

EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 29 June 1999
(Morning)

Meeting 1

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THE OLDEST MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE:

*Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

*Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

*Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)

*Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP)

*Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab):

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

*Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP)

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

*Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP)

*Ian Welsh (Ayr) (Lab)

*attended

COMMITTEE CLERK:

Gillian Baxendine

ASSISTANT CLERK:

Alistair Fleming

Scottish Parliament

Education, Culture and Sport Committee

Tuesday 29 June 1999

(Morning)

[THE OLDEST MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE *opened the meeting at 09:30*]

Ian Jenkins (Oldest Member of the Committee): Good morning and welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to the first meeting of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. It must come as great surprise to you all that I am the oldest person here. I was at the Beltane ceremony in Peebles, where a wee girl called Sophie became queen for the day. I can now be Winnie Ewing for five minutes. It is my duty to welcome members of the committee now that there are enough members present to form a quorum. If members do not all have briefing papers, there might be some spare ones.

As the oldest member, I must preside over the first two items of business, which are the declaration of members' interests and the committee's choice of convener. After that is done, the elected convener will take the chair.

Interests

Ian Jenkins: Members will recall that when a member has lodged a statement for the "Register of Members' Interests" about an interest

"which would prejudice or give the appearance of prejudicing his ability to participate . . . in proceedings of the Parliament relating to any particular matter, he shall, before otherwise participating in those proceedings, make an oral statement in those proceedings declaring the nature of that registrable interest."

I invite each member to make a declaration of registered interests that are relevant to the remit of the committee as it is understood at this meeting. Members will do so in alphabetical order.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): I have placed nothing in the register that would prejudice my contribution to this committee.

Ian Jenkins: I declare that I was a teacher for three days on 7, 8 and 9 May 1999 after the election. I have put that in the register. I am also a member of the Educational Institute of Scotland, but I do not think that that is relevant.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I used to work for the BBC, and both my parents worked in education and are still active on various

committees. I will mention that again in future if necessary.

Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP): I am a member of the Library Association and I am also a life member of Friends of Historic Scotland, which concerns itself with Scotland's built heritage.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Apart from all my past sins, I hold a contract to publish the Royal Lyceum theatre programme. I do not know whether that will be renewed. My wife paints.

Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): I have nothing to declare.

Ian Jenkins: Poor soul.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I have nothing to declare but a passion for Scots music and culture.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I am married to a teacher and am the son of two teachers. That will, no doubt, influence my thinking. In terms of registered interests, I am still a director of a television and film company that produces work for a variety of broadcasting companies and which has, in the past, applied to Scottish Screen. I am also an author and my publisher has received grants from the Scottish Arts Council for publication of my books.

Ian Jenkins: Jamie Stone is not here yet.

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): I have no interests to declare.

Ian Welsh (Ayr) (Lab): I am a former deputy head teacher and a former member of the EIS. I am chief executive and director of Kilmarnock Football Club. I will continue to do that in an unremunerated capacity, although that has some contractual benefits to me that still accrue.

Ian Jenkins: Everyone is as clean as a whistle.

Ian Welsh: All Kilmarnock supporters can now stand up and leave.

Convener

Ian Jenkins: The Parliament has decided on a motion of the bureau that the convener of this committee will be chosen from its Labour members. I invite anyone from that party who wishes to stand to identify himself or herself and to confirm his or her candidature.

Mrs Mulligan: I wish to stand.

Ian Jenkins: Mary Mulligan wishes to be considered. As no one else wishes to be considered, the nominations are closed. Once the clerk has confirmed the result, I shall announce it to the committee.

Mrs Mary Mulligan was elected convener by acclamation.

Ian Jenkins: I now have great pleasure in inviting the successful candidate to take the chair.

The Convener (Mrs Mary Mulligan): Thank you very much. That is the easiest election that I have had for a long time.

I very much appreciate the opportunity to chair the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. Much work lies ahead of us. An education bill is about to be lodged; I am sure that many of us will take great interest in that and will be keen to ensure that we set about delivering the schools and the standard of schooling that our children in Scotland deserve.

I am also aware that the committee will include sport and culture in its remit. There is a great tradition in Scotland of promoting our own culture, and I hope that we will be able to assist those around the country who do so, to broadcast it to the rest of the world.

I hope that we can help to make great improvements in the standard of excellence in sport and in people's involvement in the sporting world. It is essential that we see sport as an opportunity for everyone, not just for those who excel at it.

Remit

The Convener: The committee must consider its remit. Members should think about how they see the committee proceeding and about any briefings that would assist the committee in carrying forward its remit at this stage.

Ian Welsh: Will archive services be within the remit of the committee?

The Convener: We will need to check that. Are there any other questions or comments?

Nicola Sturgeon: We should quickly move on to discussion of our early role in relation to the education bill. My understanding is that the draft bill will be published next week and that there will be a consultation period over the summer. I am on record as having said that the consultation exercise is not as innovative as it might have been, so it would be useful for us to decide now what our role will be over the summer period. I hope that we will play a very active role even before the formal committee stage of the bill.

The Convener: It is obviously within our powers to consult and to introduce any innovations that are missing from the formal procedures. Anything that the committee wishes to take on board would be possible.

Michael Russell: I agree with Nicola that we

should be proactive; that should extend to the committee having a "say how" role.

I know that all the committees have said this, but this committee has, it seems, more reasons than most to meet in places other than Edinburgh, to take evidence and to discuss matters. Education, culture and sport are Scotland-wide issues. It is important that we allow maximum access to the committee, and that we investigate and discuss throughout the country.

Last week, I was at a reception at which John McCormick, the controller of BBC Scotland, described BBC Scotland as the most important cultural organisation in Scotland. The BBC has a wide-ranging cultural remit, and I hope that at some stage in this meeting we can discuss whether it will be possible both to take evidence from the new director-general of the BBC, who will probably be the most important cultural figure in Scotland, and to consider other broadcasting issues—including the annual report of BBC Scotland, which is due to be published this week.

The Convener: We have the power to call people to give evidence to the committee and to discuss with us any issues that are within our remit. Broadcasting, as we all appreciate, is a reserved matter, but that does not preclude us from investigating issues on which we want to comment. We might come back to that.

Michael Russell: I will raise that later.

The Convener: To give more structure to the meeting, can we deal first with any comments and questions that members have about education? We can then move on to culture and sport. That will bring some order to our discussion.

Mr Macintosh: The Government is to introduce an education bill, which, given that it is the most important piece of legislation that will come before Parliament, is bound to occupy most of our time. We should invite Sam Galbraith to appear before this committee after he has published the draft bill next week. I do not want the committee to get into the habit of meeting during the recess or outside parliamentary hours, but there might be a case for meeting after the bill is published and before we reconvene after the recess. At that meeting, Sam Galbraith could talk us through the bill, and we could ask him some preliminary questions.

The Convener: I will ask the clerk to clarify how long it will be before the bill, which is published next Wednesday, comes before the Parliament.

The bill will come before Parliament at the end of October, so there is some time between its publication and its consideration by Parliament. However, I take Mr Macintosh's point—obviously, we will want the minister to attend the committee to discuss the bill with us. We will ask the clerks to

arrange that, if members agree.

Nicola Sturgeon: I very much agree that we should try to arrange for the minister to appear before us, sooner rather than later. At the beginning of the consultation period, it will be useful for us to hear from the minister exactly what the thinking behind the bill was. That will inform our deliberations as we move forward.

The Convener: I agree totally, but I am conscious of the time scale to which we are working. We are close to the recess, and that might make it difficult for some members to attend; I want as many members of the committee as possible to have that opportunity. However, Nicola Sturgeon is right, and we will try to work something out as quickly as possible.

Does any other member have points to make about education?

Fiona McLeod: Will our work on education extend to considering child-centred policies and policies for young people? It is important that the committee gathers in child-centred statistics and publishes them—possibly as an annual report—so that we can see what is being done, not only in education, but in all areas that affect our children and young people.

The Convener: I understand—I am sure that I will be corrected if I am wrong—that, because the minister holds the portfolio for children and education, it is within the committee's remit to consider any matter that relates to children. Fiona McLeod's suggestion is useful and will be noted.

Karen Gillon: Can the convener clarify where community education will fit into the committee structure? Will it be within the remit of this committee, or that of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee? Obviously, that is still at the development stage.

The Convener: I am being told that community education comes within the remit of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee. I must say that that is slightly different from what I was told last week, and I know that there has been some discussion surrounding the issue. I am sure that the committee clerk, Gillian Baxendine, will check and report back to us. Many of us have an interest in that area and would like early clarification.

09:45

Mr Monteith: Our remit is described as school and pre-school education. Because of the higher still programme, there will be a great deal of interplay between colleges of further education and secondary schools. To what extent will members of the committee be able to discuss the interface, as there is a possibility of turf wars regarding the teaching of over-16s?

The Convener: Again, at this stage I cannot give the member a definite answer, as we are not sure what the division of responsibility will be. Having said that, it is quite feasible for the committee to consider issues that overlap between committees, of which there will be many. There is no bar on us including the matter to which Mr Monteith refers in our remit and investigating it when we wish. We can also work jointly with other committees.

Nicola Sturgeon: First, I want to reiterate the point that Brian made. It is important that we do not attempt—I do not think that it is possible—to draw a clear line between school and further education, in particular. There is a huge overlap.

Secondly, I want to return to the issue of children, an important aspect of which is the child-proofing of legislation. I would like some clarification as to our ability to consider legislation that has been introduced by other ministers or departments, so that we can assess the impact on children. For example, if there were a family law bill, would we, as a committee, be able to scrutinise it to determine whether it was child-friendly?

The Convener: My understanding is that we can influence any legislation that affects children. Where a lead committee is designated, on the basis of where most responsibility lies, other committees can contribute to that committee's findings. With regard to measures that affect children, there are no barriers to our influence. We must accept that the committee set-up will involve overlaps, and that there should be no bar on committees making their views known where necessary.

Fiona McLeod: I want to expand on that point. The UK is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which refers to the child-proofing of legislation. We, as a committee—and, perhaps, as a Parliament—could reaffirm our belief in the UN convention and ensure that our Parliament child-proofs legislation.

The Convener: As a founder member of the committee that considered the position of children in Scotland, I am keen that all legislation should take account of its effects on children. We should take that on board at a very early stage—we will have a significant contribution to make.

Do members have any other points to make about legislation, and about the education bill, in particular?

I hesitate to raise this, given that there are teachers present, but perhaps we should acknowledge that teachers, through their unions and organisations, will have a important contribution to make. Formal procedures are in place for that, but this committee will welcome any

representations from teachers' groups and any assistance that they can give us in shaping the bill. It is worth recording that at this stage.

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I am delighted that the convener said that teachers must be listened to, as I did not want to have to say it myself. Given the current situation in education, the role of teachers is desperately important.

Cathy Peattie: The whole idea of this Parliament is that it should be open and inclusive. We must ensure that young people and parents have an opportunity to influence the bill.

The Convener: I agree. Can we move on from education?

Ian Welsh: I should perhaps have declared that I have a child with special needs. I want to ensure—again, this relates to child-proofing legislation—that the rights of children with special needs and the responsibilities of staff and local authorities are scrutinised carefully. I regard the inclusion of children with special educational needs as a human rights issue. That said, I will champion the issue in this committee and in the Parliament.

Michael Russell: There is a legal provision that primary schools in certain categories can be closed only if there is an appeal to the relevant minister. When the Parliament takes its powers at the end of the week, this committee might be a useful vehicle for taking part in that procedure.

It was announced last week that a school in Islay is to close. My wife has gone through the same thing in her school; it would be heartening for parents in those circumstances to know that there was a committee that took an interest in special circumstances, examined the need for rural primary schools and did not always take the view that cost saving and cost cutting were the best course to follow. In terms of the point that Cathy made about parents, it would be reassuring if the committee were to take a sympathetic, watching brief on the closure of rural primary schools.

Nicola Sturgeon: I strongly agree with that. We could become involved in the issue of the closure of rural primary schools at a reasonably early stage. I have lodged a parliamentary question on that, although I have not received an answer yet. It is an area where there is need for reform.

Ian Welsh: Rural primary schools are very important. When I was leader of South Ayrshire Council, it had a small schools initiative, which attempted to keep some rural schools open when there were cash constraints. I commend that scheme and a number of others for perusal by the committee in the context of ensuring that rural

primary schools are not adversely affected by the cash constraints of local authorities.

Michael Russell: It would reassure many parents and contribute to the quality of education in Scotland if the committee were to consider a way in which we could examine the issue at an early stage—that is a matter for the clerks.

The Convener: We are all aware of the cash constraints under which local authorities operate—no authorities want to close schools. However, it would be useful if we could add to the discussion.

I want to move on to discuss the committee's sport remit. Are there any individuals or groups with which the committee would like to discuss the sport remit?

Ian Welsh: The Scottish Sports Council—officers of which are with us today—should be asked to give us its vision of the future. I strongly believe that sport and culture should not be regarded as the cinderellas of the committee. Sport is a vital ingredient in social cohesion in many parts of our community—with some dishonourable exceptions. In the main, sport is a vehicle for social inclusion and should be regarded in that way, particularly in its interface with health and healthy living. I should like the Scottish Sports Council to discuss with us how it sees sport developing in the widest sense.

Sport is also an important indicator of economic success. It is a vital ingredient in the economy and is often disregarded.

I am making a big play for sport to be made a central focus of the committee as well as of the whole business of social inclusion.

Michael Russell: During the bureau's discussion on the establishment of committees, I raised the question whether it was appropriate that education, culture and sport were to be included in one committee. I suggested a culture and sport committee or even a culture committee and a sport committee. That was rejected in the interests of economy and of creating a manageable committee structure. However, I was told that there was the potential to establish sub-committees to take up particular initiatives. Over the recess, we should consider whether to establish standing sub-committees on sport and culture.

I echo Ian's comments. There are big issues to be discussed, including the forthcoming appointment of a senior person to the Scottish Sports Council; in culture, there are also huge issues of concern. The establishment of smaller, flexible sub-committees that can undertake some of that work—particularly when we are considering the education bill—would be appropriate. If the committee agrees, we should try to do that after

the recess, at an early stage.

The Convener: We are all aware of the huge remit of the committee; the suggestion of setting up sub-committees is helpful. We should ask the clerks to look at the feasibility of that.

Nicola Sturgeon: It is important that, as Ian says, we do not allow sport and culture to fall off our agenda. There is a danger that that could happen if the education bill consumes our time. An early briefing from the Scottish Sports Council, which provides comprehensive briefings, would be useful. I strongly support the idea of having two sub-committees, one to consider sport and the other to consider culture. We could give those matters proper consideration rather than squeezing them into the remainder of the agenda after we have finished with the education bill.

Cathy Peattie: I endorse that point. It is particularly important that culture is not sidelined or left to the end of the agenda. I support the idea of a standing sub-committee focusing on Scottish culture, because there are so many issues to consider.

Mr Macintosh: I sympathise with all those views, although I am conscious of the fact that the key thing is that we find enough time to discuss education, culture and sport. I have slight reservations about setting up lots of sub-committees because I welcome the chance to discuss education, culture and sport in the main committee. I do not particularly want all the culture discussions to take place in a sub-committee as I would not be able to take part if I were not a member of that sub-committee. The same is true of sport.

I agree that the establishment of sub-committees is a practical proposition for dealing with the volume of work with which we expect to cope.

The Convener: There would be no barrier to other members of the committee attending the meetings of sub-committees, contributing to discussions or listening to presentations. I appreciate that we all want to take part, but it might be helpful if we approached some issues in smaller groups, and thus freed up time for other issues.

There is a limit to the time during which the committee will meet, and I would hate to see sport and culture fall off the end of the agenda, particularly given the fact that we will have the education bill to consider. The clerk has heard what has been said, and we will consider the issues that have been raised and work out the feasibility of establishing sub-committees.

I am also aware that members probably serve on other committees; the clerks are currently

working hard to timetable all the meetings. Having sub-committees might ensure that there was no lack of impetus on sport and culture.

Ian Jenkins: We have a massive remit, which relates to the way in which people live their lives every day—it affects all their waking hours, one way or another.

The Convener: We have only to look at the briefings that we were sent and the many organisations that contribute, very professionally, to the sport and culture debate, to see how many people could contribute to the work of the committee. Again, it might be useful to do that at a sub-committee level.

We would all like to have input into the programme that is outlined in "Sport 21", following a presentation by the Scottish Sports Council.

We will move on to discuss the culture remit and any briefings that members would like.

Cathy Peattie: I am particularly interested in the traditional work that is happening at a local level, such as community arts and arts in which local people participate and I would like some information on that. I know that the Scottish Arts Council has some stuff, but it is much a wider issue. I do not know how much information is available, but I am sure that the issue is relevant to this committee, given that it is about active citizenship, community participation and the role of children in community arts.

10:00

The Convener: Those of us with a local authority background will know that much good work is being done in estates, cities and small villages throughout the country and we would not want to lose that. We will try to discuss that issue in due course.

Michael Russell: Obviously we want the widest possible interpretation of arts and culture. Although I am not sure that the national strategy per se will achieve that, we should pause and see whether it will. Cathy is right about arts in the community, where a whole range of activities is taking place.

I want to narrow down the discussion to the point that I made at the beginning of the meeting. There is no doubt that the broadcasting companies have a big influence on the culture of Scotland and have possibly the biggest influence as cultural animators. BBC Scotland has a direct influence on arts in Scotland, given the money that it spends. For example, many events taking place this week have been paid for, sponsored and broadcast by the BBC.

The future plans and policies of BBC Scotland

will be important to this committee as they will have a huge impact on the cultural life of Scotland. The most important driver of those policies will be the director-general. The appointment of the new director-general will give us the opportunity to ask him about those issues. We cannot demand that he attends this committee, but I am sure that he would find a polite invitation irresistible. If he came to discuss broadcasting matters, he might bring the controller of BBC Scotland, who could usefully answer questions about his own annual report. I ask for very early consideration of that matter. I think that the new director-general takes on the shadow role of deputy director-general in November, and we should ask to meet him before that.

Mr Monteith: We could meet him during the festival.

Ian Welsh: I have no problem with what Mr Russell says. However, I do not know why we have to single out BBC Scotland when there is another large broadcasting organisation in Scotland. I would be happy to agree to meet the relevant people, but it is only fair to give the new director-general time to bed in. We would be delighted to see him or his representatives and representatives from Scottish Television to have a wide-ranging discussion about the nature of broadcasting output in Scotland.

Michael Russell: With respect to Ian, there is a big difference between the BBC and STV. I am very happy to investigate the activities of commercial television in Scotland, but we would have to consider a whole range of organisations beyond STV, which would get us into the issue of the reserved power of broadcasting. I am specifically focusing on the cultural role of BBC Scotland, which is, by all definitions, much bigger than that of the independent television companies, although those companies might persuade us otherwise.

Brian Monteith raises a good point—the key players in broadcasting matters are likely to be in Edinburgh during the television festival and I wonder whether consideration could be given to that timing.

Mr Monteith: I was just about to mention that. Although late August might be difficult for some members—especially if we are going to have a sub-committee—we might have an opportunity to dovetail with the festival.

Mr Macintosh: From what we have heard of Greg Dyke, he sounds open to ideas about broadcasting in Scotland. However, as Ian said, it may be difficult for him to appear before this committee before he has bedded down as director-general. Will the committee meet during the festival in August? I do not think that it will.

The Convener: I do not think that the date for the next meeting has been decided, although that may be a matter for the committee.

Mr Monteith: Greg Dyke did not find much difficulty in seeing William Hague to give him reassurances. I am sure that he will be able to see us.

The Convener: Are you suggesting that William Hague is not an important person, Mr Monteith?

Ian Welsh: William who?

Michael Russell: It was an act of charity—William Hague does not get many visitors.

It might be interesting to meet at least once during the festival to give us the opportunity to interest ourselves in the cultural and other events of the festival and the fringe. I suppose that could be a performance event in its own right.

Ian Jenkins: Not on expenses.

Ian Welsh: Michael will be too busy at the Ayrshire arts festival.

Michael Russell: We could nip up for the evening. I am sure that they will sell tickets to see Ian Welsh.

The Convener: Now that we are all regularly in Edinburgh, I am sure that we will all take advantage of the festival and partake of the culture available then.

The committee is not scheduled to meet during the recess, but the television festival takes place towards the end of August. It may be possible—and helpful—to schedule a meeting to coincide with that. However, if the new director-general takes up his position later than that, a meeting with him might not prove so easy to organise. We will ask the clerks to organise something with the BBC and the festival organisers.

Michael Russell: Greg Dyke has proved himself very willing to talk and I think that he might welcome the opportunity to meet us. It might even be the right thing to do during the television festival. I am grateful for that progress.

The Convener: There seemed to be a suggestion that, if we agreed to set up sub-committees, the culture sub-committee could meet the new director-general. We cannot agree to that yet because the setting-up of sub-committees has to be referred back to the Parliament and we do not have the opportunity to do that. The meeting with the director-general would have to involve the whole committee, which would probably be for the better anyway.

Fiona McLeod: I want to move from broadcasting to libraries. I find the issue of libraries difficult—both personally and

professionally—to discuss under the term culture, although libraries have a big input into people's cultural and literary lives. One of the biggest concerns of the library profession in Scotland is the information service aspect of librarianship. There has been an explosion—through information and communications technology—in the role of libraries and of information in people's lives. I am keen to work out how to co-ordinate that, especially with regard to ICT networks such as the national grid for learning, the public libraries network, NHS Net and JANET—I could go on.

All those networks run in parallel. At the moment in Scotland, we are spending £144 million on parallel developments which are not talking to one another. One of the greatest things about Scotland is that its size—5 million people—its geography and its people's educational background should allow us to integrate information matters into a national strategy that would serve the information needs of the people and allow Scotland to become a world leader.

Such strategies already exist. Ireland has a fairly developed information strategy, as has Denmark, and Singapore is called, I think, the smart island. Scotland is just the right size for such a national information strategy. I would be desperate if we missed the opportunity at the start of a new century and a new Parliament to change what we are doing and found that in 20 years' time, instead of having one network to serve everyone's needs, we had to renew five, six or seven networks.

This issue cuts across education and enterprise—in fact, it takes in everything. I am not sure how we can fit the matter into the committee's remit but I want us to address it. That could also save the country money.

The Convener: We will take that point firmly on board. The issue of libraries cuts across many areas and it is essential to address it if we are to continue to promote the availability of information to all the people in Scotland. It is important that we work on the issues that Fiona McLeod has raised.

Nicola Sturgeon: I want to raise a slightly narrower point about libraries, which was also mentioned in my discussions with senior librarians at the University of Glasgow. That university has one of the biggest official documents departments of any university library in Scotland and is also the official centre for European Parliament documents. However, the librarians are very concerned at the lack of access to Scottish Parliament documents. They have subscribed to the *Official Report*, but their budget does not run to committee reports and they are concerned that they will not build up the specialism that they have with Westminster and the European Parliament. They have been told that they have not been provided with some of those reports because the documents are

available on the internet. However, for research purposes, documents taken off the internet are not sufficient because they are not primary sources. That sounds like a technical matter that we could deal with easily. Is it within our remit?

The Convener: We are not absolutely certain. However, if it is not, we could raise the matter with whoever is responsible for it. We will investigate and report back to the committee.

Ian Welsh: I raised the question of the archive earlier. I think that we should claim the issue if no other committee is willing to.

The Convener: I am very wary of claiming any more issues, but I appreciate your point.

Fiona McLeod: I back up that point. Nowadays, archival services are not just a depository; they exploit the information that they hold and are part of the country's information service.

Ian Welsh: They relate to cultural identity, which is very much part of our remit.

The Convener: We will try to find the information that has been requested and to have some input to that issue. Does anyone have further points or feel that we need briefings from anyone else with which to start our work?

Nicola Sturgeon: Will we move on to a general discussion about how the committee will go about its business? I have one or two points to raise on that.

The Convener: Yes, we will do that—I just wanted to check whether anyone had further points on sport and culture. I do not want to be accused of moving on too quickly.

Ian Welsh: Cathy talked about what is happening in communities. I want to record my view that local authorities are crucial partners in this exercise—I would say that, wouldn't I? I am happy to put on the record my faith in local authorities as deliverers of all the services within our remit. I hope that we can make the local authorities our first partners. In particular, I hope that we can lay to rest the notion that we want to be great centralisers in education. We should set our face firmly against that.

Perhaps it would be helpful to start generating some kind of cultural calendar. I spoke to the Québécois Minister of Culture and Commerce, Madame Louise Beaudoin, when she was over here; she viewed culture, and the budget that is attached to it, as a driver for national identity. Is there any extant work on a Scottish cultural calendar? I mentioned the Ayrshire arts festival; others may mention the Marymas festival and the Edinburgh festival. Could some work be done to demonstrate the extent to which culture pervades Scottish civic life?

Cathy Peattie: I endorse that. People could go to a folk festival every weekend in Scotland if they had a mind to—and loads of time. It is important that we promote work that is actually happening; with respect, many things happen in Scotland apart from the Edinburgh festival.

Michael Russell: Many attempts have made to draw together a cultural calendar; I am not sure that any of them have succeeded. The thought that we could stimulate such a calendar is interesting, although it would reflect only public activities—there is a great deal of other activity.

I endorse what Ian said about local authorities as partners and deliverers, but it will be germane to this committee to consider whether local authorities are so resourced that they can continue to provide participation in culture, for instance, and well-funded services. Funding has been a considerable problem in recent years—indeed, almost for as long as one can remember. If local authority services and input cannot be resourced, they will not exist.

10:15

Mr Monteith: In response to Ian Welsh's comments, I must go on record as saying that this committee has a role in listening not just to teachers, parents and children, but to taxpayers. In relation to education, publicly funded culture or sport, we must ensure that services are delivered effectively and with value for money.

After hearing Ian's comments, I look forward to his support for the transfer of Jordanhill primary and secondary school to the local authority sector.

Ian Welsh: Would that be the transfer as opposed to the taking back?

Mr Monteith: If Ian wants local authorities to have Jordanhill, I look forward to his saying so.

Ian Welsh: Scottish local authorities operate under a best-value regime, which is significantly better at delivering services than the old compulsory competitive tendering regime. Many local authorities not only deliver, but support external organisations. For example, my authority supported the Keynote trust and Borderline theatre in productive public-private partnerships. Another advert for South Ayrshire Council's activity is that it is working hard to create a Scottish school for music and recording technology in Ayr. There are good examples of effective service delivery and productive partnerships with other organisations to deliver cultural renaissance.

The Convener: I am sure that the committee will seek to work with all its partners and to listen to all those who can contribute to best value in Scotland, which is very much our aim. Best value will also guarantee us value for money. Over the

next four years, our practice as a committee will be to ensure that we speak to as many people as possible who are affected by our remit and take on board their views.

Michael Russell: Partnership is fine, but the role of the Scottish Arts Council must also be considered anew. I questioned the Minister for Children and Education about that last week and, although he refused to consider a review of the SAC, it is important that we closely examine its operation. A new director of the SAC is coming into place and it may be appropriate for us to do something about a review in the autumn. The SAC spends about £26 million or £27 million of public money—I am not trying to sound like Brian—and usually spends it rather well, but there are big questions about the size of its bureaucracy. We should ask questions and seek reassurance.

The Convener: I do not wish to curtail this discussion, but we have only about another five minutes and we wanted to move on to how the committee will operate.

An important role for the committee, obviously, will be to challenge and question what has gone before rather than to assume that everything should be done as it was in the past. I hope that that covers Mike's point.

We will move on to the issue, raised first by Nicola, of how the committee will operate. We are entering a recess, during which no committee meetings are timetabled. However, we may wish to be provided with early briefings so that we can take part in further discussions on the education bill. Does anyone have a view on how we should proceed?

Nicola Sturgeon: I will make several points, which refer to education simply because of the imminence of the bill, although they can also be considered more generally. My first point, which Michael touched on earlier, is about where the committee will meet. We should decide to travel around the country as much as possible to ensure that we hear as broad a range of opinions as possible. Perhaps the clerks could come back with a feasibility study on how that could be done.

My second point relates to whom we should take evidence from in the early stages of the committee. We should decide to meet at least once during the recess and the purpose of that first meeting—or only meeting, depending on what we decide during the recess—should be for us to be briefed by the minister on the draft education bill. It is important that our future discussions and meetings with others are informed by the minister's and the Government's thinking on that bill.

I strongly suggest that we have discussions—either during the recess or very soon afterwards—

with the groups and individuals that submit responses to the draft bill, so that we understand how the arguments are developing and are aware, before the bill comes to us for scrutiny, of the views of all the different interest groups.

My third point relates to our ability to co-opt people on to this committee. I would be very much in favour of the committee exercising that right, so that we could co-opt, for example, representatives of the key interest groups when we examine the education bill. It is important that we allow those groups to have a direct input and I would like us to discuss that possibility very soon, if not today.

My final point is that the committee must ensure that it exercises its role properly. One of the recurring problems with legislation on education has been the tendency of Governments to make announcements without adequate consultation. To allow the committee to do its job properly, we should insist on being briefed in advance of any major statements by the minister on any of the areas within our remit. I am not sure of the extent of our power to demand pre-briefing, but we should make it clear that we expect it.

The Convener: I would like to pick up on a few of those points. It is open to the committee to decide whether it wants to move around the country; I would appreciate any other views on that. The clerks have investigated some places to which we could go. It will be important to tie in the subjects that we are examining with the places that we visit—we should not hike around the country for no apparent reason. It will also be important to go to accessible places: if we are serious about being an open Parliament, we should go to places to which as many people as possible can get, so that people outside Edinburgh can come and speak to us. The clerks will continue to examine venues that could accommodate us; we have to be aware that we take an entourage with us, which also has to be accommodated.

The committee does not have powers to co-opt people, but we can ask for advisers to work alongside us. I know that that is perhaps playing with words, but I hope that it addresses Nicola's concern and would be satisfactory.

Nicola Sturgeon: Yes, it would.

Karen Gillon: I welcome the idea that the committee should have the chance to move about the country. In committee, most of our work will probably be on education; sub-committees, if we form them, will look at culture and sport. However, if we go somewhere, we should try to take in all three aspects of our work and we should try to make the best use of our time. In particular, if we go to the north of Scotland, we should try to meet for longer than the usual couple of hours so that

we can hear the broadest range of opinion.

I would also welcome the appointment of advisers. I think that a number of groups would like to be represented and, if we are to be truly effective, we will again have to hear the broadest range of opinion. Having advisers is clearly one way of doing that. I hope that the clerks will be able to make some initial suggestions as to who those advisers should be. We could add more names if we felt it appropriate.

Fiona McLeod: As Karen said, it is important that we invite people to join us on the committee—and not just when we think that they have something to say. They should take part in our discussions and inform our decisions week by week. I am thinking of groups such as Children in Scotland and the Scottish Library and Information Council. There will be times when, thinking that they know something, we will invite them; but there will be plenty of times when we will not know that they know something. If they are here more or less permanently, they will be able to inform our decisions.

The Convener: Are there any other comments on that point or on the way in which we will operate? How do members feel about meeting during the recess?

Michael Russell: We have already talked about the possibility of meeting during the television festival. However, 10 days or a fortnight after the education bill is published—to give the minister a chance to get his thoughts in order—it would be appropriate for us to talk to him and to ask him questions. After that, the most appropriate time for us to meet would be during the television festival.

The Convener: The obvious difficulty will be calling the minister during the recess. However, we will bear in mind the fact that people are keen to follow up on that bill.

I am aware, as we approach the recess, that the Parliament agreed to attempt to have its recess in parallel with school holidays. However, I want everybody in the committee to have the opportunity to meet the minister. We will make serious efforts to arrange that as soon as possible, but please bear with me on the dates.

We are running out of time—is there anything else that members wish to raise?

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I dare say that other members did this while I was wending my way down from the uttermost regions of the north, but I ought to declare formally that I am a director, in the sense defined by the Companies Acts, of the Highland festival, which clearly has an arts input.

The Convener: I am sure that that will be noted. I thank you all for your attendance and

contributions. I look forward to meeting you again.

Meeting closed at 10:27.

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