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Official Report

EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Wednesday 23 February 2011

Session 3

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EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
6th Meeting 2011, Session 3

CONVENER

*Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP)
*Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
*Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)
*Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
*Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
*Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD)
Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)
Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Alan Clements (STV)
Adam Ingram (Minister for Children and Early Years)
Elizabeth Partyka (STV)
Michael Russell (Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning)

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee

Wednesday 23 February 2011

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

Subordinate Legislation

Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 (Consequential Provision) and Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc (Scotland) Act 2003 (Amendment of Specified Authorities) Order 2011 (Draft)

The Convener (Karen Whitefield): Good morning. I open the sixth meeting in 2011 of the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee. I remind everyone that all mobile phones and electronic devices should be switched off for the duration of the meeting. We have received no apologies.

I am pleased to welcome Adam Ingram, Minister for Children and Early Years. He is joined by Kit Wyeth, who is head of the children's hearings reform team in the Scottish Government. This must be your first visit to the committee this year, minister.

The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram): Yes, it is.

The Convener: I am sure that you have missed us. We have missed you. I invite you to make brief opening remarks.

Adam Ingram: It does not seem very long ago that I was here to discuss the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Bill. I hope that today's discussion will not be as long as some of our discussions on the bill.

The draft affirmative order that the committee is considering will, if it is approved, ensure that the national convener and children's hearings Scotland are subject to well-established statutory regimes, in the same way as similar public office-holders and public bodies are. The amendment that article 2 will make to the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 will enable the Scottish ministers to cause an inquiry to be held into the carrying out of the national convener's functions. Such a power already covers the principal reporter and others, and it is right that the national convener should also be covered.

Article 3 will ensure that the appointment of board members to children's hearings Scotland will be covered by the code of practice that is issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Scotland, who governs that type of appointment. It is appropriate that children's hearings Scotland, as a public body, is covered by those provisions.

I invite the committee to approve the order.

The Convener: What will be the overall, lasting effect of the order? You explained what it will do, but will it help to improve standards?

Adam Ingram: The power to cause an inquiry to be held would be used only if fairly controversial things were happening in relation to the national convener's role. The committee and I have discussed what would happen if there were concerns about how the national convener was going about his or her job, to the extent that some form of inquiry was needed to satisfy people's concerns. As far as I am aware, such an approach has not been used—that is certainly the case in relation to the principal reporter's function. The provision offers a fall-back approach or safety net, whereby the Parliament and ministers can address issues in a formal way. I hope that such a situation will not arise.

The Convener: If there are no comments from members, I invite the minister to move the motion. I remind members that we have up to 90 minutes to debate the motion, if it is necessary or appropriate to do so.

Motion moved,

That the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee recommends that the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 (Consequential Provision) and Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 (Amendment of Specified Authorities) Order be approved.—[*Adam Ingram.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Convener: I thank Mr Ingram and Kit Wyeth for attending the meeting.

10:05

Meeting suspended.

10:06

On resuming—

Broadcasting in Scotland

The Convener: Item 3 is evidence from STV as part of our evidence-taking sessions on broadcasting in Scotland.

I am pleased to be able to welcome a late substitute to this morning's witnesses. We have been joined by Alan Clements, who is the director of content at STV, and Elizabeth Partyka, who is the deputy director of STV channels. I thank them for joining us, particularly Mr Clements, who came at short notice. I understand that he has a short opening statement to make to the committee.

Alan Clements (STV): Yes. Thank you very much, convener. I will be brief. Apologies from our colleague Bobby Hain, who has been unavoidably detained in London and is sorry that he cannot be here—he was looking forward to it.

We are delighted to take your questions on STV, its role in broadcasting in Scotland and its broader role in the creative industries. When I came through on the train with my colleague, I reflected that it is probably quite an auspicious month for us to give evidence to the committee, because it is clear that February has been an important month if we take a slice of STV's activities in Scotland. As well as our continuing role in news, which is important on air and online, and the launch of our bespoke Edinburgh news bulletin, we have done 20 hours of "The Hour", which is the only live magazine programme in the United Kingdom outside London and is a topical look at life in Scotland.

In addition, on 1 and 8 February, we did a major international co-production called "Born Fighting", for which Ted Brocklebank—occasionally of this parish—hosted a great reception at the Scottish Parliament. For those who missed the programme, I say that it told the incredible story of how the Scots Irish grew in Scotland and the crucible of Ulster and then shaped American history. It was presented by Senator Jim Webb of Virginia. STV and Ulster Television simulcast the production—which was also a first—and it will be shown in America on the Friday of tartan week, which is 9 April, with a major launch in Washington. That is very exciting for STV. It is perhaps not immodest to reveal that Senator Webb also discussed the programme with President Obama. We had probably my favourite e-mail of my career in broadcasting, which was a request for copies to be sent to the White House, to which I said, "Okay. If you insist, I am sure that we can get those for the President to view."

On a lighter note, this Friday sees the launch of our second series of "The Football Years", which is a series of documentaries. I am looking around here to see where the partisan views might be. However, the series covers everything from the great Dundee United team of the early 1980s to the Rangers team that should have gone to the European cup final in the 1990s, the inside story of Fergus McCann's takeover at Celtic and, this Friday, "Oh, if it hadn't been for the shape of Billy Bremner's knee, we might have been world champions in 1974." I think that there is something for everybody in that series.

That was a brief snapshot of the kind of activities that STV is up to in February. Thanks again for having us here.

The Convener: Thank you very much, Mr Clements. However, you did not mention Airdrie United or Shotts Bon Accord, so that is you in my bad books already.

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): I want to look briefly at the issue of digital switchover. In particular, are there any lessons for the rest of Scotland from the switchover in the north of Scotland?

Elizabeth Partyka (STV): Obviously, STV has been very much involved in digital switchover and rolling out the information and marketing to the Scottish audience. Are there lessons to be learned? Yes, there probably are. The more information is given out to the audience, the better. You probably realise that, with the switchover being imminent for the rest of Scotland, we have a strong on-air marketing campaign and information on all our websites. We have also set up a viewers' inquiry line that is ready to take any calls from anybody who is interested in or worried about digital switchover.

Alasdair Allan: Did having multiple switchover dates in different parts of the north create any issues? I know that the small island of Barra in my constituency had two switchover dates. Did the public in the north generally understand the switchover dates?

Elizabeth Partyka: Digital switchover is quite a difficult concept for a lot of the audience. We hope that the procedures that we put in place were available whenever anybody needed more information or questions answered.

Alasdair Allan: Has STV been involved in any way in the switchover help scheme, which allows more vulnerable groups to access technical assistance?

Elizabeth Partyka: STV has been part of the wider group dealing with digital switchover, so we certainly contributed and offered any kind of assistance that we could in those instances.

The Convener: Recently, you were instructed or advised by the Office of Communications as part of its public sector broadcasting review, that STV could reduce the number of hours of news that it broadcast during the day. What has been the impact of that on your news production both on screen and on your website? You may want to talk to us a bit about STV local, which is still in its formative stage, and say how you think that it is developing.

Elizabeth Partyka: In most weeks we deliver more than the minimum amount of hours of news that we have to deliver for Ofcom. We must deliver four hours of news a week, but we normally deliver four and a half hours. We also have our continuing commitment to regionalisation of the news, so we have four microregions. In any one day, because of the split between the STV north programme and the STV central programme, both of which split into their two separate microregions, we deliver 70 minutes of original news content across Scotland. News is very important to the schedule, so we are happy to overdeliver on the minimum requirements. That overdelivery flows through to stv.tv, our online offering, as well as to STV local, which has now been launched in over 16 territories or towns and cities, from Buckie down to Edinburgh. In the north-east, we have started doing specific news bulletins for STV local—in particular, on STV local Aberdeen. A live news bulletin goes out at 11 o'clock and at 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

News is very important to the STV schedule, and we have always had a strong commitment to it. Throughout Scotland, 125 people are employed in our news operation; we have editorial and technical resources in Inverness, Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow and Edinburgh; and we have recently announced that we are going to enhance the news operation with a dedicated Edinburgh bulletin at 6 o'clock. News is important for us, and we will continue to outperform on all our platforms.

10:15

Alan Clements: We also regard the other Ofcom requirement for non-news programming very much as a floor rather than as a ceiling. Over the past two and a half years, we have consistently outperformed that requirement.

There has been a big philosophical change for STV. There was always lobbying to do fewer and fewer programmes for Scotland, but now we say, "No, actually—content creation is what we do, and we want to do more for Scotland." The Ofcom report said that Scotland was the only area in the United Kingdom in which television production rose in 2009-10. The report gave great credit to STV for that.

The Convener: You have spoken about improvements in having more localised news bulletins in the north in particular. Would you like to develop that in other parts of Scotland?

Elizabeth Partyka: Yes.

The Convener: What kind of response have you been getting from viewers, and what interest has there been in the websites for STV local? Have you been monitoring that? How many hits have you been getting?

Elizabeth Partyka: We started the north-east bulletin only on Monday, so it is relatively new. It is a pilot that we definitely want to roll out on all the STV local sites. We regard STV local as an extension of STV's unique selling point. The production of news for Scotland is certainly at the heart of STV's tradition, and STV local can make a unique offering. Our 125-strong news team can give backing to our local sites, where they will work with the community editors who are based in the locality of each site. The 16 STV local websites have a community editor who is based in the area, and they are responsible for gathering local news and feeding it into the STV local site, which, in turn, may feed that local news into the national, on-air version of the news. We are keen to put in place a network of newsgathering that works both ways. If the north-east bulletin is successful, we intend to roll it out across all our STV local sites.

You asked about hits and about how STV local is performing at the moment. There is a certain amount of commercial confidentiality about those figures, but it is fair to say that we have reached and surpassed where our business plan expected us to be at this time with our local sites.

Alan Clements: Convener, I am sure that you are delighted that North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire were among the first wave of websites.

During the bad weather just before Christmas, we saw an interesting spike. Compared with a local newspaper, a website can give a very up-to-date and localised service. An ill wind does not blow advantage to everybody, but it was really useful for us.

Elizabeth Partyka: The weather—or the big freeze, as we called it—was a good example of the relationship between local news and information on the one hand and STV the national broadcaster on the other, because we were able to feed local news that we got from our STV local websites about road closures and snow heroes, as we called them, through into the national programme. We also tried to change our on-air schedule as much as possible to incorporate special weather bulletins and travel bulletins. We got information out across Scotland through STV

as well as gathering and giving information at a local level through STV local.

The Convener: STV local in my part of North Lanarkshire has been pretty successful. Around the time of the adverse weather, Kenny McKay did a fantastic job of pulling together all the information about where roads were closed and which train services were running. That was vital information to people who were trying to get around. We have also had positive experiences of local stories being moved up on to the national news. Sometimes, they were stories that might not otherwise have had such coverage but deserved it.

My experience has been positive. It will be interesting to watch developments and see whether more and more people turn to the site as a quick source of reference and information daily.

Elizabeth Partyka: One of the strong points about STV local and STV as a broadcaster is that we have the capacity to take giant peaks in traffic at any one time. Therefore, during the big freeze, STV local was able to cope with thousands of people coming online at once to try to get information. We were aware of other sites that did not cope as well with the amount of traffic that suddenly came their way, but we put in place a robust technical system for online content.

For example, on Wednesday night, there was a champions league football match. We streamed that live on stv.tv and put in place a process called cover it live. That enables people to watch the football match on stv.tv, but there is also an interactive, commenting aspect. On that one night, nearly 150,000 people watched the live streaming on the website. They all turned on at the same time—the beginning of the match—but, because of the technical resources that we put into building them, the sites are robust and can cope with that kind of traffic instantly.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): STV exceeds its quota of commissioned programmes, but its percentage is still less than the network average of 45 per cent. Is that a deliberate policy? Are you trying to produce more programmes in-house, do you plan to increase the amount of programmes that are commissioned from outside companies, or is your approach simply based on the best possible programmes filling your schedule? What is STV's philosophy on that matter?

Elizabeth Partyka: You are absolutely right: we want to deliver the best possible relevant and affordable schedule for our audience, so we have made a conscious effort to deliver that through a mixture of network programmes, commissioned programmes and some key acquisitions.

That is quite a change. In the past two years, we have increased our level of commissioned programmes dramatically. A large part is "The Hour". That is 250 hours a year that we did not do two years ago. There are also key projects such as "Born Fighting" and "The Football Years". We believe that that kind of programming is relevant to, and wanted by, a Scottish audience, so we are keen to make space in the schedule to put it in.

Alan Clements: On the subject of production, members will know that, under the terms of trade, ownership of intellectual property is important to us. If we make programmes such as "Born Fighting", we can sell them around the world. Obviously, that takes the story of Scotland around the world, and it is clear that a profit is made at the same time.

It is Elizabeth Partyka's responsibility to commission indies with programmes such as "Being Victor", which was a Shed Media Scotland drama production for STV, but we often work with indies as a production company. Perhaps a year and a half ago, we made "The Scots Who Fought Franco", which we co-produced with Move on Up, which is a production company that is based in Cromarty. It had key archives relating to Scots who had gone over to Spain during the Spanish civil war, and it wanted to partner us to make a series. We had a joint venture to sell the series internationally and roll it out into UK channels.

Therefore, a mixture of approaches is taken. To give members some perspective, what STV Productions makes for STV broadcasting is probably around 20 per cent of what we do.

Kenneth Gibson: Obviously, you are very enthusiastic about "Born Fighting", and I am sure that we are all looking forward to seeing it. Will you go down that road much more in the years to come? Do you see high-quality products being produced for an international market as well as the domestic market? Is that how you envisage additional revenue being generated, given that there is so much competition for advertising revenue, in order to be able to produce better programmes for the domestic market, for example?

Alan Clements: I think that there will always be a slightly mixed economy. For example, we have just finished but not yet broadcast the second series about the Royal (Dick) school of veterinary studies in Edinburgh, which is a Discovery Channel UK pre-buy. We will show that first in Scotland, and it will be taken to a wider UK audience on a digital channel. We can achieve a better-quality product by putting our money together. We hope to sell that series internationally and to share in the exploitation of that with Discovery.

Sometimes there are UK co-productions. We have done them with the Biography Channel, the History Channel and Discovery, and we are talking to National Geographic. We also make a show called "Antiques Road Trip" for the BBC. I am sure that you are all far too busy to watch television at 5.15, but I think that it has been played as a strip on BBC2 on seven occasions in the past four weeks, and that it was BBC2's best-rated programme of the entire evening on seven occasions, although it was on at 5.15. Obviously, that is a fantastic achievement, and we hope to do many more such programmes for BBC2. The programme is all made in Scotland, but it contains nothing culturally significant about Scotland. Some of it is set in Scotland, but some of it is set in Wales, Northern Ireland and England. That is very good for the Scottish creative industries, but it is not really a culturally significant thing for Scotland. Members may be able to see the distinction. All those approaches are important parts of the mix.

Kenneth Gibson: I do not think that everything has to be culturally significant things to Scotland, to be honest. People have a broad range of tastes. I am certainly not interested in always watching things that relate to Scotland. People have broad horizons.

Speaking as a layperson, I think that two things about television annoy the public.

Alan Clements: Just two?

Kenneth Gibson: There are two main things, one of which is that, if one channel decides to put on a comedy programme, all the other channels will put on comedy programmes at the same time, or if one channel puts on a political programme, all the other channels will put on political programmes at the same time. I know that many people can record programmes and watch them later, but that is quite grating. I find it bizarre that that has happened for decades.

The other thing that annoys the public is repeats. STV's proportion of repeats at peak viewing time is higher than the network average.

Will you comment on those two points?

Elizabeth Partyka: I am sorry, but what did you say about repeats?

Kenneth Gibson: STV shows a higher proportion of repeats at peak times than the UK network average. Around 13 per cent of peak-time programmes in Scotland and around 9 per cent in the UK are repeats.

Elizabeth Partyka: Do you mean on the UK ITV network?

Kenneth Gibson: Yes, of course. I am sorry.

Elizabeth Partyka: To be perfectly honest, I am surprised by that figure. We make up our schedule by taking 95 per cent of the network schedule, so if there are repeats on that, we will probably go with them. Any opt-outs—where we put in our own programming—would, certainly in the past 12 months, have all been new programmes that were either commissioned or acquired, so I am not sure why our proportion of repeats would be higher than the ITV network average. If you like, I will investigate and come back with an answer, but I am surprised at that.

10:30

Kenneth Gibson: To be fair, the figures that we have are for 2009, so the situation may have evolved in the opposite direction since then. I am sure that we will all be pleased if that is the case.

Elizabeth Partyka: I think that it probably has. In the middle of 2009, we put in our content strategy, which involves dropping more network programming in favour of Scottish or relevant programming for our audience, so the situation will probably have changed quite dramatically.

Kenneth Gibson: What about the issue of scheduling? At a particular time, regardless of the channel, there always seems to be sport, politics or drama on, or whatever it happens to be.

Elizabeth Partyka: It is very frustrating for our scheduling team, too, as Alan Clements and I were discussing on the way through.

When we put out "Sports Centre" on a Friday night, for example, we have to some extent to follow the action of sport during that week. We have talked about putting "Sports Centre" out on another night, but all the football clubs have their conferences on a Friday, so if we want to be up to date and relevant, we have to wait until then. That will be true of all sports programming, which is why we have that clash.

It is also true of our "Politics Now" programme, which goes out on a Thursday night. We want the information and guests to be as up to date as possible. If we moved the show to some time earlier in the week, it might be difficult for us to be as up to date and topical as the other programmes that go out on the Thursday night.

There are definitely issues, and we would certainly like to be able to move the programmes around the schedule. However, if we do, we are in danger of harming the editorial content of the programmes because we will miss the topicality and the main things that are happening over that week.

Kenneth Gibson: Those were just examples. In other areas you get the same thing, such as movie against movie and drama against drama. It has been going on since I can remember. Is there not a way in which all the broadcasters can get

together and try to reach some kind of arrangement to provide more diversity with regard to when programmes are scheduled?

Elizabeth Partyka: There are two aspects to the issue. As I said, we take 95 per cent of the ITV network schedule, so to some extent—

Kenneth Gibson: You do not necessarily have much of a say.

Elizabeth Partyka: Correct. There are difficulties with moving things around the schedule. There is no way that we can move "I'm a Celebrity ... Get Me Out of Here", for example, which is a 9 o'clock live programme. It is the same with the big juggernauts such as "The X Factor".

Both the ITV network and the BBC recognised that there was some conflict in that area, which is one of the reasons why "Strictly Come Dancing" and "The X Factor" did not conflict at the end of last year. There was a direct decision by the BBC and the ITV network not to compete against each other, so "Strictly Come Dancing" was on first and then people could turn over to watch "The X Factor".

Alan Clements: The only saving grace is the proliferation of +1 channels. "Taggart", which we premiered in Scotland, played across the UK in the past six weeks. It launched against "Silent Witness" on BBC1 and the launch of "CSI" on Channel 5. If you are a crime drama fan, that must be the most frustrating thing in the world. Interestingly, however, ITV+1 was launched in that week, and 300,000 people watched "Silent Witness" and then turned over to watch the first episode of "Taggart" on the +1 channel.

With the STV player and the BBC iPlayer, the situation is, I hope, now slightly less frustrating for you than it was perhaps three or four years ago, but it is certainly an on-going issue.

Elizabeth Partyka: One leading idea in our new vision for STV is STV anywhere. We are trying to make our content available wherever and whenever anybody would like to consume it through the STV player, our STV+1 channel and the STV channel on YouTube, which contains all our contemporary programmes as well as iconic programmes from the archive. We hope to deliver our content to our audience when and where they want it. As Alan Clements said, that might start to combat the battle of the schedules.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): In 2009, STV decided to opt out of some ITV1 network material, particularly at peak times—the main issues relate to that. What were the reasons behind that? What was the overriding reason?

Elizabeth Partyka: The overriding reason was that we wanted to deliver a schedule that reflected our audience. We could have taken 100 per cent of the network programming, but that would not have defined STV as a broadcaster that was relevant to and interested in its Scottish audience. We wanted to commission and find relevant programming for our audience.

Scheduling is a bit like a jigsaw. As soon as we decide to make six hours of "The Football Years", for example, we must find six hours in which to show it, so six hours must come out of the schedule. We looked at the ITV network schedule and decided which programmes to take out to allow us to put in our own programmes and therefore deliver a varied and more relevant schedule to the Scottish audience.

The first major opt-out on which we decided was from the FA cup. As I am sure that everybody realises, although the FA cup involves good football, it has no Scottish representation. We felt that we could offer a more varied and relevant schedule without the FA cup. We then considered other peak-time programmes.

If we are to make and invest in a series such as "The Football Years", which is a high-quality and expensive programme, we want the best slot and platform for it. To be honest, 9 o'clock is the peak of a daily schedule. If we invest in something such as "The Football Years", why on earth would we not put it in the best possible slot? Unfortunately, that means that something must come out of that slot.

Alan Clements: The broader context is that the ITV network, which has always drawn its strength from its regionality in England and the other nations of the United Kingdom, has become more metropolitan in its outlook. For comparison, it would be great to take the committee to our headquarters at Pacific Quay and then to Norwich, Birmingham, Nottingham or even Leeds to see the devastation of those once-proud ITV regions.

The Norwich facility, which used to produce "Sale of the Century" and "Trisha", is now just a shed. Central Television, which used to produce "Spitting Image"—not every politician liked the show, but it was fantastic—and used to have about 2,000 employees, now has 80 people who make local news for the midlands. We can compare that with the situation in Scotland. We could have gone down that road, but that would have been a disaster of the first order for the Scottish creative industries. I hope that I do not exaggerate in saying that.

Elizabeth Partyka: Our move in the direction of changing the schedule and putting in our own programming has been justified by the fact that our audience share for the peak has beaten the network in 2010. Our audience is responding well to the changes that we are making in the schedule.

Claire Baker: I accept the argument that there is a desire for increased Scottish content and to support the Scottish broadcasting community, but cost was also a factor in coming out of the ITV scheduling.

Elizabeth Partyka: Yes.

Claire Baker: What savings have been achieved through that and how important a factor was it?

Elizabeth Partyka: The savings were a factor. We cannot deny that. We have always said that we want to deliver a relevant and affordable schedule, so savings have been a factor, but the strong lead is an editorial decision. We know that there will be some savings, but the decision is editorial first and foremost: what in the network schedule that we are offered do we think will not be of as much interest or relevance to Scotland?

Claire Baker: You mentioned earlier that you wanted a schedule that reflected the audience. Decisions are not made solely on viewing figures, but what has the public reaction to the changes been? Perhaps the media discussed the matter as much as communities, but there are obvious examples of concern about programmes that came out of the schedules.

Elizabeth Partyka: We conducted four major focus groups at the end of 2010 to find out in a one-to-one situation what our audience thought about our opt-out strategy. The four groups were in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen. The feedback that we got from them was that they did not see any deterioration in what came out of the telly in the corner. They knew about the opt-outs—they knew what they were not getting—but all that information came from the newspapers and, because of the way it was reported, they were not aware of what they got instead. They were not aware of the fact that, for the first time ever, "Taggart" was premiered in Scotland. The Scottish audiences got "Taggart" before anybody else; it was a world premiere in Scotland. Much of the other programming that we are putting in is UK premiere. The focus groups were unaware of the positive sides of the opt-out strategy. They were aware only of what they did not get—the negative side—and they got that information only from the newspapers. However, they were perfectly happy with the service that they got from STV. For us, that was a positive reaction. Coupled with the audience ratings, it justified our strategy.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): How is STV doing financially at the moment? The relationship with ITV is quite important for you.

Alan Clements: I am slightly stymied in answering that, because our results are out tomorrow, so we are in a closed period. You will know in 24 hours. We are not looking miserable.

Ken Macintosh: I will ask about Gaelic, but I will give you the context for my question. The committee discussed broadcasting with Blair Jenkins recently. We discussed the digital Gaelic channel, the potential for a Scottish digital channel, how they might overlap or mix and the future of Gaelic broadcasting generally. He expressed his view that it has always been difficult for commercial channels—STV in particular—to cope with Gaelic, because there can be difficulty reconciling the commercial imperative with the requirement to fulfil the needs of the Gaelic audience, which is clearly a specific audience.

What is your current commitment to Gaelic and how do you envisage it developing?

Elizabeth Partyka: The current commitment is that we broadcast one hour of Gaelic a week. The material is supplied by BBC Alba. It chooses what it wants to put out and we have a commitment to broadcast it, which we do.

Ken Macintosh: When is it broadcast?

10:45

Elizabeth Partyka: Monday nights at 10.40.

We also have a very close relationship with BBC Alba. We have done co-productions with it. Alan Clements's production team has made Gaelic programmes for BBC Alba and STV has invested in those programmes to create English versions. We recently did that with a one-hour drama documentary on Peter Manuel, which BBC Alba transmitted a few times in 2010 and which we transmitted in January 2011.

As part of that relationship with BBC Alba, we agreed to promote other programming on BBC Alba around the Peter Manuel programme, so we gave promotional time in peak viewing hours to BBC Alba programming. There is a close working relationship with BBC Alba on those two levels and, of course, Alan Clements makes programmes for BBC Alba and we have regularly made programmes for BBC Alba and, previously, the Gaelic Media Service.

Alan Clements: In the co-production model that we discussed earlier, we have occasionally been able to bring in UK digital money. Unfortunately, it was for a series about Scottish serial killers, which we seem to specialise in. We made a Gaelic version and an English language version, which played on the Crime and Investigation Network. You get a better quality show because a number of people contribute finance to it.

Ken Macintosh: Is the one hour an Ofcom obligation? How do you see STV's commitment to Gaelic developing, particularly in the light of BBC Alba's existence and potential developments on a digital network, if that ever transpires, or do you

have a one-hour commitment and that is it, and you have no plans to change it?

Elizabeth Partyka: We have a one-hour commitment until BBC Alba is launched on Freeview. We have been in discussions with BBC Alba this week about how we can help to launch it on Freeview. We are hugely supportive of BBC Alba, because we have always believed that it is the right way for Gaelic broadcasting to go, but it is difficult for a commercial channel to have Gaelic programmes in peak viewing times. I do not think that we will ever go back to the days when we transmitted Gaelic programmes at half past 7 or 9 o'clock, because a very successful dedicated channel now exists.

Alan Clements: From a production point of view, it is about increasing and enhancing the relationship, so that we can do more and more co-productions with BBC Alba, in which case there will be an English language version and a Gaelic version and everybody will benefit from a bigger pot of cash.

Ken Macintosh: There are no plans to make STV programmes more accessible in Gaelic or to use an online platform or anything like that. You have no plans to develop your own Gaelic service.

Elizabeth Partyka: No, not at the moment.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I will ask about programme sponsorship. As you are well aware, a couple of years ago there was concern in some elements of the press that there was maybe a bit of, dare I say, party-political pressure on you to make certain programmes, and you had to have discussions with Ofcom on the matter. Can you update us on that?

Alan Clements: In what sense?

Elizabeth Smith: An issue was reported in the press regarding whether you were under political pressure to have certain sponsorship and to produce certain programmes.

Alan Clements: Which was found not to be the case.

Elizabeth Smith: It was found not to be the case, but can you update us on your discussions with Ofcom on the matter?

Alan Clements: It is difficult to give an update on a situation that did not exist, if you see what I mean. There has been no further request for information from Ofcom.

Elizabeth Smith: None?

Alan Clements: None at all.

Elizabeth Smith: Can you update us on how you wish to take sponsorship forward?

Alan Clements: I do not think that it is sponsorship. Do you mean in terms of commercial sponsorship of programmes?

Elizabeth Smith: Yes. Obviously, a variety of people may decide that they wish to sponsor programmes or input to such sponsorship. Do you have any future sponsorship plans?

Elizabeth Partyka: Any sponsorship or ad-funding relationship that we enter into is bound by Ofcom rules, which we continue to adhere to. The main finding with regard to the incident to which you refer related to undue prominence, not political pressure.

Elizabeth Smith: How often do you find yourselves having to be accountable for or facing questions on such issues?

Elizabeth Partyka: We do not face questions on any regular basis. We have a very close relationship with the Ofcom offices in Glasgow and London. For example, our compliance officer has daily discussions with Ofcom on different—and, indeed, new—parts of the code. When the code changes we seek advice, and we also regularly contribute to Ofcom's consultations.

Elizabeth Smith: So you have daily discussions.

Elizabeth Partyka: As far as that particular incident is concerned, Ofcom gave its ruling; we accepted it and moved on.

Alan Clements: I must make it absolutely clear, though, that the ruling was not to do with political pressure.

Elizabeth Smith: But there were some issues in that respect.

Alan Clements: There were issues about undue prominence but, going back to a previous question, I do not think that it is for me to suggest that the press might have an agenda with regard to a commercial rival such as STV.

Elizabeth Smith: But the fact is that certain issues were raised and it was important that you were accountable.

Alan Clements: It was critical.

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): I apologise for being slightly late this morning.

Your comments suggest that there is very much a mixed view with regard to producing a lot of your own material. You have lobbied the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to be categorised as an independent producer rather than a broadcaster, so that you can get access to programmes that the BBC and Channel 4 commission. However, you have had a bit of a knock-back in that respect, with the Government

appearing to feel that granting such status would have a knock-on effect on the independent sector in Scotland and that the issue could be examined in the longer term. Where are you with all of that? How would being granted such status and being given that opportunity benefit Scottish broadcasting?

Alan Clements: I am delighted to answer that question.

We were disappointed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport's decision. He clearly examined the evidence very carefully before reaching his conclusion, but I should point out that it ran counter to the recommendation made by Ofcom and in the "Digital Britain" report that we be granted such status. As I said earlier, a small minority of our business relates to our own channel and, given the current relationship between the two companies, I do not think that even my worst enemy would accuse me of having any influence over the ITV schedule.

Faced with that decision, we commissioned BiGGAR Economics to put together a report that I hope some of you have seen—if not, I will be delighted to send it to the committee—on the potential impact on the Scottish sector if we were granted that status. It is quite long, but it concluded that such a move would not impact on the Scottish independent sector and that, if you like, a rising tide would float all boats.

I have read the evidence that you have received from Stuart Cosgrove, Blair Jenkins and Kenny MacQuarrie that outside of my previous company IWC Media—which is now part of RDF Scotland—the Scottish independent sector tends to be made up of quite small companies and boutique operations. We see the main competition for the growing amount of out-of-London production that the BBC is committed to coming not from the Scottish independent sector but from London indies setting up Scottish offices. Of course, one could argue that both ways. It is great that companies are moving to and investing in Scotland but, as we know, the first office to be shut in any downturn will be the Edinburgh or Glasgow one. On the other hand, we will still be located in Pacific Quay and elsewhere in Scotland and will be committed to that.

In our view, if a big, long-running quiz show is made in Glasgow by talkbackTHAMES or Endemol, the profits from that flow to London, Holland or New York. If we make it as an indy for the BBC, the profits remain and are reinvested in the Scottish creative industries. I am happy to provide the report, which makes that argument much more eloquently than I have just done, if it would be of interest to the convener and the broader committee.

Margaret Smith: Is there any mileage in putting that argument to the Government again? Do you have any indication that it will look at the matter again in a couple of years' time?

Alan Clements: You may have seen that, about two weeks ago, Anas Sarwar MP had an adjournment debate on the issue. We continue to lobby on the matter. Reading through the parliamentary language, the indication was that it will be looked at again when the new communications bill is introduced at Westminster. It will not be looked at again in isolation before then, but it will be looked at in that context. We hope that the outcome will be much more favourable at that point.

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): Earlier, we touched on issues relating to the Scottish digital network. When Blair Jenkins appeared before the committee a few weeks ago, he talked about the impact and consequences of that. What are your thoughts and feelings about the proposal for a Scottish digital network and its possible impact on STV?

Alan Clements: Broadly, it is an interesting proposal that has cross-party and full parliamentary support. We welcome any input into the Scottish creative industries. I have made the point that a rising tide lifts all boats. The establishment of a Scottish digital network would be a really significant investment. The committee came to the nub of the issue—who pays for it? We welcome and agree with Blair Jenkins's view that it should not seek advertising, as that would not be a commercially sustainable proposition. I am sure that radio stations and newspapers across Scotland would also agree with that.

The suggestion is that public funding would come directly from public funds in Scotland or Westminster, or from a slice of the BBC licence fee. I would probably be stepping outside my jurisdiction if I said how such a network should be funded; it is not really for STV to do that. However, should the network happen, we would love to work as producers for it. Rather than create another building or set of playout facilities, there might be a place for STV to serve as the transmission hub for it. We would be happy to co-operate fully with it.

Christina McKelvie: It is always good to get your bid in early.

Alan Clements: Yes. Shy guys get no broth.

Christina McKelvie: You will understand that we are a very shy committee.

Blair Jenkins also suggested that a Scottish digital network would reinvigorate democracy. As politicians, we are really interested in that. He was pretty disappointed that local broadcasting had not embraced devolution as much as he thought it

would, by producing much more focused pieces of political reporting. What do you think about that? Do you think that a Scottish digital network would reinvigorate democracy? Do you agree that broadcasters have not embraced devolution in as much detail and depth as Blair Jenkins hoped?

Alan Clements: That is an interesting question. I read Blair Jenkins's evidence carefully, especially his point that it is really odd that there is no debate or discussion programme on Scottish politics. I am so old that I once worked on Scottish "Question Time"—you will remember that, pre-devolution, once a month there was an opt-out from UK "Question Time". I also worked on "Words with Wark", which was a debate and discussion programme. There was also "Axiom" on BBC Scotland and "Scottish Women", in various forms, on STV. It is curious that we now have much more political activity in Scotland but not a show that identifies that. Where such a show would be scheduled is an interesting issue. If there were a Scottish digital network, that would be a natural place to have it. It is interesting that there is no debate show on BBC Scotland.

11:00

Elizabeth Partyka: As a broadcaster, I point out that our coverage of the Westminster elections last year was extensive. We intend to do even more for the forthcoming elections. For the Westminster elections, we were live from half past 10 at night through to half past 5 in the morning as the results came in. We will be doing something similar in May. We will also have a six-week campaign, starting off with a four leaders debate at the beginning and a live four leaders debate on the night before the election.

For the Westminster election, we had an awful lot of debate going on online through CoveritLive, Twitter and Facebook. We are using social media to encourage debate among all parts of the Scottish audience.

For 2011, STV local will become a key part of that. We expect issues and debate to feed up from the local sites to the on-air programmes and back down again. I hope that what we are currently doing in our political programming goes some way to putting Blair Jenkins's mind at rest.

Christina McKelvie: I am sure that we are all really interested in reinvigorating democracy. You mentioned some of your plans for the future, particularly your immediate plans in the run-up to the election. We have talked about STV local and the production of programmes. Have we missed anything out?

I pay tribute to the local STV area in North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire, which Karen Whitefield mentioned. Particularly on the South Lanarkshire side, there is a great wee reporter who manages to pick up lots of things—she is excellent.

Is there anything in your future plans that we have missed? I know that you have got your bid in early for the SDN.

Elizabeth Partyka: It is really important that everyone understands the issue of STV developing into a multiplatform media company. As I said, stv.tv is one of the most popular sites in Scotland. We have a dedicated STV channel on YouTube, which has a global audience. We have 2,500 hours of material on YouTube, which includes many of our iconic titles from the past. We are constantly putting our news on to YouTube. "The Hour" goes on to YouTube every day. We are also delivering the STV message to all the ex-pat communities in Canada and Australia. We really are trying to put STV on as many platforms as possible in order to allow our content to go out to as many people as possible. You can get the STV player on your PS3. I am sure that you all use your PS3s pretty regularly in your bedrooms. "STV anywhere" is our mantra at the moment, which is important for a multimedia audience.

Alan Clements: From a production point of view, our slogan is, "From Scotland to the world". That is how we see it. We are immensely proud of what we have done, but it is only the first steps towards regenerating Scotland as a production base. There is a real strategic opportunity. I would like Glasgow to be a bigger media hub than Manchester. That is a real ambition for me. It is not only about the stories that we tell ourselves in Scotland; it is about taking those stories to a wider UK and international audience. If we do more of that, I will be a very happy man indeed.

The Convener: That concludes our questions. Thank you very much for your attendance. The meeting will now be suspended to allow our witnesses to leave and to have a short comfort break.

11:04

Meeting suspended.

11:14

On resuming—

The Future of Schools Management in Scotland

The Convener: Our fourth agenda item is our final evidence-taking session on the future of schools management in Scotland. I am pleased to welcome Michael Russell, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning. He is joined by Jamie MacDougall, the head of educational options, and Peter Hope-Jones, who is a policy officer, both from the Scottish Government's options and partnerships division. I believe that the cabinet secretary would like to make an opening statement before we move to questions.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): I would, convener. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on the topic. I have followed the committee's work on the issue with interest. I tend to share what I think is the committee's emerging view that the management or governance of schools will form a central part of the considerations in the next session of the Parliament. I also share the view that was eloquently expressed in one meeting by Christina McKelvie that it is results in education that matter rather than merely structures.

I will outline what I think we are trying to achieve in Scottish education. I say "we" because I believe that consensus is a vital ingredient of educational reform. To see that, we need only look at the stability that was generated by the parliamentary consensus on the national debate on education, which led to the curriculum for excellence. The curriculum for excellence is the first building block for what we want to achieve, and we are on firm foundations with it. If we look elsewhere, we can find envy of what we are trying to do through curriculum for excellence. Yesterday morning, I spoke at a seminar that was organised by the Tapestry Partnership in which a professor of education at Harvard University spoke warmly about what Scotland is achieving with curriculum for excellence and how it is showing the way.

We can look elsewhere to understand how we can improve further. The recent programme for international student assessment—PISA—study showed that, after declines in performance in reading and maths in previous years, we are turning the corner. We are performing above the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average, although we want to do better. We will come on to the management of schools, which is of course one of the areas in which we can do better.

Another key issue is the quality of teaching. That is why I commissioned Graham Donaldson to conduct a fundamental review of teacher education. The committee has read his report, to which I will respond in the Parliament shortly. So curriculum for excellence is one pillar and the ever-improving professional development and teacher education is a second pillar. A third pillar is financial stability. The McCrone review in 2000 brought in a decade of stability in Scotland's schools, and tribute should be paid to that. However, it is time to review that agreement, which is why I set up the McCormac review team, which has now had its first meeting.

If we have consensus on the curriculum, a drive for ever-improving teacher excellence and long-term financial stability, we will have three key pillars in place. Of course, we are entering a period of severe financial restrictions in public expenditure. In addition to always improving the performance of education, we must deliver education more efficiently. That is the collective challenge. We will need new and innovative ideas in Scottish education to weather the reductions in public spending but improve our performance and make the most of the opportunities that the three pillars offer.

How we do that is vital. The introduction of any change in our education system is often met with initial scepticism and opposition, so we must engage properly with communities, not least parents, pupils and staff, on the reasons why we think change is desirable and explain clearly the benefits that we hope to achieve. Without that, we will rightly be viewed as introducing change purely for change's sake or to cut costs. Cost is an important factor—nobody will gainsay that in the present situation—but it is not the sole driving force. If we bring together the need to reduce costs with a desire to improve performance, we will probably have the right mix.

The topic of the committee's inquiry is very much part of that. As members know, I commissioned David Cameron to review the devolved school management guidance and to submit his recommendations on that. You have already taken evidence from him, and I hope to make an announcement on that before the end of this parliamentary session. I have expressed on many occasions that I am sympathetic to headteachers requesting more autonomy. However, that must be done intelligently. As I often say, I have never met a headteacher who wants me to give them the power to speculate on the price of heating oil. However, with the introduction of the curriculum for excellence, I have met many headteachers who believe that it demands a further degree of autonomy in their schools or school communities, or within school clusters.

What you are doing is entirely correct. This is the right time to have this debate. We have seen other people participating in it, such as the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, the Educational Institute of Scotland—which made a proposal over the Christmas period to have a number of education boards—and the other teaching unions. I noticed this morning that local authorities have made submissions to you that show that, although they argue, quite rightly, that we need to protect the innovations around the curriculum for excellence, they are open to this debate taking place. It will be a vigorous debate over the next few months. It is well joined. I look forward to hearing your views and I am sure that I will contribute some of my own.

The Convener: You started off by saying that results are what matter, and no one in this committee would disagree with that. To what extent do you believe that there is a correlation between management structures and attainment? That is one of the issues that the committee has been wrestling with, and we have not, as yet, got a clear answer from anyone. In fact, David Cameron told the committee that it is a conundrum, as there is no correlation between the two, in his view. Why is it that the issue is so perplexing? Do you have a view on it?

Michael Russell: It is a crucial issue. There is always a temptation for politicians of every hue to draw lines on maps and devise new structures, because that is what people do. I am reluctant to do that. I want to be led by the evidence. I want to know that the likelihood—because one can never be 100 per cent certain—is that the changes that we make will lead to changes in performance.

We know that the curriculum for excellence will improve performance—I think that we are already seeing that. There is strong evidence, worldwide, that the continuing improvement of the teaching profession produces improvements in performance. I believe that smaller class sizes do that, but I am not necessarily going to enter into that debate with you today, unless you wish to rehearse it. I also think that, allied to continuous improvement in teaching performance, the issue of ensuring that there is stability in education by having a well-rewarded workforce in education with clear and supportive terms and conditions will make a difference. All the evidence, such as the PISA evidence, proves that that is the case.

However, there is still a question about how we organise education. To some extent, the things that I am talking about are a result of educational organisation, so we must ask whether that could be done more efficiently and effectively. It is useful to consider other systems. For example, New Zealand has a national system, which means that the schools are run by the Government without an intervening body. The Tories have turned to models that exist in Sweden and elsewhere and have asked whether those bring better results. In Sweden, actually, the answer is no. Although there are some interesting elements in the free school movement, it has not produced an overall rise in performance, even if it has produced some rises in some circumstances.

We have a lot of work to do on this issue. One area in which we have done some work and should do more—I am pushing to see whether we can publish something on this—involves the correlation between expenditure and results. Since devolution, there has been a considerable increase in education expenditure—even in the past 12 months, it has increased. Some will argue, like Liz Smith, that the correlation between the increased expenditure and the improved performance is not exact by any means. However, the question is whether the administrative system is absorbing more of the resource than it should. That becomes an issue in terms of the efficiency of the use of public resource at a time of difficulty.

The issue is being examined, but I do not think that we have the answers yet.

The Convener: Is it the case that innovation and creativity could be stifled by unnecessary and inappropriate structures? Keir Bloomer suggested that that might be the case. Should we think about how we can improve creativity and innovation? I would have thought that the curriculum for excellence would go some way towards doing that. Are structures a hindrance in that regard?

Michael Russell: I think that the curriculum for excellence does that. I spend a lot of time talking to teachers and, since I became the cabinet secretary, I have made a practice of ringing up headteachers every week—they are given a warning that I will call—and talking through some of the issues that they are experiencing in their everyday work. A regular feature of those calls is discussion about more autonomy and greater freedom to interpret the curriculum for excellence in their schools.

There is no unanimity among headteachers. There is a general feeling that they should take on more responsibility, but there is a general issue about what the boundaries of that responsibility are. There will be circumstances in which over-rigid structures will suppress creativity and innovation in schools. Some would argue that it is necessary that that happen, in order to ensure a uniformity of performance—you have to trade that off in Scotland, too.

An issue that is often raised with me by MSPs is the variation not in outcomes, because we have a national examination system, but in the number of qualifications delivered in schools—Margaret

Smith and Ken Macintosh discussed that matter at a meeting with my officials. Some MSPs have questioned why one school offers six qualifications while another offers eight and have said that everyone should offer the same number.

We have a system in Scotland that enables each school to make decisions. The question is, should we extend that system? I think that Keir Bloomer's view is that the curriculum for excellence is doing well, but could do better if there were more autonomy for not only headteachers, but the entire teaching profession. I am sympathetic to that view, but I am not entirely sure yet where the limits of that lie.

Ken Macintosh: If you were to give headteachers autonomy, the outcomes could be quite long term. How would you assess whether they were delivering the outcomes? What would you do if you thought that they were going wrong?

Michael Russell: That is one of the great problems of education innovation. It is not without risk to individual young people. If you were to develop a system that diminished achievement, you would not know that that was the case for some time. At certain stages in the past 20 or 25 years in Scotland, there have been systems that certainly did not raise attainment, even if they did not diminish it. With the curriculum for excellence, we have introduced by consensus—despite spats that have existed even in this committee—a system that seems to be producing good results and has the potential to produce more.

It might be that a number of approaches could be piloted. When I came into office, I said that I was sympathetic to that approach, but I have not yet seen much work by local authorities along those lines. I would like to see more work on piloting approaches, as I am sympathetic to trying things out and seeing how they work.

A type of guarantee might involve the leadership and management qualities of headteachers. They have a considerable responsibility as leaders in education, and we need to ensure that they are trained and supported to the highest level. By and large, that happens. I am impressed with the skills of headteachers, but I am not saying that those skills are universal. One of the ways in which we might go about making progress on the issue would be to ensure that we have developed to the highest level possible the leadership and management skills of our headteachers—and of our teachers, because there is distributed leadership within our schools.

Ken Macintosh: You say that you are disappointed that more piloting has not been undertaken by local authorities. Are you aware of examples involving greater or lesser autonomy in practice?

Michael Russell: If you talk to headteachers throughout Scotland, you will find that that is going on in some areas. For example, headteachers in West Lothian say that they have a great degree of autonomy. I do not want to say anything invidious about other authorities, but there are areas in which there is not as much autonomy and there is a feeling that there is much more restriction.

When David Cameron comes up with revised guidelines, we should seek to make the norm as devolved as possible. I am waiting for David to give me a set of guidelines that will take the issue further. After that, we need to ask whether there is anything that we can do outwith the existing set of guidelines—all that David is doing is developing the existing set of guidelines—that might require legislation, more effort, the creation of different types of organisations or the adoption of a different mindset.

11:30

Ken Macintosh: A strong piece of evidence from the round-table discussion was that the biggest challenge in Scotland is raising attainment levels within schools rather than between schools. In other words, the challenge is for all departments in a school to achieve at the level of the highest-achieving department. Will giving greater autonomy to heads allow that to happen? I am not quite sure how that would improve matters.

Michael Russell: One of the major challenges—although I am not sure that it is the only one—is to ensure that there is a constant raising of attainment for all pupils and that there is a desire to ensure that the gap in attainment is constantly narrowed. I do not know whether a lack of autonomy is a barrier to that, so we need to find that out. Certainly, I do not think that there is much correlation with spend in that circumstance. It is irrefutable that socioeconomic issues have a strong influence on educational outcomes—there is no dispute about that at all—and in so far as that is related to financial issues, then there are strong financial issues, but there are other issues that we need to look at.

Kenneth Gibson: We have talked about leadership to an extent already. Ken Macintosh raised the important point about different levels of achievement and attainment between departments within the same school. Do you believe that principal teachers need to be given more autonomy in how they run their departments? Do they have enough autonomy, leadership training or innate skills to be able to overcome the barriers that lead to different attainment levels within schools, which David Cameron said are 10 times more important than those between schools?

Michael Russell: A school is a community, and the best schools are a community in which there is distributed leadership. Essentially, that means that there is very good leadership from the top. One of the things that distinguishes a good school from any other school in Scotland—I have no doubt about this, because I have visited many schools—is the quality of leadership in the school. However, it is not just the heroic headteacher model that one looks for; it is an understanding that the leadership is distributed throughout the school and that various types of leadership are displayed in various roles within the school.

There should also be an understanding that the school community makes decisions, not just an unelected or unresponsive monarchy within the school—in other words, that there is decision-making participation within the school. The school community can decide how to organise itself, and each part needs to be well led. We need to develop constantly the leadership skills of all teachers, because they are educational leaders. Even an unpromoted teacher is an educational leader. We need to ensure that they understand that leadership role and are helped to do so.

Some very good leadership training opportunities are on offer in Scotland through a variety of organisations. I am impressed by a number of them. Columba 1400 is one example; I have never met a headteacher or teacher who would say that it did anything other than change their view of the world. There are other organisations, too, and we need to make such opportunities available to teachers.

We also need to make headship as attractive as possible. We have turned a corner in that, too. The number of head vacancies is, I think, smaller; it certainly has not risen in recent years. That indicates that people are willing to come forward and be headteachers. The headteachers will usually tell you that what encourages them more than anything else is having greater autonomy, so there is also an element of that in what we are trying to do.

Kenneth Gibson: Keir Bloomer said that there was a culture of compliance and risk aversion. He said:

"The inspectorate in particular cannot avoid cultivating a culture of compliance and risk aversity that is contrary to the innovative and risk-taking education service that we now need."—[*Official Report, Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee,* 2 February 2011; c 4627.]

What really needs to change?

Michael Russell: The inspectorate is on a useful and important trajectory of change. I pay tribute to Bill Maxwell and, indeed, to his predecessor Graham Donaldson for that. I spoke at Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education conference last week, which reported on the first of the small school inspection changes that they had undertaken, something that I was particularly keen to see happen. The inspection took place on the island of Luing. I was told last night on the telephone that the entire community thought that it was a wonderful experience. I have never heard that said about an inspection before, so that seems to have worked.

The inspectorate's experience of suspending activity last autumn and going into schools to support curriculum for excellence, which was Bill Maxwell's innovation and which was very productive, has changed the inspectorate and made it focus much more on the innovative nature of curriculum for excellence. The inspectorate has made a series of proposals to continue to change the inspection process to something much more positive and supportive. In those circumstances, it will also be likely to support innovation and new thinking.

The inspectorate's involvement in the new organisation—there is an acronym but I am refusing to use it at the moment because there are far too many acronyms in education—with Learning and Teaching Scotland, while retaining the statutory duty of inspection, will also develop the idea of inspection as a supportive and positive activity. That is extremely important.

Kenneth Gibson: So autonomy and leadership are clearly important for headteachers and department heads. What autonomy should they have to deal with teachers who are unable to deliver in the classroom?

Michael Russell: We have to be careful with how we define that problem, because there is a spectrum. Through the General Teaching Council for Scotland, we have the statutory ability to deal with teachers who cannot perform and who are essentially unsuited to teaching. I am sure that you would accept that there are people in politics who are unsuited to being politicians. If people who are unsuited to teaching are in teaching, they should not be, and we need to make sure that they are not in teaching as quickly as possible. There are statutory provisions for that and they should be used.

There is the more difficult issue of those who, to be charitable, have been in teaching for a long time, for whom the spark has gone—I am not being ageist, because there are some very good teachers who are at the end of their careers and are still inspiring others—and who might not be performing to their full capability. That is a problem in all organisations. How do we motivate and encourage such people? Good leadership in schools is essential for that, and it might well be useful for headteachers to have more autonomy to decide whether people can be retired early, or to

change the dispensation in the school of departments and what people do.

We also have a third problem that I freely acknowledge and which we are in the process of solving. We have a cohort of younger teachers, not all of whom have gone into schools in the past two or three years. We are in the process of getting them into schools and that will also make a difference. Often those teachers whose careers are flagging a bit are energised by the example of the highest quality young teachers. One of the headteachers I was talking to yesterday said that, in their 40-year experience in education, they had never seen higher quality young people coming into education. That is a good indication that people want to teach in Scotland. That situation will therefore change.

There is a conundrum with a small group of de-energised older teachers. It is only a small group, and I want to make that absolutely clear, because I know that there are people from the press here and I have seen terribly inaccurate reporting of this issue. There are failing teachers out there—there are also failing journalists—and we must make it absolutely clear that a failing teacher is not the norm.

Of course, there are no failing journalists in this room.

Kenneth Gibson: That is a good point. As Graham Donaldson said, it is not really appropriate to say that a percentage of air traffic controllers is allowed to fail: "We did quite well last year; only 5 per cent of our planes crashed." The teaching profession in Scotland is of a very high standard but there are still issues. We all think back to our personal histories and how some people failed to get the qualifications that they needed in order to go to university, or to go down whatever avenue of life they had chosen, because they had a teacher who was unable to educate them effectively and they suffered as a result. I am talking about how we deal with that.

All this talk about autonomy and leadership is wonderful, but I am thinking about how it impacts at the chalkface and how we continue to improve standards at that level. I hope that there will be no pussyfooting around the problems. The cabinet secretary mentioned the GTCS; I am not desperately enthusiastic about how it deals with these issues. There is still a huge element of producer interest rather than consumer interest in schools and that has to be faced. Scotland has a culture of pretending that the problem does not exist and we must overcome that if we are to make a quantum leap in attainment for children in Scotland.

Michael Russell: I will make a point about Graham Donaldson's report. I will repeat what he said at its launch—I was sitting next to him and I heard it, although, strangely, it did not get reported. What he said was that his recommendations were only possible because of the very high quality of Scotland's teachers and that he was building on success.

I entirely accept the point about what might be called zero tolerance of bad teaching. We should not tolerate bad teaching in our classrooms. There are people who should not be in the profession and it does nobody any good to pretend otherwise. I do not think that there is a large number of them and I do not think that we have a significant problem, but where the problem does exist—I entirely agree with Mr Gibson on this—we should solve it with dispatch.

Kenneth Gibson: I do not believe that that applies to a large number of teachers either, but it is an issue in some schools and departments and we have to address the matter directly.

Elizabeth Smith: Cabinet secretary, you raise an interesting point about what makes a good school—and it is not necessarily about management structures. We have had it put to us strongly that parents are the key driver and, to pick up on what Mr Gibson said—although "consumers" is a horrible word to use in education—parents are the people who will be choosing the school and they have a vital role to play, so it is important to consider what makes them decide what a good school is.

How could parents be more involved in the processes around the possible changes in school organisation, so that they have greater choice over what makes a good school? I am not asking about management structures, but about what makes a good school.

Michael Russell: There is a degree of parental choice in Scotland anyway, with the system of placing requests. I think that it is a good system, and that the one or two local authorities that have been targeting school closures on schools with high levels of placing requests are just not getting it. There is a system in place, and it can be positive.

I agree with you about the absolutely vital role of parents—and I widen that out to the role of parents and children—in creating school communities that work. In the inspection process in Norway, for example, there is a statutory children's inspection of the school, in which they say what they think of it. I am not saying that that should be statutory here, but it is certainly a positive element.

Some schools find no difficulty in getting parental involvement, and some schools struggle at it. It is not just about what socioeconomic group they serve; it is also about the nature of the school

and its outreach. Yesterday afternoon I visited St Bride's primary school in Govanhill, which is the school with the highest proportion in Scotland of children who do not have English as their first language. At the end of that visit, I was sung to by a school choir—as sometimes happens—and it was in Italian, on this occasion, even though there was just one Italian-speaking child there. It was just wonderful. There was a whole group of parents there, some of whom had no English at all, but they were deeply involved in the school, because the nature of the school was that it reached out to them and wanted them to be part of the process. We need schools that actively do that. Good leadership in schools recognises that that is part of the equation. Parents are not excluded—nor are they allowed simply to turn up.

There is an issue for every school. The one thing that we have all done is go to school. It was either an experience that we did not like and would not wish to go back to—that does happen—or we think that we are experts on it and that we can tell teachers how to do their job. There are difficulties in that, but a school that welcomes and draws in parents, that includes them as an integral part of the process and that engages them in their children's learning should not be the exception; it should be the absolute norm.

I could go through a whole list of strategies that I have seen in operation, and part of the leadership training for headteachers is to ensure that those strategies work. I do not think that anybody would get to be a headteacher in Scotland now without some determination to see their school as part of the community.

There is a wider issue that we need to think about. Mr Gibson was laughing at that; there are some headteachers, however, who do not have that—

Kenneth Gibson: Sorry: it was nothing to do with education. I was thinking that even ministers of the Church of Scotland have to have a strong community input.

Michael Russell: How we define the school community becomes an issue. There is some discussion about whether a school should be considered as a cluster of schools—a secondary school and some primary schools—but we should think a little bit more widely than that. If we understand, as I am sure we do, the importance of the early years and the getting it right for every child approach, school becomes a wider group than simply the secondary and primary schools in an area. It will engage all the parents, and even putative parents, in the community, as a child-centred, learning community. Finding out how to do that is a good thing.

Elizabeth Smith: It has been put to us strongly that a good school is often one that engages the parents successfully and is part of the community. Graham Donaldson's report talks about the role of the headteacher and says that the skills that may be required in future are not necessarily the traditional skills. The headteacher will be an important force in driving up standards in schools. Some people—including me—argue that the traditional one-size-fits-all policy used by local authorities is slightly contradicted by the view expressed in the report. There may be various ways of achieving a good school, and the one-size-fits-all strategy does not really help.

11:45

Michael Russell: I do not think that we have a one-size-fits-all strategy in Scotland, and I would not support one; but if we can agree to differ on whether we have such a policy or not, I will certainly agree with you that such a policy would not work. There is considerable variation in the ways in which local authorities manage education in Scotland. It is sometimes positive and it is sometimes negative, but there is no one-size-fits-all strategy.

Elizabeth Smith: Many headteachers argue for more autonomy because—in some local authorities but by no means in all—they feel constrained by a one-size-fits-all controlling factor on certain issues.

Michael Russell: I would not call that a one-size-fits-all policy. I would not want to speak for headteachers, but I do speak to them often and I think that they feel that the limits to their authority need to be widened and that the way in which they lead their educational community needs to be less constrained.

Scotland has a strong tradition of the community being involved in education. We were the first nation in the world to have a system of parish schools and we regard education as a community activity. It could be argued that one of the differences between us and people south of the border is that we regard education as collaborative while they regard it as competitive. I am not making any judgments; I am just saying how things are. Here, education is a collaborative activity, based in the community.

However, it may well be that our interpretation of the community—which developed in the 20th century, through the 1918 act in particular—is now too large. The community is now interpreted as being the local authority area, but the original model is rooted in the idea of the community being the parish. That change may be at the root of the current difficulty. At one stage, the community is the community that a headteacher serves; but at

another stage, the community is something very much bigger—a very large grouping that is too big. How can we ensure that the community basis is strengthened? Answering that question may be one way in which to consider the issue.

It might be implied that the school cluster and the wider grouping—which is pre-school and other activities—is the natural educational community. That is fairly obvious in rural areas but in the larger cities things can be harder to define. I have heard it argued in cities that people should choose their educational community—and the community may not just be geographic, it may be a community of interest. Such models need to be discussed.

Elizabeth Smith: That is a helpful answer. I understand what you were saying about collaborative versus competitive. However, since 1999, spending on schools has doubled and although I think that some fantastic things are happening in schools—do not get me wrong—overall attainment levels are not as good as we would like them to be. Most people would accept that, I think.

In our efforts to drive standards up, there are pillars on which we can build, such as curriculum for excellence and the Donaldson review. However, could an element of competition be added? I do not mean political competition, but if schools know about examples of best practice and have the freedom to adopt them, would you accept that that would be an important part of—

Michael Russell: Rather than describing that as competitive, I would describe that as being willing to learn from and implement best practice. Virtually every school I go to knows that it should find out what people elsewhere are doing and learn from it. They do that, and they look outside Scotland, too.

In Edinburgh, 25 per cent of education is private and in Glasgow the percentage is smaller; but, in the rest of Scotland, that model of competitive choice does not exist. We have not developed the idea of academies, which is built on competitive choice, and I do not think that they are the right thing for Scottish education, but there are models for change that I think are the right thing for Scottish education, and that is what we are discussing.

Christina McKelvie: Good morning, cabinet secretary. An issue that came up at the round-table discussion was a possible reduction in the number of local authorities. What is your view on that? Is there a link between the number of local authorities and performance?

Michael Russell: I do not think so. I would not be foolish enough to give an opinion on whether the present number is the right number—that is outwith my pay grade, to tell you the truth.

We need to look more closely at the correlation between educational spend and performance. There is the issue of duplication. I am extremely encouraged by the work that is being done in East Lothian with Midlothian to examine how to bring together the educational administration to make it more efficient and cost-effective. That is also happening in Stirling and Clackmannan. There is lots of scope to reduce back-office costs and overheads so that administration is managed more effectively. That may not be the answer in this case, because we should be fairly careful about how we define the issues, but there is scope for spending less on administration and spending more at the front line.

That is where we are at the moment. We are not having the debate about why that is the case here. Regrettably, we are in a position in which we are asking people to do more for less. I will not blame anyone—I usually do, but I will not do so on this occasion. How we do that is part of the debate, but it is not the whole debate.

Christina McKelvie: At the round-table meeting, Professor Mongon said:

"According to all the international evidence, the structural question is a second-order question."—[*Official Report, Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee*, 2 February 2011; c 4618.]

I agree with him. If you have been following the committee's deliberations, you will understand that my position is that the child, not the structure, should be at the centre and that we might be looking at the issue the wrong way round.

An observation that I have made is about not so much bad teaching but a lack of aspiration. We still hear about kids who have an aspiration to go to university, for example, being told by the teacher, "You'll not be able to achieve that." I wonder whether there is a link between the Scottish cringe factor when it comes to success and the issues that Carol Craig has written about, such as our not showing off. Is that still inherent in the system? Is it part of what holds children back?

Michael Russell: Where that exists, it does hold children back, and it is greatly to blame for some of the problems that we have had in the past, but I see less and less evidence of it now. Part of the process of the nation growing is the growing of confidence in young people and their growing ability to put themselves forward.

I had a conversation this morning about some members of the civil service who had gone to three different schools to talk about careers. They had gone to a private school, where they encountered a group of young women who were very confident in talking about their careers, then they had gone to a state secondary school, where they were somewhat disappointed by the fact that

the children were not of a forthcoming nature. As good civil servants who wanted to have evidence-based policy making, they went to a third school, which was another state school, where the young people were in their faces in terms of how they projected themselves. Therefore, the situation is patchy—it depends on the school and the young people.

We are seeing growing confidence and a growing ability to recognise that a confident-learner approach is what we need. Curriculum for excellence is extremely important in that regard. The word "confident" is there in the four capacities; this is about confidence.

Christina McKelvie: I think that you are right. I am seeing less of the cringe factor, too.

I want to ask you about the holistic approach to child development. I have mentioned all the other influences on a child's life that can affect their attainment. If the option of a break with local authorities comes up, how will we remedy the issue of shared services and ensure that a holistic approach is kept in place for the child? Some of the best measures for children that I have seen have involved a local primary school working really well with the local child protection team and the local health board, not only in safeguarding children but in ensuring that they have the right environment in which to grow and develop. It is by developing young children through such support that we will get young people who are confident learners as they go into adulthood. I hope that you can give us an insight into how early years ties into that.

Michael Russell: The inspection process for children's services, which I think is through its second cycle, demonstrates that there has been a great improvement in children's services.

We are all united on the concept of partnership delivery. I am not predicting a different structure for schools, but if there were one, partnership working with health, social work and children's services would have to continue, and indeed might improve, because there would be a greater focus on individual school communities and perhaps therefore on individual children. I do not anticipate any threat to partnership working. I am not sure how much partnership working is enhanced by everyone working for the same local authority. There are issues there. There have traditionally been difficulties in drawing in different parts. If you discuss the issue with any school, depending on the local authority you will find different parts of different local authorities reacting differently. I do not anticipate that changing.

The focus on the individual child is where it is at. The welfare of that child and the opportunities that it has from cradle onwards are of massive importance. We have to remember that the great advantage that we have in Scotland—I constantly go back to it—is that we are a small country. The numbers are not overwhelming. Therefore, it is possible for us to operate in a much more personalised way than would otherwise be the case. We should cleave to that as a major opportunity.

Christina McKelvie: One of the organisations that came before the committee suggested having a child development service, for children from ages one to three, to build emotionally confident children and break the cycle of poverty of opportunity and expectation. I do not know whether any of your scoping exercises are considering some sort of formal process for child development that ties in all the partners.

Michael Russell: I am convinced that the process for the early years is one of education and not merely—I do not use the word "merely" pejoratively—care. The best results come from seeing the early experience, in the earliest years, as being an educative process, although not a formal educative process. That is the type of focus that we need to have, and I want to see a great deal more of that.

Margaret Smith: The evidence that the committee took in its round-table discussion, which I think we all found extremely helpful, suggests that there is not the same appetite for radical change in structures in Scotland as there is in England. From your discussions with stakeholders and headteachers and so on, what kinds of structural change do you think might fit the current Scottish context? You have mentioned that East Lothian and Midlothian are sharing services, which is a reasonable approach. We have heard a lot of different suggestions, but my sense from the round-table discussion is that there is not a great embracing of any of them in particular. The cluster idea is the one that is perhaps closest to taking forward the idea of giving greater autonomy to headteachers, involving the local community—while keeping the local authority where it is needed—and building a much more steady-as-you-go approach. Is that, rather than something more radical, where the structure in Scotland might end up?

12:00

Michael Russell: We should be careful not to conflate the words "appetite" and "need"—I am not entirely sure that they go together. I referred in my opening statement to the importance of seeing what change is necessary and persuading people that it is necessary. The appetite for change might not exist until there is recognition that change is necessary.

However, no one I know is wading into this saying, "We need to do this, this and this." The EIS argued at the turn of the year that it would like to see 10 regional boards. That is an interesting contribution, but it strikes me that having 10 regional boards is not that different from having 32 local authorities. There are some other issues there.

Nobody has said to me that they want to see an entirely national system, such as exists in New Zealand where the Government runs everything, although that would be an option. Nobody has said to me that the present situation is entirely satisfactory and should simply be left. Therefore, what you are doing is an important part of the process. We are having a debate about what would be useful.

There is some evidence that headteachers regard a strengthening of their autonomy as being important to their achieving what they need to achieve, especially given the demands of the curriculum for excellence. We did not anticipate this, but we now know that the curriculum for excellence demands a change in teaching and teacher training as well as a change in teachers' terms and conditions and how we employ teachers. It may also demand some change in the way in which we deliver education, which is what we are now working towards. If the curriculum for excellence is our foundation, we must bear that in mind at all times.

There is a spectrum to be considered. Nothing happening is probably not on that spectrum, as there is now a general desire for change—even the evidence from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities indicates that there is some need for change. I do not find the idea of a single national educational service attractive, and I am not sure that there would be many takers for it. I have had discussions with people in New Zealand who talk about its advantages, but they also talk about its disadvantages. Somewhere on the spectrum there is what we might call a rebalancing of the structure, which is what we need to debate—and what better time to have that debate than when an election is due and people can put forward their ideas fairly?

Margaret Smith: Kenny Gibson talked earlier about the thorny issue of bad teachers. I agree totally that bad teachers should not be in our classrooms—they should be out of teaching and doing something else, as the price that is paid for their bad teaching is paid by the children. In conversations that I have had with headteachers—especially secondary school headteachers—about the need for more autonomy and their frustration at their lack of power in their schools, they have raised issues around staffing. At the same time, some of the reticence among unions and others towards change in the existing structures is partly the result of fear about staff terms and conditions and so on suddenly being in the hands of an individual teacher.

You say that there is scope for a shift on the autonomy of headteachers. Are there certain things that you believe will always have to remain with a local authority, a regional board or whatever?

Michael Russell: I cannot imagine our moving away from national bargaining on teachers' salaries and terms and conditions. The Balkanisation of that would be foolish, in my view. The college sector does not have national terms and conditions, and I am on record as saying that that is a disadvantage. I know that some—although not all—college principals disagree with me. We would see that writ large if every one of Scotland's almost 3,000 schools had a different set of terms and conditions. That is not on the table and I cannot imagine that it would be discussed.

Nevertheless, there are issues of the deployment of staff within national agreements that might be better decided by discussion and negotiation at the school level rather than by local authorities. There are also issues of hiring and a school's priorities that might be better decided at that level. Some schools are already in that position; others may want to get there. Within the debate, there are areas about which we would say, "No, that is not a place where we're going." However, there are other areas about which we would ask, "How would that help?" Some people might argue that it would make no difference, but I have heard teachers arguing that they would like the flexibility to decide what to do.

Margaret Smith: That is great. Thank you.

The Convener: That concludes our questions to you, minister. Thank you very much for your attendance at the committee.

Michael Russell: I will see you next week and look forward to it. Thank you.

12:04

Meeting suspended.

12:05

On resuming—

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener: The fifth item on our agenda is a decision on taking business in private. Is the committee content that the draft report based on our evidence sessions on the future of schools management in Scotland will be considered in private at our next meeting?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Subordinate Legislation

Teachers' Superannuation (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/42)

Teachers' Superannuation (Scotland) Amendment (No 2) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/52)

12:06

The Convener: The sixth and final item on our agenda is consideration of subordinate legislation. No motions to annul have been lodged. Does any member want to say anything about either of the instruments?

Ken Macintosh: The background to the instruments is the movement to a different measure of inflation, which is very unwelcome among the teaching profession. Just for information, will the decision on that be taken by this committee, through subordinate legislation, or at Westminster?

The Convener: Our understanding is that the matter was part of the UK budget.

Ken Macintosh: That is right: I am aware that the overall decision comes from Westminster, but I wondered whether we have any—

Kenneth Gibson: We do not have any autonomy on that.

The Convener: I hope that the situation has been clarified for you, Mr Macintosh.

The question is, that the committee agrees to make no recommendation on the instruments. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: That is agreed.

Meeting closed at 12:08.

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