



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 14 June 2011

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EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

1st Meeting 2011, Session 4

CONVENER

*Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)

*Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab)

*Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)

*Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD)

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Terry Shevlin

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Education and Culture Committee

Tuesday 14 June 2011

[Jean Urquhart *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

Interests

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Good morning everybody, and welcome to the first meeting of the Education and Culture Committee in the fourth session of the Scottish Parliament. I have the fairly dubious pleasure of having been declared to be the oldest member of the committee, which is why I am in the chair for the moment. I remind everyone present, including members, that mobile phones and BlackBerrys should be turned off, because they interfere with the sound system. We have received apologies from Liz Smith.

Item 1 is declarations of interests, in accordance with section 3 of the “Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament”. I have no declaration to make. I invite other members to make their declarations.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I have no relevant interests to declare.

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): I am not aware of any relevant interests to declare, but for the record I point out that I have been a supporter of, and adviser to, the campaign in Eastwood to oppose the closure of Robslee primary school. I also point members to my declaration of interests on the Parliament’s website.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I am a North Lanarkshire Council councillor. My husband, John Adamson, is a teacher in North Lanarkshire and is a National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers union representative. I am a member of the National Trust for Scotland. I point people in the direction of my declared interests.

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): I direct everyone to my declaration on the Parliament’s website. In the interests of clarity, I add that I am some £15,000 in debt to the Scottish Government via the Student Loans Company. As the sum is non-trivial and larger than most members would record, I thought that it would be helpful to put it on the record—I think that that is a voluntary declaration.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I am not aware of relevant interests, aside from my

parents’ membership of the Educational Institute of Scotland—I do not know whether that is relevant—and that I, too, have a student loan.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): The committee’s remit includes culture as well as education, so I declare that I write a weekly column for *The Scotsman* newspaper, for which I am remunerated. I point to my declaration of interests for details of the remuneration. I have made a programme for Scottish Television, which will be shown in the autumn and for which I received no payment—it is a four-part series on the best Scottish album. For other information about my past media work, I point people to my voluntary declaration in the register of members’ interests.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): My declaration will not remotely be as interesting as that. I point people to my entry in the register of members’ interests. In the interests of clarity, I declare that I am the parent of two pupils at a school that is the subject of a potential closure order. I am the son of a former headteacher, Open University lecturer and former EIS member, who continues to do Scottish Qualifications Authority marking. I have a sister who is currently a language teacher in Glasgow and is an EIS member.

Jean Urquhart: I must come back in now that everyone has shown me how to do it. I carefully read section 3 of the code of conduct and I thought that it related only to financial interests, but I had better declare that I am a member of the court of the University of the Highlands and Islands and a member of the Highland Council and the council’s education, culture and sport committee. I am also vice-chair of Eden Court theatre.

Convener

Jean Urquhart: Agenda item 2 is to choose a convener. The Parliament has agreed that only members of the Scottish National Party are eligible for nomination as convener of this committee. That being the case, I seek nominations for the position.

Clare Adamson: I nominate Stewart Maxwell.

Stewart Maxwell was chosen as convener.

Jean Urquhart: Congratulations, Stewart.

The Convener (Stewart Maxwell): Thank you, Jean, for convening the opening part of the first committee meeting of session 4. I thank members for nominating and choosing me as their convener. I am very much looking forward to the next few years on this committee; it will, I think, be an interesting and, I hope, exciting one of which to be a member. I certainly look forward to working with everybody over the next few years on what I think are extremely important issues facing the Government, the Parliament and the people of Scotland. We will have an interesting time, but I am sure that there will be plenty of hard work along the way.

Deputy Convener

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is to choose a deputy convener. Members have before them a note from the clerk that sets out the procedure for selecting a deputy convener, which is identical to the procedure for choosing a convener. The Parliament has already agreed that members of the Scottish Labour Party are eligible to be chosen as deputy convener of the committee. That being the case, I invite nominations for the position.

Jenny Marra: I nominate Claire Baker.

Claire Baker was chosen as deputy convener.

The Convener: I congratulate Claire on becoming the deputy convener.

Work Programme

The Convener: Agenda item 4 is the approach to developing our work programme. I refer members to the clerks' paper, which suggests that, as an initial step, we agree in principle to holding a business planning meeting during the summer recess. The clerks will prepare a detailed paper for us. We can look at it at our next meeting and discuss in more depth what the agenda will be. In my experience, a business planning meeting during the recess has always proved to be useful for members of committees. It gives us a chance to go over a range of issues and give our initial thoughts as to how our work programme should be developed.

The clerks' paper also proposes that we receive at our next committee meeting a briefing from the Scottish Government on its priorities within the committee's remit. That would be a very helpful introduction to our work; it might also inform the format of the business planning meeting. Our work programme discussions will obviously be shaped by the Scottish Government's policy and legislative intentions over the next few years.

Before I put questions to the committee, do members have any general comments on the paper from the clerks? I will take the silence as a "no".

Do members agree in principle that we should hold a business planning meeting during the summer recess?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Do members also agree to invite the Scottish Government to give a briefing at our next meeting, which will be on 28 June?

Members indicated agreement.

Liam McArthur: Once we identify which minister is likely to appear, do we anticipate inviting wider stakeholder groups to contact us to tell us which issues they wish to put on the record at an early stage, or will the meeting be very much about inviting ministers to set out an agenda and probing what they say?

The Convener: I hope that the ministers will set out their priorities for the forthcoming session. We do not yet have the Government's legislative programme and will have to wait until the autumn for it. However, I think that the ministers will be able to set out priorities in their areas of responsibility. That meeting will give the committee an initial opportunity to probe the minister on those areas. Outside bodies have absolute freedom to contact us with any issues that they want to have raised either at that meeting or, more important, subsequently, when we get into the detail of the Government's programme,

and the committee has agreed its policy priorities and how we will proceed with our work programme. I would be happy for any organisation or outside body to contact members of the committee with suggestions or helpful advice.

Marco Biagi: Convener, you are using interchangeably the terms "minister" and "ministers". Given the fact that we are the Education and Culture Committee, it might be useful for us to have representation from both portfolios, depending on who is sent.

The Convener: I have already asked the clerks to approach the Government about the availability of both sets of ministers, including the cabinet secretaries. They will see who is available and whether one or both of them can attend on 28 June. Their availability is up to them, but I hope and expect that a minister or a cabinet secretary will be available for that meeting. The committee is not just about the education side; it is about education and culture, so both cabinet secretaries have been approached.

Jenny Marra: Given the possibility that two ministers might attend the away day, can we ensure that the committee has sufficient time to set out its own agenda before giving both ministers an appropriate amount of time in which to lay out their agendas? My fear is that, if we have two visits, the day will become about the Government's agenda rather than about the committee's agenda. Perhaps we can set aside four hours for the committee to set out its agenda and then be briefed by the ministers at the end of the day.

The Convener: I am talking about the next formal meeting of the committee, on 28 June. I expect and hope that a Government minister will attend that meeting, at which we will also discuss what we want from the away day. At that meeting on 28 June, we can talk about the detail of that: whether we want one, two or no Government ministers to be available; whether we want other outside advice, information or presentations to the committee; and how much time we should allocate for those things and for other discussions that we want to have at our away day in the summer recess. The two are separate.

Jean Urquhart: Is it going to be an at-home away day, if you know what I mean?

Liam McArthur: The convener was using the old terminology.

The Convener: Yes, I was using old terminology. I am happy to suggest that the business planning meeting should take place here, in the Parliament, and not be an away day, as such. However, it will happen during the recess rather than in normal parliamentary meeting time.

Jean Urquhart: I wondered whether you were thinking of Paris or somewhere.

The Convener: I probably was thinking of Paris, but I am not sure that that would be appropriate or welcomed—by a number of people.

The discussion on 28 June of the paper that will be provided by the clerks for our work programme discussion at the away day should probably be held in private in order to give us complete freedom to discuss the areas that we want to prioritise. Are members agreed that we will hold that discussion on 28 June in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: That completes today's business. The next meeting of the committee will be on the morning of Tuesday 28 June at 10:30.

Meeting closed at 10:14.

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