

EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Monday 11 June 2001
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

18th 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

WITNESSES

Bill Howat (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar)

Domhnall MacAoidh (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar)

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh (Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig)

Malcolm Maclean (Pròiseact nan Ealan)

Dr Finlay MacLeod

Catherine Ann MacNeil (Lèirsinn)

Ruairidh Moireach (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar)

Agnes Rennie (Pròiseact nan Ealan)

Dr Robert Stradling (Lèirsinn)

Rosemary Ward (Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Martin Verity

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Judith Evans

ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

LOCATION

Council Chamber, Council Buildings, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis

Scottish Parliament

Education, Culture and Sport Committee

Monday 11 June 2001

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER opened the meeting at 13:43]

Gaelic Broadcasting

The Convener (Karen Gillon): Feasgar math. Welcome to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. Today, we are taking evidence in relation to our Gaelic broadcasting inquiry. I am delighted to welcome to the committee representatives from a wide range of organisations.

This is the first Scottish Parliament committee meeting to take place in Stornoway. We are grateful to everyone from the local council who has been involved in helping us to hold the meeting here and in making the necessary arrangements.

I apologise for the deputy convener, Cathy Peattie MSP, who is unable to be here this afternoon, and for Brian Monteith MSP. I welcome Calum MacDonald MP, who is the local MP and is here to listen to proceedings. There is a Westminster interest in our discussions, with regard to the communications bill.

I begin by asking representatives from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to give evidence in relation to our inquiry.

13:45

Domhnall MacAoidh (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar): A neach-gairm agus a bhuill na Pàrlamaid Albannach, tha sinn anabarrach toilichte an cothrom seo fhaighinn coinneachadh ribh agus còmhraidh ribh air an fheasgar a tha seo, gu sònraichte ann an dàimh ri nithean Gàidhlig. 'S mise Dòmhnall MacAoidh agus 's mi neach-cathrach comataidh Gàidhlig na comhairle. Tha mi air a bhith nam bhall den chomhairle seo bho chionn còrr is fichead bliadhna, agus tha mi air a bhith gabhail ùidh anns a' Ghàidhlig anns an ùine sin. Tha mi a' coimhead adhartas ann an saoghal na Gàidhlig ann an cuid de dh'àiteachan, agus tha mi a' coimhead gu bheil a' Ghàidhlig a' dol air ais ann an àiteachan eile.

Dh'fhaodainn a ràdh gu robh mi an làthair air latha na Gàidhlig shìos anns a' Phàrlamaid, agus

bha e inntinneach dhòmhsa a bhith an làthair an latha sin, agus cluinntinn cuid de na buill Pàrlamaid a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig, agus gu sònraichte an taic a bha air a nochdadh dhan Ghàidhlig air an latha sin, agus tha sinn an dòchas gum bi sin a' meudachadh, agus ann an tomhais gur e sin a tha gur fàgail còmhraidh rinn ann an seo an-diugh, ann am broinn na comhairle.

Chuir sinn tagradh a-steach mar chomhairle thugaibh, agus bithidh sinn toilichte leudachadh air an sin. Tha mi cinnteach gum bi sibh airson ceistean fhaighneach dhuinn agus bithidh sinne toilichte, mar as fheàrr as urrainn dhuinn, na ceistean a tha sin a' fhreagairt. Mar a tha mise a' coimhead cùisean a thaobh Comataidh Telebhisein Gàidhlig, tha iad air obair ionmholta a dhèanamh anns na h-eileanan againn bho chaidh an cruthachadh. Tha mi a' creidsinn mar a h-uile bhuidheann eile, nuair a dh'amhairceas iad fhèin air ais, gun aidich iad gun do rinn iad mearachdan, agus tha sin nàdarach do bhuidheann sam bith a tha air an cruthachadh as ùr. Tha e ceart agus cothromach dhuibhse a bhith a' dèanamh sgrùdadh orra, ach tha sinn an dòchas anns an sgrùdadh a tha sibh a' dèanamh, gur ann an rùn a bhith a' neartachadh na comataidh a tha sin.

Tha a' chomataidh a tha sin mar mheadhan air a bhith a' cruthachadh oibrichean anns na h-eileanan againn, sgilean nach robh ann, cothroman cosnadh nach robh ann, agus tha e cudthromach dhuinne ann an seo a tha a' meas gu bheil sinn ann an saoghal Gàidhlig. Tha mise, mar eisimpleir, beò ann an coimhearsnachd anns a bheil a' Ghàidhlig air a bruidhinn gu làitheil, agus tha mise gu pearsanta, is e Ghàidhlig a bhitheas mi a' cleachdadh na mo dhachaigh, ach feumaidh sinn na rudan a tha sin a' chumail beò. Nise, tha an telebhisean sònraichte feumail, a thaobh a' chainnt againn a chumail beò.

Dh'fhaodainn a ràdh a bharrachd air an sin gu robh mi bliadhnaichean an sàs ann am Biùro nam Mion-Chànan, agus dh'fhoghlaim mi ann an sin gu robh riochdachdan na Roinn Eòrpa a' coimhead cànan agus cultair luachmhor. Mar eisimpleir, anns a' Chòrn, far a bheil an cànan aca air bàsachadh a-mach, tha iad air oidhirp a dhèanamh an cànan sin aiseirigh a thoirt dha, agus mar sin tha iad ga fhaicinn luachmhor.

Tha sinn a' coimhead Comataidh Telebhisein Gàidhlig aig cridhe na tha sinne a' dèanamh anns na h-eileanan a tha seo; tha sinn a' coimhead gu bheil buannachd ann dha samhail a' BhBC agus SMG agus Grampian; ach tha sinn a' coimhead gu sònraichte gu bheil buannachd ann do bhuidhnean beaga neo-eisimeileach a chaidh a chruthachadh anns na h-eileanan againn, agus a tha mar mheadhan air gun dh'fhàs iad ri linn agus gu robh Comataidh Telebhisein Gàidhlig ann. Is dòcha aig amannan nach eil iad riaraichte leis a' chuibhrinn a

bha iad a' faighinn dhan na bha air a riaghladh a-mach agus bhitheadh sin nàdarrach, ach tha mi a meas gun do rinn an comataidh a h-uile dhìcheall a b' urrainn iad airson an t-ionmhas a bha iad a' faighinn a roinn gu cunbhalach. Tha mi a' creidsinn gu bheil iad a' cur feum air tuilleadh maoinachadh, ach aig deireadh an latha is e tha sin cothromachadh a dh'fheumas sibhse a dhèanamh, ach bithidh sinn an dòchas gur ann am meudachadh a tha an obair a tha iad a' dèanamh.

Tha telebhisean sònraichte cudthromach, mar a tha fhios agaibh uile, airson foghlaim troimh mheadhan na Gàidhlig. Tha sin air meudachadh agus tha pàrantan ga fhaicinn mar mheadhan oideachaidh luachmhor dhan chloinn aca. Nise ann am meadhan sin, tha telebhisean cudthromach, gum bi prògraman sònraichte ann airson cloinne troimh mheadhan na Gàidhlig. Tha a h-uile càil a tha sin a' cosg airgead, agus tha iad a' cur feum air airgead airson prògraman math den t-seòrsa sin a dhèanamh, agus gu sònraichte tha sinne a' coimhead anns na h-eileanan a tha seo na sgilean a tha iad mar mheadhan air a chruthachadh, na cothroman cosnadh a tha ann.

Tha e tàmailteach dhuinne a bhith a' coimhead Gaidheil, gum bi aca ri bhith a' fàgail nan eilean againne airson cosnadh fhaighinn air tìr-mòr, bho nach eil cothroman cosnadh ann. Chì sibh, tha mi an dòchas, mus crìochnaich sibh bhur turas chun na h-eileanan, an dà studio againn ann an seo ann an Steòrnabhagh. Bha mise agus mo charaid còir ann an seo, mar mheadhan air a' chiad tè a bha ann an sin a chuir air chois, nuair a thàinig Grampian gu Steòrnabhagh, agus ged a dh'fhalbh Grampian, tha studio ann an siud fhathast, agus is e ar miann gu faiceadh sinn nise cothrom agus feum air a dhèanamh de na studio a tha sin ann an Steòrnabhagh fhèin, anns na h-eileanan againn fhèin ann an seo. An àite nan companaidhean mòra mar SMG agus am BBC, dèanamh mòran dhan a sin air falbh bho na h-eileanan againn, ach gidheadh a tha crochadh air na Gaidheil a dh'fhalbhas às na h-eileanan a tha seo airson na dreuchdan a tha sin a lìonadh. Mhiannaicheadh sinne barrachd de na dreuchdan sin a bhith anns na h-eileanan againn fhèin.

Chan eil mi airson cus de bhur n-ùine a thoirt an àirde. Chuir sinn a-steach tagradh thugaibh, agus bithidh sinn toilichte ceistean sam bith a fhreagairt a tha sibh airson a chur oirnn.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Convener and members of the Scottish Parliament, we are pleased to have this opportunity to talk to you, particularly on matters to do with Gaelic. I am Donald Mackay, chairman of the Gaelic development sub-committee of Western Isles Council. I have been a member of the council and have taken an interest in Gaelic matters for more than 20 years. There has been progress in

some areas of Gaelic, but there has been a decline in others.

I was present at the Gaelic day at the Parliament. It was interesting to be there and to hear some of the members of Parliament speaking Gaelic. I was pleased by the support that was shown for Gaelic that day. We hope that that support will increase. I expect that that is what has led the committee to come to Stornoway to speak to us today.

We have made a submission to the committee. I am sure that members will have questions for us and we will try to answer them as best we can.

Since its creation, the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee—the CCG—has done a lot of good work in the Western Isles. Like every other organisation, when it looks back it will admit that it made mistakes—that is natural for any new organisation. It is only right that we examine and audit the CCG to strengthen its work.

The CCG is a medium for creating employment opportunities in the Western Isles that have not existed before. That is particularly important for those of us who consider ourselves to live in a Gaelic world. I live in a community that lives and breathes Gaelic—we use it in our everyday lives. We must keep the momentum going. Television is particularly important in trying to maintain our language.

For many years, I have been involved in the European Bureau of Lesser Used Languages. Through that I have learned that the Governments of Europe consider minority languages to be valuable. For example, in Cornwall, people are trying to revive the language because they see it as valuable.

We see the CCG as being at the heart of Gaelic development in the Western Isles. The CCG brings benefits to organisations such as the BBC, the Scottish Media Group and Grampian Television. In particular, there is a benefit for the small independent groups that have been created in the Western Isles—they have expanded due to the CCG. At times those groups are not happy with the percentage of work that they get, but that is only natural. The CCG has done its best to use its money to the best advantage of the Western Isles. The Education, Culture and Sport Committee must consider whether the fund has been properly utilised.

Television is a particularly important medium for Gaelic-medium education, which has expanded over the years. Parents, in particular, consider television to be a valuable tool for education. All that costs money and we need the same quality of programmes in Gaelic as we have in English. That is important for parents.

It is not good for us to see young people leaving our islands for employment opportunities on the mainland because such opportunities do not exist in the Western Isles. Before the committee finishes its visit to the Western Isles, I hope that members will visit the studios at Seaforth Road. When Grampian Television came to Stornoway, the council had to establish one of the first studios. Although Grampian has left, the studio remains and could easily be utilised. We would like the studio to be used. Instead of the big companies such as the SMG and the BBC doing much of their work away from the islands, yet depending on the Gaels who leave the islands to work on their programmes, we would like the programmes to be made in the Western Isles.

We are happy to answer any questions relating to our submission.

The Convener: I open up the session to members for questions.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): Before I start, in accordance with the standing orders, I declare an interest: I have given the clerks a full declaration of the financial interest that I have had in Gaelic television for a number of years.

I thank the witnesses for their evidence. I want to ask a couple of questions specifically about what Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has done in partnership with Gaelic television. What activities have community education, education or economic development departments been involved in, either in partnership or individually, to support the development of Gaelic television in these islands in the past 10 years?

Domhnall MacAoidh: Is ann le seòladh bho Chomataidh Telebhisein Gàidhlig a chuir sinn an studio air Rathad Shiphoirt air chòis. Bha sinn a' faighinn seòladh agus fiosrachadh bhuapasan, agus bha sinn an crochadh gu mòr air an eòlas a bha aca—eòlas nach robh am broinn na comhairle seo. Mar a bhitheas cuimhne aig cuid agaibh—is dòcha—bha iad dèidheil air an franchise fhaighinn bliadhnaichean air ais agus gheall iad gun tigeadh iad a Steòrnabhagh agus gun cruthaichadh iad oibrichean ann an Steòrnabhagh. Airson ceartas a dhèanamh dhaibh, rinn iad sin, thàinig iad a Steòrnabhagh, agus bha iad ann bliadhnaichean; ach, gu mì-fhortanach, nuair a theirig cuid den airgead a bha iad a' faighinn, dh'fhalbh iad. Ach, a-nise, is e sin cuid den cho-obrachadh a bha eadar sinne agus Comataidh Telebhisein Gàidhlig. Bha e fìor cuideachd an uair a chaidh an studio mhòr a chur air chois agus mu cheithir no chòig bliadhna air ais chaidh a thogail a-rithist—cuid le airgead Eòrpach. Bha iadsan a-rithist an sàs ann còmhla rinn fhèin agus bha sinn a' co-obrachadh gu sin a chur air chois. B' e a' chrìoch a bha againn anns an amharc, gum bitheadh goireasan

ann an seo a bha freagarrach airson gum bitheadh prògraman air an dèanamh anns na h-eileanan againn fhèin.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

We established the studio at Seaforth Road with information and guidance from the Gaelic Television Committee. We are largely dependent on its experience—experience that we did not really have within the council. Some members of the committee will remember that the Gaelic Television Committee was keen to get the franchise years ago. It promised that it would come to Stornoway and that it would create employment here. To be fair, it did come to Stornoway and was here for a few years, but when the money dried up it went away. Co-operation existed between the Gaelic Television Committee and us.

When the big studio was established with European funding four or five years ago, the Gaelic Television Committee co-operated with that, with the aim that we would have facilities that were appropriate for programmes to be made in the Western Isles.

Michael Russell: I understand that, but could you expand on community involvement? The work of the council is often an interface between the community and other bodies. What has been the council's track record over the past 10 years in community education activity, activity in schools or, on the economic side, support for small and medium-sized enterprises to be ancillary providers to broadcasting?

Ruairidh Moireach (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar): Feasgar math. Is mise Ruairidh Moireach, iar-cheann-suidhe na comhairle, agus is mi cuideachd cathraiche comataidh poileasaidh agus stòrais, a tha an urra ri poileasaidhean Gàidhlig na comhairle. Airson freagairt na ceiste aig Mgr Russell, rud mu dheireadh a rinn sinn, is e gun do chum sinn taca ri bhith a' cur a-mach phrògraman digiteach. Nise, tha sin fo smachd S4C anns a' Chuimrigh, ach thàinig sinn gu aonta riutha, agus thatas a' cur a-mach nam prògraman sin a-nise ann an Gàidhlig troimh Studio Alba ann an seo, ann an Steòrnabhagh, agus chuir a' chomhairle, cha b' e a-mhàin taic airgid, ach taca air dòighean eile ris an iomairt sin.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Good afternoon. I am Roddy Murray, vice-convenor of the council. I was also the chairman of the policy and resources committee, which is in charge of Gaelic policies. To answer Mr Russell's question, the most recent thing that we have done is to support digital broadcasting, which is under the control of S4C in Wales. The programmes are being transmitted through Studio Alba in Stornoway. The council supported that enterprise

not only financially but in other ways.

Michael Russell: That is a good example, but I want to go a bit further. Are there initiatives in your schools and community education service that might demystify television, to bring young people into the culture of television and to try to help them to develop that culture within their own language and their own community from school onwards?

Ruairidh Moireach: Uill, tha Colaisd a' Chaisteil ann an seo ann an Steòrnabhagh, tha iad sin air a bhith ri toirt misneachadh agus brosnachadh mòr do dh'òigridh. Bha cùrsaichean trànaidh aca airson òigridh, airson a dhol a-steach do dh'obair ann an telebhisean. Ach, gu mì-fhortanach, is e an rud a tha duilich mu dheidhinn na cùise, nach robh na cothroman ann an seo dhaibh, agus glè thrìc gu feumadh iad falbh gu tìr-mòr airson oibrichean a lorg. Agus, cuideachd, gu mì-fhortanach, is ann nas miosa a tha a' chùis air a dhol, leis gu bheil Grampian an dèidh tarraing a-mach a-nise às an studio ann an seo, agus is e nas lugha de chothroman a th' ann do dh'òigridh an àite a' dol nas motha.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Lewis Castle College in Stornoway has greatly encouraged young people and offers them training courses to allow them to become involved in television work. What is sad is that there are no employment opportunities when they finish; they often have to go to the mainland for employment. Unfortunately, matters have become worse than that, in that Grampian Television has now withdrawn and there are even fewer opportunities for young people.

Michael Russell: And even fewer now, with further jobs being shed in the independent sector in the past few weeks. Presumably that must worry you. Do you want to react to what has happened?

Ruairidh Moireach: Is e rud gu math duilich dhuinne a tha ann an sin dha-rìreabh, gu bheil sinn a' faicinn oibrichean aig cridhe na coimhearsnachd agus aig cridhe na Gàidhlig, gu bheil iad gan toirt air falbh às an seo, a' cur às dhaibh buileach glan, air no gan toirt air falbh do dh'àiteachan eile den rìoghachd. Tha na h-eileanan a tha an seo ri cur ionmhas mòr ann am foghlam troimh mheadhan na Gàidhlig don chloinn. Tha sia air fhichead anns a' cheud, no 600 duine cloinne anns na h-aonadan Gàidhlig am bliadhna, ach is e glè bheag den sin a gheibh cothrom obair fhaighinn anns na h-eileanan tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig. Is e sin aon rud a bhitheadh sinne a' sùileachadh a dh'atharrachadh anns na bliadhnaichean a tha romhainn, agus gum bitheadh an roghainn aca co dhiubh a bhith ag obair ann, an àite sinn a bhith air ar faicinn mar àite a tha biathadh òigridh le Gàidhlig gu

àiteachan eile den rìoghachd.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

It is sad to see jobs at the heart of the Gaelic community having to be done away with altogether or taken to other parts of the country. The islands put a great deal of money into Gaelic-medium education. There are about 600 children in Gaelic-medium education this year, but very few of them will get opportunities for work in the islands in Gaelic. That is something that we expect to change in the future; we would like people at least to have the choice of working here instead of having to leave and transferring their skills to the mainland.

Michael Russell: As you know, I support that view and have done so for a long time. The point I was making is that the number of jobs in Gaelic broadcasting seems to have peaked some years ago. There now appears to be a decline in the number of such jobs and we have seen a further decline in the past couple of weeks. Can you think of a specific strategy that would reverse that trend? It seems to be a disappointment—as big a disappointment as the decline in the number of Gaelic speakers in the past 10 years—despite tremendous efforts, particularly by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

Ruairidh Moireach: Is e ionmhas cridhe agus cnag na cùise agus, ma tha an t-ionmhas ri dol sìos, bithidh na dreuchdan agus na h-oibrichean ri dol sìos. Chan e seirbheis choimearsalta a tha ann an craobh-sgaoileadh Gàidhlig, agus tha mi a' smaoineachadh gum bi iomadach latha ann gus am faic sinn sin ri tachairt.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Finance is at the heart of the matter: when finance decreases, jobs decrease. The service is not commercial and it will be a long time before we have such a service.

Domhnall MacAoidh: Bu mhath leam, a neach-gairm, ma dh'fhaodas mi, is dòcha beagan a chur ris an sin. Tha trioblaid ann anns an ùine ghoirid agus tha trioblaid ann anns an ùine fhada, mar a chì sinne e. Tha sinn mothachail air gur e saoghal digiteach a tha air thoiseach oirnn, ann an dhà no trì bhliadhnaichean air adhart. Is e a tha gu bhith cudthromach dhuinne anns na h-eileanan a tha seo nuair a thèid a stèidheachadh gur ann anns na h-eileanan a tha seo a bhitheas e air a stèidheachadh. Ma bhitheas e air a stèidheachadh air tìr-mòr, tha e a' ciallachadh gum bi tuilleadh den òigridh againn air an tarraing air falbh bho na h-eileanan againn. Is e cothrom a tha sinne a' meas a tha ann sònraichte, gnìomhachas a shuidheachadh ann an seo anns na h-eileanan a bhitheas làidir agus a chruthaicheas oibrichean proifeasanta math do dhaoine òga. Tha sinn a' meas nach eil e ceart gum bi iad sin air an tarraing

air falbh bho na h-eileanan againn a dh'àiteachan eile. Tha e glè mhath a bhith ri faicinn nan nithean sin air an cruthachadh aig a' BhBC agus an Obar Dheathain agus an àiteachan eile, ach is e Gaidheil a tha air an oideachadh agus an togail anns na h-eileanan againn a bhitheas a' lìonadh a' chuid mhòr den sin. B' fheàrr leinn a bhith faicinn sin ri tachairt anns na h-eileanan againn fhèin.

Tha trioblaid ann anns an ùine ghoirid, is mar a thuit mo charaid ann an seo, is e maoineachadh a tha aig a' chridhe aige. Chan urrainn dhan chomataidh a bhith a' cur a-mach ach an t-ionmhas a tha iad ri faighinn, agus mar a thuigeas mise cha do mheudaich an t-ionmhas a tha sin thairis air na bliadhnaichean. Nuair a thèid mise air ais is dòcha faisg air fichead bliadhna, bha mi air turas dhan Chuimrigh, bha S4C a' faighinn £40 millean an uair sin, ach chan eil mi a' coimhead gun deach an t-ionmhas againn mòran an àirde thairis air na bliadhnaichean bho thòisich Comataidh Telebhisein Gàidhlig.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

There is a short-term problem and a long-term problem. We are aware that we have to face the digital world in the next few years. When digital broadcasting is established, it is important that it is established in the Western Isles. If it is established on the mainland, there will be a further drain of skilled young people away from the islands. We have an opportunity to establish an industry in the Western Isles that will be strong and which will add to the number of professional jobs that are available here. Otherwise, all the skills and all the young people will drain away. If broadcasting is run from the mainland, training and skills learned in the Western Isles will go to fill jobs at the BBC and elsewhere. We would prefer to see those jobs here in the Western Isles.

There is a problem in the short term. As Roddy Murray said, finance is at the heart of the matter. The CCG can distribute only the money that it is given. As I understand it, the committee's funding has not increased over the years. I visited Wales about 20 years ago, when S4C was getting about £40 million. Funding for the CCG has not increased very much at all since its inception.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): Your submission seems to lead to the conclusion that a Gaelic channel should be established, preferably in Stornoway—a surprising submission from the Western Isles Council. Given that there are probably more Gaelic speakers in central Scotland, particularly in the city of Glasgow—which has well-developed educational opportunities and full-scale schooling for those seeking Gaelic education as part of mainstream education, too—would not it be better to identify developments there or elsewhere in Scotland to spread out the use and effectiveness of the

language, rather than locating a channel in the Western Isles?

Domhnall MacAoidh: Tha caochladh fhreagairtean ann dhan cheist a tha sin. Tha mi a' gabhail ris gu bheil argamaid ann airson cuid de na h-oibrichean sin a chruthachadh. Tha mi fiosrach gu bheil mòran Ghaidheal gu sònraichte timcheall Ghlaschu, agus shìos mu mheadhan na rioghachd, ach tha goireasan agus companaidhean mòra ann an sin cheana. Tha sinne a' coimhead ris gum bi rudeigin stèidhichte anns na h-eileanan againn fhèin. Ma thèid, aig an ìre sin, seanail digiteach a-steach agus gur ann aig deas a bhitheas e, is ann a-rithist a' tarraing air falbh bho na h-eileanan againn. Tha sibh mothachail air mar a tha sluagh anns na h-eileanan ri dol sìos, agus tha sinn a' cur feum air oibrichean, a chumas an sluagh ann an seo. Is dòcha leis a h-uile cheartas, shìos mu mheadhan na rioghachd gum bi cothroman obrach eile ann nach eil anns na h-eileanan againn. Mar sin, tha sinn a' coimhead gur e cothrom air leth a tha ann agus cothrom cudthromach a bhitheas na chall dhuinn ma chailleas sinn e.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

There are a variety of answers to that question. I accept that there is an argument that some of the jobs should be based in the central belt, particularly in Glasgow, where a lot of Gaels are based, but there are already facilities and big companies there. We would like to have something based in the Western Isles. If a digital channel were to be established in the central belt, it would drain skills away from the Western Isles. We are aware that the number of people here is declining and that there are employment opportunities in the central belt that do not exist in the Western Isles. Digital broadcasting offers a singular opportunity. If we lose that opportunity, we could be in quite a bad way.

Mr McAveety: I understand that and I am not unsympathetic to what you say.

Is the central argument more about resources for other economic and social development strategies, to examine other aspects of infrastructure and to consider other ways to ensure that there is not a haemorrhage of significant sections of the population from the area, as was indicated to committee members by senior economic development officers of your council this morning? The figure for out-migration was 18 per cent higher than in the rest of Scotland. Would not it be better to deal with that issue separately rather than to identify digital television as the way to tackle it?

14:00

Domhnall MacAoidh: Chan e seo an aon

mheur a tha ann idir. Tha meuran eile ann a tha a' cheart cho fìor ri telebhisean, ach tha sinn a' coimhead telebhisean cudthromach. Tha mòran chothroman ann. Chan eil fhios agam an do leugh sibh an aithisg a sgrìobh am Professor Sproull, bho chionn bhliadhnaichean air ais, a thaobh eaconomaidh na Gàidhlig, agus na cothroman a tha ann a thaobh eaconomaidh na Gàidhlig. Chan eil an seo ach aon de na cothroman a tha ann agus tha mi a' gabhail ris an argamaid a tha sibh a' cur rium. Tha sinne a' faicinn gu bheil seo cudthromach a thaobh a bhith a' cruthachadh an seòrsa oibrichean a tha iad a' cruthachadh, gur e oibrichean anns a bheil ùidh aig na daoine òga, agus mura faigh iad e, an uair a ghluaiseas iad air falbh airson trèanadh, tha e buailteach nach till iad air ais gu na h-eileanan againn tuilleadh.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Television is not the only strand—there are others—but we see it as very important. There are many opportunities. I do not know whether members of the committee have read Professor Sproull's report on the Gaelic economy and the opportunities that exist within it. Digital television is just one of the opportunities. I accept the argument that Frank McAveety presents, but we see digital television as especially important, owing to the type of employment that it creates. It will attract young people; if we do not get it, they will move away for training and it is highly unlikely that they will come back to the Western Isles.

Bill Howat (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar): I should declare an interest: I am not a Gael and I have moved recently to these islands.

I will make a couple of observations about what Mr Russell and Mr McAveety have said. Since I arrived in these islands, I have tried to visit all our schools. I assure the committee that although the schools might not look too great on the outside, they are wonderful on the inside. They are very well resourced. We are not just preparing our children for television; we are preparing them for all forms of technology in the modern age, including computing and radio. Those are taught in both English and Gaelic. That aspect of the educational system in these islands is as good as will be found anywhere.

On Frank McAveety's comments, I will make an obvious point that is important to somebody such as me who has come to this culture. Mr McAveety is aware that I know Glasgow—I was born and raised in west central Scotland. I have to say that it is distinctly different living and working in a place where there is an alternative language and culture. My council believes—and, having experienced this, I support it—that if we are to have a broadcasting channel that will truly keep the language alive, it must be set in a place where it is part of the living, everyday culture. No offence, but

the folks in Glasgow do not have that. They may have it within their own small bits of the community but Glasgow is clearly a different culture, as Mr McAveety knows.

I submit that a critical consideration for the committee is that the channel must be put where the language is spoken every day.

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP):

Much of the discussion so far has been about employment, encouraging new and innovative business opportunities and about spreading the benefits that may accrue from this investment and initiative. How many Gaelic independent production companies have you encouraged and funded outwith Stornoway?

Domhnall MacAoidh: Chan urrainn mise, le ceartas, a' cheist agaibh a fhreagairt, ach tha fios agam gu bheil dà chompanaidh neo-eisimeileach—aon aca ann an Steòrnabhagh an seo air meudachadh thairis air na bliadhnaichean, Eòlas; is e an companaidh eile Media nan Eilean—a tha le chèile air mòran adhartais a dhèanamh. A bharrachd air an sin, tha daoine ann a tha ag obair air an ceann fhèin. Tha mise a' smaoinachadh gu bheil mi ceart ann a bhith ag ràdh gu bheil suas ri 50 duine a tha ag obair, eadar daoine le camarathan, is daoine den t-seòrsa sin, a tha ag obair air an ceann fhèin, aig a bheil an comataidh ri toirt beòshlaint. Tha barrachd ag obair, tha iad mar mheadhan air a bhith ri toirt obair do bharrachd air na tha sinne a' gabhail a-steach, chan e a-mhàin na tha anns na companaidhean neo-eisimeilach, agus na tha anns an companaidhean mòra, ach a' chuibhreann sin de dhaoine a tha ag obair air an ceann fhèin aig a bheil Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig ri toirt cuideachadh.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

With all due respect, I cannot really answer that question. I know that there are two independent companies. One of them, Eòlas, is in Stornoway and the other is Media nan Eilean. They have made a lot of progress. About 50 freelance people with cameras and so on work independently. The Gaelic Broadcasting Committee helps them. That is a way of giving jobs to more people than we realise. There are many freelance people whom we do not know about.

Irene McGugan: You will know better than I do that the Western Isles is a big area. In capitalising on those prospects, there is more than Lewis at stake. I would have expected to find independent producers from Barra or Uist. Is it not the case that both the companies that you mentioned have recently shed jobs and that jobs in such companies are fewer in number than they were?

Domhnall MacAoidh: An companaidh a chaill an luchd-obrach, is ann stèidhichte anns na h-

eileanan a deas a tha e, agus tha mi a' tuigsinn gur ann a-mhàin ann an Steòrnabhagh a chail luchd-obrach an cosnadh. Mar sin dheth, tha companaidh a deas agus companaidh a tuath ann. Chan eil sinn a' caill sealladh air nach ann an Steòrnabhagh a-mhàin a tha sinne ag iarraidh gum bitheadh buaidh aig na nithean a tha seo ach air feadh nan eilean againn. Tha mi a' gabhail ris gu bheil, mar eisimpleir, Barraigh a cheart cho airidh air cuideachadh is a tha Steòrnabhagh. Ach feumaidh na goireasan a bhith ann an àite sònraichte air choreigin agus tha na goireasan cheana ann an Steòrnabhagh, ach chan eil sin a' cantainn nach eil e math na goireasan sin a ruighinn air feadh nan eilean againn.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

The company that lost staff was based in the southern isles, but I understand that it was only in Stornoway that staff were lost. However, we do not expect the effects to be felt only in Stornoway; Barra is just as worthy of help as Stornoway. However, the facilities have to be situated somewhere. Facilities already exist in Stornoway, although that does not mean that their benefits would not be felt throughout the islands.

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): In your opening remarks, you spoke highly of the CCG, although you admitted that some of its initiatives had not been 100 per cent successful. How do you measure success? As it appears that the Gaelic-speaking population is still declining, surely any moves to establish a channel or to make improvements would partly be in the service of trying to reverse such a trend and expand the Gaelic language-speaking base. Is there any evidence that pouring more money in would reverse that trend, or would it be a King Canute operation?

Domhnall MacAoidh: Is e ceist fharsaing a tha sibh ri cur rium a thaobh àireamhan. Tha sinn mothachail air gu bheil àireamhan luchd-bruidhinn a' chànain againn ri dol sìos, ach mar a thuirt Mgr Ruairidh Moireach, tha àiteachan ann anns a bheil meudachadh, gu sònraichte anns na sgoiltean. An urrainn dhomh eisimpleir a thoirt dhuibh, a-rithist air mo thuras dhan Chuimrigh, agus an rud a bha a' tachairt ann an sin? Bha iad mothachail air gu robh ginealach aca air a chall nach robh a' bruidhinn a' chànain, ach bha iad a' foghlaim gu robh na daoine òga a bha a' tighinn as an dèidh nach d'fhuair an cànan, bha iad ag ràdh nach tug am pàrantan acasan an cànan dhaibh, agus bha iadsan a-nis ag iarraidh gum bitheadh a' chlann acasan air an oideachadh troimh mheadhan a' Chuimris.

Bha sinne a' coimhead mar gum bitheadh sin ri tachairt againn fhèin ann an seo: daoine òga, gu sònraichte pàrantan òga, a tha a' cur meas air gu bheil dà-chànanachas luachmhor. Ach os cionn

nan uile nithean, tha iad a' coimhead gu bheil dà-chànanachas toirt dhan chloinn aca mòran chothroman nas fheàrr airson a bhith air an oideachadh.

Agus dh'fhaodainn innse dhuibh, mar eisimpleir, bha sinn le chèile shìos aig latha na Gàidhlig ann an Lunainn, aig deireadh na seachdain, agus bha mi a' bruidhinn ri neach a bha a' fuireach shìos ann an Lunainn, agus bha e a' bruidhinn air buidheann beag a chaidh sìos às an seo de sgoilearan às na h-Eileanan an Iar a shealltainn air an dome. Choinnich e riutha agus bha e a' cantainn gu robh e moiteil asda cho math agus a bha iad air seasamh air an casan agus gu robh e follaiseach gu robh a' Ghàidhlig ri toirt dhaibh neart. Is e seo an rud a tha pàrantan a' cantainn rinne, agus is e seo far a bheil sinn dòchasach gu bheil an cànan ri dol a mheudachadh, ach mar a thuirt mi na bu tràithe, tha e cudthromach gum bi prògraman Gàidhlig aca dha fhaicinn nuair a thèid iad dhachaigh, air neo bithidh iad buailteach air a bhith a' coimhead na Beurla.

Is e an rud a dh'fhoghlaim sinne anns a chomhairle a tha seo bho chionn bliadhnaichean air ais a thug oirnn a bhith a' tionndadh gu foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig gu bheil neart na Beurla cho làidir, agus mura bi iad ga bruidhinn anns an raon-chluich anns an sgoil, mura bi iad a' bruidhinn a' chànain nuair a thèid iad dhachaigh, tha uidhir a bhuaidh aig a' Bheurla is gum bi iad a call a' chànain. Chan e rud a tha fìor a-mhàin a thaobh na Gàidhlig a tha ann; tha e fìor mun h-uile cànan anns an Roinn Eòrpa. Agus ann a bhith a' bruidhinn air rìoghachdan eile, dh'fhoghlaim mise an seo gu robh eagal orra ro neart na Beurla, oir is e a' Bheurla a bha iad a' cleachdadh, mòran dhiubh, nan obair làitheil na rìoghachd fhèin. Agus bha iad a' coimhead gum bitheadh Beurla a' tarraing air falbh bhon cànan agus bhon chultair aca fhèin agus bha iad a' dèanamh oidhirp airson a' chànain agus an cultair a chumail beò. Tha sinne a' coimhead an nì cheudna a' tachairt ann an seo. Feumaidh sinn a bhith ri toirt, mar gum bitheadh, neart dhan rud a tha sinn a' dèanamh troimh mheadhan na Gàidhlig airson gum bi na nithean sin a' soirbheachadh.

Fhad 's a tha mi a' bruidhinn, dh'fhaodainn seo a ràdh gu pearsanta: tha mi toilichte gu bheil an Riaghaltas a' cur cudthrom air na thatar a' dèanamh ann am foghlam. Tha sinne a' coimhead foghlam cudthromach dhan ghinealach a tha a' tighinn. Tha sinn a' gabhail ris gu bheil cuid de na ginealaich a dh'fhalbh—gu sònraichte seann daoine—nach eil sinn a' dol gan cosnadh; cha robh iad a' coimhead luach anns a' chànain. Tha mi a' smaoineachadh gu bheil na daoine òga eadar-dhealaichte. Tha iad a' coimhead an cànan is an dòigh beatha againn luachmhor.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

That is a fairly broad question as far as figures are concerned. We are aware of statistics that suggest that the number of people who speak the language is declining but, as my friend Roddy Murray said a few minutes ago, there have been increases, particularly in schools. I will provide another example from my visit to Wales. A generation lost out on speaking the Welsh language. The young people of that generation blamed their parents for not giving them the language and wanted their own children—the third generation—to have it. The same thing has happened here. Young parents now value bilingualism as a means of providing their children with more opportunities; indeed, they see it as something that gives their children two windows on the world, if I can put it like that.

At the end of last week, I attended the Gaelic day in London, where I spoke to a man who lives there. He told me that he had met a small group of pupils who had visited the dome and that he was very proud of how the language gave them strength and allowed them to stand on their own. That is where we hope we can extend the language base. It is important that children see Gaelic television programmes instead of English-language programmes at home. Years ago, the CNES turned to Gaelic-medium education because the English language is very strong. Children tend to speak English in the playground, and unless they speak Gaelic and watch Gaelic TV programmes when they go home, they will lose the language. That is true not just of Gaelic, but of every minority language in Europe. After talking to people throughout Europe, I realise that they are afraid of the strength of English and that the everyday use of English is weakening their languages. That is happening here. We have to strengthen what we are doing through the medium of Gaelic to ensure that the Gaelic language is successful.

I am pleased that the Government has placed emphasis on education, which is vital for the next generation. Some members of the older generation do not value the language because they do not regard it as useful, but the present younger generation does realise its value.

Ian Jenkins: I am happy to pay tribute to the extension of Gaelic-medium education. Friends have convinced me of its value and I offer encouragement to that movement. The Milne report referred to the possibility of investing £44 million a year in a dedicated Gaelic television channel. I wonder whether directors of education might consider that it would be better to invest £44 million in more Gaelic-medium teachers and schools. Would you like to comment on that proposal?

Bill Howat: Ian Jenkins should remember that

people other than directors of education would have views on such a proposal.

Ian Jenkins: Indeed.

Michael Russell: I want to take the discussion in a slightly different direction. There has been much talk about Wales and we all recognise the importance of S4C. We talk about mistakes, but we must recognise that the S4C strategy of spinning off a huge number of diverse independent companies as a counterbalance to broadcasting companies was influential. Mention was made in Donald Mackay's submission to the difficulty when SMG anchored the news in an unsuitable broadcasting slot.

I draw attention to the differences involved, one of which is the immense amount of money spent on education in Welsh compared with what is spent in Scotland. The new channel in Wales brought new employment. It was based in Cardiff, but people were employed throughout the country. Given the Welsh experience, how do you see the future of broadcasting? Even S4C is changing substantially. There is a tendency towards smaller organisations—perhaps with smaller audiences—but much more diverse television. There is a huge range of possibilities. Does that fit in with your model of having a studio and a broadcasting operation that is based in Stornoway, which some may say is a slightly old-fashioned model of television compared with the way in which television is going now?

Ruairidh Moireach: Ged nach e ach seachd bliadhna bhon a chaidh an studio sin a chur air chois, tha an saoghal air atharrachadh gu mòr bhon latha sin. Is iad eaconamaidh agus ionmhas cnag na cùise. Tha feum air airgead mòr—£44 millean anns a' bhliadhna a tha air dhol a-steach—ma tha sinn a' dol a chur air dòigh seirbheis digiteach. Tha sinn a' dèanamh na h-iomairt airson math na Gàidhlig agus airson math nan eilean againn fhìn agus 's ann an seo a bu chòir a bhith a' cosg earrann mhòr dhen airgead sin.

A thaobh a bhith a' sgaoileadh a-mach air feadh an àite, is urrainn dhuinn a thoirt seachad iomadach seòrsa cuideachadh agus taic do dhuine sam bith a tha airson iad fhèin a stèidheachadh mar bhuidheann—beag no mòr—airson prògraman a dhèanamh. Feumaidh iad a bhith a' faighinn obair, ge-tà, agus feumaidh iad a bhith a' faighinn taice bhon mheadhan mhòr airson nan rudan sin mas urrainn dha tachairt.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

The studio was established only seven years ago, but the broadcasting world has changed a great deal since then. Economics and financial affairs are at the centre of matters. If we are to have a digital service, much money will be needed and we should at least be spending part of that

money here in the Western Isles.

As for the broadcasting organisations being in various places, there are ways in which we can assist people who wish to establish a small or large programme-making organisation. There must be a way in which they can broadcast.

14:15

Michael Russell: There must be a transmission mechanism, but several can be constructed for digital television. For example, the job of broadcasting could be contracted to an existing broadcasting company, such as the BBC, and excellence could be developed in a range of production specialities in Stornoway. We all agree that a channel is necessary to achieve that end, but it does not have to be run by a new organisation. The Pròiseact nan Ealan submission referred to an organisation that was independent of all other broadcasters. That is leaning in the opposite direction to broadcasting, but has the council considered the range of transmission and production options that might become available with a different set of production strategies, some in small units? Ideally, such structures could be spread throughout the Western Isles and would be of much benefit to the population.

Ruairidh Moireach: Feumaidh mi a ràdh nach do ghabh a' chomhairle beachd air a leithid sin de structair a chur air chois, ach tha sinn a' coimhead gu mionaideach ris, agus bidh sinn a' tighinn an àird chun na comhairle airson gun gabh iad beachd air dìreach dè seòrsa structair a bu chòir a bhith ann anns na làithean a tha romhainn.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

The council has not considered establishing that kind of structure, but we will certainly look into it. The council will have to consider precisely what structure it wants to have in future.

Michael Russell: One of the useful things that the committee can do in its report, after taking evidence, is feed back ideas into the council's deliberations. I hope that the council will be willing to consider such ideas.

The Convener: Thank you for giving evidence to the committee this afternoon. If you would like to give us any further information, we would be more than happy to receive it.

The committee will adjourn for one minute while the witnesses swap round.

14:17

Meeting adjourned.

14:18

On resuming—

The Convener: I welcome members of the Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig, who will give evidence to the committee. I ask Rosemary Ward to introduce the colleagues who are with us this afternoon.

Rosemary Ward (Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig): A neach-gairm, agus a bhuill, feasgar math agus fàilte dhuibh uile gu Steòrnabhagh. An toiseach, bu mhath leam leisgeulan ar cathraiche, Mata Maclomhair, a thoirt seachad. Cha b' urrainn do Mhata a bhith an seo an-diugh, air sgàth agus gu bheil buidheann-obrach Jack McConaill a' coinneachadh ann an Dùn Èideann madainn an-diugh, agus tha Mata na bhall air a' chomataidh sin. Tha mi duilich nach eil esan ann a sheo. 'S e sin is coireach gu bheil mise, Rosemary Ward, mar iar-chathraiche na comataidh, a' gabhail àite Mhata.

As leth na comataidh, tha mi air leth toilichte gu bheil Comataidh an Fhoghlaim, a' Chultair agus an Spòrs a' gabhail ùidh ann an gnothaichean Gàidhlig anns an fharsaingeachd agus anns an obair aig Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig gu sònraichte. Tha sinn an dòchas gun soirbhich leibh leis an sgrùdadh agaibh. Gheibh sibh cothrom cluinntinn mu na gnothaichean a shoirbhich leinn thairis air na deich bliadhna a dh'fhalbh, agus gheibh sibh iomradh air na trioblaidean co-cheangailte ri craoladh Gàidhlig. Agus bhithinn an dòchas gun tig taic bhuaibh airson aithisg Mhìlne agus ann a' bhith a' dealbhachadh ro-innleachd agus a' coimhead air adhart ri saoghal ùr craolaidh Gàidhlig. Chan eil mòran a' chòrr agamsa ri ràdh ach dìreach innse dhuibh cò tha an làthair a' riochdachadh na comataidh an-diugh. Ri mo thaobh ann a sheo, tha Iain Aonghas MacAoidh, stiùiriche na comataidh, agus air mo làimh eile, tha Iain MacAsgaill, ball dhen a' chomataidh, agus cathraiche air fo-chomataidh air poileasaidh agus gnìomhachas. Tha facal no dhà a-nis aig John Angus ri ràdh ribh.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Good afternoon and welcome to Stornoway. I begin by conveying the apologies of our chairman, Matthew MacIver, who is not able to be here today because Jack McConnell's task force, of which he is a member, was meeting in Edinburgh this morning. My name is Rosemary Ward and I am the deputy chairperson of Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig. I am taking Matthew's place today.

I am pleased that the Education, Culture and Sport Committee is taking an interest in Gaelic. We hope that the committee will have a successful inquiry and will have a chance to hear about the things that we have succeeded in doing over the past 10 years. You will also hear about the

problems involved in Gaelic broadcasting. We hope that you will support the Milne report, so that we can look ahead to a new world in Gaelic broadcasting.

Also representing the CCG today are John Angus Mackay, the director of the CCG; and Iain Macaskill, a member of the committee and chairman of its sub-committee for policy and industry. John Angus would like to say a word or two.

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh (Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig): Tapadh leibh. Tha e math a bhith còmhla ribh an seo an-diugh. Bu mhiann leamsa dìreach dhà no trì rudan a ràdh a tha is dòcha a' togail air a' chòmhradh a bh' agaibh le Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

Their mi puig no dhà an toiseach mu dheidhinn foghlaim. Tha fiosrachadh neo-eisimeileach againn a tha a' sealltainn gu bheileas a' cleachdadh phrògraman telebhisein Gàidhlig gu mòr anns na sgoiltean, bun-sgoiltean, àrd-sgoiltean, agus ann an colaistean far a bheilear ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig. Oir tha cion ghoireasan air foghlam Gàidhlig, agus tha maoin telebhisein Gàidhlig air a bhith uabhasach fhèin feumail dha siostam an fhoghlaim a chionn 's gun do dh'obair sinn còmhla ri muinntir an fhoghlaim gus ro-innleachd a chruthachadh, a tha a' ciallachadh gu bheil sinn a' cur dha na clasaichean agus dha na sgoiltean stuth a tha a' cur taic ris na leabhraichean agus na rudan a th' aca mar-thà. Mar eisimpleir, bho chionn bliadhna, chuir sinn air dòigh gu bheil daoine a' dèanamh bhideothan leis an airgead againn a tha a' cuideachadh le higher still. Seach gu robh sin cho ùr, cha robh goireasan aca air a shon.

Faodaidh mi cuideachd a ràdh gun deach rannsachadh neo-eisimeileach a dhèanamh bho chionn sia bliadhna, agus chaidh ceist a chur air sluagh an Eilein Sgiathanaich, sluagh Loch Aillse agus sluagh nan Eilean Siar, agus chaidh foighneachd dhaibh dè an rud is cudromaiche dhuibh co-cheangailte ri cultar no ealain na Gàidhlig a tha a' ciallachadh gu bheil misneachd aca mu dheidhinn an cloinne a chur gu foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig? Agus às an rannsachadh sin, 's e an leasachadh a thàinig air gur e telebhisean Gàidhlig an rud bu mhotha aig an robh buaidh air pàrantan airson foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig a thoirt dhan chloinn aca. Fhuair iad misneachd gu robh obraichean gu bhith ann, agus bha iad a' faicinn gu robh an rud co-cheangailte ri meadhan a tha cho cudromach ri meadhan sam bith eile a th' air an t-saoghal.

Ma dh'fhaodas mi ràdh mu dheidhinn Ghlaschu agus Steòrnabhagh, mas e sin tè dhe na ceistean—carson Steòrnabhagh no carson na h-Eileanan Siar seach Glaschu? 'S e freagairt na cùise sin, dhòmhsa gu pearsanta tha i inntinneach

on a bha mi an sàs ann an stèidheachadh foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig ann an Glaschu, agus mar stiùiriche air Comann na Gàidhlig, bha trì rudan ann a bha sinn a' feuchainn ri dhèanamh, bho 1985 air adhart. Bha sinn a' feuchainn ri leasachadh foghlam Gàidhlig, na h-ealainean Gàidhlig, agus craobh-sgaoileadh Gàidhlig còmhla.

'S e an trioblaid a th' againn, gu bheil an òigridh againn a' falbh às na h-eileanan a tha seo, a' dol a dh'fhuireach ann an Glaschu airson obraichean fhaighinn ann an telebhisean Gàidhlig, agus cha leigeadh duine dhen a sin a leas tilleadh. A' cheist anns na làithean a tha romhainn 's e, a bheil seirbheis digiteach ùr gu bhith ann is, ma tha, an tèid a chleachdadh sin, an cothrom ùr a tha sin, airson obraichean ùra a stèidheachadh anns na h-eileanan. Cha leigeadh sin a leas ciallachadh nach eil na daoine a tha ann an Glaschu an-dràsta ann, feumaidh iad a bhith ann, agus thig fàs ann an Glaschu co-dhiù, ach mura cuir sibhse ur taic ri meadhan telebhisean Gàidhlig a bhith anns na h-eileanan no air a' Ghaidhealtachd, 's ann an Glaschu a bhios a h-uile duine a th' ann.

Agus 's e an rud mu dheireadh a bu mhiann leam a ràdh ann am freagairt na ceiste a bh' aig Micheal Ruiseal, 's e a dh'aindeoin 's ged is urrainn dhut seirbheis a chur ri chèile ann an grunnan àiteachan, tha thu fhathast ag iarraidh studio air choreigin, airson cùisean a tharraing ri chèile. Agus 's e an dealbh a bhiodh againn air a seo, 's e gum biodh bho na h-eileanan as fhaide a deas, bho Ìle suas gu na h-Eileanan Siar, suas gu Mealanais ann an Cataibh, tarsainn gu Alanais air an taobh eile dhan dùthaich, agus sìos tron dùthaich air fad gach cuid an ear agus an iar gum biodh daoine ann a bhios ag obair a' cur stuth a-steach dhan t-sianal Ghàidhlig. Chan eil duine ag ràdh gum bu chòir dhan a h-uile càil a th' ann a bhith anns na h-Eileanan Siar.

'S e an trioblaid a th' agaibh, mur a cuir sibhse rudeigin romhaibh mu dheidhinn e bhith anns na h-Eileanan Siar, cha bhi e idir ann, ach bithidh e ann an àiteachan eile. Agus le sin a-rèist, b' urrainn dhomh aon rud eile a ràdh. Chaidh ceist a thogail mu dheidhinn na h-obraichean. Agus mhothaich mi anns na pàipearan a bh' agaibh gu robh àireamh a bha mi fhèin air a thoirt dhuibh, nach robh e air a leughadh ceart, agus 's e sin: thuirt sinne gu robh aig toiseach gnothaich mu chòig cheud neach a' faighinn beag no mòr a choreigin de dh'obair a-mach à maoin telebhisein Gàidhlig. Bha sin a' ciallachadh nuair a chaidh luchd-cùnntais an sàs ann, gu robh faisg air trì cheud neach no trì cheud, mar a chanas iad, FTEs. Tha sin a' tuiteam—tha e air a dhol sìos leth-cheud. 'S e an adhbhar sin gu bheil na daoine air a dhol sìos, agus nan robh an t-airgead againn an-diugh a bh' againn nuair a thòisich an gnothaich, bhiodh na h-obraichean shuas far am

bu chòir dhaibh a bhith. Mar sin, chanadh sinn ribh gu bheil e feumail gu bheil airgead a' dol ann an telebhisean Gàidhlig, ach tha e feumail gun tig barrachd ann—chan eil teagamh sam bith mu dheidhinn sin—no crìonaidh an rud fhèin air falbh.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

It is good to be here today. I would like to say a few things following on from the committee's discussion with the witnesses from Western Isles Council.

My first point relates to education. We have independent information that Gaelic television programmes are widely used in primary schools, high schools and colleges where people are learning Gaelic. While there is a lack of facilities for Gaelic education, money for Gaelic television has been very useful to the education system because we have created supporting books and other materials that will be helpful and that can be put into the classroom. For example, a year ago, we organised people to make videos with our money to help with the higher still course. Before that, that course had no such facilities.

An independent study was carried out six years ago in which the people of Skye, Lochalsh and the Western Isles were asked what was most important for them in Gaelic arts and culture in making them feel positive about sending their children into Gaelic education. That survey showed that the development of Gaelic television influenced parents most in relation to educating their children in Gaelic. They were encouraged to feel that there would be jobs and they could see that television was as important as any other medium.

One of the committee's questions may be: why Stornoway and the Western Isles, rather than the mainland? I will answer that question from a personal point of view. I was involved in setting up Gaelic-medium education in Glasgow. As director of Comunn na Gàidhlig, from 1985 onwards I tried to develop Gaelic education, arts and broadcasting. Our problem is that young people leave the islands and go to live in Glasgow to get jobs in Gaelic television, and none of them comes back. The questions for the coming days are whether there is to be a new digital service and, if so, whether we will use that new opportunity to create new jobs in the islands. That does not necessarily mean that people working in Glasgow now should not be there—they must be there—but if the committee does not support television as a medium for Gaelic in the islands and the Highlands, everyone will be based in Glasgow.

My answer to Mike Russell's question is that even if a service could be put together in a number of places, there must still be a foundation where everything can be drawn together. The picture that

we envisage is that throughout the country—from Islay and the most southerly islands right up through the Western Isles, to Millness in Sutherland and right across to Alness and down again—people will work on and feed into a Gaelic channel. No one is saying that everything should be based in the Western Isles, but if we do not do something about basing the service in the islands, it will be based elsewhere.

A question about jobs was asked. I notice that a figure that I gave members has been recorded incorrectly in one of the papers that is before the committee. At the beginning, we said that about 500 people get a certain amount of work from Gaelic broadcasting. When the accountants took a look, there were about 300 full-time equivalent jobs. The figure has decreased by 50 because the money has decreased. Today, we do not have the money that we had at the beginning; if we did, the jobs would be at their previous level. It is useful that money is going into Gaelic television, but there is no doubt that more would be more useful; otherwise, the service will begin to crumble away.

The Convener: I thank the witnesses for their statements. I ask members to indicate whether they have questions.

Michael Russell: You have expressed a statement of success. It might surprise you to hear me say this, but one of the successes has been that the existence of the committee in Stornoway has not caused work to become centralised. Indeed, the work that you have been funding has been somewhat distant from you, whether it be in Aberdeen, Glasgow or elsewhere.

At this point, however, you are presenting a model of centralisation. There is a role for centralisation, but I want to press you on this point. A press statement that you released last week talked about the lease of the studio transferring to the CCG with a view to the studio becoming an integral part of the media village that is envisioned for the Seaforth Road complex, which includes Studio Alba, the digital television service Tele-G, independent production offices and the Seaforth House studio. Do you think that that model could develop into a situation in which there will be a small number of people in a media village and a freelance group of people who will be available to work in the studio and elsewhere? In essence, might not there be an old-style broadcasting headquarters, even though most people in broadcasting are against such centralisation?

Everyone would welcome a rise in the number of broadcasting jobs in Stornoway, but people would be afraid of that resulting in the diminution of activities elsewhere. I hope that I will be forgiven for saying this, although people hear me saying it all the time, but that fear is felt particularly in the independent sector, which is neither as vibrant nor

as diverse as it was even six or seven years ago.

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh: Tha mi toilichte gu bheil Micheal a' togail seo oir tha e toirt dhuinn cothrom mìneachadh dè fèir an ro-innleachd a th' againn. Na h-obraichean a tha sinn ag ainmeachadh, anns an t-sanas-naidheachd a tha sin, tha sin dìreach a' cur air na h-obraichean a chaidh a chall bho chionn dhà no trì mhìosan. Cha bhi an àireamh dhaoine a bhios ag obair anns an studio sin mòran nas motha na bha e o chionn dà bhliadhna, nuair a bha Grampian telebhisean ga ruith, ach 's e tha sinn a' feuchainn ri dhèanamh le faighinn an àite sin, a dh'fhosgladh cothroman a-mach tro phrògram a bhith dèanta anns an studio sin de sheòrsa nach robh againn riamh ron seo.

Bidh am prògram a thèid a chur ri chèile anns an studio sin, bidh e a' toirt cothrom dha companaidhean neo-eisimeileach, agus daoine eile is dòcha a tha ag obair an-dràsta, air an ceann fhèin—"freelance", mar a chanas iad—cothrom a thoirt dhaibh rudan a dhèanamh ge bith càit a bheil iad air an dùthaich, agus na piosan de phrògraman, còig mionaidean an sud agus còig mionaidean an seo a chur a-steach do phrògram iriseach a thèid a chruthachadh anns an studio. 'S e th' ann ach goireas a tha a' dol a chuideachadh ri leasachadh craobh-sgaoileadh Gàidhlig, agus chan ann dìreach ann an Steòrnabhagh, oir nam biodh an argamaid sin a' seasamh, mar a tha Micheal ga cur, cha bhiodh CCG air an ro-innleachd a th' aige a chumail a' dol gu ruige seo, nam b' e feuchainn ri cùisean a tharraing a-steach chun an aon mheadhan a bhiodh ann. Is tha sinn an dòchas a-rèist gu faic sinn stuth air a dhèanamh a thig a-steach dhan a studio a sin airson a dhèanamh na phrògram, ach chì sinn an stuth a' tighinn bho cheàrnaidhean air feadh Alba, agus ceàrnaidhean fiù 's air taobh a-muigh Alba.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I am glad that you have raised that point, as it allows me to explain our plans. The press release concerned the replacement of jobs that were lost a few months ago. The number of people working in the studio will not be much higher than it was two years ago when Grampian Television was there. We are trying to open out opportunities by making in that studio programmes of a kind that we have not made before. Small independent companies and other people who may be working for themselves can make parts of programmes—perhaps five minutes here and there—that will be included in the programme. That facility will help Gaelic broadcasting to develop in places other than Stornoway.

Michael Russell's argument would stand only if the CCG did not have the vision that it has. We hope that the material that is included in the programme will come from places all over Scotland and, perhaps, from outwith Scotland.

Michael Russell: Having an area in which small bits of programmes that are produced elsewhere are put together is not the same as having a diverse production service. Most people's vision of a developed digital service would be a service that takes high-quality programming—I accept the need for having high-quality material—from a large variety of sources and feeds it through a distribution network. You seem to be placing in the middle of that an additional element of sewing things together. It appears that you want to act almost like a commissioner, which you are not allowed to do under the Broadcasting Act 1990. I think that the act is weak on that—it allows you to be a funder, but gives you no commissioning powers, which, as you and your colleagues say, is a great problem. I do not understand the need for an additional barrier—an additional middleman.

I want to return to the question that I asked the witnesses from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. We should be talking about a modern digital service almost in advance of what has been happening elsewhere. I have often heard you argue that Gaelic should not lag behind, but should try to leap over and imagine new things. We should be talking about a very diverse service and a substantial number of contributors with a production output. The BBC or some other mainstream broadcaster could easily have such a service as part of its digital service, perhaps on a dedicated channel. I support that.

14:30

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh: Tha dà phuuing agaibh an sin a-measg a' chèile. A' cheud tè, 's e feumaidh sinn cuimhneachadh gu bheil sinne fhathast a' maoineachadh airson analogue; tha seirbheis digital a' dol a thighinn, tha sinn an dòchas, ach 's ann airson na seirbheis analogue a tha sinn a' maoineachadh a' phrògram seo, a tha a' tachairt anns an studio. Ach tha sinn an dòchas tro bhith a' dèanamh sin, gun cruthaich sin cothroman trèanaidh, a bheir dha barrachd dhaoine cothrom tighinn a-steach a dh'ionnsachadh ciamar a tha thu a' cleachdadh uidheaman digiteach agus ullachadh a dhèanamh airson sianal digiteach a bhith ann.

Rud eile a dh'fheumainn a ràdh mu dheidhinn sin, air sgàth agus gu bheil na h-eileanan agus tìr-mòr còmhla mar phàirt de structair an UHI, tha cable ri dol tron studio sin a tha a' ciallachadh gum b' urrainn dhuinn ceangal ri studio a bh' anns an Eilean Sgitheanach, agus studios beaga air feadh an àite ri chèile tro network an UHI. Tha sin a' ciallachadh a-rèist nach ann an Steòrnabhagh a-mhàin a bhitheadh an rud idir, ach gum bitheadh an rud ri dol air adhart air feadh na dùthcha. Cò dhiubh an e am BBC no SMG a bu chòir a bhith a' ruith seirbheis Ghàidhlig air sianail, is e ceist

inntinneach a tha sin. A' bruidhinn mar Ghaidheal, agus air a bhith ag èisteachd ri Gaidheil eile.

A-rithist a thaobh craolaidh, ma tha thu a' craoladh air seirbheis digiteach, tha agad ri cur an stuth a tha thu a' craoladh sìos a Lunainn, an dara cuid air satellite no sìos air loidhne, agus tha e an uair sin a' tighinn suas air ais thugad. Chan eil gu cus diofar, co às a tha thu a' craoladh a-nis, a bheil thu a' craoladh à Steòrnabhagh, a bheil thu a' craoladh à Inbhirnis, no à Glaschu, feumaidh tu a chur a Lunainn.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Two points have been mixed together. We must remember that we are still funding analogue. We hope that a digital service will come, but we are funding an analogue service for the programmes that are being made in this studio. By doing that, we hope that we will create training opportunities that will give more people the chance to learn how to use digital equipment and to get ready for our digital channel. The islands and the mainland are together as part of the University of the Highlands and Islands structure. Cable goes through the studio. That means that a studio in Skye and little studios all over the place could be tied together through the UHI network. Something would be going on not just in Stornoway, but throughout the country.

Whether the BBC or SMG ought to be running a Gaelic service is an interesting question. I am a Gael and have listened to other Gaels. If a digital service is broadcast, the broadcast must be put down the line to London. It then comes back up. It does not matter if the broadcast is from Stornoway, Inverness or Glasgow.

Michael Russell: Exactly so. I understand and support the economic arguments for the growth of jobs in Stornoway, just as I support the growth of jobs in Barra, Skye and all over. The original intention of Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig was to realise that diversity, but there was another intention—to ensure that Gaelic was not left behind and forgotten, but that it re-entered the mainstream of Scottish television, life and discourse. The more there is a concept of a new middleman broadcasting an exclusive channel from Stornoway—that is how the matter sometimes appears, although I know that you would not agree with those terms—the less Gaelic enters into the wider discourse. We could argue about that all day.

I have another question about the secondary role of Gaelic television. Despite considerable success in the early days, Gaelic television has now become a problem, largely because only the BBC seems to maintain a commitment to Gaelic as peak-time viewing. How has that come about? Why has Gaelic television fallen away from what it

was meant to be? How might the situation be recovered, if at all?

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh: Tha mi a' smaoinreachadh gu robh an rud a chaidh a chur dhan achd ann an 1990 gu robh sin lag, agus ged a chaidh an rud a cheangal ri ITV, agus ged a chaidh a ràdh gu feumadh suas ri 200 uair a thìde a bhith air am maoinreachadh agus gum feumadh ITV a bith gan sealltainn. Tha dà rud air tachairt, seach gun deach a' mhaoin sìos chan eil uidhir de phrògraman ann agus chan eil uidhir de dh'uairean a thìde ann, ach cuideachd tha ITV fhèin air atharrachadh gu mòr ann an deich bliadhna. Tha fad a bharrachd co-fharpais aca bho stèiseanan satellite agus, mar a tha fhios agaibh, dh'atharraich a' chùis le Grampian agus Scottish Television agus ghabh SMG thairis iad.

Anns a' chiad bhliadhna a bha a' mhaoin seo ann, bha airson dhà no trì mhiosan, bha dà leth uair a thìde, air feasgar Dimàirt agus air feasgar Diardaoin, ann am prìomh uair, air ITV. Ach gheàrr iad sin sìos gu aon am broinn naoi mìosan, agus chaidh a ràdh rinne bho chionn dhà no trì bhliadhnaichean gu robh a' cho-fharpais a bh' aca cho làidir, agus gu lìùgadh iad sguir a chur Gàidhlig a-mach aig prìomh uair gu tur. An siostam a chaidh a chruthachadh bho chionn deich bliadhna, bha e caran lag ann an dòigh no dhà, aig an toiseach, agus a-nis seach gu bheil cùisean air atharrachadh, tha cùisean air a dhol fada, fada nas miosa.

Tha e a' ciallachadh cuideachd gu bheil STV agus Grampian a' cur a-mach phrògraman a tha iad fhèin a' maoinreachadh as dèidh meadhan-oidhche, far na chleachd iad a bhith gan cur a-mach air feasgar, can aig leth-uair an dèidh dhà no trì uairean feasgar air Diluain no Dimàirt. Tha iad a-nis a' dol a-mach as dèidh meadhan-oidhche, agus canaidh iad fhèin gur e na tha de chudthrom coimearsalta a' tuiteam orra as coireach ri sin. Tha cùisean air a dhol bhuaithe anns an t-seagh sin—tha iad air fàs na laige—agus tha sibh ceart a ràdh gu robh am BBC taiceil. Chum am BBC dà uair a thìde air feasgar Diardaoin gu cunbhalach thairis air na bliadhnaichean sin.

Feumaidh mi a ràdh cuideachd, le bhith a' feuchainn ri rudeigin a dhèanamh mu dheidhinn seo, gu bheil sinn air faighinn SMG anns a' bhliadhna a chaidh seachad, aon uair agus gu bheil cùisean air a thighinn gu aon uair a thìde air feasgar na Sàbaid, leth uair a thìde a tha iad ri toirt dhuinn feasgar Dimàirt, aig leth uair an dèidh aon uair deug, agus feasgar Disathairne, leth uair a thìde airson beagan sheachdainean, is e sin na gheibh sinn tuilleadh. Agus, chan eil sin, a rèir agus mar a bha cùisean anns an achd, chan eil mi a' smaoinreachadh gu bheil e a' toirt dhuinn na cothroman dèanamh na farsaingeachd de

phrògraman a chleachd a bhith againn.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

The Broadcasting Act 1990 was weak. Although the act was tied to ITV, and although it was said that up to 200 hours would have to be funded, two things have happened. The amount of money decreased and there are not as many programmes or hours. Additionally, ITV has changed enormously in 10 years. There is far more competition from satellite stations and things have changed between Grampian and Scottish Television with the SMG takeover. In the first year after that takeover, there were two half hours—on a Tuesday and a Thursday evening at prime time—on ITV for a few months, but that was cut down to one half hour.

We were told recently that the competition was so strong that STV would like to stop broadcasting Gaelic at prime time. The system that was created 10 years ago was a bit weak in a couple of ways. Now, because the situation has changed—it is much worse—STV is putting out the programmes that it funds after midnight, whereas those programmes used to go out in the evening or at 2.30 or 3.00 in the afternoon on a Monday or a Tuesday. STV says that that is because of the commercial pressure that it is under.

The BBC, which was supportive, kept two hours on a Thursday evening. In the past year, SMG has reduced its Gaelic broadcasting to half an hour on Sundays, half an hour at half-past 11 on Tuesdays and half an hour on Saturdays for a few weeks. According to the Broadcasting Act 1990, that does not give us the opportunities to make the breadth of programmes that there used to be.

Michael Russell: The commitment from SMG is pathetic. Half an hour on a Sunday is a token commitment. I see that you are nodding; I wish that you would say yes so that we would get it on the record. Clearly, many people would agree that the commitment is token.

Irene McGugan: I would like some specific information on jobs and training. Can you tell us how many of those who were trained at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and Lews Castle College have found jobs in radio and television? How many are still employed in radio and television? Have you been able to work out, from your investment in that training and the number of those jobs, what the average cost of each post is?

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh: Tha e air soirbheachadh glè mhath leis na daoine a chaidh tron chùrsa aig Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. Tha mu thrì chairteal dhiubh ag obair anns a' ghnìomhachas agus tha cuid eile den fheadhainn nach eil, ann an Gàidhlig ann an seagh air choreigin—mar luchd-teagaisg, mar eisimpleir. Den trì chairteal sin, tha còrr agus an dara leth ag obair aig a' BhBC, agus

tha an còrr dhiubh ag obair aig SMG no aig companaidhean neo-eisimeileach. A thaobh a' chosgais, tha an cosgais àrd, chan eil teagamh sam bith mu dheidhinn sin. Tha e a' cosg mu thrì cheud mìle not anns a' bhliadhna a bhith a' ruith na cùrsa sin airson deichnear. Dh'fhaodadh tu a ràdh a-rèist gu bheil e a' cosg deich air fhichead—no trichead, mar a chanas sinn anns a' Ghàidhlig ùr—mìle not airson gach neach a tha a' dol tron sin. Tha e cosgail daoine a thrèanadh airson telebhisein co-dhiù—bitheadh sin ann an Gàidhlig no bitheadh e ann am Beurla—agus tha na daoine sin air feum mhòr a dhèanamh agus air obair mhòr a dhèanamh. Ach, a-rithist tha mi a' creidsinn gun canadh an fheadhainn a bha ann an seo roimhe, gu mì-fhortanach, gu bheil cus dhiubh ag obair ann an Glaschu seach air a' Ghaidhealtachd bhon tàinig iad, a chionn 's gur ann an sin a tha a' mhòr-chuid de dh'obair ann an telebhisean Gàidhlig. Agus a-rithist ged a tha buannachd a' tighinn a-mach às, ann an cuid de dhòighean, tha ceist ann an ann dìreach airson sin a thòisich sinn ri toirt Gaidheil a-steach air cùrsa den t-seòrsa sin, airson obraichean a thoirt dhaibh taobh a-muigh na Gaidhealtachd.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

The people who worked through the courses at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig have had considerable success. About three quarters of them work in the Gaelic broadcasting industry. Some of those who do not work in the industry work in Gaelic in some way, perhaps as teachers. Of the three quarters who work in Gaelic broadcasting, more than half work for the BBC. The others work for SMG or the independent companies.

There is no doubt that the costs are high. To run the course for 10 people costs about £300,000 a year. We could say that it costs £30,000 for each person to go through that course. To train people for television, whether Gaelic or English, is expensive.

The people who were trained at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig have been useful and have done good work. Some would say that it is unfortunate that so many of them work in Glasgow rather than the Highlands because the jobs in Gaelic television are in Glasgow. Although some benefits come from the course, it must be questioned whether the only reason that we started to bring Gaels into such a course was to give them jobs outwith the Gaidhealtachd.

Irene McGugan: We all applaud the fact that you have trained people and got them jobs. Have you conducted any kind of audit that enables you to tell us exactly what writing skills, production skills, technical skills and craft skills have been developed and built up in Gaelic television during the past 10 years? Do you have such an audit of skills?

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh: Tha dùn stuth dhen t-seòrsa sin againn ann a sheo gu sònraichte ma tha sibh ag iarraidh na h-àireamhan fèir glan, nì sinn sin a chur thugaibh as dèidh làimh, oir dh'fheumadh sinn tòiseachadh a dhol tron a h-uile càil tha sin dìreach a h-uile càil a chur gu mionaideach sìos air pàipeir dhuibh. Bheireadh e barrachd ùine na th' agamsa an-dràsta son tòiseachdainn air coimhead tron a sin.

Ach tha beàrnann ann, a dh'aindeoin is ged a chuir sinn taic farsaingeachd ri sgrìobhadairean is ri riochdairean, agus trèanadh a thoirt dha daoine anns a h-uile sgìl, tha beàrnann anns an trèanadh fhathast. Gu h-àraid ma bhios sianal telebhisean Gàidhlig ann, tha fada a bharrachd trèanadh ri dhèanamh anns na dhà na trì bhliadhnaichean a tha romhainn, agus is e fear dhe na rudan a chanadh sinne an-diugh, tha mi a' smaoinreachadh, gur e gum bi sinne an dòchas gun cuir sibhse taic ris an t-sianal, agus gun tòisicheamaid sa bhad a' trèanadh dhaoine a nì an obair anns an seòrsa siostam a bha Micheal a' mineachadh—daoine a bhiodh ag obair air feadh na dùthcha ann an caochladh àitichean. Ach bheir sinn dhuibh am fiosrachadh mionaideach a tha sibh ag iarraidh as dèidh làimh mas e bhur toil e.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I have a heap of such information with me, but if you want numbers, I would have to send you them later. It would take more time than we have just now to go through all the papers and write everything down for you.

Even though we have supported a breadth of writers and producers and trained people in many skills, gaps in training remain. If a Gaelic television channel were to be established, much more training would be needed in the years to come. We hope that the committee would support that. We hope that training would start straight away on the people who would do the work in a system such as that which Mike Russell described, under which people would work all over the country.

We will give you the detailed information that you would like afterwards, if that is okay.

The Convener: That would be helpful.

Mr McAveety: How do you account for the drop in audience figures for Gaelic programmes over the years?

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh: Nuair tha thu a' coimhead ri telebhisean, aig amannan dhen là, tha tòrr dhaoine a' coimhead telebhisein agus 's e an àm as motha a tha iad a' coimhead 's ann as dèidh sia uairean a dh'oidhche—eadar sia uairean a dh'oidhche agus mu aon uair deug a dh'oidhche. Ma tha na prògraman againne a-rèist a' dol a-mach air ITV aig àm far a bheil tòrr dhaoine a' coimhead telebhisein, tha tòrr dhaoine gu bhith

gan coimhead.

Ach nuair a thòisich SMG a' toirt nam prògram air falbh bhon phrìomh uair tron an t-seachdain, can feasgar Dimàirt agus feasgar Diardaoin, agus chaidh an cur air feasgar na Sàbaid, chan eil uiread de dhaoine a' coimhead telebhisein aig an àm sin, aig sia uairean feasgar na Sàbaid, 's a tha aig leth-uair an dèidh seachd a dh'oidhche air feasgar Dimàirt. Air an adhbhar sin, tuitidh na h-àireamhan, chan eil teagamh, ach, tha e annasach, bha sinn a' coimhead an dà chuid air dè bha a' tachairt an-uiridh, agus, tha seachdain, can, thagh sinn seachdain, anns an tritheamh cairteal dhan a' bhliadhna, fèir nuair a tha na h-oidhchean a' fàs dorcha, is bidh barrachd de dhaoine a' coimhead telebhisein, agus dh'iarr sinn, rinn sinn rannsachadh air cia mheud duine ann an Alba a bhathar a' dèanamh dheth a bha a' coimhead prògram telebhisean Gàidhlig airson barrachd air trì mionaidean air an t-seachdain sin.

Fhuair sinn a-mach gu robh naoi-deug anns a' cheud, tha sin a-rèist a' toirt dhut faisg air naoi ceud mìle neach an Alba a' coimhead prògraman telebhisean Gàidhlig air an t-seachdain sin. Ma bha sin fìor mu dheidhinn aon seachdain, is iongantach a-rèist mur eil faisg air dà mhilleann neach ann an Alba a' tighinn tarsainn air prògram telebhisein Gàidhlig aig aon àm no àm eile. Agus air an adhbhar sin, chanadh sinn gu bheil seo na sheirbheis chan ann a-mhàin dha na Gaidheil, oir mur a h-eil againn ann ach trì fichead 's a deich mìle, tha sinn a' faighinn fada a' bharrachd luach a-mach às an airgead dha Alba, na tha dìreach a' faighinn dha coimhearsnachd na Gàidhlig.

'S e rud, freagairt simplidh na ceist, ma tha prògraman air aig àm far a bheil daoine comasach air am faicinn, bidh tòrr dhaoine gan coimhead. Ach chan eil mòran a' coimhead nam prògraman a tha a' dol a-mach, can, air uair sa mhadainn. Agus fiù 's cuideachd dh'fhaodainn a ràdh, nuair a bha Gàidhlig an aghaidh "EastEnders", bha na h-àireamhan mòr, agus 's e an adhbhar sin, ged a tha tòrr dhaoine ag iarraidh faicinn siabain, tha gu leòr dhaoine nach eil. Nuair a chuireas sinn prògram ciùil a-mach air ITV aig leth-uair an dèidh seachd a dh'oidhche, an aghaidh "EastEnders", tha ceudan mìltean a' coimhead sin, air sgàth agus gu robh rudeigin eadar-dhealaichte ann.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

At certain times of the day, many people watch television. Most people watch television between 6 pm and about 11 pm. If programmes are broadcast on ITV when many people are watching television, many people will watch those programmes. When SMG started taking programmes away from those prime times—say on Tuesday and Thursday evenings—and scheduling them on Sunday evenings, not as many people watched them, because not as many

people watch television at 6 pm on a Sunday evening as do at 7.30 pm on a Tuesday.

The situation last year was interesting. We chose a week in the third quarter of the year, when the evenings were getting longer and darker, and we researched the number of people in Scotland who watched a Gaelic television programme for more than three minutes in that week. We found that 19 per cent did that, which means that about 900,000 people in Scotland watched a Gaelic television programme in that week. If that happened in just one week, perhaps as many as 2 million people in Scotland come across a Gaelic programme. The service is not just for the Gaels—there are only 70,000 Gaelic speakers. From the money that is provided, we obtain far more value for Scotland, not just for the Gaelic community.

The simple answer to Mr McAveety's question is that if a programme is broadcast when people have a chance to see it, many people will watch it, but not many people watch programmes that are shown at 1 am. I could say that if Gaelic programmes were in competition with "EastEnders", their viewing figures would be high. Although many people want to watch soaps, many do not and would be just as happy to watch a music programme on ITV at 7.30 pm. Hundreds of thousands watched such a programme, because it was different.

Mr McAveety: If I had the choice between watching "EastEnders" or an SNP political broadcast, I would watch the SNP's broadcast—particularly if it were the good kilted version that Mike Russell and I discussed earlier.

It strikes me that your answer to Mike Russell's earlier question is probably yes. You say that locating a more appropriate time in television schedules and giving more time to programmes would address some of the issues that we have raised during our inquiry. Therefore, the role of the broadcasting companies is critical. If you could make some helpful suggestions to the broadcasting companies, what should they do more of and less of to ensure that the commitments in which your organisation is involved can be developed?

14:45

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh: Tha mise a' smaoinèachadh gur e co-obrachadh eadar na companaidhean craobh-sgaoilidh agus CCG airson cruthachadh seirbhis de sheòrsa ùr, an rud a b' fheàrr a dhèanadh na craoladairean. Chan eil sinn ag ràdh idir nach bu chòir do chraoladairean a bhith an sàs ann an seirbheis telebhisean Gàidhlig. Tha mi smaoinèachadh gum b' urrainn dhuinn obrachadh còmhla airson seirbheis telebhisean Gàidhlig a thoirt gu buil; oir tha feum

air tòrr obrach airson sin a dhèanamh agus tha feum air proifeasantachd agus tha feum air na sgilean a tha anns na companaidhean telebhisein, chan eil teagamh.

Ach canaidh sinn, ann a bhith ag ràdh sin, gur iad na Gaidheil fhèin a bu chòir a bhith a' dèanamh an inntinn an àird mu dheidhinn dè na prògraman a bu chòir a bhith ann, càite bheil iad a' dol, agus, aon rud eile dh'fheumainn a ràdh an sin, 's e, mar a tha telebhisean a' leudachadh agus na ceudan sianalan ann.

Tha na h-àireamhan dhaoine a tha a' coimhead nan sianalan a' fàs nas lugha. Tha iad a' coimhead fada a bharrachd sianalan agus air an adhbhar sin, ged a chumadh sinn a' dol a' cur phrògraman a-mach air ITV airson fichead bliadhna eile, bidh na h-àireamhan a' tuiteam, oir bidh na h-àireamhan a tha a' coimhead ITV fhèin a' tuiteam. Thig e chun ìre far a bheil e nas ciallaiche don Ghàidhlig a bhith ann an suidheachadh far an urrainn dhut do phrògraman a chur a-mach air sianal telebhisean, far an urrainn dhut an cur a mach air an eadar-lìon, is far an urrainn dhut cleachdadh na prògraman airson reic ghnòthaichean, na prògraman fhèin a reic thall thairis, agus cuideachd stuth eile a reic air an druim. Nam biodh sianal Gàidhlig ann, b' urrainn dhut sin a dhèanamh le sanasachd. B' urrainn dhut airgead fhaighinn a-steach le sanasachd agus b' urrainn dhut taic fhaighinn bho chompanaidhean airson prògraman a dhèanamh. Ach, chan urrainn dhan a' BhBC sanasachd a dhèanamh, agus mar sin air adhart. So, bhiodh sianal Gàidhlig a' co-obrachadh eadar buidheann Gàidhlig agus na craoladairean. Chanainn-sa gur e sin an t-slighe air adhart.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

The best thing that the broadcasting companies could do would be to co-operate with the CCG to create a new service. We do not say that broadcasters should not be involved in a Gaelic television service—we could work together to create such a service. Much work is needed to do that. The TV companies' professionalism and skills are needed.

That said, the Gaels should be making up their minds about the kind of programmes that there should be and where those programmes should be going. As television expands into a medium that has hundreds of channels, the numbers of people who watch each channel get smaller. Over 20 years, because the number of people who watch ITV is falling, the number of people who watch the programmes that we put on ITV is falling. If a Gaelic channel was set up, money could be made through advertising, through sponsorship and from selling the programmes abroad. The BBC cannot advertise; the way ahead is to have a Gaelic channel and for there to be co-

operation between the Gaelic bodies and the broadcasters.

Mr McAveety: We are focused on television, but what about the role that radio can play? Are there also opportunities in the development of Gaelic broadcast radio?

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh: Tha, nam biodh sianal Gàidhlig ann, a-rithist, bhiodh tu ag iarraidh gu bheil rèidio agus telebhisean a' co-obrachadh le chèile. Bhiodh tu a' cleachdadh nan sgilean a tha aig daoine airson prògraman de sheòrsa ùr a dhèanamh. Ach cuideachd nam biodh sianal Gàidhlig fosgailte ceithir uairean fichead anns an là, cha chreid mise ged a bhiodh dà fhichead millean nòt againn, mar a chaidh ainmeachadh nas tràithe, cha lìon sin sianal telebhisean Gàidhlig. Dh'fheumadh tu rèidio agus prògraman fuaim a chur a-mach air an sianal sin cuideachd, agus gabhaidh sin a dhèanamh a-nis. B' urrainn dhut fiù 's cur a-mach dhà no trì sianalan fuaim còmhla ri dealbh ann an Gàidhlig, ann am Beurla agus ann an cànan sam bith eile mas e do thoil e. Dh'fheumadh an dà chuid obrachadh ri chèile airson am feum as fheàrr a dhèanamh dhen airgead a th' againn.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

If a Gaelic channel were to be set up, co-operation would be needed between radio and television. That would make the best use of skills and lead to a new type of programme making. If a Gaelic channel was to be open 24 hours a day, £40 million would not be enough to fill it—radio would also be needed. Sound programmes could be broadcast on the television channel together with pictures. The two things would have to work together to make the best use of the money.

Ian Jenkins: The big television companies are worried about the fragmentation that you have spoken about. However, as you rightly say, fragmentation gives opportunities for niche marketing. Of which programmes, broadcast under the name of Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig, are you most proud? If CCG were to be given more airtime, what would you broadcast?

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh: Tha mi a' freagairt na ceiste sin ann am fianais dhà no trì riochdairean telebhisein. Ma dh'ainmicheas mi aon phrògram seach prògram eile chan eil mi ag ràdh am bi mi beò a-nochd fhathast. Ach feumaidh sinn a-rèist.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I am being watched by a few television producers. If I name one programme rather than another, I may not survive.

Ian Jenkins: Go on, go for it.

Michael Russell: Do not do it. [Laughter.]

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh: Feumaidh mi a ràdh

gu bheil mar eisimpleir prògraman a mhaoinich CCG a' buannachd duaisean ann an co-fharpaisen eadar-nàiseanta, agus tha iad air buannachd BAFTAs cuideachd. A-nis, 's e rud mòr a th' ann do chompanaidh à Alba, buannachd BAFTA award, agus nuair a' smaoinicheas tu air companaidhean Gàidhlig an uair sin, a' tighinn bhon choimhearsnachd bheag tha seo, a' buannachd duaisean dhen t-seòrsa sin, tha e ag ràdh tòrr mu dheidhinn cho sgileil 's a tha na daoine againn, cho proifeasanta 's a tha iad, agus, is iongantach mur an robh a' chomataidh a' dèanamh rudeigin ceart nuair a bha sinn a' maoineachadh nam prògraman sin anns a' chiad dol a-mach. Feumaidh mi a ràdh cuideachd, nam bithinn a' dol a tharraing aonach a-mach às, tha Gàidhlig agus an t-airgead seo a' toirt dha Breatainn an aon phrògram Eòrpach a chì sibh air an telebhisean, an aon phrògram a tha a' sealltainn gnothaichean làitheil Eòrpach. Agus is e sinne a' stèidhich sin, còmhla ris a' BhBC. 'S ann a-mach às an seòrsa còmhraidh a rinn sinn eadarainn a thàinig am prògram sin. Rudan dhen t-seòrsa sin, ag ràdh gu bheil sinn moiteil mu dheidhinn cuid de rudan.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Programmes that have been handled by the CCG have won prizes in international competitions. They have also won British Academy Film and Television Arts awards, which is a great thing for a company from Scotland. For a Gaelic company from this small community to win a prize like that says a lot about peoples' skills and professionalism. It also shows that our committee did something right when it funded those programmes. Gaelic, and that money, gives Britain the only European current affairs programme that is to be seen on television. It was established with the BBC and we are proud of a few programmes such as that one.

Ian Jenkins: Broadly speaking, I watch only that Gaelic-speaking programme. How would you fill a schedule without even more gash stuff than is used at present? The big companies have more money and resources.

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh: Chaidh ainmeachadh S4C nas tràithe, is chleachd mi sin mar eisimpleir. Tha màileid glè mhòr acasan, nas motha na th' againne, ach nuair a smaoinicheas tu an rud a rinn S4C nuair a fhuair iad sianal digiteach, bha S4C dìreach a' cur ceithir uairean a thide anns an là air an adhar le faisg air ceud millean nòt aca, so 's e ceithir uairean a thide san là a bha iad a' dèanamh le ceud millean nòt. Nuair a fhuair iad sianal digiteach, thòisich iad a' lìonadh sin, agus 's e an dòigh a bha iad ga lìonadh 's e seo—can, fèill mhòr anns a' Chuimrigh 's e an Eisteddfod, tha e mar am Mòd a th' againne agus tha thu a' cur dhaoine ann a shin le camara agus tha thu a'

pàigheadh airson daoine a bhith an sin a h-uile latha san t-seachdain, fad an latha, agus bhiodh iad ag obair fad na tìde leis na camaras mar a tha na daoine sin an-dràsta gus 's e aon uair a thìde no leth-uair a thìde a gheibheadh iad aig deireadh na h-oidhche.

Nuair a fhuair iad sianal digiteach, chùm iad na camaras sin air, agus bha iad a' craoladh a h-uile càil a bha a' tachairt aig an Eisteddfod fad an là. Agus is aithne dhomh aon duine, a tha ceithir fichead 's a deich bliadhna a dh'aois, a bhiodh a' lìonadh flasg cofaidh dha fhèin agus a' dèanamh sandwiches aig seachd uairean sa mhadainn, na shuidhe bho mhoch gu dubh a' coimhead an Eisteddfod air an telebhisean—fad an là. Nam faigheadh sinne am Mòd againn fhèin air an telebhisean mar sin, tha mi a' smaoinichadh gum biodh daoine gu math moiteil.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

S4C was mentioned and I used it as an example. It has a fairly big purse—bigger than we have—but when it got a digital channel, S4C was putting four hours a day on the air for about £100 million. When it got the digital channel, it began to fill airtime.

The Eisteddfod, which is similar to the Mòd, is fairly big in Wales. S4C would send someone there with a camera and pay that person to work there every day, all day. At the end of the day they had an hour's broadcasting. When S4C got the digital channel, it left the camera on and broadcast everything that happened at the Eisteddfod. I know one man who is 90 years old who would make coffee and sandwiches for himself at 7 o'clock in the morning, and sit from dawn to dusk watching the Eisteddfod on television. If we had the Mòd on television like that, people would be proud.

Ian Jenkins: There are some sad people who watch the Scottish Parliament all the time, too.

Would it be possible to take a gradualist approach? Assuming that the space exists for a digital channel, would it be possible to start it small and build it?

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh: Tha thu ag iarraidh, an sin, ceist mhath a tha sin, anns an t-suidheachadh anns a bheil sin, dh'fheumadh tu tòiseachdainn a thogail suas ceum air cheum. Chanainn ge-tà gu feumadh sinn bho thùs faighinn co-dhiù dusan uair a thìde no fiù 's fad an là air sianal—gum feumadh an sianal a bhith ann dhuinn fad na tìde, agus gun tòisichadh tu ga lìonadh. An-dràsta, tha na prògraman a tha sinne a' maoineachadh a' cur leth-uair a thìde anns an là a-mach air digital, air On Digital. Ghabhadh sin a thogail suas anns a' bhliadhna a tha romhainn gu uair a thìde.

Ach cha b' fhiach dhut sin a dhèanamh mur an robh thu a' dol a chur tè eile agus tè eile os cionn sin a-rithist. Air sgàth gu bheil cùisean a' tuiteam air ais a thaobh obraichean agus gu bheil tuilleadh trèanadh a dhìth, dh'fheumadh tu tòiseachdainn a' trèanadh am bliadhna, tòiseachdainn a' fosgladh an rud a-mach an uair sin, sianal fhaighinn an ath-bhliadhna, agus tòiseachdainn a' lìonadh le barrachd is barrachd phrògraman mar a tha na bliadhnaichean a' dol air adhart. Ach chanainn gur ann thairis air ceithir bliadhna a dhèanadh tu e. Nam biodh e gu bhith nas fhaide na sin, 's e call a bhiodh ann. Dh'fheumadh tu màileid a bhiodh a' ciallachadh gun deigheadh na bha sin a dh'airgead a chur ris an ath-bhliadhna, agus na tha sin an ath-bhliadhna a-rithist agus na tha sin a-rithist. Bhiodh an uair sin sianal agad.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

That is a good question. In our situation, the channel would have to be built up step by step. At the start, we would need at least 12 hours, or perhaps all day on the channel. The channel would have to be available to us all the time, and we would start to fill it. At the moment, we are funding half an hour of programming a day on digital. That could be increased in the year to come to one hour, but it would not be worth doing that unless we were broadcasting more and more—another hour and another hour.

More training is needed—we would have to start training people now. We have to start opening things out. We could get a channel next year, which we could fill with more programmes as the years go by. That could be done over four years, but if it went beyond that there would be a loss. If that much business money were put in next year, the following year and the following year, there would be a channel.

Michael Russell: I will follow up the idea of a mixed channel, because there are precedents for it. As you admit, it would be difficult to take even one or two hours a day at the moment given what is happening. However, despite what Ian Jenkins said, it has been mooted that there could be a channel that covered the Scottish Parliament and its committees during the day, and which broadcast Gaelic programmes from 5 o'clock until 10 or 11 o'clock or 12 midnight, because Parliament tends to finish at 5 o'clock at night, unfortunately. There is the potential to share programmes with, and to buy them in from, Ireland, Wales and Brittany, as well as from other cultures. The matter is not just about building up a solid phalanx of Gaelic programmes to fill the airwaves; there are ways in which such a channel could benefit a range of audiences. Indeed, with the technology that is available, a simultaneous translation of the Scottish Parliament could be broadcast in Gaelic through a separate sound

feed.

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh: Bhiodh sin math, agus bhiodh an uair sin sianal agad, eadar-dhealaichte bho sianal sam bith eile a gheibh thu san dùthaich seo. Bhiodh e ùr, bhiodh measgachadh de stuth air nach fhaiceadh ann an sianal eile. Agus chan e a-mhàin Gàidhlig a' chanainn-sa a bu chòir a bhith air. Chanainn-sa gum bu chòir dhuinn mar Ghàidheil cumail a' dol an co-obrachadh a tha air a bhith eadar sinn agus na daoine a tha a' bruidhinn Doric, na daoine ann an Sealtainn a' bruidhinn an cànan aca fhèin, agus gun tòisicheadh sinn a' togail an àird còmhla ri na daoine sin, seòrsa de sianal a' sealltainn cultar na h-Alba, còmhla ris a' Phàrlamaid, agus Gàidhlig ann cuideachd. B' urrainn dhuinn sin a dhèanamh—bha mise anns a' chathair air buidheann aig Comhairle na Gaidhealtachd a rinn sin.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

That would be good, because we would have a channel that was different from any other channel in this country. It would be new, and would provide programmes on a mixture of subjects that could not be seen on any other channel. It would not be only about Gaelic. We, as Gaels, ought to continue to co-operate with people who speak Doric and with people in Shetland who speak their own dialect. We should put together—with those people and the Parliament—a channel that shows the culture of Scotland. It could be done.

Michael Russell: To come back to where we started in this discussion—the argument is that it would not need to be you, or some new organisation, that transmitted the channel. You could go from being a funder to being a commissioner of content for the Gaelic part of the channel. That joint model of operation—like that which involves the BBC and broadcasting rights for the Scottish Parliament—might be useful.

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh: B' fhiach coimhead ris, ach feumar cuimhneachadh cuideachd an còmhraidh a bh' againn o chionn deich mionaidean mu dheidhinn dè tha tachairt nuair a tha buidheann Ghàidhlig ag obair còmhla ri craoladair agus mur a bheil na priorities, mur a bheil an aon seòrsa dealbh aig na daoine sin air dè tha math airson Gàidhlig is a tha aig luchd na Gàidhlig fhèin. Dh'fhaodadh rudeigin de thrioblaid a bhith ann.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

That would be worth considering. However, we must remember the conversation that we had 10 minutes ago about what happens when a Gaelic organisation works with a broadcaster. If they do not have the same priorities or the same picture of what is good for Gaelic and Gaelic speakers, there can be problems

Michael Russell: Indeed, but as the commissioning agent for, say, four or five hours a day to start with—I would obviously support that—you could have a programming strategy for those hours that would not be affected by anyone else, because the channel would be there to fill. You would be the commissioning agent and, in another context, the operator of the multiplex. You would be operating certain hours and commissioning for those hours, and would therefore have a clear strategy for what you were trying to do. However, you would not be trying to create a new broadcasting organisation—the time is past when new broadcasting organisations will come into the market.

Convener, may I ask a final question?

The Convener: If you are brief, Mr Russell.

Michael Russell: I am interested in the news programmes that you have recently tendered. I want to illustrate a difficulty that exists for you and for others—in terms of your role as a funder, rather than as a commissioner. You had a contract that was worth roughly £1 million for the news programme. Is that right?

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh: The amount was £1.2 million.

Michael Russell: Is it correct that you were asking the companies at tender to do those programmes for just under £0.5 million, using the facilities of Seaforth House?

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh: Yes.

Michael Russell: I presume that you know the contents of the Broadcasting (Independent Productions) Order 1991. It states that a production cannot be classified as independent where

“the broadcaster has required ... the person to whom the contract to make the programme has been granted to agree, as a condition on which that contract is granted, to use the production facilities of that broadcaster or not to use the production facilities of some other broadcaster.”

You will argue that you are not a broadcaster, but you interviewed three companies for a tender for an existing slot. You came precious close to being a commissioning broadcaster. Can you understand the concern that, in those circumstances, something was happening that would not happen in English-speaking broadcasting?

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh: Tha sin inntinneach, oir tha e ag ràdh anns an achd 1990 cuideachd mu dheidhinn CCG:

“When making any grant out of the Fund in pursuance of subsection (4)—

that is, the one that deals with funding programmes—

"the Committee may impose such conditions as they think fit, including conditions requiring the grant to be repaid in specified circumstances."

So we're not acting ultra vires agus chan eil sinn a' coimiseanadh. Mura biodh Grampian telebhisean air aontachadh am prògram seo a choimiseanadh, cha deigheadh sinn air adhart leis.

Ach chanainn aon rud eile mu choinneamh sin. Nuair a chaidh ainmeachadh gu robh sinn a' dol a sgur a mhaoineachadh Telefios, a bha a' cosg còrr is millean not, chuir companaidh neo-eisimeileach a-steach tairgse thugainn airson dèanamh prògram dhuinn aon uair san t-seachdain airson an aon phrìs, a-mach às an studio. Bha iad a' gabhail ris gun gabhadh iad fhèin an studio thairis. Nuair a ghabh sinn an studio thairis, agus nuair a dh'iarr sinn air daoine a chur a-steach le tairgse airson prògram a dhèanamh, chuir an aon chompanaidh thugainn tairgse, ag ràdh gum b' urrainn dhaibh a dhèanamh airson leth millean not. Agus tha sin a' sealltainn carson a ghabh sinn an studio thairis, a chionn 's gu robh e gar cur ann an suidheachadh far nach robh sinn tarsainn a' bharaille mar a bha sinn anns na bliadhnaichean ron sin. Bha an aon chompanaidh, cho luath 's a bha studio againn, a' tairgse dhuinn prògram airson leth millean not, a bha a' tairgse bho chionn trì bliadhna airson còrr is millean not.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

That is interesting, because the Broadcasting Act 1990 says, about the CCG, that:

"When making any grant out of the Fund in pursuance of subsection (4)"—

that is, the one that deals with funding programmes—

"the Committee may impose such conditions as they think fit, including conditions requiring the grant to be repaid in specified circumstances."

So we are not acting ultra vires and we are not commissioning. If Grampian had not agreed to commission the programme, we would not be going ahead with it.

When it was said that we were going to stop funding Telefios, which cost more than £1 million, an independent company put in an offer to make a programme for us, once a week, for the same price and from the same studio. That company said that it would take over the studio. When we took over the studio, and when we asked people to tender to make a programme in it, the same company put in a tender saying that it could do that for £0.5 million. That illustrates why we took over the studio. We were being put over a barrel, as we had been in the years before. A company was offering to make a programme for £0.5 million which, three years previously, offered to make it for more than £1 million.

Michael Russell: I do not think that that addresses the question. I am not saying that you were acting ultra vires. Clearly, you are a cautious organisation and would not act ultra vires. Do you accept that there would be concern—this is the point that I will put to the Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television when it gives evidence to us next week—that, according to the Broadcasting (Independent Productions) Order 1991, English-speaking companies would not have accepted the condition that you required of the companies that were tendering for the Gaelic news service? That is a difficulty for Gaelic independent companies.

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh: Chan eil mi a' tuigsinn carson, oir mura biodh rudan ri dhèanamh ann an dòigh eadar-dhealaichte, ann an Gàidhlig, cha bhiodh am buidheann seo ann. Chan urrainn dhut iarraidh oirnn dèanamh fèir an seòrsa rud a tha a' tachairt ann an craoladh Beurla.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I do not understand why. If things were not to be done in a different way in relation to Gaelic, our organisation would not exist. You cannot ask us to do exactly the same as what happens in English broadcasting.

Michael Russell: We can ask you to abide by the law—what producers understand to be the law, and which protects the position of independent producers. That is a key point.

Iain Aonghas MacAoidh: Bu chaomh leam aon rud eile a ràdh mu dheidhinn sin. Ma tha buidheann ann an Alba a rinn barrachd airson neo-eisimeilich Gàidhlig anns na deich bliadhna chaidh seachad, na rinn sinne, bu chaomh leam a chluinntinn. Air a' bhliadhna seo, tha iad a' faighinn faisg air dàrna leth an airgid againn. An ath-bhliadhna, gheibh iad leth-cheud 's a còig anns a' cheud dhen airgead againn, so ma tha e co-cheangailte ris an taic a tha sinn a' toirt.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I want to add one thing about that. If an organisation in Scotland has done more for Gaelic independents in the past 10 years than we have done, I would like to hear about it. This year, independent producers are getting almost half our money; next year, they will get 55 per cent of our money.

Michael Russell: This has perhaps become arcane, convener, but that point is made on a definition of independence that many people would dispute.

The Convener: I think that you are going down a particular road, Mr Russell, which is perhaps not part of this inquiry.

Mr McAveety: It is one of those words, "independence". It can mean anything.

The Convener: If there are no further questions from members—

Michael Russell: I know what it means, Frank.

The Convener: Calm down, calm down.

I thank the witnesses very much for their evidence. If there is any supplementary evidence that you wish the committee to have over the next few weeks, please let us have it.

We will take more evidence next week, and we hope thereafter to produce a report after the summer recess. I adjourn the committee until 3.15.

15:03

Meeting adjourned.

15:20

On resuming—

The Convener: We move on to our third set of witnesses, who are from Lèirsinn.

Dr Robert Stradling (Lèirsinn): My colleague Catherine Ann MacNeil and I work at the Lèirsinn research centre, which is located at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig on the Isle of Skye. Thank you for the opportunity to talk to the committee and to respond to any questions that members may have arising out of our submission.

Audience research is an important part of our work. We have been carrying out audience research for the Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig since 1993 and we do similar work on a smaller scale for the Gaelic department of the BBC. In addition, we do much research on education, linguistics and language development, cultural and community development and social and economic development. We have drawn on that research in writing our submission.

I would like to emphasise that we decided to submit a paper to the committee not because we have a particular view on the past, present or future of Gaelic broadcasting, but because so much research has been done over the past 10 years. We felt it necessary to bring that research to the attention of the committee, if only in the form of some indicators of the main findings. In that spirit, I add that we should be very happy to make full research reports available to the committee if that information would be helpful later in the inquiry.

Catherine Ann MacNeil runs the audience research unit at Lèirsinn, and she would be happy to answer questions on that aspect of our work. I am happy to take questions on the social and economic research to which our submission refers. Both of us are happy to take questions on the educational impact of Gaelic broadcasting.

The Convener: Thank you. I would be very keen to see the research papers on young people and children. They are the future of the language.

Mr McAveety: Forty-four million pounds is a lot of money. Is it best spent in the way that has been suggested so far today?

Dr Stradling: Are you talking about the intended £44 million?

Mr McAveety: Yes.

Dr Stradling: If not, we could see three hours of Gaelic television a day, which would follow a pattern that we have seen emerge in other programming. There would be repeats every few hours and a lot of dubbed programming. A decline in standards is a risk. On the other hand, it is difficult to know how to fund such a channel in any other way without being prepared to put in as much as £44 million. There needs to be a balance.

There are several contextual difficulties, such as the different production values of the broadcasting companies. We live in a country where there is no tradition of showing programmes from other countries that are dubbed. If one were watching television in Spain or Italy, one would see a fairly high proportion of such programmes. There is a resistance to that here. There is therefore a problem with buying in programmes that would be of interest and dubbing them into Gaelic. It is difficult to answer your question in the sense that there are several cheaper options open to Gaelic broadcasting, but the risk would be a reduction in quality.

Mr McAveety: The other debate is whether Gaelic broadcasting sustains commitment to the language and whether broadcasting develops further penetration of the language. If £44 million is the available resource, how best should it be used?

Dr Stradling: The issue of whether that money would be better spent somewhere else, such as on Gaelic-medium education, is often raised. Our findings suggest that it is essential to develop a critical mass of exposure to Gaelic. When carrying out research on young people in schools, we found that, across the country, about one in three children come from homes where Gaelic is not spoken—the only Gaelic that such children get is at school. To some extent, there is a worry among educationists that that is a kind of school Gaelic, which is low in idiomatic speech. Such children get a broader exposure to Gaelic by listening to radio and television.

As Pròiseact nan Ealan said in its submission, the synergy of various elements of Gaelic—Gaelic-medium education, education for learners and Gaelic broadcasting—is important.

Mr McAveety: Does location matter? If it does,

is Stornoway the right location?

Dr Stradling: I am based in Skye, so I do not have a brief on behalf of Stornoway. I would answer your question in two ways. Technically, it does not matter. Even the small, independent television companies that have operated in the Highlands and Islands have often brought in freelance crews who are based in the central belt or even further south. They have done that because they have built up long track records with those people, usually because they were on the production side at the BBC or in independent television companies before they set up their own companies. It has to be said that, very often, those people do not speak Gaelic. Although some of those small companies have a Gaelic producer and a Gaelic owner-manager, a number of the freelance team members do not speak Gaelic. That has presented some problems, particularly with editing.

From the other perspective, as Gaelic broadcasting has tended to be a Scotland-wide process, much public investment money has been spent. Most of it has leaked back from the Highlands to the central belt. We did multiplier research on that, which is referred to in our submission. In terms of the employment multiplier and the output multiplier, the situation is as good now as it was when Dr Allan Sproull did his research in 1992. Television production generates a certain amount of output and a certain amount of employment in the Highlands and Islands. That employment has to be considered in terms of all the support services that contribute to Gaelic broadcasting, and not just the small companies that are actually making the programmes.

At the same time, however, income haemorrhages. Money coming in goes straight back out. There is a case for more of that money staying in the Highlands and Islands, but the way in which the small companies work will continue to be a Scotland-wide process.

The Convener: We have heard much today about the location of a potential Gaelic channel, and there are obviously arguments about whether it should be located here, in a Gaelic-speaking community, or in the central belt. Are the benefits for the community and the culture and the positive spin-off for young people of such a facility being in their own back yard, rather than in the central belt, measurable? Can you gauge from your work with young people whether such a facility would be a positive development for them?

15:30

Catherine Ann MacNeil (Lèirsinn): Gaelic programmes themselves are successful at involving young people, so I suppose that in many

respects location does not matter. There are a number of youth programmes that involve young people at every level. Reference was made to demystifying Gaelic broadcasting for young people, and the programmes themselves do that to some extent—probably more than one would find with English language programming.

Dr Stradling: There is also a difference in a community where 65 or 75 per cent of the people are Gaelic speaking or have Gaelic-speaking parents or grandparents. If there is a service that is theirs, they have a sense of identity with it. Young people tell us in surveys that the programming must acknowledge their sense of identity and their Gaelic roots as well as being the kind of programmes that they would want to watch in English.

Catherine Ann MacNeil: We have to remember that those young people are located not only in the Highlands and Islands. A substantial number of young people in the central belt are going through Gaelic-medium education. That sense of ownership is as important to them as it is to young people in the Highlands and Islands.

Dr Stradling: We also want to attract them back. We may have the University of the Highlands and Islands, but many young people are still going to Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen. They are getting skills—we want those skills here.

The Convener: That debate will take place and it will rage. When a community is losing skills in any industry at an alarming rate, anything that can positively enforce the culture in which people are brought up might be helpful and worth pursuing.

Dr Stradling: What matters is that youngsters from the area can train in the area. It does not matter whether they end up working in the central belt or in London, as long as they go on those training programmes to learn their craft. The training provided at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and Lews Castle College is to a national standard; they are trained to work in either language.

Ian Jenkins: The material in your submission on education is strong and convincing on the potential for television expansion—and its effect on children—for people at home and when they are being educated. I totally accept the idea of community ownership.

I was slightly surprised at your submission when you dealt with the single channel for Gaelic. You state:

“The majority of Gaelic speaking television viewers (74%) support the concept of a Gaelic channel.”

Seventy-four per cent of 50,000 or 60,000 Gaelic speakers is quite a small number. You went on to say:

"Over two-thirds ... felt that a Gaelic digital channel would have a positive impact on the future of the language."

That means that nearly a third of them did not—I wonder where they were coming from. Is there a problem about whether people would buy digital equipment and so on? The statistics in that part of the submission suggest that not everybody was ragingly keen on a single channel.

Dr Stradling: In certain areas, many people cannot even see all the terrestrial channels, so there is reluctance to spend a lot of money until they have seen what digital television looks like and have heard about it. There is conservatism about digital broadcasting, which has come through in the work that we have been doing with the community.

Catherine Ann may know more about this, but I think that the statistics that you mentioned—the two thirds and the 74 per cent—probably reflect the views of the generations here. Some of the older generation of native Gaelic speakers are not sure that broadcasting has had a positive effect on the language that they speak. It does not necessarily mean that there is any contradiction.

Catherine Ann MacNeil: We monitor uptake of the new digital technology. It has been slower among the Gaelic-speaking viewers than has been observed at national level. As Bob Stradling said, there is conservatism; people are not sure what will happen. However, of those who have subscribed to digital, three quarters have opted for digital satellite—that is important.

Michael Russell: I want to ask about two separate things, one of which follows on from what has just been said. If a digital channel were established—and I am an unequivocal supporter of such a channel—its existence would surely attract and build its own audience. Indeed, the sooner a channel was available, the more likely it is that people would switch to that enhanced service. Do you have any research findings that back that up?

Dr Stradling: Not at the moment.

Michael Russell: Will you look into it?

Dr Stradling: It depends on whether we are asked to.

Michael Russell: Unfortunately, the committee has no budget for that, although I am sure that others sitting in this room have.

I will return to the question of the £44 million. My colleagues have asked—correctly—whether that seems a large amount, even though in television terms it is not a large amount at all. There is a churn of employment in broadcasting, by which I mean that not everyone is able to work where they

were brought up as they might have wanted; as in other areas, people go elsewhere to work in television. However, that gap is filled by others coming in who work in television and add skills. The missing element is the creation of a Gaelic-speaking community of broadcasters; it has been assumed that such a group would be created from the existing Gaelic-speaking community. When this year's census might show that there are 50,000 or fewer Gaelic speakers, surely the time is ripe to discuss the creation of a new community of Gaelic speakers from English speakers. We must make the language easier and less costly to learn, and develop schemes within the Gaelic community whereby people can become fluent comparatively quickly—perhaps within 1,000 hours, not 1,500.

One of the key areas for such a scheme might be the broadcasting community, which would create a critical mass of people who were interested in working in both Gaelic and television in these communities, and who brought with them an increasing amount of language skills. In order to do that, we would have to encourage people to populate and work in the whole Gaidhealtachd, not just in one town. Are there any ways in which that might work?

Dr Stradling: We are talking about a long process. Recently, we have written reports about Gaelic learners and non-Gaelic-speaking parents of children in Gaelic-medium education. Clearly, the education authorities, the broadcasting bodies and all the agencies involved in promoting Gaelic should get together on the whole issue of Gaelic learners. I am such a learner myself, although it might be better to describe me as lapsed.

Michael Russell: We would all sympathise with that.

Dr Stradling: However, such a situation might take 10, 15 or 20 years to come about. I realise that I am not speaking as a researcher when I say that the data we have collected show that an integrated strategy for the development of Gaelic—which would include broadcasting—is clearly required.

Michael Russell: I want to develop that point. The council representatives mentioned the need for short-term and long-term strategies. Although there is no doubt that a short-term strategy is required, we should realise that no matter how successful short-term strategies have been in other areas or individually in Gaelic television, they have not halted the decline in the number of Gaelic speakers. Indeed, that decline has accelerated. In such circumstances, we should be considering both short-term strategies that cement the present situation and long-term strategies that help us to recover from it. Are you suggesting that the agencies are not working together on such broader thinking?

Dr Stradling: Yes, that is the first point I would make. The second point is that, in the short term, we need to examine how Gaelic learners use television, which is something that we have been doing in our research. You mentioned involving people in the community in programming and so on. That is perhaps some way down the line, but they see Gaelic television—not just learner programmes such as “Speaking Our Language”, but programmes that have subtitles and which might be interactive to some extent—as a means of honing their language skills and hearing an idiomatic language. That is as crucial as the need for language-learning courses.

Michael Russell: And your research shows that quality is also a key issue.

Dr Stradling: Yes.

Michael Russell: I refer next to your panel. Your paper outlines the operation of the panel, which we broadly understand. However, in the CCG’s decision-making process, what cognisance does it take of—and what value does it place on—the outcomes of your panel?

Catherine Ann MacNeil: The panel has provided the CCG with a wealth of data. With our weekly data, we can build up a long-term picture that allows us to consider different trends. The research is used in the CCG’s decision-making processes.

We use the panel in several different ways. We are building up a vast database, which gives us viewing figures and appreciation scores. It lets the CCG consider how different slots and programme types are doing. In addition, we use the panel to examine in more detail how specific programmes are doing. That helps the CCG to go back and negotiate with broadcasters if it wants changes to be made to programmes.

Michael Russell: That is therefore a valuable tool for any organisation that is involved in broadcasting, as it gives such organisations a more in-depth examination of audience reaction than they could obtain through a Broadcasters Audience Research Board survey. Do you regard it as an integral tool in making decisions on funding?

Catherine Ann MacNeil: Yes.

Dr Stradling: Yes. We believe that it should be. Obviously, we are biased, but we believe that it is a more useful tool than BARB surveys, given that the number of Gaelic speakers within the BARB panels is very small. The extrapolations from that are, to us, quite worrying.

We noticed that the CCG’s submission stated that we do qualitative research. In fact, we do both types. We provide audience response figures on how many people have watched a programme. If

one is extrapolating from one to 200, it is a much better extrapolation than the one from—

Michael Russell: So you do qualitative and quantitative research for the CCG, to provide it with a key tool in the decision-making process. Do we see the fruits of that on screen?

Dr Stradling: One of the key trends that we have identified in the research over 10 years is a more discerning audience. I do not mean that to sound patronising. Initially, in the first two or three years of Gaelic broadcasting, there was such delight that any programmes were being broadcast that people were happy to watch them. Mostly, they were watching the programmes because they were in the Gaelic language. If the programmes were criticised, it tended to be because of the quality of the Gaelic. We now find, with more and more programmes, that people are watching as a critical audience: they are into production values and complain about a programme with talking heads. We feed those comments back regularly. We have seen an improvement in the quality of programming.

Mr McAveety: It seems to me that quality is the criterion. The breadth of experience could be brought to bear on that. The fact that people from the islands get a chance to go to other parts of Scotland and Europe to share experiences brings quality back to the product, which can enhance it and, de facto, therefore helps the audience figures and the language. We come back again to the way in which we can celebrate the fact that people move: the social mobility and awareness that that brings can help the eventual product.

Dr Stradling: There is not a strong feeling within the Gaelic communities that Gaelic broadcasting should be something precious that is separate from Scottish culture. They want it to be an integral part of Scottish culture. Some of the new programmes have been targeted at young people. There was a gap in the youth market. The programmes that are now coming out are very much about the experiences that young people have when they leave the islands and go to university in Glasgow and Edinburgh, rather than there being, as some would have said a few years ago, too many programmes about people who left the islands 20 years ago and have come back to retire. We have moved away from nostalgic programmes to ones that are seen as more relevant to being Scottish as well as being Gaelic.

Mr McAveety: Mike Russell and I have had a discussion in the past few weeks about the quality of production values in the programmes that are broadcast. How important is that, in the discernment of the audience?

Catherine Ann MacNeil: Our audience is clearly becoming more aware of production values

in its ratings of programmes. Expectations of Gaelic programmes are high among Gaelic-speaking viewers. They are not looking just for information or entertainment. They are also interested in the language and the values that are being conveyed. They want the language to be supported. They have much higher expectations for Gaelic broadcasting than for any English-language programme that they may choose to watch.

15:45

Dr Stradling: There is a great deal of funding for Gaelic-language documentaries. However, the younger generation would like a wider range of programmes, which the older generation might not see as quality broadcasting. There is a new programme on Radio nan Gaidheal called Rapal. It has a Gaelic-speaking presenter, but the pop songs that it plays are by Eminem, Robbie Williams and so on. One sign of a language coming of age is that people forget why they are listening to it and take it for granted as a medium of communication. The younger generation may have different notions of quality and different production values.

The Convener: Thank you for your evidence. If you would like to send us any further information, we would be happy to receive it.

We will now take evidence from representatives of Pròiseact nan Ealan. My pronunciation is improving—clearly I need to watch some of these television programmes. I welcome our witnesses and ask them to make some introductory remarks.

Agnes Rennie (Pròiseact nan Ealan): Tapadh leibhse, a neach-gairm agus buill na Pàrlamaid. Is mise Agnes Rennie agus is mi cathraiche Pròiseact nan Ealan. Chan eil mi air a bhith san dreuchd ach bho chionn beagan is bliadhna. Mar sin dheth, as dèidh facal no dhà a ràdh san fharsaingeachd airson dealbh a thoirt air an ùidh a tha agam fhìn san obair seo, bheir mi cothrom do stiùiriche na buidhne, Calum MacIlleathain, cur ris na tha san tagradh againn.

Dh'fheumainn aideachadh sa chiad dol a-mach gu robh mi a-measg aon dhe na ciad buill a bha air a' chomataidh nuair a chaidh a cruthachadh an toiseach. An àite an declaration of interests a tha ceart air an latha, tha còir agam sin a ràdh.

Bu mhath leam cuideachd a ràdh gu robh mi nam bhall agus nam chathraiche air bòrd companaidh iomairt nan eilean siar. Gu dearbh airson grunnan dhe na bliadhnaichean sin chunnaic mi tòrr dhen obair a bha Pròiseact nan Ealan agus an CCG a' dèanamh an làimh a chèile. Mar sin dheth, bha mi a' coimhead—mar gum biodh—bho dhà thaobh a' bhuird air an obair a bhathas a' dèanamh agus am feum a bhathas a'

dèanamh dhen airgead. Chunnaic mi an ìre aig an robh an t-airgead ga chur an sàs san choimhearsnachd agus a' bhuaidh a bha aig na buidhnean agus gu h-àraid aig na h-ealainean air a' choimhearsnachd san fharsaingeachd.

Tha fios am gur e ceist mhòr an-còmhnaidh am bu chòir samhail no seòrsa airgead mòr a chleachdadh. Mar a dh'ainmich Micheal Ruiseal na bu thràithe, nuair a thathas a' bruidhinn air an airgead a thathas a' cosg air telebhisean, saoilidh duine gur e airgead mòr mòr a tha ann an taca ri, mar eisimpleir, uiread 's a thathas a' cosg air foillseachadh no fiù 's air foghlam fhèin san fharsaingeachd. Tha fios againn air na cosgaisean a tha na lùib, ach nuair a sheallas sinn dè a' bhuaidh a tha aig an dàrna rud air an rud eile, chan eil teagamh sam bith nach biodh cus feum anns na ceumannan mòra a thathas air an gabhail—ann am foghlam gu h-àraid—às aonais na h-obrach eile a tha air dol air adhart timcheall sin sa choimhearsnachd.

Chan eil cus diofar ann a bheil iad ann an Gabhsann no ann an Glaschu, tha an òigridh Ghaidhealach—òigridh a tha a' bruidhinn na Gàidhlig—a' coimhead ris an t-saoghal a tha a-muigh an sin timcheall orra. Tha fios am gu bheil feadhainn eile air bruidhinn air seo nas tràithe an-diugh, ach liùgann dìreach a ràdh gur e sin an sealladh a tha againn air. Is e sin an sealladh a tha agam fhìn air nam dhachaigh fhèin. Chì thu òigridh a tha a' dol tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig anns an sgoil aig a bheil sùil mhath air a' choimhearsnachd agus an t-saoghal a tha timcheall orra. Mana eil an saoghal sin cho math anns a' Ghàidhlig is a tha e anns a' Bheurla, cha bhi iad fada a' cur cùl rithe.

Tha mise a' smaoinreachadh gu bheil synergy a' tòiseachdainn air tachairt san obair a tha air cuideachadh maoinreachaidh fhaighinn—ann an telebhisean, ann an rèidio, ann am foillseachadh agus ann am foghlam. Chaidh an synergy sin ainmeachadh na bu thràithe le Bob Stradling, agus gu dearbha, dh'ainmich sinn fhìn e san tagradh againn. Tha an obair a tha sinn air fhaicinn a' tachairt le maoinreachadh a' Chomataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig a' toirt cothrom dha an synergy sin tachairt. Tha mi a' smaoinreachadh, is dòcha, nach eil sinn fhathast ach aig toiseach tòiseachaidh.

Chan eil mise ag iarraidh cus eile a ràdh an-dràsta. Tha fiosrachadh mionaideach anns ar tagradh a thug sinn dhuibh. Liùgann dìreach cothrom a thoirt dha Calum MacIlleathain rud beag feòil a chur air feadhainn dhe na cnàmhan a tha anns an tagradh sin. Bhiodh sinn ro thoilichte an uair sin ceistean a ghabhail bho dhuine sam bith agaibh fhèin.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Thank you, convener and members of the

Parliament. My name is Agnes Rennie and I am the chairman of Pròiseact nan Ealan. I have held that post for only a year, so after saying a few words I will hand over to the director of the organisation, Malcolm Maclean, who will add to the submission that we have made to the committee.

I would like to make a few general comments to give the committee a sense of my interest in this work. I was one of the first members of the CCG. I should declare an interest, in that I was also a member and chairman of Western Isles Enterprise. For many years I was able to observe from both sides of the table the work that Pròiseact nan Ealan and the CCG were doing together—how the money was used, how it was transmitted to the community and the effect it had on the arts and on the community generally.

I note that a major question was whether we should use the kind of money that Michael Russell mentioned. When people talk about money and television, they mean the huge amounts of money that are spent on publicity or education, for example. We know the costs that are involved. When we consider the impact of one thing on another, there is no doubt that the major steps that have been taken in education in particular would not have been taken if it were not for the other steps that are being taken in the community.

It does not matter whether young people who speak Gaelic are in Galson or Glasgow—they look at the world outside. I know that others have spoken about this issue already, but I would like to say that that is how we see it—that is how I view it from my own home. Young people who go through Gaelic-medium education know the world around them and look around their community. If something is not as good in Gaelic as it is in English, they will turn their backs on it pretty quickly.

Work in radio, television, publishing and education has been carried out and has received funding. The synergy that was mentioned by Bob Stradling and that we mentioned in our submission is now beginning to happen. The work that has been done with the funding from the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee gives that an opportunity to happen. Perhaps we are just at the beginning of the process.

I do not want to say too much at this stage—we have given members our submission in which there is a great deal of detail. I would like to give Malcolm Maclean an opportunity to put some meat on the bones of our submission and then we will be only too happy to take questions from members.

Malcolm Maclean (Pròiseact nan Ealan): Tha sinn mothachail gu bheil diofar dhòighean air

tighinn gu craobh-sgaoileadh Gàidhlig. Tha diofar sheallaidhean a dh'fhaodadh am buidheann nàiseanta airson deasachadh nan ealainean Gàidhlig ann an Alba a chleachdadh airson sùil a chur do chraobh-sgaoileadh Gàidhlig. Tha sinn a' tighinn thuige bho shealladh no perspective chultarach. Tha am pàipear againn a' feuchainn ri an sealladh sin a dhèanamh cho soilleir agus cho làidir 's is urrainn dha a dhèanamh.

Tha sinne air a bhith an sàs anns na h-ealainean ann an suidheachadh a tha—is dòcha—sònraichte. Chan eil commercial interests no institutional interests againn rin dìon anns an suidheachadh anns a bheil sinn an-diugh. Ach tha sinn air a bhith a' co-obrachadh glè fhaig air, agus còmhla ri, diofar dhaoine a tha air a bhith an sàs ann an craobh-sgaoileadh Gàidhlig thairis air an deich bliadhna a chaidh seachad.

Tha sinne dhen bheachd gu bheil sin air cothrom a thoirt dhuinn togail an àird dòigh obrach ùr inntinneach far a bheil na h-ealainean agus craobh-sgaoileadh Gàidhlig—ann an cuid de suidheachaidhean co-dhiù—air cothrom co-obrachadh fhaighinn. Cha ruith mi thairis air na tha san aithisg againn, ach tha mi dìreach airson a ràdh mus tòisich sinn gu bheil sinn an dòchas, ma thig gluasad no leasachaidhean ùra ann an craobh-sgaoileadh Gàidhlig, gum bi cothrom ann a bhith a' cleachdadh nan leasachaidhean sin ann an dòigh ùr airson a bhith a' neartachadh leasachadh cultar na Gàidhlig ann an Alba agus cultar Alba.

Tha sinn a' faicinn an dòigh obrach a thathar a' moladh anns a' phàipear againn mar rud a tha cuideachd freagarrach mar phàirt dhen ro-innleachd nàiseanta airson cultair—the national cultural strategy. Tha e a' freagairt na h-aithisge air deasachadh na Gàidhlig, a bha fo stiùireadh Sheonaidh Ailig Mac a' Phearsain, a thàinig a-mach bho chionn sia mìosan no barrachd air ais.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

The Gaelic Arts Agency is aware that there are many ways of approaching Gaelic broadcasting, although we try to have a perspective that is as clear and strong as possible. We have been involved in the arts in what might be thought of as a peculiar situation—there are no commercial or institutional interests to protect the situation that we are in today. However, we are co-operating with people who have been involved in Gaelic broadcasting in the past 10 years. That has given us an opportunity to build up a new and innovative method of working in Gaelic broadcasting, at least in some situations. We have also had an opportunity to co-operate on some programmes.

I will not go over what is in our submission, except to say that we hope that any innovations or new developments in Gaelic broadcasting will be

used to develop Gaelic culture in Scotland. Such a recommendation is part of our proposal for a national cultural strategy that follows on from the report on Gaelic development, the Macpherson report.

Ian Jenkins: I enjoyed section 5 of your submission about the impact on the development of Gaelic arts and education and I shall read out for the record your views. The submission sets out your approach to cultural activity, not broadcasting as a whole. It states:

"This question goes to the heart of any debate about Gaelic broadcasting. The high-pressure, urban-centred, ratings-focused, anglocentric hothouse world of broadcasting, and the professional self-interest of the broadcasters, will resist the idea that broadcasting is about anything other than broadcasting for broadcasting's sake."

That is certainly some sentence. Is it not slightly unfair to broadcasters?

Malcolm Maclean: I thought that I was being mild. That is an understatement.

Ian Jenkins: To give those who have not read your submission a flavour of it, can you tell us about one or two areas in which culture has been developed by the presence of CCG and its funding? You talked about a step change in the whole of Gaelic culture when the CCG first received the money. Can you explain what has been valuable?

Malcolm Maclean: Speaking from an arts and cultural perspective, the reality is that the funding that was drawn into Gaelic television through the CCG has been by far the most significant investment in Gaelic culture and economy. It has ensured that a level of funding has come into the Gaelic cultural economy that it would not otherwise have received. It is unlikely that it would have come from any other direction. Such investment in the Gaelic cultural economy has enabled us, as a Gaelic development agency with a specific locus in the arts, to develop various projects that have, because of their link with broadcasting, opened up arts initiatives to a much wider audience.

The funding has enabled us to increase the production values of arts events and to develop initiatives ranging from training initiatives to flagship events that unfortunately, given the relatively low funding of other Gaelic culture in Scotland, would never have taken place. We at Pròiseact nan Ealan believe that that synergy and collaboration have achieved more than would have been possible if we had attempted to develop the arts in the absence of a Gaelic broadcasting service. We have achieved more than the CCG or Gaelic television would have achieved if they were functioning in the absence of an arts development strategy.

Ian Jenkins: You advocate having a single channel for Gaelic. If a great amount of time were to be filled, might whoever was commissioning the work come under the kind of pressure to achieve high ratings and so on, as happens in the other channels, or would the channel be a purer than pure public service and be concerned only with good cultural stuff?

16:00

Malcolm Maclean: Good cultural stuff should also be capable of attracting good ratings. Problems would begin to arise only if ratings were used to determine our sense of culture. By its nature, broadcasting is competitive and broadcasters have to be preoccupied with ratings to a degree that can be contradictory in the context of Gaelic television development.

Michael Russell: I also enjoyed your submission, which was didactic and aggressive and made all the relevant points. It was also generous, especially in the last two bullet points of part 6. We are told that the new channel should

"position itself as the Scottish cultural channel and feature arts and other programming relevant to other Scottish cultural and linguistic interests"

and that it

"should be seen as a key element in Scotland's cultural infrastructure and a means of promoting Scotland's cultures to ourselves and the wider world."

Those are tremendously sensible and important contributions to the debate but I want to take issue with earlier points in the submission. I agree that the Gaelic community

"needs a dedicated digital Gaelic broadcaster with commissioning powers"

but I would point out again that other models are available, such as having time allocated en bloc on a Scottish cultural channel.

The submission also says that the broadcaster should be

"based in the Gaelic heartlands of the Western Isles"

and that the

"new Gaelic media service should be independent of other broadcasters."

No one would deny the crying need to have Stornoway, Lewis or the Western Isles *primus inter pares* in any arrangement about Gaelic broadcasting, but there is a fear that centralisation might draw jobs and initiatives out of other areas—just as this area has suffered in the past—and that that might be to the detriment of the channel. It might be that the concern about the independence from other broadcasters might be a hangover from an old way of thinking about broadcasting and that it might be better to think of a broadcaster as like a

publisher. An independent broadcaster might be a minnow in a small pond, even though you might hope that its independence might make it more equal. That might be damaging.

All that is a long way of saying that there is a debate to be had around those issues. You have taken a position in the debate and I assume that your organisation is indicating that it wants to engage in the debate. Would you comment on some of the alternatives that I have put to you?

Malcolm Maclean: We do not have a fixed position on how a dedicated digital Gaelic broadcaster might be delivered. As you said earlier, there is a difference between the transmission of the programmes and the question of who runs the service. The key point relates to who runs the service rather than the mechanism by which the service is delivered. We have no position on the mechanism, but we have a position on the management and strategic direction of the service.

Michael Russell: Nevertheless, the idea of a Scottish cultural channel, of which Gaelic would be an integral part, is attractive. Given your work with arts organisations in other parts of Scotland, do you think that an interest in such a channel exists elsewhere?

Malcolm Maclean: Yes.

Michael Russell: Is that interest sustainable?

Malcolm Maclean: Yes.

Michael Russell: What is your time scale for progress? If you could look into a crystal ball, where would you say the idea was going and how quickly?

Malcolm Maclean: Unfortunately, we do not have a crystal ball any more than you do. Given that a changeover date has not yet been set, it is clear that the time frames that confront digital television are elastic. It is becoming clear that Gaelic television is in a position to take a lead on the issue because of its history, incentives in terms of urgency and the basic infrastructure it has developed.

I am cautious about predicting time frames for the pace at which any developments that might arise from such a lead would move, but I believe that there would be an interest in and appetite, audience and support for a cultural channel that could cover important aspects of Scottish culture that are squeezed off the airwaves because of the ratings pressures with which commercial broadcasters and even the BBC must contend.

The Convener: Why does your submission say that such a channel

“should be based in the Gaelic heartlands of the Western Isles”?

Malcolm Maclean: In saying that, I pick up on the Gaelic task force’s report to the Executive last year. The report identifies three distinct Gaelic communities. I say straight away that I am a Glasgow Gael. I speak as someone from Govan—

Mr McAveety: Which is separate from the rest of Glasgow anyway.

Malcolm Maclean: Exactly.

The Convener: That is the fourth community.

Malcolm Maclean: Yes. The Macpherson report is correct in identifying three Gaelic communities, which have different needs and different dynamics. Each has serious needs and its own internal dynamics, as I said. However, as a general principle I do not think that there is an example anywhere in the world of a language community that has survived without having a heartland.

In at least one part of the community, Gaelic is the first language and is spoken daily. However dispersed the learner community and language community may become, a reference point exists where the language is strong. That reference point is the Western Isles—the area with a critical mass. That in itself is a strategic argument for targeting resources. However, there is another side to the argument, which concerns creative critical mass and the developing creative community. In the town of Stornoway alone, several employment spin-offs have been created in the past 10 years from the presence of Gaelic television in the area. A degree of creative critical mass exists and could be built on.

Perhaps the most important reason for stressing the Western Isles connection is that if we consider the location of the Scottish Media Group and the BBC, we have a Glasgow-centric broadcasting culture in Scotland. I do not believe that that industry needs any support from public funds to maintain a presence in Glasgow. If Scotland is to develop a genuinely dispersed media industry, active steps have to be taken to invest in that dispersal and it has to go into enough areas to ensure that the Scottish media industry does not get drawn entirely into the central belt. In any case, there would be strong interactions; it is in the nature of the media for there to be strong interactions.

Agnes Rennie: The question of added value comes up very often in respect of the investment of public moneys and it has already been touched on several times today. The arts sector and the way in which CCG funds have been used through the arts agency is one of the best examples of added value that we have, in terms of training, performance and the output from those training courses in the provision of practitioners and artists—if I may make that distinction—who have

then gone on to perform and participate and, in some cases, to set up their own companies. The leverage that in some cases is then available for further public investment through the lottery, the millennium fund and European fund investment, also provides an interesting example of how very small pockets of money in communities such as this can have a substantial, significant added-value effect.

Mr McAveety: I have taken up the challenge; I have worked my crystal ball. I am looking for a model in Europe that has a very effective devolved parliamentary structure, with the two Parliaments having responsibilities for slightly different areas in broadcasting, culture and language development. Which parts of Europe seem to be getting that balance between the role of the centre and decentralisation right, which enhances the development of the relevant culture and language? What can we learn? Which parts of Europe should we look at as models of, or for inspiration for, getting the balance right?

Malcolm Maclean: The first place that it occurs to me to suggest is Spain, specifically Catalonia. We have collaborated not only with the British Council in Catalonia, but with other arts organisations there. As a consequence of that connection, we have been fortunate enough to have had exposure to, and an opportunity to be educated to a certain level about, the dynamics of cultural policy in Catalonia.

We see strong parallels. Three months ago, *Próiseact nan Ealan* hosted in this chamber a seminar organised by the Barcelona-based Interarts Foundation observatory for cultural research and international cultural co-operation. It is considering precisely these issues—the relationship between arts and cultural policy and language policy throughout Europe. The observatory published its paper on that; it was commissioned and funded by the European Union, I believe in 1999. It is currently mid way through the second phase of that paper, which considers language policy and arts and cultural policy and the interconnections between them.

Unfortunately, what came out of the first study was that there are not many examples of those issues being addressed in tandem and that the connections between language policy and arts and cultural policy, which many people consider to be obvious, have not been pursued at policy level.

That was a fairly long answer, but I hope it was specific.

Mr McAveety: It strikes me that the debate is about recognising where influence can be brought to bear where appropriate. I think that it is a case of trying to find ways of doing that. People have different experiences of what their language and

culture have been.

We can learn from some of what has already been done, and not just in Catalonia: there may be other countries that have gone through the process of decentralisation and devolution. We could learn about the balance that they achieve between central and devolved roles.

Malcolm Maclean: You are absolutely right. However, we should consider what the Catalans have managed to do with their programme of normalisation. Twenty years ago, in the aftermath of Franco's death, it was highly controversial. Many people in Catalonia did not believe that it would be possible to reverse language decline because it had gone too far. The progress that has been made in the normalisation of Catalan is an example of what can be achieved.

It is no accident that the Catalans have taken the lead in the study I mentioned, which examines the link between language and culture. They have personal and practical experience of that that few other areas in Europe have.

16:15

Irene McGugan: You mentioned in one of your responses to Michael Russell that you felt that Gaelic arts and culture have been squeezed off the schedules. Some of the most successful CCG-supported programming certainly seems to fall into the news, current affairs, documentary and educational categories, although drama, for instance, has not featured significantly or successfully. Why is that? Are you disappointed that that is the case? Given that English speakers can access news, current affairs and documentaries in English, perhaps drama is a way of getting a bigger audience among English speakers who are just attracted to a good quality drama. Could your organisation have been, or should it now be, proactive in encouraging more drama productions on to Gaelic television?

Malcolm Maclean: When I responded earlier and referred to arts programmes being squeezed off the schedules, I was talking more about mainstream English-language broadcasting than about the CCG's menu of programmes. That said, I agree about the power and accessibility of drama and the extent to which drama in particular offers ways of attracting audiences that do not consist of fluent Gaelic speakers.

On what could be done in that regard, the step that was taken in the creation of "Machair", for example, was bold and creative. "Machair" was able to develop a pool of skills that have in turn been utilised elsewhere in Gaelic broadcasting. The evolution of "Machair" is a positive model for ways in which drama in a minority language context can be used and made to work.

When—immediately after the announcement of the creation of the CCG and the announcement of the funding—the idea was first mooted that soap opera should be the first form of programming to emerge, I had reservations. However, when I stopped to think about it, those reservations evaporated within a couple of weeks. That is because serial drama creates a continuity within which it is possible to develop skills and to raise people's game over a period of time, which is what happened with "Machair".

The reasons why "Machair" is no longer on the screens are complex and not necessarily for me to discuss. On what should take its place, we argue and have argued consistently that without investment in creative training and the development of creative skills, television in general is profoundly weakened. That does not apply only to Gaelic television. There must be general investment in skills development and talent development.

We have managed an arts and media training programme over the past three years, which has enabled us to explore some of the problems and possibilities in the sector. There have been significant positive outcomes from that, but there will have to be significant investment if we are seriously going to develop the kind of quality Gaelic drama that Gaelic television has demonstrated that it can deliver. Some of what has been produced has been excellent, but if we are to have a sustained service in that regard, investment in creative skills training must be a high priority.

The Convener: Thank you for your time and evidence. If there is any supplementary evidence that you wish us to have, do not hesitate to send it to the committee.

Finally, I welcome Dr Finlay MacLeod. Thank you for sitting with us all afternoon. It has been a long but worthwhile session. I invite you to make your introductory remarks.

Dr Finlay MacLeod: It has been a long afternoon for members, but it is encouraging and important for us to see the committee here. Although I can speak the indigenous language, I will speak in English to—I hope—increase our engagement.

I will not go over in great detail who I am or what I have done. I have been involved in a number of ventures to do with Gaelic development, not least formal and community education, Gaelic publishing on a European basis in relation to minority languages, and latterly in broadcasting. After the Broadcasting Act 1990, I saw broadcasting as being crucial to Gaelic society, because although Gaelic-medium education, which my children have gone through, is

precious—as has been repeated a number of times today—any community or society in today's world that does not have a comprehensive broadcasting service has serious learning difficulties.

For the past 30 years, one of the main aims in Highland Gaelic society has been to build up an infrastructure to strengthen life in the Highlands and Islands across broadcasting, education, publishing and everything else. What we are doing here today is a result of that. Because of the history of Gaeldom, many of the strong Scottish institutions were based in the cities. Among the proclivities that Gaels had was that they did not build cities, therefore we do not have cities in the Highlands and Islands, and so we do not have the institutions that go with cities. Therefore Gaels usually—myself included—found ourselves within the large institutions in the cities, be they universities, broadcasting institutions such as the BBC, and so on.

In many ways we have tried to build up a new infrastructure. The local authority in the islands is a good example of that. It linked with the BBC and co-funded the first local Gaelic radio station, which was set up here in the Western Isles in the days when Alastair Hetherington was the controller of BBC Scotland. That epitomises the kind of development that has been attempted.

As to the location of such things as broadcasting—whether they should be in Glasgow or the Western Isles—if we were in Norway, we would not spend much time asking whether such things should be in Oslo or in rural areas.

That opens up the question of how the Scottish Parliament examines rural development and development in the Highlands and Islands. The Highlands are different. That difference adds to Scottish life, which is also the case with Gaelic and Gaelic broadcasting. Some people in Scotland are perplexed by Gaelic and they are perplexed and annoyed that we Gaels are still here. At times the racial abuse that we get from fellow Scots is perplexing and hurtful; that situation must give the committee members pause for thought. However, the Highlander is different; he has been different in the past and I hope that he will continue to be different in future. His language is one of the Highlander's characteristics, as are his history and his place.

I was urged to come to speak to the committee today by Michael Russell—he thought that I was not going to come forward—and I offered reluctantly to come. I need the committee's help to find out what is the motivation behind its inquiry, because that will help me to answer members' questions. Is the inquiry the result of strong feelings of members' constituents? Will it examine the anomalies and shortcomings of the

Broadcasting Act 1990 and how they have made that act difficult to apply? Is the inquiry primarily examining whether the body that has been implementing the act has been effective?

Although broadcasting is reserved to Westminster, Westminster has hardly had a mention, nor has the communications bill been mentioned. If the law remains as it is, any constitutional changes will have to be made at Westminster. I hope that Gaelic will be considered at Westminster as part of consideration of the communications bill. I hope that the recommendations of the Milne report and the committee's recommendations, if they are sent to Westminster, will also be considered.

My impression from the debate this afternoon is that it would be ironic if we risked Westminster seeing this initiative as an attempt to devolve broadcasting and to create a tartan channel that has Gaelic as a part of it during the evenings. We must be careful about that. I will take questions now from committee members, having made those random comments.

The Convener: I thank Dr MacLeod for his comments.

The committee's role, in my own view, is to look at the devolved responsibilities of education, culture and sport. We must work in conjunction with our colleagues at Westminster as they look at their responsibilities, which include broadcasting.

Dr MacLeod has a long history of involvement in education. What impact would the establishment of Gaelic television and a dedicated channel, if that was the way that we were to proceed, have on education? Would the impact be positive and what lessons can we learn from the past?

Dr MacLeod: Education has been around for a long time. Gaelic-medium education has not. It is more recent and it must be nurtured in every possible way. The question must be asked, "In what Gaelic society do the youngsters who are going through Gaelic-medium education live?" We must also ask, "How do they use Gaelic?" and, "What use will Gaelic be to them?" I often think of children in Dunfermline, or wherever, who are learning Gaelic. In those places, the challenge is to make that learning meaningful and purposeful. The challenge is also to motivate them to learn and to use Gaelic. Gaelic literature and Gaelic history would enrich those youngsters' education. However, on-going Gaelic broadcasting would enrich them most of all. Broadcasting is the bread and butter of contemporary life—it is even more generic a medium than is formal education.

The Convener: Do you believe that CCG has helped Gaelic-medium education?

Dr MacLeod: Yes. You have had quite a bit of

evidence of that and more could be said. The prime example is a series called "Speaking our Language", which became very well known throughout Scotland. It had a lot of interest and generated many classes. It was a great beginning, but so many of those initiatives are just beginnings. It is sustained development that is so expensive and needs an infrastructure and good will to support it. To the extent that it could, CCG has provided a great help for education. The evidence of those researching such matters backs that up.

16:30

Michael Russell: I would like to say how much I enjoyed what you described as "random comments"—they were very much to the point. The purpose of our inquiry is to support and encourage the further development of Gaelic broadcasting and to do so by engaging the Scottish Parliament with the issue. It is not just a broadcasting issue. Broadcasting is a reserved matter and is therefore not something on which we can make decisions. However, we must engage with broadcasting as a matter of considerable interest both in Gaelic and within the cultural life of Scotland.

I remember that before the Parliament was set up you said to me that you hoped that it would engage with the Gaelic community in Scotland. We must engage with the community through a very honest assessment of the achievements and possibilities that exist. That is a refreshing thing to do. The Education, Culture and Sport Committee is broadening its knowledge and experience by engaging in honest debate on such issues.

There have been achievements in Gaelic television over the past 10 years—you have been involved with it longer than that—using the structure that we have at the moment. What are the difficulties and failings of that structure and how should we move forward to engage not just the people in the room, most of whom would be immensely supportive of moving to a channel however it was configured—that is something that we can argue about—but the rest of Scotland?

Dr MacLeod: I have been involved in broadcasting and giving evidence on it for many years. The first committee to which I gave evidence was the Crawford committee in the 1970s. We have been through the same thing with the Annan reports and with every other group that has considered the problem and tried to solve it.

Michael Russell: Some groups have made contributions.

Dr MacLeod: Yes, they have. Calum MacDonald set up the task force, which has reported. The delivery of its report has been

arranged to coincide with the broadcasting legislation. After such a remarkable election result, we hope that the Government will go ahead and implement that.

Michael Russell: Are you saying that the Education, Culture and Sport Committee and the Scottish Parliament should have no legitimate role or not take part in legitimate discussion of the matter? I find that surprising.

Dr MacLeod: I have not said that.

Michael Russell: You were edging towards it. Perhaps you would like to edge away?

Dr MacLeod: What I edge towards is for me to say. I did not edge towards that at all. I welcome the committee and I am very pleased that you are here.

At the moment, for whatever reason, the money that supports Gaelic broadcasting is lodged in Edinburgh. That is not part of normal UK broadcasting provision. Given that broadcasting is a reserved power, I suggest that it is an anomaly that the money is placed in Edinburgh. It is no accident that broadcasting is a reserved matter. It is seen as a crucial and important mechanism.

Michael Russell: Indeed, we have been engaged in that debate for a long time.

Dr MacLeod: Yes, we have, and it is important to recognise that this is a language initiative—for Gaelic and for Gaels. How to sustain service within that provision will be up for discussion. However, it must never be seen that the tail is wagging the dog and that we are getting the money for the sustaining service and that Gaelic comes as a small part of that.

Michael Russell: I entirely agree.

Dr MacLeod: I am very pleased that you agree.

Michael Russell: I am delighted that I agree with you.

Let us focus on the question that I asked you and look at the mechanism by which we move forward. There is a discussion about the practical way in which broadcasting and Gaelic are interfaced. I asked you for some of the highlights and some of the structural difficulties that you have experienced in the past 10 years. Can you outline those?

Dr MacLeod: Gaelic society has many lacks and shortcomings. An education service that deals with the community and is a wide community service—which is and has been close to my heart and yours—can be very effective, as can journalism and a building up of awareness of what is happening. Again, the issue is about infrastructure and which parts of Gaelic society are strongly developed and which are not.

A new mechanism came in 10 years ago that was already strange in shape and funding, and already hobbled—the organisation cannot schedule, broadcast or commission. It is amazing that it has functioned at all. We should have pause for thought. It has had to deal with structural shortcomings in all sorts of ways. Funding has declined in real terms. It could be said that it has very little going for it. However, out of that, it has evolved a range of programming—not a service, but perhaps an incipient service—as best it could, given that it had to deal with major broadcasters with their own interests and try to nurture as best it could an independent sector. Were it a stronger, larger organisation, it could have had a wing that was concerned with nurturing the independent sector. That would have helped the independent sector more. However, that was not feasible, given the lopsided organisation that has been run.

Michael Russell: There is a debate as to whether that was feasible. Structures elsewhere encouraged that to happen and it may not be too late for it to happen.

What is the next stage in encouraging a diversity of input towards what takes place under the current arrangements or what may evolve through the digital revolution?

Dr MacLeod: The transitional stage towards digital is crucial. The Milne committee spent a lot of time considering that and trying to understand what to do as we move towards digital and, I hope, a full channel. In the meantime, what can be done? Can extra funding be made available in the short term? If so, that would have to be done as the situation is at the moment rather than from a declining fund.

The CCG is the main body that is planning and considering how broadcasting progresses in the short term. Some of the steps that it takes in trying to build up the infrastructure may seem perplexing. The committee has questioned some of those steps very hard this afternoon. That is fine, but those are the sort of steps that are necessary in the medium term to strengthen the infrastructure.

Michael Russell: There is a debate as to whether those steps are necessary. That is the point of the questioning. There are arguments on both sides. We have to accept that the argument about how things develop is a positive sign that the Scottish Parliament and others are engaging with this extremely important issue.

Dr MacLeod: You sound very defensive, Mr Russell.

Michael Russell: I do not think that I sound defensive. The implication that in some sense there is no other way of doing things worries me. That is a very determinist way of looking at the world.

Dr MacLeod: The CCG is oriented to problem solving, developing things and bringing things forward. That is part of its work. I hope that its work will be not to keep the status quo in place, but to be innovative. That is its task. To work with it and for bodies such as Parliament to work with it is very welcome.

Mr McAveety: For once, I will try to make things more mellow than they have been in the past two or three minutes.

Dr MacLeod: What a pity.

Mr McAveety: You asked earlier why we were here.

Dr MacLeod: Yes, but in a generous way.

Mr McAveety: I accept that—and the answer, without being too complex about it, is because it matters. That may sound trite, but that is why we are here. Those of us who perhaps have not had this level of exposure to the Gaelic language—or to other minority languages and cultures—can welcome that exposure. In my constituency, Irish traditional culture is developing. Scots-born people are trying to redefine and remember their roots, but they are doing so within modern Scotland and therefore getting the best of both worlds.

In your submission, Dr MacLeod, you say that the CCG has had an important role and that its

“main task is to audit its present skills, resources, achievements and vision and harness these so as to inform and facilitate the significant developments that are necessary if an adequately funded digital Gaelic television service is to be put in place.”

However, the most intriguing sentence is your final one:

“If the Scottish Executive were to add its informed political will to the task that has to be achieved ... via Westminster, this could be of considerable significance”.

I participated briefly in the Scottish Executive, and may or may not have aspirations ever to participate in future. What lessons would you give me that might help me to impress the next time that I am in front of Mr McLeish with a curriculum vitae? *[Laughter.]*

Dr MacLeod: Everything that I have said about the role of Gaeldom in modern Scotland. Here we are, building up a strong infrastructure to enrich the picture of Scotland. People should not hide others away and say, “Oh, those are the Gaels, up in a little corner by themselves.” Economic necessity, if nothing else, has made the Gaels outward-going—like the Irish that you mentioned—in order to play a full part in Scottish life and in Scottish city life, as you know very well.

The developing of a service can strengthen a strand of Scottish life. That will help a renewed Scotland, when talking to itself or to an outside

audience, to do so with confidence and vigour. Young Gaels should be enabled so that they feel that they can take part in modern Scotland. The lack of opportunity and the lack of a tendency among Gaels to take part in wider Scottish political life interest me greatly; indeed, some television programmes made at the time of devolution were actually called “Where are the Gaels?”

To answer your question, broadcasting, education and everything to do with them have to be a vital force in Scottish life and beyond. I hope that Mr McLeish would like that, but I cannot say.

The Convener: Thank you very much for the evidence that you have given. A number of Gaels in the Parliament are pushing very strongly for Gaelic to be included—not least your own MSP, Alasdair Morrison. I thank everyone who has given evidence this afternoon. In particular, I thank Màiri Anna Dhòmhnaillach and Doileag NicIòid for their help with the interpretation to us non-Gaels. *[Applause.]*

This has been a very worthwhile experience. Among those of us with less knowledge than our colleague Mr Russell of the issues around Gaelic broadcasting, it has helped to raise awareness of the feelings of the people in the communities that are directly affected. Bringing the Parliament to Stornoway has helped us to get a flavour of the views that are out there. We will take further evidence on the issue next week in Edinburgh. I hope that all of you have found this meeting useful in advancing the issues that matter to you.

I would also like to thank the members of the public who have come along. I understand that it was a sell-out and that ticket touts were outside offering tickets at very reduced prices. A number of groups from schools in the Western Isles also came along. It is very valuable that those young people had a chance to come along to the Parliament. That is what I feel the Parliament is all about. If the political process is to engage with children, they must be able to participate. This has been a welcome step forward.

Meeting closed at 16:44.

National Stadium

The Convener: Item 2 on our agenda is consideration of the report on our national stadium inquiry. If we require to hold an additional meeting to discuss our report, do members agree that we should hold that meeting in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

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