

# **EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 3 November 1999  
(*Morning*)

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### EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

#### 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting

##### CONVENER:

\*Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab)

##### COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

\*Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
\*Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
\*Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)  
\*Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
\*Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
\*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

##### THE FOLLOWING MEMBER ALSO ATTENDED:

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab)

##### COMMITTEE CLERK:

Gillian Baxendine

##### ASSISTANT CLERK:

Alistair Fleming



## Scottish Parliament

### Education, Culture and Sport Committee

*Wednesday 3 November 1999*

*(Morning)*

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 09:33*]

**The Convener (Mrs Mary Mulligan):** Good morning. I am impressed by everybody's punctuality—except mine. Well, I was not late; other members were early.

### Work Programme

**The Convener:** The first item on the agenda is the committee's work programme, which has proved difficult to work on, and on which I have received some comments. Do members who have not commented wish to do so?

**Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I gave notice to Gillian Baxendine and to you that I would like to have an investigation into the national funded arts companies in order to assist in the process of deciding which companies should be funded. I know that that topic is on the work programme already, but the matter has moved on since it was first included, so we should address it in the near future.

**The Convener:** Cathy, do you wish to expand on that?

**Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** I agree with Mike. It is tempting to address whatever is the issue of the day and become caught up in it. We must examine the national arts companies and related issues in a couple of meetings. We should have a discussion and decide how to move forward, because the issues that arose last week could arise next week with a different company. Rather than examine one company, we should examine them all. We had the opportunity to speak to the Scottish Arts Council, but I would like more information and the opportunity to ask questions, so that we can discuss the issues.

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** We should also consider the possible establishment of a national theatre company, because we are examining the current theatre companies and there is likely to be a debate about a national company.

Given that the Deputy Minister for Culture and Sport will be here next week, I intend to draft a number of questions in advance—if the convener agrees—so that we receive as full answers as

possible on the events surrounding Scottish Opera and Hampden park.

**Michael Russell:** It is important that the minister discusses the national companies, and particularly Scottish Opera, with us next week. Cathy is correct: the crisis surrounding Scottish Opera, on which the committee and others should have more information, is one issue in a complex web of issues, such as the merger and the possibility that debt will be carried into it. Brian Monteith is right to say that there is an active debate on a national theatre. The Scottish Arts Council and the companies constantly complain that there is a shortage of money for the national companies.

Cathy Peattie is right that the committee should take formal evidence over a couple of meetings on those issues and produce a report on the national companies. That would help the debate, and open up the issue of what has happened at Scottish Opera, in the hope that it does not happen again, because members will know that this is the third occasion on which the company has faced such a crisis.

**The Convener:** We all share those concerns.

**Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** I agree with everything that was said. This is a good time to address those matters because a cultural strategy is being formulated, so we can take evidence and form an opinion before other decisions are made and before knock-on effects complicate matters.

**Mr Monteith:** On the national companies, we are talking about the performing arts. Paying due deference to our work load, I would like us to examine museums and galleries later in the year, because the evidence that was presented to us showed that the funding that they receive is considerably less than similar institutions receive in the rest of the UK. That is an ideal matter for the committee to examine.

**The Convener:** We can take that on board later on, when we are looking at items for future discussion and inquiry. With regard to the national companies, members will be aware that the time that will be available to us at the end of November and the beginning of December will be curtailed by our involvement with the forthcoming education bill. I suggest that we hold a short inquiry—only a couple of meetings—to investigate the present situation of the national companies.

Members will be consulted about people whom it would be appropriate to invite to answer questions and discuss the situation. We will probably set aside two meetings to conduct that inquiry. The committee will then put together a report giving our views and recommendations.

**Ian Jenkins:** Can we be assured that we will

receive briefings, and that the committee will be resourced before it takes evidence?

**The Convener:** Certainly.

**Michael Russell:** It is absolutely right that a briefing by Parliament researchers on the national companies—on the present status, the history, the funding, and the issue of a national theatre—should be circulated to the committee.

I notice that the committee is due to meet on 17 November and 23 November. Those two meetings might allow us to take evidence and draw up a report that could be ready for the beginning of December. However, I make a truly personal plea that, as the meeting on 23 November is scheduled to be at the same time as the Parliamentary Bureau meeting, the timing of our meeting be changed.

**The Convener:** I am aware of that difficulty.

We will provide members with the relevant information. That does not preclude them from raising points with the minister next week, as a meeting with her is also on the agenda.

**Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I e-mailed you and Gillian Baxendine about Hampden.

**The Convener:** I am sorry, Fiona. Is what we said on the national companies agreed?

**Michael Russell:** Perhaps we can give Gillian Baxendine information on people to whom we might want to talk. For example, I am sure that Equity will want to be heard on the national theatre, and we must be certain to ask the trade unions to be part of the inquiry. The Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union has expressed great concern. There is concern that trade unions and those who work in the cultural industries are often the last to be consulted. I want to hear representatives of a variety of unions, including the Musicians Union, on all those matters

**The Convener:** That is important. I think that everybody is agreed.

**Fiona McLeod:** I hope that deciding to consider the national companies over the next two meetings does not preclude us from examining the situation at Hampden, which I have tried since July to get the committee to consider. That is my proviso for agreeing to the inquiry into the national companies.

**The Convener:** The committee is aware that the Deputy Minister for Culture and Sport will attend the meeting next week. We have agreed that that meeting will examine the cultural strategy, but that the minister should also be asked to address the issue of Hampden. More information has come to light since we agreed that. Getting the relevant

information at that meeting will be an important starting point, from which we can decide how to proceed. The difficulty will be how we timetable two inquiries at the same time.

**Fiona McLeod:** I do not think that meeting the minister next week is the starting point. The starting point should be today—it should have been in September. We are watching a drip-drip revelation through the media. We are talking about £40 million of public money, and cannot keep putting off the matter. This committee, as the sports committee, has responsibility to examine the use of public money. We cannot keep sitting back to wait for the Executive to tell us what it is doing, as the answers that we have had from the Executive so far tell us nothing, or tell us that it is not going to tell us anything.

We need to take responsibility and launch an investigation rather than wait to ask the minister questions, which on current form will not be answered.

I have a few specific points for the committee to get on with. Before Rhona Brankin comes next week, we must tell her that we want full details of the package that has been worked out, so that we can investigate it and decide whether it is suitable.

**Ian Welsh (Ayr) (Lab):** I disagree—

**Fiona McLeod:** May I finish?

**The Convener:** I will bring you in shortly, Ian.

**Fiona McLeod:** We want a copy of the consultants' interim report because, again, we are learning things through the media about that report, about which Mr Galbraith has refused to answer questions in Parliament. I would also suggest that we launch our own investigation, taking written and oral evidence from those involved to find out exactly what is going on.

09:45

**Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP):** Fiona is right to press the matter. The situation has been going on for some time and, for a variety of reasons, we have continued to put the matter back.

There might be a compromise. The Deputy Minister for Culture and Sport is coming next week. If we take on board one or two suggestions, we can probably find a way forward. Could we ask the minister or the Executive to provide us with certain pieces of information prior to the minister's appearance next week, so that we know what questions are pertinent and how to ensure that we get the answers? It would be good to have a section in next week's meeting, after the minister's evidence—timetabled on the agenda—to discuss what action, if any, the committee wants to take,

so that, if we decide that the minister's answers have not satisfied our concerns, we can make progress on the matter. Fiona's two suggestions provide us with a way forward.

**Ian Welsh:** Nicola's approach is much more sensible, with respect. I would be happy to see a briefing note or statement prepared by the Executive, to show the extent to which there is a move towards a conclusion in the negotiations on what is clearly a package to rescue the project.

I am very unhappy, however, about our levering ourselves into what may be delicate negotiations at this stage. I am perfectly happy to have a view taken on the matter at the appropriate time, but I do not think that this is the appropriate time. However, it is the appropriate time for the minister to give us a full and clear briefing on progress to date. I concur with Nicola to that extent.

**Mr Monteith:** I support Nicola's suggestion. I am thoroughly fed up with seeing on the BBC, or reading in *The Scotsman*, in *The Herald* the next day, then in the *Sunday Herald* or *Scotland on Sunday*, drip-drip information about what is happening, while the Scottish Executive hides behind commercial confidentiality. I am prepared to wait until Rhona Brankin is here next week, but I think that we should at least have the consultants' document, so that we can read through it and give the minister the benefit of sensible questions. We have seen internecine warfare starting in another committee, with allegation and counter-allegation. It has reached the point where the minister involved has said that the questions were not hard enough or accurate enough. We should ask the right questions by ensuring that we have the right information to formulate them.

**The Convener:** I have no doubt that we can ask the right questions. I will now say something on what I was going to ask Fiona originally: I am not sure that, at this stage, we could have a constructive discussion on what is going on, because we do not have all the information. I accept that the committee has been patient in trying to get questions answered and to obtain information.

There are sensitive questions, which should be answered. Nicola's suggestions are about preparing the questions and information on which we would like to be briefed before next week's meeting. We could then put questions that would extract the information that we need. That is probably the most sensible way to go.

**Michael Russell:** Fiona is right. There is no doubt that the lack of information has been scandalous. Essentially, next week is the last chance for the minister to provide us not only with the information that we need, but with the information that the public need.

The creation of a debentures millionaire is the latest thing about which people in Scotland are stunned. There might be a case later on—but I am not making a formal proposal—in the light of the Scotland v England ticket sales fiasco, for us to examine the whole question of the running of Scottish football. I am sure that we would be greatly assisted by Ian Welsh, who is an expert in the matter. There is much public concern about football, and the football authorities seem, as it were, to be kicking themselves in the shins.

**Fiona McLeod:** As Mike said, the committee has to send out a clear message. There is great public concern about what is happening. We must show that we share that concern and accept our responsibility for the matter.

As I said, Rhona Brankin appearing before the committee next week should not be the start of the process, but part of it. I would like us today to make it clear to the minister, before she comes, that we want copies of the consultants' report, a clear breakdown of the funding—who it is coming from and how it is being applied—and the dates of all the meetings of the co-funders that have taken place so far. We want to be clearly informed.

In a written answer to me on 26 October, the Minister for Children and Education said:

"The consultants' reports contain commercially sensitive information. It would not be appropriate to publish them."—*[Official Report, Written Answers, 26 October 1999; Vol 3, p 18.]*

I do not think that it is appropriate for a minister to say that a committee of the Parliament cannot have access to those documents to inform its decisions. We must be very clear to Rhona Brankin about what we want.

**The Convener:** Some issues are so sensitive that it would not be appropriate to publish information. However, the minister would have to explain that to the satisfaction of the committee. Obviously, that will be her decision.

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** I have a slight difficulty with that. Ultimately, the buck stops with us—we are the law makers in Scotland. For any minister in any department to say to any committee of this Parliament that information cannot be supplied to it is very dangerous. If the matter is sensitive, we should see the information and hear evidence in camera. There is an important principle at stake. I am not as well acquainted as are members across the table with the issue in question—if I see a football, I run—but this is where I pop my head above the parapet.

**The Convener:** We wish that the Scotland team would do that.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Fiona has made the case

well, and she is absolutely right. At this meeting, the committee should make it clear to Rhona Brankin what information we expect to be provided with. If the minister does not supply us with that information, we as a committee will have to make our views known. We cannot get any further by discussing the issue today, but we must make it clear that we expect the information to be provided in advance of her appearance next week.

**The Convener:** Is that agreed?

**Ian Welsh:** I want to reiterate that I do not think that we should attempt to lever ourselves into the delicate negotiations that might still be going on. Irrespective of what Fiona says about the need for information—I am as pleased as the next person to receive information—I would prefer a resolution of the Hampden situation without further undue controversy.

**Fiona McLeod:** I take the opposite view from Ian and want that recorded. The committee has a responsibility for the use of public funds. There has been a drip-drip of information through the media. Ian says that we should not get involved in delicate negotiations. What we know of the negotiations so far suggests that they are working against the public interest. It is the committee's public responsibility to work for that interest.

**The Convener:** It is quite clear that it is the job of the Executive to sort out the matter. The committee's task is to ensure that the Executive does the job in the public interest. I think that we can strike a balance between those things; it is to be hoped that that will bring about a resolution of the situation. We will ask the questions and seek to provide the information before next week's meeting.

We do not seem to have got very far. There is on-going discussion of our work plan. The intention is to identify one major area for investigation. We have agreed on one short, sharp inquiry, into the national companies, and we are looking for guidance from the committee on a longer inquiry, bearing in mind the role that we will be playing in scrutinising the improvement in Scottish education bill.

**Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** Before we start deciding our priorities, I want to make the point that earlier, when we were talking about what should be on our agenda, we discussed the Scottish music industry. I do not think that that needs to be a priority for our committee. Pauline McNeill and other members are setting up a cross-party group, which a few members of the committee have said that they are keen to join. While the music industry should not be at the top of our agenda, I would be concerned if it were missing from a list of topics that we might discuss in future, as we need to come back to it.

**The Convener:** I am happy to record that comment.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** The paper on the work programme is extremely good. It focuses attention on some areas of priority and gives us a clear idea of the direction in which we are heading. I suggested two additional areas under "Topics for major inquiries", which are not in my version of the paper, although I think that Gillian Baxendine included them in a revised version of the paper. For members who have an old version of the paper, those topics were: the role and operation of Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools and an examination of the further protection that can be given to small and rural schools. With those two additions, the paper is on the right lines.

I want to make some suggestions about the areas that we should prioritise. It is estimated that we could handle two short inquiries—perhaps three at most. We already agreed the subject of the funding of the national arts companies, but I would suggest another two subjects, which are, in order of priority, a report on special educational needs, which is an extremely important subject, and the response to the Executive's cultural strategy, which is a pressing matter.

I have three suggestions for "Topics for reporters", although there might be some discussion about how much work is possible. Those suggestions are: consultation with young people, which we have discussed on a number of occasions, the Scottish film industry and rural schools. While I suggested rural schools under "Topics for major inquiries", I doubt that we will have time to undertake that as a major inquiry in the forthcoming parliamentary year. It might be appropriate to start that work with an initial examination by a reporter, with a view to having a major inquiry later.

Finally, under "Topics for major inquiries", I suggest that the most important issue is school infrastructure, given the scale of the problem. I suggest that that should be our first major inquiry, which might involve taking evidence outwith Edinburgh. As part of the overall investigation, I wish to suggest another subject that we should examine—I make this suggestion from an educational point of view, not from a party political point of view. At an appropriate point during that inquiry, we should examine and report on the Glasgow schools private finance initiative and its impact on education.

We must decide how we will deal with a couple of other issues, such as the McCrone committee. I note that the paper says that the Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee will come up in the context of the education bill. However, as far as I can gather, that is not certain. Although the minister has said that he intends to make proposals on the



abolition of the SJNC, he has yet to say when he will do that. The consultation process on the education bill has now finished and there is a question mark over how SJNC reform is to be factored into that bill.

**The Convener:** The time scale, which was not very clear, seems to be slipping.

Committee members have flagged up special educational needs a number of times as an area of interest. There was nothing specific on it in the draft bill, but the Executive has indicated that it might consider it further. I am not sure whether we should start an inquiry on that issue, or whether we should wait to see what the Executive proposes, following the consultation process, before we decide whether we want to proceed with such an inquiry. I am happy to take members' views on that. We should not duplicate that work, given that we have several other issues to consider, but I feel strongly that we must tackle it.

Several members wish to speak; I suggest that everyone be given an opportunity to comment on the revised work programme, following which we will try to order our priorities.

10:00

**Mr Monteith:** On the shorter inquiry, I lend my ample weight to the suggestion that we discuss the Riddell committee report, which I think is especially important—it has not been considered in the public domain as much as it should have been.

On the major inquiry, I am concerned that we will take on too much if we try to cover too many of these subjects. We should discuss curriculum issues. This committee could do our country a great service by examining that objectively.

Three subjects listed in the suggested work programme—maths, Scottish history and sport—particularly merit discussion. It is rightly pointed out that a report on maths is due in November. Given that there is concern about Scotland's performance internationally in maths, it is important that we examine that matter. There is a growing interest in how Scottish history is taught in Scottish schools. There is also interest in the teaching of sport in terms of health and sporting performance.

One issue that is not mentioned in the suggested work programme but that might be worth considering is the teaching of foreign languages in primary schools, which HMI reported on before the establishment of this Parliament. Many teachers felt ill judged by the report—they felt that they had been carrying out HMI's recommendations only to be told that they were teaching wrongly.

**Mr Macintosh:** I am conscious that we are in danger of repeating a previous exercise and producing a big wish list. I will pick up on some of the points made by Nicola Sturgeon and Brian Monteith. As Nicola said—I think everybody agrees—we should examine special needs. It is difficult to decide whether we should deal with that subject before the minister comes back to the committee, but it is missing from the bill and we do not know whether he will change his mind about it after the consultation. As we are concerned about whether the bill should cover it, perhaps we should have an inquiry into it before the minister comes back.

There are a lot of issues that I would like to discuss, but we must prioritise. Brian raised curricular issues, which I would be keen to examine as, again, the bill does not cover them. The broader question of what education is for is also missing from the bill. We should consider issues such as why we are educating our children, good citizenship and sustainable development.

Brian mentioned maths and Scottish history. Those are broad subjects and, although I do not know quite how we would focus an inquiry, we should consider them.

A point that emerged from a trip that Fiona McLeod, Ian Welsh and I made to a school this week was how children learn. Understanding of the process of learning has developed significantly in recent years, so there is a lot for us to examine. That might cross over into early intervention and early-years education as well. I am not sure whether that helps us to make progress or just adds another couple of issues to the list.

**The Convener:** I think that it is helpful.

**Ian Welsh:** I will concentrate on special needs. I am wary of waiting for the Executive to respond on special needs. My experience is that Governments talk up the issue but deliver at a very low level. We cannot yet judge whether this Executive will deliver more than any previous Government.

I would be concerned about restricting ourselves to considering the Riddell report, important though it is. There is a broader issue about the integration of children with special educational needs. I am concerned that we do not take a top-down approach. The matter concerns families, school adaptations, auxiliary support, additional teaching support, teacher training, school ethos indicators and a range of other factors. The basic issue, as I have indicated before, concerns human rights.

Some of the smaller, curricular issues do not concern me. However, we should treat the strategic issues seriously. For me, they will be an indicator of whether the Scottish Executive is serious about social inclusion. That would be a major inquiry and, if I had to plump for any, that is

the one that I would plump for.

**Michael Russell:** We have been meeting since May. We must get to grips with what a committee is for. Why does this committee exist? It exists because it has a number of defined roles within the Parliament. Those roles can be broken down. The first role is legislative. As the improvement in Scottish education bill is scrutinised by this committee, it will need serious attention; we will need to take evidence at the pre-legislative stage. When the bill is introduced, it will be our responsibility to produce a stage 1 report. We must request from the minister his proposed time scale for introducing the bill and we must find the time for our work on it. Let us call that role A.

Role B is to instigate legislation. We can produce committee bills. At any time, a proposal for a bill can be referred to us by any member of this committee and we would have to consider it. In those circumstances, we should have a constructive discussion about any legislative change that we think that we could bring about as a committee. To do that, we might have to inquire into certain areas, rather than simply have a seminar on this or a briefing on that. The question is this: what change could we bring about as a committee? If we can focus on that, the topics for inquiry will become self-evident.

Role C is to right wrongs—to look into things that are difficult and to discern whether we can help. It is wrong to define our task as this paper does—although I am grateful to have the paper—as some sort of short or medium-term inquiry. That is all about inputs. We should be examining the outputs for which this committee has responsibility.

Our main task, between now and next summer, is to scrutinise the bill. We must examine it clause by clause. As some people have said, it may have deficiencies. We might want to pre-empt our work by talking to some of those people about what they think. We are receiving the information. We should consult some of the people who are providing information now, to get ahead of ourselves. That is the first timetabling priority.

Our second task is to inform the Executive about priorities, if we think that we can make a difference. The most important issue on the list is school infrastructure. Nobody has really taken on the task of saying to the Executive how it could address that. We could suggest new thinking, new ideas—I hesitate to say it, but modern ideas and a modernisation of the issue—and we could take evidence in a way in which the Government never could. People will talk to us, and we can visit people. That seems to be a way in which this committee could make a difference.

No member of this committee has yet produced

any legislative ideas. We should ask members whether there is something that we can do. That will entail an inquiry. In terms of shorter inquiries for the righting of wrongs, we have already agreed to hold an inquiry on the national arts companies. That is good. We could also have an inquiry into special needs. That would allow us to make an impact in that area, as we all want to do. A shorter inquiry need not be limited to two or three meetings; it would just not be the main work that we are doing. In the context of the bill, we can consider the Gaelic language. Some organisations might be happy if we were to assist in that matter.

There are one or two other areas within our remit. We have a role in monitoring what the Executive is doing. We must examine issues such as the national cultural strategy to determine whether we can jolly the Executive along, make comments or give assistance. If those issues become the subject of legislation, we must get involved in that process. We can also send members away—with a bit of research help—to look into issues that might inform the committee. That is the purpose of a rapporteur: to inform the committee without tying up all its time. There are some items on this list for which that would be helpful.

I plead with you, convener, and with the committee, for the clearest and most rigorous timetable for the things that we know that we have to do. If we occasionally interview people whose evidence seems to be of interest at the time, or if we take endless briefings from people who simply want to put their spin on things, we will be wasting our precious time. Rigour must be brought to bear now.

**Mr Stone:** I echo what Mike Russell has said. He has given an incisive view of the role of this committee and we should take that up and run with it. As both Mike and Nicola have said, we have asked about infrastructure before; Sam Galbraith himself responded by saying that the issue should be considered.

Nicola talked about rural schools. In Highland region, we have been through a tortuous process in recent years, as it became almost an annual fixture to shut a number of schools. Last time, thank goodness, we saw off that threat, but for the sake of children and their parents and communities this committee must make a contribution to solving the problem. The system simply cannot go on. Not only does it cause huge upset, but the removal of a school can gut a small rural community. When a little place such as Drumbeg loses its school, it is in trouble.

I do not know whether we should change the powers that the Secretary of State for Scotland used to have or whether we should legislate to give different pointers to councils. I would like

some advice about that. The process of closing rural schools may have stopped in Highland, but it is still going on in Argyll. If we believe in education in its broadest sense, I urge committee members to make the closure of rural schools a priority issue. It matters a great deal in my part of the world.

**Cathy Peattie:** I would like to consider the involvement of the wider community in education. We talk about involving parents but we are not sure how to do it. I would like to examine the proposals for school boards in more detail. There is also the issue of children having a say in their own learning and participating in how their schools are run. Active citizenship, the youth parliament and youth forums are also important. We should talk about all those wider issues.

However, if we cannot get kids through the door of a school to be educated in the first place, or if kids think that education is nothing to do with them, we are lost before we start. We must consider whether community schools work and how they involve parents, other members of the community and voluntary organisations with an interest in education.

**The Convener:** Mike was right to point out that there must be a purpose to any inquiries or evidence sessions. There must be a reason for the committee to conduct such exercises and we must be clear about what we want to achieve. We should bear that in mind when considering how to plan our work programme.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I am aware that the discussion is beginning to become rather wide-ranging again. I reiterate Mike Russell's point. We need to focus on the issues outlined in the paper. We have had umpteen stabs at it and we have all had our say, but we are not here to decide what we find interesting as individuals. If we want to do that, perhaps we should go away and do a PhD on some of the subjects that have been mentioned. Mike was right to outline our roles and we must focus on our priorities. If we were to set our priorities outwith the confines of the paper, I would be worried.

**Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab):** I agree with Ian Welsh that a major inquiry into special educational needs should be a priority. For too long, that has been a back-burner issue; it has been disregarded and left for somebody else to deal with. If we are not careful, that situation may persist. We should look at all aspects of special educational needs. The bill gives us a starting point but, as Ian said, we must also consider how people with special educational needs can be integrated into schools fully, rather than in an ad hoc, add-on way.

The role of rapporteurs is very important. When

we were in St Andrews, performance indicators emerged as an important subject. Perhaps a member of the committee can report on whether performance indicators should be qualitative or quantitative. We need to consider how we rate schools, how we rank schools, whether the indicators that we are using are the most appropriate ones and whether they take into account all the factors.

Young people are very important and it is important that we consult them. In the past, consultation has not been carried out as it should have been. We should, perhaps, get some information on that and develop ideas on how we take it forward. It would not do any good for us to say that we want to consult young people if we have not done the groundwork and examined how that should be done.

We must examine rural schools. Too often, they are easy targets when budgets are under threat.

I agree with Cathy Peattie's comment that we have become very school focused in our outlook on education. We must look at education in a wider context. If we fail to engage with education in the wider community, all education will be done in schools. Kids who do not go to school will not be educated properly. Their parents will not be able to engage in their education because they do not have the basic skills that would help them. We need to launch an inquiry into education outwith schools, and into how people learn in that context.

10:15

**Nicola Sturgeon:** There are all sorts of things that we should do, but we do not have time to do them all. This meeting is about pinning down priorities. The issue of being school focused is important; indeed, the SNP has made that point in relation to the education bill.

Performance indicators represent a big part of the bill's proposals, so we have an opportunity to examine that issue. All Karen's points are valid and we would tackle them all if we had all the time in the world, but we do not have that time and I think that we should start to pin down our priorities.

**Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab):** I apologise for being late.

Karen made a point about special educational needs. How will the Riddell committee report fit into the process of examining the bill on improving schools? What relationship will we have with other committees on this issue? I am aware that the Equal Opportunities Committee has been examining what the report says about the length of school days and so on.

**Michael Russell:** I agree with Sylvia, but she

raises an issue relating to standing orders. Any member is entitled to attend this committee—Sylvia is very welcome to attend on each occasion that this committee meets. There is, however, meant to be a political balance on the committees—that has been agreed by the bureau. There is now regularly an additional member at meetings who has—properly—speaking rights. That diminishes the time available for other members of the committee.

I respect Sylvia's interest in this and I think that she would be a valuable member of the committee, but if the Labour party wants her to be a member, the quid pro quo is that someone else from another party should also be a member. That would leave those charged with membership of the committee with a reduced role.

I say that for the record so that the parties will consider it, and not to Sylvia personally, for whom I have great respect and whose contribution I am glad to hear.

**The Convener:** My understanding of the standing orders is that they say that members can indicate whether they wish to attend committees of which they are not members. If that is the case, the member is entitled to take part in the discussions. It is not necessarily for us to decide on how that is operated. Your point has been recorded, Mike, and the appropriate place in which to take it up is the bureau.

**Michael Russell:** I raised the point so that it would be recorded. There is an issue regarding the operation of committees. The standing orders, as I understand them, were designed to allow any member to address an issue in a committee. They were not designed to allow for additional full-time members. I welcome Sylvia's contribution, but we do not want to end up with the balance of committees being disrupted.

**The Convener:** The interpretation of the rule has to be discussed by the bureau and some guidance has to be given to the committees.

**Ian Welsh:** It might be helpful if we were to crystallise the discussion. I have jotted down an idea and I wonder whether the committee would like to take a view on it.

I think that national companies, school infrastructure and special educational needs are issues that the committee should examine in depth. To try to reflect the balance of the committee, three reporters could produce a report each. For example, one could be on sport in schools, one on Scottish film and one on consulting young people. In view of the range of issues that we have to deal with, it would be useful to deal with things in bite-sized chunks.

**The Convener:** I agree that special education

and school infrastructure are the two things that people have identified as needing to be investigated.

I said at the beginning that I was not sure how to deal with the issue of special education because we do not know what the outcome of the Executive's consultation process will be. However, I take on board the points that have been made about the committee's responsibility to dictate the agenda.

I disagree with Ian Welsh about the use of individual reporters to make the reports. We have already taken evidence on consultation with children and Children in Scotland is preparing a report on that—I thought that Fiona McLeod might want to do some work on that, given her interest in the subject. A reporter could start the discussions on rural schools, as Nicola suggested, and if the issue becomes bigger, the committee could return to it later in the year. Jamie, would you like to do that?

**Mr Stone:** Sure, I guess that Fiona and I would be equally interested in that.

I want to emphasise a point that Karen Gillon made. This is the Education, Culture and Sport Committee and part of the solution to the problem of rural school closures would be to push together the different aspects of our committee to create units with many uses in communities. We should remember our wider responsibility.

Lots of councils missed the opportunity to work together and pool their budgets. The consultation document is called "Improving our Schools", but it deals only with education and ignores the opportunities to link in with other areas.

**Michael Russell:** Ian has moved us on substantially, which is valuable.

As Nicola Sturgeon pointed out, we need a focus and a timetable. We must leave this meeting with an absolutely clear idea of what we are doing. There is broad agreement that school infrastructure and special educational needs should be investigated first and that we should continue to take evidence on the bill. Jamie should be the reporter on rural schools. The purpose of a rapporteur is not to end the discussion on a subject but to begin it. A rapporteur on Scottish film could identify the issues that needed to be discussed.

I mention one final point on the curriculum, because curriculum issues are important. The teaching of Scottish history is an issue that concerns all parties. Reports on the issue have become politicised. It would be interesting to have a report, perhaps from a member who has not shown great enthusiasm for the matter, on whether we should consider the issue.

I chaired a book launch for Tom Devine in Edinburgh where the teaching of Scottish history became the main topic of discussion. It was raised by a range of people, some of whom were in favour and some of whom were against. The committee needs a report on whether it is an issue that we should consider and whether there should be a rapporteur. It would not be impossible to have five rapporteurs working during the winter and giving reports successively during the spring.

**Ian Jenkins:** People laughed when I said that I would trust Mike Russell to tell us about Scottish film. May I suggest that he be the rapporteur for precisely that? We must get culture and media into our programme and that would be a good way of doing it. There are issues about Scottish film that need to be discussed. It would be useful for us to consider them. The matter involves specialist knowledge, which Mike is in a good position to provide.

**Mr Stone:** Does that mean that Mike can do us a film for free?

**The Convener:** No.

**Ian Welsh:** Before we make a decision on a rapporteur for Scottish history, I would like us to invite a delegation from the organisation responsible for the delivery of history teaching in Scottish schools to tell us what goes on.

**Michael Russell:** That is what the rapporteur would find out.

**Mr Stone:** A delegation would take up more committee time.

**Ian Welsh:** Yes, but it would be an interesting conversation for those who do not know what is taught in history in Scottish schools to have before we took a decision—I speak as a trained history teacher.

**Michael Russell:** The rapporteur on Scottish history would do that job for the committee.

**Mr Stone:** I agree.

**Ian Welsh:** I would prefer to hear what the professionals have to say about the issue first. Afterwards, the committee can take a view as to whether the teaching of history is inadequate or not.

**The Convener:** Before we move on, can you remind me, Ian, of the other topics that you suggested?

**Ian Welsh:** I suggested three issues that rapporteurs could examine: sports in schools, Scottish film and consultation, which you picked up on. I had forgotten that Children in Scotland was coming back to the committee. The bigger issues were special educational needs, national companies and school infrastructure.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Obviously, Scottish history is an important topic, but I suggest that we leave a major inquiry into it until the next parliamentary year, possibly taking the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum report on culture and history in the curriculum as a starting point.

A major inquiry into infrastructure is very important. I want to record my desire to include a purely objective examination of the educational impact of the private finance initiative deal in Glasgow as part of that inquiry.

**The Convener:** We will want to consider all aspects of infrastructure. The aspect that you mention is topical and we will want to pick up on it.

**Mr Macintosh:** I want to echo some of the points that have been made. Sports in schools is an emerging topic. I recommend Karen Gillon as the rapporteur on that, as she has great sporting prowess. Jamie Stone, Cathy Peattie, Karen Gillon and Nicola Sturgeon have all mentioned education outside school. Where are we on that? Is it a matter for a reporter?

**The Convener:** That is a bigger topic.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** We will get a stab at some of the issues when we consider the bill.

**Cathy Peattie:** Nicola is right. We will be able to pick up on some of the issues during our examination of the bill.

**The Convener:** It is an issue that needs to be given a bit more time. We may want to consider it once we have examined special educational needs and infrastructure. I am trying to restrict our programme of work so that we can focus on what we are doing.

**Mr Macintosh:** I want to consider, in the context of the bill, issues such as education outside schools, performance indicators and the wider role of education. I do not want to lose focus on those issues in some general conversation about the bill.

**Michael Russell:** That also works the other way, Kenny. Our consideration of the bill may spin off issues into which we will want to inquire, but that will happen only if we allow flexibility for the process to feed either way. That seems to have been other committees' experience.

10:30

**Mr Macintosh:** Nicola Sturgeon mentioned the McCrone committee. Although we do not want to duplicate that committee's work, we should at some point focus on how we can raise teachers' morale and help them take control of their profession. Our committee has a valuable role to play in that respect.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** We have a straight choice

regarding the McCrone committee. Either we make a submission to it—although the chances of the two committees agreeing are probably quite slim—or we ask the minister to ensure that a copy of the McCrone report comes to this committee at the same time as he and the other parties involved receive the document, so that we can examine it properly. That is probably the appropriate way to proceed.

**The Convener:** I agree totally that your second suggestion is the best way forward.

**Michael Russell:** Reviews such as the national cultural strategy and the McCrone inquiry have been carried out or commissioned by the Government and we might want to comment on the recommendations of those reviews before they are implemented, or have some input into them. Nicola is right. As it is highly unlikely that we will agree with the McCrone committee, we will want to comment on its conclusions. On the other hand, we can have input into the national cultural strategy as ministers decide on the strategy's terms.

**Ian Welsh:** I disagree with Nicola. I think that we will have substantial agreement on the McCrone submission. However, that is a matter for another day.

Presumably the report will have two consultation phases. The Education, Culture and Sport Committee could invite a range of interested parties to a day session—perhaps on a Saturday and perhaps not here. We could then submit the record of those events to the McCrone committee. That would be a productive way to engage in the debate and it would allow the community to participate in the process.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I disagree with Ian. I was very critical about the establishment of the McCrone committee and still have deep reservations about its chances of success. Ian's suggestion would only duplicate the committee's work and probably would not add much value to the process. It would be far more constructive for the committee to comment on the McCrone report when it is submitted.

**Ian Welsh:** Nicola and I obviously disagree on that point.

**Michael Russell:** There is a standing orders difficulty with meeting on a Saturday.

**Mr Monteith:** Especially if Kilmarnock is playing.

**Ian Welsh:** The session could take place on any day.

**The Convener:** The committee will want to examine new ways of tackling subjects and perhaps we will follow Ian's suggestion in future inquiries. However, I tend to agree with Nicola that

we should not duplicate the work that is going on. Perhaps it would be better to wait until we have a report to discuss.

**Ian Welsh:** My point is that there would be no duplication.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** If I can be helpful for the umpteenth time today, might I suggest a compromise? If the McCrone committee follows the same pattern as the Cubie committee—we do not know if it will—and has two stages in its consultation process, we could reconsider the matter at the end of the first stage and decide whether we want to have an input at that time.

**Michael Russell:** That is the point.

**The Convener:** I do not think that we need to make a decision on that just yet. We can ask exactly what the process will be and, if there are two stages, we might get involved after the first one.

Do we agree that the two items on which we wish to proceed are special education and infrastructure?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Particularly in Glasgow.

**The Convener:** Yes. The reporter on rural schools will be Jamie Stone. Fiona McLeod will report on consultation with children. I do not know whether Mike said yes or no to Scottish film.

**Michael Russell:** I am told that I said yes.

**The Convener:** Good.

**Michael Russell:** I am reluctant, but yes, okay.

**The Convener:** Keenness is what we want. It was suggested that Karen Gillon should report on sport in school.

Is there anything else that anyone was desperate to do? I ask you to bear in mind that you will be doing this alongside a large amount of other work.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** As part of the investigation into infrastructure, can we ask for permission to go outside Edinburgh to take evidence in different parts of the country?

**Gillian Baxendine (Clerk to the Committee):** I was going to suggest that we bring a remit for each inquiry to the next meeting, so that they can be formally agreed. The remit would include the point about travelling.

**Michael Russell:** I know that there is going to be an increasing demand on resources for committee travel. There are resources this year. We will need to make an early decision about the programme of the infrastructure inquiry and a series of visits for the inquiry on special educational needs. It is very important that we

have the chance to consider rural Scotland as well as the central belt when we investigate infrastructure.

Rapporteurs also have the opportunity to apply for committee travel money—I know that Jamie will want to do so. Money is also available for advisers to the committee on key issues. We can put a convincing case for an adviser on either special educational needs or infrastructure—not for both. There is a lot of interest in special educational needs and a special adviser to the committee could undertake a survey of provision and give the committee specialist advice. I am happy to work with Mary and Gillian to organise that, because I have had some experience of that process.

**Mr Stone:** I have a question for Gillian. What Mike says about infrastructure is correct, although I suspect that we are going to travel around looking at holes in roofs and speaking to directors of education who say that their revenue budgets are not big enough. What are we going to do about the Treasury side of the matter? Ultimately, it comes down to the public sector borrowing requirement, or private finance initiatives, or both. I suspect that we will need to have some financial input on the subject and I want to know how we go about getting that.

**Michael Russell:** We could call officials and ministers responsible for spending money on infrastructure to give evidence. The inquiry is about finding out the present state of the infrastructure. It would be appropriate to take evidence on that in rural Scotland and outside Edinburgh. We could have an evidence session in Inverness or Oban.

**Mr Stone:** We could go to Thurso.

**Michael Russell:** Thurso might be going a little too far.

**Ian Welsh:** So that we do not focus too narrowly on whether there is a hole in the roof—although that is important—we must bear in mind what constitutes an adequate school. That relates to car parking, up-to-date technology resources, libraries and other issues.

**Michael Russell:** We can take evidence from people who have designed award-winning schools. Schools that are well designed and meet pupils' needs can give us a template on which to measure provision elsewhere. Lionacleit school in Benbecula is, by all accounts, one of the finest schools in Scotland in terms of facilities. Why does that school work and other schools do not? That relates to Cathy Peattie's point about community schools. What makes a good school?

**The Convener:** Let us not get bogged down just yet in what we will be investigating. All those

things are important and we must give them some time.

**Mr Monteith:** I have two points. My first is about school infrastructure. I remind the committee that there is a private finance initiative project going on in Edinburgh that might be worth examining. If we examine the issue of capital budgets, we must not fail to ask why some organisations that have money left in their budgets rush to spend it before the end of the financial year while other organisations, such as schools, could benefit from a transfer of funds.

**The Convener:** That point was mentioned during our visit last week.

**Mr Monteith:** My second point is that no conclusion has been reached on curriculum issues, although there has been a discussion about Scottish history. It would be useful to have views on that subject. Before members all say, "Why don't you do it, Mr Monteith?" I should point out that I have already lodged a motion on the subject and my views are well known. It may be useful to have a reporter who has not yet formed a view on the subject.

**Michael Russell:** I think that we should wait until later on. I thought that the committee was content with that.

**The Convener:** I have a final question before we round off this part of the meeting. Sylvia Jackson said that the Equal Opportunities Committee is also looking into special educational needs. Gillian, could we obtain the information that it has, rather than duplicate the effort? How could we ask that committee for it?

**Gillian Baxendine:** I imagine that any evidence that the Equal Opportunities Committee takes will be public evidence, so we need only ask to be apprised of that. Members of this committee could also attend meetings of that committee.

**Michael Russell:** Several committees are taking evidence on the Abolition of Poindings and Warrant Sales Bill and they are keeping each other informed so that members of all committees can attend. The conveners are also liaising. I propose that you liaise with the convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee on the matter.

**The Convener:** Yes. That is important. Thank you for that information.

## Visits

**The Convener:** The next item is feedback from the committee's visits to schools. Not everyone has been able to take part in a visit, but dates are being proposed for the final visit. I suggest that we put off any discussion on visits until the final visit has taken place. Is that agreed?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## **Improvement in Scottish Education Bill**

**The Convener:** We now move on to consideration of the written evidence that we have received on the improvement in Scottish education bill. Does anybody have any comments on the submissions that have been circulated? I am sure that all members have read them.

**Michael Russell:** Could an updated summary be provided each time new reports come out? They are beginning to pile up and we need a list of all of them.

**The Convener:** Yes. That is a great idea.

**Fiona McLeod:** I came in this morning and found all this on my desk at 10 past 9. It would be useful to get summaries as the written evidence comes in.

**Michael Russell:** It is rather like collecting bubble gum cards; there is bound to be one missing from the set. I would like to know which one it is so that I can swap with Karen.

**The Convener:** We shall continue to issue submissions and summaries as they become available. I think that that concludes this item.

**Michael Russell:** There are two points for decision on paper ED/99/6/2.

**The Convener:** Sorry, Mike. Thank you for pointing that out. Do we agree to take oral evidence on the bill?

**Members:** Yes.

**The Convener:** At this stage, do we want to invite the organisations that have been suggested? I think that we should.

**Mr Macintosh:** I thought that St Mary's Episcopal Primary School, Dunblane was already pencilled in, as it is in my diary, although it is not at the top of my priority list.

**The Convener:** I think that members have received letters from St Mary's.

**Michael Russell:** From all of them.

**The Convener:** I told a couple of members that the committee should invite representatives of St Mary's to attend so that we can discuss the issues with them. Rather than each of us replying and having separate discussions, it would be best to have a discussion together.

**Michael Russell:** I agree entirely but, as our briefing paper suggests, we may wish to meet organisations that address concerns that the Executive is unlikely to address. That applies to many of the Gaelic organisations that believe

Gaelic issues are not addressed in the bill. Could we add at least Comunn na Gàidhlig to the list, and possibly Comunn nam Parant, to determine whether they have an interest?

**The Convener:** I would be happy with that.

10:45

**Fiona McLeod:** I am not proposing that we add to the list, but once the bill is produced, will we return to the written evidence that we have received and use it to decide whether we take oral evidence?

**The Convener:** We can make decisions when the bill is produced. We are currently identifying people who we know we want to interview. I am sure that once we see the next draft of the bill other issues will arise that we must address.

**Mr Macintosh:** East Renfrewshire Council has already been inspected and would be happy to give evidence. It has learned some interesting lessons and introduced a refined way of using the statistics that are thrown up by performance indicators and inspections. It would be useful for the committee to hear about that.

**The Convener:** East Renfrewshire Council and West Lothian Council will have interesting information for us as they are the pilot councils, so we should meet both.

**Ian Jenkins:** I am not sure about the procedure and timing of discussing the bill. Could Steiner schools come and talk to us? I know that St Mary's is in the bill, but people feel that pluralism is not being addressed.

**The Convener:** We could meet representatives of Steiner schools if committee members feel it is important.

**Ian Jenkins:** At which stage would we do so?

**The Convener:** I am reluctant to produce a long list at this stage, but I am happy to take on board your point.

**Mr Monteith:** I agree with Ian. We are trying to address the deficiencies of the bill. Steiner schools are not covered, and as they have cross-party support, the committee may be able to play a useful role.

**Ian Jenkins:** If there is to be consultation before the bill becomes law, Steiner schools ought to have the chance to state their case.

**Fiona McLeod:** We are not making suggestions today about whom we should see: we will wait until we see the bill and then produce a list of who we wish to provide oral evidence.

**The Convener:** I hope that today we can agree to meet representatives from St Mary's, East



Renfrewshire Council, West Lothian Council, the Gaelic education sector and Steiner schools, so that we can give them meeting dates.

**Fiona McLeod:** May I throw in one other organisation?

**The Convener:** If you must.

**Fiona McLeod:** I had thought that we were putting off this decision, but I am keen that the Scottish Library Information Council talks to us about its proposal, in conjunction with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, to have a statutory school library service.

**The Convener:** The committee would be happy with that. We will leave that discussion for now, but we are not ruling out anyone at this stage. Once we have the next draft of the bill we will reconsider our position. The decision that we have reached so far on the organisations that we will talk to allows appointments to be made.

## Petition

**The Convener:** Do members have any comments to make about the petition?

**Michael Russell:** Mr Guild outlines a serious matter. This sort of situation, where a series of public bodies and others have not co-ordinated their actions, is exactly what the petitioning process was designed to cover. As it is the committee's first petition, we should treat it with the utmost seriousness. Despite the clerk's note, it would be useful if we could have a recommendation with each petition so that we can consider the recommendation.

I suggest that we appoint a committee member to meet Mr Guild and report back with a view to the committee assisting him in resolving the matter. We cannot have a hearing yet, as we do not know enough about the situation.

**The Convener:** Are there any other comments?

**Ian Welsh:** It is an important matter but it would be more appropriate for the local authority to deal with it. I am sure that the local authority is dealing with it. I do not have a problem with Mike's suggestion, but I am pretty sure that the issue will have been addressed in the local plan by the range of agencies that Mr Guild refers to.

**Mr Macintosh:** I tend to agree with Ian. It is obviously an important issue that matters very much to Mr Guild, but there are many ways in which we can refer the matter to the local authority. Rather than tying up a committee member's time, we could write to ask for the local authority's view and how it is dealing with the situation. If necessary, we could also write to Historic Scotland, which might also have a view. It is a question of prioritising. We are having a

nightmare this morning as it is.

**Michael Russell:** Brian Monteith has an interest in the area and in the subject—he could meet Mr Guild. Mr Guild is a Liberal Democrat, while Brian is a Tory, so they are not likely to find that much in common. Perhaps they could talk history in a constructive way. Brian could come back and tell us what is happening.

It is fine if the appropriate action is to write to the local authority, but the press cuttings that Mr Guild has enclosed date back a long time. One can see how long he has been pursuing this matter and how old the cuttings are because they refer to Willie Ross as the Secretary of State for Scotland—those were grand days indeed for Ayrshire. It is time that something was done and we should treat the matter seriously. This is our first petition and we should show that the process works. I suggest that Brian should meet him and report back to the committee.

**The Convener:** Brian, are you willing to take the matter up?

**Mr Monteith:** As one of the members with only one committee, I probably have more time than other members.

**The Convener:** It would be helpful. I accept what Ian said, as the local authority has a lead role to play. However, if there is some way in which we can assist the local authority to take the matter on board, I am happy to take Mike's recommendation. Are we agreed?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** Thank you, Brian.

## Subordinate Legislation

**The Convener:** The fifth item on the agenda is the statutory instrument. Do members have any comments? Gillian, would you say a few words?

**Gillian Baxendine:** I want to advise the committee that the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee considered this statutory instrument and had no action to recommend. I am happy to elaborate on the procedures that are set out on the note, if members would find that helpful.

**The Convener:** Do members want to hear about the procedure or are they happy to continue with the next agenda item?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I do not think that there is much to be said about the statutory instrument. I do not see any grounds for objection.

**The Convener:** Neither do I. So, do we just note it?

**Michael Russell:** We approve it.

**The Convener:** We approve it, do we?

**Michael Russell:** Do we not make a recommendation to the Parliament?

**Gillian Baxendine:** The committee recommends that no action is taken on the statutory instrument, which then passes into law.

**The Convener:** Are members happy with that?

**Members:** Yes.

## Invitations

**The Convener:** The final item on the agenda deals with two invitations that the committee has received. The first is from Friends of Scottish Rugby and the Caledonian Club. Members will see from their papers that the club wishes to become the Scottish Parliament's rugby side. It has been suggested that my friend, Karen Gillon, should be our representative, as she knows so much about rugby.

**Karen Gillon:** There was some confusion—

**Michael Russell:** She is a formidable front row. I am not unhappy about this invitation, but should a London-based club be the Scottish Parliament's rugby side? Should we not put that out to tender to Scottish-based clubs?

**Fiona McLeod:** Does the Caledonian Club allow women to join?

**Michael Russell:** Good point.

**The Convener:** That is a good point. Shall we continue to ask it questions? I am a bit confused.

**Michael Russell:** Can we consult a rugby expert, to get some advice?

**Mr Stone:** Surely, given all the people that we employ—perhaps not the MSPs, apart from Mike—we could put out our own rugby team. I am quite serious. The House of Commons and the House of Lords do that, and I bet that the National Assembly for Wales has a rugby team.

**Karen Gillon:** Would any team be mixed?

**Mr Stone:** I would not mind it being mixed. Rather than jump at this issue, we should think about it.

**Ian Welsh:** Frankly, I do not think that this is appropriate for us.

**Michael Russell:** The sad thing is that this is the only matter on which I can see the journalists in the room writing down every detail, although it is the least important item on our agenda. I think that we should seek information on what we should do and leave it at that.

**Mr Stone:** If we are going to do things, we should try to do them by our own hand. I make that plea, be for it football, rugby, darts or beer

drinking. I am not volunteering to be a forward, by the way.

**The Convener:** It is okay, we have our front row. Seriously, I think that there are points that need to be considered further.

The second invitation is from the European Forum for Teachers of Religious Education. It follows a letter from Donald Gorrie MSP, who has been contacted and asked whether we would like to be involved.

**Michael Russell:** Can we refer this to Reverend Graham Blount, the Scottish Churches parliamentary officer, for his advice? We do not know the body—it may or may not be fine—and we should have some information.

**The Convener:** I am happy with that suggestion.

Before we finish, the committee has also been invited—the invitation was received only yesterday—to an event that is being organised for 19 November by Save the Children. It is to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Save the Children wants to hold a reception at the Parliament. The Executive was originally going to organise it, but unfortunately the ministers are not available. That is why Save the Children has come back to us at this late date. It has invited children from all over Scotland to the Parliament to talk to MSPs.

Yesterday, I agreed that I would attend the function, but I am keen to ensure that members of this committee know about it as well. I will circulate the details, if members are happy for me to do that. I know that this is very short notice, but I would be happy if members of the committee could attend.

The event is to be on 19 November—a Friday—from 2 to 3.30. I have warned Save the Children that it will be difficult, but if members of the committee can attend, they should let me know. Save the Children is keen to hold a question-and-answer session with MSPs, and it would be useful if we knew which members were likely to be present so that we could supply them with questions beforehand.

**Fiona McLeod:** This is the first I have heard about this event and my diary indicates that I will not be able to come. At a recent meeting, I suggested that we should take steps to inform MSPs. That would have meant our being in control of the date—being pro-active and saying to young people in Scotland, "Your children's committee wants you to come and we want to listen to you." We now have to respond to someone else's invitation, and some of us will be unable to attend. I am upset about that, because this is a very

important issue. Two or three meetings ago, we could have taken a lead on it and publicised it.

**The Convener:** As I said, I did not progress this matter because I thought the event was being organised by the Executive and that we would be given some notice. Unfortunately, because we had a meeting about it only yesterday I have not been able to get details to members before now. I know that many members will not be available and will be unhappy about that. On the positive side, all I can say is that next year we should be able to organise things so that we do not end up in the same situation.

Are members happy for me to circulate the details for information?

**Gillian Baxendine:** Alistair Fleming has copies of the information here. At the end of the meeting he will give them to any member who wants them.

**Michael Russell:** Can the clerks send a note as soon as possible to each member of the committee who has taken on an obligation or responsibility, so that we are aware of it? I know that, through no fault of the official report, there will be a delay in the publication of the *Official Report* of this meeting. I should add that I do not always receive a copy of the *Official Report* of our meetings. Will the clerks check that every member gets a copy of the *Official Report* of this meeting?

**Fiona McLeod:** I want to return to the consulting of MSPs. As we are not doing anything as a committee, can I urge members to give up a surgery or a good bit of a surgery in November and to publicise the fact that they will be available to listen to the views of children in their constituency? It is important that we say that.

**The Convener:** I am happy to do that. Thank you for your time this morning.

*Meeting closed at 11:00.*



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