

# **EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE**

Monday 18 June 2001  
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

£5.00

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## **EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE**

### **19<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2001, Session 1**

#### **CONVENER**

\*Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

#### **DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

#### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

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

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

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP)

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

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

\*attended

#### **WITNESSES**

Raibeart Barrach (Comunn na Gàidhlig)

Anton Colella (Scottish Qualifications Authority)

Donald Emslie (SMG Television)

Neil Fraser (Broadcasting Consultant)

Dennis Gunning (Scottish Qualifications Authority)

Kris Jones (Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television, Scotland)

Mark Leishman (BBC Scotland)

Allan MacDonald (Media nan Eilean Television)

Rhoda Macdonald (SMG Television)

Billy MacIntyre (Scottish Qualifications Authority)

Donalda NicFhionghuin (BBC Scotland)

Ken McQuarrie (BBC Scotland)

Dòmhnall Màrtainn (Comunn na Gàidhlig)

Bill Morton (Scottish Qualifications Authority)

Brian Naylor (Scottish Qualifications Authority)

Margaret Scott (Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television, Scotland)

Derrick Thomson (Grampian Television)

#### **CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Martin Verity

#### **SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK**

Judith Evans

#### **ASSISTANT CLERK**

Ian Cowan

#### **LOCATION**

Committee Room 1



## Scottish Parliament

### Education, Culture and Sport Committee

Monday 18 June 2001

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER opened the meeting at 13:07]

### Item in Private

**The Convener (Karen Gillon):** I convene this meeting of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. Do members agree to discuss item 2 on the agenda—lines of questioning for witnesses—in private?

**Members** indicated agreement.

13:07

*Meeting continued in private.*

13:20

*Meeting continued in public.*

## Scottish Qualifications Authority

**The Convener:** Good afternoon. I welcome members of the public and representatives of the Scottish Qualifications Authority to this meeting of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. I ask everyone present to ensure that all mobile telephones and pagers are turned off—that applies especially to members of the committee.

We will now take evidence from the SQA on progress to date and on the steps that are being taken to ensure the successful delivery of the 2001 examination diet. Members have received a paper that was submitted by the SQA. I ask Bill Morton to make a brief opening statement.

**Bill Morton (Scottish Qualifications Authority):** Good afternoon. As before, we have submitted information that provides an update on issues that we regard as important. If it suits the committee, I am happy to take questions straight away.

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

**Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** Will you begin by reporting on the diet 2000 clear-up, so that we can get that out of the road and move on to other matters?

**Bill Morton:** As members know, that process is taking longer than anybody would like. Although there are still one or two outstanding issues to do with the delivery of certificates, all queries for school candidates have been resolved. We are still working on some outstanding issues that relate to college-based candidates. Those are tied into the data match and the reconciliation of duplicate candidate numbers.

**Ian Jenkins:** Will you be able to say any time now that the 2000 diet is done and dusted and that we need to move on?

**Bill Morton:** We could say that now, as far as school candidates are concerned. We have been keen to ensure that any concerns that have been raised by a school or college on behalf of a candidate are addressed; we have not turned them away.

**Ian Jenkins:** When we met in Dalkeith, I raised with you a case that involved a late appeal. I do not want to go into the details of that case, but I understand that other people have made similar queries.

**Bill Morton:** We are looking into the case that you raised with us.

**Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I wrote to you about another case involving pupils in Ullapool, which was drawn to my attention on a visit to their school. They received their results too late to take advantage of the appeals process or even of the independent appeals review. What are you doing to tackle specifically those cases, and how many such cases are there?

**Bill Morton:** We are examining the case to which Michael Russell refers and obtaining appropriate evidence from the examination centre concerned. I do not know in exactly how many cases certification has not yet taken place, but they are embraced within the statement that all outstanding cases have been resolved, one way or another.

**Michael Russell:** With the greatest respect, the SQA's first response in the Ullapool case was to say that nothing could be done. Only the persistence of the school's head teacher—who believed that it was unjust that a group of pupils should be treated in that way—produced a slight change of heart. The exams that those pupils sat took place more than a year ago. What will they get, when will they get it and when—as Mr Jenkins asked—will a line be drawn under the 2000 diet?

**Bill Morton:** A line has been drawn under the 2000 diet. If outstanding cases are brought to my attention by the committee, by members of the Scottish Parliament, by schools or by account managers, I will consider them. Where I judge that a case needs to be examined in more detail, I will do that. As far as I am concerned, the 2000 exercise—which I concede has taken too long to complete—is over.

**Michael Russell:** A line may have been drawn under the 2000 diet, but what will happen to pupils whose appeal could not be heard because they received their results too late? Will those appeals be considered as part of the independent process or as part of another process? How will they be considered?

**Bill Morton:** I am not sure what Mike Russell means when he says that the results were received too late. In many instances the position would, from the statement of results, be clear to the examination centre involved. If there were an outstanding issue to be resolved, that would be subject to an independent review, as part of the appeals process. I am happy to consider any outstanding cases.

**Michael Russell:** That does not deal with the case to which I referred in my original question. The examination centre is deeply concerned about that case. If it is impossible for you to give an answer today, we must have it promptly and in writing after this meeting. I wrote to you some weeks ago about this matter. I am talking about

pupils who feel dissatisfied, whose centre is dissatisfied, whose parents are dissatisfied and who have been disadvantaged by the system because they only learned their results long after the appeals process had ended. What will happen to those young people?

**Bill Morton:** I am happy to respond in writing on that specific case and on any other case. I concede that we may not have achieved closure of such cases to the full satisfaction of those who are involved. However, we have done what we can to resolve such cases and are drawing a line under the 2000 diet.

**The Convener:** The member can take up the case with Mr Morton after this meeting.

**Bill Morton:** I will be happy to deal with it.

**Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** One of the major issues that was raised in our previous discussion was the situation in relation to markers. You assured us that work was being done to recruit new markers. During our visits to Dalkeith and Glasgow, we were given some indication of the increase in the number of markers. However, I am concerned that markers will still have to mark double batches of scripts. Do you see that changing in the future? Last year people were required to mark far more scripts than previously. Are markers still doubling up?

**Bill Morton:** We have a record number of statistics to describe this year's diet. They include the fact that this year we had to make nearly 20,000 appointments. Those range from examination setters, principal assessors and invigilators through to the markers. I thank schools, colleges and individual markers for their co-operation in that exercise. We are confident that the entire marking requirement has been identified and that the marking need will be met, using any contingency that might be required. If, for some reason, markers who have been assigned an allocation are unable to take it up, a series of measures can be implemented. One might be to ask the existing marking team to take on an additional allocation. If members would like more detail on that, my colleague Brian Naylor can provide it.

**Cathy Peattie:** In discussions that we have had in schools, we have heard that schools are having to free up staff to do additional marking. I understand that there were issues that needed to be addressed, but is that how the system will continue to work in future? If not, how will the problems be overcome?

**Bill Morton:** I apologise for not addressing that specific point. Brian Naylor will provide members with a chronology of the various measures that can be triggered to ensure that the full marking need is properly met.

This year we started the process as quickly as possible. We could have redesigned elements of it, delayed its start or risked the full complement not being in place. We decided to improve the efficiency of the management of the established system. That was rather a challenging task, because it involved securing 20,000 appointments. I am sure that the committee understands that that is difficult to do annually. Now that the process has reached conclusion—albeit recruitment will continue until the date of the turnaround—we have a review under way to ensure that all the lessons that have been learned and all the improvements that are in place can be built on.

13:30

**Brian Naylor (Scottish Qualifications Authority):** We have introduced a time line for the recruitment process for each subject. We continue to recruit markers until just before the markers meeting takes place. At the same time, we consider reallocating scripts to markers who may not have had the size of allocation that they expected.

We have worked with the national exams coordinator and volunteers who have approached us on the possibility of their marking a second allocation, which is the point in which Cathy Peattie is interested. That process has been successful and has helped us. We have received a good number of volunteers. We have not been able to use them all, because sometimes we have filled the subject requirements through the normal process. The process continues for a few days after a markers meeting. If a gap remains, a series of contingency measures will be used. For example, as Bill Morton said a minute ago, if only a small number of scripts remain outstanding, the examination team will pick them up. That is a normal process; there is nothing unusual in that. If a shortage remains, we will work with the principal assessors to identify other existing markers who can help out. That is the expected way of proceeding.

In our submission, we said that we would try to give the committee an update today. The figures that the committee received related to close of play on Thursday, which was only one working day ago. I think that we gave a figure of 93. By this morning, that figure had fallen to 55. When I left Dalkeith, 23 names were in the pipeline, so we are well on the way to clearing the outstanding numbers in the next few days.

Bill Morton talked about the possibility of a review. We have set that in place. We will want to consider the process from top to bottom and to leave no part of it unexamined. In any case, I think that annual consideration of the system should be a normal process. We want to consider whether

we could have slightly longer contracts, for instance, for some of the better quality markers. I do not know what the implications of that would be, but we should examine such matters. We need to examine our software, to ensure that it is easy to use and that if new staff are drafted in, it will be easy for them to pick up with a small amount of training. We also want to consider the flows of information in and out of the appointments unit, to ensure that the system has no glitches. We will want to have a pretty good look at all such matters in the next few weeks, to ensure that the system is as efficient as possible.

**Dennis Gunning (Scottish Qualifications Authority):** Another factor in deciding how many markers are needed is the time that the markers have to mark in. The shorter the time, the more markers are needed. We hope that the change in next year's exam timetable, as proposed, will give us a marking period that is a little bit longer. That should reduce the number of markers needed or the size of allocations.

**Cathy Peattie:** A lay person might assume that the SQA could plan the number of markers that it will need. The SQA knows roughly how many young people are taking exams, so it seems quite odd to hear you talking about recruiting more people if they are required, and saying that you are still trying to employ more people and that people are volunteering. I would like to hear, for the future, that people know exactly—or as near as possible—what is expected, and can plan for that. Are you anywhere near to that position? Is that what Mr Gunning is saying that the plan is?

**Bill Morton:** The planning exercise improves year on year, as it must do. This is a record year: we have a record number of exams, a record number of papers and therefore a record number of appointments. As I tried to explain when I gave evidence previously, the process is dynamic and varies according to the number of entries, which can change, and across the levels of courses. Some subjects are more complex to mark than others. Although we can plan at the high level, we must ensure that flexibility is built in. That is where the co-operation and support of the qualified and experienced teachers and lecturers who are involved in the process come into play.

**Cathy Peattie:** You are building on the good will of lecturers and teachers in our schools and colleges. I assume that you are aware that that good will needs to stay, but I think that those people feel fairly disillusioned—they certainly felt that last year. I still feel that there is an expectation that they will continue to show good will towards the success of our exams system. Does that exploit them a bit?

**Bill Morton:** That is a good question. I do not think that we could say that last year was the best

experience for markers, or that it is anything other than presumptuous to suggest that that good will could be restored in one year. We are grateful for the commitment from those who are willing to mark and who have come forward. Lessons can be learned about how to do things better. We have said that it may take three years to put in place the improvements to the process, across the board, that are sustainable and that we would all like. Some of those are small steps down the line, on the basis of one year.

I would have liked to adopt a more wide-ranging review last year of how we approach matters, but that would have been too risky. It was more important to start the process, as we did, in October, than to review it then start in December. That would have been dangerous.

**Brian Naylor:** The review will consider the flow of information to teachers, training and other such issues, because, as Cathy Peattie is right to say, we depend on teachers' good will. It is important that we do our bit to ensure that teachers are kept properly informed. That will be an integral part of the review.

**The Convener:** Where are the gaps? Are some subjects still causing problems or are the problems across the board?

**Brian Naylor:** The gaps are not across the board if we take into account the concept of the examination team. For example, with English last week, we cleared the position, but then one or two markers returned their scripts, which reopened the gap. If a gap exists when the examination team kicks into place, the team will pick up those one or two subjects. When I left Dalkeith this morning, we thought that there might be difficulty with only two subjects—computing and business management—and we are in the process of addressing that.

I described the progress that we made between Thursday evening and this morning. I could also show that with office and information studies. On Thursday evening, that subject had the biggest gap—16 allocations were outstanding—but by this morning, that figure had fallen to two. We concentrated on that subject because it had the biggest gap. Today and tomorrow, we will consider business management and computing.

**The Convener:** Is there a specific reason why those subjects are falling short on markers?

**Brian Naylor:** I am not sure whether I have the experience to say what the reason is. I understand that those subjects are newer and that it may have been more difficult to obtain markers.

**Bill Morton:** That is a generally a factor, but I would not offer that up as the sole reason.

**Dennis Gunning:** I will return to Cathy Peattie's question about planning. Another factor is that in the past two years, it has been difficult to predict the uptake of intermediate 1 and 2 courses. Highers are predictable and standard grades are reasonably predictable, but implementing intermediate 1 and 2 was optional for schools, which have generally implemented those courses in bigger numbers than we had expected. It will probably take a further couple of years before numbers stabilise at levels that will remain steady.

**The Convener:** I call Brian Monteith.

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** So extensive were Cathy Peattie's questions that they have covered my points.

**Ian Jenkins:** What is the number and proportion of new markers? How will quality control be exercised over them and over volunteers who have become involved later? How are you monitoring the quality of marking and preparation?

**Bill Morton:** I am aware that concerns were expressed last year when a small number of inexperienced markers were involved in the main diet—if my memory serves me correctly, the figure was 11 from a total of 7,000-plus markers. The quality assurance process has been applied rigorously, so that at least three years' teaching experience of presenting the subject that is to be marked is a prerequisite of marking. That may mean that some individuals are marking for the first time, but it does not mean that they are not experienced teachers or lecturers. We have taken quality assurance seriously. There has been no complacency about it.

**Ian Jenkins:** Have all markers attended markers meetings?

**Bill Morton:** If a marker fails to attend a markers meeting and is needed, the fallback option is that the principal assessor for that subject goes into a one to one, or a face-to-face detailed briefing, with the marker to ensure that nothing is missed. Although there are lessons to be learned in the administration of markers meetings, perhaps given the scale of this year's diet, those lessons are pointed, as they are evident. The markers meeting programme is now complete. By and large, it was completed successfully.

**The Convener:** I want to ask about data management and the reports that have been issued to schools about candidates who are missing entries or results. Is a significant number of individuals or cases involved? How has the situation changed since March, when you sent out the initial letters?

**Bill Morton:** I will preface our answer, then pass on the question to my colleague Billy MacIntyre. Members will recall from our previous



appearances before the committee that it is important that we put in place checks and balances, so that centres that present candidates have a means of assurance that the data are complete and accurate. I am concerned that that may have led to additional work-load pressures on centres this year. Centres have approached that task constructively, because it ensures that candidates' interests are best served. Billy MacIntyre will update you on the data and put the situation in context for the committee.

**Billy MacIntyre (Scottish Qualifications Authority):** We have issued two reports to centres in the past week. One report covered courses for which the entry was not complete—the most normal position being that we had received an entry for the external assessment and perhaps two of the three units that would be required for a candidate to complete a course. We highlighted those courses for which the third unit was missing from our records. There were 13,107 such entries on 11 June.

The feedback from our account managers is that the majority of such records appear to relate to candidates who had been following the diet, but left their courses at Christmas. Centres had not withdrawn the relevant entries for those people before their exams, to avoid candidates eventually sitting an exam from which they had been withdrawn. That should account for the vast proportion of that number.

The other report is perhaps more important in relation to results. It covers courses that require units, for which we have received all the requisite entries but have identified that a result of fail or defer has been received for one or more units in that course, or that a result for a unit or units is missing. On 11 June, there were 39,221 such courses in total in the report. Within that, we would expect a level of ineligible courses, because, in every year, there are candidates whose results for units are fail or defer. A total of about 58,000 results were missing, but since that date, a significant number of results have been received from the centres.

I had hoped that I could provide an update for the committee today, but the reports take some time to run. They were being run overnight last night and I did not have time before the meeting to assimilate the information. I would be happy to give the committee an update within the next few days when the information becomes available. Based on what I know the throughput of results to have been, I expect the number of missing results to come down. It will come down further prior to Wednesday and Thursday of this week, when we intend to rerun the reports and reissue them to schools and colleges so that, prior to breaking up for the summer, they know exactly what changes

we have made compared with the initial reports that we issued on 11 June.

13:45

**The Convener:** What will be the cut-off date for that process prior to certification?

**Billy MacIntyre:** The deadline for the submission of unit results was 31 May, but we continue to receive and process results. We issued the reports with the intention of flushing out any remaining problems to do with data that still had to be submitted. We will, as I said, reissue those reports to centres, probably to be received by Monday or Tuesday of next week.

If there are any remaining issues thereafter, we will process any data that we receive. The volume will be so small that it will not be difficult for us to process the data.

**The Convener:** I take it that there are nominated individuals in each school who, if there are problems after the schools break up, can be contacted and will be the point of reference for any anomalies that exist.

**Billy MacIntyre:** When we identify the anomalies, it would be for the centre to contact us. If we do not know about an anomaly or something that requires to be corrected, we can do nothing about it. The opportunity exists for the centres to highlight any problems that remain with any candidates whom we have highlighted as potentially problematic and for the centres to come back to us.

That is the purpose of the final closure reports. They show, based on the data that we have received and processed, the position as it stands as close to the end of June as we can make it. They allow a little bit of extra time to flush out any remaining problems.

**The Convener:** Is that process additional to what you did last year?

**Billy MacIntyre:** There are three eligibility reports in the process. One was issued in April, one was issued on 11 June and the remaining one will be issued next week. No such reports were issued last year; the process did not exist. At the end of June last year, schools did not know for which candidates data were potentially missing within our system. This year, we are telling schools twice, at relevant points in June, what is missing according to our records, so that the opportunity exists to correct any remaining omissions.

**Bill Morton:** The education authorities have also made provision for a recognised contact should there be any continued iteration of data checking after the schools break up. That answers

your previous question.

**Michael Russell:** I must express a little alarm with what you have told us, Mr MacIntyre. There is something eerily familiar about hearing that, three weeks after a deadline, there are 58,000 missing pieces of data or errors and that the reports that are going to the schools are going two days before the schools break up. I am sure that you believe that the systems are all in place, but you will forgive me for saying that, this time last year, had we been asking people from the SQA for an account of what was happening, they would have told us that the number of errors was going down and that errors were to be expected in the system—all the same things that you have been saying. What is the difference this year from last year? The rhetoric appears very much the same.

**Bill Morton:** Before Billy MacIntyre answers that question, I state that one fundamental difference between this year and last year is that we have management information, so the information that we are providing is factual. Last year, I do not think that the SQA or the centres knew exactly what data were in the system and what condition they were in.

That is the reason for having the eligibility reports. The process is centred not just on one report that goes out at the end of June. A sequence of reports has been issued through April, May and June. There will also be a closure report. In effect, there are three opportunities to ensure that everybody is content that the data that we hold on behalf of the candidates are complete and accurate.

**Michael Russell:** That is a useful difference and I am glad that you have pointed it out. However, you must accept that it is worrying for lay people who have been involved in the situation and are concerned about it to hear references to missing deadlines, errors in data and reports going to schools when schools are hardly in a position to cope with them.

**Billy MacIntyre:** The reports that allow centres to identify any problems in the data were sent at the beginning of last week. Centres have been taking action on the basis of those reports. The report that will be issued at the end of this week will reflect any data that we have received in response to the first reports in June. Schools can be assured that we have done what they expected with the data that they have submitted to us. The report will be received late in schools, but it is a closure report. The reports that allowed schools to take action to correct any remaining anomalies or omissions were issued at the beginning of last week.

**The Convener:** How different from what happened last year does Anton Colella, whose

background is in the schools system, consider the situation to be? Is it better this year?

**Anton Colella (Scottish Qualifications Authority):** I appreciate Mr Russell's concerns. From an outside perspective, it must be concerning to hear about missing data or an eligibility check and to hear about large numbers. In fairness—I speak from the position of an active centre—the centres are in a position to say clearly that they know the state of play with their candidates and with the data that they hold and have transferred to the SQA, and which the SQA can confirm and they can check. The centres were unable to do that last year. That should greatly reassure the committee—and the public in general—that every effort has been made by the SQA and by SQA co-ordinators, who have pored over the data to check that they are being good stewards of the data that they hold. The committee can be reassured by that.

The schools' perspective is that we are running to the wire. A report is coming out next week and schools are thinking about breaking up next Friday. The report is probably the last thing that teachers want to have on their desks, but there is recognition that the report confirms the accuracy of the data. Even up to the last day, if an SQA co-ordinator has concerns about the accuracy of the data, they can contact the SQA to clear them up. That is very reassuring.

**Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab):** What factors contribute to the anomaly in the figures? The report will go to the schools next week. The youngsters will disappear for the summer, and trying to get hold of them over that period might be difficult. What factors have caused such an amount of data to go missing? Do the data go missing at school level or when passing through the SQA and back again? Are the data still knocking about in some sort of Bermuda triangle?

**Billy MacIntyre:** I will put the figures into perspective. The overall volume of results that we would expect for schools is more than 800,000 units. We are down to about 37,500. We knew at the outset that there were some schools where the teaching and completion of units would go into June. The report that we issued on 11 June was based on the results that we had received up to 31 May and a few days into June. However, we always knew that we would receive some results in June.

That such a volume is outstanding should not be particular cause for concern or alarm. I expect that the volume will already have come down significantly. Unfortunately, I do not have the data with which to update the committee today, but I will certainly provide it to the committee in the next few days to show how the position has changed in

the course of a week.

**Mr McAveety:** I recognise that. Language matters in the debate. If, when you shared the information with us, we had known the context—that a percentage of results is always expected to be received in June and that most of what is missing will be addressed through the completion of modules or parts of the course by the end of June—perhaps the concern that we have expressed in our questions might not have arisen. It would have been useful to have had that information.

What really interests me is, if new procedures are in place at school level, what difference will they make between now and 14 August, when certification takes place?

**Anton Colella:** We should note that the processes for administration of the national qualifications and administration at school level are evolving. They are still relatively new.

I will speak about my centre. We have candidates who leave at or after Christmas. They start a course and finish one or two units. The teachers wonder whether those candidates will come back for the exam and, as far as possible, do not want to put a full stop at that possibility. The exams finished only last week. Some staff have said things such as, “Let’s hold on. They may turn up for the exam. They may complete the unit. They may come in on 14 June. Jimmy will turn up and sit the final assessment.” There is a sense of keeping that possibility open all the time.

Schools will learn to administer that process better as they recognise that their holding open places for such candidates causes them more difficulty as they draw the process to a conclusion. My centre needs to examine its internal procedures and how it administers the process to ensure that we do not have problems with data at the end of a session.

**Bill Morton:** There is an issue with language. We had an interesting discussion about language the previous time that we were at the committee. A term such as “error” has a certain connotation. It is a data term. We are talking about anomalies that we are trying to resolve. For example, if a candidate has not been withdrawn but is not completing a course and is not presenting, ideally we would like to resolve that anomaly. Otherwise, that data would be outstanding and potentially an error. We would still need to reconcile such data with the centre.

**Billy MacIntyre:** As Bill Morton said, the language that is used can be emotive. The word “missing” can also be emotive. When I talked about the 58,000 unit results, I used the term “missing”, but for some or perhaps many of those, we will never receive a result because a result will

not be applicable. Those are entries for units for which we have not received a result. It is quite conceivable—indeed, normal—that no result will ever be received for those units because the candidate will never have gone through them.

**Mr McAveety:** So they are missing, presumed dead.

**Billy MacIntyre:** Essentially, yes.

**Cathy Peattie:** Frank!

**Mr McAveety:** I meant the units.

**Michael Russell:** Would the term “not yet complete” be a better one to use? Would that be a useful term to use so that you do not frighten the horses, still less the students—and still less the Education, Culture and Sport Committee?

**Bill Morton:** Absolutely. That would be useful.

**Anton Colella:** Last week, I spoke to two groups of SQA co-ordinators who had received the reports. For the most part, they knew the exact explanation for each instance of incomplete data. They were able to explain them straight away.

**Mr McAveety:** When they know that, what do they do and who do they talk to at the SQA to resolve the problem?

**Bill Morton:** The account managers for schools and colleges are closely associated with their SQA co-ordinators. For the most part, the data is not yet complete in small measure across the centres. The account managers work with their contacts in the centres to resolve such issues. That is another improvement in the process this year, which has paid dividends. That procedure was not available last year.

**Cathy Peattie:** It is vital to consider communications in the whole organisation. When we asked you some of the questions that the SQA trade union members who gave evidence to the committee had raised, we heard that you were meeting the trade unions and that you felt that things were moving positively. Can I have an update on that? What is the situation in relation to staffing and staffing input? If there are concerns about the 2001 diet, are they being listened to?

14:00

**Bill Morton:** Again, there is no scope for complacency. Communications will never be 100 per cent satisfactory. We have made all sorts of endeavours to get more information to individual members of staff. Recently, our communications manager initiated an all-user e-mail system—the SQA had not had one before. We had a staff forum, but it was a bit hit and miss as to whether the information got to its intended audience. There is much scope for improvement.

The dialogue with the trade unions has a regular format for joint exchange. Not long ago, the chairman and I met the trade unions informally in an open and constructive session.

Over the weekend, the press raised concerns about staff morale. Those stories were based on a report that was commissioned in recognition of the concerns of the trade unions and the management of the organisation about staff welfare. The report was based on a sample of 80 staff and was undertaken in January—it is almost six months out of date. We are making significant progress on many of the issues, including communications, how we cope with stress, occupational health needs and training and development issues. We have not resolved those issues but we are dealing with them.

**Cathy Peattie:** Reading the press comments at the weekend, I was concerned that we had heard about those issues before and had been assured that things were getting better. Were the comments the result of a leak or were they simply the report of a study that was undertaken in January?

**Bill Morton:** I understand that a copy of the report relating to the exercise that took place earlier in the year found its way into the hands of the media.

**Cathy Peattie:** Perhaps you should have an inquiry, too.

Communication with the centres is another area where there seemed to be problems. I had information that things were improving, but I would like to hear your view.

**Bill Morton:** There are good things and bad things in terms of the measure of change and improvements. As an organisation, we are probably guilty of bombarding centres with correspondence, instruction and advice. We are perhaps not as good as we should be at differentiating between the various categories of information. The work of the SQA co-ordinators is critical—they are the unsung heroes. I have seen some of the detail of the arrangement documents for some of the subjects and I would not want to wade my way through them. That is an area in which we should be much sharper. Perhaps in the fullness of time we can resolve those problems through the electronic communications that are accessible by the centres, either through the website or through some form of networked approach.

On the up side, the work of the school account managers and the college account managers has put a human face on the dialogue. Information is not given out in isolation, but explained so that people can work through it. Increasingly, that process operates as an exchange. It is a valuable

source of market intelligence for the SQA to which we may not have been open or responsive enough in the past. The “NQ Digest”, for example, which is in a readable format, provides the centres with topical and useful information and I understand from the feedback that it is well received.

We have also learned some important lessons about when and to whom to communicate. We sent out a circular to the candidates via the centres, just as the examination diet was about to get under way. That was important, as the candidates needed to know what preparations were being made. Building on that, we intend to communicate our carefully planned proposals for the operation of appeals this year. We have produced a leaflet explaining those; that leaflet will go out to teachers, candidates and their parents. It deals in plain English with the most frequently asked questions. We have also produced a digest that sets out simply what constitutes grounds for appeal and what evidence would be acceptable in support of an appeal. We have distilled the wodge of information that a teacher or SQA co-ordinator would have to go through at the moment if they wanted to find out those things. That communication process is under way now; it is not being left until later in the year.

**Cathy Peattie:** Are you confident that, on a particular date in August, when results come through folks' letterboxes, teachers will know what is happening, communication links between schools and the SQA will be in place, and an appropriate helpline will signpost people to the information that they seek?

**Bill Morton:** When we appeared before the committee in May, we mentioned the helplines, of which there are two kinds. Each candidate will receive with their certificate information explaining the candidate helpline. Given the volume of inquiries that we may have to deal with, we have contracted out that helpline. It will deal with fairly straightforward issues, such as explaining what the certificate means. It will also indicate to the candidate that concerns about more technical issues should be referred to their presenting centre. There will be two technical helplines through which the centre can raise queries with the SQA. The helpline for schools will be staffed by school account managers, so that when a school contacts the SQA they will be able to deal with someone with whom they are already familiar. That individual will have access to all the detailed information that is required.

Last year, the candidate helpline was in many instances staffed by volunteers from within the SQA. Occasionally, despite good intentions, wrong or misleading information was given out, which is counterproductive. This time we want to ensure that there is a graduated process. General

inquiries will be dealt with by the candidate helpline, while more detailed inquiries will be referred via the centre to the technical helplines—one for schools and one for colleges.

**Cathy Peattie:** Are you confident that they will all be in place at the right time?

**Bill Morton:** Yes, because they are being planned and prepared for now.

**Michael Russell:** I have a question for Dennis Gunning—the only witness who was working for the organisation this time last year. We have talked about communication and the culture of the organisation. What differences are there between the situation now and the situation last year? What remains to be done? I understand that you are leaving the organisation, so you are even more free to speak. You have the experience, so what has changed and what must still change?

**Dennis Gunning:** I could spend about two hours on that question, but I will try to be brief.

My first point has already been covered by Billy MacIntyre. The position that we are in and the knowledge that we have of the data in the system are hugely improved over last year, when there was too much guesswork and not enough hard management information. This year, we are working on hard management information—that is a huge improvement.

The second big change is that the business of managing the aftermath of the exam diet—the process of preparing for markers meetings and getting stuff through the system—has been much better prepared. That is the result of the generation of the action plan, which has been our bible, if you like, as we systematically worked our way through the issues.

The third big change is related to the second. This year, we have been systematically planning for contingencies in a way that did not happen last year. When something goes awry—as always happens in an operation of the scale of the SQA—we are much better prepared to deal with it and we have back-up systems in place.

You asked where we must still improve. As Bill Morton said, communication is an area in which we must still strike the right balance. An organisation that deals as much as we do with schools and colleges is inevitably going to send out a lot of information. Somehow, we must get the right balance between not overloading centres but nevertheless not stinting on information that the centres absolutely must get.

Linked to the question of balance is another area for improvement: we must ensure that the information that we put out reaches the right people. Although information from the SQA might reach the school co-ordinator or, beyond the co-

ordinator, the principal teacher, it must also reach every teacher in a particular subject. That is a difficult issue, because it touches on how internal communication works in all our centres.

However, all those issues are being dealt with better than they were last year. Improvements could still be made and next year I hope that we will be able to move the date of certification back to slightly earlier in August, where it used to be. We would prefer not to issue results as late as we are doing this year, but we were being cautious.

We could also improve the balance in the organisation's activities. This year, for obvious reasons, there has been a huge focus on national courses, but we also run a range of other qualifications, particularly for colleges and private training providers. We have not focused on that work this year, for understandable reasons. However, we must refocus on that work if we are to achieve the Executive's ambitions when it created the SQA.

**Michael Russell:** You have been in the organisation long enough to have lived with the plans for the winter diet, which are about to come to fruition. Many people are worried that that is an additional burden on an organisation that has had difficulties coping. What is your view?

**Dennis Gunning:** We are applying the same planning processes to the winter diet as we applied to this year's summer diet. The winter diet has therefore been planned for carefully. It should not involve an enormous resource, given that, as you know, the uptake is relatively limited. We are talking about seven examinations covering five subjects, which is not a huge task for us.

I should also set against that information the fact that the winter diet, and whether there should be one, was the subject of consultation. If I may paraphrase slightly, the general reaction from the further education sector to the consultation was a strong desire for the winter diet, which gives flexibility of timing. The reaction from schools was one of relative uninterest—their view was, "If FE wants it, that's fine. We are not particularly interested in it." The need for the diet was established through consultation; the decision to have it was supported by the Secretary of State for Scotland—I believe that the decision was made before the Scottish Executive's time. The arrangements that we put in place are based on a consultation that established that there had to be a minimum of 100 candidates for a subject to run, and the seven exams are running on that basis.

I guess that the winter diet might be of interest to some candidates in some schools. For example, some schools may have an interest in the winter diet as a resit diet—if a pupil has failed higher mathematics, they would have an opportunity to

resit that exam at Christmas. However, so far we do not have the hard data to back up my guess. We expect that most of the entries will come from colleges. If you were to ask me whether we should have embarked on the winter diet, my personal view would be that we must meet the needs of all our customers. If colleges say that there is a desperate need for flexibility in the system, because not all their candidates work to the annual August-to-June cycle, we must find a way of meeting that need.

I am no longer sure what the long term means as far as the SQA is concerned—or even as far as I am concerned—but if we are talking about four or five years ahead, the answer is to make greater use of information technology. IT will allow us at some point to have diets on demand instead of timed diets, and we have to move fairly quickly in that direction.

14:15

**Mr Monteith:** On an entirely different subject, will Bill Morton reassure me that the SQA is properly constituted? According to the Education (Scotland) Act 1996, there should be a minimum of 15 board members. From what I have seen on the SQA website and from what I can recall of the appointments, I can find only 12 at the moment. Is that correct, or have there been any further appointments since the initial announcement some months ago?

**Bill Morton:** That is a very good question. As far as I am concerned, the reconstituted interim board of the SQA is competent for our purposes. I am sure that, in the fullness of time, the Scottish Executive and the SQA board will address that issue.

**The Convener:** I am sure that Mr Monteith is aware that Mr Morton is an employee of the board, and is not responsible for the board itself. Perhaps Mr Monteith should take the matter up with the appropriate minister.

We have all been concerned about the FE sector, and I am glad to see that progress has been made. In your report, you say:

“By the end of week commencing 11 June, we will have written to centres specifying certification dates for candidates other than those for National Courses”.

Will you give us an indication of those dates so that people know when they are likely to receive their certificates?

**Bill Morton:** In essence, we would like to get back to the same level of service that we once offered the FE sector. My colleagues and I very much regret that we have fallen down on that. The certification happened four times a year. We have currently issued 32,270 certificates for group

awards—I was about to say almost 33,000, but I had better not exaggerate—and 71,000 free-standing units. That has been the product of a process involving a data match, which has taken an awful lot longer than we and the colleges would have liked. Furthermore, there has been a reconciliation of duplicate candidate numbers. I shall pass the question of certification dates to colleges to Dr Gunning.

**Dennis Gunning:** Bill Morton has been describing the process of clearing up 2000; the next thing is to move into 2001. College candidates who are completing national courses will be certificated on 13 August, along with all other national course candidates. For other qualifications, we want to move back to the position where a candidate who completes a group award such as an HNC or an HND will be certificated as soon as possible after the completion is confirmed. Those qualifications do not involve exams; as they are free-standing unit programmes, if you like, which cluster together into a group award, once the last unit result is in and our computer has confirmed the complete programme, we should be able to certificate. This year, in practice, for colleges and students who are not doing national courses, the likelihood is that certification will follow on from 13 August.

**Billy MacIntyre:** The certification of group awards will be done weekly. As a result, when a candidate completes a group award, their certificate will be issued to them at the next available weekly opportunity. For candidates sitting only free-standing units, it is intended that the majority of certificates will be issued in mid to late August after the certificates for the main diet of national courses are issued. There will be a period towards the end of July and into the beginning of August in which the weekly certification of group awards will be discontinued because of the requirement to process the significant volume of national course certificates. However, we are, broadly, moving back to weekly certification.

**The Convener:** I know that you do not like to talk in terms of guarantees, but can you give a guarantee to the FE sector that people will not still be waiting for certificates this time next year? That is simply unacceptable; it would not have been acceptable in the schools sector.

**Bill Morton:** To be honest, I am reluctant, given recent experience, to offer any guarantee. However, I can say that the process of improvement will continue. We cannot tolerate any further deterioration of the service that we have offered to that very important customer sector. The service is getting better just now and there are prospects for its getting very much better next year. It is important to note that the support, co-

operation and understanding that we have had from the colleges is being translated into positive energy in terms of working with the Association of Scottish Colleges to address all those issues in the immediate future. The basis of co-operation that that represents is valuable to us and will certainly help the SQA to respond better than we have done in the past year.

**Mr McAveety:** Last year, there was uncertainty about the way in which information seemed to be dragged out of the organisation when concerns were raised. Eventually, there was a massive discrepancy between the official statement of the SQA in the early stages of the process and what was eventually uncovered. What will be markedly different this time? Are you confident that everyone in the organisation will be focused on that and that they will not repeat some of the mistakes of last August?

**Bill Morton:** There are a number of issues tied up with openness. In fact, your question presents me with a valuable opportunity to raise a point that I wanted to make the committee aware of; I shall come to it in a moment.

The big difference this year is in management information, rather than management by guesswork, to use a term that was used earlier. In the nine months or so since last August, we have not all of a sudden become expert and 100 per cent confident that we have management systems in place to produce all the information that we need and that it is entirely robust. However, the system is very much better than it was and it continues to improve. The action plan and the diligence that has been applied to monitoring it are proof positive that that is the case.

Mr Russell asked Dennis Gunning what more still needs to be done. A great deal still needs to be done to improve the processes. Many of the processes that the staff have to use are intensive and demanding; they need to be made more efficient and less burdensome. You will be aware from the presentation that I gave to the committee on 1 November last year that we are changing the structures of the organisation.

Many of the ways in which people behave and need to work in the organisation also need to change. The staff who are going through that process have changed. The memory of last August's experience—painful though it was—is sharp in their minds. They are therefore particularly anxious about anything that may not be going according to plan, which is, in fact, a good fail-safe device in the organisation. That is the human component. I believe—although it is not fully the case—that the staff are more ready and willing to say, "We have a problem here. We need help and we need to address this."

There will still be instances in which people will keep their concerns quiet. We need to continue to work on that, so that staff are confident about raising problems. We can fix only what we know about, and we need to get better at that.

I wanted to raise an issue with the committee. We still need to get better at some of the process improvements, but our planning and monitoring systems allow us to track all those improvements. Last week saw the start of the pass mark meetings. Of the 20 that took place, we had to defer four, because we had not got all the data through the system quickly enough. That is not critical in itself, but we must ensure that adequate staffing is in place to check the scripts when they come back from the markers and that that information and the validation of the data go through quickly enough to meet our schedule. If we do not have good management information, staff would be concerned, as they might see something building up.

We need to be diligent. There is absolutely no scope for complacency. Issues will crop up from time to time and difficulties need to be overcome between now and 14 August. The progress that we have made and what has been achieved allow me not to give a guarantee, but to say to the committee and publicly that I believe that there are prospects of a successful certification on 14 August.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much. As there are no further questions, I wish you and your staff every success in delivering diet 2001. We hope that we will not need to see you after the recess unless for planning, progressing and improving the situation for Scottish students through the SQA. If you wish to inform the committee of any issues that come up, please correspond with me and I will ensure that the information is circulated to committee members.

**Bill Morton:** We will certainly do so.

14:26

*Meeting adjourned.*

14:38

*On resuming—*

## Gaelic Broadcasting

**The Convener:** We continue taking evidence for our Gaelic broadcasting inquiry. We have six sets of witnesses this afternoon. I begin by thanking our interpreters, Joan MacLeod and Johan Graham, for helping us.

Our first witnesses are from Comunn na Gàidhlig. Welcome to the committee. We have your written submissions, but you may want to make some introductory remarks before we ask questions.

**Dòmhnall Màrtainn (Comunn na Gàidhlig):** Tapadh leibhse, a neach-gairm agus tha sinn toilichte a bhith an seo. Taing dhuibhse mar chomataidh na Pàrlamaid airson a' chuiridh agus a' chothruim a thug sibh dhuinn tighinn a bhruidhinn air an fheasgar a tha seo. Tha sinn uabhasach fhèin toilichte gu bheil a' chomataidh a' toirt sùil air suidheachadh craoladh Gàidhlig agus tha sinn an dòchas gun soirbhich gu math leibh leis an sgrùdadh agaibh.

Is mise Dòmhnall Màrtainn 's tha mi nam cheannard-ionaid air Comunn na Gàidhlig. Tha mi air a bhith ag obair aig Comunn na Gàidhlig o chionn ceithir bliadhna. Thairis air na sia seachdainean a chaidh seachad, tha mi air a bhith os cionn a' bhuidhinn nuair a ghabh mi dreuchd Ceannaird bho Ailean Caimbeul, fhad 's a tha e air falbh ag obair dhan bhuidheann comhairleachaidh aig an Riaghaltas air Gàidhlig—am buidheann a tha fo stiùir an Ollaimh Dòmhnall Meek.

Còmhla rium, a' riochdachadh bòrd stiùiridh Chomunn na Gàidhlig, tha Raibeart Barrach. Tha e na bhall dhen bhòrd stiùiridh againn agus tha e cuideachd na neach-cathrach air buidheann-obrach inbhe thèarainte agus bha e gu mòr an urra ris na molaidhean a chaidh a chur air adhart chun an Riaghaltais airson dreach iùl airson bile Gàidhlig bho chionn dà bhliadhna air ais.

Mus tèid mi nas fhaid' air adhart, bu chòir dhomh cuideachd a dhèanamh follaiseach a bharrachd air an dreuchd anns a bheil mi ann an seo an-diugh, tha ùidh agam tro dhà dhreuchd eile ann an craoladh Gàidhlig. Tha mi a' smaoinèachadh gu bheil e iomchaidh gum bu chòir dhomh sin a dhèanamh follaiseach: anns a' chiad àite tha mi na mo bhall de Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig. Tha mi air a bhith na mo bhall airson trì bliadhna—tha bliadhna agam ri dhol anns an ùine seo. Tha mi cuideachd a' riochdachadh Comunn na Gàidhlig air urras Studio Alba, a tha an urra ris an togalach a chunnaic sibh

ann an Steòrnabhagh air an t-seachdain seo chaidh, agus tha mi na mo neach-cathrach air an urras a tha sin.

Bu mhath leam dìreach beagan iomraidh a thoirt dhuibh air Comunn na Gàidhlig fhèin, a chaidh a stèidheachadh bho chionn seachd bliadhna deug air ais airson a bhith a' co-òrdanachadh agus a' brosnachadh leasachaidhean Gàidhlig air feadh Alba. Tha sinn a' dèanamh sin fo roinn foghlaim, òigridh, cultar, leasachadh eaconamach, sòisealach agus innleachd agus foillseachadh. 'S ann mar phàirt dhe na dleasanais sin a dh'aontaich Comunn na Gàidhlig ann an 1988 gun deigheadh aithisg ullachadh air craoladh. Chaidh an aithisg ullachadh le eòlaiche neo-eisimeil agus chaidh a cur a-staigh chun an Riaghaltais. Chaidh an aithisg sin a chleachdadh an ìre mhath ann a bhith a' cur air adhart Achd Craolaidh 1990, an achd a chruthaich Comataidh Telebhisein Gàidhlig, mar a bh' air aig an àm sin.

'S e am moladh a bha san aithisg sin gum bi sianail sònraichte Gàidhlig ann airson a bhith a' leasachadh agus a' brosnachadh craolaidh Gàidhlig—rudeigin coltach ri S4C sa Chuimrigh. 'S ann mar opt-out air BBC 2 no air Sianail 4 a bhiodh sinn an dùil a bhiodh an t-seirbheis sin a' dol a-mach. Bha sinn airson dèanamh cinnteach nach biodh na duilgheadasan ann a tha air a bhith aig Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig a thaobh a bhith a' coimiseanadh agus a' cur a-mach phrògraman aig amannan freagarrach tron an latha agus tron oidhche. Bha sinn airson an sianail a bhith air a ruith mar a tha S4C agus le airgead freagarrach, air a mhaoineachadh bhon an Riaghaltas. Bhiodh seo a' toirt dhuinn seirbheis choillonta agus chunbhalach a bhiodh a' coinneachadh feumalachdan coimhearsnachd na Gàidhlig. Bhon àm a tha sin, chan eil Comunn na Gàidhlig fhèin air a bhith an sàs gu dìreach ann an craoladh, oir tha sin an urra ri Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig, mar a tha fios agaibh. Tha sinne bho àm gu àm air a bhith a' toirt taic do dh'iomairtean airson a bhith a' faicinn leasachaidhean air craoladh Gàidhlig—telebhisean agus rèidio.

Sin na tha mi airson a ràdh aig an ìre seo. Tha mi a' smaoinèachadh gu bheil sinn air iomradh a thoirt air na molaidhean a tha sinn air a bhith a' cur air chois tro phàipearan poileasaidh mar inbhe thèarainte. Tha Raibeart Barrach, mar neach-cathrach air buidheann-obrach inbhe thèarainte, an seo airson na tha ann an inbhe thèarainte a mhìneachadh dhuibh.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

We are delighted to be here and we thank the committee for the invitation and the opportunity to be here today. We are happy that the committee is examining Gaelic broadcasting, and we hope that the committee succeeds in its research.



I am Donald Martin, acting chief executive of Comunn na Gàidhlig. I have worked with Comunn na Gàidhlig for four years, and for the past six weeks I have been in charge of the organisation—I have taken over as chief executive while Allan Campbell is on secondment with the advisory group on Gaelic under the chairmanship of Professor Donald Meek.

With me, representing Comunn na Gàidhlig's board of directors, is Rob Dunbar. He is a member of the board and he chairs Comunn na Gàidhlig's working group on secure status. He was very much involved in the recommendations and draft brief on a Gaelic act that were given to the Executive.

Before I go on, I should say that, as well as representing Comunn na Gàidhlig, I am wearing two other Gaelic broadcasting hats. It is only fair that I make it clear that I am a member of the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee; I have been a member for three years and have one year left. I also represent Comunn na Gàidhlig on the Studio Alba trust—responsible for the building that you saw in Stornoway last week—and am chairman of the trust.

Comunn na Gàidhlig was established 17 years ago to co-ordinate and promote Gaelic development throughout Scotland. We do that through education; through our youth section; through cultural, economic and social development, and through publishing. As part of our responsibilities, a report on broadcasting was prepared in 1988 by an independent adviser. It was submitted to the Government, and that was the report that was pretty much used in preparing the Broadcasting Act 1990 and the act that established the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee.

We would like there to be a Gaelic channel to promote Gaelic broadcasting. Something like S4C in Wales would be our ideal. We see such a service operating as an opt-out from Channel 4 and BBC 2. We want to ensure that the problems that Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig has had in commissioning and scheduling are avoided, and we want to run the new channel in the same way as S4C is run, with finance from the Executive. That would give us a coherent service and would accord with the demands of the Gaelic community. Until now, Comunn na Gàidhlig has not been directly involved in Gaelic broadcasting; we leave that to the CCG. From time to time, we help and support campaigns to develop Gaelic broadcasting on television and radio.

That is all that I want to say at this stage. Our submission lays out the recommendations that Comunn na Gàidhlig is putting forward, especially with regard to secure status. As chairman of the secure status working group, Rob Dunbar can answer any questions on that.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much. I shall kick off the questioning. When we were in Stornoway last week, one of the big issues that arose was the location of any future Gaelic channel. Where do you think would be the most appropriate location for a Gaelic channel?

**Dòmhnall Màrtainn:** Tha sinne ag ràdh anns an tagradh a chuir sinn a-staigh gu bheil sinn a' faicinn gu bheil buannachd ann ann a bhith a' togail air na goireasan a th' againn mar-thà, goireasan a th' againn ann an Steòrnabhagh, goireasan a th' anns an Eilean Sgitheanach a thaobh trèanaidh. Chan eil sinn idir a' faicinn gum bu chòir seirbheis craolaidh Gàidhlig ann an telebhisean a bhith stèidhichte dìreach ann an aon àite. Tha sinn a' faicinn an t-suidheachaidh mar gum biodh cridhe an leasachaidh a bhith ann an aon àite, mar eisimpleir, stèidhichte anns na studios a th' againn an-dràsta ann an Steòrnabhagh agus an uair sin gum biodh spògan a' tighinn a-mach às an sin agus a' dol gun Eilean Sgitheanach agus gu na h-eileanan eile far a bheil coimhearsnachdan Gàidhlig agus coimhearsnachdan Gàidhlig air tìr-mòr agus gun teagamh cuideachd ann an ceann a deas Alba ann an Glaschu agus ann an Dùn Èideann. Chan e rud a th' ann a tha sinne a' faicinn a tha dìreach stèidhichte ann an aon àite idir ach tha sinn a' faicinn gu bheil buannachd ann gum bu chòir cridhe na seirbheis a bhith gu math faisg air coimhearsnachd na Gàidhlig far a bheil a' Ghàidhlig beò agus i ga bruidhinn gach latha.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

In the paper that we submitted to the committee, we acknowledge the benefits of capitalising on the resources for training that we currently have in Stornoway and on Skye. We do not think that a television broadcasting service should be set up in only one place. The heart of the development should be in one place—perhaps in the studios in Stornoway—but there should be other developments on Skye and in other Gaelic communities in the islands and on the mainland and also in southern Scotland in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The service should not be based only in one place, but we acknowledge the benefit of having its heart in the Gaelic heartland, where the language is spoken every day.

**Cathy Peattie:** Good afternoon. I am sorry that I did not make it to the meeting of the committee in Stornoway. You suggest that it is probably best to have a base in Stornoway, but to work in the other islands as well and to have outreach centres in the rest of Scotland. What would be the advantages of that for young people who want to get involved in Gaelic broadcasting?

14:45

**Dòmhnall Màrtainn:** Tha sinne a' faicinn gu bheil ùidh aig ar n-òigridh ann a bhith a' faighinn trèanaidh airson gnìomhachais telebhisein agus tha sinn fortanach gu bheil cùrsaichean, a tha gu math soirbheachail, aig Sabhal Mòr Ostaig anns an Eilean Sgitheanach. Tha an òigridh às na h-eileanan agus à àiteachan eile air feadh Alba a' frithealadh nan cùrsaichean sin anns an Eilean Sgitheanach. Tha e na bhuannachd dhaibh, an dèidh dhaibh na cùrsaichean sin a chrìochnachadh—an fheadhainn a tha airson fuireach anns na h-eileanan, anns na coimhearsnachdan aca fhèin—tha e na bhuannachd dhaibh gu bheil cothroman aca a dhol air ais agus obair fhaighinn anns na studios a tha againn an-dràsta. Chan ann a-mhàin ann an Steòrnabhagh tha studiothan; tha studio anns an Eilean Sgitheanach cuideachd, far a bheil leasachaidhean craolaidh a' dol air adhart.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

We can see our young people being trained in the television industry and we are fortunate in having successful courses at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig on Skye. Young people from the islands and throughout Scotland attend those courses. When they have completed the courses, those who want to live in their own communities in the islands are able to do so, because opportunities exist to attract them to jobs in the studios that we have just now. We have studios not only in Stornoway, but on Skye, where broadcasting developments are taking place.

**Cathy Peattie:** Do you have statistics to back up the claim that young people are taking that opportunity? If they are taking the opportunity, how many are doing so? If they are not, how can you encourage young people to take up professions in broadcasting?

**Dòmhnall Màrtainn:** Tha mi a' smaoinichadh gu bheil dearbhadh ann air sgàth 's gu bheil na cùrsaichean a tha iad a' ruith aig Sabhal Mòr Ostaig an-còmhnaidh gan lìonadh. Chan eil beàrn sam bith ann aig àm sam bith agus. Mar eisimpleir, aig an ìre seo, tha faisg air 80 duine air a dhol tron a' chùrsa làn-thìde—79 daoine—agus tha a' chuid-mhòr dhiubh sin air cothroman cosnadh fhaighinn ann an gnìomhachas craolaidh. A bharrachd air an sin, tha cùrsaichean goirid air a bhith air an cur air chois cuideachd. Tha faisg air 180 duine air a dhol tro na cùrsaichean sin. Mar sin, tha mi a' smaoinichadh gu bheil an dearbhadh ann. Tha na cùrsaichean ann airson feumalachdan na h-òigridh—an fheadhainn a tha airson an dòigh-beatha a dhèanamh sa ghnìomhachas—tha sin ann.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Many statistics back up what I have said. The

broadcasting courses at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig have always been filled to capacity—there are never any free spaces. At the moment, about 80 people—79 to be exact—have gone through the full-time courses. Most have taken employment opportunities in the broadcasting industry. In addition, there are short-term courses that have been attended by about 180 people. There is conclusive proof that the courses are successful and that they meet the demands and needs of the young people who want to be involved in the industry.

**Michael Russell:** Before I start, I repeat the declaration of interest that I made at our previous meeting, details of which have been given to the clerks. It might be useful to record that this is the third time that the committee has taken evidence in Gaelic; I hope that other committees are watching our example.

The witnesses have often referred to paragraph 24 of the written evidence, which concerns the long-term support of Comunn na Gàidhlig for secure status for Gaelic. In that paragraph, you state:

“a comprehensive Gaelic broadcasting service along the lines outlined in the Milne Report is but one of a number of essential measures in achieving Secure Status for Gaelic.”

What role would such a service play in achieving secure status? What other things would be important in achieving that? What is the current position of Comunn na Gàidhlig on achieving secure status, especially with regard to legislation?

**Dòmhnall Màrtainn:** Tapadh leibh, tha mi a' smaoinichadh gun iarr mi air Raibeart Barrach a tha na neach-cathrach air buidheann-obrach inbhe thèarainte freagairt a thoirt dha na ceistean sin.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

I will ask Raibeart Barrach, the chairperson of the working group on secure status, to answer those questions.

**Raibeart Barrach (Comunn na Gàidhlig):** Tapadh leibh uile airson a' chuiridh thighinn ann an-diugh. Tha mi a' smaointinn gu bheil craoladh cudthromach, ach chan ann leis fhèin, oir feumaidh sinn cuimhneachadh gu bheil obraichean eile a dhìth. Ma tha sinn gu bhith a' bruidhinn air ath-leasachadh a' chànain, feumaidh sinn a bhith a' coimhead air raointean eile—mar eisimpleir, foghlam, an roinn phrìobhaidich, seirbheisean poblach agus mar sin air adhart. Agus ma tha sinn gu bhith a' togail craoladh, feumaidh sinn a bhith a' cuimhneachadh gu bheil feumalachdan eile ann agus tha a h-uile sian a' dol le chèile. Sin an rud as cudthromaiche. Feumaidh sinn a ràdh agus aideachadh nach dèan e feum a bhith a' gluasad air adhart ann an aon raon gun a bhith a' gluasad air adhart ann an

raointean eile.

Mar eisimpleir, ma tha seirbheis gu bhith ann tha sinn gu bhith a' bruidhinn air seirbheis slàn, fallainn agus bidh mòran a bharrachd obraichean againne, ach co às a thig an fheadhainn a lionas na h-obraichean sin? Tha sin ceangailte ri foghlam, mar eisimpleir, agus an àireamh cloinne a tha a' dol tro fhoghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig. Mar sin, tha a h-uile rud a' bualadh air a chèile, agus ma tha sinn gu bhith a' togail siostam craolaidh a tha gu bhith ceart, feumaidh sinn cuideachd a bhith a' cur foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig agus seirbheisean poblach ann, agus a bhith a' cuideachadh na roinne prìobhaidich a bhith a' cleachdadh na Gàidhlig far a bheil iartras gu leòr ann. Feumaidh sinn na cuspairean sin uile a chur air stèidh bhunaiteach. Sin an rud as cudthromaiche.

Agus a' tilleadh chun na ceiste mu dheireadh, tha mi a' smaointinn gur e sin aon de na cnapan-starra as motha dhan òigridh. Anns an latha an-diugh ma tha thu comasach gu leòr, ma tha a' Ghàidhlig agad, tha an uabhas chothroman agad le bhith ag obair anns a' Bheurla tro mheadhan na Beurla. Tha mi a' teagasg lagh aig Oilthigh Ghlaschu agus tha triùir againn anns an roinn andrasta a tha uabhasach fhèin comasach agus fìor dheagh Ghàidhlig aca cuideachd. Nìst, bu toigh leotha a bhith ag obair tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig, ach tha na cothroman aca mòran nas lionmhoire taobh a-muigh na Gàidhlig agus bhiodh e na chall an fheadhainn òga sin a chall air taobh a-staigh na Gàidhlig. Tha mi a' smaointinn an dith seasmhachd a th' aig a' Ghàidhlig anns an fharsaingeachd gur e sin an cnap-starra as motha. Nam bithinn fhìn nam òigear a' dol tron oilthigh, leis cho cugallach 's a tha a h-uile suidheachadh leis a' Ghàidhlig—

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

I thank you all for the opportunity to be here today. Broadcasting is important, but it should not be considered in isolation. Other jobs are necessary and, if we want to develop the Gaelic language, we must consider other areas such as education, the private sector, public services and so on. We should not focus only on broadcasting; we must remember that other needs must be met. Everything works together and we must acknowledge that interdependency. There is no point in developing and advancing in one area without doing the same in others.

If we want a good, healthy service that offers many more jobs, we must consider where the people who will fill those posts will come from. That obviously links in with education—the number of children who are going through Gaelic-medium education will have a knock-on effect. If we are to build up a good broadcasting service, we will also have to meet the demands of public

services, Gaelic-medium education and the private sector.

Michael Russell's last question illustrates one of the greatest stumbling blocks for our young people. If one speaks Gaelic and is very able, there are many opportunities to do things through the medium of English. To give the committee an example, I teach at the University of Glasgow and many people in my department speak very good Gaelic and would like to work in the medium of Gaelic. We do not want to lose those people, but the opportunities outwith the Gaelic world are much greater for them. Gaelic has no status—

**Michael Russell:** Do you mean no legal status?

**Raibeart Barrach:** Chanainn-s' gu bheil sin bunaiteach. Ann an dùthaich sam bith air feadh na Roinn Eòrpa far a bheil Riaghaltasan a' gabhail cùraim agus a' toirt taic do mhion-chànanan ann an dòigh a tha ciallach agus bunaiteach, 's ann stèidhichte air lagh a tha sin. Tha sin fìor ann an dùthaich nam Bascach, ann an Catalonia, anns a' Chuimrigh, mar a tha fios againn, agus caochladh àiteachan eile. Mar sin, tha laghan bunaiteach gun teagamh sam bith agus tha sin cho fìor mu chraoladh 's a tha e mu fhoghlam agus rud sam bith eile a tha a' buntainn ris a' Ghàidhlig.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Yes—that is fundamental. Other countries in the European Union all support minority languages. They have realised that that is fundamentally important to minority cultures. As we know, that is true in the Basque country, in Catalonia, in Wales and in other places. Laws are fundamental—for broadcasting, education and anything else to do with Gaelic.

**Michael Russell:** You talked about—forgive me if the words are not quite exact—building a good broadcasting service. What must still be done to build a good broadcasting service? Some of the present arrangements have worked, but in what ways do they fall short?

**Dòmhnall Màrtainn:** Tha mi a' smaoinreachadh, mas urrainn dhuinn, feumaidh seirbheis choilionta a bhith ann. Cha bhi seirbheis choilionta ann gus am bi fios aig daoine càit agus cuin a gheibh iad na prògraman. Chan e seirbheis choilionta a th' againn an-dràsta ma dh'fheumas tu sùil a thoirt gach latha anns na pàipearan agus faicinn cuin a tha prògraman a' dol a-mach. Bhiodh e na b' fheàrr nam biodh prògraman a' dol a-mach aig amannan far a bheil trì uairean a thìde no ceithir uairean a thìde sa latha a' dol a-mach agus fhios aig daoine càite am faic iad sin. Sin tha mi a' smaoinreachadh an rud a tha sinn a' ciallachadh le seirbheis choilionta. 'S e an rud a tha a dhìth air an t-seirbheis a th' againn an-dràsta nach eil prògraman a' dol a-mach aig amannan a tha freagarrach do dhaoine. Chan eil mi a'

smaoineachadh gu bheil e uabhasach freagarrach prògraman Gàidhlig a bhith a' dol a-mach aig leth-uair an dèidh aon uair deug air an oidhche suas gu leth-uair sa mhadainn mar a tha a' tachairt.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

If we can, we must achieve a good, comprehensive service. We will not achieve that unless people know where and when they will get programmes. At the moment, we do not have a comprehensive service—people must look in the papers every day to find out when programmes will be broadcast. It would be much better if three or four hours of programmes could be broadcast each day, because people would then know when they could watch programmes. That is what we mean when we talk about a comprehensive service. It is not appropriate to broadcast programmes between half-past 11 at night and half-past 1 in the morning, as happens now.

**Ian Jenkins:** I will come back to a question that I asked in Stornoway. The Milne report proposed a dedicated Gaelic channel, which would cost £44 million a year. Is that realistic and is that the way in which £44 million could best be spent? You spoke about Gaelic-medium education. If money is to be invested in Gaeldom and in the promotion of Gaelic, is a dedicated television channel the best way to do that?

**Dòmhnall Màrtainn:** Tha mi a' smaoinneachadh, mar a chaidh ainmeachadh roimhe seo, nach eil ann an craoladh ach aon rud de dh'iomadach rud eile a tha feumail agus a dh'fheumar a bhrosnachadh airson an cànan a chumail beò. Tha foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig ann agus tha na h-ealainnean ann agus leasachaidhean coimhearsnachd an sin, agus chan eil teagamh sam bith nach canadh daoine gu bheil dòighean eile ann air am bu chòir an t-airgead a chosg. Tha feum aig foghlam air airgead cuideachd, ach chan eil sinne a' faicinn gum bu chòir co-fharpais a bhith eadar an t-airgead a thathar a' comharrachadh airson craoladh agus foghlam. Tha sinn feumach air airgead airson an dà sheirbheis a choilionadh agus, ma tha sinn mar rioghachd a' smaoinneachadh gu bheil an cànan agus an cultar mar phàirt phrìseil de dhualchas Alba, chan eil mi a' smaoinneachadh gu bheil an t-airgead cho mòr ri sin. Chan ann a-mhàin leis na Gaidheil no le luchd na Gàidhlig a tha an cànan; tha i le Alba air fad.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

As has been mentioned, broadcasting is only one aspect of the multifaceted arena that must be developed and encouraged in order to keep the language alive. There is Gaelic-medium education, and there are the arts and community development. There is no doubt that people say that there are other ways to spend the money and that education also needs money. There should

not be competition for money between broadcasting and education; we need money for both services. If we, as a country, think that language and culture are integral and important parts of Scottish heritage, £44 million is not a large sum of money. Gaelic does not belong only to the Gaels or Gaelic people; it belongs to everybody in Scotland.

**Raibeart Barrach:** Tha mi a' dol leis na thuirt Dòmhnall Màrtainn gun teagamh. Tha sinn buailteach a bhith a' coimhead air a' Ghàidhlig mar chuspair leis fhèin agus tha mi a' smaointinn gu bheil sin cunnartach. Feumaidh sinn a bhith ag amas air suidheachadh slàn a bhith ann, anns a h-uile raon fa leth, an àite a bhith a' goid bho chraoladh gus togail a thoirt air foghlam. Feumaidh sinn a bhith a' smaointinn air gu dè tha riatanach agus gu dè tha deatamach airson gach raon agus gach rud. Cuideachd, tha mi a' smaointinn gu bheil sporanan eadar-dhealaichte ann—rud a tha Milne a' moladh. 'S e cnap-airgid fa leth a bhith ann a gheibhear bho àite eile 's mar sin, tha mi a' smaointinn, an-dràsta gu bheil Riaghaltas na h-Alba a' pàigheadh an airgid a tha an CCG a' faighinn agus tha mi a' smaointinn gu bheil e a' bruidhinn air rudeigin fa leth nach bualadh air gu dè tha a' tachairt taobh a-staigh Alba agus taobh a-staigh Riaghaltas na h-Alba anns an aon dòigh, 's mar sin feumaidh sinn cuimhneachadh seo. Tha e cudthromach a bhith a' coimhead air gu dè tha dhith anns a h-uile raon fa leth agus a' dèanamh na tha iomchaidh agus deatamach.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

I agree. Gaels might be inclined to consider Gaelic as something that belongs only to us, but that would be dangerous. We must consider the larger picture, rather than take money from broadcasting to develop education. We must consider what is essential for each sector, but we are talking about different budgets. The Milne report mentions money that we could get from other purses. The Scottish Executive is currently paying money to the CCG, but the Milne report talks about something different, which will affect what will happen in Scotland. It is important that we consider what is necessary in each sector and that we act in accordance with that.

**Ian Jenkins:** The witnesses should not assume anything about my opinions just because I asked that question, which I asked in order to air a point rather than to criticise the suggestion. Others will ask that question. I recognise that the pots of money are not the same pots, but that question is in the air, so it should be asked.

**Mr McAveety:** One of the questions that was raised consistently last week was why—if money is available and whether it comes from broadcasting at a UK level or wherever—is it best

to centralise most of that spend in Stornoway?

**Dòmhnall Màrtainn:** Tha sinne dhen bheachd gu bheil feum ann togail air na goireasan a th' againn an-dràsta. Tha goireasan ann an Steòrnabhagh agus tha iad air a bhith ann bho chionn ceithir no còig bliadhnaichean a-niste agus aonan dhiubh cus nas fhaide. Chan e a-mhàin gu bheil na goireasan ann ach 's ann an sin cuideachd a tha luchd na Gàidhlig, no a' chuid mhòr aca co-dhiù. Far a bheil an òigridh ag èirigh an-àird, tha iad a' dol tro sgoiltean tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig agus tha iad an uair sin—an fheadhainn a tha airson leantainn ann an gnìomhachas craolaidh—a' dol air cùrsaichean trèanaidh taobh a-staigh nan eilean, anns an Eilean Sgitheanach, mar eisimpleir. Tha mi a' smaoinèachadh gu bheil e cudthromach gum bu chòir dhaibh an cothrom fhaighinn fuireach anns na coimhearsnachdan aca fhèin far am biodh cothroman aca obair fhaighinn anns a' ghnìomhachas.

Tha rud eile cuideachd ann. 'S e sin, ma tha sinn airson gum bi na h-àiteachan iomallach, mar na h-eileanan, mar àiteachan far a bheil àireamh an t-sluaigh a' dol an-àird, tha e cudthromach gum feum leasachaidhean eaconamach a bhith air am brosnachadh anns na h-àiteachan sin airson gum bi cothroman cosnadh aig daoine agus aig teaghlachaichean a' fuireach ann. Ge bith càite am bi gnìomhachas craolaidh, tha e a' toirt buaidh air seirbheisean eile cuideachd—seirbheisean mar còmh-dhail, seirbheisean mar àiteachan-fuirich, taighean-òsta agus mar sin. Tha sinn a' smaoinèachadh, airson nan adhbharan sin, agus cuideachd, mar a thuirt mi ron seo, gu bheil sinn dhen bheachd gum bu chòir seirbheis dhen t-seòrsa seo a bhith cho faisg air a' choimhearsnachd Ghàidhlig agus is urrainn dhi. Sin agad an t-adhbhar a tha sinne a' toirt ar taic do chridhe na gnìomhachais a bhith anns na h-Eileannan an Iar. Mar a thuirt mi ron seo, chan eil sinn a' smaoinèachadh gum bu chòir a h-uile càil a bhith ann.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

We must build on the resources that we currently have. There are resources in Stornoway, which have been there for four or five years. One resource has been there for a lot longer. Not only are the resources and structures there, but many Gaelic speakers live there and young people go through Gaelic-medium education there. Those who want to carry on in the broadcasting industry go on training courses within the islands; on Skye, for instance. It is important that people should have the opportunity to live in their own communities and to work in the broadcasting industry.

If we want to talk about increasing the number of people who live in remote areas such as the

islands, we must encourage economic development in those areas so that families are given the opportunity to live there. Wherever the broadcasting industry is based, it will have an effect on other matters, such as transport, bed and breakfasts and so on. We believe that a service such as broadcasting should be as near the Gaelic community and Gaelic speakers as possible. We support the view that the heart of the service—not all, but most of the service—should be in the Gaelic heartland.

**The Convener:** Thank you for your evidence and your time. We will come back to you if we want to raise any other issues.

We will adjourn for two minutes while the witnesses from the BBC take their places.

15:01

*Meeting adjourned.*

15:04

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** I reconvene the committee. I welcome the witnesses from the BBC, who are going to give evidence. I ask Mark Leishman to introduce his colleagues and to make some introductory comments. We have received your written evidence.

**Mr Mark Leishman (BBC Scotland):** Thank you for inviting us to the committee. My colleagues are Donalda Mackinnon and Ken McQuarrie. They will pick up the discussion shortly.

I will set the scene briefly. The BBC's commitment to Gaelic is well known. We have been broadcasting in Gaelic and English since the 1920s. The story of the development of the language can be traced in three phases. Until the 1990s, the BBC pretty much led the field. Then the Broadcasting Act 1990 came along, and there was the bold innovation of the creation of a fund. The third phase is distinct—the digital landscape is changing everything, from the way in which programmes are made to the way in which people receive those programmes.

We are here to discuss the progress of the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee. Our broad position is that BBC Scotland has enjoyed a productive relationship with the committee. We have received funds annually since 1993. Funding from Comataidh Telebhisein Gàidhlig and later Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig made possible the production of new areas of programming for the Gaelic audience, such as “Eòrpa” and “Dè a-nis?”. The combined economies of BBC licence-fee funding and CCG funding have helped to create long-term employment and to enhance talent and

the craft and skills base. In a moment, my colleagues will pick up the issues around those themes.

On our strategic view, we know from research that our services are valued by an audience that trusts the BBC. We believe that, because that trust exists, we should take a leading role in the debate about the creation of a Gaelic digital channel, provided that the necessary resource is available. As a multimedia Gaelic producer and broadcaster, BBC Scotland would play a key role in the delivery of a new service. That proposition would be underpinned by our ability to deliver a unified approach to Gaelic media, with co-ordinated output on television and radio and online. A new service in the digital age would have to ensure maximum benefit to the audience. It would have to be a content-driven service, delivered with quality and providing value for money. Beyond those outline themes, it is difficult to say more. We would be happy to come back and talk about them in more detail if things become more clear in the months ahead.

**Donalda NicFhionghuin (BBC Scotland):** Tapadh leat, Mark Leishman. Feasgar math. Tha e math a bhith an seo.

Thug Mark iomradh air taic a' BhBC thar iomadh bliadhna agus chanainn-sa gur ann stèidhte air mòran a chuir am BBC air bhonn agus air na tha am BBC fhathast a' cruthachadh a tha cuid mhath de shoirbheachadh craobh-sgaoileadh na Gàidhlig. Tha àite sònraichte aig a' BhBC ann a bhith a' stiùireadh slighe, ann a bhith a' co-obrachadh agus ann a bhith a' toirt gu buil mòran de na leasachaidhean ann an craobh-sgaoileadh Gàidhlig thairis air na bliadhnaichean. Tha seo fìor gu sònraichte ann an raointean foghlaim, òigridh, naidheachdan, fealla-dhà, na h-ealainean agus trèanadh am measg mòran eile.

Bha, agus tha, ro-innleachd a' BhBC stèidhte air feumalachdan ar luchd-èisteachd. Is e seo, cuide ri èolas agus ionnsachadh luchd-dèanamh nam prògram, an dà chuid air taobh a-staigh a' BhBC agus air na taobh a-muigh, an lùib mòran de na buannachdan eile a tha a' tighinn an cois a bhith taobh a-staigh aon de na craoladairean as motha san t-saoghal. Mar thoisich tòiseachaidh, tha am BBC air seirbheis craobh-sgaoilidh proifeasanta, iomadh-meadhain a thabhann do luchd-labhairt na Gàidhlig agus duine sam bith aig a bheil ùidh sa ghnothach ann an Alba neo gu dearbha air feadh an t-saoghail.

Eu-coltach ri beachdan chuid, tha mi fhèin den bheachd nach eil am BBC air a bhith ga biathadh fhèin air airgead poblach an CCG ach a' biathadh air ais a-steach dhan t-seirbheis le prògraman aig àrd ìre thar nan trì meadhan—Radio nan Gaidheal, telebhisean agus an eadar-lìon. Tha seo ga dhèanamh, le bhith a' togail air buannachdan a

tha an lùib sheirbheisean eile a' BhBC, le earbsachd agus creideas sgiobaidhean phrògraman a tha air leth dìcheallach, taobh a-staigh an àite agus am measg nan companaidhean neo-eisimileach.

Le maoin agus gach goireas craolaidh a tha a dhìth, chanainn-sa gum feum an luchd-cleachdaidh, agus an luchd-èisteachd, a bhith aig cridhe cruth-dealbhachaidh sam bith airson an àm a th' air thoisich oirnn. Gu dearbha, aig cridhe ro-innleachd seirbheis ùr sam bith, tha e riatanach gum bi aire air gnìomh na seirbheis sin. Anns an t-seagh seo, 's e an gnìomh a bhith a' cruthachadh 's a' libhrigeadh phrògraman air am bi fèill aig daoine gu cunbhalach. 'S e amaideas a bhiodh ann gun a bhith a' togail air eòlas agus ionnsachadh agus a bhith ag amas air structairean craolaidh a th' ann mar-thà. Tron sin, bidh dòigh againn air seasmhachd a bhonntachadh agus 's e seasmhachd a bhios na mheadhan air cùisean eaconamach eile a thig ri linn.

Tha suidheachadh na Gàidhlig ann an Alba ro chugallach airson a bhith a' fulang fo bhuaidh farpais mhì-fhalainn agus fo bhuaidh ana-caitheamh a' bheagain. Thuirt Jack MacArtair le gliocas na phàipear fhèin, cho cudthromach 's a bha còmhraidh cruthachail an coimeas ri deasbad innleachdach. A dh'aindheoin cho math 's a chòrdadh deasbad rinn uile, cuiridh mi geall, tha cuideam a' ghleoc trom do Ghàidhlig mar a tha e don chomataidh a tha seo an-diugh. Mòran taing.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Good afternoon. It is good to be here. Mark Leishman mentioned the commitment of the BBC over many years. I contend that the success of Gaelic broadcasting has been based on much of the service that the BBC had established and continues to establish. The BBC's role in pioneering, collaborating on and executing many of the broadcast-related developments of recent and less recent years cannot be underestimated, particularly in the areas of education, youth, news and current affairs, comedy, arts and training, to mention but a few.

Our strategy in the BBC has been, and will continue to be, solidly audience focused. That, combined with the expertise and experience of the production sector within and outwith the BBC, along with many of the attendant benefits of being part of one of the world's leading broadcasting and new media infrastructures, has contributed significantly to the delivery of the beginning of a professional multimedia service for Gaelic speakers and those interested in the language, wherever they are in Scotland or, indeed, throughout the world.

Contrary to some people's views, I believe that the BBC, through its service across three media—

radio, television and online—has not fed off additional public funds but has fed back into and built on the service with quality Gaelic programmes and content produced by committed teams both within the BBC and in the independent production sector.

With the guarantee of necessary resource, consumers must be at the heart of any future proposition and a strategy for a clear focus on core activity must be at the heart of any new service. In this case, the core activity is the delivery of programmes and content that audiences would wish regularly to avail themselves of. We must build on extant expertise and experience and avail ourselves of as many of the extant infrastructures as possible. Therefore, we have the means to consolidate sustainability, which will be the key to all the other economic by-products.

Gaelic in Scotland is too fragile to suffer the fallout of ill-advised competition for and diffusion of relatively scarce resources. In Jack McArthur's submission to the committee, he emphasised the benefits of constructive dialogue as opposed to clever debate. Although I am sure that we would all enjoy the latter, the clock is ticking for Gaelic and, no doubt, for the committee, which places the imperative on the former.

**Mr Ken McQuarrie (BBC Scotland):** We are moving into the third age of Gaelic broadcasting. As Mark Leishman said, the first age was when the BBC was almost exclusively responsible for the provision of Gaelic broadcasting. The second was the partnership with the CCG and other bodies, which largely centred on the delivery of television programming. The third age will provide the opportunity of connecting with the audience in more ways that are available now.

The discussion of the various rates of digital take-up is interesting. The majority of analysts agree that the rapid take-up that we have witnessed over the past two years will continue until the end of 2003 and that the bulk of the audience will access digital services between 2003 and 2006. Many will access those services in their own time and at their own inclination. However, enhanced television and interactive services will, for the most part, continue to centre on quality content produced for a scheduled channel. In whatever manner the audiences access the content in a digital age, the same range of needs exists in the Gaelic audience as in any other audience. Although a common language and all the cultural values that a language entails and accrues will bind the content, programming for children, schools, the arts, entertainment, music and drama and independent journalism will all demand a place.

In the United States, four providers serve 50 per

cent of all internet usage, so consolidation is the dominant force in even an online service, which is perhaps the most diverse publishing medium that we have witnessed. However, the third age of broadcasting, or publishing, provides the opportunity of maintaining a rich diversity and of allowing each culture in the world to participate and share with one other to an extent that was undreamed of hitherto. The opportunities for Gaelic broadcasting lie in a scheduled channel and a scheduled service, but are attendant upon the parts of a fully tri-media and interactive service.

**Michael Russell:** The committee will appreciate your analysis—which was one of the more profound analyses that we have heard—and Donalda Mackinnon's passion for the ticking clock in particular. The fact that time is short for getting this right also came out in evidence last week.

I was particularly intrigued by some of the words that the witnesses used, which are echoed in their submission. Mark Leishman used the word "strategic" once and Donalda twice used the word "strategy", which is in the submission four times. That suggests that the strategy that is being employed in Gaelic broadcasting is being questioned, at least in the minds of the witnesses, when it is set against the strategy that they might employ, as representatives of a broadcasting organisation, towards both the language and the question of how Gaelic television might flourish.

Could you tease that suggestion apart for the committee, as I believe that it was at the heart of what you were saying?

**Donalda NicFhionghuin:** Tha e air leth cudthromach gum bi ro-innleachd againn airson seirbheis ùr craolaidh. A dh'aindeoin 's dè a tha an eachdraidh ag innse dhuinn—agus tha an eachdraidh ag innse tòrr dhuinn—tha mi a' smaoin eachadh gu bheil e neo-chruthachail a bhith a' coimhead ro dhlùth air an eachdraidh ach tha còir againn coimhead air adhart agus ionnsachadh. Tha mi a' smaoin eachadh gu bheil e riatanach gum bi ro-innleachd againn a dhealbhas seirbheis a bu chòir, nam bheachd-sa, a bhith iomadh-meadhanach agus aig a bheil an luchd-èisteachd agus an luchd-amharc aig cridhe gnothaich. Dh'ainmich mi sin anns an rud a thuit mi na bu thràithe. Tha mi a' smaoin eachadh gur e rud a th' ann cuideachd air am faod iomadach neach, a tha an-dràsta an sàs ann an craobh-sgaoileadh, cur ris. Tha e cudthromach gum faigh a h-uile duine cothrom an guth fhèin a thogail agus na beachdan aca a chur air beulaibh dhaoine gus ro-innleachd ceart a chruthachadh. Nì sin cinnteach gum bi an t-seirbheis seo freagarrach ann an saoghal far a bheil roghainn ann an seirbheisean craobh-sgaolaidh a' fàs cha mhòr le gach latha. Tha e tur riatanach gum bi an t-

seirbheis againne cho math ri, no nas fheàrr na, iomadach seirbheis eile, agus tha seo gu math fìor a thaobh òigridh ar dùthcha a tha às gach ceàrnaidh dhen dùthaich seo.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

It is important that we have a strategy for a new Gaelic broadcasting service. While history tells us a lot, it is not beneficial to examine history in minute detail; rather, we should look ahead and learn. A strategy that can create a multimedia service that puts viewers at the centre of discussions is essential. Many who are involved in broadcasting can add to that. It is important that everyone has the chance to air their view, so that we have a proper strategy. That would reassure us that the service would be comprehensive and ensure that the service that we offered was as good, if not better, than many other services. That is true especially for the youth all over our country.

15:15

**Ken McQuarrie:** Unless we approach the future strategically, we will be unable to maximise the opportunities that we have. I referred to quality content, which does not happen accidentally. It depends on the quality of ideas, talent, investment in training and an analysis that considers how to exploit the rights available to maximum effect for all audiences. For that reason, and unless we approach Gaelic broadcasting with a firm strategy, the opportunity will not be maximised.

**Michael Russell:** You may exploit the rights, but not necessarily the programme makers, because there has been a dispute about rights.

Page 2 of your submission says:

"The CCG strategy in terms of selection of programme proposals for funding has, at times, been unclear and although work has been undertaken to overcome this, there are issues which the inquiry might well want to discuss."

What are the issues that we would want to discuss on selection of programme proposals for funding? Where are the problems? Where are the solutions in the existing structure and any structures that might emerge?

**Donalda NicFhionghuin:** Tha mi a' smaoinèachadh gur e aonan de na rudan a tha ceàrr na h-uireasbhaidhean air an t-siostam mar a tha e againn aig an ìre seo. Tha mi a' smaoinèachadh gu bheil cuid de bhuidhnean—sinn fhèin nam measg, tha mi a' creidsinn, neo co-dhiù 's dòcha gun cuir daoine às ar leth gu bheil—ag obair ann an dìomhaireachd gu ìre air choreigin. Chan eil e air a bhith furasta tighinn còmhla a dheasbad dè na seòrsaichean prògraman a tha còir a dhol a-mach air gach seirbheis. Ri linn sin, agus air sgàth 's gu bheil—

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Our system is lacking in that many organisations—ours possibly among them, or accused of being among them—work in secret. It has not been easy to come together and debate the programmes that should be broadcast on every service. Because of that—

**Michael Russell:** With whom has it not been easy to come together? Are you speaking about your organisation and the CCG, or are you talking about a wider group? Progress needs to be made in that relationship.

**Donalda NicFhionghuin:** Tha mi a' bruidhinn air craoladairean eile cuideachd agus luchd-dèanamh nam prògraman.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

I am talking about other broadcasters and programme makers too.

**Michael Russell:** It has not been easy for you as a programme-making organisation to define clearly the strategy that is being applied by the CCG when you debate the programmes that you would like to make and that the audience might want. Is that what you are saying? I am sorry; I am not trying to be difficult, but we must be clear about what you are saying.

**Donalda NicFhionghuin:** Tha ro-innleachd againne taobh a-staigh a' BhBC airson na seirbheis againn fhèin thar nan trì meadhanan. Tha sinn a' feuchainn, gu ìre, co-obrachadh leis an CCG a thaobh an ro-innleachd sin a choilionadh. Chan eil e furasta dhuinne. Chan eil fios againn, mar eisimpleir, dè na prògraman a tha a' dol a-mach air sianalan eile. Leis an sin, tha mi a' smaoinèachadh gum biodh e air a bhith feumail nam biodh buidheann air a bhith ann a bha a' coinneachadh gu cunbhalach, a bhruidhinn air an t-seòrsa prògraman a bha còir againn a bhith a' dèanamh, ri linn 's nach eil, agus nach robh, na goireasan a thaobh maoin is airgead pailt.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

The BBC has a strategy for its multimedia service, but we are trying to co-operate with the CCG on implementing the strategy. That is not easy. For example, we do not know what programmes will be broadcast on other channels. It would have been useful if an organisation had met regularly to talk about programming and the programmes that we should make, because we do not have sufficient financial resources.

**Michael Russell:** It is ironic that that situation existed before the CCG was created. Programme makers had that debate, and the Gaelic service was more unified. You say that a unified service no longer exists. A diverse service now exists in which independent contractors negotiate



independently without any idea of a clear strategy.

**Donalda NicFhionghuin:** Gu ìre, tha sin fìor.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

That is true to an extent.

**Cathy Peattie:** Donalda Mackinnon spoke about building on an audience focus. How do you do that? How do you measure how the delivery of the service impacts on young children and young people?

**Donalda NicFhionghuin:** Tha na h-uibhir de rannsachadh air a dhèanamh chun na h-ìre seo le buidhnean mar Lèirsinn, rannsachadh a tha sinne, air a chur air dòigh leotha. Tha e follaiseach dhuinn gu bheil na prògraman a tha sinn a' cruthachadh, anns an fharsaingeachd, a' còrdadh ri cloinn agus ri daoine òga. Mar eisimpleir, tha sinn a' dèanamh nam prògraman foghlaim a tha a' dol a-mach ann an Alba. Tha sinn ann an co-luadar leis na sgoiltean a tha a' gabhail nam prògraman sin, agus tha e follaiseach dhuinn gu bheil fèill mhòr ga chur air na prògraman sin. Bu mhath leam a ràdh gur ann le co-mhaoin an CCG a tha sinn a' dèanamh nam prògraman foghlaim telebhisein san fharsaingeachd.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

We conduct some research. Groups such as Lèirsinn, which is based in Skye, research programmes that we have set up with them. In general, kids like the programmes that we produce. For example, those of us who are involved in education programmes in Scotland are much involved. We are in discussion with schools that receive those programmes. Those schools appreciate those programmes and the children thoroughly enjoy them. Generally, CCG funding allows us to produce those educational programmes.

**Cathy Peattie:** It appears from your submission that you play a key role in Gaelic education. Do you agree?

**Donalda NicFhionghuin:** Tha e bunaiteach a thaobh cor a' chànain san fharsaingeachd. Tha e tur riatanach gum bi craobh-sgaoileadh, ann an co-bhonn ri sgoiltean agus ionadan foghlaim eile, gum bi sinn a' feuchainn ri—a-rithist a' dol air ais chun an fhacail seo—ro-innleachd a dhealbh a tha a' seirbheiseadh feumalachdan na cloinne agus duine sam bith a tha airson Gàidhlig ionnsachadh.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Education is fundamental to language development. It is essential for broadcasting to work with schools and other educational establishments. I return to the word "strategy". We must prepare a strategy so that we serve the needs of children and anyone who wants to learn the language.

**Cathy Peattie:** I will also return to the idea of strategy. As I am from central Scotland, it seems important to me that people work together. What are the barriers to that?

**Donalda NicFhionghuin:** Tha mi a' smaoineachadh, gu ìre, gu bheil sinn ag obair còmhla. 'S dòcha nach eil sinn ag obair còmhla cho math 's a tha còir againn a bhith a' dèanamh agus tha amharas agam gum b' urrainnear piseach a thoirt air an t-suidheachadh sin. Tha sibh air a ràdh gur ann a meadhan na h-Alba a tha sibh. Tha e cudthromach a ràdh gur ann leis an dùthaich seo air fad a tha an cànan seo agus tha mi a' smaoineachadh gu bheil còir aig a h-uile bhuidheann a th' ann, deas is tuath, a bhith a' dèanamh barrachd còmhla, 's math dh'fhaoidte na tha sinn an-dràsta. Chan eil mi ag ràdh gu bheil sinne neo-chiontach nas motha. Tha mi a' smaoineachadh gu bheil barrachd ri dhèanamh.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

We are working together, but perhaps not to the extent that we would like. We could work on that and improve the situation. You said that you are from central Scotland. It is important that the whole country has access to the language and that it belongs to them. We should all work together for the language. We are not innocent in preserving the language either.

**Cathy Peattie:** How do all the organisations work together and make progress? I do not feel that people have the same vision. They know what they want to do, but the ways in which they achieve their aims are different.

**Donalda NicFhionghuin:** Tha mi a' smaoineachadh, aon uair 's gu bheil seirbheis choilionta ann an suidheachadh craobh-sgaoilidh, tha mi a' smaoineachadh ann an raointean eile gum feum iad dèiligeadh leotha fhèin ann an seagh leis na feumalachdan aca fhèin. Ann an seagh craobh-sgaoilidh, tha mi a' smaoineachadh gu bheil e comasach dhuinn—mas e 's gu bheil sinn ag amas air aon sheirbheis an àite 's dòcha trì no ceithir diofar sheirbheisean—saoilidh mi gu bheil e nas fhasa, gu bheil cothrom ann a-niste seo fhaighinn ceart agus barrachd co-obrachaidh a bhith eadarainn. Chan eil sin ri ràdh nach robh sinn a' co-obrachadh idir idir. Tha mi a' smaoineachadh gu robh, ach 's dòcha gum faodar barrachd co-obrachaidh a bhith ann.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Other areas must deal with their own needs. If we aim to have one comprehensive broadcasting service instead of three or four services, it will be much easier to co-operate. We have opportunities to get that right, which means more co-operation. That is not to say that we were not co-operating, but we can build on the position and maximise it.

**The Convener:** You mention in your paper that various organisations have commissioned quite a lot of research. Helpfully, you say that more effective use could be made of the research in which various people have participated. How can that be done? Do we need an organisation, or does the present culture need to be changed to allow that information sharing to take place?

**Donalda NicFhionghuin:** 'S dòcha gu bheil feum air an dualchas agus air a' chultar atharrachadh gu ìre ach, a-rithist, tha mi a' smaoinreachadh gu bheil e nar comas fhèin, mas e 's gu bheil dòigh gu bhith ann air barrachd còmhraidh a bhith ann a thaobh phrògraman agus ro-innleachdan phrògraman, 's ann taobh a-staigh sin, an lùib sin, a thachradh e. Bhiodh e riatanach, bhiodh e deatamach an uair sin, bruidhinn air rannsachadh luchd-èisteachd agus luchd-amhairc.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Perhaps we need to change the heritage and culture to an extent, but we can do something about that. If there is a way of having more discussion about programme strategies and programmes, it will be essential to consider researching the needs of the viewers in that arena.

**Ian Jenkins:** What is your view on the funding arrangements—the way in which money would be drawn together—that the Milne report proposes? If the channel that you describe went ahead, what would be the position of the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee?

**Ken McQuarrie:** You ask about the funding arrangements that the Milne report proposes. Given what the Milne report suggested as an ambition for the service, the report sets a realistic figure against the funding required. It is for bodies such as this committee to comment on whether the mechanism that was set out in the Milne report is attainable. The Gaelic Broadcasting Committee is a sub-committee of the Broadcasting Council for Scotland. We envisage the committee having an increased role under our systems of accountability.

**Mark Leishman:** Can you clarify what committee you are referring to? Do you mean the CCG or the Gaelic advisory committee?

**Ian Jenkins:** I am asking about the CCG. It complains about not being able to commission programmes and so on. How would it fit in with your plans for a multimedia channel? What part would the BBC play in that? What relationships would emerge if that came to pass?

**Ken McQuarrie:** We need a new structure for this third age of broadcasting. The CCG has served the second age well, but if we are to maximise our opportunities in future we need a new structure. In this multimedia world there will

be a consolidation. That consolidation will involve a split between commercial providers, which will be driven purely by commercial motives and will create walled gardens of content that operate on an entirely commercial basis, and public service providers. If the Gaelic service is to flourish, the BBC, with its critical mass, will need to be a key player.

This relates back to some of the questions that were asked earlier. In education, for example, the divisions between the formal curriculum and lifelong learning are beginning to break down. It should be possible to make available products such as "The Blue Planet", one of the BBC's forthcoming showpieces, not only for informal education but for the formal educational curriculum. Given its resources, the BBC needs to play a key role. Whatever systems of accountability obtain, it is my view as head of programmes at the BBC that the priority must be to produce high-quality programming and to get the bulk of the spend on to the airwaves for our audience.

**Ian Jenkins:** What representations has the BBC made to Westminster about the provisions that need to be made in the legislation that is about to be considered there? We do not want something that happens at Westminster to make it difficult for the channel that you envisage to come into existence.

**Mark Leishman:** These are early days. We are waiting to see what progress the communications bill makes. In the white paper there is a reference to the Milne report. It is not for the BBC to advise or to take a view on the system of accountability or on the legislation that may eventually emerge. We are having talks in our own areas about the impact that such legislation may have, but at this stage it is difficult for us to take a view on it.

**Mr Monteith:** I find the idea of a television programme called "The Blue Planet" highly appealing.

**Michael Russell:** That is because you are on another planet.

**Mr Monteith:** I want to pick up on the question that Ian Jenkins asked about the £44 million suggested by the Milne report and on your response to it. In your paper you state:

"If a dedicated digital Gaelic channel emerges, it will be essential that:

- sufficient resource is identified".

From your answer to Ian Jenkins's question, I take it that you regard £44 million as a reasonable sum. Do you believe that a digital Gaelic channel could be provided for less than that—for a more economically affordable amount?

15:30

**Ken McQuarrie:** The figures that Milne suggests are benchmarked against those of other, similar broadcasters. If the ambition of the service is to be multi-genre and to cater for the range of audiences that we have talked about today, I do not think that it could be provided for much less than £44 million.

However, there are benefits to be had from new ways of working and new technology. Those would have to be accurately business planned and examined for sustainability. There is a technological dividend, but the funding for new technology and new ways of working is being released rather more slowly than we might have anticipated, because of rapid recapitalisation and the need to replace equipment in a much faster cycle than is the case in an analogue world. That has been the story hitherto.

**Mr McAveety:** Page 2 of your paper, under the section headed "Challenges", includes an interesting teaser paragraph. It states:

"The CCG strategy in terms of selection of programme proposals for funding has, at times, been unclear and although work has been undertaken to overcome this, there are issues which the inquiry might well want to discuss."

On page 4 of the submission you say:

"We would wish to discuss in more detail our views on the place of the CCG in the new digital environment."

You have already addressed some of the questions that have been raised in the light of the Milne report and have stressed the BBC's track record of commissioning, producing and broadcasting a tranche of quality programming over a long period. I know that you could answer on this topic all afternoon and evening, and I do not know whether we would be any the wiser at the end of that. Can you encapsulate what you would like this committee to tease out? That would be helpful, as we have already received some proposals. An idea was suggested to us last week by CCG.

**Donalda NicFhionghuin:** Tha e a' tighinn air ais dhan fhacal a bha sinn a' cleachdadh nas tràithe: ro-innleachd. Ma mholas a' chomataidh seo gum bi ro-innleachd ceart ann a thaobh craobh-sgaoilidh na Gàidhlig anns na bliadhnaichean a tha ri teachd, tha mi a' smaoineachadh gun leasaich sin tòrr de na puigean a thog sinn. 'S e ro-innleachd a tha a' gabhail a-steach gach buidheann a tha an sàs ann an craobh-sgaoileadh agus a tha cunbhalach gu ìre a' coimhead air seirbheis a tha gu bhith tur freagarrach ann an ceann trì, ceithir no còig bliadhnaichean às an seo. Tha e cudthromach gun smaoinich sinn air sin. Tha an gnìomhachas seo ag atharrachadh bho latha gu latha 's mathaid nas luaithe na cus de gnìomhachasan eile. Ri linn sin,

tha mi a' smaoineachadh gu bheil e deatamach a-niste gun coimhead sinn air an seo agus dà-rìreabh gun dèan sinn cinnteach gum bi seo soirbheachail dha na daoine a tha ga h-iarraidh aig a' cheann thall.

A bheil sin a' freagairt na ceiste?

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

This comes back to the word that we used earlier: strategy. If this committee recommends that we should have a proper strategy for Gaelic broadcasting in the future, that will be a positive development. It would build on many of the points that have already been made. The strategy should include every organisation that is involved in broadcasting and should constantly have in view a service that will be suitable and appropriate in three or four years' time. It is very important that we reflect on that. This industry is changing faster than other industries. Because of that, it is important that we ensure that the service we offer is successful and meets the demands of those who want it. Does that answer your question?

**Mr McAveety:** Not really. Earlier, Ken McQuarrie stated that the bulk of the spend should go on the airwaves. Can you tell me, naive city boy that I am, what else the money could be spent on?

**Ken McQuarrie:** The money should be spent on programming rather than on duplicating the infrastructure that already exists. We should use our extant resources—in the widest sense. Instead of creating things anew, we should use what we have to get the maximum revenue into the content of programming. It is important that the economic benefits of investment in digital Gaelic programming should be dispersed across Scotland. The real economic benefit will come if Gaelic programming is successful and of high quality. It will come in train of that, rather than in parallel.

**The Convener:** Are you saying that if there is to be a channel, it should not be located in the Western Isles? Should it be located in Glasgow or Edinburgh? You have a vested interest in one or two of the options, as others have in other options.

**Ken McQuarrie:** We live in an age in which it is easy to disperse the provision of content for all the platforms that we have discussed. I am not in favour of centralising content provision in one place. It is as difficult to get to Stornoway from Islay as it is to get to Glasgow from Islay. There are difficulties in choosing one location. That does not mean that there cannot be a critical mass, but I am against centralisation per se.

**The Convener:** I am not clear what you are suggesting. The channel must be based somewhere. You cannot just say, "This will

happen here and that will happen there.” Somebody somewhere must co-ordinate the channel.

Last week, I heard arguments as to why the channel should be based in the Western Isles. They were very strong arguments relating to culture, symbolism and the economic impact that a channel could have on a community where out-migration and unemployment are far higher than in communities elsewhere in Scotland. I have not heard an argument as to why a co-ordination base should be in either Glasgow or Edinburgh, other than because it can be.

**Ken McQuarrie:** I will give you a practical example. The newsroom for Radio nan Gaidheal—the BBC Gaelic radio service—is in Inverness and is fully equipped. It covers the Highlands and Islands and the rest of Scotland. If a newsroom were reinvented in another location, the spend could be diverted elsewhere.

**The Convener:** I understand that, but I am talking about the co-ordination centre, rather than outposts of a channel.

**Donalda NicFhionghuin:** Gabhaibh mo leisgeul. An e a thaobh coimiseanadh? Chan eil mise buileach soilleir dè tha sibh a’ ciallachadh le co-òrdanachadh.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Are you talking about commissioning? I am not clear what you mean by co-ordinating.

**The Convener:** BBC Scotland has headquarters in Glasgow and Edinburgh. If there were a Gaelic channel, where should it be based? Its headquarters should be somewhere. Last week, a very strong play was made for having the headquarters in the Gaelic heartlands. There was a counter suggestion that there are as many—if not more—Gaelic speakers in Scotland’s central belt and so the headquarters should be located there. I am interested in the headquarters rather than in where news programmes are made. In a multimedia world, programmes can be made anywhere and sent along a wire. They have to go to London and come back anyway.

**Donalda NicFhionghuin:** Leis a h-uile urram, ann an saoghal craobh-sgaoilidh a tha ri teachd, tha mi a’ smaoineachadh gu bheil e caran sean-fhasanta a bhith a’ smaoineachadh air ionad anns am feum craobh-sgaoileadh a bhith a’ tighinn. Tha mi a’ smaoineachadh gun do mhìnich Coinneach McQuarrie—agus is urrainn dha a dhèanamh nas fheàrr na mise—a thaobh sgaoileadh phrògraman is eile. Tha mi a’ smaoineachadh gur e càit am biodh na co-dhùnaidhean gan gabhail agus tha mi a’ smaoineachadh gum b’ urrainn dha na co-dhùnaidhean sin a bhith air an gabhail ann an diofar àiteachan, chan ann a-mhàin ann an aon

àite. Anns an roinn sa bheil mise, tha dàrna leth an luchd-obrach—agus tha còrr is ceud san roinn agam—ag obair air a’ Ghaidhealtachd agus anns na h-eileanan, ’s tha mi a’ smaoineachadh gu bheil sin cudthromach.

Cuideachd, dìreach a’ bruidhinn air, chuala mi Dòmhnall Màrtainn a’ bruidhinn air coimhearsnachd na Gàidhlig, agus tha mi a’ smaoineachadh gu bheil sin uile-chudthromach. Tha coimhearsnachdan fhathast ann far a bheil a’ Ghàidhlig ga cleachdadh gu làitheil ach chan ann a-mhàin anns na h-Eileanan an Iar, ged is ann an sin, tha mi a’ creidsinn, a tha a’ chuid as motha ga cleachdadh gu làitheil. Tha coimhearsnachdan beaga ann an àiteachan eile cuideachd. Tha mo thrìuir chloinne-sa a’ frithealadh Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu agus ’s e coimhearsnachd bheag a th’ anns an sgoil sin. Tha mi a’ smaoineachadh gum feum seirbheis sam bith a bhith cho fìor dhaibhsan agus a bhith a’ sealltainn dhaibhsan am beatha làitheil aca cho math ri beatha fheadhainn eile air feadh na dùthcha. Chan ann a’ tarraing bho na h-àiteachan eile a tha mi leis an sin, ach dìreach ag ràdh cho cudthromach ’s a tha e gun gabh sinn ris gur e an t-seirbheis, aig a’ cheann thall, as cudthromaiche, gur e an seòrsa rud a tha sinn am beachd a thoirt dhar luchd-amhairc ’s dhar luchd-èisteachd, gur e sin an rud as cudthromaiche ’s chan e togalaichean agus àiteachan anns am bi na co-dhùnaidhean gan gabhail.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

With respect, in the future broadcasting world, it will be old-fashioned to think of a base from which broadcasting must come. Kenneth McQuarrie outlined that better than I can when he described broadcasting and dissemination of programmes. The question is more where conclusions are arrived at. Conclusions can be arrived at in different places—not just in one place. Around half the people in the department in which I work work in the Highlands and Islands.

I heard Dòmhnall Màrtainn speak about the Gaelic community. That is also important. There are still Gaelic communities where Gaelic is spoken daily, and not only in the Western Isles. For example, my three children attend the Gaelic-medium school in Glasgow, which is a community in itself. The service that we offer must be as close to them as it is to other people throughout the country and it must represent their daily life as much as it does that of others. The service that we offer viewers is more important than the buildings and places where conclusions will be arrived at.

**The Convener:** I accept that. We can commission services throughout Scotland and react to the needs of the Gaelic community.

Last week, a strong argument was put to the committee that there would be a symbolism in

locating the headquarters—the address, if you like—of a Gaelic television channel in the Gaelic heartlands.

**Mark Leishman:** I am not avoiding the issue, but there is a practical element. If there were a Gaelic digital channel and the BBC took on a lot of commissioning and production work, for example, a decision would be made very quickly after a scout around the places where the effort currently is—in the main, that is in Stornoway, Inverness and Glasgow. With luck, we will be on course to have our new headquarters built at Pacific Quay in around two years' time. A decision could be taken then on where best to house the effort. Where is production best developed and where can local talent best be drawn from? If I read the situation correctly, at the root of the question is where to draw on the best talent and how to retain that talent. Assuming that such talent can be attracted in the first place, are there facilities to give people work?

**Ken McQuarrie:** I would distinguish between headquarters, where editorial control rests, and the technical play-out centre. The capital costs of providing a play-out centre with a degree of resilience—in other words, with server capacity and back-up—so that the service is able to stay on air, are significant, particularly given the information and data streams that are carried in a digital world. There are various types of data—for example, the triggers for personal video recorders. Logic leads us to the conclusion that if play-out centres are based where another set of channels goes on air, considerable savings can be made. As I said, with changes in technology it may well be possible to have a stand-alone transmission centre in Stornoway, Barra, Uist or Skye, but most analysis indicates that a critical mass at the play-out centre gives cost savings across the piece. I would separate the editorial and play-out activities.

**Michael Russell:** It is refreshing, if ironic, to have a lesson in decentralisation from the BBC. It is even more ironic that I agree 100 per cent with what Kenny McQuarrie said. Understanding the issue is important. I want Kenny to respond to what I say. The brass plate on the wall—where the headquarters is—is moderately important symbolically. Editorial control inside the head office is even more important. There would be a real problem if the brass plate became a magnet that drew all the paraphernalia of the old thinking about what broadcasting is and which attracted all the play-out centres, studios, media companies and petitioners—the whole lot grouped round one place. Last week, we saw some of the things that are being done in Stornoway, particularly in digital broadcasting. They are quite legitimate and work there is encouraging, but one monolithic organisation established in the old, monolithic way would help nobody and would ultimately decrease

rather than increase the number of jobs.

**Ken McQuarrie:** That is correct. If we take into account the geography of Scotland and the dispersal of the Gaelic-speaking community, it is important that there is genuine diversity and equality of opportunity for all and that young Gaelic speakers have the opportunity to be educated through the medium of Gaelic in the central belt.

**Ian Jenkins:** Could Donalda Mackinnon, as a Gael who lives in Glasgow and whose youngsters are in Gaelic-medium education, say what is wrong with Gaelic broadcasting? The people from whom we heard in Stornoway said that there was an awful lot wrong with it, including scheduling and content. If there is not a dedicated channel and we just want to improve Gaelic broadcasting, what changes would she like to see?

**Donalda NicFhionghuin:** Tha mi a' creidsinn nam biodh na mìltean de mhilleanan de notaichean againn mar Ghaidheil ann an Alba, bhithinn-sa lùigeachdainn gum faicinn seirbheis thar iomadh meadhan a tha a' toirt dhòmhsa na tha mi a' faighinn de roghainn ann an seirbheis craobh-sgaoilidh sam bith eile. Dha mo chuid-chloinne, tha mi air leth mothachail cho cudthromach 's a tha rudan mar coimpiutaran agus telebhisean nam beatha agus cho mòr 's a tha iad a' taobhadh ri prògraman Beurla ri linn 's gu bheil a leithid dhiubh ann. Lùginn-sa barrachd a bhith ann aig àrd ìre a tha gu bhith a' còrdadh riutha-san agus anns am faic iad sgàthan air am beatha fhèin agus anns am faic iad cuideam sònraichte ga chur air ar cuid chànan agus gum bi iad moiteil aiste aig a' cheann thall.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

If I had thousands of millions of pounds for us Gaels in Scotland, I would create a multimedia service that would give me everything I get from any other broadcasting service.

I am very aware of how important computers and televisions are in the lives of my children and of how much they side with English programmes because there are so many of them. I would prefer to have more quality programmes in Gaelic that mirrored my children's lives and lifestyle, in which they would see importance being attached to their language so that they would be proud of it.

**Ian Jenkins:** Is that possible?

**Donalda NicFhionghuin:** Tha rud sam bith comasach ma tha rùn ann.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Anything is possible with the desire and the will to do it.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much. The committee has no further questions. I thank you

for your time. If you want to feed anything else into the inquiry, please feel free to do so.

15:45

*Meeting adjourned.*

15:50

*On resuming—*

**The Deputy Convener (Cathy Peattie):** I reconvene the meeting. I welcome Donald Emslie and Rhoda Macdonald from SMG Television and Derrick Thomson from Grampian Television.

First, I will give you an opportunity to say a few words. The committee will then ask you some questions.

**Donald Emslie (SMG Television):** Thank you for the invitation to give evidence to the inquiry. I will make a few introductory comments before we take questions.

I am the chief executive of SMG Television, which is the television division of SMG plc. I am responsible for the licences of Scottish Television and Grampian Television, all our broadcasting requirements and our network television business. Derrick Thomson is the managing director of Grampian Television and oversees that licence.

Rhoda Macdonald is currently head of public affairs for SMG Television. Her previous job was as head of Gaelic in Scottish Television. She was responsible for a number of our ITV network commissions and for liaison with the CCG on programmes such as “Machair” and “Speaking Our Language”. I point out that her greatest claim to fame is probably that she gave Mike Russell his first job as a producer some years ago.

**Michael Russell:** That is the oddest declaration of interests I have ever heard.

**Donald Emslie:** Michael Russell has already declared his interest, so we should do likewise.

We thank the committee for the opportunity to put our case on the record. I have mentioned a couple of programmes that we have made—“Machair” and “Speaking Our Language”. Grampian Television, over some nine years, made a valuable contribution to Gaelic broadcasting by producing and transmitting the news service “Telefios” and “Telefios na Seachdain”, which was the current affairs round-up programme.

Our Gaelic broadcasting has been running for a number of years. We were instrumental in setting up the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee. STV also helped to fund Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the Gaelic college, with some £300,000 of grant in 1990.

I should make it clear that we have two remits.

One is regional. We are licensed by the Independent Television Commission. Under that licence, Scottish Television and Grampian Television have an obligation to provide a total of 72 hours of Gaelic programming. We also have an obligation under the Broadcasting Act 1990 to receive up to 200 hours of Gaelic programming funded by the Gaelic television fund. We lend all the skills and experience of our television production department to trying to win commissions from that fund. Under the 1990 act, we also have an obligation to provide up to 30 minutes of Gaelic programming at peak time, as our contribution to Gaelic broadcasting.

All the licence obligations have been and continue to be met. The merger of Scottish Television and Grampian Television, which raised some issues at the time, has been of significant benefit to Gaelic broadcasting and programming. Previously, Scottish and Grampian, even though they were both ITV broadcasters, had different obligations and licence programmes—the co-operation was not there.

It was interesting to hear Donalda Mackinnon's comments about co-operation between broadcasters. We agree that that should be considered in future. Since Scottish Television and Grampian Television merged, they have co-operated on the production of their licence hours and scheduling. That has been to the benefit of Gaelic broadcasting. One particular example is the fact that until the merger, “Telefios” appeared only at peak time on Scottish Television; for the past two years, it has gone out at lunch time and in the evening on Scottish and Grampian, all to good effect.

My other point concerns ITV's position within the broadcasting ecology. I may have misunderstood Ken McQuarrie's comments, but I believe that I must correct him. We are a public service broadcaster. ITV and, within that, Scottish and Grampian are the most heavily regulated broadcasters in the UK broadcasting ecology. We have stringent obligations to meet. There is tension between the need to meet our public service requirements and our position as a commercial broadcaster, whose income is dependent solely on our audience. We have to sell that audience to advertisers. That tension is always there and we are used to dealing with it, but in the competitive environment in which we find ourselves, it is increasing. With the introduction of multichannel television, about 45 per cent of the population now have access to many channels. We have to compete strongly against those offerings, which are mainly entertainment driven.

We support the development of a Gaelic channel. We always thought that the legislation

envisaged the commitment to Gaelic broadcasting moving towards a stand-alone Gaelic channel, once the capacity for broadcasting was less constrained than it is in the current analogue environment. The discussion about where to site the channel needs to be considered in some depth. Technology is developing so quickly that a channel's physical broadcasting facilities can be based anywhere. ITV could have its broadcasting facilities in London and transmit the 27 different regional services across the United Kingdom quite effectively. I echo what Ken McQuarrie said: the physical side and the technical infrastructure can be put anywhere. We can then place commissioning and editorial control and base production wherever the independent producers or production companies are housed.

**Michael Russell:** Your written and oral evidence throw up a range of questions that add to last week's debate in Stornoway and to today's debate. I will try to draw some strands together from your comments. Your written evidence in particular indicates that the relationship between you and the CCG has been difficult. One takes from that that the relationship was productive, but is no longer. There are indications that you feel you were treated unfairly, particularly given what you claim was the CCG's strategy to encourage independent production. If that was the strategy, it does not appear to have succeeded.

Many people believe that, while your various organisations have made a huge contribution—through the volume of high-quality material that they have produced—you have either lost interest or the terms and conditions under which you make the material have changed greatly to your disadvantage and you no longer want to do it. Alternatively, the world of broadcasting has changed in such a way that the obligation on you is no longer realistic. Is it one of those, all of those or bits of each of those?

16:00

**Donald Emslie:** I suspect that it is probably bits of each of those. It is not surprising that there has been tension between the CCG and us. You say that the relationship was unproductive—I would not go as far as that. We have a body that has a fund and can commission programmes, but has no real ability to schedule, and broadcasters who have permission to take the programmes and then are free to schedule them when they like. Our ambition as a commercial broadcaster is slightly different from what the CCG is trying to achieve. I think that our commitment—half an hour at peak time on Sunday night; Saturday afternoon for children's programmes; and Tuesday evening from 23:30 for other Gaelic broadcasting—suits everybody.

**Michael Russell:** Except the viewer, probably.

**Mr Emslie:** We have fewer viewer complaints than we used to.

**Michael Russell:** That is probably because nobody watches television at the times you mentioned.

**Donald Emslie:** The answer is that increasingly ITV is a network, so there is less opportunity for us to opt out in favour of our regional programmes. The vast majority of our regional programmes—whether or not they are Gaelic—go out at 23:30 and late in the schedule. We have about 81 peak slots each year for all our regional output. Gaelic now gets 52 peak slots, which means that 64 per cent of our regional peak output goes to Gaelic, which is a considerable investment on our part.

**Michael Russell:** I did not intend any criticism. You did not pick up on my comment that you made an enormous contribution, especially in the early years—you did more; you showed more; and you made more.

The point that I am trying to make is that the position from here on in is fairly important. There will not be legislation in the next 12 months to create a Gaelic digital channel, no matter how much we want there to be. What happens until analogue switch-off and thereafter is vital. It seems that the commercial pressures on you mean that you will not play a major role in that. There is no obligation on you, but if you want to continue to play an active role, you have to ask yourselves what you want to participate in, how you want to participate and what you want the outcomes to be. You have indicated where you agree with the BBC and where you disagree. What is your ideal solution from here on in?

**Donald Emslie:** At the moment, we have obligations to take Gaelic programming and we will continue to do that. We are not advocating a move away from our obligations under the current legislation. Our licence has just been renewed for 10 years; our obligations to Gaelic have been renewed as part of that. In Derrick Thomson's case, the obligation is for 46 hours a year; for Scottish Television, it is 26 hours a year. We will continue to meet those obligations and will continue to show our regional programming and the programming that comes from the CCG. We would like the commercial pressures that we face to be understood. Gaelic is only one of a number of genres of programming that we have to schedule within our regional slots.

Over the coming years, as the legislation that covers ITV takes a lighter touch, that will change. As we mentioned in our paper, if a Gaelic channel is to be set up, we would be happy for our programmes to be shown on it. Over time, as we move towards switchover, our broadcasting

obligations will decrease as the Gaelic channel grows in strength.

**Michael Russell:** That is a useful and clear definition of where SMG Television wants to go. It contrasts with the BBC definition: the BBC seems to be indicating that its involvement will increase. Although the BBC feels that the strategy that is being pursued is not adequate, it has a vision of what the strategy might be. Are you saying that your involvement will decrease and that—without any hard feelings, as you have a different job to do—it is inevitable that your company's role in the Gaelic sector will come to an end?

**Donald Emslie:** Our involvement does not need to come to an end, although it might do so when we reach completely digital broadcasting. At that time, capacity will not be constrained and whatever is set up and funded could lead to a Gaelic channel. We have a lot of skill and experience in our production base that could easily be utilised to make Gaelic programmes. We would continue to pitch to the CCG—

**Michael Russell:** So, SMG Television will become a contractor to make programmes like any other contractor. Do you see SMG Television being the main transmitter, or even the co-ordinator, of that activity?

**Donald Emslie:** We have the capacity to do so if—

**Michael Russell:** That is not what I asked. Do you see SMG Television doing that?

**Donald Emslie:** We could easily do that. We have a well-equipped automated transmission system that supports three channels and which could easily support more. If, at such a time, we were able to enter into an agreement with the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee, we would do so. However, our relationship would not need to come to an end because we were not producing and broadcasting regional Gaelic programmes, because we also see ourselves as just producing programmes. We make programmes for Channel 4, Channel 5, Sky and for the ITV network.

**Mr McAveety:** Is that commercial suicide?

**Donald Emslie:** Is what commercial suicide?

**Mr McAveety:** Is it commercial suicide to broadcast Gaelic programmes? In the letter that covers the SMG Television submission, there is a lovely invitation to the committee. The letter says that you have not gone into detail about your

"tensions in ... dealing with the CCG",

but reading through the submission is almost like reading a summary of the discussions between Ribbentrop and Stalin during 1939. Does SMG Television have continuing uncertainties about the role that the CCG plays? If so, what are they?

**Donald Emslie:** I am probably not best placed to comment on the CCG. It exists under legislation as a body that has a Gaelic broadcasting fund to administer. We all operate within legislation. It is not commercial suicide to broadcast Gaelic programming.

**Mr McAveety:** I might agree with you about that; I was simply asking whether that was the case.

Two or three times in the submission, the language that is used to describe broadcasting Gaelic programmes refers to an obligation that is laid down by legislation. We are trying to tease out something about commitment. I come utterly fresh to the subject and I admit that I would prefer to watch a Scottish National Party political broadcast than the occasional Gaelic programme. There is a revelation for the SNP.

I recognise that technical changes are taking place in the industry and that SMG Television, as an independent company, must operate within commercial pressures. However, there is an issue about the role that it plays. What role will SMG Television play and what contribution will it make in future, as we move forward post-Milne report and post the broadcasting discussions that are taking place?

**Donald Emslie:** We are committed to being a public service broadcaster and that means that we have to cover all the interests of a variety of groups. That goes for the Gaelic viewer as well as those who want to watch religious programmes or children who want to watch programmes that are made for children. We are committed to our role as a broadcaster in Scotland, so we will continue to make a contribution as far as that is concerned.

**Mr Monteith:** Point 4.07 of your written submission mentions the £44 million that we talked about in our earlier discussion of the Milne report. It says that that figure

"does not reflect the scale of economy that can be achieved."

What economies might be achieved and what ballpark figure might therefore be more appropriate?

**Donald Emslie:** The Milne report talked a lot about setting up a channel. That point has already been discussed with the BBC. It is not necessary to recreate an entire broadcasting business. One can hire in many of the services, such as a play-out centre or transmission facilities. Those can be based anywhere and do not have to be recreated wherever a Gaelic channel is based.

As far as we are concerned, £44 million is on the rich side. We produce and broadcast some 1,300 hours of programming a year, and the economies of scale that we can achieve mean that we are able to create a regional service of 1,300 hours a



year for closer to £20 million. On top of that, transmission costs another £5 million or £6 million. It can be done for a lot less than £44 million.

**Mr Monteith:** In point 4.10 of your submission, you mention

“the substantial levy already paid to the Treasury”

by ITV. How does that levy work and what is your component of that levy, if you pay one?

**Donald Emslie:** That is part of the licence that is paid to the ITC. Each broadcaster must now pay a fixed cash sum and a levy, which is placed on their advertising revenue. We have recently gone through a licence renewal; every ITV broadcaster has had its licence renewed. In total, the licence payments from ITV to the ITC and the Government are just more than £300 million. That has come down from £400 million through this licence regime.

Grampian pays something like £100,000 a year and 7 per cent of its advertising revenue to the Government. Scottish Television pays £1.5 million a year and 11 per cent of its advertising revenue to the Government. On top of that, we have had to fully fund investment in creating digital capacity so that we can broadcast digitally. We also have a regional programming commitment through our public service obligations. ITV's total commitment to the Treasury is therefore quite significant.

**Mr Monteith:** Does any of that funding go towards the costs of S4C in Wales?

**Donald Emslie:** It did previously. S4C is now funded directly by the Government. Prior to 1990, a significant part of the levy that we paid to the Government went to S4C, but that has changed.

**Mr McAveety:** When the committee was in Stornoway, I asked about the idea of a media village in Stornoway. I have also asked other witnesses today about that. What is your opinion?

**Donald Emslie:** Derrick Thomson can probably say more about that. Grampian Television was in Stornoway for some nine years, and created and financed the studios there in conjunction with Western Isles Council and the CCG. I do not know whether you visited the building in Stornoway when you were there last week, but there are two or three tenants there. The idea had been to encourage media occupation of those premises to create a media village. By and large, we would support that.

**Derrick Thomson (Grampian Television):** Media nan Eilean and Lews Castle College were in that building and we also took people from Sabhal Mòr Ostaig into that environment at every opportunity. I see no difficulty with the growth of a media village in Stornoway; in fact, I would positively encourage it. There are key issues

surrounding where the transmission systems should lie, but there are no issues concerning the centre—or the brass plaque, as Mike Russell described it—being based in Stornoway.

16:15

**Michael Russell:** There are a lot of commercial pressures on you. Setting aside transmission issues, would it be better for you to be shorn of your obligation to broadcast Gaelic programmes, and to take your position as a willing contractor competing with programmes that you want to show?

**Donald Emslie:** Is not that what we do currently?

**Michael Russell:** Would you be happier if you were shorn of the obligation?

**Rhoda Macdonald (SMG Television):** What we have failed to discuss is the relationship between Scottish Television's enterprises as a producer of programmes—as a contractor competing with independent producers on a level playing field—and the fact that our broadcasting division occasionally made decisions that impacted on us as a producer and which were sometimes unpalatable to us—I see Mike Russell looking at me sceptically, but it is true. We were competing on a level playing field and we want to continue to compete on that level playing field. There is massive production experience that could be of great use if the ambition to produce three hours of programming a day is to be achieved.

**Michael Russell:** I am reluctant to disagree with somebody who was once my executive producer, but I must say that the level playing field did not appear very level to most other people, who were playing up the pitch. That said, I return to my central question. Would you rather be shorn of your obligation to broadcast? I do not think that it would be shameful to say yes. Indeed, it would be quite helpful for Scottish broadcasting if you were to say that you would rather be shorn of that obligation, because the present obligation is unfair on you and on others.

**Donald Emslie:** We might not have put it as bluntly as saying, “We want to be shorn of our obligation.” That is not our current position. We have only one channel at the moment, but we have always believed that, if capacity is unrestrained, a digital channel for Gaelic broadcasting can be created. At such a point in time we would like to see our obligations under the Broadcasting Act 1990 moved towards that new channel. However, we would still continue to pitch for programmes from a commercial perspective, and to win commissions.

**Michael Russell:** That is fully understood.

**Donald Emslie:** We treat the CCG's fund in a similar way to any other commissioning editor. We must pitch ideas, win the ideas and win the money to make programmes. Programmes are then made in the network production business, which is an entirely different part of the business to Scottish Television and Grampian Television.

**Michael Russell:** That is fully understood, but you said a qualified yes to being shorn of your obligation, which I think is helpful.

**The Deputy Convener:** Thank you. We shall adjourn briefly to allow the next witnesses to take their seats.

16:18

*Meeting adjourned.*

16:23

*On resuming—*

**The Deputy Convener:** I welcome Kris Jones and Margaret Scott from the Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television, Scotland. I will give you the opportunity to make an opening statement, after which committee members will ask questions.

**Kris Jones (Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television, Scotland):** Good afternoon. I thank the committee for inviting PACT Scotland to give evidence. I am the head of public affairs for the organisation and Margaret Scott used to head up our office in Scotland. She is now the head of nations and regions. PACT is the largest trade association in the television industry, and represents about 1,000 companies nationwide and 98 production companies in Scotland. I understand that six of our members are directly engaged in making Gaelic programmes, two of them on an occasional basis and four of them full time. The number of production companies that make Gaelic programmes has fallen in recent years. I understand that a few years ago, as many as 16 production companies that belonged to PACT made Gaelic programmes.

We want to underline the importance of the independent production sector. The UK Government's communications white paper says that it wants to create a competitive and dynamic media and communications market. One of the advantages of the independent production sector is that not only has it been able to provide diversity and a wider range of voices on television, it has also provided price and creative competition that has led to an overall increase in the quality of programmes that are available to viewers. PACT is a very strong supporter of diversity, including the provision of services for minority languages. As a result, we support the provision of Gaelic

television programming and the introduction of a dedicated Gaelic service.

However, we are somewhat concerned about the way in which the Gaelic broadcasting fund currently operates. A strategy seems to have developed that has neither been publicly debated, nor have we had the chance to provide input into it. The statutory framework for the fund is set out in section 183 and schedule 19 of the Broadcasting Act 1990. The fund was obviously established to assist the production of Gaelic programming in recognition of the fact that, because there was bound to be some market failure, there should be some public support for the provision of programmes.

Section 183(4) of the 1990 act says:

"The Fund may be applied ... in the making of grants"

for certain purposes. Furthermore, section 183(6) says that

"nothing in this section shall be construed as authorising programmes to be commissioned by the Committee".

However, we feel that the current system is not working. It appears that the CCG is operating beyond its remit and possibly ultra vires. It has recently leased premises on Seaforth Road in Stornoway, and is apparently making the use of those facilities a condition of tender for programme makers. That means that, if one of our members wants to make a programme that is supported by the Gaelic broadcasting fund, the facilities in the Seaforth Road complex must be used. That is unfortunate, because some of our production companies are not based in Stornoway. Such a system has an anti-competitive effect, because companies are financially disadvantaged either by having to use those facilities or because they are otherwise unlikely to win the tender.

Besides being anti-competitive, the system also affects the income our members receive from working on an independent production. They are paid for making the programme and the production fee, less the cost of the facilities that they use. Production fees are the lifeline of our independent production members; they represent the additional bit above the cost of production. They cover companies' overheads and contribute to the profits. If a company is asked to make a programme for £1 million, the production fee might be 10 per cent of that. However, if that company is told that it must use certain facilities, and that the cost of those facilities will be taken off that £1 million, the company might therefore get only £0.5 million. The production fee will be lower, which will reduce the contribution to the company's overheads.

We are concerned that, although the Broadcasting Act 1990 says that the Gaelic

television fund is to make grants, the fund has been used to take on leases, which do not seem to be provided for within the statutory framework within which the fund currently operates.

We have heard today from some people about the idea of a media village in Stornoway. We would not necessarily object to that, but we are concerned that there has been no public debate and no discussion of the strategy with stakeholders—including the independent production companies—who might suffer adversely from a decision to favour such facilities.

16:30

**The Deputy Convener:** I open up the meeting to questions.

**Michael Russell:** In a moment I will return to the issues that you raised about the operation of the Broadcasting Act 1990.

Page 5 of your submission says that as a reputable trade organisation—of which I used to be a member—you went to the ITC for clarification of the facts that you have referred to. I am concerned, because you say that the attitude of the CCG representatives at your subsequent meeting with them was “aggressive and defensive.” Subsequently, you invited CCG to PACT Scotland’s broadcasting sub-committee, but CCG’s representatives did not turn up. Does it concern you that you must work with an organisation that, is “aggressive and defensive”, and which does not attend meetings that you expect it to attend?

**Margaret Scott (Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television):** Yes. We have found it difficult to arrange meetings for the past year or year and a half. When we took over responsibility for representing Gaelic independent producers in 1998—prior to that Gaelic independents had their own trade association, and although they got their services from us we did not lobby for them politically—we came to an arrangement with the CCG, had good relations with it, and negotiated SMG contracts.

However, over the past year it has been difficult to arrange meetings. When we write to CCG, we find its attitude to be very aggressive. Given that we are talking about public funds, we are within our rights to ask questions, although those questions might be difficult and hard to answer. We do not appreciate the aggressiveness of the CCG’s response.

**Michael Russell:** Further on in your submission you state:

“In the PACT/CCG Agreement of Practice and Procedures ... the CCG promise to inform us of any alteration to their programming strategy, but we have yet to

receive a communication to this effect.”

Do you or your members believe that you understand the programming strategy, for example, how tenders are offered, how applications are made, what criteria the CCG operates under, and what the decision-making process is in assessing those tenders? Is it transparent?

**Margaret Scott:** The CCG sends out tenders and press releases regularly, so people are relatively well-informed when tenders go out. When talking about the media village and other strategies in future, what are its proposals? We would possibly be setting out a different position in this inquiry if we had had meetings with the CCG and we knew exactly where it wanted to go. However, we have not had such meetings.

**Michael Russell:** At the bottom of page 4 of your submission, you draw attention to the particular case of the drama series. You state:

“An individual was hired by the CCG to creatively assess the tenders. Once the tenders were rejected, the same individual was hired to produce the drama series”.

If that is so, is that an unusual arrangement in the world of television? If so, would it damage the confidence of independent producers and others in the commissioning body?

**Margaret Scott:** It is unusual if a producer is not already attached to a series or an individual programme. Whether for half-hour, one-off shows by independents or for a series, the production company normally would be up-front. However, we are in a situation in which the ideas seem to have come first, after which somebody was attached to those ideas. That is an unusual situation when commissioning from independent companies.

**Michael Russell:** What your submission says is more serious than that. It appears that somebody who represented one side of the process suddenly became the representative of other side, and that there is no clear understanding of how that happened. Do you know how that happened?

**Margaret Scott:** We do not. There was definitely a tendering process, and independents applied. After that, we were told that the ideas were, for whatever reasons, not good enough. There was then an application process for writers, which was looked at differently. During that time, an individual was hired, although I am not sure about that—you would need to get clarification from the CCG. There was a glass wall between the processes, but it is strange to have the same individuals brought back in.

**Michael Russell:** Finally, to return to your point about section 183 of the Broadcasting Act 1990, if the CCG was operating ultra vires, what would be the remedies and who could apply them?

**Margaret Scott:** My understanding of the purpose of the inquiry is to examine how the issues can be developed in future, which might include the operational practices of the CCG. Whatever decisions the committee reaches and whatever recommendations it comes up with, we want protection for the independent sector. At the moment, the definition of an independent production company provides protection for companies in broadcasting terms, but the CCG falls through a loophole. When we say, "Here is the definition, why are you doing this?" the CCG says, "We are not a broadcaster, so we can." Why? The same level of protection must be awarded to Gaelic independents as is awarded to any other independent in the UK.

**Michael Russell:** The argument that we heard last week when I raised that specific point was that special arrangements are required for Gaelic because it is a fragile and small market in which fewer people operate, therefore it must operate differently. Have you heard that argument before? How would you respond to it?

**Margaret Scott:** I know about that argument because I downloaded the *Official Report*. It is hard to accept that argument. If a thriving independent sector is to develop, it must be able to compete. There are other ways in which studios can operate in commercial terms. Some companies might have offered to operate studios in the past and might do so in future, so it is not necessarily for the CCG to do that. However, if it is able to do that and to act as a commissioner, provision and support for the independent sector must be written in, in order to protect the independents. The CCG seems to be in a situation in which it can benefit from the best of both worlds, which is not acceptable as far as the independent sector is concerned.

**Kris Jones:** The Broadcasting (Independent Productions) Order 1991 excluded broadcasters from specifying that particular facilities must be used in order to promote competition. The CCG is not a broadcaster, but as Donald Emslie said, the CCG commissions programmes and programmes come from it. The CCG apparently commissions programmes, but is not covered by the provisions in the Broadcasting (Independent Productions) Order 1991.

The CCG exists to be used well. I accept that Gaelic broadcasting serves a smaller community, but that does not obviate the need for it to be accountable.

**Michael Russell:** Do not the Independent Television Commission, the Competition Commission and a variety of others have an obligation to ensure competitive practices? How

can you ensure and enforce competitive practice in the broadcasting industry in this case?

**Kris Jones:** It is very difficult in this case. The ITC has a general duty to ensure that there is fair and effective competition, but its only remedy is the way in which it operates licences. It can fine licensees, shorten licences and, in the worst cases, it can revoke licences, but it does not have general powers to police competition across the board.

**Michael Russell:** It can, however, give instructions to a sub-committee and the CCG is a committee of the ITC. Surely it would be competent for the ITC to give an instruction to one of its committees.

**Kris Jones:** If that is the case. I had not understood that that was exactly the structure. We have drawn the issue to the attention of the ITC, but I am not sure that we have found it terribly helpful, have we?

**Margaret Scott:** No. We have had a response from the ITC which accepts the CCG's position that it was acting on the grounds of programming and cost-effectiveness, but at the expense of companies.

**Michael Russell:** Representatives of the ITC are here today, so I am sure that they will take note of that.

**Kris Jones:** There is no evidence that the CCG's approach promotes cost-effectiveness. Taking on a lease may not be the most cost-effective way of delivering programmes. It comes down to the fact that there should be a grant-making body.

**Mr McAveety:** In your submission, you use the words "aggressive" and "defensive" on several occasions. Can you expand on what you mean by the CCG being "aggressive" and "defensive"?

**Margaret Scott:** As a trade association, we are used to dealing with a range of broadcasters, including Channel 4, the BBC and ITV. We have regular meetings at which we must raise difficult issues, on which we have different points of view. We argue the issues out and lobby on behalf of our members for things to change on access and all sorts of matters. When we recently met the CCG, we found that there was complete aggression, to the point where it was difficult to discuss and debate the position that we were trying to take. The approach was, "This is why it is happening—end of story." It was difficult to take the debate further.

**Mr McAveety:** Could that not be firm and decisive?

**Margaret Scott:** Yes. It could be, but this is my interpretation of the CCG's approach.

**Mr McAveety:** Could that be artistic sensitivity?

**Margaret Scott:** It could be.

**Mr McAveety:** I was being as gentle as possible, in case you were upset.

The other question that I want to ask is about a point that you make in page 6 of your submission. In the first paragraph, it states:

"The dispersal of the Gaelic community does not make it appropriate for all of the CCG's resources to be concentrated in one specific area."

That is clear. What would you like to see happening that is not currently happening?

**Margaret Scott:** I was at an interesting CCG conference in Inverness at the beginning of the year. A wide discussion was held among the community there and there was a big argument about where the centre of Gaelic is. People from Inverness were arguing with people from elsewhere. I sat back and listened.

I go along with what the BBC is saying about this. We must come together to develop a strategy. We must have a discussion with the whole community to develop a strategy to determine where the centre should be, or whether there needs to be a centre. I can understand the need for a business office. We advocate that the money goes, where possible, into the commissioning and production of programmes. That is where we would like the money spent, not on buildings. We want to see the engagement of as much of the Gaelic community as possible.

**Mr McAveety:** One of the threads that has come through the discussion with most of the witnesses is whether there is a vehicle in which you can bring together all the different elements involved in this, such as producers, broadcasters and the range of different power players. Will there ever be Gaelic harmony on this?

**Margaret Scott:** I doubt that there will ever be complete harmony. When you are pitching to the network in London it is clear that there are companies across Scotland. The issue is not about where independent companies are based, but where studios and resources are based. It is useful to have different models that are financially viable in their own right. We must consider where best value is. If we are successful in creating a channel—which I sincerely hope that we are—resources will be limited. The effort must be put into making the best use of those resources for the consumer. The consumer of the programmes must be the winner.

**Ian Jenkins:** On page 6 of your submission, you state:

"In our view the CCG is positioning itself as the new Gaelic Broadcasting Authority."

You question the broadcasting experience that individuals in the CCG have in order to perform that function. What should the shape of the broadcasting authority be, in your view? How should the different agencies come together?

**Margaret Scott:** There must be a partnership that contains the various elements of broadcasting and education, so that we can develop the best strategy and the best programming strategy. We should lean on people who have a great deal of experience. The broadcasters should play a part in this, but we would like it to be a much more diverse group. We want the independents to play an active role. There are 97 independent production companies in Scotland, which would be more than willing to get involved in helping to develop new programme ideas for any future channel.

**The Deputy Convener:** Thank you very much. We will adjourn for a few minutes to give the next witnesses a chance to take their places.

16:46

*Meeting adjourned.*

16:49

*On resuming—*

**The Deputy Convener:** We will start again. I welcome Neil Fraser. We do not have a written submission as such from you, but if you want to make some comments, please do so. Members will then have the opportunity to ask you questions.

**Mr Neil Fraser (Broadcasting Consultant):** Tha e glè mhath a bhith an seo, ach tha mi a' dol a bhruidhinn ann am Beurla air sgàth 's gu bheil an ùine air ruith oirnn.

Members can take their headphones off now.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation.*

It is good to be here. I am going to speak in English because time has run out on us.

*The speaker continued in English.*

Time is of the essence, so I will try to be more brisk than I would be in my native language.

I was not quite clear on what the committee expected me to talk about, but I will say something about my background. I am the author of a report on aspects of Gaelic broadcasting, commissioned by the then Scottish Office, which appeared in 1998. I was also assessor to the Milne Gaelic task force report that was published last September. The chairman of that task force was personally appointed by the late First Minister, Donald Dewar. He has not yet had a chance to interface with

Scottish Executive ministers, and he would welcome an opportunity to present his views. A meeting between him and the current First Minister might be appropriate.

I will confine myself to a few brief remarks. I am happy to deal with any questions that members have about the Milne task force. The task force's principal recommendation was that there should be a change in the structure of the overview and organisation of Gaelic broadcasting. The need for such a change is evident from the divergent views that have been expressed here today and that were mirrored in the evidence that was presented to the Gaelic broadcasting task force.

Over the past few years there has been a terrific change in the broadcasting environment. Within the BBC there is what some have described as an increasing need to compete with the commercial companies and, therefore, to provide more mass-market product. However, the BBC remains principally a public service broadcaster. Within the corporation there is pressure for the establishment of more digital channels, which are soaking up more of the licence money. In the ITV system the culture is changing even more dramatically, with many of the smaller ITV companies being subsumed into larger organisations. It is predicted that we are heading ultimately for a unified ITV sector across the UK.

The CCG has also been affected by the changing environment. The value of the resources that are available to the CCG has been in serious decline since its fund was set up. The committee may want to give close consideration to that issue. Not only has the fund not been inflation linked, but it has at times been reduced. Today the value of the fund is much lower than it once was.

The three organisations that I have mentioned have contributed greatly to Gaelic broadcasting in their particular ways. However, the Milne task force found that there was a serious need for a new organisation to oversee Gaelic broadcasting—one in which the broadcasters could participate and in which elements of the existing CCG could be subsumed.

The Milne task force was also concerned that developments in Gaelic broadcasting should not be confined to television but should be truly multimedia, embracing television, radio and the internet. Its report implied that there should be an emphasis on the usefulness of a multimedia channel for surveying the educational requirements of the dispersed Gaelic population and helping to meet educational requirements in schools. Above all, the task force felt that any service should be audience led. We must provide what the audience wants—and should have as of right.

Earlier, Donald Emslie said that the funding proposed by the task force was considerable. He said that Scottish Television was providing its regional output for £20 million plus transmission costs. However, the range of Scottish Television's regional output is limited. The Milne task force has recommended that a Gaelic channel be available with the full range of programmes that are available in any other language—dramas, documentaries, quality entertainment programmes and so on.

Such obligations would not impinge on the ITV licence holders in Scotland by making them spend a lot more money. We projected £41 million for the Gaelic channel, plus £3 million for transmission costs. That is a sober estimate. It is not even at the same level as the general cost of television programmes across the mainstream sector. We did not expect that making provision for Gaelic would entail £44 million being made available in the first year of development. We envisaged starting with what was possible, using the available human and technical resources; and we envisaged a service being built up over a period—perhaps during the transition from analogue to digital—during which the next step and all other steps would be justified against targets that had been set to be achieved during that five-year period.

**Michael Russell:** Considering our relationship over the years, you may be greatly surprised to hear that I agree with every single word—

**Neil Fraser:** Relationship?

**Michael Russell:** Over the past few years. I would not like to imply that it has been anything other than good; but you and I know the truth of it. I agree with every single word that you have said so far.

I want to probe one issue that you touched on latterly. The question is this: how do we get from here to there? Creating a digital channel will not happen in a big bang. We will not suddenly be able to say, "There it is—we can do it today." I am sure that you will agree that we will have to build a range of production skills, a range of genres, and a critical mass in terms of being able to serve the production demands of the channel. We will have to overcome what some might see as a decline in those things in recent years. That decline may have been precipitated by a decline in money, although there may have been other reasons.

An American whose name escapes me said that we should work as if living in the first days of a better country. We have to start work as if we are living in the first days of a Gaelic channel. How do we do that? What are the dangers? We have talked about centring activity on Stornoway and drawing our activity into a limited geographical

area. That might be seen—although it is a matter for debate—as weakening our ability to develop the strengths required for a Gaelic channel.

**Neil Fraser:** The end is less difficult than the process of getting there. The transitional period, between now and the establishment of a full Gaelic digital channel, will be the hard bit. I cannot comment on where such a service should be based, and neither was it the job of the Milne task force to make such a recommendation. If a new organisation is set up, it must be free to make its own decisions on many issues, including location.

From a personal point of view, all I would add is that I would like to see a strong production centre in places such as Stornoway—of that there is no question. How do we get there? There has been a lack of co-ordination between various broadcasters and organisations in the past. In my 1998 report, I suggested that the question should be addressed by the formation of a group under an independent chair. That group would consider issues that should be resolved—answering questions such as what genre of programming such-and-such a person did, and could we help each other by specialising in different programme areas. Sadly, that has not happened. Such a mechanism is perhaps necessary as a precursor to the establishment, building and development of a new service.

**Michael Russell:** Why has that not happened? Some time ago, as Mr Fraser knows better than I do because he was working at the BBC at the time, it was not uncommon for people to be able to talk to other companies and individuals about what the service should be, without tying themselves down. The companies are now so competitive that there is no co-ordination, although we heard earlier that there are questions about competition. If co-ordination is desirable, how should it be achieved and how quickly can it be achieved?

17:00

**Neil Fraser:** I am not sure that I can answer that question fully. Back in 1982, I recall that I attended a meeting with my BBC Scotland controller and Bill Brown, who was then managing director of STV, and David Johnston, the controller of programmes at STV. We had a pleasant evening discussing ways forward in co-operation on Gaelic broadcasting, but the discussion foundered when neither organisation proved willing to cede editorial control. The situation has not changed all that much since then. I made the recommendations in my report, and I have no idea why such a body was not set up. The problem is that someone would have had to do that, but no one seemed to have the authority to say that it had to be done. That remains the case today.

**Michael Russell:** When you were a member of the CCG, were you arguing for that to be done?

**Neil Fraser:** Indeed I was. As I recall, I asked for a conference to be held between the broadcasters and the CCG. I cannot put a date on it, but the conference was held in the ITC offices in Glasgow and was attended by senior staff from STV, the BBC and the CCG. On that day, we discussed many possibilities for co-operation but nothing came of that initiative. I served on the CCG for only a short period—for about a year.

**Mr McAveety:** Earlier submissions included the notional figure of £44 million. If I picked up correctly what Mr Fraser said, that figure was modest, relatively speaking, when compared to the overall cost. The oral contribution from the BBC—or was it from SMG?—was that with even half of that amount much more could be done. The convener has told me that that was said by SMG. Will Mr Fraser help me out on that point?

**Neil Fraser:** I will indeed. For its £20 million of regional output, STV is required to make a limited range of genres or types of programme. The Milne task force recommended that a broad range of programmes, including dramas and documentaries, be made. Those are much more expensive than are political programmes and political discussion programmes, although committee members might wish otherwise. The cost goes up as the range of programming is increased. However, the cost per hour envisaged for Gaelic is way below that which is sustained by BBC1, BBC2 or even ITV as a whole.

**Mr McAveety:** Most of the other submissions make the point that the world of broadcasting has changed dramatically since the idea first evolved and that there continue to be technical and financial challenges. What does Mr Fraser think of the debate that compares the need for the Gaelic broadcasting location to be in Stornoway in the Western Isles with the need for fluidity that would allow other parts of Gaelic-speaking Scotland, as well as other parts of Scotland, to be utilised? New technology would facilitate the utilisation of development and production facilities in those other parts of Scotland.

**Neil Fraser:** As I said earlier, I have no view on where a headquarters should be based. That is a matter for a new authority or committee or whatever you want to call it. To reflect in a healthy way the nature of the dispersed Gaelic communities in Scotland, I hope fervently that production will come from a lot of areas. For example, at present, insufficient attention is paid to the southern mainland and the southern isles. Of course, Gaelic is much weaker in those areas than it is in the north, but if attention is not paid to them, I suspect that it will get weaker still. Production is not the prerogative of a particular location—

healthy production happens where the best ideas come from.

**Mr Monteith:** Mr Fraser, at the beginning of your oral evidence you mentioned the fact that Alasdair Milne had not met the new First Minister following the production of the task force report. As you were an assessor for that report, could you explain what follow-up has taken place? Have there been meetings with other culture ministers or deliberations with the Executive, or are the only deliberations those of the committee, which is beginning to consider Gaelic broadcasting?

**Neil Fraser:** Discussions have taken place with officials from the Scottish Executive, the Scotland Office and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Most of those discussions took place prior to the publication of the report last September. I suppose that the sad events that took place in the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament caused people to lose sight of Gaelic broadcasting, which may not be at the top of the Parliament's agenda. However, I hope that, before too long, that issue will be addressed and the task force chairman will be invited to hold discussions with senior ministers.

**Ian Jenkins:** I am interested in the element of gradualism in what you said, as I am worried that the Milne report does not talk about that transitional period. What stages do you think there might be? It is clear that there must be some air space for the television channel. How much would you fill the first year? Would you go for a complete evening of Gaelic television? I worry about trying to do too much with insufficient funds, as we would end up with poor quality programming, which would not do Gaelic broadcasting a service. Moving too quickly is a danger.

**Neil Fraser:** That was not spelled out in the Milne report, but the report implied that we could not spend that kind of money straight away, given the human and technical resources that are available and the fact that we must train new producers and directors. Above all else, a new organisation that embraces the current interest in Gaelic broadcasting should come together, plan effectively and devise a strategy—that word is used frequently in Gaelic broadcasting—for the development of programme output. That is fundamental.

It could be argued that the news service should be the first programme to be produced daily, but it would be impossible to produce programmes to fill three hours a day, seven days a week from next January. That simply would not be on and is why we must take a developed approach, ensuring that, as the service develops, the standards and quality are in place, as they will encourage people

to watch and to demand more.

**The Deputy Convener:** As there are no further questions, I thank Mr Fraser for attending.

We will adjourn for a few minutes to allow our final witness, Allan MacDonald, to take his seat.

17:08

*Meeting adjourned.*

17:10

*On resuming—*

**The Deputy Convener:** I welcome Allan MacDonald from Media nan Eilean Television. I will give you an opportunity to speak for a few minutes, after which I will invite members to ask questions.

**Allan MacDonald (Media nan Eilean Television):** I feel isolated on my own after all the groups of people that have appeared before the committee this afternoon. Being so lean and mean is quite an interesting metaphor for the independent sector. However, my colleagues have advised me against stretching the metaphor too far by using the word “lean”.

Media nan Eilean Television welcomes the committee's engagement with the development initiatives for Gaelic culture and the way that it has enabled the first forum in 10 years on the Gaelic broadcasting fund. We hope that the findings will encourage the committee to support measures to enhance Gaelic's place in the cultural life of Scotland. MnE has earned its reputation as Gaeldom's leading independent producer by making £9 million-worth of programmes commissioned by Scottish Television, BBC and Grampian Television, with the vast majority funded by the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee. Several series have also been sold abroad to the Irish Gaelic service TG4.

At the moment, MnE has 11 full-time staff at its headquarters in Glasgow and in other production offices on Skye and Lewis, and has been awarded the Investors in People standard by Scottish Enterprise. It might be an answer to some earlier questions to say that although we have three offices, no one really knows where we live; however, people still know MnE and know our programmes. That is an important point. Regrettably, in the current year, the company's operations and activity will be severely curtailed by the unexpected cancellation of “@ìre” and the uncertainty of future funding for music productions. Five members of staff have been given notice of termination of contracts with the likely closure of our Stornoway office in the media village.

The third part of our submission refers to the



Broadcasting Act 1990. Suffice to say at this stage that the act, within which the Gaelic fund was embedded, was a legislative and operational muddle, and it has proved impossible to create any kind of coherent operational or service provision from it. Our submission outlines the six weaknesses in the 1990 act. For us, one of the most important is the fact that the legislation contains no acknowledgement of a pre-existing independent sector or of the protection required for that industry.

Throughout its existence, the CCG has wrestled to define its own role in a situation where it has such a limited ability to respond directly to the broadcast aspirations of the community it represents in a fast-changing environment. It inevitably defines and justifies many of its achievements primarily in terms of their economic impact and, in our view, is drawn to a vision of a broadcasting future predicated on that basis.

Our main interest obviously lies with the independent sector itself. Despite the recent serious setback that I mentioned, MnE has enjoyed relative success as Gaeldom's leading independent due entirely to the fund's support. However, by virtue of our position in the industry, it is incumbent upon us to admit that, after 10 years, the sector has been unable to engage with the fund to create a sense of confidence or partnership on a creative or business level; to share and discuss strategic and performance objectives; to promote products effectively; to analyse results; or to review progress. Confidence in the fund's declared goal of strengthening and diversifying the sector is further undermined by its current refusal to accept the definition of independent productions that is recognised throughout the broadcast industry.

The final section in our report is based on the proposal for a Gaelic single channel. Our proposition is based on supporting the quality, all-media approach of the BBC, but with safeguards for the community built into the system. The channel would be a special voice for the community. The independent sector would be protected and the channel would be seen as an asset of quality and diversification.

Because the Gaelic community is so scattered we feel that it is for the channel to choose the most effective broadcasting location within a public service corporation. It is a fast-moving environment, but that corporation—the BBC—will obviate the need for vast expense in many aspects of broadcast transmission: high-quality engineering equipment, training, archive news material and so on. Those aspects are costly and would have to be duplicated and reduplicated in any small organisation. The BBC would create the environment for young Gaels to be attracted to a

career in the world's leading broadcast organisation.

17:15

However, an imperative should be placed on the BBC to strengthen its existing policy of devolution and dispersal, underpinned by a revitalised independent sector that is guaranteed legislative provision and support. At the end of the day, the most important thing is what the viewer sees and the best way to carry the product is to have a brand name. Especially in the internet age, that brand has to carry across the world. We must seriously consider the biggest, best-known and most important broadcasting brand name in the world: the BBC.

I am not here to argue for the BBC in its entirety. I work there and know its shortcomings. Its advisory system is out of date and ineffective. The Gaelic community must have some intermediary, whereby it can speak on a political level with the Secretary of State for Scotland. Our proposal in the document is that the Secretary of State should set up an organisation to advise and give strength to the Gaelic community so that it can represent its interests directly. The system should then be contracted to the BBC.

What better way to move forward than to have a new vision of how that would operate in a scattered community? The programming would be spread throughout Scotland, with its commissioning editors and broadcast system in Barra, Uist, Ardnamurchan, Lewis and Skye. It is crucial that, within a monolithic corporation such as the BBC, arguments can be made internally. Somehow or other, wherever a person is placed, they should be able to make their arguments within a corporation at the same time as programming comes from within the community.

**Michael Russell:** This is the last time that I will do this. I want to question you about three particular aspects of your paper, Allan. First, there is the

"six major weaknesses in the formulation of the Act".

That is a concise summary. However, it should not go into the record as criticism of individuals, as you would say—I hope that you would say, as someone who has worked extensively with money from the fund—that there have been notable successes and that most of the problems arise out of a flawed piece of legislation, albeit one that was warmly welcomed by all of us at the time.

**Allan MacDonald:** Absolutely. It was a monumental financial and programming boost to the system. The BBC and ITV—ITV in particular—were persuaded by the legislation to increase their contribution to Gaelic broadcasting. The fund has

produced, and continues to produce, some excellent programming, but the infrastructure that underpins that is crumbling as every year goes by. That is partly due to pressure because of the lack of inflation proofing of the system, but it is also because the role and definition of the CCG is unclear—it is unclear to the CCG itself.

**Michael Russell:** Mr McAveety and I picked up the word “strategy” in the BBC submission. That is part of the problem. There are inbuilt flaws, but there is also, in your view, a lack of coherent strategy.

**Allan MacDonald:** If there is a coherent strategy, it is not being conveyed to me. There is a lack of a coherent strategy among all bodies in the industry. It is discomfiting to find one section of those bodies forging ahead on such a crucial question without engaging in debate and discussion with other organisations that have a valid and equal part to play in taking the system forward.

**Michael Russell:** Are you referring to the CCG?

**Allan MacDonald:** Yes.

**Michael Russell:** Let me build on that point, as the next point in your submission that I want to pick up on deals with the decision in relation to Seaforth House. We heard the evidence from PACT about that and about the difficulties of productions and production fees and of the enforced use of a facility, which is contrary to the 1990 act and the Broadcasting (Independent Productions) Order 1991. A different point arises. You heard proposals for a development in Benbecula—not that far away from Stornoway, but somewhere different. What was that proposal and why could it not go ahead?

**Allan MacDonald:** The proposal was for a £1 million development on the island of Benbecula, which would indeed have diversified the industry throughout the Gaelic community. Proposals have been made in the past to lease the studio at Seaforth House in Stornoway—that proposal was rejected by the CCG. We then looked to alternatives, under which we would be diversifying the industry to other areas. We entered into a discussion with Western Isles Enterprise and came up with a workable system that would have produced a £1 million studio development in Benbecula.

Our board of directors had no confidence in proceeding any further, simply because the CCG had decided that it would prefer to lease the studio at Seaforth House and was therefore effectively in competition with us for any work that would be going on in the Western Isles. We could not proceed with a £1 million development when our funder was in direct competition with us. The question is: on what strategy did the CCG,

knowing the proposals for Benbecula, base its decision to go ahead in competition with the independent sector?

**Michael Russell:** You are describing an invidious situation. You are trying to develop the infrastructure but you find that the organisation by which you are primarily funded—it pays for the programmes that you make—is also developing the infrastructure and is using that as a condition of grant. We begin to understand why the Broadcasting Act 1990 was framed as it was—so that there should be no such conflicts. However, the conflict in which you found yourself meant that a commercial development could not go ahead because of a development that was state-funded—in the context of competition legislation, such situations are not to be encouraged. Do you think that that is essentially what has happened? Could you not go ahead because of something that state funding was intending to provide?

**Allan MacDonald:** That is precisely right. If there is a strategy behind such decisions, there will be a continuing problem. Every time the state body invests in studios, equipment or anything of that nature, it militates against any kind of commercial development. If it militates against commercial development, it militates against the introduction of different money into the industry.

**Michael Russell:** The final point that I wanted to raise was on the fifth section of your submission. We have had many discussions and have read many papers outlining the many problems. You have brought us a proposed solution, which is very good of you—I am sure that it will help us greatly. Tell us how your solution differs from the Milne solution. I think that I understand it, but I ask you to explain it. Where do you think your solution overcomes some of the problems that others have outlined today?

**Allan MacDonald:** My understanding of the Milne solution is that, if the proposed authority were set up, a channel would be set up to work directly to that authority. The authority might envisage itself, at some point in the future, devolving that responsibility to another organisation, such as the BBC. In my view, the level of investment and operation needed by that channel would make it difficult for it to survive in any broadcasting world in which consolidation was the name of the game.

Throughout the industry, consolidation is taking place. We have seen it taking place in Scotland. I worked at Grampian Television, which one would have thought was a large enough organisation to exist on its own. It used to take the view that it was like a boutique on the high street, but it was unable to sustain that view and had to join the major players—even Grampian Television was, at the time, too small to operate in that kind of world.

Grampian Television would not have the same responsibilities as a channel of the sort that I have outlined, which would deliver a very wide range of programming. To sustain news programmes, the resources of a news organisation such as the BBC would unquestionably have to be brought into play—it is a worldwide player. For a small organisation such as mine to set up a television station and try to replicate what the BBC is already delivering in news, events, archive or anything else would be a pretty ludicrous proposition.

During the first year of the new channel, the organisation would have to seek capital investment to undertake the engineering development work. With the pace of technology moving along at such a rate, that work would have to replicate itself almost every year. I do not think that the fund could sustain that. Our principle and priority is for the fund to be spent on programming, rather than on capital or infrastructure investment. Channel 4 is a good model in that respect, in that its commissioning system is set up across the country and it limits its infrastructure and its involvement with engineering and other costs that are so crippling in broadcasting.

The only organisation that has a strong public service remit and that has shown itself to be committed to Gaelic is the BBC, although it is not without its problems. Our solution requires the BBC to change. There must be an acknowledgement that the Gaelic community has more than just an advisory role to play; it has a big part to play on a political level, in advising how the BBC or any other organisation proceeds.

It is incumbent on the BBC not just to run the service, but to increase the resources that it is putting in. It should be required to provide news and current affairs for free—it is the public service broadcaster, after all. In drama, animation or events, the BBC should be required to include Gaelic at no extra expense—for all that that is worth in global terms—given what would be required for a small organisation to set itself up and to come, even in five to 10 years, anywhere near offering what a corporation the size of the BBC offers. In doing so, the BBC should ensure that the interests of the community are safeguarded—and, I naturally add, that the interests of the independent sector are safeguarded.

**Mr McAveety:** Can that be done only through a PSB model or could you have a mixed model?

**Allan MacDonald:** I am talking about a mixed model, in the sense that we are proposing that the BBC undertakes almost half the work that will be done. There is, in different locations around the country, a commercial and economic model in the independent sector: an enterprise based in Islay accesses money through Argyll and the Islands

Enterprise and one based in Skye accesses money through Skye and Lochalsh Enterprise. That diversifies not just the programming base, but the business base, which is a crucial factor.

The independent sector plays a large role and that can include broadcasters: it can include the Scottish Media Group or Channel 4, if those organisations wish to take part. The independent companies can be pretty large and what they can take on varies. The organisations vary from a small company, with one person who simply wants to buy a piece of equipment in Lewis or Skye, to what would be termed a large independent. Many of the country's strongest programmes are made by large independents, such as Tiger Aspect and Wall to Wall in London. That encompasses a wide range not only of programming proposition, but of commercial proposition.

**Mr McAveety:** In the fourth section of your submission, you state that, although you welcome the 10 years of development,

“the sector has been unable to engage with the Fund”—

you then go on to list not one, but five points, so you will be glad when I have finished this paragraph—

“to create a sense of confidence or partnership on a creative or business level; to share and discuss strategic and performance objectives; to promote products effectively; to analyse results or to review progress.”

I do not want to get at you—I am not into the emotive language that Mr Russell uses—but that is a critical view of what has happened so far. If there is an absence of strategy, how do we get a strategy that everyone buys into and that everyone feels comfortable with? There is an inconsistency.

17:30

**Allan MacDonald:** I predicate my reply on the fact that MnE has done particularly well in getting support from the CCG, the enterprise companies and others but that, because we are the leader in the industry, it is incumbent on us to speak up for those who are not here any more or who are struggling in one way or another in the industry in Scotland. We have to say, “This is the picture in the industry,” although it does not necessarily apply to MnE. Other witnesses who have spoken to you today would probably back that up.

At the simplest level, the issue is basic management, in terms of talking to people and creating structures that can operate in a geographically diverse area. When MnE won its investors in people award, Scottish Enterprise commented that MnE was able to organise three offices across the country—in Skye, Stornoway and Glasgow—when companies in Glasgow were unable to organise three offices next door to each other. That is an important point.

This is all about management and getting the people who are involved in broadcasting to talk to one another, so that they engage with one another at different levels and feel that they are an important part of the system. Many people in the industry feel that independents must be on the make—I can speak from both sides of the fence, because I have been in the broadcast companies and worked in the independent sector. Such views were reflected by the director of the CCG last week, when he suggested that an independent company had had the CCG over a barrel. That is an objectionable comment for any public service organisation to make. That view of independents was prevalent in the early days of S4C and Channel 4, because people were working with new systems and there were examples of such practice.

My experience of people in the independent sector—as a broadcaster from Grampian Television in particular, and from working in the sector—is that they are highly dedicated and, in the main, give far more to the industry and programmes than they are ever rewarded for. People in the broadcasting industry in Scotland acknowledge that that is the reality of the system. We set out from a bad base, in the sense that there was a view that independents were out to make money. The comments that were made at last week's Stornoway meeting justify my saying that that view is prevalent in certain areas.

**Ian Jenkins:** I am interested in the model that you propose. When we were in Stornoway, we talked about the Gaelic channel piggy-backing on the Parliament channel, because there would be space in the evenings and perhaps in the mornings. The BBC and ITV are worried about the coming of digital television. The multiplicity of choice means that channels as we know them are under threat, yet here we are talking about a channel that does everything for a population of 65,000 people. Do you see a Gaelic channel being like a local newspaper or like a glossy magazine, or will it be something in-between? What style of channel will there be in the end?

**Allan MacDonald:** That is a good question. Unless we are talking serious money—S4C and others have budgets of £100 million—we are talking about a service within a channel. Although that point has not been discussed in detail, it has arisen in the evidence that you have heard. I tuned in to S4C on my digital satellite system yesterday. It is shown from 12 o'clock in the afternoon until 12 o'clock at night. Clearly, if investment in a Gaelic channel is significantly less than that in S4C, the hours will come down. S4C, TG4 and any service for the Gaelic community must, in effect, reflect what is happening across £3 billion-worth of programming in the English-language sector. That is a mammoth task for a small player to undertake.

The Gaelic audience is as demanding as any other audience in what it wishes to see and a balance must be struck between, for example, infotainment programmes, quiz programmes and drama programmes. Programming must come from across the board in terms of quality and content. A Gaelic channel would have to have a wide programming remit.

**Ian Jenkins:** Radio Borders is a successful, small commercial company, which takes local advertising and has a range of programmes. The range is limited, but it appeals to people.

**Allan MacDonald:** I was responsible for setting up the BBC's radio station in Stornoway in 1979. It was the first community radio station in that area, so I speak with some knowledge. It was based on models from Canada and arose from a study tour to see how dispersed and rural areas were being serviced. When I was manager, the programming on Radio nan Eilean had by far the highest reach of any radio station in the country, at about 80 per cent. The programmes were highly appreciated. As someone from that background, I would not be looking for that kind of programming exclusively, although I accept that it will have an important part to play in any service that is created.

I am completely dedicated to communities having a large voice in the programme-making process. We won national awards for that when I was running radio stations. I am also highly appreciative of high-quality current affairs, as provided by BBC Scotland. My view was not that the soap opera "Machair" was on too often, but that it was not on enough. It did not get a chance to develop on SMG.

I have a fairly broad view of the programming that should be on a Gaelic channel. Resources could be used at local and community levels. Our company makes international programmes. As I say in my submission, we make programmes from Bangkok to Barra. All kinds of programming could be part of a Gaelic channel. Many of the programmes that I have talked about were encouraged by the CCG, but the inability to put those programmes into a coherent statutory service has led to the breakdown that we are facing.

**The Deputy Convener:** As there are no other questions, I thank Mr MacDonald and all our witnesses this afternoon, as well as our interpreters, Joan MacLeod and Johan Graham. I ask members to stay behind for a few minutes after the meeting because Michael Russell has some reports for us.

*Meeting closed at 17:38.*

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