

# **EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 10 January 2001  
(*Morning*)

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## EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

1<sup>st</sup> Meeting 2001, Session 1

### CONVENER

\*Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

### DEPUTY CONVENER

\*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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

\*Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)

\*Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP)

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

\*Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP)

\*attended

### THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:

Mr Dougal Carnegie (Scottish Traditional Music Lobbying Group)

### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Martin Verity

### ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

### LOCATION

Committee Room 3



## Scottish Parliament

### Education, Culture and Sport Committee

*Wednesday 10 January 2001*

*(Morning)*

[THE DEPUTY CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:07*]

**The Deputy Convener (Cathy Peattie):** Good morning and happy new year. Welcome to the first meeting in 2001 of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. For about three minutes, I shall convene the meeting.

### Interests

**The Deputy Convener:** I welcome the new members of the committee, Frank McAveety and Karen Gillon, and I invite them to make a declaration of interests.

**Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab):** I declare that I am a member of Unison, a substantial number of whose members work in education, culture and sport.

**Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab):** I am a member of the Educational Institute of Scotland, and my wife is a teacher for Glasgow City Council. I am also a director of the Arches Theatre Company.

### Convener

**The Deputy Convener:** The committee must now choose a new convener. I remind members that it was agreed on 17 June 1999 that the convener of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee should come from the Labour party.

**Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I propose Karen Gillon.

**Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** I second that.

*Karen Gillon was chosen as convener.*

**The Deputy Convener:** I invite Karen Gillon to take the chair and convene the meeting. That was not even three minutes.

**The Convener (Karen Gillon):** Thank you very much. I look forward to working with the committee again after my wee period of absence.

## Item in Private

**The Convener:** The next item on the agenda is to consider whether we should take item 6—our forward work programme—in private. Standing orders allow us to take that item in private, but I invite the committee to comment on whether it is necessary to do so.

**Michael Russell:** Considering that the forward work programme is a second draft, and that the first draft was considered in private, I do not think that there is any need to discuss it in private. It is well established and we will simply be confirming a great deal of the detail.

**The Convener:** Are we agreed that we will take that item in public?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Subordinate Legislation

**The Convener:** We have two Scottish statutory instruments before us this morning. The first is the Education (Provision of Information as to Schools) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2000 (SSI 2000/406), which is subject to negative procedure. I invite the committee's comments on it. The Subordinate Legislation Committee has made some recommendations on its drafting and the Executive has agreed to redraft it in the light of those recommendations.

As no one has any comments to make on that instrument, we will proceed to the second instrument—the Education (School and Placing Information) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2000 (SSI 2000/407)—which is also subject to negative procedure. The Subordinate Legislation Committee has commented on the instrument and the Executive has agreed to redraft it. I am aware, however, that committee members want to comment on the instrument as well.

**Michael Russell:** This SSI presents the committee with two problems. The problem relating to the drafting is less significant, although the note from the Subordinate Legislation Committee is pretty damning about it—I hope that those responsible for the drafting will take heed of that.

The more substantial problem relates to the information that the SSI seeks to place into school handbooks. Those of us on this committee who went through the Scottish Qualifications Authority inquiry are concerned about the difficulty that pupils, parents and teachers—let alone employers—have had in understanding the examination results as presented after the candidate has been through a diet of exams. We made a number of recommendations on the simplification of the system, including the introduction of a new type of certificate, which the minister has taken on board for consideration.

This SSI seems to have been drafted before our report was produced. It seeks to place into school handbooks details of pass rates and the number of certificates achieved, using SQA categories such as “Advanced Higher at A-C”, “Higher at A-C”, “Intermediate 1”, “Intermediate 2” and “Access 3 Cluster (Foundation)”. Many of us do not know what those categories mean, even though we have been through the SQA inquiry. I am sure that Ian Jenkins knows what they mean, but he has professional knowledge. I suspect that virtually no parent would understand the categories. Furthermore, what page 2 of the SSI proposes to present is absolutely mind boggling.

I understand that the SSI is subject to negative

procedure and will be in force unless the Parliament votes against it and I recognise that the situation is made difficult by the fact that school handbooks are being prepared and will be prepared during the next few months. However, I ask the committee whether it would be possible to say to the minister and his department that we believe that the SSI reflects past thinking about results and does not take into account some of the problems that arose from the SQA's presentation of information. A new SSI should be drafted with urgency to simplify the presentation of information, so that parents, who are the main beneficiaries of school handbooks, can understand what the qualifications mean. Such a change should reflect the impending changes in certification and help parents to understand what the qualifications are. My suggestion would carry more weight if the committee were unanimous in its support.

**Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** I support what Michael Russell is saying. There is clear evidence that people did not understand the issues. Printing the information that the SSI suggests would only add to the confusion. As the instrument seems to have been drafted before our report was published, it would be worth asking whether it can be rewritten.

**Mr McAveety:** I do not know the detail of the SQA inquiry, so I come to this relatively fresh. Having professional experience in awards and certification, I do not quite see what the problem is. Are we saying that the qualifications that are listed in the right-hand column on the first page of the instrument would be difficult to understand if given as information in a school handbook? I would argue that they would not be, given the way in which I have dealt with school handbooks. However, there is an issue to do with the way in which results were listed last year. People had difficulties about the inclusion of various awards on the same piece of paper.

10:15

**Michael Russell:** The evidence that we took, which was substantive and is included in our report, was that parents, pupils and employers, among others, did not yet understand such categories as, “Intermediate 2 at A-C” and “Access 3 Cluster (Foundation)”. It was also hard for them to understand “Advanced Higher”, which is new. The committee was unanimous in the belief that there needed to be a much clearer way of expressing the information and of getting through to people exactly what the qualifications meant.

The problem with the SSI, which is made obvious by the explanatory note, is that it was produced before our report was published. In those circumstances, I think that the minister would be receptive to the idea of redrafting the

instrument to ensure that the information in the school handbooks is easier to understand.

**Mr McAveety:** Having been greatly involved in the development of handbooks and having listened to parents' views, I accept the second part of the statement about the need for the information to be easy to understand. The smaller the amount of detail, the better. The problem is that a number of organisations will not be aware of some of the new terms. I am sure that that would have been the case when standard grades were introduced in the 1980s. However, given the evidence that the committee has heard, I am willing to accept Michael Russell's point. I suggest that we say that the instrument should be refined rather than added to.

**The Convener:** I suggest that we write to the Executive with the comments that have been made and ask for a response as soon as possible, preferably within the next couple of weeks.

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I would like some clarification. I understand what Michael Russell says and I agree that it would be absurd for the committee to recommend greater clarity in the certification and then to approve something that would not assist that. However, would I be right in saying that any changes to be made by the SQA in agreement with the education department would not need to be made through an SSI? That would mean that any reporting in subsequent handbooks would not have to come before this committee. Could not changes be made no matter what we decide today?

**The Convener:** It is possible.

**Mr Monteith:** That could be one of the questions that you ask the Executive.

**Michael Russell:** I would expect the Executive to go further—

**The Convener:** Mike, Ian Jenkins is next.

**Michael Russell:** Convener, you have started as you mean to continue.

**The Convener:** Exactly.

**Michael Russell:** I am glad to see it.

**Ian Jenkins:** The intention is to make the information clear to parents. No one wants to mystify them. As Michael Russell says, the question is whether the information makes sense. While the instrument is in force, there is no harm done, but we should be thinking about amending it. I do not know whether we should let it go just now and indicate in a letter that there is a problem with it and that transparency is important. We do not want to do anything to prevent schools from publishing such information. It should be published, but it is not clear at the moment.

**Michael Russell:** I am not suggesting that we oppose the instrument in the chamber, but I think that it would be useful to note in the chamber that, in letting the SSI through, we have made a constructive suggestion. Our suggestion is not only to do with a worry that the information suggested for inclusion in the handbook will not be current because of changes in certification; it relates to the fact that parents and others did not understand what the categories meant, which was a major problem. We should make it clear that, if instructions are being given about what should be in a school handbook, there should be an attempt to help parents to understand the information. The bald table that is suggested will not help parents to understand the information.

**Ian Jenkins:** The trouble with that is the danger of spinning. Facts need to be presented in one place, with interpretation of those facts in another place.

**Michael Russell:** I am always resistant to the idea of spinning, as is my colleague Mr McAveety.

**Mr McAveety:** Absolutely.

**The Convener:** Cathy, how will we cope with this pair?

**Cathy Peattie:** It is going to be fun.

**The Convener:** I suggest that we write to the Executive and ask it to respond as soon as possible so that we get a chance to consider its view. I also suggest that we do not invoke negative procedure on the SSI but that, if we want to make comments on the instrument in the chamber, we do so. Is that agreed?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Petitions

**The Convener:** We have three petitions before us this morning. Petition PE23, from Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society, calls for action to be taken to repair storm damage to the access to the caves. The petition has been on-going for some time—members will recall that we first considered it in January last year. Considerable work has been done on the petition and issues have been raised with Fife Council and the Executive. I suggest that we send the papers to the petitioners and await any comments from them. There may be nothing further that we can do at this stage, although members may think otherwise.

**Mr Monteith:** Is there anybody in the public gallery who is here with regard to any of the petitions that we are considering today? If so, I suggest that we give them the opportunity to address us.

**The Convener:** I have no problem with that suggestion. Is there anybody here on behalf of the Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society? I see that there is not. Are members happy with the course of action that I have proposed?

**Michael Russell:** It is a pity that, despite the fact that this issue has been running for more than year, neither we nor Fife Council are making a huge amount of progress on it. However, the most recent letter from Fife Council indicates some movement on the matter. It would be useful to keep up the pressure, as I noted that, somewhere in the papers that we have received in the past year, attention is drawn to the rising water levels. Although Robin Harper did not draw attention to that point when the petition was discussed by the Transport and the Environment Committee, it is obviously a concern; if sea levels are rising, the caves will be flooded or badly damaged. That needs to be addressed urgently. Progress is being made and the petition could be referred back to the Public Petitions Committee, which could keep pushing the matter.

**Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** From reading the papers, I think that there is an issue that we could usefully highlight, perhaps once we have received a response from the petitioners. Organisations face difficulties in attracting funding for projects whose primary purpose is to preserve part of our heritage or something of cultural value to the nation, as the funding criterion always seems to be whether any investment could achieve an economic benefit. Historic Scotland and the Executive have not readily felt able to support initiatives to bring about a resolution that would please the petitioners in this case, as the artefacts that we are trying to

preserve are part of our cultural heritage. The question is how we value such artefacts or sites or measure their value in economic terms. Until we resolve that question, issues such as this will continue to arise all over the country where parts of our national heritage are under threat and it is difficult to attract funding to protect them.

**The Convener:** That is a reasonable point, to which we may wish to return in more detail.

Petition PE233 is from the Technology Teachers Association. Is there anyone in the gallery in connection with this petition? There is not.

**Ian Jenkins:** I have asked a couple of questions about how the Executive is addressing the fall in the number of presentations for examination in technological studies and the availability of technology teachers, but the questions have received holding replies—they say that the minister will reply in due course—so I cannot comment on the answers. Part of the reason for the decline will relate to the fact that other choices are being made—if choice is widened, certain subjects will be taken up less. Clearly, this issue needs to be examined. Technology is an important subject in the eyes of everyone who stands back and looks at the matter. I do not know where we go from here. I have asked the questions, but the answers are not immediately available.

**Irene McGugan:** I, too, am concerned about this issue. I think that we have to take the petition very seriously, particularly because it has been submitted by a teachers organisation.

I found one parliamentary question on this matter that had been answered. Kenny MacAskill asked about the number of children being presented for examination in technological studies at standard and higher grade in the past five years. The answer takes the form of a complicated table, from which I will give one global figure. In 1995, 5,978 candidates were presented for examination at standard grade, but, in 1999, the number had dropped to 3,649. That demonstrates the problem. The number of pupils taking technological studies is undoubtedly falling. The subject is almost dropping off the curriculum—we should ask why that is happening. It will be difficult to reinstate skills, infrastructure, teaching and enthusiasm for the subject once it has been lost.

As well as the statistics, we could also usefully examine the level of support that has been expressed by the organisations that are most involved. In its response to the Executive's reply, the Technology Teachers Association says that support for the petition has been expressed by a number of organisations, but we have not seen the letters of support that it has received. It would be useful to know whether organisations such as the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association,



Electronics Scotland and Scottish Engineering, which are major players in high-level industries, have supported the petition and share the concerns of the Technology Teachers Association about the fact that youngsters are not coming through the system with the skills and training to slot easily into the positions that those industries are trying to fill. All of us who are concerned about Scotland's industry and its ability to compete with the rest of world have to consider this matter and view it with some importance. If it is the case that we are not training youngsters adequately to take up the jobs that are available in high-level industries, we are failing somewhere.

**Michael Russell:** That is a key point. The petition is interesting, as is the minister's response, albeit slightly evasive. However, our information is incomplete. We do not have the information from industry and universities that we need to judge whether we should pursue the petition. The committee paper says that the Public Petitions Committee asked the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee to consider whether there is a deficit in applied technology training in schools, which would have a knock-on effect on universities, but that is a narrow point, as a much wider range of organisations than just universities are affected. I wonder whether we could ask the clerks to seek comments on the petition from other bodies, such as industry bodies and universities. We could consider the petition again when we have received responses.

**Cathy Peattie:** The issue is wide. We need to consider what is happening in schools, including the issues of gender—girls are doing a lot better—and development and advice to young people. Certainly, in my area, which contains employers from the petrochemical industry, there is concern about the number of people in schools who have not considered working in industry. That is the case not just in relation to technical areas; across the board, people have not given much thought to industry. People in industry are concerned about the lack of advice on technical subjects.

We may want to return to the issue, which is important for the skills base. Companies are saying that in 10 or 20 years they will not be able to operate in Grangemouth or elsewhere because they cannot recruit young people who have the skills and want to enter the industry. I am aware that the McCrone committee considered this matter. We may wish to reconsider the contents of the petition, but we must also examine the wider issue of what is being done in Scotland to encourage young men and women to consider a career in industry. Industry has become an unfashionable area in which to work.

**Mr McAveety:** It would be useful to have detailed information from educational authorities

about the Technology Teachers Association's assessment, as the situation varies across the country. The position will be affected by personal choice and local factors such as the push that is made. There seems to be a dichotomy between what the association is saying and the broader debate in which we are all involved on preparing for new technologies and industries. We should try to bring things together. We should perhaps seek the views of people such as Frank Pignatelli, who was involved in the Scottish University for Industry; I am sure that such people will be critical of the situation, given that there are those who would take technical and technology education to fourth-year level and then move into employment and those who might want to take those courses from fourth year into higher level and on to the university sector.

10:30

**Mr Monteith:** Only yesterday, I received some correspondence on this matter, which merits more investigation before we can say much to the petitioners. One important aspect that the petition raises is the level to which technological studies can be taken. People may not take a standard grade if they do not think that they will take the subject further and so they do not take it up at all.

I am reminded—this is a small anecdote—of my own experience. My best subject at school was technical drawing—

**Mr McAveety:** Mine was woodwork.

**Mr Monteith:** However, when I wanted to go into architecture—which is what I did—I was advised by my careers guidance officer to drop technical drawing, as I would not need it. A course that may be required for, say, the petrochemical or any other technological industry may not be matched by the technological teaching in schools.

It would be easy for us to dismiss the petition or to support it but, without knowing more about the subject, we cannot do either.

**The Convener:** I suggest that we try to gain some more information about the petition. Perhaps we should write to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland. Frank Pignatelli would also be a good source of information. We should also write to the trade groups that are involved in some of the bigger industries. Once we have that information, we could consider the petition in more detail.

**Michael Russell:** We should also ask the petitioners what responses they have had, as I know that they have been pursuing the matter with industry.

**The Convener:** Perhaps we could contact

Scottish Enterprise as well.

We must take that action bearing in mind the committee's remit—we must not stray from that—in relation to how education is delivered and how technological studies deliver for industry.

Petition PE307 is from the Scottish traditional music lobbying group. I understand that representatives of the group are here—in fact, the petitioner is here. If he would like to say something, I am more than happy—

**Mr Dougal Carnegie (Scottish Traditional Music Lobbying Group):** I might just clarify a couple of points.

**The Convener:** Come and have a seat.

**Mr Carnegie:** It is a pure coincidence that our petition is being discussed on the same day as Celtic Connections starts in Glasgow, but if members were to look at the scale and success of that festival, which attracts major artists from across the world, they would think that everything is healthy and rosy in the garden of traditional arts. However, that is only one side of the coin; although I am a great supporter of Celtic Connections, its success could be countered with the fact that last year saw the demise of the Edinburgh Folk Festival and the official closure of Balnain House on hogmanay. I spoke to Caroline Hewat of Balnain House at the Celtic Connections reception last night; it does not seem that great progress is being made in setting up an alternative facility in the north. I heard that people were seeking to obtain alternative premises in order to continue the educational and developmental side of Balnain House, rather than the commercial side. That is the other side of the coin: year after year, folk clubs are struggling and many have to close down or considerably curtail their activities.

The first point in our petition asks the Parliament to promote as proactively as possible traditional arts and culture. I would like to clarify that point a little. Projects such as community arts projects, of which the Adult Learning Project in Edinburgh is a good example, are behind our thinking. The Edinburgh project is largely self-financing—it raises its own funds by running ceilidhs, the money from which goes back into similar projects. However, the grass roots need to be supported, as it is at that level that young adults are encouraged to learn traditional music, play instruments and sing—the project has more than 400 students who are learning those skills.

The second point in our petition takes the issue back further, to schools. It is good to have cultural champions, but I, and the group that I represent, would like traditional arts to be incorporated into the curriculum, whether they are tied into Scottish history or into culture in general. That would give every child the opportunity, if they want it, to

access their culture and to play traditional music or to learn traditional signing. In many schools, a child who picks up a musical instrument is encouraged to learn classical music. Kids should have the opportunity to go for traditional music—they should pick up the fiddle if they want and learn it. That would start the process, which would continue through the community-based initiatives.

On the final point in our petition, I know that there might be some controversy around regional arts centres, as, in some ways, money would be put into buildings, which, as we have seen with Balnain House, is an expensive operation. However, the centres must be spread around Scotland in order to reflect the variety in traditions, music, song and dance culture throughout the country—the traditional arts in Edinburgh are not the same as they are in the north-west Highlands, the islands or Aberdeenshire. Our thinking is that there must be centres to reflect the variety of the traditions in different parts of the country. Local authorities might have a role; I recognise that they are strapped for cash, but they could provide premises at reasonable and affordable rents, which would get around the problem of the expense of maintaining buildings such as Balnain House.

Our group believes that there is an inequality in recognition, support and funding for the different forms of art in Scotland, especially in comparison with what is provided for the allegedly high arts. I was at the debate on the national cultural strategy; I believe that Scottish Opera gets £6 million a year and classical music gets £4 million. I appreciate that the traditional arts will get an extra £1.5 million over three years, but that says it all to me. If we are to value our culture, we must ensure that there is more support and funding for the traditional arts and culture, which are too valuable to lose.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much for your comments. Over the past year and a half, the Education, Culture and Sport Committee has consistently raised the issue of traditional arts. We welcome the petition, as it helps to put back on the agenda a matter that might have slipped off.

Mr Carnegie, you made a number of valuable points, which I am sure we will want to consider in some detail. Your final point about the discrepancies in funding is one that the committee has flagged up on numerous occasions, particularly during our inquiry into the financial situation of Scottish Opera and during our discussion of the cultural strategy and how traditional arts can be supported in Scotland.

I suggest that we should have a committee report on the petition and that, given Cathy Peattie's experience and interest, she should prepare that report. There are issues to do with the funding of cultural and regional centres and it

would help us to move the debate forward if Cathy examined those issues in some detail and came back to us with a report.

**Michael Russell:** Cathy Peattie is the ideal person to do that work.

The petition is timely—as you said, convener—and it is right that we should keep the issue in our sights. I am always nervous of the either/or argument in cultural funding. However, there is a great deal of sense in what Dougal Carnegie said, particularly given the parliamentary answer that I received some weeks ago, in which I noticed that the cost of the failed merger between Scottish Opera and Scottish Ballet was well over £500,000. My question attempted to make sense of a strange funding pattern within classical music—one can only dream about what £500,000 would have achieved for the Scottish traditional arts.

It was important that Dougal Carnegie reminded us about the current tragic difficulties of Balnain House. That example also raises a question mark over the third point that is made in the petition. While I am not in any sense against investing in traditional arts centres, the difficulties of sustaining Balnain House, which were regrettable, might lead us to wonder whether investing in buildings in that way might skew the amount of funding that might be available for other activities.

However, I support thoroughly the proposal that Cathy Peattie should produce a report for the committee. We should take account of that report in our discussion of the next agenda item, which is our work programme. We should timetable consideration of that report in late spring, so that we can put some impetus into the matter and persuade the Scottish Arts Council to do a lot more.

I have frequently made the point about languages in Scotland in the chamber and, when we consider Scottish traditional arts and culture, we should bear in mind the fact that if we do not do anything about them, no one else will. Nobody on the planet but us is responsible for looking after our culture. If only people who live elsewhere are looking after our culture because they are interested in it, we are seriously failing. The culture is ours—it is our duty to do something about it.

**Mr Monteith:** I support the suggestion that Cathy Peattie produce our report. I cannot add much to what Mike Russell has said. The petitioner mentioned the teaching of music in schools and I have great concerns about that. I hope that Cathy will consider it in her report. Related to the teaching of music is the teaching of dance in schools. One aspect of Scottish traditional music is that it is not only music to listen to, but music to dance to. Dance also needs to be taught in schools.

I ask members to support my motion on Sir James Shand, which has been lodged in a cross-party spirit. I hope that members will feel able to sign it.

**Michael Russell:** I have already done so.

**Cathy Peattie:** I grew up listening to Jimmy Shand, so I am bound to sign it. His music is in my blood.

I welcome the petition and it was good to hear Dougal Carnegie speaking about it. He has attended so many of our meetings that I expect one day to see his name in front of him at the table. He said all the things that needed to be said. I am happy to go away and do the report.

Convener, you were right: I am reminded of Ian Smith's comment when we took evidence on the national companies, that something like 7 per cent of Arts Council funding goes into traditional music. Something is very wrong there, when we consider the effect of an event such as Celtic Connections on Glasgow's economy and tourism and the sheer celebration of the arts in Scotland that will take place this month. We should be doing something about it. I agree with Mike Russell; if we do not do something and if we do not hold on to our culture, no one else will.

I look forward to working on the report—but to a realistic timetable, because I would like to meet a host of people.

**Mr McAveety:** I would like the committee to consider something even broader, but which takes in what Dougal Carnegie talked about. It strikes me, Dougal, that the success of Celtic Connections is predicated on a number of things. It requires fairly substantial public support and it continues to receive that support from the local authority. Local authorities are crucial to the development of any arts or music strategy. The festival has also benefited from merging traditional and contemporary music. Its programme shows balance and mixture, including folk and country from the USA as well as traditional Scottish music.

That leads me to the debate in the Scottish Arts Council. I am interested in popular and contemporary music and traditional music, so I wonder whether Cathy Peattie could also look into those kinds of music and the issue of young people's engagement in the music industry. I know that cross-party working groups have been set up on that subject. I do not know whether we could use Ian Smith as a reference point, rather than setting up a separate inquiry into the popular music industry. A number of key players in that industry would consider such an inquiry into Arts Council expenditure and local authority commitment as a priority. We need to think about that.

The areas of Scotland that have supported popular music well—I am thinking of my experience in Glasgow—have done so because of committed public support for different art forms. Support has been given to things such as the Arches and Celtic Connections, but it has been recognised that the dynamics of the industry are changing. We should not have a fixed perspective. I wonder whether it would be worth while for Cathy Peattie, in her report, to cut across into some other issues as well. The bigger debate in the cultural industries in Scotland concerns the cultural strategy and the relationship with the Scottish Arts Council.

I am not convinced about the case for regional arts centres. I would need to be persuaded about that, but it is worth exploring. I hear from musicians that they are interested in support for individual musicians to help their development, rather than premises. That is not to say that premises are not important, but the core issue should be to try to develop the art form.

If members do not feel that Cathy Peattie should also consider those issues, I would certainly be interested in coming back to the committee with information on popular and contemporary music. For many young people, those are important issues.

**The Convener:** I will suggest a couple of things. First, the petition is important and it is the petition that we should be discussing. We do not want to lose sight of the issues that it raises by discussing other things, because that could get out of control. It is important that we consider traditional arts in context and that there is an inquiry. However, Cathy Peattie will be aware of the comments that committee members have made and, when she meets the Arts Council and other organisations, she can flag those comments up and then come back to us so that we can have further discussion on them within our debate on the cultural strategy.

It would be good to allow Cathy as much time as possible, but I would like to have a report back before the summer recess. We can then, in October, pick up any issues that interest us.

10:45

**Michael Russell:** Frank McAveety has introduced an interesting topic. On two previous occasions during discussion of our work programme, the committee has considered looking into the Scottish music industry, but has shied away from it. I resist the idea of Cathy Peattie taking that on as an additional responsibility, because the petition is clear about what it wants. We would not do the petitioner a service if we diluted it. However, I am persuaded that we need to look into the Scottish music industry as a whole.

Frank has made an offer and he is the man with the largest collection of vinyl and other substances known to man.

**Mr McAveety:** You had better clarify that.

**Michael Russell:** No, I will just leave it as it is. However, if Frank McAveety were to look into the Scottish music industry—especially into the question that he raised about engaging young people in the cultural debate—and if that work were to run in parallel with Cathy's inquiry, we would see two very interesting reports before the summer, which would contribute to our debates. Frank should be asked to do that—he has not been here 10 minutes and he has got a job.

**The Convener:** Are you happy with that, Frank?

**Mr McAveety:** Yes, I am.

**The Convener:** Right—we will go ahead with two reports.

**Mr McAveety:** And Mike and I did not discuss this before the meeting.

**The Convener:** Members know that we have to consider the cultural strategy. The two reports will help to expand our discussion—when we come to it—on that strategy. Perhaps we can set our timetable so that we discuss the cultural strategy after we receive the reports.

**Ian Jenkins:** I agree with what Mike Russell said about the role of the committee. It seems obvious from this discussion that the petitioner—on the general points if not, perhaps, on some of the details—is pushing at an open door. We and Parliament can change the way in which the arts are thought of. Irene McGugan spoke earlier about our heritage and about cultural funding. We need more information and these reports will be helpful.

**The Convener:** I thank the petitioner for raising the issue with us and for helping us to have what I think has been one of the better discussions that we have had for some time—it has been positive.

## Work Programme

**The Convener:** Item 6 on the agenda is the consideration of our forward work programme. Members have a paper that suggests a programme up to the Easter recess. It is quite a full programme, because we are taking on the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Bill, which will require the taking of evidence. We will also take oral evidence on the Hampden inquiry. We have to tie that up, because it has been going on for a considerable time. It would be good to take that oral evidence, produce a report and conclude that inquiry, rather than letting it drift on and on.

The schools infrastructure inquiry will be fairly detailed. It will be valuable to the committee and it would be useful to get it done and dusted by Easter, if possible. We should therefore dedicate a substantial amount of time to it.

During previous inquiries, I have found it useful to concentrate on just one inquiry, rather than having two or three running at the same time. Obviously, we have to deal with the bill; I suggest that we do that first, to get it out of the way. We could then do the Hampden inquiry and get it out of the way, concluding with a report. We would then move to the school infrastructure inquiry, which would run right through and be concluded by Easter.

That would not give us scope to take on much else. However, it would help us to focus our work and to produce worthwhile reports. We can consider what we want to look into after Easter and perhaps give the clerks some guidance. We are a member of staff down at the moment, because David McLaren has moved on to work for Sir David Steel. We should therefore give the clerks as much help as we can in preparing the forward work programme for after Easter.

**Michael Russell:** The film report has been long anticipated. It is brief and to the point and will be with the clerks if not tomorrow, on Friday, and out in time for the papers next week. It recommends two areas for further inquiry that might fit into our programme later in the parliamentary year. One is purely educational and the other is more about infrastructure. That is a taster, a teaser—

**The Convener:** Do not spoil the surprise.

**Mr McAveety:** A trailer.

**Michael Russell:** A trailer—the report, coming to a committee near you.

I think that the convener is right about ordering inquiries. It is difficult to run two major inquiries at the same time. The urgency of the Hampden inquiry has passed so that is, essentially, the completion of a piece of unfinished work. That

should be the shorter of the two inquiries—I think that we have already agreed to curtail it. The really important inquiry before Easter is the schools infrastructure inquiry. The files containing evidence that has been submitted to us are very impressive. It might be that the clerks should write to all those who gave evidence asking whether they want to add anything, because that evidence came in before the summer. We should then concentrate on it.

In the period between Easter and the summer, a general election might disrupt our timetable. We have agreed to do something to mark the tenth year of the Gaelic television fund. That offers a rare opportunity to quantify a cultural spend in terms of employment and impact. I suggest that we need to firm up the proposal and prepare for the anniversary. We should have two meetings in June. At one we will take evidence in Edinburgh and the other—in Stornoway—will, I anticipate, include taking evidence as well as a visit to the Gaelic television studios, with a view to producing a report in September. I would be happy to work with the clerks in asking for evidence—I know most of the key players—and on a preparatory paper to set the scene, so that we are ready to go with that in June.

**The Convener:** I suggest two further things that are not included in the work programme because I was not here for the discussion of it. At the first meeting after the Easter recess we should, if possible, have the Scottish Qualifications Authority back for a public session in which we will ask how it is getting on with its forward programme, whether it is meeting its objectives and whether there are issues about the budget, training and delivery. The committee has a responsibility to ensure that the SQA is on track to deliver this year what it did not deliver last year. That public scrutiny would be useful for us and for the SQA.

We talked about the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Bill. There is a gap in consideration of issues for children in care. How is the education of children who are fostered, in residential care and adopted attended to? In the work programme after Easter we should at least have a preliminary investigation to gather statistics and to decide whether we want to examine the issues in more depth after the summer recess.

**Mr McAveety:** Adoption policy in Scotland is not included and we should look at that. There have been announcements elsewhere in the UK. I have had two very different experiences of the adoption process with the same social work department in the past five years and I think that that should be looked at. There are differences in how the system impacts on employment and there are a number of inconsistencies that I have experienced and inconsistencies in terms of access and

information. How one is treated depends on one's social class. I would be keen to take an opportunity to address that after the summer, because that has been neglected in Scotland.

**Irene McGugan:** I endorse the convener's point about the academic experience and usual failure of young people who are looked after or in care. Social workers and carers have long held it that such children do not achieve well in school and that there must be reasons for that that have not been addressed, although statistics are available which show that to be the case. I support an investigation into that with, I hope, a remedy as its outcome.

**Mr Monteith:** I managed to get to the previous meeting only in time for the mince pies—

**Michael Russell:** Who ate all the pies?

**Mr McAveety:** We were out making snowmen.

**Mr Monteith:**—so I did not contribute to the list of priorities for after the Easter recess. New members of the committee will also want to add suggestions, as Frank McAveety has, and I support his suggestion to examine adoption.

Rural schools are included under "Other matters for consideration" on the list. School closure is second only to health as a topic for members' business debates. The committee has looked at rural schools in an inconclusive way and we should revisit the issue. If we do not do that, the issue will continue to be raised through members' business debates, without any clear guidance on how we can resolve the problem of Parliament being the first point of complaint when a local authority seeks to close a school. It is right that parents have the opportunity to bring school closures to the attention of Parliament, but we are all floundering for want of clear guidance on where Parliament stands on giving advice. Rural schools needs to be moved up a category and examined in more detail.

Similarly, if we do not do something about museums and industrial museums, that matter will come back. There is likely to be a further round of museums saying that they need funding and that they face closure. If we do not give that some priority, we will miss out an important aspect of Scottish culture.

"Minority languages, including Scots" is also under "Other matters". I would like that to be broadened and I suggest that the committee examine at some point language teaching in schools, including Gaelic, Scots and foreign languages. There is a lot of evidence coming out that foreign languages are not well taught in Scotland, as well as evidence that we are losing our own culture. The committee should look at that on a cross-party basis, to add further pressure to

bring about change.

**Ian Jenkins:** Brian Monteith talked about rural schools. Cathy Peattie's report was a very positive contribution to thinking on that and it was positive in outlining local authority good practice.

**Mr Monteith:** It looked at only one instance of closure.

**Ian Jenkins:** Indeed, but since your comments were negative, I wanted to highlight Cathy Peattie's positive contribution.

**Cathy Peattie:** Thank you, Ian, but there is unfinished business there. We agreed that there were issues in Argyll and Bute and that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities should look at the issues more generally and at a code of practice for school closures. To my knowledge, COSLA has not yet begun work on that. I remind members that I met COSLA before I recommended that it should do that work. I think it would be helpful for the committee to write to COSLA asking for an update. We will start to get more petitions from schools that are facing closure—MSPs have been approached.

It is a disappointment that there are no set procedures that people can consult. COSLA must consider that. Parents need such information and local authorities need to follow a set programme. That is not happening yet. COSLA must consider the procedures that surround proposed school closures.

11:00

**Michael Russell:** Abercorn is a current example where, yet again, parents are claiming that the consultation procedures were flawed and biased against them. The reason that the closure in Argyll did not proceed was because of the concern that was expressed about the consultation procedures.

Many people have spoken to COSLA on the issue and have received warm words and understanding. However, COSLA must grasp the nettle and draw up a set of guidelines for local authorities that will ensure fair, impartial consultation, which engages at least the grudging support of parents, even where their school is listed for possible closure.

I support Cathy Peattie's comments. We should write to COSLA, ask it what is happening and encourage it to make proposals. The committee could also play a part in helping to develop those proposals.

**The Convener:** There are several issues that could be dealt with in reports by committee members. Next week, we could have a short discussion on the remits of those reports. One issue is museums and industrial museums, in

which both Brian Monteith and Mike Russell have an interest. Irene McGugan has raised the issue of language—perhaps she could take on that report. If we have a discussion about remits next week, members can go away and come back to the committee on some of those issues by the summer. Frank McAveety will report on popular music and Cathy Peattie will report on traditional music.

There is an on-going issue in relation to my report on sport in schools. I will be happy to follow that up and pick up on sport strategy issues. Perhaps we could also consider some of the early-years education issues. Ian Jenkins has quite a lot of experience in that area. That would give us all a report to work on, in addition to the general committee work.

The conveners group has recommended that committees meet fortnightly, but we are due to meet weekly until the Easter recess. To be realistic, we should say that we will, at least until the summer, meet weekly. However, we should leave some gaps in the timetable following the Easter recess—perhaps one gap a month—to pick up on issues as they arise.

At some point we will have to consider the McCrone report. I can give the committee a brief update on that. I understand that the Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs will make a statement to Parliament this afternoon on the current situation. I spoke to him this morning and he has agreed to keep the committee informed through briefings to me. Once agreement has been reached between the Executive, the employers and the unions, we will have to discuss the issue. It is not for the committee to determine the agreement, but I am sure that we will want to discuss it and its future impact on education.

We should leave some gaps in our timetable. Subjects such as the SQA, Scottish Opera and Hampden have come up in the past, which has meant that we have had to ditch other work to deal with them.

**Michael Russell:** You are right about the McCrone report, convener. However, there is the probability that the Scottish Executive education department—perhaps I should call it the Scottish Government education department—will produce its review of higher still. It is essential that we consider that review.

I want to return to Gaelic. As it will take some time for organisations to give information, would it be possible for me to work with the clerks to pull that information together? We must also try to set a date for the visit to Stornoway, because that cannot be done at the drop of a hat. The clerks would have to request permission from the Parliamentary Bureau for the committee to travel

outside Parliament—there should be no great difficulty in that.

**The Convener:** I suggest that we spend 20 minutes or so next week discussing the remits of the reports. That will allow us to put together a bid for funding if members need to go on visits and so on. I suggest that Brian Monteith takes on the issue of museums and industrial museums and that Mike Russell deals with Gaelic television. Is that agreed?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** The final report of the special educational needs inquiry will be on the agenda for next week. I know that Julie Allan asked for comments from members, but that she has not received very many. If members have any comments on the report, they should give them to the clerks by 5 o'clock tomorrow afternoon. It has been quite a long time since the report was drafted. If members do not have a copy of the report, the clerks will give them one today. If there are no comments, we will assume that the substance of the report is agreed as it stands.

Members should note that the papers indicate that the all-powerful conveners group has changed our meetings to Tuesday afternoons.

**Michael Russell:** I did not see that.

**The Convener:** It is on the agenda. The conveners group has agreed that our first meeting on a Tuesday afternoon will be on 23 January. I was not consulted about the change and I take it that the committee was not consulted either. I know that Mike Russell is not on the bureau any more and that that was the major problem with Tuesday afternoons. If any one else has a problem with Tuesday afternoons they should flag that up over the next few days and I will do my best to battle with the conveners group. I suggest that we timetable our meetings for 2.30 pm to 4.30 pm and try to stick to that. Martin Verity will send round a note on that.

The conveners group has given us special permission to meet on Wednesday 14 February in the morning. The committee had agreed that Sam Galbraith would come to give evidence on the Hampden inquiry and he had already timetabled that date in his diary.

**Michael Russell:** Will we meet on the Tuesday afternoon as well?

**The Convener:** No—we will meet on Valentine's day, so I will bring my cards.

**Mr McAveety:** I do not have a sack big enough to put all mine in.

**The Convener:** Aye, right. If you and Mike Russell are going to give me trouble for the next six months—

**Michael Russell:** Who? Us? The two living Scottish debaters of the year will be fun to deal with.

**Mr Monteith:** Was there a difficulty with Wednesday morning meetings?

**The Convener:** Everyone wants to meet on a Wednesday morning because no members want to come to Edinburgh on Tuesday afternoons. The committees that met previously on Tuesday afternoons have swapped with those that had a Wednesday morning slot. That is part of the on-going process of sharing resources in the current accommodation until we move down the road to our new purpose-built building—at considerable cost to the taxpayer.

**Mr Monteith:** Are you saying that the problem was availability of rooms, rather than people's diaries?

**The Convener:** Yes. As committees tend to meet every week there has been a problem about the availability of rooms. Our decision to meet weekly after Easter might cause further difficulties. However, if we say it now, the bureau will just have to timetable it in.

*Meeting closed at 11:09.*



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