

PROCEDURES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 20 November 2001
(*Morning*)

Session 1

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11th Meeting 2001, Session 1

CONVENER

*Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)

*Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD)

*Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP)

*Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)

*Mr Gil Paterson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED :

Paul Grice (Clerk and Chief Executive, Scottish Parliament)

Professor David McCrone (Adviser)

Shona Simon (Scottish Parliament Office of the Chief Clerk/Chief Executive and Presiding Officer)

WITNESSES

Des McNulty MSP (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body)

Sir David Steel MSP (Presiding Officer)

Mr Andrew Welsh MSP (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

John Patterson

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Mark MacPherson

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Procedures Committee

Tuesday 20 November 2001

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 09:30*]

Consultative Steering Group Principles Inquiry

The Convener (Mr Murray Tosh): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I have received an apology for lateness from Frank McAveety, whom we expect to arrive shortly.

This morning we will hear from the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body and from the Presiding Officer. I will hand over to Andrew Welsh. Andrew, are you going to lead off?

Mr Andrew Welsh MSP (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): No. Des McNulty will lead.

The Convener: I thought that you were more important, Andrew, because you are sitting in the middle—I should have known better.

I invite Des McNulty to introduce his team. We will listen to your opening statement and take the discussion from there.

Des McNulty MSP (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): I thank the committee for the opportunity to give evidence.

My colleagues are Andrew Welsh, who is a fellow member of the corporate body, Paul Grice, who is the Parliament's clerk and chief executive, Huw Williams, who is from our secretariat, and Shona Simon, who is responsible for the preparation of the equalities framework.

It might be useful if I explain the role of the corporate body at the start. The corporate body was set up under the Scotland Act 1998 to provide the Parliament with the property, staff and services that it requires for its purposes. In addition to Andrew Welsh and me, the other members of the corporate body are Sir David Steel—who chairs the group—Robert Brown and John Young. We were elected as individuals and when we sit as the SPCB, or when we represent the SPCB, we do so on a non-party basis.

We usually meet weekly to consider a wide range of issues that might include monitoring the operation of the allowances scheme, provision of information technology, consideration of

employment matters and provision of catering facilities at the Holyrood complex. Over the next few months, we will be heavily involved in planning for the next Parliament. That work will of course include planning the migration of all services to the new building. We have already submitted detailed written comments to the Procedures Committee's inquiry and, with Andrew Welsh, I want to highlight some of our submission's main points.

We recognise that there are difficulties in creating mechanisms for effective involvement of the public in sharing power with elected politicians. Political parties, with their manifestos and electoral mandates, are at the core of our democratic system. Although none of our political parties has a parliamentary majority, there is no doubt that party politics and party affiliation shape both Government and Opposition. Nearly all MSPs are members of political parties and the political parties organise voting on the motions that are discussed in the chamber. That being the case, it would not be possible for non-MSPs—with the occasional exception of the law officers—to participate directly in the proceedings of the Parliament.

Members are accountable through the ballot box to the people whom they represent and they have loyalties to their respective political parties. Each of us also has a responsibility to the Parliament. Those loyalties and responsibilities play out in different ways, according to individuals and issues. It is our view that, to some extent, the pattern of operation and the standing orders of the Parliament can affect the balance between those different interests. Therefore we feel that during the course of the inquiry, the Procedures Committee might wish to consider whether the correct balance has been struck between legitimate party interests and other responsibilities. The committee might also wish to consider whether and how back-bench MSPs might have more input and a stronger voice. Members of the corporate body have discussed that issue briefly and suggest that occasional slots could be allocated to back-bench motions, which could be debated and voted on. We emphasise that any radical change might have a significant impact on the support services that are required.

The corporate body welcomes the progress that has been made in areas such as pre-legislative scrutiny of legislation, innovative use of the committees and the involvement of young people in the Parliament. As the legal provider of services to the Parliament, the SPCB believes that it has played a significant role in supporting those developments. We will continue to support members of the Parliament in carrying out their functions and in developing better mechanisms for increasing public participation and engagement.

I hand over to Andrew Welsh, who will talk about accountability.

Mr Welsh: It might be useful if I start by saying what we do not want: we do not want a Parliament that is remote, incomprehensible, uncommunicative, introverted and unfriendly. Our Parliament belongs not to the MSPs but to all the people of Scotland, whom we serve. We must work positively to earn their trust and respect.

The corporate body's task is to provide the resources to ensure the smooth and efficient working of Parliament and to communicate that to the people of Scotland. How do we make our Parliament accountable, open and accessible and create a living partnership with the people whom we serve? That is another task for the corporate body.

In relation to accountability, we understand that there is poor understanding of the distinction between Parliament and Executive—we are concerned about that. That division of powers is fundamental to our democracy. People can see clearly that there is a separate judiciary, but the distinction between the Executive and the legislature is not as clear to the Scottish people. That can be seen from the misuse of the word Holyrood, which has become a broad-brush term that covers everything that is connected to the Parliament. The media have failed to distinguish clearly between Executive and Parliament and have created what I believe to be unnecessary and misleading confusion in the public mind. The corporate body has tried to counter that misconception through staff presentations and talks about Parliament to a wide range of groups and organisations throughout Scotland. We believe that the Parliament-versus-Executive problem is continuing and that it creates genuine confusion in the public mind. I hope that that problem will be sorted out soon.

The Parliament's budget is scrutinised separately and in advance of the Executive's proposals, and all that scrutiny is conducted in public. In fact, our colleague Robert Brown and officials met the Finance Committee last week. The corporate body's budget is openly available and we also publish accounts and information about members' allowances and expenses. That is not done in Westminster and is a proper innovation. It is absolutely correct that there is maximum openness about all aspects of public finance and the corporate body's budget.

On the principles of accessibility and openness, the corporate body took a conscious decision to publish minutes of our meetings and to make those minutes as widely available as possible. Much of our work necessarily involves confidentiality, but wherever possible we try to be as open and as informative as we can be.

On accessibility, Parliament really tries to reach out to the people of Scotland. We are not Edinburgh's Parliament—we are always Scotland's Parliament. Work continues on civic participation and on how to promote the widest possible interaction with the communities of Scotland. That is a long-term process—we have only just begun that important journey.

The corporate body is developing a communications strategy not only to promote Parliament in the media, but to try to find as many other ways as possible of allowing Parliament and people to communicate and interact. Significant and innovative progress has already been made, some of which has involved the use of the latest technology. Parliament's website has received praise for its clarity and currency and for the breadth of its information service. The corporate body recently updated the website and is looking at improving accessibility, for example for disabled users.

We have excellent videoconferencing facilities and the corporate body hopes that there will be even greater use of those facilities to improve outreach to the rest of Scotland, especially by the Parliament's committees. Our webcasting service broadcasts our committee meetings and meetings of the Parliament not only in Scotland, but around the world. The House of Commons Broadcasting Committee produced a report last year that was particularly complimentary about our webcasting facility and its pioneering work. Scotland has a world leader in its Parliament. We are the only Parliament to broadcast on broadband over the web, providing television-quality pictures on computer screens.

The corporate body realises that not everyone is a techie or has access to a computer. We have provided a free inquiry telephone number to encourage the public to contact their Parliament. That service is used heavily and informs the public about how they can visit Parliament and about the parliamentary business that they can see when they visit us. As far as I know, there is no equivalent service at Westminster, where visitors are officially described as "strangers". We have no such hang-ups in Scotland. In our democracy, all are equally welcome to our Parliament.

The corporate body has set up partner libraries in every constituency in Scotland, which carry hard copies of all parliamentary publications. We also train library staff to understand Parliament and to answer inquiries from the general public. Some partner libraries even have webcam facilities that allow people to watch parliamentary proceedings as they happen.

Those are some examples of the ways in which the corporate body has tried, through the use of old and new technology, to ensure that our

Parliament and Scotland's people can establish contact and mutual understanding as part of a living and vibrant democratic system.

Des McNulty: The theme of the committee's inquiry is the CSG principles. Another example of a way in which we have tried to enhance accessibility is the education service, which has done a terrific job and has received lots of praise for involving young people and teachers in the Parliament. It undertakes considerable amounts of work through an extensive visits programme. About 10,000 children have used the service that is offered by our education team. We understand that our model is being adopted down in Wales and in Westminster.

As well as enhancing accessibility and being accountable in the way that Andrew Welsh has mentioned, the SPCB's prime function is to take responsibility for the services that are provided to the Parliament. That means that we are responsible for the staff who work here. Knowing that the alteration of parliamentary sitting hours might come under consideration, we want to emphasise that any such changes could pose considerable additional demands on staff. The work of many offices, such as the facilities management office, is probably unseen by members, but that work is directly related to the current sitting arrangements. That office is already exceptionally busy and will become more so as it takes responsibility for aspects of the move to Holyrood. If changes were made to sitting hours or other working arrangements, both staff and members would be affected. The SPCB would want staff's concerns and interests to be taken into account in the deliberations.

In our written evidence, we submitted a copy of the draft equalities framework, which we consider to be one of the most comprehensive of its kind in the public sector. We hope that the Equal Opportunities Committee will consider it in due course. We hope that the framework, which will place the Parliament at the forefront of good practice, will be further enhanced by the appointment of an equalities officer, which will be made shortly.

The equalities framework focuses on the SPCB as an employer and as a provider of services to the public. The framework provides guidance to members on their role as employers and service providers. Among other things, the framework will adopt a code of good practice for members on the employment of people who have disabilities. In due course, the corporate body will provide guidance to members on their legal obligations and on good practice in employment and service delivery. We try to provide people with a comprehensive service that is geared toward good practice so that, throughout the Parliament, people

can identify that the Parliament is a model employer and service provider.

I am happy to answer any questions on the details of our written and oral evidence—or, indeed, on anything else.

The Convener: I can probably guarantee that questions will be on anything else. I introduce Professor David McCrone, who is the committee's adviser for the inquiry. He will participate in the discussion as and when he wishes. Our clerks have developed a considerable volume of lines of questioning, which might not all be covered. We might therefore seek more written evidence from the SPCB later.

We have not farmed out questions. Members are not restricted to asking the clerks' suggested questions; they will have identified issues that they want to pursue. We will have a free discussion for the next three quarters of an hour.

I will start with a question on your written submission. In paragraphs 5 and 6, you indicate your intention to change direction quite substantially. As I understand the case that you make, so far you have been going through the nuts and bolts of setting up the Parliament. However, you intend to operate more strategically, to examine issues in depth and to agree new policies and initiatives. Can you give us a brief flavour of the direction that you envisage the corporate body taking as you move away from the nitty-gritty of running day-to-day parliamentary life? I realise that you will have a lot of detailed implementation work to do on the new Parliament building but, as you become free of that work, where does the corporate body want to go strategically?

09:45

Des McNulty: The best way of dealing with that point might be if I were to ask Paul Grice to speak about the management planning process that has been instituted. We could then talk about the role of the corporate body in the context of that process.

Paul Grice (Clerk and Chief Executive, Scottish Parliament): As the convener said, we have been very focused on nuts and bolts. He was also right to pick up on the fact that our major challenge over the next two years is to ensure that the new facilities work at Holyrood. We will get no thanks from members for having a fantastic strategy if catering services are not in place, or if IT services do not work.

That ties into a major corporate governance initiative that we have been undertaking. We have been considering with the corporate body its role and how we run the Parliament. The point of that

initiative is to make us look ahead and think more about the sort of organisation that we want in the medium term—that is, in three to five years' time. We also want to take a member-focused and public-focused view of the medium term. In other words, rather than worry about whether services are being delivered—which we will continue to have to do—we should try to pitch ourselves forward in our consideration of the opportunities that the new technologies and facilities at Holyrood will offer.

Des McNulty and Andrew Welsh talked about outreach and communication and we are thinking about what those should mean in the medium term. For all the tremendous and positive webcasting initiatives, we must think a little more strategically about what we are trying to achieve and about what people want.

The Procedures Committee's inquiry is particularly timely. We hope that some of the committee's conclusions will help us to get our strategic planning of services right. In other words, we are trying to imagine the specifics of what we should achieve in the medium term. Who do we want to communicate with and how do we want to communicate with them? What will be the combination of physical outreach work and work that we do in Edinburgh? What will technology enable us to do and for what will technological solutions be inappropriate?

As ever, the corporate body must consider resource implications. What should we be planning for now? What issues can we hold over and pick up later? We are conscious of the four-year parliamentary cycle—it is only proper that the corporate body should take account of that, so what view will the new Parliament take, post-May 2003? We are grappling with those issues.

We have a reasonably well-developed management planning process, although it is by no means the finished article. It is fair to say that we have hitherto focused on more immediate delivery issues, but we will use the management planning process as a vehicle to allow us to undertake some medium-term planning.

That is probably as much as I want to say by way of setting the context.

Des McNulty: Paul Grice produces a monthly chief executive's report for the corporate body's meetings. That report identifies three categories of issue, the first of which is strategic issues that we want to develop. We plan our meetings around handling those issues, with advance planning of when those issues will come up. The second category of issue is those that arise in the course of events. The political process and the operation of the Parliament mean that particular issues leap on to the agenda from time to time. The third

category is issues that have been raised previously and that we hope to resolve—the report shows how we are handling them and we have a table that shows where in the system such issues are. We try to be systematic about handling those different categories of issue to ensure that we do not lose sight of any of them.

Like Andrew Welsh, I have sat on a number of public bodies—most of the members of the corporate body are experienced in these matters.

We are interested in identifying from Paul Grice—as the manager—and from his staff, what they are trying to achieve in different areas of their work. We want to probe effectiveness of delivery, identify what financial and staffing resources are required and bring those aspects together in a clear decision-making process in which everybody knows what is expected, intended and due to happen. We have moved a long way toward getting that transparency within the organisation—there is clarity about what we need to do. There are difficulties in the political context, because members are never entirely consistent about what they want. Part of the corporate body's job is to identify the requirements of members of the Parliament and to drive the system to ensure that those are effectively delivered.

Our role as trustees is equally important. We must ensure that value for money is achieved, as well as efficiency. We have had considerable success in doing that.

Mr Welsh: Two aspects have rightly been pointed to. First, the setting up of Parliament and secondly—once it has been set up—asking where it is going and what we are doing with it.

It is easy to talk about setting up Parliament, but underlying that has been an enormous range of decisions to get the machinery of Parliament into shape to allow MSPs to do their work. That has concerned the corporate body from the start. Some minor miracles have been achieved. I want to give due public credit to our parliamentary staff, such as the staff of the official report and the printing and information technology offices. The machinery has settled in quickly across the range of services. If that had not worked, we would have seen problems. There have been a number of problems, but as far as we as MSPs are concerned, the corporate body's job is to allow us to do our work. I give due praise to our staff. We did not know what this Parliament would do and where it was going. It is still in the process of settling in, but the machinery of Parliament that enables us to do our work has settled in remarkably quickly.

We must now consider the more strategic elements for the new Parliament down the road at Holyrood. Our aims are clear: Parliament must be

able to fulfil its constitutional role; Scotland must be well informed about its Parliament; the people of Scotland must be able to be involved in our Parliament; and Parliament must be well run and respected as such. The corporate body's job is to provide the resources and staff and to do so as economically and efficiently as possible.

I have given the committee an impression of the massive range of problems that we have had to face and overcome. Once the machine has settled down, we can all consider the next stage: that is how to build upon and improve the good things that have been introduced.

The Convener: We appreciate all the work that has been done. The biggest tribute that we have paid is that we take it all for granted, because we all get on with our roles and let the corporate body get on with its role.

The corporate body sees its role evolving into a more strategic one. It is important that ownership of that role is shared. Things must not only be transparent, but must be seen to be transparent. The corporate body must seek ways to involve the whole Parliament in the direction that the Parliament takes. I do not want to know how the corporate body handled catering—it has done it and that is great. However, when the corporate body starts to take the Parliament in different directions it must speak to a wider audience.

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I want to explore the support that is given to members of the Parliament, because people currently help us do a very good job with very limited resources. The Scottish Parliament information centre does well within its limitations, and I have found the non-Executive bills unit to be remarkably helpful.

I will use a football analogy. The Executive has its team—it has endless numbers of spin doctors, of whom we have heard far too much already—and each party has its own team of press people and policy people. However, the Parliament does not have such people. It has competent press people, but there is no push from the Parliament to publicise itself better as a Parliament. As Andrew Welsh said, there is confusion in the public mind between Parliament and the Executive. We are much better than the Executive and confusion between the committees and the Executive is harmful.

If we are to take on the Executive on equal terms, the committees need more help. The three committees on which I sit are all helped by—I think—a professor in each case. That is useful. There is a lot of talent out there in Scotland and if we could evolve a better system in which people work in support of the committees, we could make more use of that talent.

In order to promote the Parliament, we need to

consider research, publicity and the use of the talent of people from outwith the Parliament. I see the Parliament as more of an organisation of 4+2 political parties than of 129 MSPs. If you share that view, what can you do to improve the situation?

Des McNulty: The corporate body must be careful not to encroach on the affairs of the 129 self-publicists who are the elected members of the Parliament. A balance must be struck between our role and that of members. We have identified the need for a general communications strategy and a report has been done on that for the Parliament. We are progressing a number of steps to take advice and to examine ways in which we can ensure that the Parliament has its own distinct voice. That involves a number of things, such as improving the support for committees in publicising their reports and activities, and examining better ways of communicating the Parliament's activities to the national and local newspapers and to other local groups. I said earlier that the corporate body considers education work to be an important means of taking the message about the work of the Parliament out to the broader community. Work continues on the issues that Donald Gorrie raised; we have identified those areas as priorities and are acting on them.

On the matter of research support for the committees, I can only contrast my experience with that of Donald Gorrie. In my time at the Parliament, I have been a member of four or five different committees. I see no uniform pattern of support—different inquiries require different resources, even within the same committee. In my experience, the system of flexible support for committees in which the committees have been allowed to identify their own advisers and bring in support where required has worked effectively.

Perhaps the Procedures Committee should look during the course of its inquiry at the performance of that system across the range of the Parliament's committees. My perception is that committees are generally content with the existing structures and with their control over the support that they receive. Every committee always wants additional resources. The corporate body has acted properly to establish a system that allows committees to get appropriate support. At the same time, we have tried to establish rules and parameters within which committees must operate. That system will have to evolve as the Parliament evolves. Those are interesting issues for the Procedures Committee and for the corporate body to develop.

Mr Welsh: Our job is to provide the resources that allow MSPs to do their work. How do we help MSPs in their constituencies? The corporate body has tried various ways, including provision of

offices, office equipment and office machinery. It has also provided a budget that allows MSPs to hold surgeries and hire halls. We have tried in specific and general ways to ensure that equipment and machinery exist for them.

In Parliament, a non-Executive bills unit has been established. I remind members that we are in the early days of the first Scottish Parliament. When we began, everybody wanted our committees to visit everywhere in Scotland. We all said that that should happen and that it was right for us to do so. In the beginning, the corporate body had to find a budget for that. We had to ensure that the money that was used was within budget limitations and that it was used to the greatest effect in helping the work of Parliament.

I remind the committee of the scope of what we must do in the Parliament. The statistics for the parliamentary year 2000-01 show that the SPCB answered 145 questions; that 13 bills were introduced; that 14 bills received royal assent; that the non-Executive bills unit assisted 15 back benchers and two committees with proposed bills; that there were 71 members' business debates on a wide range of topics; that 55 committee inquiries were carried out and that ministers were asked to give evidence on 129 occasions. From a standing start, the Parliament has achieved a very high work rate. We must provide the means to maintain that within budget limitations, and the corporate body must keep in mind what Parliament needs to do its work.

10:00

Mr Gil Paterson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I want to add to Donald Gorrie's first point, about the confusion that surrounds the distinction between the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive. Des McNulty suggested some methods that he thinks would enhance the Parliament in particular. Has he any idea why the distinction is so confused in the minds of the public?

Des McNulty: Some work was done on that in the research that we commissioned from the University of Stirling, which tried to identify the issues before the Parliament and highlight a distinct identity for the Parliament. The confusion has arisen partly because the Parliament is a new institution and people are not familiar with the furniture outside this setting. Members of the Parliament are much more aware of the distinction between the Parliament and the Executive, the role of the committees, and so on, because we live it every day of the week. People outside the Parliament have a more sketchy understanding, which is gained largely through the press.

The committee will know that the press is selective about which bits of the Parliament it

covers and why. We feel that the Parliament must try to entice the press into providing more rounded and comprehensive coverage of the Parliament. That will not be an easy task, as the press like to concentrate on inter-party rows and other such matters. The press sit in the gallery at First Minister's question time, but very few members of the press come to the Transport and the Environment Committee unless a burning issue is being discussed.

We need to be a bit more systematic in highlighting the issues that are being dealt with in the committees, focusing on the issues that are being raised in the debates and facilitating opportunities for the outside groups that come to the Parliament to get their message across. That will not be easy to achieve, because of the nature of the press focus on the Parliament, but we have identified it as an issue on which we want to make progress, through getting expert advice and support. It will take time.

Mr Paterson: Guinness once said that it takes 20 years and buckets of money to establish a corporate identity. I wonder whether we have approached this the hard way. Why do we not call a spade a spade, a government a government and a parliament a parliament? "Executive" normally means the people who do the administrative work for the Parliament.

Des McNulty: That is not really an issue for the corporate body.

Mr Paterson: I just wondered what your views are.

Des McNulty: I am here to represent the corporate body. We are here, in essence, to deal with the issues on which we have to concentrate in that role.

Mr Paterson: You mentioned that—

The Convener: Come on, Gil. We have only 25 minutes left and a huge area to cover.

Mr Paterson: The corporate body says that it does not have a view on the issue. I am asking for a view.

The Convener: If it does not have a view, that is because it has not considered the matter. We might be able to probe that later, but other members are anxious to ask questions.

Mr Welsh: Let me respond, convener. We do not have buckets of money, but we have centuries in the future to ensure that the Parliament stamps its authority. The corporate body is a non-partisan body that works on behalf of the Parliament. There is a danger that we might stray into party-political areas in answering Gil Paterson's question.

However, the quick answer is that the classic distinction is between the Executive and the

legislature. We are not going to get hung up on the word "government", although that may be lurking somewhere. The media use the word "Holyrood" as a catch-all phrase, although we have not even arrived at Holyrood yet. It is up to the media to play their part in distinguishing between the Executive and the legislature. It is also up to every MSP to promote the Parliament and to ensure that our people know what the Parliament does and can distinguish between the three arms of democratic government.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Of the four principles on which we have heard evidence, sharing the power is one of the most difficult to judge, in terms of how successfully we are following it.

In paragraphs 11 and 12 of your submission, you promote the interests of back benchers, not the Executive or the parties. Can you expand on your suggestions? What you say might find some resonance among the back benchers. Do you have any examples of back benchers' interests being overlooked, or their not having as much sway over parliamentary affairs as the Executive or the political parties?

Mr Welsh: Time is the scarcest commodity in any parliament. In every parliament, the Executive tends to dominate parliamentary time.

We must ensure that we do not repeat the experience at Westminster and that back benchers feel that they have a positive role to play. We must always keep in mind the needs of back benchers. By definition, the Executive is powerful and back benchers are relatively weak, which is why we should encourage participation by back benchers.

There is also a feeling that some issues may go beyond individual parties or members and that an all-Parliament view could be taken on such issues. It has been suggested that, if consensus were achieved among a certain number of MSPs—129 or whatever—and if the parties were in agreement, there should be a mechanism to allow the Parliament to speak on behalf of all members. That would give any such view an enormously powerful backing.

Fundamentally, however, we must protect the rights of back benchers to participate and to feel that they are making a worthwhile contribution.

Des McNulty: I shall deal with Ken Macintosh's question in a different way. We are not in charge of the allocation of time for parliamentary business—that is a function not of the SPCB, but of the Parliamentary Bureau. We provide the wherewithal for that business to be conducted. An aspect of that is the provision of support to back benchers, through research support, supporting their role and the committees' role, and perhaps

enabling members' bills and members' business debates. There is demand for such support and we are aware that, with more support, back benchers might be able to do more. However, the barrier to that—as Andrew Welsh said—is the amount of time that is available.

We are highlighting a number of questions. What are the respective roles of back benchers and the Executive? How is time allocated and what impact is that likely to have on the functioning of the corporate body and our allocation of resources? Those are interesting questions, but it is not our job to make recommendations; we are just flagging them up as issues.

Mr Macintosh: I welcome those comments for various reasons. It is difficult to find a body in the Parliament that speaks on behalf of back benchers. I am not sure whether that is the role of the SPCB, but it is interesting that you have promoted back benchers' interests in a non-partisan way.

I have two further questions on your submission. First, in paragraph 14 you highlight the difficulty in sharing the power with the public and defining the way in which power is shared if the public are not involved in decision making. If there is only participation, the question is whether that is enough. Secondly, in paragraph 13 you make a constructive proposal to set up an independent body. I have mixed feelings about that, as we are all accountable to the people who elect us and I wonder whether we need another body between the public and us. However, on the basis that that body could stand back and give us a disinterested view, it could be a good idea. Have you made any progress with that proposal?

Des McNulty: One of the Scottish Parliament's characteristics is that it sometimes questions itself too much. We have a very good story to tell about accessibility. Given other comparators, people find this Parliament far more accessible; for example, they can access their MSPs and get their ideas discussed or issues developed. However, we are aware that, when the structure of the Parliament was being discussed and the CSG principles were being developed, there was a big appetite for accessibility to, involvement with and participation in the Parliament. As a result, the Parliament needs to discuss how not to turn its back on that demand. Parliament should not become introspective; it has to find better ways of extending participation in the decision-making process, while at the same time recognising that doing so will not be easy.

As I said in my opening remarks, the nature of representative democracy is that representatives have a particular status; they can be involved only in the final decision-making process in the

Parliament. Because of that, we have to think about innovative ways of increasing accessibility and participation and the terms on which that can be done. We are highlighting the issue as part of our role in organising the various financial arrangements of the Parliament. However, as the convener pointed out, developing that agenda will necessarily involve a much wider group of people than the SPCB and will perhaps require to be more of a parliamentary initiative. For example, we need to discuss how to advance the agenda in the Parliament, who will be responsible for it and what will be the best mechanisms to ensure broader parliamentary involvement. We do not necessarily have any answers; we are simply identifying an issue and tentatively suggesting how to address it.

Mr Welsh: One of our jobs is to encourage the practice of the principles. Although others might will the end, we have to provide the means, by which I mean that we have to ensure that the committees have the resources to do all these things. For example, we have to ensure that the non-Executive bills unit is adequately staffed. Although there will always be greater demands on the SPCB, we have to provide the resources to put into practice the theories that others think up.

The Convener: There is an impression abroad that the non-Executive bills unit is very strained and is having to prioritise its work. What guidance have you given to the unit on whose bills to prioritise?

Paul Grice: That is a timely question, as the Parliamentary Bureau and SPCB formalised existing guidance just last week.

On your first point, the bills unit is very busy, but after discussing the situation with the unit, I think that it feels that it has met just about all members' requirements. Indeed, when we consider the amount of parliamentary time that is left in this session, we are probably almost as far along as we can go. Any brand new proposal that was introduced today would, by the time that it had gone through the consultation process, probably struggle to find parliamentary time before the next election. Even bearing it in mind that people always want more resources, the unit feels that it is in a reasonable resource position. However, we need to keep the situation under review. A non-Executive bills unit is a novel idea, and it is hard to know just how to staff it. The unit's staff numbers are not particularly high, but the staff are all of high quality; we appointed some of our best people to those positions, because it is a very demanding area of work. I was particularly pleased to hear that Mr Gorrie had found them helpful—they have certainly tried hard.

As for guidance, the issue is almost one of common sense. In terms of resources, the unit is expected to give priority to draft bills that fall within

the legislative competence of the Parliament. That said, as the committee well knows, one could introduce a bill that does not fall within that competence. Another relevant criterion is whether the Executive or the Westminster Government intends to legislate on a similar proposal. The idea is not entirely uncontentious, but it is relatively straightforward.

There are other, harder criteria that might require a measure of judgment. For example, we have to take into account the size and complexity of a bill. A 40-section, eight-schedule bill would tie up a huge amount of resources. Unlike the Government's legislative programme, there is no non-Executive bills programme, and the unit operates on what is, in effect, a first-come, first-served basis. There is an issue about what constitutes reasonable complexity in a bill, given that we do not want to tie up the entire unit's time if other members turn up a month later with their own bills.

It would be a simple matter to give the committee a precise note of the criteria under which the bills unit operates.

10:15

The Convener: That would be helpful.

Mr Welsh: Our task is to develop general rules that are flexible and fair. We have to try to avoid rationing and must be able to provide resources within budget to allow Parliament to do its work. That is always the priority. Parliament must have the resources to do its work.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Obviously, in the first two years of the Parliament, you have had to establish the machinery and—more important—the culture of government. With regard to the issue of sharing power and the relationship between the Executive and the Parliament, to what extent have staff been recruited from the existing Scottish Executive civil service? Furthermore, how much independence has the Parliament managed to establish in its staff recruitment and operating culture to ensure an external view instead of simply importing the old ways of the civil service into the Parliament?

Paul Grice: I challenge vigorously the notion that we have imported any old ways into the Parliament. I would guess that about 20 per cent of Parliament staff have a Scottish Executive background, which leaves another 80 per cent. The Executive will inevitably be a major competitor employer. However, of the 450 Parliament staff, only 30 remain on secondment from the Executive and most of them are on the Holyrood progress team. We have worked very hard on this issue and the SPCB has supported us in several ways, principally through the pay and grading structure

review. Next April, Parliament staff will move onto their own set of pay structures and systems.

More important, we have worked hard from day one to create a separate and challenging culture. Although I am the last person to want to criticise the Executive, I would rather focus on the positives. We have created a can-do and flexible parliamentary culture that is separate from the Executive instead of simply being one of its offshoots. Furthermore, it is important to point out that we are not the civil service; we are a separate service, employed by the SPCB and answerable to the Parliament. Your question seems to imply that we are somehow a branch of the civil service. However, if you were to ask the vast majority of staff—including the clerks and official reporters around the table—they would probably challenge your assertion quite vigorously.

Fiona Hyslop: I am very pleased to hear those comments and have no doubt that the staff will give me their views after the meeting.

I want to pursue the policy aspects of developing parliamentary culture. In some areas, such as international relations, the Parliament will obviously have to develop its own policy. Indeed, pages 36 to 39 of the SPCB annual report focus on the international aspects of the Parliament. To what extent does the SPCB consult the 129 MSPs in developing its policy on how Scotland and the Scottish Parliament is seen by the world?

There is also a suggestion that the Parliament is not using all the tools that were set out in the CSG report—in annexe G, in particular—to ensure that we make internal connections within Scotland and are therefore able to consult and participate within the country.

I suppose that I am trying to ask two questions in one. The first is how we develop external policy to face the rest of the world. The second is whether you feel that there is scope to do more internally to ensure that the Parliament reaches all the groups and organisations in Scotland and that, by doing so, we create a participative, accountable, accessible and responsive democracy.

Des McNulty: I am not sure that the corporate body is the best group to answer all those questions.

Arguably, the Presiding Officer and the Deputy Presiding Officers have played a significant role in the development of international links, because they are, under the scheme, the official representatives of the Parliament. Nonetheless, the corporate body has taken an interest in the development of external links and external relationships. We have budgetary responsibility for the way in which that work is progressed, and Paul Grice's staff have produced a paper on that.

Paul Grice: External relations policy in the Parliament is an interesting and complex area, and the corporate body alone does not own it; a number of people have ownership of it. Des McNulty mentioned the role of the Presiding Officers, which is critical. We produced a paper at official level, which we shared with the Parliamentary Bureau and the corporate body. We could provide a copy of that paper if the committee would find it helpful. As you might expect in a paper from officials, there was no great blue-sky thinking; the paper focused on regional context, giving us some idea of where our main interests lie. Others are involved. A Commonwealth Parliamentary Association branch of elected members sets the policy for that area within a delegated budget. You will be aware that the European Committee is undertaking a major review of our relationship with Europe and is likely to produce a report quite soon on regional governance. Importantly, that report will set a policy context.

When the Executive gets round to articulating the full range of its policies, that will be helpful. I often hear that a joined-up approach to this should be taken—that the Parliament, the Executive and others should not be running off in different directions. It is a complex area, and the question is who, on behalf of the Parliament, should seek to pull it all together.

From the corporate body's perspective—this may sound slightly uninteresting—the vast majority of our resources are spent on managing internal visits, for which a policy is not needed. Members will be aware of that, as we often have to come and ask them to host those visits. A very large slug of the resources is spent not on the outward visits, which attract the profile, but on the hundreds of people who come to visit us. That is extremely positive, but the policy that is involved in those visits is rather workaday, concerning who gets the full red carpet and who gets medium-level treatment. It is an interesting area of policy, in which we are doing our bit, but at some level in the Parliament a coherent policy must be pulled together. The corporate body and staff would be keen to play a part in that.

Fiona Hyslop: Internally, are there other ways of ensuring public involvement?

Mr Welsh: There has been a flourishing of contacts at all levels in the Parliament. All the different party groups have been making contact through the CPA. Officially, there are a great number of international links, mainly through the Presiding Officers, whether through tartan day or other international events. A tremendously impressive range of international visitors has come here. There have also been contacts with industry, through the Industry and Parliament Trust, and the

committees are forging contacts. The Audit Committee, for example, is making contact with its equivalents elsewhere in the devolved assemblies and the Westminster Parliament. That work is continuing and will develop over the years.

There have been more than 16,000 visitors to the Holyrood visitor centre; more than 70,000 calls have been taken by the public inquiry unit and more than 7,000 more detailed inquiries have been dealt with in writing by the public inquiry unit. There have also been 170 research briefings and we have 79 partner libraries. In addition, there are the civic forum and the youth parliament. There has been an enormous flourishing in a very short period of time, and that work will develop, grow and deepen in the future.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): I mention for the record the fact that I attend meetings of the corporate body in another capacity.

One of the areas in which I am most interested is the work of the education service. I am conscious that the service was mentioned as a key area of interest in your report. I am also aware that the MORI Scotland survey that was undertaken for us identified young people as one of the key groups that should be informed about the role of the Parliament, its relationship with the Executive and its distinctiveness. Given the large number of young people who have gone through the education service, and the fact that visits are frequently oversubscribed, are there any plans to do more outreach work or to revise the way in which the education service can react—perhaps to the situation of those who are unable to get to Edinburgh? We make a huge investment in tomorrow by talking to young people today and explaining to them how the Parliament operates as they are growing up with it.

Des McNulty: The education service has been a tremendous success. Members are always delighted to see school parties visiting the centre. The education service provides an induction in the work of the Parliament, which almost all the young people find interesting.

The visitor process is a positive one, and I hope that we will be able to make it even better at Holyrood, with all the facilities, rooms and support that will be available. We have had some discussion about trying to develop modules or a more systematic set of educational materials, both for people who visit the Parliament and for people who do not, so that we can provide a more structured account of the working of the Parliament that will be useful for teachers and pupils at different stages of their educational development. That is an important idea.

Another issue that has been highlighted in the

corporate body is the accessibility of the Parliament to school parties from different parts of Scotland. We are considering arrangements to ensure equalisation of the cost to people from different parts of Scotland of hiring buses or of otherwise getting to the Parliament.

The education service is working well, but we are considering different ways in which we can improve it. We would like to involve some of the teachers who have visited the Parliament and seen the process in deciding how that ambition can most effectively be facilitated.

Mr Welsh: I have never known time to pass by so quickly. Nothing that the corporate body does is static. Paul Grice and his management team are constantly reviewing what they are doing to determine how they could do it better, across the whole range of facilities. We hope that the new Parliament building will have facilities that are more welcoming and better equipped to deal with visitors, especially those who are on educational visits. The Parliament has already created and pioneered, but we can always do better.

Patricia Ferguson: I appreciate that the new building might be more welcoming and might encourage young people to visit, but I suspect that the issue will come down to resources. The number of staff whom we can employ will dictate the number of visits that can be made or the number of people whom we can send out to talk to schools. Would that aspect of the education service be reviewed at the same time?

Paul Grice: We should not underestimate the current physical impediments to the education service. As you know, the service is based in Cannonball House, which we have to give back every summer for the tattoo. That prevents us from investing in permanent infrastructure up there. In contrast, there will be a purpose-built classroom at Holyrood, and the physical infrastructure of the new building will allow much greater throughput. You are right, however, to say that it will come down to staff resources.

As part of the communications review, we are considering participation in general, and the education service will be involved in that in two ways. First, we will consider the resources that we have at present. I would have thought that the provision of additional resources would always be a high priority if the corporate body felt that they were justified. Secondly, we will consider outreach generally, throughout the country.

We should be asking ourselves questions. We have a good education service, but where do we go with it next and what about outreach, in the general sense? Are we making the best use of links with local members and partner libraries? What about good, old-fashioned ideas such as a

visitor bus? There are lots of good ideas that we will want to develop as part of the review, but, rightly, we must then cost them all and decide which are best. I hope that the next two or three years will signal a really significant development in outreach, with education as part of that.

The Convener: We have saved the best until last. Here is Frank McAveety.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): Thanks very much, convener. You have not heard the question yet.

Are there more or fewer staff members in the education service this year than last year?

Paul Grice: I think that the numbers are about the same. We had an excellent head of education but, as so often happens with excellent staff, he got himself a post at a university. However, there is a positive aspect: he still provides us with some services. As for the rest of the service, we are about up to speed.

10:30

I should mention two points. As I said earlier, we have just had a major pay and grading review, which directly impacted on all those staff. Because the review is still being negotiated with the unions, I cannot say any more about it. However, it will all be resolved by April. At the moment, there have been some temporary promotions to cover the gap in the education service team and I want to consider the result of the communications review before we make any decisions about increasing the team itself.

The number of posts has not changed. As I said, we have lost our head of education, which is an occupational hazard with good people. Once the pay and grading review is settled—which I hope will happen in the next two or three months—I will examine the education service in the round and in the context of outreach generally. That is the wise and sensible thing to do. I would be very disappointed if there were any long-term diminution in the service. We have to think about how we can develop it over the next two or three years to take advantage of the new facilities.

Mr McAveety: Is there a head of education in post at the moment?

Paul Grice: Yes. She has been promoted from the team. She is also excellent, and we are very lucky to have had such a person as a number two.

Mr McAveety: Some members have expressed concerns about access to the service. Those concerns centre partly on practical, physical problems with Cannonball House, which is a bit like my old school board building on the inside. What is the current demand over and above what

we are providing? Are we able to measure that?

Secondly, most members would agree that enhancement of the education service with the move to the new Parliament building is a very important development. Such enhancement might include more modular core work, packages of material and maybe even a virtual Parliament that would allow youngsters in schools to experience the Parliament through the internet. Some of those measures might build on the positive attitude towards the Parliament that young people expressed in that MORI poll.

Paul Grice: All the ideas that we are considering are very positive, and some of them have been developed a bit more than others. From the outset, our philosophy has been to work with the teaching profession in developing materials.

We are lucky to have Cannonball House but, as you rightly say, it is a very limited resource. We do not have it all year and, if I can be blunt, we cannot fix things to the walls. For example, there are no cable links from Cannonball House into the chamber. Although the obvious thing would be to have a live feed, I am afraid that we are limited by physical capacity.

There is no doubt that demand outstrips supply on this issue, and I would like to do more to remedy that situation. On the other hand, we have to work with what we have at the moment. As a result, our strategy will be to preserve the current service as best we can and look to develop new ideas. In 18 months or two years from now, when we have a better all-round resource, we will be in a much stronger position to enhance the education service. In the meantime, we will plan for that.

That said, if there are any opportunities to enhance the service in the short term, we will take them. For example, we are actively considering CD-ROMs and other such ideas. To be fair, the SPCB has always been extremely supportive in finding resources for this area and I do not expect it to change its view now.

The Convener: I thank all the witnesses. We have slightly overrun our time slot and have still only covered a fraction of what we intended to examine. I am particularly aware that we did not get as far as discussing the draft equal opportunities framework. As the Equal Opportunities Committee convener will be coming to the committee some time later this year, I wonder whether Shona Simon would be willing to attend that meeting and discuss those issues if we can negotiate a time slot.

Shona Simon (Scottish Parliament Office of the Chief Clerk/Chief Executive and Presiding Officer): Of course.

The Convener: Might it also be possible to give

us a brief summary of the framework's main features? As we are all slightly intimidated by your voluminous report, a précis of it might be handy as the basis for our discussion at that meeting.

Shona Simon: I will certainly do that.

The Convener: I thank all the SPCB members who have attended this morning. As expected, we have not been able to raise all the issues that we had hoped to and we might wish to pursue some of those in writing. We might also arrange another meeting later in the inquiry to discuss progress, and I hope that the witnesses will be willing to accept a further invitation to come and see us at that point.

For the next evidence session, I welcome the Presiding Officer, Sir David Steel, and his supporting officials. Although the officials are known to us all, I should introduce them. From my left to right, we have Bill Thomson, Paul Grice and Elizabeth Watson.

Sir David Steel MSP (Presiding Officer, Scottish Parliament): First of all, I want to express the thanks of the Presiding Officers to you and your committee for your work. I realise that it is not the most glamorous committee on which to serve—

The Convener: Well, we think that we are, but never mind.

Mr McAveety: We add glamour to it. [*Laughter.*]

Sir David Steel: All right—I will rephrase that.

Mr Paterson: Thank you.

Sir David Steel: Perhaps I should say that the Procedures Committee is very workmanlike. The standing orders, the rules and, indeed, the statute under which we operate were handed down to us and the fact that the Procedures Committee has been able to help us in adjusting and developing procedures as we go has been very important.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to give evidence on behalf of the Presiding Officers. We have already submitted a written memorandum that sets out our thoughts on the Parliament's implementation of the CSG key principles. Our response mainly concentrates on the areas closest to the interests of the Presiding Officers.

This is a timely inquiry. As we are more than halfway through this session of Parliament, it seems an appropriate time to take stock of just how much has been achieved in two years. The sheer volume of work that we are carrying out in the Parliament deserves to be highlighted and noted much more than it is. The Parliament is dealing with issues that are close to the heart of the Scottish people. I believe that our procedures have bedded down and, in our third year, there is clear evidence of a Parliament that is steadily and

thoughtfully going about its business.

At the end of our first two years, we had considered 28 bills. That legislation will make real differences to the people of Scotland as it covers matters such as education, land tenure, housing, poindings and warrant sales and regulation of care. All those bills have been informed and influenced by a great wealth of evidence taken by the committees both formally on the legislation and through the knowledge that they have gained in their inquiry work.

As we have indicated in our written memorandum, the Scottish Parliament's annual report sets out the many positive examples of the way in which Parliament is implementing the CSG principles, recognising in particular the strength of the Parliament's committees. We have seen our first committee bill—the Protection from Abuse (Scotland) Bill—which is particularly significant as Westminster committees have no similar power to introduce legislation.

Committee work has been receiving better press coverage of late, for example in relation to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee's report on the funding of higher education and the Health and Community Care Committee's report on hepatitis C. Both are good examples of work that has clearly been undertaken by the Parliament as distinct from the Executive.

Furthermore, a great deal of activity is going on outside Edinburgh. As well as formal committee meetings that have been held elsewhere, there are numerous examples of committee reporters and groups of committee members gathering information across Scotland. All of those are listed in our annual report.

In general, the dual role of committees is working well. Their work on pre-legislative scrutiny and inquiries means that members are well-informed when they come to consider legislation. Such a unity of purpose is very different from the committee system that I have known at Westminster. However, we believe that there remains a challenge to balance the work load in terms of scrutinising the Executive, undertaking what I would call "own initiative" work and processing legislation. On that subject, the Parliament has still to fully adapt to the concept of a four-year legislative term that might give more flexibility and relieve unnecessary pressure on the parliamentary timetable, particularly when we approach the beginning of each summer recess.

That said, a lot of the practices and procedures that we have initiated in this Parliament have been admired—indeed some have been copied—by Robin Cook, the Leader of the House of Commons, and Lord Williams of Mostyn, the Leader of the House of Lords, who visited us. Both

made public statements about how impressed they were, and I can assure the committee that conversations I have had with them have made it clear that, in an attempt to change centuries of tradition at Westminster, they have taken on board some of the practices that this Parliament instituted from the beginning. I think that we can take some pride and pleasure in that fact.

In our view, an important aspect of sharing power with civic society is that the Parliament has a very effective Public Petitions Committee. That committee has received more than 400 petitions, some of which have led to committee inquiries and reports, debates in the Parliament or changes in legislation. Again, that contrasts strongly with the tame and limited petitions system at Westminster.

We also note the innovative move by committees to engage with civic society outside the formal evidence-taking procedures. More and more, we are using our chamber for open-space events. For example, we had a very successful conference on the 25th anniversary of the Race Relations Act 1976 and a recent event involving Gypsy/Travellers. Such events, together with the use of innovative methods such as video-conferencing and the piloting of an interactive website during the Education, Culture and Sport Committee's inquiry into the Scottish Qualifications Authority, show that we are engaging with people outside Parliament far more effectively than has been the tradition in our parliamentary history.

Feedback received by committee clerks suggests that most people who have engaged with the Parliament's committees have found it a positive experience. However, I am sure that most of you will agree that more effort needs to be put into involving individuals and groups who have not already engaged with the Parliament.

I turn now to chamber business. The Presiding Officers welcome the opportunity that time for reflection provides for people with a wide range of faiths and beliefs to share their thoughts with us. By the end of June, prior to the summer recess, 66 representatives from nearly 30 different faiths or denominations had led time for reflection. That reflects well the multicultural nature of Scottish society.

10:45

A welcome development has been the establishment of the conveners liaison group, which was not enshrined in any way in our standing orders. The conveners of the Scottish Parliament's committees have an important role to play in the development of the Parliament. I welcome the relationship that is developing between the Parliamentary Bureau and the conveners liaison group, which I hope will lead to

better planning of plenary and committee business and a better understanding of the priorities that drive the decisions in both sectors.

Under our standing orders, one of the functions of the office of the Presiding Officer is to represent the Parliament. Patricia Ferguson, George Reid and I undertake a great deal of work under the general heading of external relations, through the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body and parliamentary delegations, and by welcoming the many visitors that we receive to the Parliament, hosting receptions and so on. That is a greater portion of my work than I expected when I took on the job.

Finally—and I know that you have talked about this before—we need to do more to separate the Parliament and the Executive in the public perception and to promote public participation in the work of the Parliament.

The Convener: Thank you very much. The clerks have identified various lines of questioning, but members typically range over issues that they feel are pressing and the two do not necessarily coincide. Consequently, we may not touch on some issues, although we may want to pursue them later in writing.

I was struck by the number of times that you mentioned Westminster and the House of Commons. When I hear members talk about how well we are doing, I often feel that Westminster is a ferocious monkey on our back. We are always making comparisons and saying how much better we are than Westminster.

However, we are very much a Westminster-type Parliament, in that business is done by the bureau, through the usual channels, meetings are held in private, the legislative time is taken overwhelmingly by the Executive and back benchers complain that they are squeezed to the margins. Increasingly, civic society is complaining that we are a consultative Parliament rather than a participative one, and that we are not meeting fully the aspirations of the CSG principles, but paying lip service to them.

Do you recognise any of those criticisms? Have we got it right, or do we need to readdress the whole question of civic society's participation in a Parliament in which the Executive and non-Executive parties are more equal partners than they are at the moment?

Sir David Steel: Perhaps more than others, I tend to refer back to Westminster because I spent a large part of my life there.

The Convener: You are not the only one.

Sir David Steel: I am therefore able to contrast what happens here with what happens in both Houses at Westminster. The Parliament is in

transition. It is interesting that we will shortly have a first minister who, for the first time, is not an ex-Westminster member. After the next parliamentary election, when I and others in this room may retire, the Scottish Parliament will gradually emerge out of the shadow of Westminster and will not need to make those comparisons.

I do not accept the criticism about participation. The access that people have to the Parliament, and their involvement in it, is light-years away from what has happened in the past. We should take pride in that. However, some of the criticism is justified regarding the other part of your question. We are still feeling our way in the balance of how we spend our time in the chamber, and the demand for members to have more time to debate what they would like to debate—more time for committees, for example—is legitimate. The fact is that speeches are kept rather too short, because of the short sitting times and the number of members who want to speak. Four minutes, which is the standard time, is a very short space of time for members to address themselves in. Perhaps we should keep that under review.

Mr Paterson: We have taken evidence on the issue of the bureau being a closed shop, as all its meetings are held in private. What are your views on that? Would it be possible to open up those meetings? Will you reflect on the possibility of providing minutes of the meetings and agendas in advance of the meetings, so that back benchers will know what is happening and can have some input? The complaint is not about what comes out of the meetings so much as about the fact that we never hear what is going to be discussed.

Sir David Steel: The bureau only recently decided that we should publish a notice of our decisions each week. That is now being done, and it is being welcomed. I do not think that we publish our agendas in advance, although I see no reason for our not doing so. However, the bureau would feel very inhibited if we had to have open, public meetings for the discussion of our weekly business. That would make our job impossible.

Forgive me if I contrast the way in which the bureau operates with what happens at Westminster. There is no bureau there at all. The usual channels are called usual channels because they are cloaked in total secrecy and no one is ever very sure who is involved. In our system, we all know at least that each of the parties is represented in the bureau according to its strength in the Parliament. Everybody knows who is on the bureau and how it is composed. There is no mystery about it. It is not called the usual channels; it exists. Its decisions are published, whereas decisions of the usual channels are announced at Westminster in the form of the weekly business statement, which members get

the chance to question. Minorities are not represented in the usual channels, whereas the minority parties are represented in the bureau. I would defend our system; I think that it works quite well.

Mr Paterson: Could it be enhanced by publishing the agendas and minutes of its meetings?

Sir David Steel: I shall take that suggestion back to the bureau. We are developing all the time. The fact that we have started publishing notes of our meetings is a good thing. If there was a demand for us to publish our agendas, I would have no difficulty with that.

The Convener: Have you ever thought about the different basis of representation in the SPCB and wondered whether the way in which the corporate body works might work better in the bureau, that is, by members being elected by the Parliament to deal with the business? It is the block voting and the Executive control that a lot of people have complained about. I doubt that, if the bureau had corporate body-style representation, the Executive would have difficulty in getting time for statements and debates on bills. However, you might find a better mechanism for balancing the allocation of time and recognising the interests and aspirations of parliamentarians as well as those of the Executive.

Sir David Steel: That is quite a difficult question, as the compositions of the bureau and the corporate body are laid down in the Scotland Act 1998.

Paul Grice: The composition of the corporate body is, but the composition of the bureau is not. The bureau is created under standing orders. The composition of the corporate body is set out in statute and its method of election cannot be changed. As Murray Tosh said, the two bodies are fundamentally different. Under standing orders, it would be possible to change the bureau if the Parliament so decided.

Sir David Steel: Four members of the corporate body are elected by the Parliament. Technically, they are not there as party representatives, but the Parliament in its wisdom—and it is wisdom—has thought it sensible to have one member from each party. That does not have to be the case. They are four people doing the job of the corporate body—five including me as the chair. I have a deliberative vote and voice in the corporate body as well as a casting vote if that is necessary, although I have never had to use it.

The bureau is slightly less satisfactory, because the four representatives have the voting strength of the parties. When there is a coalition Administration, as there is now, it means that a combination of two people can dictate what the

bureau does. I have no vote. It is inconceivable, with the present arithmetic, that I would ever have a casting vote because there is an in-built majority. The Parliament could usefully ponder on that.

The Convener: Has Gil Paterson finished?

Mr Paterson: I wanted to ask about another matter.

The Convener: I will bring you back in at the end, if there is time.

Mr Macintosh: I will continue on that point. The Executive may dominate the business of Parliament to an extent, but that is a product of the democratic system. A different concern is the way that not only the Executive but the front-bench spokesmen of each of the parties dominate time. I am not concerned about the balance between the Executive and the Opposition, but about the balance—and I raised this with the SPCB—between the views of back benchers and those on the front benches of all the parties. Back benchers are least represented in respect of getting debating slots or influencing the agenda. What are Sir David Steel's views on that?

Has the system used by Presiding Officers to choose which back benchers speak and make that information available to back benchers, during or before debates, now bedded down? Have we reached a level where a balance to the satisfaction of all has been achieved between front-bench spokesmen and back benchers?

Sir David Steel: On the balance between, if you like, front benchers and back benchers—although we do not use those terms—I am not sure how we arrive at the arithmetic of speaking time. Is it agreement between the parties?

Paul Grice: It was effectively agreement of the parties around the bureau table. It was no more scientific than that.

Sir David Steel: The length of time given to members depends on the length of the debate. The longest speech in any debate is an opening speech of 20 minutes in a full three-hour debate. I have not had many complaints that that is excessive. In most debates, opening speeches are shorter than 20 minutes.

On the selection by Presiding Officers of back benchers to speak, it is well-known that there are two ways of getting called. One way is by the party managers, quite sensibly, discussing with their colleagues who would like to participate in certain debates and putting in a list of names. That does not have the status of holy writ. I assure Kenneth Macintosh that the Deputy Presiding Officers and I take care to include those who volunteer to speak, outside the context of the business managers' list. That is especially true of members' debates, which are almost entirely not governed by the business

managers. The Presiding Officers are completely independent. We are sometimes aware that a particular back bencher is not currently in favour in their party. We must allow for that and enable them to have a voice.

Paul Grice: On Kenneth Macintosh's point about the level of satisfaction, I cannot answer for that. However, the Presiding Officers monitor the number of members not called in debates, because the system allows us to do that and it was a concern at one time. In recent times, it has been rare for more than one or two members who want to speak in a debate not to be called. I understand that the situation is probably more complex than that. If members think that they will not get called, they might not even try. I know that this is not robust, but we monitor the situation as far as we can and it gives an indication that there appears to be some equilibrium. I do not know whether members are happy with the situation, but I thought that Kenneth Macintosh might be interested in that information.

Mr Macintosh: Thank you for that. I am interested. I am glad that you made the point that back benchers might have adjusted their behaviour to suit the system rather than the other way round. There is not the level of dissatisfaction that there may have been when we started and were bedding down the system.

Gil Paterson mentioned privacy. The three committees that meet in private—the conveners liaison group, the Parliamentary Bureau and the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body—deal with matters relating to the Parliament. The principle that all our committees should meet in public is undermined when a committee does not do so, even though there might be a good reason. Do you think that we have got the balance right between meeting in private and meeting in public?

11:00

Sir David Steel: Technically, the Parliamentary Bureau and the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body are not committees of the Parliament in the sense that you are speaking about. I would draw an analogy between the work that the Parliamentary Bureau and the SPCB do and the work that committees do when they draft reports. Not many people would seriously argue that a committee should discuss a draft report in public. Similarly, much of the work of the Parliamentary Bureau and the SPCB involves the names of individuals and details of money and is not suitable for general public discussion. Such matters have to be treated with confidentiality.

On the wider question of committees meeting in private, I have some figures that might interest members. Last year, out of a total of 463

committee meetings, only 32 were completely in private and the business of almost all of those was deliberation about reports.

In the early days, I was one of the people who complained that committees were using the official report too much. There is a distinction between meeting in private and meeting in public without an *Official Report*. I thought that it was unnecessary to have an *Official Report* of discussions about whether the committee should meet next Tuesday or Wednesday and whether so-and-so's diary would allow them to go to Aberdeen or not. I felt that that was a waste of the official report and was of no great interest to anybody but that there was no reason why the discussion should not take place in public. My only lingering criticism is that, when a committee decides to take, for example, item 4 in private, a person reading the *Official Report* has no idea what item 4 is. Some refinement is needed to ensure that the public knows why a committee is meeting partly in private.

The Convener: A Tasmanian parliamentarian told us a couple of months ago that, in his Parliament, reports were discussed in private but a record of the discussion was kept and published when the report was published. He made the point that we have a huge resource that is dedicated to recording every word that everyone says at stage 3, when the process is practically over, but that we do not record what people said during the preparation of the report that began the process. He felt that we had hold of the wrong end of the stick.

Sir David Steel: I am not sure that I would concur with that. If we had to record all the committee discussions, it would require an enormous increase in the resources of the official report, whose work load has already been quite stretched and whose staff has had to be increased since the Parliament opened.

I am not sure that I favour the Tasmanian model. After all, once a report is published, any member of the committee can take part in the debate and inform the Parliament of what they said in the private meetings, if they want it to be known that they would have preferred a different outcome. The report is what matters, not the discussion of the report.

The Convener: I do not know whether, as an historian, I would agree with that.

Mr McAveety: Much was made in the "Scottish Parliament Annual Report 2000 to 2001" of the centrality of the Parliament to people's lives and to the discourse of politics. Do you think that the Parliament will be able to express a view in the Secretary of State for Scotland's consultation on the number of MSPs? Will the Parliament continue

to have a central role in people's lives, even with a changed number of MSPs?

Sir David Steel: There is one problem with the constitution of the Parliament, which is that it is still set up under the Scotland Act 1998. One has to go back to that act if one wants to make any changes to our structure. I do not think that, in the long run, that is a sensible way to proceed. Apart from anything else, even if we in the Parliament agreed on sensible changes, we would have to persuade both Westminster Houses that they must give up time to change the Scotland Act 1998. The argument over whether there should be 129 MSPs has illustrated that difficulty clearly.

On how we should proceed, the secretary of state has announced a consultative process. I hope that soon the Parliament will have a chance to debate the issue and come to a view on what we want to put into that consultative process. I do not think there is any reason why we should not do that as a Parliament.

The Convener: Could we pursue some of those issues at Westminster through a private bill, instead of commandeering both Houses' time?

Sir David Steel: I had not thought of that. I presume that a private bill would also require time.

Paul Grice: We have not given that idea much thought, but there must be some dubiety as to whether the issue would fall within the criteria for a private bill. Also, the private bill process at Westminster is a long and exhausting one. Mr Gorrie is nodding his head.

Donald Gorrie: It is an expensive process as well.

Paul Grice: Yes. The idea is interesting, but not one that we have considered. I think that there would probably be some difficulties.

Sir David Steel: I think that the real answer lies in another direction. If and when the Scotland Act 1998 is reviewed, at some time in the future, one of the changes that should be made is that the constitution of our proceedings should be transferred to us—full stop.

Donald Gorrie: I see you, Sir David, as the captain of our team.

Sir David Steel: That is very flattering.

Mr McAveety: As long as he is not the Craig Brown of our team.

Donald Gorrie: There is an onus on the Presiding Officer. There is a Government team, which is about to have a new captain, and each party has a team. The Parliament as a whole does not have a team in that sense, but you are the captain.

You must have thought long about how Parliament can operate better. We have discussed the length of speeches. Do you have any views on the use of time? There is an interesting draft in your report. For example, you have agreed, because of past experiences, that not nearly enough time is allowed at stage 3 of bills. We also seem to spend an inordinate amount of time on self-congratulatory motions or amendments from the Executive and critical and abusive amendments from the Opposition—none of which gets us anywhere at all. Do you have any powers to persuade people to behave in a more adult fashion?

One suggestion, which has been mentioned briefly, I think, is that members' business—all-party group business—could be held in the main chamber time, instead of being given a half-hour or 45 minutes of debate at the end of the day. That would allow members who are particularly interested in promoting a cause—for example, people with disabilities—to get something done. Could that change be achieved?

Sir David Steel: First, I think that there have been only two occasions when the stage 3 timing was wrong. On each occasion, the bureau learned from the experience and has ensured that adequate time is provided. I am sorry to refer to Westminster again—the convener will frown again—but at least we do not have the system that is common there, in which whole sections of bills go undebated because of timetable motions. We have got it wrong twice, but to get it wrong twice out of 28 stage 3 bills is not bad. We are learning as we go. I am reasonably happy with the situation.

Your wider question was about the allocation of parliamentary time for what you called self-congratulatory Executive motions and critical Opposition amendments. I think that it would be useful to have more take-note type debates—from committees, all-party groups or whatever. It could be useful just to discuss topics, without having ding-dong “My amendment is better than your motion” arguments. I do not decry such debate, as it is the mainstay of parliamentary life, but there is scope for other openings.

I note in passing that we have sometimes had difficulty filling committee slots. In some cases, the bureau has had a slot for a committee debate, but there has been no committee report to debate. Perhaps there is another avenue into general discussion in those slots.

Fiona Hyslop: I want to ask a more general question on the CSG principles. Do you think that the Parliament should have done anything differently during the past two years to promote the CSG principles?

Sir David Steel: Wow. I cannot think of anything off the cuff, but I am sure that if I sat down and thought for long enough, I could come up with something. The Parliament is not perfect, but it has broadly carried out what the CSG set out. There might be criticisms at the margin, but we are getting the basics right and having a big impact.

It is possible that the media concentrates too much on the chamber and not enough on the committees—after all, half the week is given over to committee time. I am perhaps one of the few people who reads all the committee reports and I am impressed by the quality of work, the interaction with the public and the open nature of consultation on legislation. It seems to me that the committee system works well, but it does not receive the same attention as the weekly drama of First Minister's questions, which tends to receive too much attention compared with the solid work that is done in committee rooms such as this.

Fiona Hyslop: I want to pick up on something that Murray Tosh mentioned—the difference between participation and consultation. One of the principles is sharing power. The power is not to be shared only between the Parliament and the Executive, but with the people of Scotland. To what extent does participation enable real power sharing with the Scottish people? People can come and observe and are consulted on some matters, but can you give examples from the past two years of when the Parliament has genuinely shared power with the people?

Sir David Steel: I can report only on the reaction that I get. I travel around Scotland quite a lot and talk to organisations such as chambers of commerce. People who have been to committees on behalf of voluntary bodies or professional bodies—either for a committee inquiry or for consultation on a bill before it is debated in Parliament—say that the Parliament is fantastic and that they did not have such access or participation before. I hear that over and over again.

That opinion contrasts with that of people who are not involved in the process—the generality of public opinion. Their only access to Parliament is through broadcasting or the newspapers and they are not yet convinced that we do things sufficiently differently from what happened in the past. They are not really enthusiastic about the Parliament, which is one of our problems.

Again, the problem is that of disengaging from the Executive. If something goes wrong with the United Kingdom Government—if it is unpopular for some reason or if ministers' actions are unpopular—it gets the blame. In our new culture, when something goes wrong, that anonymous thing, Holyrood, gets the blame. We must overcome that in time. We are a new institution

that has not yet bedded down in the public mind. I see a contrast between those who have active contact with the Parliament and those who have not had contact. We must pay more attention to that second group.

Fiona Hyslop: I refer to some of the points that you made about committee work and to evidence that we have had from, for example, John McAllion of the Public Petitions Committee. The impact that the committee and the petitions have had has been strong, but Mr McAllion's evidence suggested that, from a resource point of view, there was a shortage of clerks. The clerks are very good, but he is concerned about the resource level. He was also concerned about the committee's access to the chamber. There has not been a debate so far on a petition, although there is the facility to do that. Should we consider that?

Finally, it seems that everyone is surprised at the quantity of legislation that is introduced. The most recent evidence we took from the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body indicated how workmanlike the Parliament is. Do you think that in being workmanlike—I refer to both the Executive and the Parliament—we have gone for quantity rather than quality? Given the CSG principles and the work of the Public Petitions Committee and, indeed, the subject committees, perhaps we should be looking for quality. That might mean more committee bills than Executive bills, which would allow the Executive more time to come up with the type of bills to which people might relate rather than the small, short, sharp bills that have been introduced so far.

11:15

The Convener: On resources for the Public Petitions Committee, the point that quite a few petitioners raised in their response to the inquiry was that petitions generally or often go to the subject committees, but the subject committees do not always want them and tend to take a long time to handle them. There is a bit of pressure from within the Public Petitions Committee for it to be resourced so that it can handle more petitions directly.

Sir David Steel: I am sympathetic to that. I am a great fan of the Public Petitions Committee. When I read the committee's report, I am astonished at the range and breadth of subject matter that it deals with. Some of the petitions are on major issues and some of them are on what might be regarded as minor nuts-and-bolts issues. Nevertheless, they have an airing that they would not normally have had.

The Public Petitions Committee could be better resourced. Any committee that receives a petition from the Public Petitions Committee is receiving

something that is over and above its own agenda. It is a natural reaction for the committee to say, "Look, we are dealing with bills and inquiries and suddenly this petition comes to us from the Public Petitions Committee." Although those petitions are not exactly pushed to one side, the committees feel that they are an extra burden. I am sympathetic to the idea that, in the future, the Public Petitions Committee might be better resourced to carry out implementation or investigation of petitions.

I turn to the balance of legislation, which I think will change. I do not know this for a fact, but I suspect that an analysis of the legislation that the Executive has introduced would show that some of it has been kicking around for a while, waiting for an opportunity that did not present itself at Westminster. If you like, we have been mopping up a backlog of good reforms that were necessary and which were waiting to be carried out. As time goes on, that will stop. I hope that there is scope for the balance between Executive legislation and committee legislation to change in favour of more committee legislation.

The Convener: Professor David McCrone is the committee's adviser.

Professor David McCrone (Adviser): I am also entitled to speak.

Sir David Steel: That is participation for you.

Professor McCrone: I want to make a virtue of Sir David Steel's Westminster experience to answer an academic point, which also lies behind what Fiona Hyslop was saying.

I refer to the balance of power between executives and parliaments, or legislatures. In the Westminster experience there has, in most people's opinion, been an unwarranted balance in favour of the Executive, and that continues. I have two questions for Sir David. How do we avoid that situation in Scotland and maintain a proper balance between the Executive and the Parliament? It is almost the inherent nature of parliamentary democracy that power switches to executives. How do we resist that in Scotland?

Sir David Steel: There is a difference between the two Houses at Westminster, both of which I have experience of. I do not want to get into the vexed question of House of Lords reform, but there is no doubt that the objective, which the white paper sets out, is to secure a second chamber in which the Government will not have an in-built majority.

The balance of legislation and committee activity in the Lords is much more like the balance in the Scottish Parliament than it is in the House of Commons. I have seen it myself. There is a clear difference between the two Houses. Historically,

the system has been weighted towards the Government being in control of what happens in the Commons, unless the majority is very narrow, which has not happened often.

How do we avoid such weighting in the Scottish Parliament? The answer lies in maintaining the views that the committee system is of paramount importance and that the chamber is only half our work. At Westminster, the Parliament is definitely the chamber and committees are a minor adjunct. One of the reasons why I have always resisted the pressure from committees to meet at the same time as the chamber is for the committees' own protection. They have a status; they are the Parliament functioning. They should not be considered an adjunct to the chamber. That is why Tuesdays and Wednesday mornings are the Parliament working through its committees and the chamber meets on Wednesday afternoons and on Thursdays. That pattern ought to be protected and preserved.

The Convener: I will ask you something that we asked Tom McCabe when he gave evidence a couple of weeks ago. It concerns the accountability of the First Minister. Again, we have followed Westminster. We moved away from an open question time to a First Minister's question time, which is more like the Westminster model, because that is what the then First Minister wanted and what the media wanted. It appears to be what the public want; it is the busiest time in the public gallery. Have we got ourselves into a Westminsterish mode in which we have a knockabout between the party leaders? Questions are asked that are not really proper questions, in the sense that they do not find anything out or hold the Executive to account. Answers are often not really given. Is that a satisfactory way of holding the First Minister and the Executive's programme to account? I put it to Tom McCabe that we should perhaps find a way for a committee or the conveners of the committees to interview the First Minister publicly from time to time to ask about the progress of the Executive's programme. Have you given any thought to that? Do you see any mileage in it?

Sir David Steel: Yes. I have an intermittent dialogue with the party leaders on that subject. I do not like the set questions. I keep trying to cajole them into—I had better not go into private discussions.

I do not find the present system satisfactory. It has become something of a caricature of Prime Minister's question time, which itself is not a healthy aspect of parliamentary democracy. There is scope for committees to call the First Minister to answer questions. I see no reason why that should not happen. I also wonder whether we were right to depart from the original form of question time, in

which questions were asked of the Government generally and the First Minister answered some of them. As you say, the then First Minister—and, indeed, the Parliament as a whole—wished to change the system. I am not sure that we did the right thing.

Donald Gorrie: I share your enthusiasm for time for reflection. It is occasionally criticised. Could you get your staff to produce a brief analysis of those who have led time for reflection and some sort of feedback from them as to whether they found it satisfactory? A good bit of positive publicity for time for reflection would be helpful.

Sir David Steel: We have such analysis. Perhaps we have not published it, but it has been done. I find it highly satisfactory. The fact that members often refer back to what was said in time for reflection shows that it is part and parcel of our proceedings, unlike at Westminster, where prayers are private and the same every day.

People come in and give us the benefit of their views. It is another element of our openness to outside society. The Parliament can be criticised because we have no ethnic minority representatives, but members of ethnic minorities have a chance, through time for reflection, to come and talk to us.

I think that you received a memo—which I have not seen but have read about in the press—complaining that the selection, even among the Christian denominations, was rather one-sided. I was a bit puzzled by that. In the early days, all the invitations came from me, because someone had to kick it off. As we have gone on, however, suggestions for people to lead time for reflection have increasingly come from members, and we try to fit them in. We balance the denominations according to their strength in Scotland, and we try to balance those invited by geography as well. I think that it works pretty well, but the idea that I should conduct some kind of theological examination of members' suggestions before I invite people is ludicrous. I am happy with the breadth of people that we have had take part in the proceedings.

Mr Paterson: When we ask for comments and opinions about the Scottish Parliament, people are usually unanimous in talking about the confusion between the Parliament and the Executive. What are your views on that? I said earlier that we do not call a spade a spade. When we call the Government the Executive, we are calling a spade a hand tool that you use with your foot. What I really want to get at is your view. Andrew Welsh suggested that it might take 100 years for the consciousness of the public to know what "Executive" means. Is there a shorter way of making them understand?

Sir David Steel: This is my personal view. I was actively involved in passing the legislation that became the Scotland Act 1998, particularly in the House of Lords. I said at the time, and I have not changed my view, that I thought that changing all the names and titles was quite unnecessary. People understand what the Government is. The concept of the Scottish Executive being the Scottish Government has been a difficult one to get across, just as the title Presiding Officer seems somewhat bizarre, compared with Speaker, which everybody knows and understands. It was a conscious decision by the Westminster Government when the Scotland Bill was drafted that all the names and titles should be different. I am not sure that that was wise. It has certainly made it more difficult to get across to the public who we are and what each of us does.

Mr Paterson: You have experience of dealing with a lot of other Parliaments. Do you know of many Governments that are called Executives?

Sir David Steel: The Government in Northern Ireland is known as the Executive, but as far as I know the two words that are usually used are Government and Administration. I do not know where the word Executive came from, but to me an executive is the chief official of a local authority. I think that you have put your finger on one of the difficulties that we have had in getting across to the non-political public what all the terms mean.

Mr Paterson: Donald Gorrie said that you are the captain. Perhaps it is like a football team. Every time I have put that question, people have body-swerved it. You are the only guy who did not.

The Convener: That is praise indeed. It would be a suitable note on which to end, except that I would like to wrap up the session with one final question that relates to an issue that was raised with the corporate body witnesses. They made the perfectly justifiable observation that they have been very busy in the first couple of years performing routine tasks and setting up the Parliament. They said that they are now looking forward to developing their role strategically. I guess that much the same would be true of the Presiding Officers, who have had a huge amount of work to do. Have you had time to give any thought to how the role of Presiding Officer might be broadened or strengthened in the years to come? Do you have a message for us about how you think the role might evolve—to become the champion of the back benchers, for example, or the captain of the wider parliamentary team?

Sir David Steel: The description of the role of the Presiding Officers as the embodiment of the interests of the Parliament, as distinct from the Executive, is already quite clear. I do not think that it needs to be developed; it is there and is something to be built on. As I hinted, I have been

surprised at the amount of work that the three of us have to do outside the Parliament. That is perhaps not noted enough, although it puts heavy pressure on our time. The fact that we cannot call anybody else to take the chair of the Parliament is quite difficult. If one of us is away or is ill, it is quite a serious problem.

I note in passing that my opposite number in Northern Ireland has three deputies and, as I pointed out somewhat acidly to him, the Northern Ireland Assembly hardly ever seems to meet. The Scottish Parliament meets far more often, and I have only two deputies. One of the ludicrous things about the arrangements is that it would require a change in the Scotland Act 1998 to change them; it is not something that we could put right ourselves. That is another reason why my fundamental position is that control over our own proceedings ought to be devolved to us next time there is a review of the Scotland Act 1998.

The Convener: If the number of Deputy Presiding Officers is specified in the Scotland Act 1998, is there a way in which we could amend our standing orders to allow someone else to chair a meeting, to free people up, or is that absolutely proscribed as well?

Sir David Steel: I do not think that we could do that. I remember looking into the matter on one occasion, and I was told that it could not be done. Again, that illustrates my main thesis: it is wrong that alterations to our own practices should remain embodied in the Scotland Act 1998.

The Convener: There are no other burning issues. It is a tribute to the effective work of our clerks that almost everything for which they suggested lines of questioning has been raised. There might be one or two issues that have not been explored fully and we will raise them in writing. Thank you for your time.

Meeting closed at 11:31.

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