



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

Tuesday 25 April 2023

Session 6



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HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

14th Meeting 2023, Session 6

CONVENER

*Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)

*Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con)

*Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)

*Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green)

*Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab)

*David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

*Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP)

*Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP) (Committee Substitute)

Bobby Hain (STV)

Catherine Houlihan (ITV Border)

John McLellan (Scottish Newspaper Society)

Margaret Mary Murray (BBC Alba)

Catherine Salmond (The Herald)

Louise Thornton (BBC Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Alex Bruce

LOCATION

The Sir Alexander Fleming Room (CR3)

Scottish Parliament

Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

Tuesday 25 April 2023

*[The Deputy Convener opened the meeting at
08:48]*

Convener

The Deputy Convener (Paul O’Kane): Good morning and welcome to the 14th meeting of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee in 2023. We have received apologies from Stephanie Callaghan; James Dornan is joining us remotely as a substitute.

The first item on our agenda is to choose a new convener, the procedure for which is explained in paper 1 for the meeting. Parliament has agreed that only members of the Scottish National Party are eligible for nomination as convener of this committee, so I invite members of that party to nominate one of their number for the post.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I propose Clare Haughey as convener.

The Deputy Convener: Do members agree to choose Clare Haughey as our convener?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Deputy Convener: I congratulate Clare Haughey on her appointment as convener of this committee. I will now vacate the chair and pass over to Clare. In order to make that as seamless as possible, we will briefly suspend.

08:49

Meeting suspended.

08:50

On resuming—

Decisions on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Clare Haughey): The second item on our agenda is to decide whether to take items 4 and 5 in private. Are members agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Female Participation in Sport and Physical Activity

08:50

The Convener: We now move on to the fifth evidence session of our inquiry into female participation in sport and physical activity. The session will focus on coverage and representation of women and girls' sport by the media.

We have a number of witnesses: Bobby Hain, managing director of broadcasting at STV; Catherine Houlihan, managing editor at ITV Borders; John McLellan, director of the Scottish Newspaper Society; Margaret Mary Murray, head of commissioning at BBC Gaelic digital services and inclusion; Catherine Salmond, editor of *The Herald*; and Louise Thornton, head of commissioning at BBC Scotland. Welcome to you all.

We will move straight to questions, and I will start. Is women's sport journalism seen as second class or second best, and if so, how can that perception be changed?

Louise Thornton (BBC Scotland): I would say absolutely not—certainly not at the BBC. We bring our level of professionalism to all of our broadcast coverage. However, we are on a journey. We are the biggest media provider in the United Kingdom. We provide free-to-air access and bring audiences together around our big sporting moments across men and women's sport. We can draw big audiences and help sports to grow. We have seen how women's sport has grown and flourished during the past decade, and a lot of that has to do with the fact that we can offer big-moment, free-to-air coverage.

The lesson for the BBC relates to the importance of free-to-air coverage and of having a listed system that is future-fit. We need long-term commitment, because being able to commit to coverage when growing an audience for certain sports is preferable to dipping in and out of things.

It is also about working in partnership. Our licence fee is frozen and there is a real-terms cut of 30 per cent to our income. Obviously, with the growth and success of sports comes an increased commercial cost for rights, so in some ways we are victims of our own success in relation to that.

The commitment that we have to sport and women's sport for audiences is absolute, but to deliver that effectively we need to work in partnership.

Margaret Mary Murray (BBC Alba): I would like to pick up on Louise Thornton's point.

Ceud mìle taing dhuibh airson an cothrom a thoirt dhuinn a bhith a' bruidhinn as leth seirbheisean Gàidhlig.

Many thanks, convener and members of the committee, for enabling us to offer evidence. I look after the BBC's Gaelic language services, and since the inception of BBC Alba in 2008, it has been committed to growing women's sport across the three strategic sports that we deliver: women's football, women's rugby and shinty. Earlier this year, we were delighted to learn that Kirsty Lobban was appointed as the Camanachd Association's first female development officer.

As Louise Thornton said, it requires commitment, a strategic approach and resourcing, which means ensuring that we have adequate funding for production. We also need to ensure that the production values that we bring to the coverage of women's sport are as good and professional as those that we apply to any sport. Since 2008, we have seen the profile of women's sport grow. As Louise Thornton said, however, we are on a journey.

The Convener: We do not often see women's sport on the back pages in the print media.

John McLellan (Scottish Newspaper Society): It is easy to view the coverage of sport in general through the prism of football; one could just as easily say that we do not see many sports other than football on the back pages.

Looking back over time, there is no question but that women's football was very much second class relative to the men's game, and the growth of women's football has shone a light on all forms of female sport. Looking at other sports, however, I do not think that female participation in athletics or tennis, to name but two, has been seen as second class in any way.

It depends on what sport we are talking about. In general, my answer to a very broad question is no: women's sport has never been seen as a second-class activity in comparison with men's sport. When women do well, they get the same billing as the men do, as many medal winners have shown.

The Convener: Is it that other sports are second class in comparison with football?

John McLellan: As a rugby supporter, I know that the number of times that rugby gets in the back pages is relatively small in comparison with football. Over many years, in all forms of sports coverage, be it press or broadcast, football has been dominant, and men's football has dominated to the extent that—as you probably know—women's football was illegal in England. The whole debate has changed because of the parity

that women's football and women's rugby are now achieving.

Catherine Salmond (The Herald): I would like to jump in on the print side, as I am editor of *The Herald*. The newspaper industry itself has changed dramatically, probably in tandem with the coverage of women in sport. We are now a digital-first operation, so it is difficult for us to justify the amount of exposure that women's sporting events need to get to be able to grow, because it does not work for our model. Whether we are looking at a page view model for newspapers or at a digital subscription model, as *The Herald* is doing, the audience is simply not there at present to justify the volume of attention that we give to other sports, which are unfortunately, in that setting, male dominated.

For that exposure to grow in order to allow the sporting world of female events to grow, we need a sustainable financial model. We are completely and utterly measured on metrics, and the metrics do not add up. If I was to throw everything that I had into covering female sports, it still would not yield the financial returns for our business model.

What would help would be a robust financial situation similar to the local democracy reporting scheme that we have in Scotland. That would involve some sort of support from the Government to fund reporters who cover female sports in order to allow the exposure to grow and to enable us to be in a commercially viable situation.

The Convener: Paul Sweeney wants to come in on this theme.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): That was an interesting insight, and I want to follow up on one point. What active measures do you take to monitor engagement? Have you seen any trends developing over time? Perhaps you can contrast print media with broadcasting. It is an interesting idea that if you were to front load coverage through the public service broadcasting model, it would then cascade into the commercial side and print media in particular.

09:00

Catherine Salmond: Our analytics are live. We have a live dashboard that tells us exactly how long people are spending on stories, how many people are reading them and how many people are choosing to subscribe to a story based on which one they read. That information is there for us. The yield with regard to female sports is really, really, really low.

Paul Sweeney: In broadcasting, have you seen an evolution in engagement and coverage that might, in the longer term, present an opportunity for the print media?

Louise Thornton: The short answer is yes, absolutely. When I took this job, one of my priorities was to work in partnership with my colleague Margaret Mary Murray to build on the great work that BBC Alba has done with the women's game for football. Margaret Mary can talk to that, but that investment has come from BBC Alba over many years. However, with regard to the audience interest that our audience data team can measure for us, the interest in women's football has been increasing significantly.

Over the past two years, we have invested in a joint collaboration with BBC Alba. For example, in the first year—in 2021—we covered 10 women's football programmes; last year, we covered 43 programmes, so our metrics on that have increased fourfold. When we consider that along with international coverage and the coverage of the lionesses, we can see that there is a huge market for women's football, and covering it under our "Sportscene" brand has been really successful for us. We run a highlights programme and provide red-button English-language commentary when BBC Alba has the live games. BBC Scotland is also going to stream up to 26 games on iPlayer. Similar to what Catherine Salmond said, there has been investment in digital and a growth in audiences consuming multiplatform content, so that is where we are seeing growth in audiences.

Paul Sweeney: That is interesting. Have STV and ITV had similar experiences?

Bobby Hain (STV): Yes. I will respond quickly to the convener's original question and say that we certainly do not see our coverage and reporting of women's sports as in any way secondary to that of men's sports.

I have three brief points, the first of which is on coverage. Our model is slightly different because we are not in the business of acquiring rights and making productions. We operate on an opt-out basis: we are part of a United Kingdom network and our programming obligations are largely around news and current affairs.

The second point is on the variety of sport across the board. To ensure that we reflect both activities beyond football and the profile of our society, we have very consciously and deliberately targeted better representation over the past few years. For example, for our news programmes in 2023, we are targeting a gender balance among contributors as well as a profile of ethnically diverse contributors. In the case of ethnic minorities, that is 12 per cent, which is higher than the previously published census data in anticipation of new data coming out later this year.

The final point to make is about the contribution that broadcasters and other areas can make to reporting, because that is a really important point,

too. Yes, it is about seeing inspiring women athletes, women players and women's games on television and the reporting of that, but it is also important to recognise that we need a mix of people making the reports. At STV, we have a long tradition of encouraging and nurturing female talent behind the scenes and on screen in order to achieve that.

Catherine Houlihan (ITV Border): For ITV Border, which covers the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway, the landscape for sports is slightly different. Rugby is a dominant sport, along with ice hockey and curling. We tend to be driven by the rights. Where there is action on television, the women's sport is absolutely at least on a par with the men's sport. For example, the curlers will get top billing on our programme rather than lower league men's football.

The answer is no, women's sport is not less important than men's sport, but we are restricted in what we can broadcast. We cannot send cameras to every sporting event across the region, as that is not our model. With regard to the sports that are broadcast under the sports news access code, if there were more coverage, we would be happy to show it.

Emma Harper: I want to pick up on that. I am a Stranraer lass and I now live in Dumfries. ITV Border is our go-to channel for curling and for the Solway Sharks Ladies ice hockey team. I am interested in whether you track the data that Catherine Salmond talked about, regarding digital access online. You are right that the area is different; rugby is just massive in Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders, for women and men, and ice hockey and curling are also big. Do you monitor or track what people are watching on the telly?

Catherine Houlihan: No, we do not specifically monitor in terms of a breakdown by sport or gender. We monitor gender balance across the output of ITV Border news, as well as using other diversity measurements on issues such as disability and age. However, we do not monitor the performance of individual sports.

Emma Harper: Okay.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): I want to ask Louise Thornton about a point that she made, and my question also relates to what Margaret Mary Murray said. In evidence last week, some of the witnesses were supportive of your work and said that you have amazing coverage. Obviously, you have a collaboration going on. Louise Thornton said that there is a lot of output just now and that the numbers of people watching have increased. Is that the key thing? If the output is increasing, will more people watch?

Margaret Mary Murray: Over the past 10 or 12 years, we have seen audiences and crowds growing. Just recently, we saw two national team games being played to really big crowds. The coverage across the media, on television, radio and streaming services, really helps to raise the profile and create stars of the future. We recently saw Emma Watson score her first goals for Scotland—she will be a household name from now on. We are on a journey. Through the exposure in the media, we ensure that audiences become accustomed to seeing women's sport across the schedule as something that is normal and regular. It is also incredibly entertaining, because the athletes and sportspeople involved are at the top of their games, and it is a brilliant watch. That in itself creates momentum and an attraction for people to watch the sport in person and to join into the media coverage.

The Convener: We will move on and pick up on Bobby Hain's point about broadcasting and reporting, and the roles within that. Tess White will start.

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): My question is to Catherine Salmond. Women are severely underrepresented in sports journalism, with only 3 per cent of staff jobs on the sports desks of Scottish print titles filled by women. In your opinion, what barriers do women face in accessing sports desks and what could the industry do to overcome those barriers?

Catherine Salmond: In my opinion, things are changing. I think of how things were when I started in the industry. Indeed, the fact that I am the first female editor at *The Herald* in 239 years might be an indication of how things are changing.

John McLellan will vouch for this, but sports desks were pretty much all male and there was very much a masculine culture. That probably mirrored some of the audience spectating culture, particularly in football, but things are definitely changing behind the scenes. Newsrooms are more pleasant in that respect; that has taken time, but I am confident that we are moving forward and that the change is visible.

The problem—this has been the case pretty much the whole time that I have been a journalist—is that when we advertise sports reporting jobs, very few women apply. At my previous employer, we were linked with weekly newspapers in England; they ran journalism apprenticeship schemes that brought in young journalists and exposed them to all aspects of the newsroom. However, very few females who wanted to be reporters ever wanted to go on the sports desk.

The issue has fascinated me, but I do not have the answer to it. To me, in my newsroom and on

my sports team, the barriers are not there. I have an incredibly enthusiastic head of sport who is desperate for more women and is actively trying to seek them out, but they are just not coming.

I therefore do not think that there are barriers. There might have been in the past, but they are definitely not there now. However, there seems to be no huge appetite among young reporters to join sports teams in an online print setting.

John McLellan: I want to take a step back and put on my other hat as a lecturer in journalism at the University of Stirling. I have been running final-year projects and helping with the employability agenda in that respect, and I have to say that, as the cohort has come through—we have about 80 going into the final year—and as we have one-to-one conversations with those young student journalists about what they are going to do and their eventual career goals, I could count on the fingers of one hand, if that, the number of female students who have said that they want to go into sports journalism. I do not have to ask at the beginning of the year to know that the vast majority of the blokes will say, “I’d like to go into sport, particularly football” and that very few, if any, of the female students will say, “I am interested in sports journalism.”

That situation might change over time with more exposure of, for example, women’s football on television, but as it stands the young female students among the new entrants to universities are not interested in covering sport. Usually at the top of their lists are social subjects, mental health issues, society stuff and a bit of arts, but not sport. This year for the first time a young woman at our offer holders open day said to me that she was interested in sports journalism, and I said, “Hooray—you will go all the way, because you’re needed and you’re wanted.” However, she is an exception.

Tess White: Before I go on to my second question, I should highlight a Women in Journalism Scotland research project that challenges the premise that you have set out and suggests that women students get pushback from lecturers. Are you familiar with that work?

John McLellan: I am certainly not familiar with the claim that lecturers are pushing back at female students and suggesting that they do not do sport—quite the opposite. Putting my old editor hat back on, I have to say that I would have been only too delighted to bring variety to the sports desk, because it would have changed the dynamic and the coverage. I have not seen the research that you have referred to in depth, but that is certainly not the case at Stirling.

Tess White: My second question is also for John McLellan. Last year, following the telling of

misogynistic jokes at the Scottish Football Writers’ Association awards ceremony, the sports presenter Eilidh Barbour tweeted that she had never

“felt so unwelcome in the industry I work in.”

What specific challenges do women in sports journalism face?

09:15

John McLellan: Catherine Salmond is perhaps in a better position to answer that. As she said, it is true that sports desks in the print sector are dominated by men. That is still the case and the figure that you quoted is not wide of the mark. Therefore, if someone who is already in the industry asks themselves where they want to go next and they look across the room and see a phalanx of blokes at the sports desk, that perhaps makes it a less attractive place.

That apart, as Catherine has said, there are no barriers. From a senior point of view, the more women who can involve themselves in sports coverage the better. The committee might have seen the material that Heather Dewar has recently produced for *The Scottish Daily Mail*, which has added something completely new to its sports coverage. It has generated a significant level of public interest in what is happening in one of our major sports, which is a great thing.

Emma Harper: Picking up on Tess White’s point, I see women pundits on the telly who were previously professional footballers or rugby players. Is there an opportunity for people who have played sport—professionally or otherwise—to enter a career in journalism? How would they go about doing so? Would they need to have a degree or qualification? If so, would that be at college, university or postgraduate stage? What opportunities do women who have retired from professional sport have to become journalists?

I am looking first at Margaret Mary Murray, because she is nodding.

Margaret Mary Murray: There are huge opportunities there. Underlying everything that we are discussing is the adage, “You can’t be what you can’t see,” whether that be in the print or the broadcast sector. We must ensure that we give platforms to women journalists, broadcasters, pundits, analysts and commentators as well as women players. Across BBC Scotland’s portfolio, both in Gaelic and in English, we have seen a number of former athletes and players becoming pundits, analysts and journalists. As far as I know, they do not need any formal qualification other than recognition that they are brilliant at what they do.

Perhaps Louise Thornton might want to add to that.

Louise Thornton: If Tom Connor, our sports editor, were in this chair he would be able to give numerous examples of how he and his team have developed female talent. I mention Amy Irons and Leanne Crichton, and I am sure that the committee will know the names of other people we have coming through whom I could list. We do not just drop someone into a broadcasting situation and expect them to be the full package; there are periods of training and development.

Our absolute aim is that we should have 50:50 representation on our programming. We have achieved that on "Sportscene Results" and would like to do so across all our programming and commentary. The way to do that is to develop, grow and invest in the talent that is clearly there but, as Margaret Mary Murray said, we need to invest in and support it all the way through.

Margaret Mary Murray: In broadcasting, as with anything, the more that someone does something, the better they become. As Louise Thornton said, providing support to people across teams means that they gain confidence. In the spirit of partnership, our Gaelic-speaking reporters and presenters work across both our Gaelic-language and our English-language services. For example, Iona Ballantyne presents a magazine programme for BBC Alba and also reports for Radio Scotland and our digital services on BBC Scotland.

Bobby Hain: If I may, I add that the expert voices outreach programme that STV has developed encourages people who are experts in their fields but who, for one reason or another, have not previously been media contributors. The programme is open to people from all aspects of life, and we intend to have a sports-specific version. The sessions typically include 20 or 30 people at a time. We encourage them to understand what it means to be on TV, provide them with training and coaching and, importantly, offer them confidence-building sessions with people who have already been on that journey.

The Paralympian Maria Lyle recently took part in a very successful session about people with disabilities being on TV. More than 700 people have come through those sessions in the past year or two and around 100 of them have appeared on STV news or current affairs programmes. We are reaching out to encourage more players, coaches, people who are involved in the game, people who work in the sporting bodies or in public service and people who make podcasts but are not yet on TV because they are audio only. We want them to feel confident and empowered to talk as expert voices about what they love and are passionate about.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): We mentioned the perception that sports desks are male-dominated and have a particular culture. Catherine Salmond, do you believe that we should keep challenging that perception so that women who are coming through university or from other routes, and who may have that concern playing on their minds, will think that that is somewhere that they can go to work? Is there a link between the representation of women's sport in print and on the TV and radio and the number of women who come to work in sports journalism? As Margaret Mary Murray said, "You can't be what you can't see."

Catherine Salmond: I am not sure what the perception is now. I would like to think that social media has changed things a lot. There was no social media when I started as a journalist. People went into newsrooms, perhaps on work experience when they were students, and found that the men were on the news desks. They were quite gruff and could be quite dismissive of young female reporters. I have been on the receiving end of that, which is fine.

Visibility is now really important in inspiring people and in showing change. I think that social media help. We might come on to discuss where they do not help, but they definitely help. John McLellan mentioned Heather Dewar and we have talked about countless other prominent female sports journalists. That influences change.

We try hard, and are trying harder, to work with universities to get people in. I have been at events with John where I have spoken to students. What is mirrored across the Scottish print and online offerings is that the newsrooms that I know are all desperate for the best talent, male or female. If there are aspiring female sports journalists out there, they are definitely being given the perception that we are approachable. I do not know whether that was the case years ago.

John McLellan: I remember the incident that took place at the Scottish Football Writers Association event. Moira Gordon was extensively quoted at the time and was very clear that she had never encountered bad behaviour in all the time that she had worked at Scotsman Publications, when she was the only woman on the sports desk. My recollection of my time there is that there was not a poor culture in the sports teams of the *Evening News* and the *Scotsman*. The senior sports staff would have been, and would still be, horrified to be accused of encouraging a macho culture in which a woman felt uncomfortable. The woman who was in the middle of it all did not feel uncomfortable. The people who worked there were honourable, decent people. If we could have got more women who were keen to join Moira, that

would have been to our advantage, not our disadvantage.

Catherine Salmond: It is clear that having a gruff, macho culture does not mean being mean to women and putting them off. A lot of women can hold their own quite comfortably among gruff, macho men, so it does not mean that they cannot see themselves having a job there. That point needs to be established. I really do not think that there are some weak female trainee journalists out there who are thinking, “I’d love to join there, but I am scared of all those men”. John McLellan has direct access to students and might know whether they are feeling like that. Women can hold their own among a group of men who are talking about football.

Gillian Mackay: Absolutely—or about any other issue, for that matter, given the number of gruff journalists whom I am sure we all deal with every week. Someone is going to tweet about that, aren’t they? [*Laughter.*]

I will move on to a slightly different topic.

Bobby Hain: Some of the gruffest are in politics.

Gillian Mackay: I could not possibly comment.

I am interested in how we also address additional challenges that women might face as they come into journalism, whether they are from a minority ethnic background, have a form of disability or are members of an LGBTQ+ community. I was speaking to a friend of mine who had considered doing sports journalism before they went on to do something else at university. They have a hearing loss, which put them off going into the sports punditry side of things. What do your organisations do to encourage people from diverse backgrounds to consider taking up careers in sports journalism, and how can you continue to support them throughout that journey?

Louise Thornton: It is hugely important for every single organisation to have an inclusive culture and an inclusive recruitment policy. Another part of what we do in our organisation is challenge stereotypes in our output. You can’t be it if you can’t see it, so we must ensure that our output across all our platforms looks and feels like the audience.

We need to make sure that you can see the culture of our organisation whenever you come into the BBC. I had somebody start yesterday: the first thing that we do is make sure that that feels welcoming. We will already have understood whether there are accessibility needs and whether we need to make adjustments. That will have been done right at the start.

Perhaps Margaret Mary Murray, as inclusion lead, can speak more effectively than I can about

how we recruit, but it comes down to how we look for people, write the job advertisement, hold the interview and decide what the interview panel will look like. We think about all those things at every stage, because it is crucial that we get a healthy mix of people in the decision-making teams, in the production teams and on the airwaves, in order that we represent our audience.

Margaret Mary Murray: I do not have much to add, other than to say that, for everybody, inclusion and the culture of the workplace are absolutely critical. We were speaking about gruffness in journalism, but as organisations, we should ensure that, at whatever level you are working and at whichever stage you might be in your career, you are working in a supportive and inclusive environment in the workplace.

As Louise Thornton said, we have to ensure that our output and our workforce reflect the diversity of the population. The BBC has published targets that we are working very hard to meet to ensure that our workplace and output are as representative as possible.

Catherine Houlihan: I agree. In ITV—not just in sport but across all jobs—we just want the best candidate. Once we have the best candidate, it is about how we can accommodate them and enable them to work to the best of their ability.

09:30

Bobby Hain: I have one thing to add. I have talked about STV’s inclusion and diversity targets, the journey that we have been on and our targeting for on-air representation and for the profile of our colleagues around the country. That has seen real progress. It is one of the areas in which you have to have a sense of what you are doing and you have to know and people have to understand what you stand for and your values. Some form of target that is calibrated, clear and transparent is helpful because it makes for a strong focal point.

Perhaps it is a function of television newsrooms that we encourage our journalists who are not dedicated sports journalists to do sports stories in which they have an interest. I am thinking of Evanna Holland in our Edinburgh newsroom. She is a general journalist who is very interested in sport so she will cover sport. Selena Jackson, who has just joined us in the Glasgow newsroom, did a piece on the footballing sisters Brogan and Kodie Hay, who have been in Scottish cup action during the lead-up to the Scottish cup semi-finals in the past few weeks.

Dedicated sports journalism is not the only way for someone to reflect their interest in the subject; there are opportunities for people around the

country who have an interest in sport to report on it.

Gillian Mackay: Have I got time for another question?

The Convener: No.

Gillian Mackay: That is fine, thanks convener.

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): My question is quite a direct question that reflects something that Catherine Salmond suggested in her opening contribution on potential modelling around the local democracy network. As politicians, we often find that network helpful if we want to tell a story, but not so often if we are trying to avoid a story. What is your vision of how that might work? Is it about focus on recruiting more women into journalism and drilling that down to the local level like the democracy network and ensuring that we can cover grass-roots sports clubs and events?

Catherine Salmond: The answer to that is twofold. Do you want to encourage more female reporters or do you want to increase coverage of female sport? Something that sticks in the throat of a lot of women sports reporters is their being told that women should cover women’s sport. If it is a case of increasing exposure to women’s sport, we just need the best journalists to do that. It would be brilliant if, at the same time, we could grow the number of reporting females while we grow our exposure and coverage of female sport, but it is not about women for women’s sport. For me, it is about increasing the audiences that are engaging meaningfully with women’s sport. We should fund, or part-fund, a model in which reporters focus on the sports that need to grow to survive. As I say, we just do not have the audiences at the moment, and our metrics are live and up to the minute.

Paul O’Kane: Am I correct in saying that the local democracy network was partly funded through the BBC licence fee?

Catherine Salmond: Yes—it was, originally.

Paul O’Kane: There might therefore be models for the Government to consider how we might do some of that, whether at the reserved or devolved level.

Catherine Salmond: There is genuine collaboration and willingness to do this: that is definitely true within my newsroom. I feel sorry for all the old stuffy men in the past whom we are talking about. I am not sure who they were, although there were a few. Sports desks have always been passionate places. They have to be because the antisocial hours that reporters have to put in to cover sport are phenomenal.

My team at the moment is a forward thinking, digitally focused mixture of the young, old, fresh and gruff—whatever you want to call them—but they just want to see sports audiences growing and the future of Scottish journalism to be clear in our digital model. Any ideas on that would definitely get our support.

The Convener: Sandesh Gulhane has a brief supplementary question on this theme.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I have one question that I will direct to Louise Thornton if I may.

Last week, we heard about top female athletes in sports that are not normally very well represented; for example, judo or mountain biking—sports that are very big at the Olympics. However, those ladies are not household names. Take “Trans World Sport” for example, which was on when I was a kid. Everyone who is about my age knows kabaddi, because it was covered by “Trans World Sport”, but it is not exactly a mainstream sport. Have you considered using the BBC’s position to provide a sports package in which we can see women from this country excelling in sports such as judo throughout the year, so that there is not just one big bang at the Olympics?

Louise Thornton: Thank you for the question. The short answer is that we absolutely can. I have the privilege of being able to commission across all BBC platforms. I commission not just across BBC One and BBC Scotland, but across iPlayer, Radio Scotland, BBC Sounds and our digital and social platforms. There are what you might call the big moments on television that we all come together for, but we have a significant budget pointed at what we do in sport online. Sport online is a huge platform for us: we attract about 2 million viewers a week just for the Scotland part of it. They are not insignificant numbers.

The budget that is allocated specifically to that allows us to do exactly what you suggest. We have invested in streaming of netball. We covered the judo win on our digital platforms and we have covered gymnastics and female boxing. Those platforms enable us to do things that we might not be able to schedule on television—we might see an opportunity for a sport in which we think there is a particular interest. Unlike football, which happens throughout the year and people can build a habit for, some sports happen only at certain times in the year. That is our approach; we have a list of sports that we cover on that platform.

Alongside that, we try to identify talent and to tell the stories of particular talents. If we were to follow some top Scottish athletes leading up to the Commonwealth games, we would not invest just in coverage on television; we would go to training

camps and follow their stories there. We have been following Hannah Rankin, who is a young boxer. She might not be a household name for Scotland at the moment, but hopefully she will be in the future.

Such things are where we think that we can really add value. When we see audiences coming through and we have success with something, that allows us to work out where to invest in women's sport. Women's curling is a great example. We stream women's curling and do lots of digital coverage on it. Netball is also a really interesting example; we have had some success with streaming netball, so we would look to do more of that in the future.

The Convener: We move on to our next theme.

Evelyn Tweed: Female pundits can often get a lot of criticism and horrific backlash—for example, about the way in which they have presented or what they have said. When that happens, how do you support them? What do you have in place to protect them?

Louise Thornton: Social media in particular can be very misogynistic places—some platforms more than others. Like any organisation, we have an absolute duty of care to our staff. We are particularly aware that women on social media are subjected to things that men are simply not subjected to. I have had that experience. I used to run a platform called “The Social”, and any time a woman posted content, we would be on standby.

The BBC does exactly that for our top talent—it does not matter what level in the organisation they are. If a person is posting on social media, our editors have a duty of care for that person. First of all, there is a conversation around what someone is going to post and the potential ramifications. We also monitor our output and take action. We will block people, ban people and remove people from our platforms if they break social media guidelines.

We were part of a campaign, in partnership with Sky, called “Hate won't win,” which was all about supporting female talent in the sports world. It is sad that we have to do that, but it is a matter of fact that we do. To refer back to a point that Catherine Salmond made, I note that we are talking about professionals who are aware of the environment in which they operate, but we are all human beings, and some things that people post on social media can be incredibly hurtful, so we take every action to support them on a human level and, as an organisation, to monitor the situation and take action on our accounts if there are hateful comments there.

Evelyn Tweed: The Council of Europe's report “Gender Equality in Sport and the Role of Media” found that female athletes are often

“portrayed in stereotypical, comical, sexualised and sexist ways”

in the media. The report noted that that portrayal impacts negatively on female participation in sport. What guidelines do you have in place to prevent that? What processes are in place if it does happen? Anyone can respond to that question.

Bobby Hain: I start by saying that, in all honesty, I do not recognise that description of our output. We carefully consider feedback and analysis, particularly of specifically Scottish output, whether it is ours or anyone else's.

We have the Ofcom code, which is a very detailed set of responsibilities that apply to broadcasters generally, and to public service broadcasters in particular. We have a sense of impartiality and fairness that stems from that code and which also goes back to our values, as STV, over 60-plus years.

I can think of examples of our supporting promotion of sports and individuals. One example is a young and upcoming athlete called Katie Shanahan, who was a double-bronze winning swimmer in the Birmingham Commonwealth games and is, we hope, on her way to the Olympics. We ran a feature on her in the past couple of weeks. Chloe Grant was the first young woman to be inducted into the all-woman formula 1 academy. There have been other similar stories just in the past few weeks. I think that those stories are generally very fair and absolutely appropriate, and do not suffer from allegations such as you have described.

We have a real sense of who we are, whom we talk to and who our audience members are. STV has the biggest news audience at night, with up to 500,000 watching, so we have a big responsibility to all the people in those programmes and in our audience to be fair, reasonable and accurate in how we support and promote stories.

Catherine Houlihan: I agree with that, speaking for ITV Border.

Our programming is all about celebrating the region, celebrating success and celebrating individuals. We feature a lot of female sports achievers, both in disability sports and in able-bodied sports. They are on a par with men, and there is absolutely no mocking or second-class status: it is a given that they are treated properly.

Evelyn Tweed: Do you ever get it wrong? I take Bobby's point—that you are not in line with the characterisation of the report—but do you ever get it wrong? Do the public ever tell you that you have got it wrong and they are not happy about it? If so, how do you deal with that?

Bobby Hain: I do not think that we get it wrong in the way that you describe: I am not familiar with

any complaints along those lines. We do come in for criticism, however—usually from fans of one side or another in very established sports. They are partisan supporters who are very passionate about what they do. They might think that our reporting is biased in one way or another, but that is quite different from the kind of allegations that you are talking about, which relate to fairness or to a sense of common courtesy or reasonableness in respect of how we deal with and present people. That is not an allegation that I have heard being levied against what we do.

09:45

Louise Thornton: I echo Bobby Hain's point. As we have mentioned, unfortunately some football fans, sports fans and general audience members still hold misogynistic views and will tweet or contact the BBC to express those views. However, everybody whom we work with, put on the air and feature on our programmes is an example of excellence among women in sport. We bring the same level of broadcast professionalism to women's sport as we do to men's sport, so I do not recognise the stereotype that you have talked about because it is everything that we are trying to dispel. We adhere to our editorial guidelines, but our overarching mission with sport in general, and women's sport in particular, is to celebrate it, to challenge stereotypes and to promote an open conversation about the issues that you are talking about.

Emma Harper: I will be very brief, convener.

Earlier, Louise Thornton said that we are on a journey to improve coverage of sport. I agree with Catherine Houlihan that it is not about women doing women's sport and men doing men's sport, but is about covering sport and supporting sport and physical activity for folk to be healthier, too.

The six nations women's rugby tournament is on now. It does not say that Scottish rugby women or Scottish rugby men are playing; it is just Scottish rugby. Is that a way to convey support for women in sport? Should we take gender out and just talk about Scottish rugby, for example, no matter which six nations tournament is going on, to demonstrate our support for women in sport?

Louise Thornton: That is a really interesting question. We would always liaise with sporting bodies to identify the best way to talk about their sport.

My instinct is to answer yes—we should just talk about the sport, but our audience research tells us that people are not necessarily fans of women's sport, but are fans of a particular sport. How do we achieve parity for men and women? We do that by creating really fantastic 360° coverage of a sport. That is why all our women's football coverage

comes under our "Sportscene" brand. However, we know that the football associations really welcome having a specific women's highlights programme, because the games are played at different times and the leagues are different. That is where we separate things and we flag up that we have our men's highlights programme and our women's highlights programme. That is the way it is at the moment, but we would always have a conversation with the sporting bodies and organisations about what would they prefer.

Our coverage of the women's six nations has been fantastic and has generated a lot of excitement and, as you say, it is all under the brand of the six nations.

The Convener: We will move on to our next theme.

Paul Sweeney: I was taken by the earlier comments about the idea of building some sort of ecosystem that could support young women coming into journalism. Mr Gulhane mentioned that we spoke to women who might be elite athletes but who cannot sustain themselves in their sport because it does not yet have sufficient financial heft for people to earn a full-time living out of it. Such people are fans of the sport and participate in it and will probably have great creative and innovative ideas about how to promote it. Given what you said about the local democracy initiative, could that be a model that we could use to support women who are athletes in an emerging sport and who have the potential to promote that sport through journalism as well? There is an opportunity for the country to look at building something new, not just in terms of broadcasting, which does interesting work to bring forward pundits and commentators who have insights from the sport, but on the print side, where that might not happen so much. Could we look at building something like that?

Catherine Salmond: Yes. There is a whole conversation to be had on the finances. As I said before, I think that there is a willingness to have that conversation.

Paul Sweeney: It is just a thought that I had.

John McLellan: One thing that was quite clear from the discussions between the public interest journalism working group, which I was on, and the Scottish Government was that direct funding of journalism by Government and the organisations was not something that either side would particularly wish to encourage. If there is a direct financial link between those who hold you to account and you, it raises an obvious conflict of interests, and I do not think that many of you would support that, either.

The local democracy reporters scheme created a middleman, if you will—

Catherine Salmond: Or woman.

John McLellan: I am sorry; yes—a middlewoman. That is something that the public interest journalism group, through its proposal for a Scottish public interest journalism institute, was trying to explore with the Scottish Government. That proposal still has legs; there is no money involved just now, and the working group behind it is still trying to find ways of establishing it, but some kind of clearing house where support can come in and be disbursed to organisations for whatever purpose, be it local democracy expansion or coverage of minority sports or women's sport in general, would have legs and a lot of support from our side. The issue, though, is finding the mechanism.

It is also fair to say that the BBC is facing its own financial challenges just now. The licence fee concept is probably not tenable, either. A lot of work needs to be done on this matter, with the involvement of the third sector, but the fact is that finding sustainable ways of enhancing quality, trusted coverage is very much what is needed in a variety of sectors, not just sport.

Paul Sweeney: We would all lament the decline in financial capacity in the print media over the past few decades, but there is still that tension that you have described. You need something that can get pulled on by the reader, but the question, then, is how you put it in front of people. It is a kind of chicken-and-egg scenario. Curling, for example, was a huge thing back in 2002 at the time of the Salt Lake City Olympic games, and Scotland went crazy for it for about six months. Clearly, when these things are put in front of people, they get interested in them, but how do you then seed that demand?

Catherine Salmond: There is an argument to be made in that respect for sustainable business models for Scottish journalism. It does not have to be the big sporting events that yield rewards; you can have a very focused audience for a niche sporting topic. Indeed, I have seen it done in newspapers further up north. The Highland league has gained an awful lot of digital revenue from having a particular newspaper or brand all over it.

It is therefore not just a case of saying, "Oh, we cover only the big events." Niche topics can be really good for us, too, if you can get a targeted audience, and there is definitely work for us to do in that respect. Some of the women in sport topics fall into that, but a little bit more needs to be done about the figures, because they are not yet there for us.

John McLellan: The great thing about the digital age is that there is no limit on space. In the print era, you were constrained by the fact that

everything had to go into 12 pages of sport, and there was competition to occupy that space.

One sport that I know a little bit about is hockey, in which participation levels, particularly among young women, are massive. Indeed, there are more than 1,000 young people playing hockey at Watsonian Hockey Club every Sunday. The audience is there, and the space is there to give the sport quality coverage, but what are required are the people in the middle to cover it. The cost is the journalism, because the production costs are relatively small, but the audiences are there to be had.

At the moment, hockey relies on one or two individuals and Scottish Hockey covering its own stuff. That is fine, but it is not the same as having an independent trusted platform where you will get some balance.

Paul Sweeney: So there might be people who would love to spend their days writing about their sport as well as participating in it, but they might not have the opportunity. We could consider whether there were any ways of joining those things up.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): Good morning. We have heard about what you are doing just now, but do you have targets for investing in the future of women's sport and increasing coverage?

Margaret Mary Murray: We do not have targets. BBC Alba is a partnership between the BBC and MG Alba, and MG Alba has been the funder of our television and sports portfolio, which has grown over the years, although not to a target. This year, we have increased our coverage of the Scottish women's premier league from 20 games to 26 games. We are incrementally growing our commitment to women's sport but, again, not to a target.

Bobby Hain: We have targets but not specifically for individual sports or forms of sport. As I mentioned earlier, we have targets for diversity and gender balance across programmes. We are making good progress towards those targets, which were originally drawn with a view towards a target date of 2023. We will review those targets based on the census data. I think that the 50/50 gender target will stay but that the targets relating to the profile of ethnic minorities within our output and our colleagues base will change later this year.

Louise Thornton: BBC Scotland's commitment to women's sport is a long-term one, because that allows us to buy good packages of rights and build audiences. Working with BBC Alba, we are increasing the volume of SWPL games that we show and are having active conversations about the performance of the national team. We also

have an on-going commitment to the six nations women's rugby.

The big priority for us is around what we are doing with our streaming platforms and making sure that we are achieving a 50/50 balance there and across our coverage in terms of punditry and commentary. We want to ensure that the talent development piece leads up to that in terms of representation.

David Torrance: Louise Thornton mentioned digital platforms with regard to the diversity of women's sport that is being covered. Do any other witnesses have ideas about how to increase the diversity of women's sport that is covered?

Bobby Hain: I think that we have a good coverage of different sports and areas of sport—I mentioned a few of them earlier. The coverage includes everything from Lucinda Russell and the grand national winner appearing on the news programme a couple of weeks back to Anastasia Vaipan-Law, who is a figure skater from Dundee, and Emily Nichol, who is a netball centurion for Strathclyde Sirens.

We feature a range of people and different sports. What is important for us is not only that we have a gender balance in sport but that we have a range of sports from the very established and popular ones through to more minority sports that people do not see on television as much. We feature people such as Eilish McColgan and Laura Muir, who are very established, and a range of other people. Seeing that range of people on different parts of their sporting journey goes to the earlier question about how we can support people. We are engaged in a long-term project. We need to support people and be with them on their journey and reflect their success stories as part of our daily reporting.

The Convener: You have mentioned featuring a lot of women athletes and sportspeople. Are you talking about featuring them in news articles and sports packages, rather than showing their sports?

Bobby Hain: We do both. In some cases, when we highlight the people that I have mentioned—I should point out that the people I mentioned have been featured in just the past few weeks; women's sport has become very much part of our output—we will report on their performance and their contribution to that sport, and, where it is available, we will use footage from that sport and reflect the outcome of the competitions that they are in.

A lot of our news is in the STV editorial style; it is based around people, and stories that are very people-centric. It is about people doing things. Where it is to do with sport, it is not just about people through the lens of who they are, although that is important to us, but it naturally highlights,

and gives presence and promotion to, the sport itself.

10:00

The Convener: So without covering a game, a match or whatever, it is much more focused on the individual.

Bobby Hain: It is based around the sport and the individual, but it is based more on the individual—that is for sure.

Catherine Salmond: The question was on what *The Herald* or the broader print media could do to enhance the coverage of women's sport. At *The Herald*, we are very much on our own journey in terms of what content we cover that compels people to pay for a digital subscription.

In sport, covering match reports, or pressers as they were known in those days, do nothing for us digitally, because that content is everywhere—every sports journalist was at the event. We are always looking at a different angle for all our journalism, and sport is crossing into news and business in a way that it perhaps did not previously, when it was seen as sports reporting. We are doing that a lot now, which brings me on to the point about how ex-sportspeople could go into journalism. Comment and analysis pieces, similar to the conversation that we are having here, on our pages and on our website, are the type of stuff that is doing incredibly well for us.

While it may not be that we covered a certain match, for example, the wider discussion and the bigger thinking about sports journalism definitely has a place in our content, and we are encouraging that type of approach in discussion with our writers. We are breaking away from traditional sports reporting—that is what I am trying to say in my long-winded way.

David Torrance: Is the issue with increasing the coverage of women's sport, whether it is on digital platforms or mainstream media, simply financial? We have heard about restrictions as a result of the licence fee and the revenue that you get from advertising or from people buying online subscriptions. Is it the financial impact that is restricting you in covering more women's sport, or are there any other problems in that area that your organisations face?

John McLellan: It really comes down to the money. Professional journalism costs money; our organisations would cover as many things as they wanted to if they could pay the people to do it, but as revenues go down, the ability to cover things is limited. It comes down to the financing, and at the other end it is about whether the coverage is generating enough revenue to pay for the staff. That has always been the case.

The reality is that something like 70 per cent of all new advertising goes to digital platforms—it is all going across the Atlantic. We could expand our sports coverage, but it is not going to change the fact that the vast majority of advertising is going down a programmatic digital platform route. It is about finding ways in which we can guarantee that the finance is there to sustain the coverage, and capture the audiences along the way. The incentive is to provide the coverage and to get the audience, rather than there being any real notion that we are going to generate a profit from it. If it can wash its face, that is great.

Louise Thornton: An issue that is probably particular to broadcast concerns the level, or indeed existence, of a quality feed from the sport. That can often rely on the level of investment in the sport itself. We have a pressure on our budget—we cannot do everything. However, we will always look for opportunities where we think that there is a particular Scottish interest, such as a Scottish event or something that we are doing well at, or some exciting talents. We will always look for an editorial justification for what we invest in. Often, though, there will be a conversation with the organisation first to find out whether they have a feed that we can broadcast on our digital platforms.

The Convener: I have two other members who want to come in with questions. I am conscious that we are getting to the end of our time, so I will go to Paul O’Kane and then Tess White.

Paul O’Kane: We had a panel of elite athletes in front of us last week, and we asked them what questions they would want to put to you about broadcasting and wider journalism. We have covered quite a good deal of that, but one of the points that Eilidh Doyle raised was about how we refer to women’s careers. She felt quite aggrieved that, when she turned 30, she was referred to as being at the end of her career, and it was said that she was coming to the end of her life in the sport. The reality was that she had just won an Olympic medal and she went on to run until she was 35. I am keen to understand whether there is cognisance of that in journalism more widely and whether there could be engagement with individuals about their own career and their own progress rather than such generalisations being made.

John McLellan: I think that that is a hangover. It is not a male versus female thing; generally, if someone was over 30 they were seen as over the hill. When I played first-division rugby, I was 31 and I felt that I was over the hill—and indeed, I probably was—but what is changing, as far as athletes are concerned, is the level of support and medical understanding, which is lengthening careers.

There are now people like Johnny Sexton, who is playing for Ireland at the top of his game at the age of 37, and it is not uncommon to have players of all kinds playing top competitive sport well into their 30s. The notion about age is changing, and 30 is no longer the benchmark. Now, across all sports, we have veterans competitions, which are for over-35s, but how can we have over-35s competitions for veterans when those people are still able to compete at international level? The age issue is changing across the board, and it is not necessarily applicable only to females.

Paul O’Kane: Eilidh Doyle would have contended that. I will quote her verbatim:

“I was always getting asked when I was retiring and how long I was going to go on. None of my male counterparts was asked those questions.”—[*Official Report, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee*, 18 April 2023, c 37.]

She felt that it is a very gendered experience.

Catherine Salmond: Some of that is life for a woman, and I can understand what Eilidh Doyle said there, because female journalists are asked some questions that male journalists are not asked. Sense checking all our content and trying to be professional is how we approach everything—sport and any of our other content. It does not surprise me that, over time, women probably have had a different experience from reporters, but there has been a huge cultural shift in journalism, and hopefully that will be reflected.

Paul O’Kane: The other issue that was put to us about broadcast journalism by those athletes relates in particular to the fact that we are more used to seeing presenters and the talent in broadcasting being female, but Gemma Fay put quite starkly to us that very often she did not feel that she is treated as well as her male counterparts are in the research and information that is provided when she takes part in a broadcast. She has had to do a lot of her own research, but often it was provided to the top male talent. She found that experience quite negative, and she was keen to understand what broadcasters are doing to try and level the playing field and treat talent in the same way across all programmes.

Louise Thornton: Well, that is very disappointing to hear, and I would love to hear more from Gemma Fay about that. We treat everybody equally, and our managers are trained to treat everybody equally. We have talked about inclusion and culture, and that sounds like an example of a not-great culture. I hope that things have changed since she had that experience. There are more women in sports teams than ever and there are more women on television and on the radio than ever, and they are operating at an extremely high level—the same level as their male counterparts.

We look at everybody's pay yearly, do fair-pay checks, apply rate cards and aim to treat everybody with the same level of professionalism, so I am disappointed to hear that, but everybody I know who works on the sport team is 100 per cent committed to 50/50 inclusive hiring and managing. I would need a bit more detail on Gemma's particular experience to make a fuller comment on it.

Bobby Hain: Our STV values and equality ambitions are not just about 50/50 gender balance across the company as a whole but about making sure that we also have good gender and ethnic minority representation in the senior parts of our business. We would very quickly pick up if there was any differentiation—and I am not aware of it in our business—in the way in which people approach their roles or, indeed, are supported in those roles. For example, one of our north sports reporters, Stefani Dailly, shares the sports reporting duties with Chris Harvey, and both of them report on sports that feature both genders. There is no difference in the approach that they take or the support that they have to do that work on a day-to-day basis.

Tess White: To build on Paul O'Kane's point about gendered language, we received feedback from the elite women athletes that there is a focus on age and that, when they are being interviewed, there is a focus on whether they are married. I accept that Catherine Salmond, who is the first female editor of *The Herald*, said that her team does a sense check, which is great. However, you cannot manage what you do not measure. Is there an awareness that there is gendered language? Are you conscious of that? Are you managing it? That question goes first to Bobby Hain and then to John McLellan.

Bobby Hain: I am not aware that there is gendered language and I think that we have a very self-aware team. Across our newsroom, the team—which is led by Linda Grimes Douglas, our head of news—is very professional and experienced. In general, any clichés or laziness have long been eradicated from what we do by a clear sense that we are trying to be respectful, fair and very purposeful in what we do, and not to rely on the clichés and tropes that people go to over time. We are making journalism and programmes that are respectful and do not attract that kind of criticism. If we did attract it, it would come across my desk, because we are very clear about reporting.

With regard to the profile of our output, as I have mentioned a couple of times, we are very clear on how that works. We have not moved to individual stories and language, because those are thoroughly checked, on a piece-by-piece basis, before transmission. It is not really an area that we

measure, but I agree with the sentiment that, if we want to make change, in order to do so, we absolutely have to measure something and set targets.

John McLellan: Across the industry, there is no measurement of that, but we do not operate under the same tight controls as the broadcasters. I take Ms White's point that, if we cannot measure something, it is difficult to know exactly where we are with it. Asking questions about people's broader lives should apply to all athletes and not just to females, because not asking questions of male athletes is a failure as much as anything else. As we move forward, we require heightened awareness about making lazy assumptions and stereotyping anybody, no matter who they are.

The Convener: I thank all the witnesses for your honest and thorough contributions. I am sure that the committee will find your evidence very helpful when we pull together our report on the inquiry.

At our next meeting on 2 May, we will continue our scrutiny of national health service boards and take formal evidence as part of our scrutiny of the complex mesh surgical service. That concludes the public part of our meeting.

10:14

Meeting continued in private until 11:14.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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