HEALTH AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 25 June 2008

Session 3

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HEALTH AND SPORT COMMITTEE
19th Meeting 2008, Session 3

CONVENER

*Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
*Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
*Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP)
*Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP)
*Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
*Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

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Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Jim Hamilton (Edinburgh Rugby)
Donna Kennedy (Scottish Women's Rugby Union Academy)
Gordon McKie (Scottish Rugby Union)
Kenny Murray (Culture and Sport Glasgow)
Colin Thomson (Scottish Rugby Union)
Gregor Townsend (Scottish Institute of Sport Foundation)
Peter Wright (Glasgow Hawks)

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Douglas Thornton

ASSISTANT CLERK

David Slater

LOCATION

Murrayfield Stadium, Edinburgh

Scottish Parliament

Health and Sport Committee

Wednesday 25 June 2008

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:15*]

Pathways into Sport Inquiry

The Convener (Christine Grahame): Good morning and welcome to the 19th meeting this year of the Health and Sport Committee, which today is in the splendid surroundings of Murrayfield stadium. I remind all present to ensure that mobile phones and BlackBerrys are switched off. No apologies have been received.

Agenda item 1 is our pathways into sport inquiry. We have two panels of witnesses to give evidence in the first phase of the inquiry, during which we are taking evidence from successful sportspeople. I am pleased to welcome our first panel. We have Jim Hamilton, who is a Scottish international rugby player and who played in four of Scotland's five matches in the 2007 rugby world cup. He now plays for Edinburgh Rugby. Donna Kennedy is the world's most-capped female player, having won more than 100 caps playing for the Scottish women's rugby team. In 2007, Donna took up the role as coach of the Scottish Women's Rugby Union academy team. Peter Wright is a former Scotland international and British Lion who won 21 caps for Scotland between 1992 and 1996. He was a rugby development officer in Dumfries and Galloway and was in charge of Scotland under-19s for three years. He is now director of rugby at Glasgow Hawks. Mr Wright, I understand that you are the only witness who wants to make an opening statement, so off you go.

Peter Wright (Glasgow Hawks): It is not so much an opening statement; it is just a bit of history about my involvement in rugby from a young age up to the present. I started playing rugby at Lasswade Rugby Football Club as a six-year-old. Initially, it was a baby-sitting service—my parents were keen to get me out of the house on Sunday mornings and the club was about 100m from the house, so I was pushed towards that. When I got there, I was welcomed with open arms. It was a good club with a good youth system, as many clubs at the time had. There was a huge number of players in each age group and, crucially, a load of volunteers. There were three or four coaches for each team, from the under-10s to the under-12s, under-14s and under-15s and right through the whole club.

I played all my minirugby there. We got no rugby in primary school in those days—it was just football, which was the main sport. I played football at school, but I played it as a rugby player, which unfortunately does not get you far in the football world. At that time, most of the rugby was done by the club and the club volunteers—very little was done in the school system. When I went to secondary school, I had a decision to make. I am not sure about the situation now but, in those days, we had competitive physical education teachers who ran football, rugby and basketball teams. Every teacher wanted the best player for his team, so there was conflict at times between two teachers or when one player played two sports. Decisions were sometimes made because of the competitiveness of the teachers—you went with the most competitive teacher.

In my days at Lasswade high school, one of our PE teachers was Tom Hendrie, who went on to manage St Mirren in the Scottish Premier League. Ian Hoffman, who was a talented basketball player who played for Scotland, was a basketball teacher. Another PE teacher was Tom Hardy, who was one of the top basketball referees in the country. We also had a guy called Allan Spencer, who was a good rugby teacher. There was a real competitive edge in the teaching fraternity. I went down the rugby route, probably more because of my size than my talent. The great thing in those days was the competition between the teachers, which drove the pupils on.

The school system was all about teams. The teachers hammered home the importance of teamwork, in sport and from a social point of view—we were reminded to be part of the community. Teamwork was important for me as a rugby player. I would never have made it to the highest level of sport if I had been an individual player. My motivation when I played rugby was to do the best that I could for the other 14 guys, rather than to do the best for myself. My motivation was the team and the team ethic.

I always played for the school on a Saturday and for the club on a Sunday, so I played two games a weekend. In fourth year, I played two games on a Saturday. I played for the school in the morning and I played adult rugby as a 15 or 16-year-old in the afternoon. At the time, I did not think that that did me any harm, but I retired as a player when I was 30 because of injuries, which may have been down to playing too much rugby—I do not know. However, I certainly enjoyed the two games on a Saturday, because I was desperate to play.

As I say, teachers were very proactive in team sports and saw their involvement in them as a personal thing. I still keep in touch with those guys. Although they are still teaching, things are now slightly different and they probably do not

have the time for it that they had in the past. In those days, it was very much part of the teaching job that they were expected to run extracurricular teams. I do not know whether that is the case for teachers nowadays.

In fourth year, I was playing both in the morning and in the afternoon. I did not make it to school after fourth year; I got an apprenticeship as a blacksmith, so I left school as a 16-year-old. I went straight into adult rugby and, because of my size, I competed pretty well at that level.

In those days, I played in the Edinburgh schools team, and getting into the team was a political matter. I was the only player out of 15 who came from a state school. The other 14 boys played for Stewart's Melville college. One weekend, at Watsonians, we got beaten pretty badly in the first game and they all got dropped. The guys who came in for them were all from George Heriot's school. I was the only state school pupil who played for the under-15 team.

The situation has changed a lot now, but in those days it was difficult to break into the rugby system. It was still regarded as pretty middle class and I came from a working-class background, but one guy, Allan Spencer, who was my rugby teacher at school, drove a lot of things through for me and shouted for me. Things are a lot different now, though. The system is a lot more open and talent is recognised more.

I played adult rugby very early. I played for Boroughmuir as a 17-year-old, which was 23 years ago. In those days, it was pretty unique for a 17-year-old to be playing division 1 rugby. That was probably down to my size and a little bit of luck. I remember my first days at Boroughmuir. There was one other player who was under 21; everybody else in the club was older. We had guys who were playing rugby in their 30s.

By contrast, in my last season in senior rugby, most players were under 21 and very few guys played beyond the age of 30. That is a big issue now. In my role as the director of Glasgow Hawks, I have no players over the age of 30 in the squad. They all retire before they reach that age, which is a concern at times. We have lots of young players aged 18 and 19, who we are trying to develop at one of the top clubs in the country. That is a lot of pressure on young shoulders. The balance has changed in the past 10 to 15 years.

I went on to play international rugby for Scotland, again through a bit of luck as well as talent. That all came from the experience that I had gained in my late teens and early 20s. The standard of the domestic competition was particularly good, which made my step up to the international circuit a lot easier.

The Convener: That is very helpful. You were nodding, Ms Kennedy. Do you want to give us a flavour of your pathway to where you are now?

Donna Kennedy (Scottish Women's Rugby Union Academy): It is interesting that Peter Wright started to play adult rugby when he was 16 or 17. I started playing when I was 19, so I had a different pathway although my background is similar to his. I played at Biggar high school, where, similarly, the team sports that were played were down to the choice of the PE teachers. My PE teacher was very much into hockey. The two PE teachers were husband and wife, and Mr Boyd was into boys' rugby—so, the boys got to play rugby and the girls got to play hockey. We also took part in athletics, and I played tug-of-war because I came from a farming community and had a farming background.

Then, when I was 19, Biggar high school, which was next door to the rugby club, decided to start a ladies' rugby team. I came into a sport that I had never played before—I had never touched a rugby ball—and it was a difficult sport to pick up. We had really good coaching there, which helped. That was in 1992.

In 1993, Scotland's first women's international match was played at Raeburn Place, against Ireland. I got into that through the coaching structure at Biggar. A notice was received from the Scottish Women's Rugby Union—I do not think that it was the Scottish Rugby Union at the time—inviting any girls who were interested to have a trial for the Scotland team. It was not exclusive. Whoever was available and wanted to play for Scotland was invited to go along and play in a trial. I went along, started playing and was selected to play against Ireland in 1993. I have been in the squad ever since and have been lucky along the way because I have stayed injury free, which has been one of the main factors for me. I know that Peter Wright has maybe had a different pathway on the injury side.

We have had many coaches over the years, but it has been difficult. For example, I had to pay for my international jersey for the first four years. There was basically no money, and the view was that you were lucky to be in the squad. It helped if your family had a bit of money and was prepared to back you. It felt like being able to pay to play for your country could get you selected. Unfortunately, that was the case for the first four or five years. Thankfully, that has changed.

The SWRU has done a massive amount of work with the Scottish Rugby Union, which has stepped in and given a hell of a lot of funding to the SWRU that has helped Scottish women's rugby over the years. There was originally no structure in terms of, for example, having an under-18s team, an academy or a development route; it was just

straight into women's internationals, which was difficult. It meant that you were going in at the top level and there was nothing to bring you through the system. Thankfully, that is now being done.

We now have an under-18s team, and we have identification days through the universities as well. We also have the academy team, which gets fed through from the under-18s; the development squad, which gets fed through from the two squads that sit underneath it; and, of course, the top team, which is the Scottish women's rugby team.

To give you some perspective, there are 850 senior women's players in Scotland. That is a small pool to draw on for an international side. We have 520 girls from 12 to 18 playing. That number has improved over the past year, and a lot of work is being done on that by the SWRU and the SRU. A lot of development is being done on the student side as well to bring through younger players.

I retired when I was 35, which was five years older than Peter Wright was when he retired. However, the average age of the Scottish women's team is about 27. That just gives an idea of how nothing was coming through the system. However, with what is now in place, and looking forward over the next four or five years to the next world cup, I think that the average age of our team will probably be about 19 or 20, which is exciting for women's rugby. The structure of women's rugby is slightly different from the men's game because boys get exposed to the game at an early age. Unfortunately, we do not, unless there is a teacher in school who is interested in playing rugby or coaching women's rugby. A lot of men will coach for us. The coaching is much better now, but in my day it was different by far. I can gladly say that there have been massive changes over the years, which I am pleased to see.

The Convener: Thank you. Does Jim Hamilton want to say something?

Jim Hamilton (Edinburgh Rugby): Yes, thank you. It probably will not be as detailed as what Peter Wright and Donna Kennedy said. I will just give you an outline of what I have done. Obviously, I was brought up in England. I did not start playing rugby until I was 16. I played for a local club called Barkers Butts Rugby Club. I was not that talented as a rugby player, but I was quite fit and enjoyed being part of a team and so on. I went to a school in Coventry called Coundon Court secondary and community college, which was very football orientated, so there was no opportunity to play rugby there. However, being 6ft 8in, I was not that good at football.

I got picked for Warwickshire under-18s, and from there I was scouted by Leicester Tigers through a guy called Dusty Hare. I was also lucky enough to be taken on as an apprentice in the building trade, which entailed going to work in the morning, getting a trade roofing for David Wilson Homes.

I then played for Leicester under-19s and England under-19s. I was lucky enough to get sent on a tour to South Africa by Leicester, where I played for Natal under-21s in Durban for four months. When I came back, I played for Leicester under-20s and then England under-21s. I was also lucky enough to be sent to New Zealand, where I played for a team called Marist Albion.

I then got a call to play for the Barbarians, which toured to Scotland and Georgia. From there, the Scotland opportunity came about for me and there was no looking back. My first cap came around quite quickly and I went on to play in the world cup, which has obviously been the pinnacle of my career so far. I signed for Edinburgh Rugby this spring, so it has been good.

10:30

The Convener: Thank you very much. Are there any questions?

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I have two questions, convener. The first is about football and rugby pitches in schools. From contact with people in my community, I know that some people want a rugby pitch and some want a football pitch, and sometimes they want both but they cannot have that. Would you like to comment on that?

Peter Wright: Certainly. Looking at it from the Glasgow perspective, I know that some of the guys have come out of the schools to Glasgow Hawks, which is great. A lot of great work is being done in the schools, such as extensions and new builds. However, it seems to be that the land that is being used is pitches.

I have a lad who came out of Douglas academy in Bearsden, which had three or four pitches—two rugby pitches and two football pitches—before the new school build. That is going to go down to two. The argument in the school is about who gets what.

Obviously, football is massive. You can play rugby on a football pitch, but it is an issue for a lot of the new schools. My kids go to James Young high school in West Lothian, which is building on its pitches as well. The big issue is that they are not being replaced.

One of the points that I have written down in front of me is about facilities on and off the pitch. That is a massive issue in Scottish sport. We struggle to get any facilities, and if we do get in somewhere, we have to block book it, which we are not allowed to do. That happens, particularly with all-weather surfaces. We have the worst

climate in the world for developing young athletes and we do most of our stuff in the winter, but it is difficult to get on to an all-weather surface. If more G3 and G4 pitches—artificial pitches on which we can do full contact and play a full game of rugby or football—were available 24/7, that would be the thing. Glasgow Hawks, through the schools, is looking to invest in a G4 pitch during the next three or four years so that the club can have access to facilities that would help.

The Convener: If anyone else on the panel wants to comment, just nominate yourself rather than waiting to be asked. Helen, did you have a second point?

Helen Eadie: The committee is looking not just at the competitive aspect of sport but at on-going sporting activity. It is interesting to learn, although I suppose it comes as no surprise, that 30 to 35 years old seems to be the cut-off point for a lot of competitive sports. Would you like to comment on that? When you are finished with rugby, what sort of sports do you do thereafter?

Donna Kennedy: I would say that it would have to be something very relaxing after 14 years of being battered on a rugby pitch.

I am sure that Jim Hamilton and Peter Wright will agree that it is hard to come down from playing at such a high level. When I retired, there was a void, and coaching has definitely filled that for me. If it was not for the SWRU asking me whether that was the route that I wanted to take, I probably would not be sitting here and answering your questions as a coach. I enjoy that.

People tend to stay fit but, when you are playing rugby, a contact sport, at a very high level, it is difficult to move on and do some other sport, unless you take a softly, softly approach to another sport such as tennis.

Coaching was my choice. I got so much out of playing rugby over the years that, for me, it is about giving something back, and I hope that I can give 14 years of coaching back to women's and men's rugby.

The Convener: I am not heralding your retirement in any way, Jim Hamilton, but Peter Wright has moved on, so what structures are in place for sportspeople when they move on?

Jim Hamilton: Nowadays, the retirement age is getting lower, which is down to the amount of training that we do and the size of the men that are playing the game now. People are weight training hard at 16 or 18 years old so, inevitably, there will be more and more injuries. A player is lucky to go through a season and not pick up an injury.

Guys like us need to think about what we want to do afterwards. I have learned that a lot of the guys—especially up here—like going to schools to coach children. Guys are coaching local teams, such as the Murrayfield Wanderers here—smaller teams and club teams. I would like to do that, too. Rugby has given me a lot on and off the field and coaching offers the opportunity to give something back. I enjoy going to schools to coach little kids. That is good experience for me and it is good for them to have the opportunity to work with professional players. I would like to coach after playing rugby.

The Convener: I am sure that others will pick up on coaching in schools. I remind the committee that we will look at sportscotland's 2006 audit of sports facilities, including pitches and playing fields, which Michael Matheson has previously mentioned.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): Peter Wright talked about his background in Lasswade Rugby Football Club, where he started at the age of six, which seems pretty young. The committee is considering whether people who have succeeded in their sport help others into the sport by setting an example. Do you have any idea about the health of Lasswade Rugby Football Club now compared with when you started?

Peter Wright: Yes, because my brothers are still involved. The club struggles every year to involve kids. There are several reasons for that. Children have more opportunities these days. When I was younger, either we played football or rugby, or we played nothing. Now, children have fantastic opportunities in numerous sports.

Another issue is that parents see rugby as a collision sport. High-profile injuries such as broken necks have occurred, which has had a bit of an impact. When I worked with the SRU, we worked hard to dispel that view. The statistics show that people have more chance of being run down or of many other things than of being hurt on the rugby pitch. However, when a 16 or 17-year-old has a broken neck, the publicity is probably detrimental to the game of rugby.

Lasswade has a mini-section, which involves children up to primary 7 age. It also has a secondary 1 team, an under-15 team and an under-16 team, so young guys still come through.

Another issue is that the population of young people is decreasing, whereas the population of older people is increasing, because of improved health and all the progress in science. A lot fewer young people are servicing more sports, which affects not only rugby but several other sports.

The Convener: Unfortunately, you just need to look at the committee to see what you describe, although we have some young members.

Would Donna Kennedy like to comment on whether her activities at school left a legacy?

Donna Kennedy: Unfortunately, Biggar high school does not have a ladies' team, although rugby is taught in the curriculum. It is sad to say that Biggar Rugby Football Club no longer has a women's team, either. I know that women members are affiliated to the club and that a training structure is in place, but the club does not have enough women members to put out a team.

The club is working actively with the SWRU to have more games with other clubs that do not have many members. The club is also trying to work together with some Borders clubs to get girls into rugby. The girls want to play, but the structure is not in place to allow them to compete. That is why we all play—we want to have competition and not just to train. Activities are taking place, but Biggar does not have a full team.

The Convener: Peter Wright talked about the inhibitor of high-profile serious injury, although that is rarer than a traffic accident. Are parents prejudiced against rugby for girls for similar or other reasons?

Donna Kennedy: People will have prejudice whether males or females are involved. Rugby is a safe sport. Yes, it is a contact sport, but if people are conditioned, if sessions are controlled properly and if the correct coaches are in place to facilitate sessions, such injuries will not happen. It gets a lot tougher as you go up through the age grades, but there is assistance with strength and conditioning to help those players become a lot more physically fit. It is unfortunate that those injuries happen, but they are a minority of the injuries that occur during a rugby match.

The Convener: What I meant is that rugby is not such a girl thing. As a woman, I can perhaps ask that without sounding sexist. Does that issue come up?

Donna Kennedy: You get comments such as, "Do you actually tackle?" Of course we tackle. It is a contact sport. There will always be the problem that rugby is perceived to be a male-dominated game. It probably is, but women are playing rugby and enjoying it. We just need the support of parents, and we need them to know that the sessions that their children are doing are safe.

Jim Hamilton: It is slightly different where I come from. I am good friends with Matt Hampson, who became a high-profile case back home when he broke his neck in training for the England under-21s. He is paralysed from the neck down. He has been asked whether the contact should be taken out of scrummaging and tackling, to which he says no. His was a training accident—it was a freak accident. People higher up, especially in the Rugby Football Union, are trying to use his case to say that it will make parents stop their children playing the sport. Injury is just one of those things that happens in all sports and in life in general. In football, you see guys dropping down with heart attacks.

Ian McKee: This is a health committee as well as a sport committee. When parents are encouraging their children to take up sport, one of the factors that influences them is the long-term future. The injuries that you describe are caused by freak accidents, or they are injuries that stop people from playing the sport at the time. When someone has been playing sport at a high level, and they stop, they still have 30 or 40 years of life ahead of them. You must mix with a lot of people who played the sport at a high level for a long time and now come back to watch rugby matches and take part in the administration of sport. Are the people aged 50 or 60 who have played a contact sport such as rugby at the highest level as fit, fitter or less fit, and do they suffer more from their injuries in the long term, than ordinary citizens of the same age? One school of thought is that everyone who has been in contact sport is floating around in wheelchairs, but another is that they are all running round playing squash at the age of 70. In your opinion, what is the situation?

Peter Wright: If you play a team sport or any sport and you get into the habit of playing it, you will still do something when you retire. Whatever level you played at, you will continue to be active. It might just be playing golf. Most of the guys who I played with who have retired are pretty active in sport because they are generally pretty sport-minded. If you do not play sport at all, you do not get into the habit of going out in the evening to train or out on a Saturday to play. When I worked as a development officer, our problem was that too few young kids were getting into that habit. A lot of that is down to parents who are not particularly sport-minded. My father was a football player and encouraged me to play football, rugby and so on. It was in my family. I know a lot of guys, particularly those who have come into rugby, who have done it the hard way because their parents were not particularly proactive at encouraging them. Getting into the habit of playing sport is one way to make it easier. The question whether there are facilities for playing sport is another problem that people face when they are trying to get into sport.

Ian McKee: If you had a reunion of the Scottish rugby team of the 1970s and 1980s, would the citizens that you saw at that reunion be a lot fitter and more physically mobile than the average citizen of that age from elsewhere?

Peter Wright: I think that they would be. They would have problems specific to the sport, for

example relating to certain parts of their bodies. To be fair, though, that may not be down to rugby.

The Convener: We have all got issues with certain parts of our bodies.

Peter Wright: Absolutely.

The Convener: I am speaking about Dr McKee, not me.

Peter Wright: When I bump into the guys who I have played with who have retired, they all look pretty good—apart from me.

10:45

Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): From the evidence that we have taken so far from those who have succeeded at the top end of their sport and are now involved in the sport more generally, it is clear that they have identified a range of inhibitors, which have to be addressed, that prevent young people who may be interested in a sport—in this case rugby—from getting involved. You may have mentioned a few already but, given your experience, what do you believe are the main inhibitors to young people getting involved in rugby?

Donna Kennedy: From the women's rugby point of view, it is probably a lack of knowledge about who has a rugby team and about the pathway to getting involved. Another barrier is that some—though not all—male coaches are reluctant to get girls involved, which goes back to the earlier point about parents thinking that girls cannot play the sport and that it is a male game. A crude way of putting it is that there is ignorance about the female game. That is not so much the case for the male game, but it is one of the main barriers for females.

Facilities are an issue, too. Some rugby clubs do not have female changing facilities. In this day and age, it is bad that females have to wait for the boys to vacate the changing rooms before they can get in and get changed.

Those are the main barriers, but there is also a lack of good coaches both at the top end and coming through the system. Male coaches are open to different aspects of the male game—there are other avenues to follow—but on the female side we are crying out for good coaches to progress our game. I know that the pathway for coaches is changing, but it is a question of getting people into the game.

Jim Hamilton: There is a certain degree of laziness, and children are not being encouraged by their parents. In society now, people just sit in front of their televisions, have takeaways and play on their PlayStations. Kids are not as motivated as they used to be. I have found that with my friends, too.

I come from a fairly disadvantaged background, and, for me to get where I am, I have had to be very motivated. I used to have to get up at 6 o'clock in the morning and walk to work at the building site. I would be paid there and then have to pay my bus fare to get from Coventry to Leicester, which took two or three hours. Children have to be brought up with motivation to do that.

It is also a question of opportunity. As we said before, if there are no fields and pitches for guys to throw a ball around on free of charge, they will do something else: sit at home and play on the computer or hang around on street corners and start drinking alcohol.

I feel strongly about that point. I go home and try to coach, but no one is interested. People would rather do alternative things because there are no opportunities and facilities and because of how they have been brought up.

Peter Wright: For me, volunteering is the massive issue. Fewer and fewer people are volunteering—teachers, parents and coaches.

The demands on teachers in school are huge, so the extra-curricular stuff that was taken for granted 25 years ago—certainly when I was at school—no longer happens. There is a real issue with that. The McCrone report had a massive effect on how much extra-curricular time teachers put in. Teachers are now contracted to do extra-curricular work, which takes away the whole concept. It is supposed to be volunteering that people do for the right reasons. If you make teachers, or anybody, do something, they tend to rebel, and certain people will not do it.

There is a lot of red tape for volunteers. In a rural place such as Dumfries and Galloway, a lot of the small schools had to rely on parents to take the kids swimming or to play hockey or rugby. Parents were then told that they could not do that because, at some point, there would be only one kid in their car, which broke child protection rules. They also had to go through child protection checks, which drove a lot of people away. It is a matter of filling in a form, but the whole child protection process has had a massive effect on the volunteer base.

There are also health and safety issues. We are required to carry out risk assessments of almost everything that we do. In the past, risk assessment involved going on to the pitch to check for glass, dog poo and so on, but now there is more and more red tape. By definition, volunteers work for nothing and for fun. The requirement to go through so many processes is driving those who are not so motivated out of the sport. The point applies not just to rugby but to every sport. That is the biggest

issue that we face. The SRU is trying to address it by targeting volunteers over the next five years. If we can get more volunteers, there will be more coaches driving all sports—not just rugby. That will help us to bring more kids into the game.

Michael Matheson: The same inhibitors have been identified consistently during the inquiry by you and by representatives of other sports. Other witnesses have given similar evidence on the issue.

Schools appear to have a central role in developing the pathway for youngsters to become involved in sports such as rugby and, possibly, to progress. Do we need to consider how we can strengthen the links between community rugby clubs and schools? Would it be beneficial for us to focus on getting community sports coaches from clubs to deliver sports programmes in schools, instead of having teachers deliver them? Would that help to develop links between community clubs—for rugby and other sports—and schools? Is that one way of increasing youngsters' experience of sport that we should develop further?

Peter Wright: That has happened over the years. It is a brilliant idea that works in many instances, but it is tied to the headteacher. If the headteacher is into sport—it need not be rugby—and is proactive, they will encourage local clubs to help with coaching. The flip side is that if a headteacher is not a sporty person—they may be keen on arts and drama or be very academic—it may be more difficult for clubs to get into schools. Everything depends on the opinion of the headteacher.

Half the schools in Dumfries and Galloway are proactive in letting clubs in, but half are not. Half the schools have academic headteachers and do not see sport as important. We sold our involvement as being not about rugby but about social inclusion and health. The aim was not to get children to play sport but just to get them active. Even then it was quite difficult for us to persuade some headteachers to let us into their schools. We never questioned a headteacher's decision—if they said no, we accepted that, because the decision could have been made for a number of reasons and we did not want to get political. During the years in which I worked for the SRU, we encouraged clubs to get involved in schools. We found that it was easier to get kids to come from schools to clubs than vice versa—many clubs started to run school teams. Ideally, we would have both club and school teams, but at the moment clubs are running the system.

Active schools co-ordinators have been fantastic and really positive, as they get together clusters of schools. Last Thursday we attended a festival for five schools at St Clare's in Drumchapel, where the active schools co-ordinator is doing a fantastic job. However, he made the comment that next year there may be a struggle to fund his post, because applications for funding need to be submitted to four or five different bodies. He has fallen out with one body on a personal issue and has involved his MSP in the case. I do not know what the outcome has been.

The Convener: It would be useful for Michael Matheson to ask the next panel in more depth about the interaction between schools, headteachers and local authorities.

Michael Matheson: Yes, but I suspect that those witnesses will approach the issue from a slightly different angle.

Do you think that there is sufficient infrastructure at community club level to allow coaches to go into schools, if they can get past the headteacher?

Peter Wright: I am sure that Colin Thomson and Kenny Murray will speak about that issue. The club development officer system is improving all the time. An increasing number of clubs have a full-time employee whose job is to go into local primary and secondary schools to promote sport.

It all boils down to funding, which is supplied partly by the schools, partly by the local authority and partly by the club. It is a matter of getting the resources and the funding in place. At Glasgow Hawks, we have a full-time guy whose post is funded by the Bank of Ireland, which is one of our main sponsors. The majority of the money for that post comes from the Bank of Ireland's sponsorship deal with the club, although the schools, the local authority and the SRU put in some money as well. If any of those partners is lost, the post becomes difficult to maintain.

The Convener: Thank you. I want us to move on, as I am conscious of the time.

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): I am what Peter Wright has described as the enthusiastic amateur who, having stopped playing, coached youth rugby for 10 years. I am, therefore, unfamiliar with what he has just been talking about. I then went on—I am not sure whether "progressed" is the right word—to raise funds for 10 years. I do not know which was the more depressing of those two tasks.

We have heard some interesting evidence from people like yourselves, who have had the motivation to propel themselves to an international level. It is surprising to learn that, in their sports—which are different from yours, but I am interested in your views—their prominence and status have not had the effect that the committee would have expected. We would have expected them to be a bit like magnets: highly successful people and good examples, attracting people into their sports.

What image are people getting of sports? Is the issue that international success is a short-term thing? Do people think, "Great, wonderful—these people are internationals, but, God, they've got to lift those bloody weights and do all those things, and that's not for me"? Is that a dampener? Is there some way in which we could use international sportspeople better? The evidence that we have heard from two Olympic athletes who won gold medals about the fall-off in participation in their sports at club level has been quite depressing. That has been a real stunner for the committee. How do you feel about that? You have experience and know where you are. Do you stimulate people, or is there a limited audience for that?

Jim Hamilton: That is quite a hard question to answer. Personally, I would not want to do anything else in the world. Playing a team sport at the highest level with 14 other guys—could you ask for more? Running out at Murrayfield in front of 70,000 people and standing on the pitch, singing the national anthem—it is just a surreal feeling. My friends, who have not had the opportunity to do that, have said that they would give anything to be able to do that just once. Surely that must be a motivating factor for young children. When I went to New Zealand, I got the impression that all the children wanted to play for New Zealand and perform the haka.

Ross Finnie: But do you get the same impression about the children where you come from? With respect, I think that the situation in New Zealand is slightly different.

Jim Hamilton: Yes, it is slightly different because rugby is everything there. I cannot really answer from a Scottish point of view because I have not had the chance to go out into the schools here. However, after England won the world cup, all the little kids back home wanted to be Jonny Wilkinson. They were there with the ball in their hands, kicking drop goals. Whether they would have wanted to be Martin Johnson is a slightly different matter. They saw guys such as Jason Robinson, who was lightning and exciting to watch. Jonny Wilkinson was also exciting to watch. Rugby has gone past the stage of being a bunch of fat men running around the field, running into one another mindlessly.

The Convener: Does Peter Wright want to respond to that? We might see a rugby tackle or two from the witnesses.

Ross Finnie: When I watched my first international at Murrayfield, in 1962, I would not have described Arthur Smith as a big, fat man.

Jim Hamilton: No, but you understand what I am saying. Rugby is now an exciting sport that is moving on year by year. I have been a professional for seven years, and in that time it has just got more and more exciting. I hope that that is what people who watch the games see.

11:00

The Convener: Let us hear your thoughts, Donna. You cannot be described as part of a bunch of fat men.

Donna Kennedy: I certainly hope not.

I understand what Jim Hamilton is saying. However, the women's game is an amateur game. I would love to have been paid to be a professional rugby player like Jim Hamilton, but, unfortunately, that will not happen in the women's game at present.

Much of the problem is to do with the media. I am not decrying them at all, but a winning team gets a lot of publicity, which tends to drop off when the team is losing. However, the work for people behind the scenes does not drop off. That is a difficult issue to deal with. We train day in, day out, and a massive amount of work goes on behind the scenes with the SWRU and the SRU. If a team loses, that does not mean that everything that sits behind it is also losing. Things are driven by people's perceptions and by what has been written in the newspapers.

I am passionate about the female game, the men's game and what I did when I played, and I am passionate when I coach—indeed, I would like to think that I portray that when I put my coaching sessions together. Many girls who play rugby enjoy it because it is a contact sport and a team sport and because it leads to social inclusion. I was generally quite shy when I was at school, but rugby brought me out of my shell; it has even helped me in my working life and career. If I had not had a pathway into rugby, I might not have made the choices that I have.

Peter Wright: I am an ex-player. It used to be fantastic when I went along to things; the reaction was great. It was also brilliant when I worked as a development officer and took players to festivals and competitions. However, we do not have enough high-profile rugby players in Scotland because the base of professional players is quite small. Moreover, the majority of the guys who are names do not, unfortunately, really take part in things to do with rugby. Not many guys from my era are rugby volunteers or involved in rugby coaching, and I am sure that things will get worse in Jim Hamilton's era, as the guys see rugby as a job. Rugby is a tough job, and many guys who reach the end of their careers go away and do something else rather than stay in the game.

Edinburgh and Glasgow do not get enough of the professional players because of their

commitments, but when people know that they are going to be at events at Murrayfield and in schools, there are fantastic reactions from the children. The reaction is massive. Children look up to those guys as role models. However, we do not have enough professionals in Scotland, and not enough of them stay in the game when they finish playing. Perhaps three or four of the Scotland squad that I was in are still playing rugby or coaching or are otherwise involved in the sport; the rest of the guys have gone on to do other things. They still come to watch rugby, but they do not actively volunteer.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I should declare that I am still a member of Stirling County Rugby Football Club, to which I provide occasional medical support.

The witnesses are the first who have been in front of us in our inquiry to represent a contact sport. Such sports are slightly different, as other members have said.

Is a sufficient support structure in place in rugby to deal with injuries at all levels? The role of sevens rugby and touch rugby is related to that question. I should probably declare another interest in that context: my son plays for one of the veteran Scottish teams. What are the roles of sevens rugby and touch rugby, which involve, relatively speaking, less contact than rugby union, as pathways into sport and in bolstering the totality? Rugger is the main sport in Auckland, but there are 150 touch rugby teams there. The people in those teams enjoy that sport, but they might never play rugby.

Peter Wright: Such sports have a real part to play in rugby in that they get people involved. Touch rugby is getting bigger in Scotland, and sevens rugby has greatly improved as a result of what has happened with the national sevens team over the past couple of years. That is one avenue to bring in.

On health and safety, every club has to have first aid specialists, St John Ambulance people and doctors, and most clubs have physiotherapists, so the injuries side of things is dealt with quite well. In years gone by I would go into primary schools and find kids in tears because they thought that rugby was what they saw on television and not just a fun playground game with a rugby ball. There is a bit of ignorance around that. As Donna Kennedy said, there is perhaps a lack of education among people who direct their kids towards rugby, who think that the game is what they see Jim Hamilton and other guys doing on television, which is brutal—

The Convener: You smiled when you said that.

Peter Wright: Well, that is one of the reasons why I play rugby—we enjoy that side of it. However, although rugby is a contact sport there is a place for people who are not quite so aggressive. It is still the game for people of every shape and size. That is what rugby is about.

The Convener: I remind colleagues that the committee has taken evidence on judo, which is a contact sport. I am advised by the clerks that football is not a contact sport, although it looks like one to me.

Dr Simpson: I think that there is less random violence in judo.

The Convener: Does Jim Hamilton want to comment on injuries?

Jim Hamilton: We are talking about rugby, but injuries happen in all sports. My mate has injured his cruciate ligament playing cricket at club level—you would not think that someone could do their knee in from fielding in cricket. I have just had shoulder surgery. In the past that would have meant a big open procedure and a traumatic six months out of the game, but now it is dealt with through keyhole surgery and recovery takes three months. At the top level of sport, injuries are dealt with so much better—I would like to think that that happens at lower levels, too.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I was last in the queue to ask a question, so many of my questions have been asked—I thank Michael Matheson for doing that.

The relationship with schools and identification of potential rugby players are core issues. Given the importance of physical activity, fitness and health, would it be helpful if school inspection reports, which we all receive, included reports on how well schools are doing in providing access to sport—as opposed to getting rid of their football and rugby pitches?

Peter Wright: Yes, absolutely. Sport seems to be the easy target when half an hour is needed here or there for more English or mathematics classes. My daughter, who is very sporty but also very academic, came in from school last week and said, “Dad, you know what we did in PE today? We went for a brisk walk.” They were supposed to be doing cross-country, but because four or five kids objected it was decided to go for a brisk walk instead. I do not know what other schools are like, but that type of thing seems to happen. The two hours of sport per week seem to have gone by the wayside.

Mary Scanlon: Is a brisk walk round the playground classed as PE?

Peter Wright: It is classed as physical activity. Unfortunately, a brisk walk is about all that some kids can do. The approach seems to be to go at the pace of the weakest athlete in the class, instead of making provision for the kids who have

real ambition. The Government was supposed to provide two hours of sport a week, but that seems to have died by the wayside.

Jim Hamilton: Do kids do just one hour of PE a week?

Mary Scanlon: The target was two hours a week, but I am not sure what has happened about that.

Jim Hamilton: That needs to be addressed. I have a brother who is 14—he is at school back home. When I asked him what sports he does at school, he said, "We had PE today and I did gymnastics for an hour." I asked, "What other hours have you got this week? Have you got football or tennis?" He said, "No, that's it." He has just one hour a week of structured physical education. If we want to encourage young lads and girls to get into sport, that is not the way to do it. There should be lunchtime classes, so that they can play football and tennis. They should do something active every day.

Mary Scanlon: Thank you—that was very helpful.

Peter Wright talked about being from Lasswade and playing for Edinburgh schools alongside people from Stewart's Melville and Watson's. You said that 14 players were from private schools and you were the only one from a state school. I think you said that things had improved enormously, but the idea persists that people have to go to a private school in order to play rugby. Has the situation changed enough? Are there enough opportunities in all schools for children in primary and secondary to get a taste of rugby?

Peter Wright: Opportunities have changed: rugby now is about not so much the old school tie as ability. However, an advantage that the independent schools have when it comes to rugby—and other sports—is that they are very traditional. People at independent schools get a lot of sport; sport is on the curriculum timetable, and people do extra-curricular stuff as well.

The downside can be that, when people reach the age of 18 and can leave school, they walk away from sport. All through their school career they have been told to do sport, but at 18 they have a choice. The sport drop-out rate among people at independent schools is huge. For six years, they have been told to do rugby, for example, on Tuesday afternoon, Wednesday afternoon and Monday morning, and to play on Saturday morning no matter what. When they leave school, they walk away from that.

However, the advantage is that, while they are at school, they do a lot of sport. That increases their skills and helps the guys with talent and ambition. We will not get to that stage completely in state schools, but it would be great if we could get a little more sport in state schools.

Mary Scanlon: You said that things were better now than they were when you started. Is there more access to rugby in state schools now?

Peter Wright: Yes, I would say that there is. The active school co-ordinators and the club development officers are really pushing hard for that. The schools that want to play rugby, play rugby.

Mary Scanlon: Does it depend on an individual such as the PE teacher or the headteacher?

Peter Wright: Yes. The PE department is important but the headteacher tends to be the most important person, because everything has to go through them.

The Convener: I want to bring in Donna Kennedy at this point. If there is a class divide, does it also exist in women's rugby? You were at a state school in Biggar.

Donna Kennedy: I could be wrong, but I do not think that women in private schools get rugby, so the issue is not the same as the one that Peter Wright raised. There are probably more women from state schools playing rugby than from private schools.

Mary Scanlon: What should be done to get more young men and women into rugby so that we can expand the pool of rugby players for the future?

Peter Wright: My short answer would be to bring rugby into the curriculum. It would be up to each individual PE department, but it would be fantastic if that was a compulsory part of PE.

The Convener: If we are to take evidence from the teaching profession, we would have to discuss that with the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee. We do not want to trample on its toes.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Our inquiry has three strands. We have been considering pathways into elite sport, but part of that has been consideration of health improvement and barriers to people from less well-off backgrounds—people who might not get encouragement from their family to get involved in sport.

I have three quick questions, although they might require long answers. How do we get more people involved? How, in particular, do we get girls involved? Many of the sports played in schools tend to turn girls off, so how can we make sport more attractive to them? Thirdly, can we learn lessons from other countries?

The Convener: We have an eye on the time, so I would appreciate short answers—and not necessarily an answer to all the questions from each of the witnesses.

Jim Hamilton: Back home in England, and in New Zealand, they have academies and have had sports programmes and structures in place for years. From what I have seen, things in Scotland are slightly different. How can a talented rugby player up in Inverness, or even further afield, develop? Is there stuff up there for them? It would be interesting to see whether talented players and athletes up there get the same opportunity as people in private schools in Edinburgh or Glasgow, for example.

11:15

Donna Kennedy: I will answer the question from the female point of view. We need a lot more coaches, including male coaches who are willing to coach girls in schools and in the club sector. We need a lot more clubs to open their doors to a women's team.

I refer to Jim Hamilton's point about people in rural areas who have talent. If someone is deemed to be playing a team sport, the funding goes to the team. Unfortunately, circumstances might be different if we are talking about someone who lives out in the middle of the country and does not have access to facilities. That is a funding issue for them, but a lot of the money goes to their team. Funding issues have to be addressed. We need to give such players access to funding; otherwise, we will lose them from the game.

Peter Wright: We need more volunteers, so we need to make it easier for people to become volunteers. The one big barrier that needs to be removed is the red tape that all volunteers have to go through and the other perceived difficulties in becoming a volunteer. If there are more volunteers, there are more people available to work with kids.

We have a number of club development officers. I think that the SRU's target is to get an officer in every club in Scotland over a number of years. We could put funding in place to help meet that target. The work that the development officer at my club does is fantastic. Funding to meet the target would help every club. Having an officer in every club would give a lot of support to the school system, too, because the officers go into schools; they complement what is already being done in some of the rugby schools.

The Convener: Thank you. My school was Boroughmuir high school. Even when I was there—all that time ago, when we had gas lights—it had a culture of rugby, which remains the case. I am disappointed that I did not enjoy the democracy that Peter Wright's daughter has. If I had, the school would never have got me on to a hockey pitch. However, we were not allowed to vote on whether to play. Thank you for your evidence, which was extremely interesting. I suspend the meeting for a few minutes.

11:17

Meeting suspended.

11:24

On resuming—

The Convener: We are back again. I welcome our second panel of witnesses. We have with us Gordon McKie, chief executive of Scottish Rugby and the Scottish representative on the International Rugby Board and the six nations committee; Kenny Murray, senior sports development officer at Glasgow City Council; Colin Thomson, head of community rugby at Scottish Rugby; and Gregor Townsend, who won 82 Scotland caps, has played for clubs all over the world and is now with the Scottish Institute of Sport Foundation.

I was going to describe the panel as giving the establishment view, but I do not think that that is correct, because this session is to look at another facet of delivery. I invite the witnesses to make brief opening remarks, after which the committee members will ask questions.

Colin Thomson (Scottish Rugby Union): Good morning. I will make just a short opening statement to give you the background to where I come from. I was brought up in Peebles in the Borders and started playing rugby when I was eight or nine. I played rugby at primary school and then at secondary school, where I was heavily involved in lots of other sports, too. I played rugby for south schools.

I then went on to study physical education at Jordanhill College. I taught in the west for nine or 10 years and played rugby for Jordanhill Former Pupils, which amalgamated with Hillhead Rugby Club to become Hillhead Jordanhill Rugby Football Club. As a school teacher I taught rugby, football and all sorts of PE curriculum sports. There was also a big emphasis on extra-curricular sport, particularly rugby and basketball—I was not the basketball, before you ask.

Thereafter, I took a development position with Scottish Rugby in central Scotland, which covered Stirling, Falkirk and Clackmannanshire. I worked there for three or four years before I was promoted to age grade development manager at Murrayfield and then to head of community rugby.

All through my career I have volunteered in sport. I still volunteer in sport as well as administer it.

Gordon McKie (Scottish Rugby Union): Good morning. I am the chief executive at Scottish Rugby. I am a lover of sport, which is a good thing to be in my job. I will go down memory lane, just like Colin Thomson. I played football in Glasgow when I was a wee boy and I played rugby in Edinburgh when I was a teenager. I have also enjoyed playing tennis, golf, squash—you name it. I just love sport. Fortunately, all my kids love sport, too. Therein lies a message about the curriculum—I have enjoyed it from a very young age.

In my business life, I run Scottish Rugby, the governing body for rugby in Scotland, which has to grow, develop and govern the game of rugby. Scottish Rugby is a unique governing body, not just because of its size but because of its degree of integration, from grass-roots, school and community rugby, which Colin Thomson looks after, through to our international team, which includes two professional teams. We employ most of our players; we have some who play in England and France, but, by and large, they are all in Scotland. That lends itself to great integration in respect of what we can deliver as a governing body. I will return to player appearances, which were referred to earlier.

Our system of governance is the envy of many sports, not just in Scotland but elsewhere in the United Kingdom. We have a board that is fully accountable for the day-to-day running of the governing body, which we run like a business.

We have been through a lot in the past three or four years, but I do not plan to dwell on that just now, although some of it is relevant to the growth in the game that we are achieving and how we are performing in the sport as well as how we are performing financially and commercially.

Gregor Townsend (Scottish Institute of Sport Foundation): Good morning. I grew up in Galashiels in the Borders. I played lots of sports when I was young. I was at primary school at a time when there were lots of teachers strikes, so there was no rugby then, but I played minirugby with Gala Rugby Football Club, which was my local club. I played football in Edinburgh, as well as cricket and golf, and I took part in athletics. When I was about 13 or 14 I decided to specialise in rugby, because I loved the game.

I went on to play for Scotland when I was 19. I came right through the school system, having played at all the levels. I went to university in Edinburgh, but after that and after playing for Gala, I decided to go down south. I was trying to make the most of my career, because the game was still amateur back then. I played three seasons at Northampton.

In my second season at Northampton the game turned professional, which changed everything. Suddenly, we could not do a job or a university course; we had to play full time because we were getting paid for it. In many ways, we were a lucky generation. I played alongside the likes of Gavin Hastings and David Sole, who never got paid for what they did for their country. However, we were also unlucky; we suddenly had to play 40 or 50 games a year and our bodies will probably pay for that in a few years' time.

After playing for Northampton, I played at stand-off for the British Lions in 1997 on the tour to South Africa. I really wanted to carry on playing at stand-off, but I was playing at centre for my club, so I decided to move to a club where I thought I would be able to play at stand-off—I played for Brive, who were the European champions. I ended up playing in France for five years. I also played two seasons in total in Australia. In 2004, I played in the super 12 competition in South Africa. Although I am much travelled, I came back to Scotland to finish my career with the Border Reivers. I have been retired for a year and am now working with the Scottish Institute of Sport Foundation. I am not sure whether you know about it, but we were set up two years ago by Sir Bill Gammell with the broad vision of changing the culture in Scotland to invest in programmes that will encourage kids to get into sport, to look at best practice from overseas and fund it in an effort to put the influence in sport not just on winning and losing but on education and health, and to support good programmes.

11:30

Kenny Murray (Culture and Sport Glasgow): Good morning. I have been involved in rugby for around 25 years as a player and coach as part of my profession and as a spectator and volunteer. I started taking part in sport when I was in primary school, but it was unstructured. It involved running around the streets playing football and kerby—some of you might remember that game. There was no rugby at primary school, but we played football on the school team.

I remember vividly PE at primary school where the teacher asked the children to imagine the gym hall as a boat. PE involved us all running to the bow, stern or starboard. That is my lasting memory of primary school PE. I cannot remember touching a ball, except a football when I was part of the school team. That is not a good memory of sport in primary school.

I was brought up in Pollok in Glasgow, on one of the peripheral housing estates. Either you got out

and got on with it, or you did not. I went to Crookston Castle secondary school where I first got involved with sport. I played lots of sports including rugby, football, volleyball and athletics. The main reason for that was the two PE teachers at the school, Ian Tomney and Stuart Frater, who were very motivated and ran many after-school clubs. They saw sport as a key part of a child's development.

Rugby was the sport that I liked and chose. I remember how I got involved with Cartha Queens Park Rugby Football Club, of which I am now a life member. As part of secondary 1 and S2 rugby, a club representative who was also an ex-pupil came down to the school and had a chat with us about going to the rugby club and getting involved. There was no coaching involved; it was just a chat with some of the players. The club laid on a minibus and from that Sunday I spent the rest of my playing and coaching career at Cartha Queens Park. I went down there as a 15-year-old when I was not particularly great at rugby and I did not play any representative rugby; the highest level I played at was club rugby, but I really enjoyed it. I was involved with Cartha from when I was a youth player. I played for the first XV for six or seven years before I became the head coach for the club for two or three years.

I am now coaching Ayr in premiership division 1, so I have moved up the leagues a bit. I thoroughly enjoyed and still enjoy my rugby career and, like the other guys, I have got a lot out of it.

Rhoda Grant: I will ask you the question that I asked the previous panel. How do we make sure that people from less well-off backgrounds are not excluded from sport, especially if they do not have parental encouragement to get involved? How do we make sport more attractive to girls? Are there any lessons from abroad that we could learn?

Colin Thomson: To me it is quite a simple process and one that many on the first panel mentioned. We sometimes make things too complicated. If we want all children to be exposed to sport, it has to start in primary and secondary schools. Such an approach has to be based on a long-term player development framework in which every child starts by learning physical literacy—the ABCs of athleticism, balance, co-ordination and speed—at primary school and is then given the opportunity to play a raft of team and individual sports at secondary school. If we want sport to be inclusive, it should start in our schools; after all, that is where all our children go.

Moreover, clubs and schools should establish good links and support networks to ensure that there is a clear pathway from the school to the club and that parents, for example, have a friendly face that they can contact at the club. Those things used to happen by accident, but we need to be clearer about what we are doing and to plan things. Of course, the best players will go on from there, but if you want mass participation and more people taking up sport, you need to start with physical literacy at school.

Kenny Murray: I agree with Colin Thomson that school sports are absolutely crucial to introducing kids to any kind of sport or physical activity. From my experience in Glasgow, I believe that we have to work more with local communities. Children and young people must be at the centre of decision making. Instead of telling children that they should take part in rugby, football or some other activity, we should discuss the options and give them the chance to decide what they want to do. That would play a major role in encouraging more people to take part in sport.

I know from how I got involved in rugby that we need to get the clubs into the schools. We should also use peer leadership. We were asked what we can learn from other countries. At last week's Commonwealth games conference, there were a number of presentations on how peer leadership is developing pathways into sport in Africa and the Caribbean. After taking courses, young people from various parts of the country in question go back to their communities to develop and deliver sport and to use it as a vehicle for delivering key messages about HIV and so on.

As has already been mentioned, parents and primary school teachers have the perception that rugby is a full-contact sport played by ugly people like Peter Wright. However, that is not the case, and we need to change that perception. When I was a development officer in Glasgow, I worked very closely with the Jordanhill primary school physical education teachers on changing the perception of rugby and, as a result, rugby was taken on in primary school. Changing the perception of our sport will definitely help to increase activity in primary schools.

Gregor Townsend: I agree with Kenny Murray and Colin Thomson. I certainly believe that we need to change the perception of rugby as a sport. When I was coaching in Dundee last year, I came across a 10-year-old who was the best player that I have ever seen at that age. He was brilliant at everything and listened to what the coaches were saying; however, when, at the end of the session, I asked his mum how long he had been playing rugby and whether the family had any background in the sport—I thought that perhaps her husband had played it—she said that her son had just taken it up. In fact, the kid had had to argue his way to the session; his mother did not want him to take up rugby because she thought it was too dangerous. She wanted him to take up trampolining or a similar activity instead.

That is the battle that we face. Rugby has been portrayed as an aggressive sport or as causing a lot of injuries, but it is great for girls and boys. Indeed, I know from the sessions that I have coached that girls love the athleticism involved and concentrate much better than boys. Of course, at that stage, no contact is involved. We have to promote the positive aspects of rugby, particularly through the media.

The Convener: You made Donna Kennedy smile when you said that girls concentrate better. I am sure that all the women on the committee agree with that comment.

Gregor Townsend: We could also use the summer months a lot better. I have been at winter sessions with the floodlights not working and the pitch so muddy that you can train only inside the 22. Compared with 10 or 20 years ago, kids now have more life choices and might simply choose not to go out on a dark and windy night. If we could use the summer months to play rugby and work on our rugby and coaching skills, more kids would get into the game.

My final point is that we need more coaches. It is great that the SRU is working with development officers in schools and linking up with clubs, because we always need to invest in coaches. People who have played the game need to be kept involved in the sport so that they can pass on that information.

Rhoda Grant: Kenny Murray mentioned people from communities who act almost as link officers or peer trainers within their communities. How are such folk selected and funded in other countries?

Kenny Murray: Obviously, countries in places such as Africa have many small communities that are, for want of a better phrase, out in the wilderness. Organisations such as the Caribbean health and sports partnership and the Mathare Youth Sports Association in Kenya work with small communities. That work involves identifying people in communities who have an interest in sport or are proactive in the community in another way and who are motivated to develop their community. Those people then go through appropriate training and education programmes that not only help them to deliver sport, but to move forward in whatever professional career they have chosen. In the African nations in particular, sport is used as a key vehicle for change and is sold in that way to the local community. Yes, people take part in sport, but they are offered so much more, such as information on how they should look after themselves and on key issues that affect community development, such as HIV.

The Convener: It might be helpful if we asked the Scottish Parliament information centre to provide us with more information from that Commonwealth games meeting on how people target deprived areas. That seems quite interesting.

Mary Scanlon: The previous panel of witnesses highlighted the bureaucracy of risk assessment and health and safety. Is the main reason for the present shortage of volunteers and coaches that we have become too bureaucratic? Is all the risk assessment, health and safety and disclosure form filling a disincentive to many people who would otherwise come forward? Is that a barrier to access?

Colin Thomson: Any information that I could give today would be purely anecdotal, but I know that sportscotland and Volunteer Development Scotland have carried out research that the committee could consider.

Volunteers are key. Perhaps 95 per cent of the people who are involved in rugby in Scotland are volunteers. They are the ones who will grow the game. We need to support them by considering how we tie together the Scottish governing bodies, the local authorities and the schools and active schools. The co-ordinated planning of that is key.

If I were a volunteer, I would think that there was too much bureaucracy. We say that we spend X amount on sport, but that has little impact on me when I take my bag of balls down to train a group of seven-year-olds. How does that bureaucracy help me? Collectively, the national governing bodies, local authorities and the Government need to make it easier for the volunteers who can make the sport grow.

Mary Scanlon: What needs to be done to make it easier for volunteers?

Colin Thomson: We should have one disclosure check for all involvement instead of checks by multiple agencies. That is a simple thing that is on-going—

The Convener: I think that that is under way.

Colin Thomson: Yes, that will happen, but it has taken years to change that.

We need recognition for volunteers in communities and by the clubs themselves. We need recognition from teachers, headteachers and local education authorities of the impact that school teams can have on the school community. We need recognition of the role that staff can play in those. If I were a young teacher today, I would not become involved in extra-curricular sport. I used to take extra-curricular sport because I knew that, as a result, the kids would behave during class time. Today, if I wanted to get ahead in education, I would go on this training course and that training course to get my headteacher's qualification. We are taking teachers away from children.

11:45

The Convener: Will you define what you mean by recognition?

Colin Thomson: A simple "thank you", or an offer of time off in acknowledgement of the role that a teacher is performing. If they turn out on a Saturday morning, for example, they could be allowed to go home early on a Friday.

Gregor Townsend: I back that up. I went to Galashiels academy, which is a state school. It produced two Scotland captains in the space of five years—first me, then Chris Paterson. After Chris left, the PE teacher who ran rugby sessions outwith school hours left to become a professional coach. Since then, the school has not had a team that plays week in, week out—it only has a team that plays in the Scottish schools cup. It is sad that there is no teacher to provide extra training or coaching outwith school hours; the bureaucracy means that that is very hard to do.

The Convener: Do you support recognition in the form of time off in lieu for teachers who get involved in such activity?

Gregor Townsend: Yes, but the timetable needs to be changed, too. There needs to be recognition that such work is an important part of the teacher's role and that pupils should be able to take part in after-school activities. We should make it easier for teachers to get out there and provide such activities.

Mary Scanlon: A point that I made to the previous panel—I am not sure whether you were in the room at the time—was that although we all get copies of inspection reports for the schools in our areas, I cannot remember ever reading an endorsement of how well a school was doing in providing access to physical activity. I know that such reports focus on the education agenda, but would you like schools' performance on access to sport to be measured and acknowledged in the same way that their performance on the three Rs is assessed?

Colin Thomson: Absolutely. Sport has the potential to bring a great deal to communities, especially school communities. I know that not every child will play in a team, but every child will get behind that team.

Peter Wright highlighted some of the qualities and the life skills that playing rugby can help to develop. It is not simply a question of producing players who will play at Murrayfield—only a very small percentage of players ever do that. It is about playing a role in society by developing future citizens. In that regard, I believe that team sport, and rugby, in particular, can play a huge part. We must talk up that role, which many good teachers are involved in delivering.

Last year in central Scotland we piloted the rugby champions scheme, which is about finding rugby champions in state schools, whether they work in PE, art or geography departments, and recognising the role that they play by giving them a T-shirt as a thank you for their input. Someone who has set up a team could be given a bag of balls as a reward. We will roll out initiatives to identify, recognise and reward such work nationwide next year.

The Convener: The question was about reports by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education on school inspections. Mary Scanlon made an interesting point. Do you agree that performance in providing access to physical activity should form part of school appraisals?

Colin Thomson: Yes.

Kenny Murray: I agree. In Glasgow, a key sports development initiative that we ran at the end of the year was a school of the year award, which went to a school that, as well as offering a variety of sports as part of the curriculum, involved volunteer coaches and parents in the delivery of after-school clubs. We made a big thing of that, which we used as a vehicle to promote the school; we also had a sports personality of the year award. I fully agree with Mary Scanlon's proposal.

Mary Scanlon: I have a second question—any excuse to ask Gregor Townsend a question.

The Convener: Oh! I can see that appearing in *Holyrood* magazine.

Mary Scanlon: We are talking about access to sport and support for elite sportspeople. I appreciate that you have been at the Scottish Institute of Sport Foundation for only a year, but from what you said it sounds as if everything is in place to support athletes at the elite end of the sport of rugby. Do you think that we have got it right at the institute and that the problem is more about access on the ground?

Gregor Townsend: That is a difficult one. School sport can be improved—it can be made more competitive. I have always thought that in Scotland it should be easier for people to come through the pathways because we can notice them much more quickly. Many people view it as a negative that far fewer people play the game here than do in England, but we should be able to spot talented players much more easily. It must be extremely difficult to choose an England schools team because so many school kids play rugby there; a lot of kids must fall by the wayside. The focus should be on identifying and developing pupils, and on making school sport, especially school rugby, more competitive. The Scottish schools cup is a great competition, but it would be great to see a league table, too.

I played school rugby, and we won the Scottish cup in my final year, but I also played club rugby at under-18 level for Gala Wanderers. That was a much tougher environment. We had a league table and we had to win games. The players might have been of similar quality compared with school rugby, but there was more pressure to perform, and that brought the best out of the best players. More focus on excellence would help.

Mary Scanlon: You have not mentioned the Scottish Institute of Sport; can we assume that you feel that you have got things right there?

Gregor Townsend: Gordon McKie will be able to explain the links with the Scottish Institute of Sport and the Scottish Institute of Sport Foundation. We are doing a lot of programmes with the SRU. Such programmes not only fill gaps, but take players, individually and collectively, on to another level.

Gordon McKie: Two key partners have been with us over the past three or four years. One of those has been sportscotland, which provides invaluable assistance with community participation at the grass roots. Sportscotland supports the co-funding of regional development manager positions, as well as those of performance development managers, as we call them. That is truly appreciated.

The Institute of Sport provides different forms of assistance—covering strength, fitness, conditioning, nutrition, lifestyle management and physiotherapy—to what we call our younger pathway or academy players, as well as to young professional players, who will become tomorrow's international players. The types of assistance are quite different, but that provision is invaluable for what we, as a governing body, are trying to do.

The Scottish Institute of Sport Foundation is a different body, which is starting to assist us with mentoring and coach development—which was picked up on earlier. Until three or four years ago, Scottish rugby had not had great stability. We now have a performance plan. Putting it in business speak, which Ross Finnie will relate to, it is like a succession plan. It covers coach development and seeks to identify the next generation of coaches.

We have been poor at retaining top players in the game. Many of them go on to do different things. We have never planned for the next generation of coaches who can stay back and help us to inspire young professional players to be like them, be that Chris Paterson or Jim Hamilton—although he is much too young to be thinking about coaching. On player development, it is a matter of asking who the next generation of players are, and who will take the kicks when Chris Paterson retires. Those matters are now falling into place.

We also have a strategic plan. It has four main pillars. First, how do we remain safe financially and commercially? Secondly, how do we govern our organisation? Thirdly, how do we perform? We have challenging targets for our elite, high-performance game. Fourthly, we have demanding community growth targets. That is extremely important for the future wellbeing of Scottish rugby.

Dr Simpson: My question follows on quite well from that. We have heard that volunteers, teachers and coaches are important at all levels for bringing people on in the game and preventing them from getting into bad habits at the outset. Can you tell us a bit about the structures? We have heard about the bureaucracy and the difficulties with volunteers, and I do not want to go back over that, but what are your coaching structures? How do you get people to teach the game properly at all levels? How do you bring them in? What is your development programme? I am not just talking about the top level; how are you developing coaching right down the line? What are the barriers that prevent you from proceeding with that more quickly?

Colin Thomson: We have put in place a club development officer structure. We now have 56 guys working with groups of clubs or individual clubs, and we have to upskill them. Those officers are supported by a regional development manger network, to which Gordon McKie referred. They work with clubs on growth. If growth is required, it has to be identified how many coaches, referees and volunteers are needed. There are regional and local action plans. For example, at Stirling County, the work of the development officer becomes far more focused and co-ordinated with respect to the needs of growth. We upskill the club development officer so that he is able to run a foundation course—the first-level entry course—and a refereeing course. So a dad or mum who comes along is encouraged to help. Very quickly, he or she can be educated and supported locally through the club development officer network.

Above that, we have spent a lot of time, over the past two or three years, in developing our workforce to United Kingdom coaching certificate level 1. We are now extending those courses. We had 400 people through them last year and we aim to get 600 people through them next year. We will then progress them to level 2. That is delivered according to a local needs analysis, which is worked through by the regional development manager and the performance development manager.

The past couple of years have been pretty slow as the UKCC has come into play. Now, we have developed our workforce and have a team of development officers who we must upskill so that

we can deliver for the volunteers more quickly, easily and locally, to make their job easier.

Dr Simpson: My other question is the one that I asked earlier about getting people into the sport. We have heard a lot about the image of the sport—an inappropriate image—in terms of injury. Some of us who played creak a bit, but most of us get through it okay. I asked the earlier panel about the contribution that might be made by sevens, touch and minirugby. How might those be advertised and slotted into the central game?

Colin Thomson: I apologise for hogging the conversation.

The Convener: Not at all.

Colin Thomson: We have a partnership with the Scottish Touch Association and have worked with it over the past year. Touch rugby is a huge growth area for us. I run a touch rugby team down in Peebles and games are great social events. Touch rugby keeps people involved in the sport, and people who have not been involved in rugby before also come along. Peter Wright talked about Scottish touch rugby getting bigger; that is the way in which we need to go. We must encourage clubs to run touch rugby tournaments to generate income and as social events—that is a massive side to the game.

When we talk about our growth figures, we are talking about people who play contact rugby week in, week out. For us to get those figures, the development team must expose thousands of children to touch rugby, tag rugby and new image rugby—the modified versions of the sport.

The Convener: Excuse my complete ignorance, but what are the differences between those? I thought that I understood touch rugby, but you mentioned tag rugby.

Colin Thomson: They are all variations on a theme. Touch rugby is more akin to rugby league, in which play stops.

The Convener: Players are not allowed to hold each other down.

Colin Thomson: Correct. New image rugby is more akin to the full version. Once a player is touched, they can still run forward for three steps and pass the ball. In tag rugby, players wear tags on their hips. To make a tackle, a player must pull the tag off the person they are tackling. That is usually played in S2, S1 and P7. Those are innovative ways in which to get children engaged with rugby before taking them through the pathways to their local clubs.

We have gone a long way, but we must go further. We must encourage all our clubs to get involved. In conjunction with the IRB, we have launched rugby ready, to which there is a link on our website. It is an online educational resource that anyone can use, which details best practice in safety during playing sessions. We are acutely aware that we need to get our coaches thinking about that all the time.

Kenny Murray: I agree fully with Richard Simpson about the ways in which variations of the sport can help to promote the game. However, that touches on the issue of whether we have enough pathways to increase participation in rugby. We talk about sport in schools and clubs but, for rugby and for other sports, we perhaps need to think outside the box a bit and open up other pathway opportunities for children to participate in rugby. For example, we could work with the Boys Brigade and the scouts. In women's rugby, we could work with organisations such as the Girls Brigade. That may be the only way in which we will get kids in the local communities to take part in physical activity and sport. We could do a lot better in Scottish sport—certainly in Scottish rugby—in opening up new doors. However, with the 56 club development officers, we will see opportunities for that over the next two years.

Gregor Townsend: One area that we have not touched on—I do not know whether the first panel touched on it—is inspiring kids to play through television coverage. I was brought up with "Rugby Special" on Sundays, on which I could watch the Scotland game and games from England. That has drifted away. The BBC no longer has much involvement in our club game or in promoting rugby. It argues that the demand is not there, but it has to create the demand. There is more demand for rugby than there has ever been. Kids love it—they come to Murrayfield and they watch internationals. If rugby was shown on television more regularly, that would bring other people into the sport.

The Convener: In fairness, Donna Kennedy mentioned negative publicity as well as inspirational publicity. When things are going well for international teams and so on, all is fine, but when it is not, it is a different matter. However, that is the press for you. Politicians know that better than anyone else.

12:00

Dr Simpson: There is an interesting comparison with Wales. People have to watch the Scottish professional teams playing Welsh teams on BBC 2 Wales. Okay, people can do that, but I entirely agree that we need more rugby on television. Perhaps it can be shown on community channels and so on, but in any case we need to develop the television coverage, because it encourages people enormously.

Gordon McKie: I do not wish to get on my soapbox, but everyone knows that our Argentina games were not shown live on any type of television. It would be good to let the games be seen by kids because that would help us to promote the game, but the matter goes much wider than that. Getting six slots a year for the six nations games and the autumn tests is insufficient. People want to watch sport and they want to watch rugby. We had a Scotsport pilot on STV last year, but it will probably die a death. If I could leave one point for the committee to consider, it would be that broadcasting coverage in Scotland—not just of rugby but of sport in general—needs to be addressed.

Ross Finnie: I return to the point about getting people into sport. I would like to hear your views on the balance between the running of professional sport and amateur entry into sport.

Gordon McKie made much of the benefits to the SRU of integration, saying that, nowadays, you would get your hands on Gregor Townsend at a much earlier age and he would not be allowed to move anywhere. You would control him. However, I wonder about the enthusiastic amateurs who are vital at the club level but do not necessarily share our ambition for Scotland permanently to win the world cup and the six nations. They do not necessarily regard themselves as working for the SRU, so they do not get excited by the plans constantly to develop players. They might be old-fashioned or they might just have come along to their local club to help it because they want people to be brought into the sport and they want people to be excited and enthusiastic about it.

How do you overcome the conflict between the understandable professional desire to channel the best players and the position of amateurs who are interested but are not as devoted to that? That conflict might have a bearing on the likelihood that people in general will get into the sport, because it might become too structured too quickly.

Gordon McKie: There are two answers to that. First, as I mentioned, we have a strategic plan, and I cannot stress enough that every pillar is equally important. It is critical to the targets that we have set that we grow the game in schools and clubs and have pathways that link the two. Without growth in the domestic game, Scottish rugby might become less important to Scotland as a whole. For example, there might be an effect on our ability to encourage strong kids, a safe and healthy environment, and so on.

Secondly, we are trying to improve the content and frequency of communication between the governing body and its multiple stakeholders. We are trying to engage with clubs and stakeholders more frequently to make them feel that they are a part of Scottish rugby. Our clubs create many things, including improved facilities. I am happy to report that one reason why we moved the Canada game to Aberdeen is that Aberdeen City Council has embraced the principle of partnership. It did not just give us a wad of money. We do not want the money. We want collaboration, and the council opened the door, let us access the kids and, importantly, improved the facilities in the north-east of Scotland. One of the problems that I encounter when I do my roadshows is that the facilities are no good. We can explain to our clubs that we are taking the Canada game to Aberdeen because we are trying to help.

Also, Scottish rugby is now—dare I say it—financially robust. As a result, we are increasing investment, not only in what we call the club development officer positions—more of that will follow today—but in financial assistance to the clubs. That will allow the clubs to improve their lot—in terms of facilities, equipment or engagement of club development officers—and help them to become much more visible in their communities.

There are, therefore, two parts to the answer. It is important that we grow our strategic plan; it is also important that we ensure that communication is much more frequent and structured, and that our clubs and our various stakeholders—not just players and coaches—believe that they are an integral part of Scottish rugby as a whole, including the national team. If we have a successful national team, we generate much more money, which ultimately benefits all of Scottish rugby.

Gregor Townsend: On top of that, I think that clubs have to take individual responsibility. When the game was amateur, the clubs probably got the majority of the cake, but with the realities of professional rugby they get less. The more successful clubs are those that are taking the responsibility of growing the game themselves, in conjunction with the SRU, but which are not looking for handouts. They are considering innovative things such as sevens competitions, of which there are now a lot more outside the Borders. Peebles rugby club runs a very good sevens competition in the Borders. It has taken clubs a while to wake up to that.

My own club, Gala, has been poor over the past 10 years. Having been champions in the 80s, perhaps the club became a bit complacent. Only now has it got a veterans team, which means that people get to stay in the sport. The club also runs touch rugby on Thursday nights. If people who have retired from the game stay in the sport, they can help out with the coaching. The change has taken a while. Professionalism came as a shock to a lot of the clubs, which have realised that they have to consider other ways of getting people in.

The successful clubs now are not those that win the league, but those that have got great youth systems, veterans teams and events such as sevens competitions.

Ross Finnie: I was fascinated by the issue that Colin Thomson mentioned concerning schools, and general physical literacy at an early age. We have heard conflicting evidence, including evidence from a generation of PE teachers who do not believe that it is their job to be specific about which sport someone goes into, and who would prefer to simply work on the physical literacy end. Were you suggesting that that should happen more in primary schools? Others might want to comment on that.

It is a matter of generating interest in physical activity. In the evidence that we have heard, there is quite a consensus that if that is done early on, the chances of getting someone to go into a sport are better. Were you talking about primary level? I understand that it is very unstructured. At what point would you try to influence people?

Peter Wright suggested that rugby should be mandatory. I think that we would all agree with that, but I am not sure that we would necessarily bring it about. How do you achieve a balance between getting people interested in physical activity and having people who will promote a team sport, if I can call it that?

Colin Thomson: Research into long-term player development, as it is called, shows that the right time to learn physical literacy is at an early age. There is a categorisation of sports into early specialisation sports, such as gymnastics and swimming, and late specialisation sports—team sports such as football, hockey and basketball. For late specialisation sports, people learn in their primary years how to equip themselves with the physical attributes to be able to be successful, to stay in the sport and to enjoy it. They learn how to run, and how to throw and catch; they learn athletics and gymnastics, which are the mother of all activities. All children should be doing those.

If we want children to stay in sport, we need co-ordinated early years physical literacy development. A lot of children—especially girls—drop out of sport because someone in a PE lesson in secondary school throws them a basketball or a netball, which they have never been taught how to catch. It is about perception—they do not want to fail, so they drop out. They do not want to put themselves in that situation. If people are taught how to catch—whether it is a rugby ball, a basketball, or a football does not matter—they can take up and enjoy sport rather than avoiding it. There is a lot of research on that—Edinburgh university has done a fair bit—which we need to examine.

Thereafter, sport must get organised and offer opportunities and pathways in a co-ordinated way so that people can choose their sport, just as Peter Wright, Gregor Townsend and I chose rugby. I chose rugby because the opportunities were there and I really enjoyed it, although I could have chosen to do other sports.

Ross Finnie: You suggest that there should be a fundamental change at primary school level.

Colin Thomson: That is where physical literacy must come in. By the time that kids reach their teenage years, it is too late.

The Convener: Are you saying that there should be general physical literacy in primary schools but not specialisation, such as Peter Wright taking up rugby at the age of six? You are not looking for children to be able to do that.

Colin Thomson: The balance was there for Peter because he was doing an awful lot of other sports. The rugby was part of an ad hoc physical literacy because he was out doing so many sports, as was Donna Kennedy, picking them up almost by accident. However, there was more PE in schools in those days. We must get back to that situation and provide support for curricular and extra-curricular activity. Children pick up physical literacy when they are of primary school age.

The Convener: I was distracted by thinking about how I gave up hockey when I realised that people would hit you on the shin with the stick. Nobody had prepared me for that. Perhaps if I had had some physical literacy on that, I would have stuck it out.

Colin Thomson: Or if you had had shin pads.

The Convener: Exactly.

Ross Finnie: Does Kenny Murray think that the structure that Colin Thomson talked about would be easier to integrate where he is?

Kenny Murray: Yes. It is fundamental that we give children opportunities in primary school. I did not get those opportunities when I was in primary school. We played the boat game in the hall, as I said, running between the stern, the bow and the starboard. We need to give children in primary schools opportunities. For me, that is where physical literacy will come from: playing some football and rugby, and doing some gymnastics and athletics. Certainly, in sports development in our local authority, part of our role is to work with key partners and deliverers to ensure that primary schools get the opportunity to offer their pupils the various types of activity that I mentioned. I suppose the key is that when they take part in the activities, there is a pathway there for them to move into.

I worked as a development officer in Glasgow city for nine years before I moved forward to be regional manager. We deliver a lot of rugby in primary schools, and the teachers, children and parents have embraced it. However, when the children go to secondary school, there is no rugby teacher and not the same motivation, so there is no opportunity. That is changing, though.

In Glasgow city, we now have three club development officers: one for Glasgow Hawks, one for Cartha Queens Park Rugby Football Club and one for Hillhead Jordanhill RFC. Those three club development officers help to promote and deliver rugby in primary schools, but they also work closely with the secondary schools to inform, educate and support teachers. In many ways, the teachers are not delivering the rugby; the club staff and volunteers help to deliver the rugby. However, the teachers play a key role in promoting rugby in school and getting the kids along to the gym hall when they need to be there during or after school. We hope that the next step is that teachers will get involved in some sort of coaching.

Michael Matheson: On the links between community clubs and schools, it is fair to say that rugby is probably at a more advanced stage in that area than many other sports are. I suspect that that is largely because of the work that the SRU has undertaken in recent years. However, concerns have been raised about funding for the posts that help to facilitate the development of links with schools, whether it be the active schools co-ordinators or the development officers in the different governing bodies. What is your view on that? Are uncertainties being created because of funding problems for such posts, which appear to be crucial in developing links between schools and clubs?

The Convener: Does somebody other than Colin Thomson want to respond first, so that he does not feel embarrassed at always being first to the starting post?

Kenny Murray: Club development officers will play a crucial role for our strategic plan for where we want to go and how we will get there. I was a development officer in Glasgow city nine years ago, when the maximum number of development officers that we had in Scotland was about 30. The news yesterday was that we are up to 56 development officers, so the number has increased massively.

There is always an issue with funding. The big step forward, which Gregor Townsend highlighted, is that the clubs, working in partnership with the governing body, local authorities and voluntary agencies, are taking a leading role in getting funding. In Argyll and Bute, we put together quite a unique funding partnership. The governing body, the local authority, five local rugby clubs and a voluntary organisation all contributed to funding a post for three years. Ten years ago, such a partnership would not have happened—various people would never have taken part. People think that there is no money out there, but with regional managers in post and the staff in place to access the funding, I am not sure that that will be a problem, certainly in the short term and even in the next five or six years. The idea of clubs getting funding from key partners that they have never worked with before is really being promoted.

12:15

Gordon McKie: The strategy is working, and the game is growing at youth and adult level. One of the reasons for that is that the club development officers are out in the very heart of the community, working in partnership. We have a fundamental duty to support the position of CDO. I cannot give guarantees—no one can—but I can state categorically that we are committed to those positions and to increasing their number in the future. They are growing the game.

Colin Thomson will talk about the active schools co-ordinators, which I think is a different position.

Colin Thomson: The active schools co-ordinator and the club development officer, managed by the regional development manager, deliver an agreed action plan at local level. Together with the partnerships with clubs, that is what makes the strategy work. The cashback for communities that the Government so generously gave us is helping us to sustain those posts, to create new posts and to push back the boundaries of rugby. We can say to our existing posts, "With this additional money, we want you to go into that area, that area and that area"—areas where rugby has never been before. In the east end of Glasgow, where there is no rugby club, we can put in a development officer to link with the community safety partnerships and get something going. That is how we are using the funding from the Scottish Government's cashback for communities scheme. The great job that the clubs and the volunteers in the clubs have done to raise funding should not be underestimated. What we are seeing is local authorities coming on board with that scheme, too. Given a fair wind, the funding will hopefully be secure.

Michael Matheson: That is helpful.

Falkirk Rugby Club in my constituency is not a big club, but on a Saturday between 130 and 150 kids are out playing and training. That is largely due to a change in the way in which those who run the club are pushing the club; it is also a result of support from the SRU. My first question to the previous panel regarded a big area of concern for us—you have touched on it, too—which is the

inhibitors to pathways into sport at a young age and right through to the elite end. What are those inhibitors and what could be done to address them?

Kenny Murray: One of the issues is culture. When I was first asked to appear in front of the committee, I thought about how I got involved in sport and the things that I did when I was young to take part in sport. When I was at Cartha Queens Park RFC, there was no bus to take me from my house to the rugby club on a Sunday and my parents did not have a car. There was only one way to get there, which was to walk. That is what I did and it is what many people used to do—committee members may have done that to take part in sport and physical activity. The culture has changed. Young people might not want to walk because of territorialism—they are scared to walk through certain areas—or because they have access to their parents' cars. If they do not get the car one day, they may decide not to walk. Young people's attitude to physical activity has changed. We have to overcome that in order to move forward with increasing opportunities and pathways.

Gregor Townsend: The major inhibitor is facilities. As I mentioned, rugby is a winter sport—it takes place in December, January and February. It would be great to do indoor sessions, but we need more indoor facilities. We also need more artificial turf, because for three or four months of the year we are running about in mud. Schools are not too happy to have mud traipsed through the corridors. More artificial, third-generation turf would get more people out there, even if it is windy and rainy, which it is for most of the winter.

The Convener: I remember from my school teaching days that there would be muddy children sitting in English lessons.

Gordon McKie: For me, the inhibitor is to do with facilities. In many ways, we are privileged because we have many clubs with which we can collaborate to try to create the conduit from the school to the club to play rugby. However, facilities—not just grass based, but all-weather surfaces—are a big issue for our sport. We are talking to one or two local authorities about that and have shown our willingness to invest in a 4G pitch. In return, we get access and the ability to train and prepare properly. We are also considering the possibility of a 4G pitch here at Murrayfield.

The Convener: I have to ask what a 4G pitch is.

Gordon McKie: It is an all-weather synthetic pitch—it is not grass based.

The Convener: Fine. Some of us have to learn on the job.

Gregor Townsend: It is different from the Astroturf that is used for hockey—it looks like grass and players can run about with studs on.

The Convener: We have some sports experts, such as Michael Matheson, but some of us learn as we go.

Michael Matheson: A limited 4G pitch is to be installed in Falkirk, through funding from sportscotland that was announced the other week.

The Convener: Incidentally, that was the MSP for Falkirk speaking.

Colin Thomson: The inhibitors are to do with facilities. I question the power of the janny in schools throughout Scotland in relation to access to facilities. In sport in general, janitors seem to rule the roost. We may have enough indoor facilities, although we need to consider whether we need more 3G or 4G pitches. However, there is no national strategy for co-ordinated facility development that ties in local authorities and national governing bodies. That is one big inhibitor.

Another inhibitor, which we have already covered, concerns inclusive access to sport in schools. The present system can be a big barrier. We must consider other ways of allowing people to access sport. As Kenny Murray suggested, we need to take rugby away from the clubs to satellite centres where we do not have rugby at present.

Ian McKee: I will follow up on Ross Finnie's first question and be a little bit of a devil's advocate. I understand that the way in which the sport is organised brings people to their peak for international rugby and representative sport. However, Peter Wright told us in evidence that, of all the people with whom he played, only three or four are still in the game. They have done their job and have moved on to another job. Gregor Townsend said that, since the sport has become professional, players play about 50 games a year, which really takes it out of them. I can look back to what was probably a mythical golden age when I played club rugby as a proud member of my club's fourth team. We were proud of our top players, who stayed with the club all their lives and were an inspiration. In those days, Gregor would have been at Gala all his life. I wonder whether the same inspiration was provided when he went to Northampton and Brive. In trying to achieve success, have we taken a bit of fun out of the game and a bit of the comradeship at the club level for the sake of professionalism and doing well at international level? Have we lost something, as well as gained something?

Gregor Townsend: I agree with that. Professionalism has created two sports. One is the social aspect, for people who are at a club. No international player now plays for a club—they

play for one of our two professional clubs or elsewhere. In the past, players always had the intention to give something back. They still do that and there is a lot of good will, but we need more of a spirit of openness. Hardly any of the people with whom I played in 1999, when we won the last-ever five nations, or from 1990 are involved directly in the game. That may be because they have other commitments or because things have changed. We need to get back the culture that if somebody has come through a club or Scottish rugby, they remain involved in some way. That might mean not coaching a team, but just being at games or being involved with the youth section. We need to promote that culture a bit better.

Gordon McKie: Henry Edwards looks after our coach development activities, and is trying to build closer bridges to all the clubs, particularly the premier 1, 2 and 3 clubs, which are participating for more than fun; they are doing it to win. We are trying to get those guys better trained and better coached so that, ultimately, they can be considered for employment in the SRU.

At the other end of the spectrum, I am afraid that professionalism is here to stay. If we are not running a successful international team, we will lose revenue, which will ultimately be to the detriment of our primary objective, which is to grow, develop and govern the game of rugby in Scotland, because we are a governing body.

We are much more hands on with regard to things such as human resource practices. Donny McFadden, for example, has given up the game, and we will try to turn him into a strength, fitness and conditioning guy. Other people are being considered for coaching roles when they retire. We want to keep them in the game and use them as role models, which will help the growth of the game.

We are aware of your point, which is valid.

Helen Eadie: Unlike the convener, I loved hockey, but I never got a chance to play in the position that I really wanted to play in. I felt really sad about that, and did not get the training opportunities that have been described.

Colin Thomson talked about children making more use of the facilities in the summer, when there is better weather and the days are longer. What could we do to use our facilities in that way? That point reminded me of something that I read about last week—Scandinavia has something called nature kindergarten, which involves getting children out into the fresh air and allowing them to be much more active and healthy. Could we follow the example of countries that have summer camps? Kenny Murray made a point about the scouts and similar organisations. How can we rejig the activities to ensure that they are focused on the summer months rather than the winter months? Would such a move be feasible?

Colin Thomson: The problem with focusing on the months in which the weather is better, especially during the habit-forming years when people are 14 to 17 or so, is that that is when we are telling kids to stay inside and revise for exams. We should think about when we are examining children academically. Over the past five years, April and May have had the best weather, and June and July have been worse. We want kids to be outside running about at that time of year, but we cannot do it because we are forcing them into exams. That is my personal hobbyhorse. Why do we tell children to stay inside and revise for exams at the best time of year for them to be outside?

Senior kids could be outside, coaching primary school kids and so on, and getting involved in summer camps. Our club development officers run a network of activities during the summer, which tie in to local authorities and the clubs.

We should consider more of those models, but one of the blocks to that happening is the problem that I outlined. Between the ages of 14 to 17, youngsters make up their minds about what they are going to do. If we want them to be outside and active during the better weather, why do we have exams then?

Helen Eadie: The school gates are closed for six or eight weeks in the summer, when the kids could be running about.

Colin Thomson: Exactly. The school estate could be used for many sporting activities. As was said, we are lucky, because rugby clubs have their own facilities. However, many sports are not in that position, and rely on school facilities, which are in the power of the janny.

A lot of good things have happened in recent years, such as the active schools initiative and walking buses. However, more needs to be done, and it has to happen naturally. As Kenny Murray said, we must change the culture radically.

12:30

Kenny Murray: I echo Colin Thomson's point. In Glasgow, there are summer camps that take place in schools. We also have 12 community clubs in various secondary schools around the city that have full summer programmes. However, the activities in those camps and clubs are probably prescribed. Will a child turn up to a school if they are going to be told what to do and what is happening, given that they have the option of disappearing from the school environment for six weeks? I think that it is important to involve the children in the decision-making process.

Rugby clubs play a big role in the running of rugby camps and programmes. We should be working with other sports so that, rather than having a rugby camp, we can have multisport camps that will let a child take part in rugby, football and whatever else for the two weeks or so that they are there. That would help their physical literacy and sporting skills, and give them more options. People in the various sports might not be too good at working together at the moment, but, if we have the proper infrastructure in place, we will get better at it and make some achievements.

The Convener: We should bring the session to an end, as we have overrun slightly. I should say that, for Colin Thomson's sake, I hope that he is not ambushed by jannies outside the committee room. If he is, I am sure that his rugby skills will come into play.

My final question concerns something that has intrigued me since Mr Townsend mentioned it. What happened to the 10-year-old who showed promise? Did you persuade his mother?

Gregor Townsend: I hope so. I said to her that he had the ability that coaches look for and that, when we said "Try and run past these people and pass the ball", he did that. Maybe that switched on the light in her head. She said that he is doing things on his own, and is always out there practising. As everyone knows, that shows that he wants to get better. Hopefully, he is still training.

I have his name in mind, so I will see him in the Dundee under-16s if he keeps it up.

The Convener: He is displaying the determination that you have all shown in the pursuit of your sports—I am thinking of Donna Kennedy walking to her training.

I thank our witnesses for their evidence, which will help us in our inquiry. Certain issues that are rising to the surface are extremely interesting—we might have to get the janitors in front of us.

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener: Does the committee agree to consider in private drafts of our interim report on pathways into sport at future meetings, in line with common practice?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: We will see the draft interim report following the summer recess.

Meeting closed at 12:32.

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