



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 28 June 2011

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EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

2nd 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

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED

Jackie Brock (Scottish Government)

Fiona Hyslop (Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs)

Michael Russell (Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning)

Andrew Scott (Scottish Government)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Terry Shevlin

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Education and Culture Committee

Tuesday 28 June 2011

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 09:59*]

Interests

The Convener (Stewart Maxwell): Good morning. I welcome members to the second meeting of the Education and Culture Committee in 2011, in session 4. I remind members and all others who are present to ensure that mobile phones are switched off at all times because they interfere with the sound system. No apologies have been received for this meeting; we have full attendance.

Agenda item 1 is a declaration of interests. I invite Liz Smith to declare any registrable interests that are relevant to the committee's remit.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Thank you, convener. First, I apologise for the fact that I was not at the first meeting, which coincided with the launch of a sports event for which I was responsible. That was difficult, so I apologise to members and to you, convener.

I have no registrable interests to declare, but I record that I am a member of the General Teaching Council for Scotland on the basis that I am still involved with coaching cricket and other outdoor education activities in schools in various regions. I am also a member of the governing council at George Watson's College in Edinburgh.

Decision on Taking Business in Private

10:01

The Convener: Item 2 is a decision on whether to take item 6 in private. Do members agree to do so?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Scottish Government Priorities

10:01

The Convener: Item 3 is evidence from Scottish ministers on the Scottish Government priorities that fall within the committee's remit. We will first take evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Michael Russell. I congratulate him, as I have not yet had the opportunity to do so, on his new—or rather, continuing—post. I welcome his supporting officials, who are Andrew Scott, Lesley Fraser and Jackie Brock.

Members will be aware that the cabinet secretary has to be away by half past 10, so I request that questions be kept as succinct as possible to ensure that we get round everybody. I ask the cabinet secretary to make a short opening statement.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): It will be very brief indeed, convener. I thank you for the invitation to be here, and I look forward to working with the committee over the next five years and to exchanging information regularly.

You have invited me to set out my priorities for Scottish education, some of which I addressed during the debate on 16 June. In my overall vision statement I talked about improving the life chances of Scotland's children and young people by improving attainment for all, and by raising and realising ambition for all. That is, in brief, what I seek to do.

I will break that down into some of the areas for which I have responsibility. I certainly want greater focus on the importance of the very early years of life and on early intervention to improve outcomes. My colleague Angela Constance will work in a variety of ways to support that, including using the change fund in which we intend to invest to develop a national parenting strategy. We will introduce legislation to ensure that investment in the early years is not an optional extra and that the getting it right for every child approach works throughout Scotland.

I want to support all schools to be excellent in order to enable every child to achieve their full potential. I believe that curriculum for excellence recognises the uniqueness of every child and encourages schools to be ambitious. In that context, we have a range of things to develop, which will include developing our literacy action plan through the literacy commission. We will renew the emphasis on the importance of language learning generally, and we will ensure that our children understand Scotland and its place in the world.

We will go on investing in our teachers, and will support and develop their work and build on the Donaldson review of teacher training. We have established a review of teachers' terms and conditions, led by Professor Gerry McCormac, that will report towards the end of August or the beginning of September.

Governance of schools was considered in the previous session of Parliament by your predecessor committee. I would welcome a continuation of that discussion; I intend to continue to highlight it as being an important issue. The importance of rural education and rural schools has already featured in my work and I will shortly announce further details of the commission on rural education.

We need constantly to review the avenues that are open to young people who leave school and do not go on to education, employment or training, and where those avenues lead. Yesterday's figures should have given us a further prod in that direction, if a prod was necessary.

The learning journey that begins in the classroom must continue to be flexible through school and beyond, including in colleges and universities. Tomorrow I will set out a wider package of reforms for the whole of post-16 education, which will include the review of the current governance of higher education led by Professor von Prondzynski that I have already announced.

There are many other topics that we will no doubt deal with together over the coming years, but that will have given you a broad flavour of my ambitions and of the work that I, Angela Constance and Alasdair Allan will be doing.

The Convener: Thank you, cabinet secretary. That was a helpful broad-brush sweep of your responsibilities. I now invite members to put questions to the cabinet secretary.

Liz Smith: Thank you, cabinet secretary, for your opening remarks and for the offer that you gave last week to the spokesmen of each party, which was helpful.

I ask you to reiterate some of the timescales that you expect to apply, particularly with regard to any proposed legislation that might be introduced for early years and for some of the changes with regard to universities.

Michael Russell: Yes—I will put some flesh on those bones. I have, indeed, met the spokespeople of each party. I have offered them—as I am happy to offer the committee—all the support and co-operation that we can give, including from my officials. At this stage in the session, we should endeavour to start as we mean to go on, and that means allowing the committee

to have access to as much information as we can provide.

The legislative programme will be set out by the First Minister as usual, but I have an intention in my mind—which I will talk about tomorrow—to move towards legislation on higher and further education within the next year to 18 months. As you will recall, I gave a commitment to the university principals that we would resolve the issue of rest-of-United-Kingdom fees before Parliament rises for the summer recess at the end of this week. I will therefore speak about it tomorrow. That is the most urgent issue, as it affects the prospectuses that will be produced shortly.

On the other issues around higher and further education, including further education reform, we anticipate legislating in the years 2011-12 or 2012-13, so that the new measures will be in place by 2013-14. That is broadly in keeping with what is happening elsewhere. That is still my intention, and I hope that we will produce a pre-legislative consultation this autumn, with the bill out next year. I anticipate that the eventual legislation will come into effect in 2013.

Other legislative proposals will be brought forward. Our manifesto mentions an education rights and responsibilities bill and an early years bill. It is fair to say that the early years bill will come before the rights and responsibilities bill, but we will provide further detail when we announce the legislative programme.

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I have a question for clarification about the rural schools closures moratorium. Are schools that have already been referred to you included in that moratorium? Are there decisions to be made on some of the outstanding ones?

Michael Russell: I made it clear in the letter that I sent to councils at the end of May, and in subsequent guidance that we have given to local authorities, that if a school closure had reached the stage of its being subject to a report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and a pending decision by a council, it could proceed. If a closure had not yet reached that stage, it should not proceed. That is broadly what appears to be happening.

A number of closures have come to me either for call-in or decision in recent weeks. I will make sure that Jackie Brock keeps me right on this: I have called in the two closures in Shetland, and I refused to allow Aberdeenshire Council to close two schools last week. I have called in the decision on Robslee primary school, and I think that one or two others are pending call-in. I suspect that once those have been dealt with—either called in or allowed to close—nothing will

come forward thereafter, unless a local authority chooses not to accept the moratorium, although I have had no indication that any council intends to do that.

Jean Urquhart: Have you made decisions about the timescale for those that have already been called in?

Michael Russell: The legislation specifically provides for a three-week period between a closure decision and a decision to call it in. I think that I am right in saying that, after a decision has been called in, there is no specific period in which the decision must be made. I would always endeavour to make the decision as promptly as possible, but a number of considerations apply: for example, whether I have been seeking further information and whether other factors have to be taken into account. As regards the two Shetland schools, which Jean Urquhart might be particularly interested in, I will be trying to make the decision as soon as possible.

The Convener: On school closures, I believe that you will seek further information from local authorities. What role—if any—do you envisage in the process for parents' protest groups that campaign to keep schools open?

Michael Russell: I would have hoped that such groups would have been given information to justify the call-in during the three-week period. We must remember that that relates to two aspects: a failure of process—in other words, that a council has not observed certain things that it should have observed; or new information being available that was not available at the time of the decision. Such information should have been provided during the call-in. Were I to find it helpful to seek information, I would be entitled to do so and would do so if I felt that it was necessary.

The Convener: That is helpful.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I want to pick up on the higher education questions that were asked by Liz Smith. Can the cabinet secretary say a bit more about the proposal for a European Union service charge? I am not asking you to pre-empt anything that will be in your statement to the chamber tomorrow, but although there is a certain level of support for going down that path, there is lack of clarity about how it will be delivered.

Michael Russell: With your permission, I would rather leave that until the statement tomorrow, because the service charge will be covered in it. I would merely say that it is not, as you know, a simple matter. My officials and I have been discussing it with the European Union for some time and it will have to be done—if it is done at all—step by step.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Can I take you back briefly to the issue of rural schools? I apologise for not intervening earlier on the issue. You indicated the position on processes that are under way. I think that I am right in saying that there was a suggestion that where schools had no pupils, mothballing arrangements could proceed. I think there was also a suggestion that where there is community support for it—I presume on the basis of the educational welfare of the children concerned—proposals to close could be taken forward. I suppose the first of those is fairly clear-cut, but there is perhaps more ambiguity about the second, because there might be disagreement between parents of children at the school and elements in the wider community. It would be helpful to get a bit more detail about what you mean in that regard.

Michael Russell: I have certainly never argued that every school should stay open. There are schools that close themselves because there are no pupils in them, or only two or three. In those circumstances, parents decide that the children should go elsewhere—I accept that. On the second example, however, I can only describe the particular case of—I think—Pinwherry primary school in south Ayrshire. There was a proposal for a school closure in south Ayrshire whereby the pupils were to move to a brand new school about a mile or a mile and a half away. There was no request for call-in and it was absolutely clear that the parents thought that it was a good idea. It would have been perverse had I said at that crucial time “No, I’m sorry. You can’t do that.” I think that it is therefore one of those things that you will know when you see it, if I can put it that way. If there is genuine concern within a community—even minority concern—I would want to pay attention to that. However, there are circumstances in which parents say “No. We want something different.”

Can I just make sure that we check the name of the school to which I referred? I am not sure that I had it absolutely correct—it has been a long time since I lived in south Ayrshire, and I want to ensure that I give you the correct name for the record.

The Convener: If nobody else has questions on that area, we will move on to Joan McAlpine.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): Good morning, cabinet secretary. You talked about curriculum for excellence and about attainment. Will a mechanism be in place to monitor the progress of curriculum for excellence and whether it delivers on attainment? By the end of this parliamentary session, a generation of primary school children will have gone through CFE.

Michael Russell: One of the great difficulties in education, of course, is the speed of change. It

appears rapid, but we see the outcomes only over a longer period of time. It is the classic case of the turning of a tanker: it takes a while. That is a responsibility, because things happen in education that could be detrimental. We therefore must build into any system of change some checks and balances. I think that curriculum for excellence has more built into it in that regard than any previous set of changes, starting with the work of the management board, which is not simply a guidance mechanism but is a feedback mechanism that receives information from, for example, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education and from Learning and Teaching Scotland—which are shortly to merge as a new organisation to be called Education Scotland—as well as from a range of stakeholders. There is assessment work in primary schools, which is well founded in assessing the progress of young people, and there will, of course, be the outcomes of the examination process from secondary 4 onwards, which will show what progress is being made. It is necessary, too, to make a subjective assessment of whether, in the opinion of schools and teachers, an improvement in attainment is being seen. From the feedback that we are getting, that is undoubtedly the case.

10:15

In addition, there are the twice-yearly statistics that we now produce. The set of statistics that came out yesterday indicates to us that Scottish education is on an improving trend, although not uniformly. A problem that has bedevilled Scottish education for a very long time is that there is a large divergence in performance—I will not call it a gap, as that word is used too often in education. That divergence in performance is largely dictated by socioeconomic circumstance, and it is larger in Scotland than it is in many other places. We want to take some special measures to find out whether we can close that gap, which is why I have talked so much about attainment in recent weeks. Work to address that is well overdue, and I will produce some specific proposals.

There has been some suggestion—as I know, because Joan McAlpine has commented on the idea in the past—that there should be a supermechanism for constantly assessing the progress of curriculum for excellence, but I do not believe that that is necessary or desirable. We have a range of means of checking that it is working and working well. When we find that there are problems, we have shown ourselves to be capable of dealing with them. The 10-point plan that I put in place in March last year was designed to help the whole system to work better and to produce better results. Subsequently, I set up a number of groups, one of which—the stakeholder group—I will chair later this morning. There are

also the practitioner group and the excellence group, which feed back into the system the experience of curriculum for excellence. Therefore, in every regard, CFE is well supervised and well checked, and the outcomes are well recorded. If we could do more, I have no doubt that we would.

With the convener's permission, I make the offer that I would be happy to arrange for the committee collectively or for each member individually to come to schools to see CFE in action and to talk to the profession at various levels and to our officials, to ensure that members understand everything that is happening with CFE because it is so important.

The Convener: That is a helpful suggestion, which we will discuss when we discuss our work programme later today and at the business planning meeting during the summer.

Are there any further questions on curriculum for excellence?

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): I have a question that is broadly on curriculum for excellence. In the past, you have said that it is not possible to undertake any change in education without taking the teaching profession with you. One of the key sensitivities with curriculum for excellence has been the Government's relationships with teaching as a profession, and with the unions. What is the current state of play with regard to relations between the Government and the teaching profession on the implementation of CFE?

Michael Russell: I suspect that that depends on which representatives of the teaching profession one speaks to and when. In the classroom, there has been a pretty strong commitment to making CFE work. It is always difficult to introduce a major reform if, at the same time, there is downward pressure on resources, which regrettably is where we are. In those circumstances, there will be special pressures, which I understand.

One of my key aims has been to support teachers through the implementation process. Quite a lot, if not all, of the work that we did last year in the 10-point plan was devoted to that aim, and I continue to be focused on it. Last week, the CFE practitioner group, which I also chair—I have taken a very personal interest in CFE—talked about some further developments that we might require to take place.

I have regular meetings with the trade unions—I will meet the Educational Institute of Scotland next week—and I have involved the trade unions in the management board of CFE. Despite the fact that the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association found it difficult to work within the management

board, the body that replaced it on the board, the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers, is still there and is still working with us.

Where concerns exist, I want to address them. I have always done that and will continue to do so. Where those concerns are, if I might use the language of the catechism, the "outward and visible" signs of something else that is happening and are the result of an argument about something other than CFE, we will need to address that inward state.

I think that some of the things that we have heard in recent months are more to do with a general dissatisfaction with the pay settlement. I understand that. It was a very difficult time and it was not perfect, but I felt that it was the best that we could do. We also have a severe difficulty arising with the pensions situation. The trade unions are absolutely rightly focused on the inequity of the proposals, and the Scottish Government agrees with them on that, as you know.

We have issues to address with the trade unions, but I will address them head on in dialogue and discussion as much as I can. Where there are things that we can help with, particularly with CFE, we will do so.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I want to return to an issue that I discussed in the chamber during the education debate two weeks ago—your policy of no compulsory redundancies. We have seen EIS's dispute over compulsory redundancies at Telford College and I believe that a number of colleges are perhaps planning the same. Can you confirm that you promised no compulsory redundancies in the FE sector?

Michael Russell: No. I promised—in a speech that I made in March this year—three things. I outlined three important aspects of what I thought the college situation should be. First, I felt that it would be useful to apply in the colleges the policy of no compulsory redundancies that applies to the Government's staff, and I suggested that the colleges attempt to do that. Some have done so and succeeded, some have tried but have not quite got there yet, and some do not seem to be quite so focused on the matter, if I may offer that as my way of seeing it.

The second thing that I focused on was a national union recognition, or a national agreement on terms and conditions. I find it incredible that there are 41, 42 or 43—it is impossible to say how many—sets of terms and conditions in the college sector specifically. That situation has grown over the years, and even college mergers have sometimes not reduced the number of sets of terms and conditions, because

they have simply taken the two sets of conditions and carried on regardless. It seems to me that a single national set of terms and conditions would be a prize worth working for over time.

The third thing I said was that, at a time of difficulty and particular financial pressure, we need a more rational map of provision than we have. I also talked about that in relation to the higher education sector, and I will talk about it tomorrow in the statement. We clearly need not to have unnecessary duplication and overlap.

The general point that I would make is that there are pressures on the college sector, just as there are pressures across the board at present. The £1.3 billion cut to the Scottish budget cannot be taken without pressures. That being the case, however, there is a way in which to take the college system forward—and this is what we have tried to do—that preserves the number of core places, ensures that a wide range of offerings are undertaken, and ensures that we take the very good staff that we have in the sector with us as those changes take place. Mr Biagi pointed out the importance of that.

Now, one of the additional difficulties that have with that is the fact that there are 41—is it 41?

Andrew Scott (Scottish Government): I think that there are 42.

Michael Russell: There are 42 boards, all of which operate independently and with their own sets of terms and conditions. That is something that we can no longer afford; it is wasteful.

The incredibly complex system of funding college courses is also wasteful. I invite the committee to go to the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council to discuss weighted sums and other issues. I have to say that I have done my best but am not sure that I fully understand them, so I think that members would spend a considerable time trying to do so.

Jenny Marra: Thank you, cabinet secretary. I think that, in clarifying the matter for me, you said that it would be “useful” to apply the policy of no compulsory redundancies to colleges. Would you agree that it would also be useful in the higher education sector?

Michael Russell: Yes. By and large, I would like to see the Government's policy of no compulsory redundancies being operated as widely as possible across the education sector. However, I do not have the power to do that directly, and if I were to interfere in colleges or universities in the way that is being suggested, members of this committee would be very critical. You might be one of them. In the circumstances, I have to be careful.

Nevertheless, I believe that the Government's policy is a good one, because the social contract and social wage issue to which the First Minister referred in one of his recent speeches is important. At a time when things are difficult, when pay rises are impossible and there is downward pressure on resources, there needs to be a contract of some sort between the state and those who work with it and for it. The policy is an important sign of that, and it also leads to useful stability in the sector. I have no power to enforce the policy and universities and colleges will make decisions themselves. However, if it is possible for the Government to implement such a policy, I hope that they will try hard to do likewise.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I am sorry to turn to curriculum issues again, but as a technology graduate I am concerned about the numbers going through into the sciences and technology, especially from the female demographic in our schools. Will some of the work that is connected with curriculum for excellence, especially the early years intervention, monitor how that progresses?

I know that there is confusion among parents about the qualifications in curriculum for excellence. I am concerned that our business community does not really understand what is coming out. What plans does the Government have to address that?

Michael Russell: I disagree with you on the final point. The business community has been extremely supportive of curriculum for excellence and the changes that have been taking place. It also supports the timetable that we have set out for the qualifications, which was set some years ago. We are on time for that. The media coverage of curriculum for excellence tends to be fairly glib about what is and is not being delivered. The Scottish Qualifications Authority timetable is being observed. It was agreed by the management board, and business and industry have had no problems with it. I have tried to keep parents as well informed as possible and will go on doing so. For example, last year and this year, I have written individually to the parents of every child going from primary 7 to secondary 1 to ensure some understanding about that transition. We have also published a great deal of material on curriculum for excellence of one sort or another, including parent fact files.

Anne Glover, the chief scientific adviser who reports to me, has spent considerable time on gender involvement in science. She would be very helpful if the committee wanted to meet her or take evidence from her. I am sure that she would see Clare Adamson personally—I will ask her to do that—to explain the work that she has done. She is due to bring forward material shortly.

I have also ensured that there is a strong focus on ensuring that we encourage as much participation as possible in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics—STEM—subjects and that we recognise the gender barriers in those subjects and try to overcome them. Some of the key STEM ambassadors are women, and they have done a tremendous job in promoting participation. Again, I would be happy to introduce you to those ambassadors.

Liz Smith: I go back to the timescales. Gerry McCormac's committee will report to you in the autumn. Will you give us a rough idea of the timescale that you envisage for you to assess his report?

Michael Russell: I am not the final arbiter of Gerry McCormac's report. The idea arose during discussions for this year's settlement at the Scottish negotiating committee for teachers. As you know, there is a tripartite arrangement for teaching pay and conditions, between the Scottish Government, the unions and the local authority employers. It was agreed that we would set up that review and that it would report towards the end of the summer, which now means the end of August or beginning of September. The last time I spoke to Professor McCormac he was thinking of the end of August—but we will see. It is my intention to respond to that as promptly as I can, but the report will then be fed in to the SNCT process, so any recommendations in the report on changing terms and conditions would require to be negotiated through that process. That is the means by which teachers' terms and conditions are set.

Liam McArthur: You have indicated the priority that you attach to improving language teaching in schools, which I very much applaud and support. It is clear from evidence in my constituency and elsewhere that some schools are, if anything, paring back modern language teaching. Do you see the answer to that being about resources, regulation or a combination of both? I support the objective but I am struggling a little to see how you can deliver it.

Michael Russell: We have a very distributive system in Scotland for decision making in education. At the end of the day, schools make decisions about the details of the curriculum, and they place different emphases as they see fit.

It will be necessary for us to do two things. First, we must resource the development, which we anticipated in our manifesto and have costed. Secondly, we must persuade local authorities and individual schools to take it up. I think that we will succeed in doing that, as there is every indication that they are supportive of it; nevertheless, the

resource and the money will need to be available to allow it to take place.

10:30

The idea of introducing the one-plus-two model—the Barcelona scheme, as it is called—is a good one. It is common throughout Europe but not in these islands. It will take some time to introduce it, but I hope that in the course of a school generation, over roughly the next 13 years as children go from primary 1 to sixth form, they will acquire a knowledge of their own language plus a working knowledge of two others. The degree of knowledge will vary. Some young people will take another language to fluency or almost to fluency; some will simply be able to order a coffee in Spain, Latvia or wherever they choose to go.

Liam McArthur: Do you see the HE sector playing a role in terms of its requirements for language proficiency?

Michael Russell: Yes. The committee has previously discussed language provision in teacher training, which will become a big issue. At the University of Aberdeen, where the new modular first year allows students to take a variety of courses, there has been a big uptake in language courses this year—the first year of that new system. There has been demand, but people were not taking up languages because they required early specialisation. However, if people can take up a language for a single module at school or university and learn something of it, that may turn out to be successful.

Schools also vary astonishingly in the languages that they teach. I spend an amount of time in schools in Scotland and I find schools teaching Italian, Spanish, French and German. One or two still teach Russian, an increasing number teach Mandarin, and Gaelic must be included in the same group. There is a rich diversity of languages that people will be able to take.

The Convener: With the cabinet secretary's indulgence, we will have a final short question from Claire Baker.

Claire Baker: Let us return to national pay bargaining in the college sector. Fiona Hyslop, the then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, started to pursue that several years ago. It is recognised that the drive for it is coming from the trade union movement and that there is resistance to it among principals and management in the sector. How does the cabinet secretary foresee progress being made on the issue in a way that might lead to some conclusions?

Michael Russell: National pay bargaining is one of the issues that will feature in our reform of further education. Tomorrow, I will announce the start of a process of education reform, within which that issue will require to be considered. College boards are independent entities, so it may be up to them to decide whether to introduce it. To date, the objection has been twofold: first, that it will tie the hands of the boards and remove their individual flexibility and, secondly, that it will be too expensive to move towards it. Both those objections can perhaps be disproved by taking a careful approach. I have confronted the issue on several occasions in the various fora that I am part of in further education; we now want to feed the matter into the process of further education reform and we will try to do so.

The Convener: I thank the cabinet secretary and his officials for attending our meeting this morning. There are a raft of subjects that we did not get around to discussing, but I am sure that we will get there eventually.

10:33

Meeting suspended.

10:35

On resuming—

The Convener: I welcome the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop, and her supporting officials, David Seers and Wendy Wilkinson. As I said to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, we look forward to a constructive relationship in the next few years and to further meetings and discussions on areas of mutual interest.

I ask the cabinet secretary to make an opening statement, after which we will move to questions.

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I welcome the opportunity to give evidence to the committee in my new position as the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs. I will set out where we want to take Scotland in the next five years, spelling out what we plan to do as we continue to develop Scotland as an ever-more creative nation, with its rich heritage contributing to the world as it prepares to become a modern and dynamic state.

The Government is outward facing and culturally ambitious. The fact that I am a cabinet secretary emphasises the importance that the Government places on culture. My role will be to support the fantastic range of cultural activity that is happening across Scotland, which includes the Edinburgh festivals and our successful performing companies, rich cultural collections, celebratory events and museums and galleries. Scotland's

tremendous culture, heritage and creativity are recognised throughout the world. I am committed to using those assets to promote Scotland internationally and to encouraging people to actively engage with Scotland by living, working, trading, visiting or studying here.

With that in mind, I will champion our cutting-edge technology; I also want to promote our Commonwealth games legacy policy to get Scotland dancing, which is part of the drive to improve our nation's health and wellbeing and part of our ambitions for cultural programming and legacy for the 2014 games. I want to ensure that we get the very best from our major events and that Scotland is recognised, nationally and internationally, as the perfect stage for events.

The Government recognises the value of culture, which is why, relatively speaking—in comparison with the UK Government—we have protected cultural spend. We firmly believe that culture is not a luxury and that it makes a valuable contribution to our society and economy. For example, the recently published "Edinburgh Festivals Impact Study" showed that the festivals generate more than £261 million for the Scottish economy. We recognise the crucial role that local authorities play in delivering cultural services. I look forward to engaging with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in due course on that and related matters.

Building on our numerous achievements from the previous parliamentary session, we intend to utilise the range of cultural assets that are available to Scotland to communicate internationally what we are as a country and what we have to offer, placing Scotland on the global stage and allowing us to internationalise our economy. In the past 12 months, our national performing companies, supported by the Scottish Government's international touring fund, have fulfilled various international programmes, which have enabled us to develop and build meaningful strategic relationships. We look forward to continuing that work. We will also continue the highly successful Edinburgh festivals expo fund, thereby ensuring that more artists experience the opportunities that it has provided and play their part in promoting Scotland beyond these shores.

In the previous session, we established Creative Scotland, the body that is responsible for bringing together support for the arts, the screen industry and the creative industries. Creative Scotland has already delivered benefits at home and internationally. For example, it has provided crucial support for groundbreaking projects such as Motherwell College's inspiring change project, which works in prisons and which has delivered real benefits for prisoners and staff. Creative Scotland has also supported the showcasing of

the very best of Scottish culture on the international stage, through investment in Scotland's top theatre companies, supporting them to showcase their critically acclaimed shows to audiences in America, including on New York's Broadway.

We will also continue to support and celebrate our culture through the establishment of a national book week and by maintaining our support for the writers and artists in residence programme, which was originally launched by Creative Scotland. We will also deliver our ambitious strategy for the creative industries, building on our findings from the Scottish creative industries partnership report and cementing the importance of the creative industries as a source of jobs, a pillar for economic growth and a mark of where we are as a nation.

We will establish a new music Scotland initiative to support emerging musical talent and help create the conditions for Scotland's next number 1 artist to flourish—we hope. Previously, we invested £12 million in supporting BBC Alba and its establishment on Freeview. In this session, we will continue to work to establish a Scottish digital network.

Following the publication of the museums think tank report in the previous session, we will continue to work alongside Museums Galleries Scotland and National Museums Scotland to develop a national strategy for museums and galleries, making best use of their skills and resources and ensuring a sustainable future for the sector.

We will continue our close relationship with the national performing companies, supporting their increasing domestic and international success. Over the past five years, they put on more than 700 performances and 4,000 educational events, and entertained around 0.5 million people across three continents in the process. We are determined that that will continue.

We will also look to reform the governance arrangements of the National Library of Scotland. Officials have been developing proposals from a consultation exercise last year. I hope to be able to bring forward a bill at an early opportunity.

We will introduce the young Scots fund—£50 million-worth—which will be focused on sport, enterprise and creativity, with the aim of providing enriching opportunities for young people and increasing our traditional arts apprenticeship programmes.

We will seize the opportunities presented by a second homecoming year in 2014—with the Ryder cup and the Commonwealth games—to bolster Scotland's international image as a place to be for international events and to deliver a rich programme of activity and a meaningful legacy

across the next five years, which will boost cultural participation and improve public health and wellbeing.

We will work to engage the public in the process of architectural design and increase understanding of the planning system.

We will deliver improved interpretation and visitor facilities for the battle of Bannockburn site in time to commemorate the 700th anniversary of the battle in 2014.

Finally, we will also continue to develop the world-leading Scottish 10 digital mapping project and play our part in documenting, interpreting and experiencing the great wonders of the world in a modern era.

I hope that that information demonstrates the range and ambition of what we are trying to achieve as a Government over the next five years. I want to ensure that we can work constructively with the committee. I would like a relationship whereby if I were to seek advice, the committee would want to engage in providing it. I also recognise the importance of the scrutiny that this committee must exercise on behalf of the Parliament.

The Convener: Thank you very much, cabinet secretary. It looks like you are going to be busy over the next few years. I apologise, because in my opening remarks I should have congratulated you on your new post in the Cabinet. Do members have any questions for the cabinet secretary?

Liz Smith: Cabinet secretary, you said that one of your priorities was the legacy of the Commonwealth games. Will you tell us about the method of engagement between the sporting community and the cultural community in Scotland?

Fiona Hyslop: There has been communication about and development of a programme over some time. We are seeing that not just in relation to 2014 but in relation to 2012, with the Olympic games and the cultural olympiad. Creative Scotland has been charged with putting together a cultural plan that takes us from 2012, which is also the year in which Creative Scotland will be involved as part of the homecoming themes, right through to 2014. I am in the process of approving the plan that it has put forward to take us forward, identifying the vision and strategy and some of the activities. I suggest that this is an area in which the committee will have a keen interest. I cannot release the plan until it has been approved by all the partners that are involved, but it will be released fairly shortly. I am sure that the committee will want to consider it when it looks at its work programme. The plan is very full, vibrant, challenging and modern—just what we want it to be. We will have to strike a balance between

having big-profile, showcase events on an international scale and meeting the real challenge of getting participation from everyone at grass-roots level, too. That will be quite an interesting task. I recommend that the committee look at the plan when it is published.

10:45

Liam McArthur: You talked about spreading the cultural and sporting legacy of the games out into grass-roots activity. However, as far as the economic legacy is concerned, do you have at this stage any picture of the business engagement and opportunities that exist not just in and around Glasgow or, indeed, the central belt but more widely than that?

Fiona Hyslop: I suspect that it would be better to put that question to the lead minister for the Commonwealth games, who has been working on such matters with the governance bodies that have oversight of the games. I am focusing on the international, outward-looking aspects, which will include the impressions that we give, the contacts that we make and the cultural legacy. Although I am more than happy to arrange for a report to be carried out on the economic aspects, as I said I suspect that such matters are for the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee or the other committees that will oversee the Commonwealth games and which do not necessarily fall within my remit. I do not want to give information that I do not have.

The Convener: In your opening statement, you said that, with regard to legacy, you wanted to boost participation. Can you expand on that? After all, a great difficulty with other large-scale international events, whether sporting or cultural, is how to follow through on them, achieve a lasting legacy and boost participation. What lessons have been learned from such events?

Fiona Hyslop: Obviously we are learning lessons from other countries that have held large-scale events. Indeed, one key lesson that we have learned is that with the Commonwealth games our legacy activity has to start now, not in 2014 and thereafter. Indeed, there has already been work on the physical infrastructure and I have made certain decisions on investments, including, for example, helping to move the Royal Scottish National Orchestra out of the Henry Wood hall, which it has been complaining about for many years, and into a much better rehearsal space in Glasgow royal concert hall. That major investment is important for Glasgow, as is the investment in the Theatre Royal for Scottish Opera.

Participation, though, is the key. In that respect, we should consider, for example, the Scottish contribution to the Delhi games closing

ceremony—which, if you remember, included dancing and that fantastic armadillo shape. When I visited the dancers at their training boot camp, I found that they were from every local authority in Scotland, and part of the legacy from those games has been their taking back some of the skills that they learned and contributing to their communities.

Part of the handover event included performances by a number of schools. I went to the one in Edinburgh and watched a fantastic performance by young children who had within a very short period managed to learn a dance routine that crossed ceilidh music with bhangra and covered every single sporting event in the games. We need that kind of activity in our schools and to get people moving and involved.

That said, I should point out that Scotland dances quite a bit. I am not sure that I can fit the Zumba craze into the Commonwealth games theme, but it is all about fitness. Instead of simply saying that we will get everything in place so that we have a wonderful games and expecting such activities to be a spin-off thereafter, we must ensure that they start now. Indeed, we are already working on that big challenge. It is only 2011 and we are working towards 2014 but I think that with dance, for example, we have a fantastic opportunity to ensure that Scotland is a healthy and fit nation. However, I suspect that the biggest challenge will be trying to make it accessible to 50-year-old males.

The Convener: I hope that you are not referring to anyone in particular.

Liam McArthur: I am interested in your remarks about the inclusiveness of the Delhi handover event. As you might be aware, I raised a number of issues on behalf of a young constituent who had been selected for it, and I was very grateful for the support that your colleague Shona Robison provided at what was quite a difficult time. The conclusion seemed to be that, as far as those who might have particular support needs and what not are concerned, articulating the notion of an inclusive event is a bit easier than actually delivering what is required before, during and possibly even after the event. I would be grateful if you would confirm that you recognise that and that the commitment is still to deliver the most inclusive games possible.

Fiona Hyslop: Absolutely. I hope that the cultural plan that is coming forward will recognise that in different forms, as presented by Creative Scotland. The point about inclusiveness is that it is about not just being the right thing to do but how we are seen as a country. One theme of the dance presentation in Delhi was that it was fun—it demonstrated that we are a warm, welcoming people, irrespective of anyone's background or abilities. It is very important that we demonstrate

that in how we behave as a people and through our art forms.

The Convener: As there are no further questions on legacy, we will move on.

Jean Urquhart: Good morning, cabinet secretary. I want to understand better the relationship with our 32 local authorities, which have responsibility for delivering some of the cultural activity and programme across Scotland. Some authorities do that exceedingly well—and some do it less well.

My question is on our relationship with the delivery of cultural activity, how you view the delivery of such activity, and how you influence delivery with a light touch, but in a way that communicates the vision that you—or we—might have for Scotland, ensuring that it is outward looking.

In Highland, for example, an arm's-length organisation is now totally responsible for the delivery of cultural activity, so there is a separate board that has some council representation, which changes the relationship. What is your relationship with that company? The situation is the same in Glasgow and other local authorities, where such services have been contracted out. However, this is still very much about the kind of provision covered by your portfolio.

Fiona Hyslop: You raise an important issue and question. The Scottish Government's spend nationally on culture is about £175 million in 2011-12. The most recent figure that I had for local government spend, for 2010-11, was about £198 million. According to that comparison, local government spends more on culture than the Scottish Government does. That is an important statistic, bearing in mind the fact that culture is not something for which local authorities have a statutory obligation.

On my relationship with the delivery of cultural activity, Creative Scotland has been charged with ensuring that it has an international focus—that is a new focus, in comparison with the focus taken by the Scottish Arts Council—but the corporate plan that it has recently published also shows that sense of place is an important part of its provision going forward. Through Creative Scotland, there is active engagement with some aspects of delivery.

On the political relationship, Harry McGuigan is the lead councillor with COSLA. I note that COSLA has a community safety committee, but the representatives on that are not all from culture or leisure backgrounds. That is a challenge for them rather than one for anyone else.

When I visit different parts of the country I engage actively with culture and leisure organisations. There is a very positive relationship

at official level with VOCAL, the officer-led part of local authority support for culture.

There is a bigger challenge with culture, because different authorities provide such diverse experiences; although we must respect that—every local authority has a different background and different needs to service in the local community—it is a challenge. I have met Glasgow Life, for example, and I have a very good relationship with the City of Edinburgh Council and Deidre Brock because of the festivals.

In the other councils in which I take a keen interest, experience is variable because there is a variable commitment from those local authorities to culture. You can see that from the amount that they spend. Culture is not always about spend, but there is an issue about the variability of the spend and what that means for individuals.

The committee might want to look at the interesting results from the household survey, which dug into the experience of culture. Fantastic statistics have come through about young people's participation in cultural activity. If young people participate in cultural activity—that means doing it rather than observing or attending something—they are far more likely to attend or participate in cultural activity when they are older, regardless of their parental background.

Previously, most people thought that it was what a child's parents did with them that made a difference, so the research is quite ground breaking in what it tells us. It also reflects the variability across the country in adults' experience and participation. That is a challenge. I am keen to engage at a political level with culture conveners throughout the country to see whether, collectively, we can make more of what we have. We live in challenging times and we will all have to work closely together, but I must respect people's autonomy and independence.

Jean Urquhart: This is perhaps an observation rather than a question. Highland Council carried out a bit of scrutiny work recently on the involvement of looked-after children, whom we found are not participating to anything like the same extent as other children in extra-curricular sport and arts activities such as music, tennis and swimming. I know that the Scottish Government is concerned about the issue. There is evidence that involvement in cultural and sporting activity leads to better participation at school, better academic results and so on. I am not sure what the picture looks like across Scotland, but I would like to understand your interest or concern in the matter.

Fiona Hyslop: Ever since I became a member of the Scottish Parliament I have been keen to promote issues to do with looked-after children and their educational and other outcomes. There

are big challenges in that regard, but many positive things have happened. One of the most striking experiences that I have had was in the Parliament—in committee room 1, I think—when a group of looked-after children performed a drama about what it is like for a child to wake up and not know which house they might be staying in next, because they are being moved from pillar to post, how looked-after children are treated in school and how they cope with a disorganised life. The children used drama to portray their experiences to MSPs and other people who are involved in the area.

I also saw a fantastic drama at Broxburn academy about young carers. The process of putting together the performance had uncovered a number of young people in the school who were carers. The headteacher at the school is extremely caring of the school community, but quite often young people do not want to say that they are caring for someone.

There is something about drama's ability to help young people. As you rightly said, participation is an issue, which the committee might take the opportunity to consider. The issue tends to be more to do with relationships with local government and how individual local authorities improve the life chances and opportunities of looked-after children. During the past five years I have noticed a dramatic change in the commitment and attitude of many official organisations that work with looked-after children. Some local authorities have appointed champions for individual children. For example, for every looked-after child in Perth and Kinross Council there is a named senior official who has personal responsibility for the child. That approach is increasingly being taken in other local authorities. It is possible to ask what cultural experiences a child is having.

However, although there have been improvements over the years we are nowhere near where we need to be if we are to ensure that young children who are looked after have the same life chances and opportunities as other children have.

Sorry, that was rather a long answer, but I am very passionate about the issue.

The Convener: There is nothing wrong with being passionate about the subject.

Joan McAlpine: Good morning, cabinet secretary, and congratulations on your elevation to the Cabinet. You talked about young people's participation and Jean Urquhart mentioned local authorities. I am concerned about the trend towards local authorities charging for music tuition in schools. I realise that that is an education matter, but it has a big impact not just on

participation but on our cultural future. Does the trend towards charging concern you? What can we do about it?

11:00

Fiona Hyslop: I should make it clear that when tuition fees are charged it is for extra-curricular activities, not for regular music education in schools. Free music tuition has been one of our successes in Scotland, and a number of local authorities have chosen to continue it. The local authority for my constituency, West Lothian Council, is continuing free music tuition because it believes that it is important.

Interestingly, however, West Lothian Council performs particularly badly on cultural spend and support in comparison with other areas, so local authorities must balance the way in which they demonstrate their cultural investment. Some local authorities might do such work with children, and others with adults, but the issue of free music tuition is of some concern. We must ensure that there is access to it, and that people with ability and ambition can take that forward. I want to talk with local authorities about how they view the future of free music tuition.

When I was Minister for Culture and External Affairs I made a decision to maintain the youth music initiative, despite the fact that my budget was receiving a 6.7 per cent cut in revenue. That is not a substitute that lets local authorities off the hook with regard to investment, but in difficult times we must protect the things that are precious. I have managed to do that over the past year, and there has been burgeoning investment in music in schools as a result, but it is still an area of some concern.

In some areas local authorities are trying to keep music tuition accessible, but they must make individual choices. There is a balance, as we have seen in many other areas, and the Parliament has a role in scrutinising councils that are democratically elected as organisations that are independent from Government.

Claire Baker: It is worth recognising that it is not only schools that can provide access to music tuition for young people. In the communities that I represent in Fife, there is a network of pipe bands and brass bands. The network has faced financial difficulties in recent years, and a number of bands have had to stop performing. How do we ensure that those very local activities continue to receive or have access to support?

Jean Urquhart made the point that if children are involved in music it can improve their educational attainment, as the two are quite closely linked. How can we ensure that those cultural activities are still available?

Fiona Hyslop: Claire Baker is from Fife and I am from West Lothian, and in those areas much of that activity—brass bands in particular—comes from the traditions of former mining communities. I have been at all the gala days and the Linlithgow marches—those events are testament to the fact that many bands are alive and well and performing extremely well.

The development of young children through that network is very important indeed. Interestingly, as education minister and as culture minister I have seen a big increase in the number of schools that have pipe bands and in the number of individuals who are playing the pipes. There were many different bands at the world pipe band championship, and the age profile is coming down, which is healthy because it means that more young people are involved.

A lot of those young people get independent sponsorship, and it is not by any means the case that Government must do everything: connections with local companies and sponsors are important. However, the youth music initiative has been indispensable for enabling youth brass bands to develop and flourish.

I was at Perth concert hall for the youth brass band championships, which were absolutely fantastic. There were only a few bands at the older level—the 17 and 18-year-olds—but the numbers coming through at the younger levels as a result of the youth music initiative are staggering. In a year or two, there will be far more bands competing in the 17 and 18 age group. Perth concert hall was alive and buzzing with parents and young people performing, which was evidence of the £10 million investment from the youth music initiative. That has had a big influence, particularly on the type of organisations—not necessarily school related, but outwith school—that Claire Baker is talking about.

Jenny Marra: I will continue on the subject of music tuition. You will probably agree that the local authorities with the highest levels of social deprivation in their areas have less choice in their budgets to make commitments to non-statutory spend, such as spending on culture. Given that the decision whether to provide free music tuition is at a local authority's discretion and that some councils with high levels of social deprivation might not be able to choose to provide such tuition, would you, within the Scottish Government's power, be prepared to consider making free music tuition mandatory? Such tuition has an immense cultural impact for the future.

Fiona Hyslop: You suggest that the Scottish Government should introduce a bill to that effect. We have no immediate intention to do that. We respect local authorities' rights to make such decisions.

Your premise that authorities in areas of deprivation have less scope to invest in culture should probably be challenged, because many of the authorities that spend more on culture represent areas of deprivation. For example, Glasgow City Council, Dundee City Council, Aberdeen City Council and Falkirk Council all have higher investment in culture. Glasgow City Council's spend per head, at £86, is second only to Shetland Islands Council's, which is up at £214 per head. Dundee City Council's spend is high and is above average, as is the spend by Aberdeen City Council and Stirling Council. All those councils spend above the Scottish average, so I do not accept the premise. Under the grant-aided expenditure funding formula, weighting is given for areas of deprivation in the amounts of money that local authorities receive.

It would be simple to say that councils with areas of deprivation do not invest in culture, but Scotland's experience is different. Perhaps that says something about the local authorities that recognise the importance of cultural investments for communities that are perhaps suffering economically because of poverty. Culture is vital, so I question the assumption behind your point.

Where we go with music tuition depends on how much we think that central Government should dictate to local government. In the recent election campaign, many Opposition parties—Labour and the Liberal Democrats in particular—complained about interference, dictation and direction by the Government. The wider issue is how much the national Government should dictate on culture and other matters. I am sure that the committee will return to that issue.

The Convener: We will move on from local authorities. In your opening statement, you mentioned the young Scots fund briefly. Will you go into more detail about what that fund will cover, how much money it will have and how it will develop?

Fiona Hyslop: The young Scots fund has been realised from savings on the Forth road crossing. The spend from the fund will be dictated by savings that are realised on spending in the next couple of years.

Capital investments will also be made. We are exploring several interesting projects. For example, I am keen for us to support the Scottish Youth Theatre in its activities—capital investment might help it. We must examine whether we can use capital investment for young entrepreneurs in the creative industries. Those are two areas in which I am particularly interested. The timing will have to be discussed with my colleagues who are responsible for sport and for enterprise, because the scheme is to cover several subjects.

The Convener: It is early days, but do you know yet how the fund will be split between areas?

Fiona Hyslop: Not yet. That is still to be discussed with my colleagues.

The Convener: I will move on to another area that probably interests many people. Creative Scotland's beginning involved some difficulties. Has it now settled down into its new role? How will it take forward the creative industries and help them and Scotland's wider culture to grow?

Fiona Hyslop: Creative Scotland is important. I do not think that the launch of the organisation was fraught. It is barely a year old—1 July is its first anniversary. However, you are correct that reaching that stage took years and numerous culture ministers, going way back to the Labour ministers who were involved in the first bill to promote a new cultural body. The legislation had a long birth process.

Once established, however, Creative Scotland has gone from strength to strength and has been well received in the cultural community. The corporate plan that it produced was launched a short while ago, and there have been nine events all over the country taking forward its vision. It has set out a 10-year vision and a three-year plan. It wants to concentrate on the importance of a sense of place not just in Glasgow and Edinburgh, the cities that we know are rich in culture, but right across Scotland. It believes in the importance of celebrating our festivals. One of the first things that it did was produce a fantastic booklet detailing all the different festivals. If you do not have one, you should ask for one. There are well over 200 festivals and they have been collected in a brochure so that people who come for cultural tourism can visit them. It is a comprehensive celebration of our local festivals. That kind of access and participation is very important, and I am conscious of the equality strategy, recognising what Liam McArthur said earlier.

Creative Scotland will deliver a more international focus, which the Scottish Arts Council did not have.

Creative Scotland is also very important for the creative industries. Andrew Dixon, the chief executive of Creative Scotland, and I have chaired the Scottish creative industries partnership, which brings together all the enterprise agencies, Skills Development Scotland and others to put together the plan for the creative industries and decide what we want to do.

Creative Scotland has moved extremely quickly, efficiently and effectively. Also, in difficult times, it knows how to leverage funding and raise the profile of what we are doing. Its first birthday is on 1 July, this week, and I am sure that the committee will want to wish it well. You will also

take a keen interest in its development, so I recommend analysis of the corporate plan that it has just produced.

The Convener: I have no doubt that we will take an interest in Creative Scotland. You are right that it was not the bill so much as the long gestation period that was the issue.

Liam McArthur: You have talked about the collaborative approach that is being taken to culture and the arts. You also touched on the international perspective and the significant benefit that accrues to Scotland from projecting its image overseas. You have not mentioned the likes of the British Council, the various British embassies overseas and UK Trade & Investment working collaboratively with Scottish Development International, but they could all conceivably have a role in supporting those outward-looking efforts. What are your thoughts on how we could maximise the benefit that we derive from those relationships, bearing in mind that we are never going to be able to have somebody in every place or potential market?

Fiona Hyslop: We have worked with and will continue to work with the British Council on our international visits. I think that it was involved when we took several Scottish authors to the Jaipur book festival in India. That was a practical example of working together.

The Government has brought together all the chief executives and chairs of the national companies and collections to get a better sense of where they are planning to be and when so that we can align that with where we want to pursue activity. We can also use that information to take a more strategic view of our international engagement, tying that in with my other responsibility for the international framework, to ensure that we have people performing in places where and at times when it would be helpful to us for them to perform. They have no problems with that. They are driven by their artistic imperative. People said that, because so much scheduling of international tours is done far in advance, we would never be able to co-ordinate that, but we can. They are open to doing that, and we want to continue to work with the British Council, given its reach and involvement.

We are also working with a lot of the organisations independently. The Scottish Chamber Orchestra was in Chicago and the National Galleries of Scotland took an exhibition there—the Titian painting “Diana and Actaeon” went to Chicago. That is an important place for us, given that the Ryder cup will take place there next year as a prelude to coming to Scotland. We can position ourselves strategically where we want to be.

11:15

I can give a very good example of that—I am not sure whether the British Council was involved in this, but I can check. We worked with the RSNO when it gave a fantastic performance in Paris with Stéphane Denève—the orchestra's current conductor, who is about to move on. We took the First Minister, and we engaged with the energy minister and representatives of energy companies who had come along to hear the RSNO concert. That is a very good example of cultural diplomacy with a hard economic edge, given the economic impact that can come through the energy companies.

Other countries do that type of thing, and we can learn from them. I am keen for us to co-ordinate such work. We have to respect the artistic imperative of the national companies, but they are up for it. If we have better planning, we can work more strategically with the British Council with regard to where we want to be and why we want to be there.

Funding for some of the British Council's international work is an issue because of the pressures on the UK Government's budget. We will have to keep an eye on whether that has a knock-on impact on any Scottish tours.

Liam McArthur: You have spoken about the work that is done with the British Council, and about the "hard economic edge" to cultural diplomacy. I am aware that the creative industries have worked closely with SDI and UKTI in the past and have relied heavily on the work of those organisations. That applies both to inward investment and to support for the external efforts that companies make to internationalise. It would be helpful to get a better understanding of the role that UKTI and British embassies have in supporting the work of SDI.

Fiona Hyslop: It mainly involves SDI and UKTI; I am not sure about the evidence regarding British embassies, whose activity tends to involve trade links more.

On the creative industries, there is co-ordination with UK activity and investments, particularly in the games industry in Dundee. We have invested heavily on the academic side—with some investment coming through the funding council—in computer games development in the Dundee area, particularly at the University of Abertay Dundee.

On globalisation, there are issues to do with who does what and when. Many companies are good at globalising quickly themselves. It is like any economic development as far as SDI and UKTI are concerned—it is to do with where investment is needed.

Figures are due to come out in the next week or so showing that Scotland is punching way above its weight and size when it comes to attracting and securing investments in the American market, and also in improving our position relative to other parts of the UK, considering the investments that SDI manages to secure from international sources.

I have spoken to representatives of SDI about its relationship with UKTI—although this is probably more of an issue for the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee or the European and External Relations Committee. We do not have an office for operations in the middle east, for example—although that is probably less to do with the creative industries and more to do with oil companies and engineering investments. We make use of UKTI offices there, and UKTI facilitates things where we do not have a base.

We are trying to be more co-ordinated in what we do. In Canada, for example, we now have an office where Scottish Government, SDI and VisitScotland interests are represented, so as to bring an all-Scotland approach. Where we do not have such bases, we have worked with UKTI, and we can develop things in that regard.

I suspect that the criticism of British embassies—not just regarding tourism but in other areas—is that they are less available and they do not have the experience to promote Scotland that we might have expected them to have.

Claire Baker: I am conscious that the cabinet secretary has not yet had an opportunity to discuss broadcasting this morning. In the previous session, the committee took evidence on a number of occasions from Channel 4, the BBC and STV. One subject that came up frequently was growing talent in Scotland. Issues were identified to do with the opportunities to undertake relevant training or to gain the relevant breadth of experience in Scotland. There were concerns that, once young people leave Scotland to learn skills elsewhere, it is difficult for them to come back into the Scottish market, because of the lack of suitable programmes being developed and produced here, or possibly because of certain limits that are put on what is produced in Scotland at the moment. I invite the cabinet secretary to say something about how she sees that area developing over the next few years.

Fiona Hyslop: This is an important area. In February last year, I convened a summit with broadcasters and independent producers. One issue that came out of that was to do with people who, at particular stages in their career, because of their life situation, might leave and then not come back. They are the important ones to nurture. As part of Creative Scotland's wider view of culture generally, it is considering when and

where to intervene. Perhaps “intervene” is too active, but it is considering when to be supportive and to help people at key points in their careers.

In relation to skills and training, Creative Scotland has relationships and partnerships with the BBC, MG Alba, STV and Channel 4. Skills Development Scotland has an important relationship with the BBC. The Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union—BECTU—has been heavily involved in support for apprenticeships in broadcasting, and we now have the first of those. I started that work when I had the education portfolio.

I therefore take the view that, on the sector coming together, we are in a much better place than we were, say, two years ago. At one point, there was a view that larger organisations were happy to take the talent but not to put anything back in to help to create it. There is now a view across the sector that we need to work collectively to ensure that we have the skill base in Scotland to continue to service all aspects of broadcasting. I am pleased by the developments that have taken place. When schemes have been set up, they have moved fairly quickly. That does not mean that there is not more to be done but, previously, people were in effect on their own in the area.

Together with Creative Scotland and Skills Development Scotland, we have tried to help with investment so that people stay here. That is driven by quality of production. There is an issue of supply and demand. Good-quality productions create demand for good-quality supply, and so people are more likely to stay. That is why it is vital that we have more independent productions or other productions in Scotland. That was a key recommendation of the Scottish Broadcasting Commission report, which was produced a few years back and was commissioned by the Scottish Government. We have already seen a marked increase in the number of productions in Scotland using largely Scottish talent.

We are applying pressure in relation to demand. I continually ask the broadcasting companies how much of their output is produced in Scotland and where they are on their targets. We heard in the debate in Parliament last week that there has been progress, particularly by the BBC. Channel 4 is still a challenge, although I have sympathy for its argument that not all its output is necessarily in drama or what we might call traditional areas and that a lot of it is in computer gaming and other areas. I have sympathy with Channel 4’s point that, if the Office of Communications recognised some of that production in its targets, Channel 4’s figures would look a bit better.

There are therefore two sides to the issue. First, we must apply pressure in relation to the demand for better-quality productions and more in-house

productions in Scotland. The second aspect is about the supply of key skills, which I am sure the committee will want to look into further.

The Convener: There are no further questions from members, but I have one final point. In your opening statement, I think that you mentioned something called get Scotland dancing. Is that correct?

Fiona Hyslop: Yes.

The Convener: To clarify, is that compulsory?

Fiona Hyslop: It might be better if it is voluntary, but the people of Scotland will look to the Education and Culture Committee to take a lead in demonstrating that we are an active nation that is proud of our modern and traditional cultures, including dance. I look forward to seeing you dance, convener.

The Convener: You obviously have not seen me dance before.

I thank the cabinet secretary and her supporting officials, David Seers and Wendy Wilkinson.

11:24

Meeting suspended.

11:30

On resuming—

Subordinate Legislation

Education Maintenance Allowances (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/261)

The Convener: Item 4 is consideration of a negative Scottish statutory instrument. Members will have read the clerk's note on the regulations and I confirm that no motion to annul has been lodged. Are members content with the regulations?

Claire Baker: Yes, but I wonder whether I might make a comment.

The Convener: Of course.

Claire Baker: I do not know whether other members have received these comments, but the National Union of Students has expressed concerns about consultation and certain potential unintended consequences. The primary concern is that a student based in Scotland who receives the English education maintenance allowance, which is to be withdrawn in the summer, might be left without support and have to rely on bursaries from colleges, which, as we all know, are under a bit of pressure at the moment. The NUS might well do so itself, but would we be able to raise its concerns with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning and seek assurances with regard to any unintended consequences without in any way holding up the regulations?

Liam McArthur: I agree with that suggestion. I have no difficulty with the regulations as they stand, but it would be helpful to get the cabinet secretary's comments on the discussions that he is having or plans to have with UK counterparts about successor arrangements south of the border and how they will work in relation to UK-domiciled students studying in Scotland over the medium to longer term.

The Convener: The sensible course of action would be for me to write on behalf of the committee to the cabinet secretary, asking the questions that both members have raised and highlighting some of the detail in the NUS submission which I believe we have all received. It is entirely appropriate to ask about the Government's intentions. I hope that we will get an answer as soon as possible—certainly before the start of the new term—and we can circulate it to members when it becomes available. Is that acceptable?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: If members have no recommendations to make on the regulations, are we content to agree them?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Reporter (European Union)

11:32

The Convener: Item 5 is the appointment of the committee's European Union reporter. Members will have been circulated with a note from the clerk setting out the background to the new EU reporter system, which was introduced at the very end of the third session, and will note that the role is seen as important in examining the various EU issues that might come to subject committees. That said, I point out that, as the EU has no legislative remit in either education or culture, it might not be the most onerous of roles. I understand that, in the previous session, the deputy convener took on the role and, if members have no objections, I propose to continue with that practice. I therefore nominate Claire Baker as EU reporter to the Education and Culture Committee. Are members, including Claire, content with that?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Item 6 is further consideration of our work programme and discussion about the business planning meeting. As we agreed at the outset to consider the item in private, I will now move into private session.

11:34

Meeting continued in private until 12:22.

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