would welcome that; Hope Johnston and other officials would be involved in liaison on those issues. A closer relationship would be welcomed by everyone.

Before I bring in Hope Johnston, I should point out that the education ministers talked at their meeting about five basic skills—languages, information technologies, technological culture, entrepreneurship and social skills. Some of the delegations tried to draw a distinction between the basic skills of literacy and numeracy and what they called key skills—softer modern skills in IT or languages. Deciding what was a basic skill and what was a key skill, and whether there should be a distinction between them, made for an interesting discussion.

In our approach to standard grades and higher still, we consider core skills to be communication, numeracy, IT, solving problems and working with others. Languages come within communication. Whether languages have a sufficiently high profile is something that we could discuss, but we would probably be straying outside our area of competence. However, we all recognise that languages will play an increasingly important role.

On such occasions, one has the constant embarrassment of realising that English is becoming the dominant language, especially—much to the disappointment of France and Germany—among the new countries that hope to join the EU. Representatives from those countries were speaking in English to one another as well as to UK representatives. I have no doubt that, if we want to trade successfully with other EU countries, we would be quite wrong to rest on our laurels. There is no doubt that businesses prefer to do business in their first language. That is an important lesson for our businesses to learn.

**Mrs Hope Johnston (Scottish Executive Education Department):** I am glad that you asked about the European year of languages 2001. The formal recommendation for that year is still under discussion, and I regularly attend an education committee in Brussels that is considering the recommendation. We had thought

that it would be completed and easily agreed, but the European Parliament, unfortunately, came back with more than 100 amendments; that has delayed the process considerably. We are still grinding through to get to the final agreement.

The amount of funding for each member state will not be great. There is a plan for the UK to hold one major national conference, which will be held in Scotland—in Stirling, I understand. It is hoped that there will also be enough money for smaller events, which will be funded on a voluntary basis. People will put forward proposals to undertake such activities.

The whole year is being masterminded by the Scottish Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research, and by its English counterpart, the London-based Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research. The Scottish Executive is in close correspondence with those bodies on arrangements. In the meantime, however, we are awaiting final agreement of the recommendation, which will go to the Council of Ministers, all going well, on 8 June when the council meets formally.

The Council of Europe has decided that 2001 should be the year of languages, so it is going ahead and pushing things forward. Its remit is wider than that of the EU, and the EU and the Council of Europe have agreed to work together on this initiative, so watch this space.

The Youth programme was very problematic indeed. There was considerable difficulty in reaching agreement on the final funding. The final figure ended up at €420 million, which was rather more than many member states wanted to give it, but considerably less than the Parliament wanted to give it. Again, there had to be a process of consensus after negotiation.

I agree that the launch in Scotland is rather late. That is partly because summer intervened—Europe closes down for the month of August—and because the Scottish event will be quite ambitious. It will involve young people from six other EU countries coming together for a three-day event. The logistics of that meant that more time was needed to arrange it. The event will take place in September, and it should be very interesting.

**Bruce Crawford:** It was nice to hear the minister's reflections on his trip to Lisbon. It was obviously quite an event. It was also nice to hear about the different ways in which lifelong learning is treated in different countries. Some treat it from cradle to grave; we seem to treat it from puberty to pension.

Programmes such as Socrates, Leonardo, Youth and Tempus III are hugely important, and it was good to hear about the minister's discussions of those programmes. Lisbon was obviously a

good show and a big public relations event, but I would like to talk about how the Executive has dealt with some of those issues. We are often told by people who are involved in Europe that we need to get in there early to influence issues. There have been some disagreements about funding, as we heard from Hope Johnston. How did the Executive ensure that Scotland's specific requirements from those programmes were reflected in the end results?

You mentioned the British Council and the management of those funds. I am not sure whether it is within the remit of the European Committee to discuss with the British Council how those funds are expended. If it is within our remit, perhaps we should do that at some stage. Should not the Scottish Executive ensure that those funds are managed here in Scotland? I would like you to reflect on that.

I would also like to hear about the Luxembourg process, which you mentioned in passing as a follow-up event for EU ministers who are involved in education. What role will the Executive play in that?

**Nicol Stephen:** I shall ask Hope Johnston to answer your question about Scotland's specific requirements and the relationship with the British Council. There will be Scottish representation on one of the new programmes, where there was previously no access to local British Council staff in Scotland.

It is important to let members know the scale and importance of the funding that is coming into Scotland for those projects. In 1998, for example, Erasmus placements in Europe, under Socrates I, were worth £1.29 million, and overall Leonardo I funding was £1.13 million. In 1999, there were placements and exchanges under Socrates I of £231,000, and, under Comenius, total funds were £260,000 for multi-lateral school partnerships. For in-service training, also under Comenius, the sum was £26,000. For Lingua, under Socrates, it was £211,000; for Arion, also under Socrates, it was £10,000. There are many different initiatives, which have been difficult to keep track of. We want to keep better track of what is going on and ensure that our funding matches our expectations over the next seven years.

We hope that funding will be about £1.5 million per year under Socrates, about £1 million under Leonardo and just under £500,000 under Youth. The key is to be able to access the programmes and to leverage the EU funding into Scotland. That is the challenge.

I ask Hope Johnston to speak about some of the organisational elements.

**Mrs Johnston:** Perhaps we could discuss representation. I should stress that Scotland is

part of the UK, and of the UK delegation. On behalf of the Scottish Executive, I regularly attend the meetings of the education committee to the Council of Ministers, which meets in Brussels roughly every month. I am a regular member of the UK delegation on that committee, and speak on behalf of the UK, not just on behalf of Scotland.

Of course, I put Scotland's case very firmly to our DFEE colleagues when we are agreeing a negotiating line. There is a continuing, constant input of Scotland's interests at the policy level. At the UK level, there is a UK management or steering committee for each of the three programmes. On behalf of the Scottish Executive, I speak for Scotland's interests on those committees.

Our links with the DFEE are constant and we exchange detailed information in both directions. We keep ourselves well informed of each other's policy positions.

The central bureau for educational visits and exchanges is officially part of the British Council, but acts almost as an independent unit. It had its own status for many years and only recently became part of, or brigaded in with, the British Council. It acts, however, very much in its own right. The central bureau office in Edinburgh is funded directly by the Scottish Executive, so we have management control over its activities. We exercise that control fairly closely.

The British Council aspect is not immediately relevant to the management of the various programmes. The Scottish Executive has two places on the British Council's Scottish committee, so we also have input at British Council level.

**Nicol Stephen:** I will ask David Stewart to say a few words about the Luxembourg process.

**Bruce Crawford:** I was looking for a political answer, convener. I understand Hope Johnston's position, and I fully appreciate the information that we have been given. We are dealing with contact at an official level, but the issues that I raised were in the political arena.

**The Convener:** We can hear briefly from the minister's colleague, and then have a brief comment from the minister, but I really need to push on. A number of members want to contribute and we are starting to struggle for time.

**David Stewart (Scottish Executive Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Department):** Under the Luxembourg process, each member state produces an annual employment action plan; the agreement at Lisbon was that those plans should also incorporate material on lifelong learning. The plan is for the UK as a whole, in which Scotland plays a key part in agreeing the process.

The plan covers four main areas: improving

employability, developing entrepreneurship, encouraging adaptability in businesses and strengthening policies for equal opportunities. After the Lisbon agreement, lifelong learning issues will form a key part of the next round of the planning process.

**Nicol Stephen:** As far as Scotland's specific requirements are concerned, we want to promote the programmes and maximise their take-up. The programmes have been simplified, but remain complex. For example, Socrates still involves Comenius, Erasmus, Grundtvig, Lingua, Minerva—the list goes on. To maximise take-up, people need a better understanding of the programmes, which must be better promoted.

We must encourage involvement. Perhaps that could include regular reporting back to the European Committee so that members are aware of progress, of the number of projects that are taking place in Scotland, and of the funding that is flowing into Scotland. I have a list with me, which I would be happy to make available to the committee, of a cross-section of the projects that are under way in Scotland; such a list brings the whole subject to life. Irene Oldfather is well aware of a number of the programmes; I am sure that other MSPs are too.

It is important to get a Scottish overview, and to track more closely the level of funding. When I asked a simple question about the total level of funding over the past years, it was difficult to get hold of the information. I am sure that, over the next seven years, the committee will want much more regular, accurate information about how the programmes are progressing.

16:00

**Dennis Canavan:** During the committee's visit to Brussels last week, I heard some comment about the lack of emphasis or priority in the Scottish education system on the learning of other languages. All too often, we seem to take it for granted that other people will speak English. It is important, for social and cultural reasons, that we at least make an effort to speak other people's languages, and the minister mentioned the importance of that for economic or trading reasons. Does the Scottish Executive have a co-ordinated strategy for promoting the learning of foreign languages?

Part of the problem has been the rather elitist attitude—on the part of some people in the Scottish education establishment—that someone has to be a magnificent brainbox to speak another language. What is the Executive's strategy to promote not just learning, but lifelong learning, of other languages? Socrates, Leonardo and Youth are important, I dare say, but even collectively,

they probably touch only a minority of people in Scotland.

The promotion of foreign languages requires radical action at school level. The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill, which is going through the Parliament, aims to raise standards in education. I am aware that that is not your responsibility, minister, but might not the fact that the lifelong learning of language is split between two ministries be a problem? The Minister for Children and Education is responsible for school education, while you and Henry McLeish are responsible for post-school education. How can you overcome those difficulties and give a greater priority to language learning in the Scottish education system?

**Nicol Stephen:** The starting point to answering that is to recognise and admit that there is a problem. We all recognise that we need to do more, and that the number of people participating in learning modern languages is not high enough. The level of attainment needs to be improved.

Initiatives are taking place, and more is being done to encourage the learning of languages at primary school level. There are now five different levels of attainment in languages at higher still level. A great deal has been done over recent years to try to improve the quality of language training and qualifications. However, the statistics that we have all seen still concern us. It is not the only area of the education system where we must increase involvement and improve standards, but it is a very important one because of its implications for our future trading and other relationships within and outside the EU.

Dennis Canavan mentioned the split between the education department and the enterprise and lifelong learning department, and in that area there is joint ministerial responsibility between Sam Galbraith and Henry McLeish. However, I think that the opposite of what Dennis suggests will occur and that because we are able to consider the significance of languages in the context of employment, skills and training, we can discuss the issues with the education department and place greater focus on them than ever before.

The same applies in other areas, such as some of the training and new deal initiatives. We are able to highlight problems among young people aged between 16 and 19 and to try to address them with our ministerial colleagues and civil servants in the education department, as part of a cross-cutting approach. The link between lifelong learning and enterprise is crucial. As they have been brought together in a new department, many issues of the sort that we have been discussing are being put on the agenda and brought to the attention of the education department. I believe that that will be healthy and will benefit Scotland.

Issues such as language skills will move higher up the agenda as a result of the creation of the enterprise and lifelong learning department.

**The Deputy Convener (Cathy Jamieson):** As members will have noticed, the convener has had to leave the meeting to deal with an urgent phone call. I have been asked to stand in for him for the next few minutes. I know that several members would still like to ask questions, but because we are running short of time, I make a plea for short questions and short answers. Members will have the opportunity to get more information in writing.

**Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands (Lab)):** I will be very quick, because a great deal of what I wanted to ask about has been covered. I notice that the European year of languages is designed also to draw attention to lesser-used languages, and I would like to know how Gaelic fits into that. I would also like to talk about Gaelic-medium playgroups and nursery education, which are very good at promoting language skills. Like the Swedes, could we not also consider French-medium or Italian-medium nursery education, to give kids a start?

I would also like to ask about the Youth programme. Has any thought been given to involving the Scottish Youth Parliament, which is very enthusiastic? I have met several members of the Youth Parliament, both school pupils and youngsters who are at work, all of whom were 17 or 18 years of age. They would be very keen to get involved in such a programme.

**Nicol Stephen:** Gaelic was not discussed at the meeting, but what the Swedish delegation was talking about—introducing languages at an ever-earlier stage—is a thought that I would like to pass on to colleagues in the education department, whose area of responsibility this is. We can give members more information on initiatives that are being taken in that area.

If the Scottish Youth Parliament would like to forge links with other EU countries, all of us would encourage that. The schemes that we have been discussing would be an ideal way of providing funding for those links. That is another excellent idea that I will mention to people who are involved in the organisation of the Scottish Youth Parliament.

**Dr Sylvia Jackson:** You talked about supporting unemployed and disadvantaged young people. I cannot remember whether that was in the general context of lifelong learning or in the context of the specific programmes that we have been discussing. There still seems to be a desperate need for learning centres in some of our most disadvantaged communities, to enable young people who are dissatisfied with normal education to renew their links with education and

then move into further or higher education. Do any of the programmes assist that type of development?

**Nicol Stephen:** Hope Johnston is nodding, so I will ask her to answer that question.

**Mrs Johnston:** I do not want to go into details, but the brief answer is yes. Both Leonardo and Youth are aimed at disadvantaged and unemployed young people.

**David Mundell:** I have two brief questions. First, how do the issues that we have talked about today generally—rather than the specific programmes—fit in with the activities of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and the Scottish Further Education Funding Council? If my understanding is correct, they do not take a strategic view of people leaving further and higher education as currently structured with either language or IT skills. That might be a misunderstanding of how the councils currently operate, but it seems to me that someone should be taking a strategic view on the number of people who are leaving education with those skills, in addition to their substantive qualifications.

Secondly, will Scotland be represented, as part of the UK delegation, at the ministerial conference on knowledge and information society that will take place in Lisbon this weekend?

**Nicol Stephen:** The answer to the second question is no. COSHEP is examining the role of languages within core skills. However, David Mundell makes a fair point, which links back to the point that Dennis Canavan was making—that we must take a more strategic look at the issue of languages and the full implications for lifelong learning. That means not only addressing it in the context of nursery education, but recognising that it is a key issue for further education colleges and universities.

**David Mundell:** The same applies to IT and the key issues that you identified earlier.

**Nicol Stephen:** Exactly. There is some interest in the idea of a Europe-wide qualification in IT, so that basic skills mean the same thing in every EU country. That is very controversial, but many of the EU nations are interested in taking it forward, because of the importance of IT. Other nations resist it because it would mean the introduction of a core curriculum and a sort of superstate qualification.

**Cathy Jamieson:** I was pleased to see in the document that has been circulated the proposal to include people who are the most disadvantaged in our communities. However, I am concerned that people do not take up the programmes either because they do not know about them as they are difficult to access—as has been mentioned—or

because the bureaucracy that is involved in dealing with the UK's benefits system can be very off-putting. That applies particularly to unemployed people or young people who are in education. Has any action been proposed to deal with that?

**Nicol Stephen:** Are you talking about the fact that people's access to benefit can be affected if they go overseas?

**Cathy Jamieson:** Yes. They can find themselves further disadvantaged on their return or it can be very difficult to keep up their financial commitments while they are away.

**Nicol Stephen:** Hope Johnston will address that point.

**Mrs Johnston:** Cathy Jamieson has touched on a nerve. There is a recommendation on mobility that will be very wide ranging. It will cover not only students and young people, but trainees, trainers, teachers and so on. Currently, some of the stumbling blocks in the recommendation relate to the extent to which benefits can be transferred, carried with people or reinstated. That is an extremely complicated negotiation, and I think that it will take a long time.

16:15

**The Convener (Hugh Henry):** I thank the minister and his officials for coming along. The number of questions indicates the level of interest in the issue. As I said earlier, I am sure that the committee will be interested in considering the next stage of development of the programmes and of the initiatives. We would welcome further information from you. I thank the minister for taking the time to come along—we hope to hear from you again in future.

**Nicol Stephen:** Thank you for the invitation—I hope that the dialogue continues. We would be pleased, in due course, to give further briefings on the progress of those three important EU schemes.

## Draft Environmental Action Report

**The Convener:** The next item is a report from Sylvia Jackson on the committee's contribution to the European Commission's proposals for the sixth environmental action programme.

**Dr Sylvia Jackson:** I am conscious of time and of the temperature in the chamber, so I will try not to take too long.

First, it must be recognised that this is a draft and that we are at the first stage of a programme that will extend until the summer. We might need to follow up certain issues in relation to sustainability after that period if we are to be effective.

The deadline for sending our interim recommendations to the European Commission is in just over a week. We have to try to get our ideas together before the recess and to ensure that committee members feel that I am on the right track.

Because the interim report was put together quickly, it contains a few errors. For example, on the front page, "Vision 22221" should read "Vision 21". A number of meetings have been held. A meeting with the Scottish Executive, to get an overview, was followed by what in European terms might be called the stakeholders meeting in Stirling, where we tried to get as many of the different organisations together as possible. Those organisations brought their written presentations and made oral ones. However, we tried to make the meeting as informal as possible.

Robin Harper, the representative from the Transport and the Environment Committee, has been with me most of the time, while Tavish Scott has attended many of the meetings. I have not yet been able to meet Ken Collins from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, but I will do so shortly. He is a very knowledgeable person in this area.

The meeting in Brussels clarified many issues. Alan Huyton, who will co-ordinate the sixth environmental action programme, was most useful in outlining the context in which that is developing. The European Commission would like there to be as much discussion as possible. Alan would like to encourage a stakeholders meeting with the Commission in Scotland, as has happened in some other countries. We should be pursuing that—I will refer to that later.

I have tried to outline the changes that are taking place in Europe that will help policy making in Scotland. For instance, the internal review will lead to more partnership, more flexibility and more

sharing of best practice, which can only be a good thing.

There is a move to more horizontal structures within the Commission itself. President Prodi told us about that and about how difficult it would be. The European Parliament, with its increased powers, might have an effect. I have reviewed where people think we are at here and in the rest of Europe. There is a general feeling that the fifth environmental action programme was a good start. However, we still have a long way to go. We have to consider targets, indicators and monitoring, which should be among our main aims. However, the most important aspect is integrating environmental issues into all policy levels.

We should be aware of the pressures upon the environment that will come from areas such as transport and industry, and of how to get the partnership discussing those issues.

Sarah Boyack, the Minister for Transport and the Environment, is making good moves by getting together an inner group of ministers with—if I remember correctly—sustainable Scotland, to consider development. The minutes of those meetings will be on the internet for everybody to see. Having said that, I am hoping to meet the Scottish Executive again in the not-too-distant future, to find out what happens in the civil service structure, and whether there is a need to consider horizontally those structures and to achieve a more holistic approach. Importantly, in our own work, there is the issue of whether we need consider our committees. A standing committee has been suggested in relation to drugs; an even better case might be made for sustainable development.

I have already mentioned the immediate issues of targets, indicators and the monitoring of targets. The second section of the report will be expanded. Helen Christie from the University of Edinburgh, who has been working with me, has amassed a tremendous amount of material for that section.

When we were in Brussels, we raised with Jim Currie, the director-general for environment, the problem of the whisky industry and the need for flexibility in the water directives. It seems that that issue will not be a problem, although we will have to keep an eye on it. That could easily have become a big problem, and it shows the importance for us of the networks that we have developed since the Brussels meeting.

I have listed education, at the school and community levels, as the third big priority. There are campaigns, such as the "Are you doing your bit?" campaign in England and Wales.

Another issue is biodiversity. Most of that section of the report is the work of Robin Harper,

who has been extremely useful. He has pointed out the importance of the local biodiversity action plans, two of which have been produced already by Dumfries and Galloway and by Edinburgh. They are models for every other council area in developing their own.

When he mentioned possible orientations for the future, Robin Harper did not realise that the Commission is already trying to influence all its areas to address sustainable development. Nearly all the policy areas have produced a paper outlining how they will take the environment on board. If anybody is interested, I have a copy of all the papers that I received in Brussels.

I brought agriculture into that section; however, I would like to discuss it further with others, to ensure that I have not missed anything out. I have not yet addressed the issue of organic farming—that ought to be added. There is alarming information from Denmark, where organic farming has vastly expanded. Organic farmers there now have a poor standard of living as a result of falling prices and so on. Organic farming should be regulated as well as supported.

The next section of the report concerns energy, for example, renewable energy and how Scotland could be a leader in that area.

Finally, the idea of the eco-tourism industry and how Scotland might use it appeared in the paper a few days ago and attracted quite a lot of publicity.

That was the preliminary report to the committee; the work plan still needs quite a bit of work. I am hoping to meet Ken Collins as soon as possible and to share some conclusions with the Scottish Executive. The deadline for sending the report to the European Commission is around 14 April. At some point, if members agree, I would like to promote the idea of the stakeholder meeting. Christine Boch was at the meeting with Alan Huyton, who was very enthusiastic about having such a meeting and did not think that there would be a problem. The MEP Catherine Taylor was also happy to be involved. The final report will be submitted to inform the UK position, then the effect of the issue on Scottish Parliament policy will be considered.

**The Convener:** Thank you, Sylvia. I congratulate you on an astonishing amount of work in a very short space of time. I am impressed by the amount of—to use the word Dennis Canavan referred to earlier—networking that you have been able to do. I know that that is jargon, but you have demonstrated how representatives of the committee can work in partnership with a huge range of organisations. You have done exceptionally well in that respect. Your exercise in Stirling, which from all accounts has been very productive, will, I think, be copied by others.



I am aware of the time constraints and suggest that we ensure that all members have the paper by tomorrow and that they give any comments to Sylvia by 10 April, to include in her final report. I hope that that will enable her to submit the report by 14 April. We will have the opportunity to return to the matter at a later stage.

**Dr Jackson:** I must thank my researcher, Paul Godzik, who set up the Stirling meeting.

**The Convener:** I thank you again for all your effort.

## Scrutiny

**The Convener:** The final item on our agenda is the scrutiny of documentation.

In respect of the following documents, the recommendation is for no further action, but to copy them to other committees for interest:

SP 864 (EC Ref No 5507/00 COM(2000) 51)

SP 876 (EC Ref No 6390/00)

SP 884 (EC Ref No COM(1999) 657)

SP 887 (EC Ref No 6858/00 COM(2000) 98)

SP 891 (EC Ref No 6670/00 COM(2000) 106)

Is that agreed?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** For the following documents, the recommendation is for no further action:

SP 865 (EC Ref No 6379/00 COM(2000) 27)

SP 866 (EC Ref No 6511/00 COM(2000) 80 COD 2000/43)

SP 867 (EC Ref No 6641/00 COM(2000) 99)

SP 869 (EC Ref No 6355/00 SEC(00) 229)

SP 870 (EC Ref No 6356/00 SEC(00) 248)

SP 873 (EC Ref No 6631/1/REV 1 COM(2000) 80 COD 2000/43)

SP 875 (EC Ref No 6282/00 COM(2000) 85)

SP 877 (EC Ref No 6482/00 COM(2000) 76)

SP 878 (EC Ref No 6524/00 COM(2000) 94 COD 1997/0264)

SP 879 (EC Ref No 6578/00 COM(2000) 104)

SP 880 (EC Ref No 6579/00 SEC(2000) 336)

SP 881

SP 883 (EC Ref No 6743/00 COM(2000) 110)

SP 885 (EC Ref No 5970/00 COR 1 COM(2000) 9 final 4)

SP 886 (EC Ref No 6778/00 COM(2000) 108)

SP 888 (EC Ref No 6847/00 COM(2000) 122)

SP 890 (EC Ref No SEC(2000) 81 EC)

SP 892 (EC Ref No 6671/00 COM(2000) 112)

SP 893 (EC Ref No 6708/00 COM(2000) 115)

SP 894 (EC Ref No 6752/00 COM(2000) 83)

SP 895 (EC Ref No 6672/00 COM(2000) 117)

SP 898 (EC Ref No 5356/00 COM(2000) 107)

SP 899 (EC Ref No 6302/00 COM(2000) 200 Vol I)

SP 900 (EC Ref No 6302/00 ADD 1 COM(2000)  
200 Vol II)

SP 901 (EC Ref No 6777/00 COM(2000) 96)

SP 868 (EC Ref No 5989/00)

SP 871 (EC Ref No 6373/00)

SP 874 (EC Ref No 6687/00)

SP 889 (EC Ref No 6042/00 COR 1 COM(2000)  
49 final 2)

SP 872 (EC Ref No 6836/00 COPEN 18)

SP 882 (EC Ref No 6072/00)

Is that agreed?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** Following the committee's previous discussion, we will introduce new procedures for the sift and scrutiny process in time for the next meeting.

If there is nothing else on that issue, I confirm that the next meeting will be on 2 May at 2 pm, here in Edinburgh. The committee room is still to be determined.

I thank members for their attendance.

*Meeting closed at 16:28.*

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