

# **EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE**

Tuesday 22 February 2000  
*(Morning)*

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body 2000.

Applications for reproduction should be made in writing to the Copyright Unit,  
Her Majesty's Stationery Office, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ  
Fax 01603 723000, which is administering the copyright on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate  
Body.

Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by The  
Stationery Office Ltd.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office is independent of and separate from the company now  
trading as The Stationery Office Ltd, which is responsible for printing and publishing  
Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body publications.

---

# CONTENTS

Tuesday 22 February 2000

	Col.
<b>WORK PROGRAMME</b> .....	609
<b>PETITIONS</b> .....	613
<b>REPORTERS</b> .....	623
<b>SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE</b> .....	625
<b>ETHICAL STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE ETC (SCOTLAND) BILL</b> .....	628
<b>POVERTY AND EDUCATION EVENT</b> .....	633

---

## EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

### 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2000, Session 1

#### CONVENER

\*Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab)

#### DEPUTY CONVENER

\*Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

#### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

\*Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
\*Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
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)

\*attended

#### CLERK TEAM LEADER

Gillian Baxendine

#### SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

David McLaren

#### ASSISTANT CLERK

Alistair Fleming

#### LOCATION

Committee Room 1



## Scottish Parliament

### Education, Culture and Sport Committee

*Tuesday 22 February 2000*

*(Morning)*

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:03*]

### Work Programme

**The Convener (Mrs Mary Mulligan):** Good morning everyone. The first item on the agenda is an update of committee business. Are there any items that committee members wish to raise?

**Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab):** Convener, we had a brief discussion two or three weeks ago about Grampian Television Ltd. There has been some concern in the area of the north of Scotland served by Grampian, particularly in relation to the effect of any changes to the cultural content of broadcasting.

As members will be aware, there have been recent developments. I understand that, on Friday, two of the three producer-directors in the programming section of Grampian were issued with compulsory redundancy notices. That is an industrial relations matter—it is not a matter for us—but it has an impact on the regional and cultural aspects of independent broadcasting in Scotland. On that basis, I would like to seek evidence from Scottish Media Group plc on its policy on those issues. I would also like to inquire what further steps the committee wishes to take, given our discussion a few weeks ago.

**Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP):** Lewis makes an important point. Today, the Scottish Media Group announced its profits—up 9 per cent, at almost £50 million. That happens at the same time as a substantial number of staff, who have contributed to that success, find their jobs threatened. On the issue of the observation of the terms of the broadcasting licence and SMG's undertakings, substantial material evidence has been brought forward by a number of people that many of the licence conditions that SMG has been putting forward are at least refracted, if not totally bent.

It would be useful for us to hear not just from the Scottish Media Group, but from the trade unions, from viewers—who have been writing extensively on this matter—and from the Independent Television Commission. We should consider the issue of regional broadcasting in Scotland, which

is a vital part of our culture—we do not want to see it eroded in the way in which it perhaps is being.

**Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** I support Lewis and Mike on this matter. We need to take evidence from viewers and from trade unions. I am aware that broadcasting is a reserved matter, but we are talking about important cultural aspects of broadcasting in Scotland. Given that we will be speaking to the BBC soon, we need to look at the wider aspects of broadcasting in Scotland.

**The Convener:** I knew that this matter was still live, so I asked Gillian Baxendine, the clerk team leader, to make preliminary inquiries about whether Grampian would attend a committee meeting. Grampian has said that it is more than happy to do so. We will also invite unions and viewers. Grampian has suggested that we await the ITC report, which is due at the beginning of April, before we invite it to discuss the proposals.

**Michael Russell:** I am sure that that would be a good reason for waiting for the ITC report, but there are two separate issues. The first is that it is not just Grampian that we need to talk to; we need to talk to the management of Scottish Media Group. Indeed, one of the key issues is whether Grampian has a distinct identity. The second matter is that there are on-going difficulties, and the longer that we delay on this matter, the greater the impact of those difficulties will be. Lewis has drawn attention to the fact that change is taking place as we speak, so although our time scale is tight, I would hope that the beginning of April would be the latest time at which we would address this matter.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I concur with that. It is important that we move this matter forward as quickly as we can. We should formally ask SMG to speak to us at the earliest possible date to account for its stewardship of the north of Scotland television licence. The beginning of April is within that time frame, but only just.

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I wish to add my support to the concerns that have been expressed. The evidence that I have seen is of a move away from broadcasting provision by Grampian Television, which fits in with the perception of many people in the east of Scotland that Scottish Television Ltd is Glasgow television. We seem to be seeing an extension of this Glasgow television company to cover the whole of Scotland. We need to consider greater diversity in provision not just for the north, but for the rest of Scotland, including the south.

**The Convener:** I am happy to take all those comments on board and try to arrange meetings with the relevant bodies, if that is agreeable to the committee. We will come back to committee members with suggested dates. The practicality of

fitting in meetings has been raised, but we will do our very best to supply those dates as soon as possible, given the committee's concern about the matter.

**Michael Russell:** Could the clerk supply the committee with the wording of its remit on this matter? Although Grampian Television is the primary issue, we cannot examine it without examining the issue of the Scottish licence—it is important that our remit covers both.

**The Convener:** Okay, I am happy to do that.

**Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP):** On another matter, convener, members of the travelling community have requested the committee to examine the position of young travellers, particularly on issues such as access to education. Although I know that our timetable is pretty packed, we should try to schedule a discussion on the matter.

**The Convener:** I am aware that you have been talking to members of the travelling community, and I am keen to make progress on that issue. Perhaps the two of us can discuss the matter with Gillian Baxendine.

**Mr Monteith:** A number of weeks ago, I wrote in my capacity as the Conservative party spokesman on sport to the Minister for Children and Education, Mr Sam Galbraith, about the committee's favourite subject—Hampden. I asked him to confirm or deny reports that the rescue package was running into the sand. Since then, however, I have not had an acknowledgement, never mind a response. As I am greatly concerned about the silence surrounding the whole issue, I wanted to ask whether you as convener had heard any more from the minister, and whether this might be a more appropriate time to ask again for the private briefing with him.

**The Convener:** I have not received anything formally from the minister. However, informally, I believe that the receivers are still considering the financial package that will be put on the table. Although the minister has confirmed that he is willing to update us in writing about what stage has been reached, that has not moved very far. However, he has also confirmed that, as soon as he has some news, he is more than willing to discuss it with the committee. The meeting is still on the table, Brian, and will happen as soon as there is something to discuss. It will also give you an opportunity to return to any issues that still need to be clarified.

**Mr Monteith:** It is probably worth mentioning that I have more serious concerns about the involvement of the Scottish Football Association in the proposed rescue package. Last week, I was involved in matters concerning the Scottish cup match between Greenock Morton and Rangers—

doubts arose about the SFA's willingness to help Queen's Park and its administrators out of difficulty by allowing that game to be played there. Although the SFA has its own procedural reasons for allowing the game to be played at Love Street, I received undercurrents of reports that Hampden's current status and the possibility that funds might be directed to it were playing heavily on the SFA's mind. When we take evidence on the matter, we will also have to question the SFA's role, because we cannot have petty politics disrupting a national stadium.

**The Convener:** The best way of proceeding would be to ask the minister to write to us about what stage has been reached in negotiations and what the likely time scale will be. I feel sure that the committee will be happy for me to arrange a meeting as soon as possible without coming back to it.

I want to update the committee on the appointment of an adviser to our inquiry on special educational needs. Dr Julie Allan, from the University of Stirling, has been appointed by the Parliamentary Bureau, and it is proposed that she attend a meeting in March at which we can discuss the inquiry with her. Is that okay?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** Next week, we will consider the draft report on stage 1 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill. Do members agree to hold that meeting in private?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## Petitions

**The Convener:** The second item on the agenda is consideration of petitions. We have one on-going petition and three new ones. I ask Brian Monteith to give us an update on the on-going petition, PE9.

10:15

**Mr Monteith:** I am pleased to give a verbal report on the petition about the development of the Cramond area, particularly the Cramond campus site and the foreshore.

Local representatives, local community bodies, archaeological bodies and various interested parties have submitted a good deal of evidence to me. There is much consensus, not only on the archaeological and historical significance of the site, but on the measures that must be taken to preserve the interest.

There is some divergence in suggested approaches. One extreme is to suggest that the best way in which to preserve everything is to leave it all undisturbed and have no development. The other extreme is to allow some development—where existing development has already taken place—but to deal with it in a considered manner, with inspections and constant monitoring by archaeological experts. From all the evidence that I have received, Historic Scotland seems rightly to have been involved at every stage of the matter.

The most significant of the two developments is the housing development proposed for the Cramond campus site. City of Edinburgh Council has prepared a pre-planning brief, which takes account of the importance of the site and how any development might be done sensitively. I hope to have further discussions with the council on this matter, because concerns have been expressed that the identified preferred bidder has suggested putting the housing development on the undisturbed site, with the current site—the brownfield site, where the Cramond campus is—returning to park status. That might go against the pre-planning brief. I am concerned about that suggestion; my natural cynicism leads me to suspect that, in 10 to 15 years' time, people will say, "As this area has been developed in the past, can we build houses here?"

The one positive aspect is that, if the developers are interested in adjusting planning briefs to that extent, they might also be open to our suggestions about a road to take traffic to the historical site. Cramond residents are naturally concerned that, if the historical site is to be opened up, tourist traffic would go down a very narrow road, which would

destroy the amenity of the village. If the development goes ahead, we must find alternative ways of bringing tourists to it.

I am relatively satisfied with most of the procedures that have been followed on the pumping station development, which are well advanced. I am waiting for further details about site plans and reassurances from Historic Scotland. That development has to be done to fit a time scale relating to European directives on water. As far fewer alternatives are available, other than improving the presentation of the development, it is unlikely that much more can be recommended.

I expect to finish my deliberations within the next fortnight, so a report will be available some time in March.

**The Convener:** Thank you. Do members have any questions or comments?

**Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** I am grateful to Brian Monteith for having done so much work. What is the committee's locus on this matter in the long run? Who makes the decisions? I do not think that Brian can do so. Where is this report leading?

**Mr Monteith:** I hope to produce a number of recommendations, as options for this committee to endorse or to reject. We are not the lead committee and do not have funds. However, we can suggest how bodies can advance their case—for example, they could put together joint lottery bids.

**Michael Russell:** I understood from the petition and from talking to people—this has been borne out to some extent by what Brian Monteith has said—that a key issue is the co-ordination of bodies in this matter. Although a number of bodies have expressed interest, no single body or group of bodies is taking responsibility for an overview of the issue. Therefore, the deterioration and lack of development have taken place almost by stealth. I hope that the committee's recommendations will be able to assist bodies to co-ordinate activity to save this unique site.

**Mr Monteith:** Mike Russell's point is well made. It seems that some bodies have been complacent. Because they have to be consulted in the procedures, they know that they will always be involved. I cannot say whether it is institutional complacency or the lack of funds that causes them not to take a lead on such an historic site. Certainly Mike Russell is correct to say that, as so many parties are involved, it would have been helpful if one body had taken charge of this historical site. I visited it with the clerk, Gillian Baxendine, and have to say that what is currently there would not bring one tourist to Cramond. The Cramond Inn is more likely to attract people to the

area than a number of cobbled sets with a very old sign that does the site no justice.

**The Convener:** I congratulate Brian Monteith on the work that he has done so far and look forward to seeing his report in a couple of weeks.

We will move on to the new petitions. The first is from the Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society. Members have the report and a covering note from the clerk giving a number of recommendations. There are responses from Fife Council and Historic Scotland, which were sought by the Public Petitions Committee before it referred the matter to us. I draw the attention of members to the fact that this petition has also been sent to the Transport and the Environment Committee for its general comments on coastal erosion. If there are no comments, I will suggest that we accept the recommendations of the clerk to seek the view of the petitioners on the responses that have been received and the view of the Executive on its policy of grant aid for such areas.

**Michael Russell:** The committee might want to indicate its general support for the preservation of ancient monuments. Again, it seems that one of the problems is that too many bodies are involved, all of which have a small amount of responsibility. Given what we have read in this document and learned from Brian Monteith's inquiry, it appears that we will have to address that issue in future.

**The Convener:** We can learn about that issue from Brian Monteith's inquiry. We will take Michael Russell's point on board.

The second new petition is from Mr G P Cooke. It relates to the Celtic 2010 campaign, which appears in your notes as the Celtic 2000 campaign, but members will have noticed that deliberate mistake. Brian Monteith has lodged a motion, S1M-567, on this matter.

**Mr Monteith:** I submitted motion S1M-567 before I saw that this matter was on the agenda today. I declare an interest, as I support the ideas of Mr Cooke, who wrote to me several weeks ago. It seems sensible to join with Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland on this idea.

I have suggested that the Scottish Football Association hold exploratory discussions about the proposal's feasibility. I leave it to the association to decide whether that is appropriate. However, exploratory discussions at the very least would be worth while. I invite members of the committee to sign the motion.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** In principle, we should give the motion our backing and encourage the SFA to enter into discussions with the petitioner. It may be that we can play a more positive role later on. However, for now it is sufficient for us to give

enthusiastic support to the project. We can leave it to others to discuss the detail.

**Michael Russell:** I think that the petition should be referred back to us and that we should not kick it over the touch line, so to speak. [MEMBERS: "Ooh."] I am sorry, but I could not resist that.

After there have been initial discussions, the petition should be referred back to us—first, to ensure that further discussions take place, and secondly, to ensure that they take place in a meaningful context. As the petitioner is friendly with Sam Galbraith—according to the letter, he is a member of the same Labour party general management committee—the Government will no doubt look sympathetically on the proposal.

**Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab):** I support a Celtic world cup—I stress the pronunciation of Celtic, to avoid any confusion with the views of Mr McAllion as expressed in Parliament. We should ask the SFA to see whether this proposal is feasible. We do not know the ins and outs of it, but we should request that the SFA meet the petitioner and come back to the committee if there is anything else that we can do. Because of Scotland's independence in the football world, there may be some difficulties, but this is a positive proposal.

**The Convener:** The precedent of nations co-hosting such tournaments has been set, and we would like to emulate that. I am aware that there is already support for such a bid in the Republic of Ireland. Like the rest of the committee, I think that we should ask the SFA to organise meaningful meetings to discuss how to take this proposal forward, which could only benefit Scotland and Scottish football.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** The petition raises a bigger issue, which the committee may want to return to at some stage—what is being done proactively to attract sporting events to Scotland. I know that Rhona Brankin has been working to bring the Ryder cup here. At some stage, the committee may want to look into whether more could be done to ensure that Scotland gets its share of such events.

**The Convener:** I am aware that the Scottish Executive is keen to encourage more international events to come to Scotland. The committee may want to consider that issue, although not immediately.

**Lewis Macdonald:** No doubt all members of the committee will join me in wishing England good luck in its bid for the 2006 world cup. In the unfortunate event that that bid is unsuccessful, we would expect the SFA to consider whether a joint bid with England would boost the chances of bringing world cup football to Scotland. As a Scottish football fan, that is my priority, rather than

which of our neighbours we collaborate with to achieve it. If the SFA takes that approach, we cannot go far wrong.

**Michael Russell:** Although the SFA was reluctant to consider that suggestion last time, I am sure that Lewis's support will tip the scales. One thing that we should do is make ourselves aware of the time scale for bids, so that any bid is not adversely affected by delay. We could do that separately with the relevant authorities.

**The Convener:** That is not a problem. Those members of the committee who wish to sign Brian Monteith's motion can do so at the chamber office.

The third petition that we have to consider this morning is from the Parents and Community Association of Boharm. Do members have any questions or comments?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** We should be very supportive of the association's campaign. As a matter of urgency, we should send the petition to the Executive, with the strong recommendation that the points that it makes are taken on board.

However, there is a bigger issue about rural schools, their place in the community and the procedures for their closure. Members will remember that we talked about looking into this matter. This example highlights the fact that the issue is of some urgency. Not only should the committee support the petition, it should schedule a wider investigation into rural schools and the procedure surrounding closure proposals.

**The Convener:** Jamie Stone is currently preparing a report on rural schools. We are involved in the issue, although I recognise that we could carry out a wider investigation.

10:30

**Michael Russell:** I note that the previous administration in Moray resisted school closures. That is hard to do, but it must be done as a matter of principle, to ensure that rural communities are not disadvantaged. The petitioners make some excellent points, particularly about the effect that closure would have on the community and on current developments in the area. We should be conscious of the fact that this is not an isolated case. There are plans to close at least four rural schools—possibly as many as eight—in Argyll in the next few months. Several closures are threatened in the north-east, as Lewis Macdonald will know, and further closures have been proposed in other areas.

I encourage members to promote the importance of Jamie Stone's report as quickly as possible and to give him any additional help that they can. The committee must consider the matter and decide whether to hold the full inquiry that has

been mentioned. In the meantime, we must make it clear to local authorities that school closures should take place for economic reasons, not for educational ones. That was the position set out by no less a person than Brian Wilson when he was in charge of education at the Scottish Office two years ago. That principle is being eroded to the great detriment of rural education and rural communities.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I had the privilege of being the Labour parliamentary candidate in Moray two years ago and was closely involved in contemporary events. It was the previous SNP administration that brought forward the initial proposals for the closure of rural schools in Moray. That administration was persuaded by the strength of the arguments and the political circumstances of the time to change its mind. Its decision was widely welcomed by the villages that were affected.

It is important that the person investigating rural schools should take on board the appropriate criteria for proceeding with such closures. It is easy for those of us with urban constituencies to see the maintenance of all rural schools as a good thing. However, the reality for education authorities in areas such as Moray is that the demands on their budget must be balanced just as in urban education authorities.

We should pass the petition on to the minister and ask him to consider carefully the points that it makes. We should look to Jamie Stone to take on board the wider points and to include them in his report.

**Ian Jenkins:** Because of changes in pre-school education, closing any establishment in a remote area must be considered very carefully. There might be extra demands relating to travel and the extension of the availability of pre-school education. Although Moray Council will know its overall circumstances better than will others, we should consider the matter as a whole and refer it to the Scottish ministers.

**Mr Monteith:** I agree with your suggestion, convener. I have received many letters about this school and several others in the Moray area. This school in particular seems to present a weak case for closure. It is important that the committee lends its weight to the petition.

**Karen Gillon:** I am not yet convinced. We appear to have heard only one side of the argument. It would be remiss of the committee to take a position based on one set of evidence. We need to know both sides of the argument.

**Mr Monteith:** Take my word for it.

**Karen Gillon:** Brian, you should know me better than that—I would not take your word for anything.

We should remit the matter to the minister and ask for him to report back on the decision. We can move on from there.

**The Convener:** Everyone has had an opportunity to raise concerns. I suggest that we agree to the recommendation to pass the petition on to the minister as a matter of urgency and ask for comments. We would then feed those comments into Jamie Stone's on-going investigation of rural schooling. Are there alternative suggestions?

**Michael Russell:** I am happy with that, but I would like to add to it. This is not an isolated case; other cases throughout Scotland are causing great concern. The committee should, therefore, write to all directors of education to inform them that we are undertaking the first stage of an inquiry into the issues surrounding rural schools. We should encourage directors to desist from closing any schools until that inquiry is over. It is not compulsory for us to write to them, but it would let the directors know that we are interested in and concerned about such matters.

**Mr Monteith:** Convener, when you said that the committee could take a view, did you mean that we could take a view in the sense of offering our support for the case that has been made by the petitioners, or that we could take a view—

**The Convener:** On what I have just suggested—that we should write to the minister and then give all the information to Jamie so that he can incorporate it in his report.

**Mr Monteith:** So would we take a view on the closure of Boharm Primary School when that report comes back from Jamie?

**The Convener:** Yes.

**Mr Monteith:** I am concerned about the time scale. Would it be possible for the committee to take a view on Boharm as soon as we have heard from the minister?

**The Convener:** I could ask for the minister's reply to come back to the committee in the first instance, so that members could take whatever view they wanted at that stage.

**Mr Monteith:** I would be perfectly happy with that.

**Lewis Macdonald:** That sounds fine, but I do not support Mike Russell's proposed addition. For this committee to issue a statement against any closures of rural schools would be to take away from education authorities the power of discretion that is appropriately theirs. If Jamie Stone, who is acting on our behalf, feels that it would be appropriate to contact directors of education to lay down the terms of his report, we should consider that. There is, however, no point in contacting

them when we do not have Jamie's report. I support the convener's original proposal, as clarified by Brian, but without Mike's suggested addition.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I do not think that there is any need to get into a tizz about this. Nobody is suggesting that this committee has, or should have, the power to instruct local authorities to do anything. However, at some point that is as yet undecided, we will be undertaking an inquiry into rural schools, and I think that it would be a courtesy to write to directors of education to advise them of that. They are already well aware of the controversies that surround any proposed rural school closure. Our letter should suggest that it would probably be in their interest to suspend—where possible—any decision to close a rural school, pending the results of that inquiry. That would not be an instruction. It would be an example of different tiers of government working constructively together.

**Karen Gillon:** I can already see tomorrow's papers, and I can see the spin that would be put on this. Nicola, let us be honest—we know why this is happening and we know what is being done. Local authorities are the appropriate bodies to make decisions. If we send out a letter saying that we urge local authorities to err on the side of caution and not to close rural schools, we all know what tomorrow's papers will say—that the committee is beginning the process of trying to take away from local authorities their powers regarding school closures. I agree that we can write to directors of education to tell them that we are undertaking this inquiry and what its remit is, but to add, "Oh and by the way, you shouldn't be closing any schools in the interim" would be a significant move away from our current views of local authorities.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I do not think that what I have said is as groundbreaking as Karen suggests. When we decided to conduct an inquiry into special educational needs, concern was expressed that the Riddell report had already been published and that the Executive's time scale would not dovetail with our inquiry, so we wrote to the Scottish Executive. As a result of that approach and, I am sure, other factors, parts of the implementation of the Riddell report have been delayed for a year, so that our inquiry dovetails with the Scottish Executive's time scale and we do not have two branches of Government working in conflict.

This is a similar situation. If want to demonstrate to the Scottish people that the Scottish Parliament and the committee structure of the Parliament have something to add to existing structures, it would be a good advert if different elements worked in tandem. By agreeing to hold this inquiry,

we have decided that the committee has a remit in the matter. It is common sense to write to directors to alert them to the fact that the inquiry is taking place and to point out that it would probably be in everybody's interest if they allowed enough time for the inquiry to proceed.

**The Convener:** Can we formalise our position? I propose that we pass the petition as a matter of urgency to the relevant minister; that we ask that the minister's response be returned to the committee; that that response also be referred to Jamie Stone, who will include it in his report; that Jamie Stone will report to the committee as soon as possible on his stage of the inquiry into rural schools; that we inform directors of education that there is an on-going initial inquiry and that we intend to hold a broader inquiry later this year or at the beginning of next year. I do not think that we should tell directors of education to hold things up at this stage, as that is not the committee's view. Is there any opposition to that?

**Michael Russell:** The suggestion was not that we tell directors of education to do anything—we have no powers to do that. If this is a drafting issue, members could see the letter before it is sent to ensure that the wording is right. *[Interruption.]*

I am glad that Lewis is so entertained by the committee—I am sure that he will have hours of fun in future.

The letter should say that the committee will have a particular interest in school closures in that period. We will receive petitions from Boharm and elsewhere on the matter.

**The Convener:** There will be interest in school closures and we will receive letters on the subject, but I do not want to tell directors of education at this stage that they should hold up their decisions. They take decisions for informed reasons and, given that we have not been informed of the reasons, we should not take a view on this issue. We will give them information but we will not make recommendations to them. I have formalised my proposal so, if there is opposition to what I have said, members should propose an alternative.

**Mr Monteith:** I am happy with what you have formalised, but for the avoidance of doubt will you confirm that we will discuss the minister's response?

**The Convener:** Yes.

**Michael Russell:** I want the letter to include the information that we think that closures during the period would come under particular scrutiny.

**The Convener:** There will be a division on Michael Russell's amendment to my proposal.

## FOR

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP)

## AGAINST

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

**The Convener:** The result of the division is as follows: For 2, Against 6.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Convener:** I am happy for members to see the letter before it is sent to directors of education.

**Karen Gillon:** I want it on record that the vote that has just taken place does not signify that the committee is in favour of the closure of rural schools. If, when they leave this meeting, members want to put a different spin on what has been decided, that is up to them.

## Reporters

**The Convener:** The next item is a report from Fiona McLeod. Fiona has submitted her report, but is unable to be with us today because of an illness in her family. Her absence gives us more time to consider her report, which we will discuss at a future meeting.

The next item is—

**Michael Russell:** I wanted to hear from sporty Karen.

**Karen Gillon:** Sporty Spice.

**The Convener:** I am sorry. We have also to discuss other reporters. Karen, could we have an update on your report into sport in schools?

10:45

**Karen Gillon:** I have to confess that, because of other pressures, I have not gone into as much detail as I would have liked, but I now have a programme of visits to various schools and educational facilities. However, given the timetable of the bill, my report is likely to slip until May.

**The Convener:** Thank you, Karen. We now turn to Mike's report on the Scottish film industry.

**Michael Russell:** I have had discussions with the clerk and others. I also find that there are pressures on my time and I would like the opportunity to consider this subject in a little more detail. Given the fact that Jamie Stone's report and the one on children and young people will be of considerable importance to us when they are published in the summer, I would like to continue my inquiry at least until the end of the parliamentary year and possibly until September. That will allow me to take a wider look at the subject.

I am also examining the technological aspects of the report, as a small amount of funding is available. It would be nice if my report could be seen as well as heard, and I am considering including in it one or two little bits that demonstrate the good things about the Scottish film industry as well as some of the problems.

**Mr Monteith:** Although I agree with Mike's time scale proposal, I am concerned that Scottish Screen seems to have selected a site for a studio that is dependent on public funds. A number of other proposals are not so dependent on public funds but, had they the support of Scottish Screen, they might have been in a better position to move forward. I would like Mike to take a look at Scottish Screen's rationale for selecting that option, which might ultimately result in there being no studio at all. If there is any possibility of a verbal update on

that subject, I would like him to give that information to the committee.

**The Convener:** That would be helpful.

**Michael Russell:** I have had discussions about the studio options, among other things. It is not at the heart of the current debate on film in Scotland, largely because—no matter what Scottish Screen has decided on—the dynamic for a studio in Scotland will come from the available throughput. There is no sign that Scottish Screen's plan—or indeed any of the other plans, save one—has guaranteed throughput. One plan might have guaranteed throughput, and that is the one that is most likely to go ahead. Apart from the usual funding for incoming industry, that plan will not require the type of public funds that Scottish Screen is talking about.

We could get a little hung up on the studio question. Experience elsewhere—in Ireland, for instance—has shown that spending a lot of time and effort on studio developments tends to create a sink down which film industry money goes. Effort becomes centred on maintaining the studio rather than on allowing a critical mass to develop. The critical mass will come if there is throughput of product. Throughput of product will dictate the studio. The equation that Mr Monteith is talking about is, therefore, not real.

I shall try to keep members updated. A number of other issues arise from the inquiry, including the development of certain craft skills and the question of a national film school, which is one of the more interesting issues that the committee will discuss.

**The Convener:** If there is any follow-up on the question that Brian Monteith has raised, let me know and I shall put the issue on the agenda.

**Michael Russell:** If members have concerns, I will be happy to address them.

**The Convener:** Jamie is not here, so we cannot get an update on his report on rural schools.

**Michael Russell:** What is the time scale?

**Gillian Baxendine (Clerk Team Leader):** The original time scale that we set was April, but I do not know whether he is able to meet that.

**Michael Russell:** Given the discussion that we have just had, I presume that we want to promote that report so that it is the first report that we receive, in which case perhaps Jamie can be encouraged to let us know how quickly he can come back to us.

**The Convener:** I am happy to speak to Jamie on behalf of the committee to impress upon him the need for this inquiry to progress as quickly as possible.

## School Infrastructure

**The Convener:** Members have in front of them a paper that includes a remit, an approach and a timetable for the school infrastructure inquiry. We will look at each of those sections in order. First, are there any questions or comments on the remit?

**Lewis Macdonald:** The remit is broadly sound. My only comment is on the second bullet point:

“the adequacy of the standards and specifications applied by authorities to school buildings”.

I would like to add the words “and other infrastructure”, because in other parts of the remit there is reference to the fact that we need to look at sports facilities and so on. Those three extra words would broaden the remit a little further.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I agree with Lewis Macdonald that, broadly, the remit is fine. I do have a comment on the first bullet point. Obviously, we want to review the information that is currently available about the state of school buildings, but we should also have a role in gathering information that is not readily available, and in encouraging local authorities and the Executive to get that information into an accessible form. The bullet point could be amended to suggest a more proactive role.

**Michael Russell:** The one thing that strikes me is that while it is important that we do this in a Scottish context, there is nothing in the document about comparisons with people who have similar difficulties. It might be interesting to know of alternative approaches. That might be a piece of desk-based research to start with, perhaps from the Scottish Parliament information centre, but it might be necessary to look at the situation elsewhere.

In the west of Ireland, for example, rural areas have witnessed a large explosion in population, and the concomitant building of new schools. The issue of the repair of infrastructure has arisen there, and there have been different approaches to it. After the desk-based research, we might want to ask whether the committee should look at what has happened in Ireland or Europe, where similar problems have been tackled.

**The Convener:** You have suggested the west of Ireland. Do you have anywhere else in mind?

**Michael Russell:** In Europe, issues have arisen over decaying infrastructure that has had to be revived. Some interesting new situations have been built from scratch.

**The Convener:** Are you happy for us to approach SPICe?

**Michael Russell:** We could start with that.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** One good non-European example, which may sound like a strange one, is in Singapore, where interesting work is being done to rebuild school buildings without using private finance. That might be worth looking at.

**Michael Russell:** I know that I am just back from India, but I am always available.

**The Convener:** We do not want any facetious comments, thank you.

**Karen Gillon:** But he wants to write a report.

**The Convener:** No.

With the addendums that Lewis Macdonald and Nicola Sturgeon have suggested to the first and second bullet points, are we agreed that that is the remit?

**Members:** Yes.

**The Convener:** Secondly, are there any comments or questions on the approach of the inquiry?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I have two or three points to make. The first bullet point is fine, but we should add another section to the second bullet point. Obviously, the views of local authorities on public-private partnerships, or private finance initiatives, are important, but we should also try to get some academic evidence on the merits of using private finance in schools. I suggest Professor Colin Mair of the University of Strathclyde. He is an expert in this field and would be able to give useful written evidence.

On the next bullet point, is there any reason why the committee cannot write separately to all school boards, rather than rely on local authorities to make the inquiry known to them? If the Scottish Executive can write to all school boards, I do not see why we cannot.

My final point concerns the memorandum from the Executive outlining current national policy. We could have written that ourselves. It is more important to find out from the Executive whether it has any plans to change the way that it does things. I am amazed that there has been no national audit of school infrastructure in Scotland in living memory. It would be useful to have the Executive's thoughts on instituting a regular audit of how bad or how good school infrastructure is.

**The Convener:** Mike, do you want to say something?

**Michael Russell:** No. I was nodding in sage agreement with what Nicola Sturgeon said.

**Karen Gillon:** We should get the views of the trade unions. We should talk to the unions that work in schools. Obviously, we should talk to the

education unions, but we should also talk to unions such as the Transport and General Workers Union, the General, Municipal and Boilermakers Union and Unison, which will have particular views on school infrastructure because they are responsible for the maintenance of the infrastructure and the construction of the new buildings.

I am happy to follow the suggestions that we have heard with regard to the academic side. We might want to ask SPICe if there are any other academics whose views we should hear.

**Cathy Peattie:** As Nicola Sturgeon said, we should write to school boards but, given the evidence that we heard last week, we should write to parent-teacher associations as well.

**The Convener:** That shows that we listen.

I draw members' attention to the last paragraph. The committee was keen to ensure that we had a divide between urban and rural areas and that we use this inquiry as an opportunity to take evidence on-site. We will consider proposals about where we could go.

Is the committee happy to take on board the points that have been made today?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Ethical Standards in Public Life etc (Scotland) Bill

**The Convener:** Turning now to the draft ethical standards in public life bill, I have met the conveners of the Local Government Committee and the Equal Opportunities Committee. The Local Government Committee is the lead committee, but this committee and the Equal Opportunities Committee have expressed an interest.

Annexe A of the report that you have in front of you gives the names of the people who will be asked for written evidence. Annexe B includes proposals for oral evidence. It is suggested that this committee seek oral evidence from the Scottish School Board Association and the Scottish Parent Teacher Council.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I am happy to talk to the SSBA and the SPTC, but I think that we should take evidence from teachers, possibly through the Educational Institute of Scotland, unless anybody can think of another organisation.

**Cathy Peattie:** I agree. We need to speak to teachers.

**Mr Monteith:** The teaching body that comes before us should bring evidence in relation to guidance, not just sex education, because discussion of homosexual sexuality or any other sexuality does not crop up only in sex education classes.

Scottish independent schools should be asked to provide written evidence. They are not governed by section 28, or section 2A, and they might have some useful contribution to make in regard to how they deal with the issue.

We should have written evidence, at least, from the anti-bullying network that was established by the Scottish Executive. It has a great deal of information on bullying and makes recommendations about how to deal with all types of bullying. Its evidence would be interesting.

11:00

**Lewis Macdonald:** I was hoping that, by the time we reached this discussion, we would have had the chance to consider Fiona McLeod's useful report on consultation with young people. Apart from teachers, who have been mentioned, the group that is most directly affected by this is school students. As members of the committee will recall from last week, there is a students forum in Aberdeen that actively represents all secondary school students in Aberdeen. If not unique, that is certainly unusual in Scotland. As we have not had the chance to address the wider question of

consultation, what consideration can we give to ways of consulting young people at school? Specific issues for young people at school arise for young people in general.

**Karen Gillon:** I agree with Lewis Macdonald's point. Some of the most poignant letters that I have received in relation to this campaign have come from young people who have experienced homophobic bullying in school, and who feel that section 28 played a part in that. It is important that we consider the views of young people. It will be difficult to do that in a way that enables those young people to express themselves.

We must speak to Save the Children or some other organisation that can help us to do that in a non-threatening way. If someone is experiencing homophobic bullying, the last thing they want to do is put their head above the parapet and talk about it, especially in a public arena such as this. This may be one occasion on which we should take evidence in a private session, and not necessarily in the committee. We might visit a school to talk to some of those young people.

I ask the clerk to include Unison among the trade unions, as particular staff who are involved with young people are not teaching staff but community education staff. They see those young people out of school as well as in school, and we should consider asking them to give evidence.

**Mr Monteith:** I am not entirely sure that I agree with Lewis Macdonald's suggestion. I urge the committee to display a great degree of caution and sensitivity when seeking evidence from children. Prior to discussing this issue, we have dealt with issues of which children already have an understanding. There is a difficulty in determining who has responsibility for children. I would be concerned if parents felt that we were interfering in areas for which they have responsibility and seeking to elicit information, judgments and views on matters that children do not yet know about.

It is important that we take account of that when determining the ages of those that we approach. Although people who have gone through school can write letters about their difficult times at school, they have since become less naive and have made judgments. The difficulty is in eliciting useful information and opinions from children who do not yet know what they are talking about.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Lewis Macdonald makes a good point about consulting young people. Such consultation is essential. We may choose to consult young people rather than children. However, I see no reason why we cannot get Save the Children to help us to facilitate something along the same lines as last week. I see no problem at all with that.

I also strongly support Brian Monteith's

suggestion that we take evidence from independent schools. As he rightly says, independent schools are not covered by section 28 and, as far as I am aware, nobody has said that homosexuality is promoted in independent schools. In fact, the evidence of independent schools may go a long way towards reassuring people that the removal of that section will not lead to the promotion of homosexuality. The suggestion is therefore an excellent one.

**The Convener:** That is a very good point.

**Michael Russell:** I concur entirely. My worry about what Brian Monteith just said is that it flies in the face of all the principles that we are here to uphold, and would mean that we would not hear from the people who would be most affected by the repeal of section 28. We have seen the letters and we have talked to young people, but Brian Monteith would have us exclude them from giving evidence to the committee in case we interfered with them. The real interference would occur if we made judgments and decisions on their welfare and future without listening to what they have to say. I strongly support what Lewis Macdonald says, and believe that we must find the mechanisms by which that can be done.

**Lewis Macdonald:** The important point is that we are not talking about children, which is the word that Brian Monteith used. We are talking about young people in their teens dealing with very difficult questions of sexuality. As Brian will know from the representatives of the Aberdeen students forum and from the other secondary school pupils whom he met last week, they are often very articulate people with a clear understanding of the world in which they live and of the issues that they face. I do not think that we should in any way be shy of raising difficult questions with young people.

We have to think carefully about the appropriate mechanism for doing that, whether it is in writing or in person, and whether it is private or public. I think that we should stick to the principle.

**Mr Monteith:** I am not the only one to have used the word children. There is a distinction between children and young people. The convener has already suggested, and others have concurred, that we examine what was carried out last week.

The young people that I spoke to last week were in primary 6. This is where we should urge caution in our approach. Parents do have legal responsibilities. We have to take cognisance of that and of the stage of maturity that young people may be at when we seek this evidence, if we go ahead. That seems entirely a matter of common sense to me. If there is to be any value in the information that we elicit, we must ensure that it is

from people with an understanding of what we are discussing. I do not see that as controversial or patronising to the young people concerned.

**Cathy Peattie:** I had the same point as that of Lewis Macdonald. We cannot underestimate the knowledge and understanding of young people. We cannot take evidence on this matter and not include young people. I agree that we need to consider how we achieve that, with regard to working with Save the Children and some youth organisations. We must ensure that we listen to young people about this issue.

**Ian Jenkins:** In a funny way, I agree with what Brian Monteith is saying, the direction of which is not, in essence, controversial. We have said it and said it again: there must be ways of listening to young people. We must trust the organisations that deal with children and young people in a non-statutory and informal way. We must use the agencies concerned as a conduit.

We are not interested in big, public, show-trial-type events. Provided that we can do it sensibly, we can come to an agreement. I accept Brian's reservations, but the committee must—absolutely must—try to get young people's views on this matter.

**Michael Russell:** Is there an association of guidance teachers, or of teachers involved with sex education, which could give evidence to us? There are often associations of subject teachers. That might be useful to find out about.

**Mr Monteith:** There is one for guidance teachers.

**Michael Russell:** That would be a useful contribution for oral evidence.

**The Convener:** We will consider that.

I suggest that we take on board the points that members have made. It is important that we, as a committee that has tried to set a standard of including comments from young people, do not shy away from that on this occasion. It is obvious that that would need to be done sensitively, and that we would need to take advice on it.

I am happy to discuss that further and then return to the representatives from each party grouping, to ensure that we take this forward in a way that members would feel appropriate.

Item 6 is the conference—

**Karen Gillon:** Before you move on, convener, I know that we have asked for written evidence from the teaching unions. Are we asking them to present oral evidence to us as well?

**The Convener:** I felt that the committee had asked that we include them for oral evidence. Is that not the case?

**Karen Gillon:** Could I ask that we try to get the written evidence in advance of the committee meeting, so that we can go through it, read it and will then be able to ask more informed questions?

**The Convener:** It will be quite a tight time scale, as we are suggesting coming back on 7 March. I am sure that the unions will try to be as co-operative as possible.

**Michael Russell:** Are we likely to take the evidence on 7 March?

**The Convener:** Yes, that is the date that has been suggested. The meeting is in the afternoon.

## Poverty and Education Event

**The Convener:** Item 6 on the agenda is the conference, "Poverty and education: Challenge and response". It is on 8 May, from 10 am until 4 pm, at Stirling Council chambers. I put this on the agenda for any members who are interested. There is no charge for attendance at the event, although there may be travel costs. The fact that there is currently no budget for committee members to attend conferences has been flagged up and is being examined. We hope to get that sorted out for any future conferences that are brought to our attention.

At this point, we can agree to attend the event if members wish to go, but we need to know who, so that we can deal with travel expenses. I am keen to go. Are any other members interested?

**Cathy Peattie** *indicated agreement.*

**Ian Jenkins** *indicated agreement.*

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

**Nicola Sturgeon:** In principle, I am also keen to go.

**The Convener:** The probability is that the conveners liaison group will not agree that too many people can go. I have noted which members have indicated an interest. We will see what we can do.

**Mr Stone:** I will give way in favour of Ian Jenkins. I did not see you put your finger up, Ian.

**Michael Russell:** I have a Parliamentary Bureau meeting on the afternoon of 7 March, unfortunately. We do not yet have anything pencilled in for Wednesday 22 March. Given that the bill is not due for consideration until after the Easter recess, is there any possibility of delaying the oral evidence on the ethical standards in public life bill until Wednesday 22 March?

**Gillian Baxendine:** It depends on the timetable that the bureau sets for consideration of that bill.

**The Convener:** So it's back to you, Mr Russell.

**Michael Russell:** It is just that I would be very keen to be present during the evidence. I would be very grateful if that evidence could be taken on 22 March. I cannot promise to influence the other decision, however.

**The Convener:** If you could leave that with us, we will take on board your points and try to reshuffle the timetable.

**Michael Russell:** That would be very helpful.

**The Convener:** We will let people know about it as soon as possible, as other members have commitments as well.

I thank members for their attendance.

*Meeting closed at 11:11.*



Members who would like a printed copy of the Official Report to be forwarded to them should give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

Members who would like a copy of the bound volume should also give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

No proofs of the *Official Report* can be supplied. Members who want to suggest corrections for the bound volume should mark them clearly in the daily edition, and send it to the Official Report, Parliamentary Headquarters, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH99 1SP. Suggested corrections in any other form cannot be accepted.

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

**Tuesday 29 February 2000**

Members who want reprints of their speeches (within one month of the date of publication) may obtain request forms and further details from the Central Distribution Office, the Document Supply Centre or the Official Report.

#### PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

##### DAILY EDITIONS

*Single copies: £5*

*Annual subscriptions: £640*

BOUND VOLUMES OF DEBATES are issued periodically during the session.

*Single copies: £70*

Standing orders will be accepted at the Document Supply Centre.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT, compiled by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre, contains details of past and forthcoming business and of the work of committees and gives general information on legislation and other parliamentary activity.

*Single copies: £2.50*

*Special issue price: £5*

*Annual subscriptions: £82.50*

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

*Single copies: £2.50*

*Annual subscriptions: £80*

Published in Edinburgh by The Stationery Office Limited and available from:

**The Stationery Office Bookshop**  
**71 Lothian Road**  
**Edinburgh EH3 9AZ**  
**0131 228 4181 Fax 0131 622 7017**

**The Stationery Office Bookshops at:**  
123 Kingsway, London WC2B 6PQ  
Tel 0171 242 6393 Fax 0171 242 6394  
68-69 Bull Street, Birmingham B4 6AD  
Tel 0121 236 9696 Fax 0121 236 9699  
33 Wine Street, Bristol BS1 2BQ  
Tel 01179 264306 Fax 01179 294515  
9-21 Princess Street, Manchester M60 8AS  
Tel 0161 834 7201 Fax 0161 833 0634  
16 Arthur Street, Belfast BT1 4GD  
Tel 01232 238451 Fax 01232 235401  
The Stationery Office Oriol Bookshop,  
18-19 High Street, Cardiff CF12BZ  
Tel 01222 395548 Fax 01222 384347

**The Stationery Office Scottish Parliament Documentation**  
**Helpline may be able to assist with additional information**  
**on publications of or about the Scottish Parliament,**  
**their availability and cost:**

**Telephone orders and inquiries**  
**0870 606 5566**

**Fax orders**  
**0870 606 5588**

**The Scottish Parliament Shop**  
**George IV Bridge**  
**EH99 1SP**  
**Telephone orders 0131 348 5412**

[sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk](mailto:sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk)

[www.scottish.parliament.uk](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk)

**Accredited Agents**  
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers