

EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 5 February 2002
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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CONTENTS

Tuesday 5 February 2002

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ITEMS IN PRIVATE	3056
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EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

5th Meeting 2002, Session 1

CONVENER

*Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)

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

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

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

*Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Martin Verity

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Susan Duffy

ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

LOCATION

The Hub

Scottish Parliament

Education, Culture and Sport Committee

Tuesday 5 February 2002

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:06*]

The Convener (Karen Gillon): I open this meeting of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. Michael Russell wants to make a point.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): Usually—not since time immemorial; it has not been that long—but usually, this committee has met at half-past 2, which is the time that has been blocked in our diaries. If the committee wants to meet at 2 o'clock or earlier, that is for committee members to decide. However, if there are to be ad hoc changes, I would like the clerks to inform members personally, rather than put it in the papers that arrive on Saturday. Many of us have a diary that is booked weeks or sometimes months in advance. For example, today I have had to cancel a meeting about private legislation. It does not matter what time we finish—I am happy to sit here with you all night.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): We would move to suspend the meeting.

Michael Russell: However, the starting time should be fixed. Any change to it should be exceptional and members should be notified well in advance.

The Convener: Can we agree a starting time for our usual meetings? It has been 2.30. We have quite a lot of business to get through over the next few weeks and a 2 o'clock start would probably accommodate us better. However, if that is a problem, we can talk about it.

I apologise for the fact that, because the past couple of weeks have been particularly busy, with the Scottish Ballet inquiry and other business, I made the decision to bring the starting time forward to 1.30. If we need to make such a decision again, we will inform members about it sooner rather than later. That decision is made on Wednesdays, so members could know about it then—that would not be a problem.

We should fix a normal starting time and try to stick to it. Do members have any views on the starting time?

Mr McAveety: I am fairly relaxed about our starting at 2 o'clock. The problem seems to be

with diary commitments. I would like to be as popular as Mike Russell and fill my diary up for 2.

Michael Russell: I will give you a few tips, Frank.

My preference would be 2.30. However, if the committee decides on 2, that is fine.

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): On the evidence of previous meetings, if we start at 2.30, we often run later than I would like. I accept Mike Russell's point, but I would rather get away at 5 o'clock if I could, and starting at 2 would give us a better chance of doing that. However, it does not matter much to me, one way or the other.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): If we start from the principle that this is a family-friendly Parliament, we should avoid anything that minimises the chance—not only for us, but for witnesses who are called to the committee—of getting away at a semi-decent hour. If that means starting at 2, I would be broadly in favour of that time.

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I am sure that the convener is right in saying that there is a volume of work still before us in the coming weeks and beyond. For that reason, perhaps we should consider starting at 2.

Michael Russell: I agree with Jackie Baillie, that the Parliament should be family-friendly; however, many of us are unable to get away to our homes and families because we live too far away. At 5 o'clock on Tuesdays, Irene McGugan and I have the delight of SNP group meetings. I would not say that I would like the committee meetings to overrun, but if the feeling is that the starting time should be 2, it should be 2.

The Convener: I can understand why you might like the committee meetings to proceed beyond 5 o'clock, Mike.

Michael Russell: Not at all. I would like to put on record how much I enjoy SNP group meetings.

The Convener: Are we agreed on 2 as a starting time as a matter of course? We will inform members in advance if we have to meet earlier, and that would be in exceptional rather than routine circumstances.

Members indicated agreement.

Ian Jenkins: I also have a meeting scheduled for 5, but I would usually like to get to it if I could, unlike Mike Russell.

Michael Russell: One of the Sunday diaries has noted that we met more often last year than any other committee. Moving our starting time to 2 will only increase our meeting time and we will retain the gold medal position.

The Convener: My goodness.

Ian Jenkins: I am also a member of the committee that is at the other end of the scale regarding meeting time and the length of meetings. Members of that committee were upset about the tone of the diary piece on meetings. However, as we know, measurements of quality are always difficult to make.

Michael Russell: Absolutely. Tell them that we do not believe in such crude standards—nor should we in educational terms.

The Convener: We will not get into measurements and men. *[Interruption.]* Mr McAveety states on the record that men are prone to exaggerate measurements.

Michael Russell: I think that that remark would have been better made in private.

The Convener: Strike it from the record.

Michael Russell: You cannot do that.

Items in Private

The Convener: We need to agree that items 2, 3 and 4 be taken in private. I also ask members to agree that we take item 4 as item 3 and item 3 as item 4, because Judith Evans has to attend another meeting. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

14:11

Meeting continued in private until 15:52.

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