

EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 14 January 2003
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE 2nd Meeting 2003, Session 1

CONVENER

*Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
*Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
*Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
*Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
*Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP)

*attended

WITNESSES

Mary Bryden (National Museums of Scotland)
Meirion Prys Jones (Welsh Language Board)
John Walter Jones (Welsh Language Board)
John Mackay (Scottish Natural Heritage)
Mary Maclean (Scottish Natural Heritage)

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ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Education, Culture and Sport Committee

Tuesday 14 January 2003

(Afternoon)

[THE DEPUTY CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:07*]

Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Deputy Convener (Cathy Peattie): Good afternoon. I apologise for the late start. Will everyone ensure that his or her mobile phone or telephone pager is switched off? I invite the representatives of Scottish Natural Heritage—John Mackay, Mary Maclean and Mary Bryden—to give evidence on the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill.

John Mackay (Scottish Natural Heritage): I will be brief. Scottish Natural Heritage's engagement in Gaelic matters goes back to its inception in 1991. Given that SNH was created as a Scottish agency, it has worked on the abiding principle of being more sensitive to local needs. It has fulfilled that principle in several ways. For example, it has a wide distribution of local offices throughout Scotland, which ensures that the organisation is visible and accessible. Furthermore, it has area boards, which are made up of local members who play an important role in working with staff in each area. Of the three area boards, those in the north and the west have a key interest in the bill.

The organisation has always been keen to communicate well on a local level. Of course, good communication is more than just language. It is about being responsive and being seen to be a reliable and trustworthy organisation. SNH has made a substantial effort to communicate in Gaelic in the Gaelic-speaking areas and to have, in a sense, a Gaelic face.

That was SNH's starting point. It has been working in the field for approximately 10 years and formalised its Gaelic policy two years ago. Members will see from its policy that SNH supports the general principles of the bill. It has some reservations about the content, but that is more to do with how the bill might be implemented. Members may want to ask us about that, as well as how SNH's Gaelic policy has operated.

SNH is committed to its Gaelic policy. I will close by making three general points. First, SNH is conscious that it is engaged in a learning process. Throughout its work on Gaelic language policy, it has found that it wants to change the way in which it does things and it expects to develop its work in the future and to improve its performance.

Secondly, SNH wants to be sensitive to other local cultural distinctiveness in Scotland, including language issues. That is very important, and members have been given an example of text that SNH provided for a nature reserve in Aberdeenshire.

Thirdly, SNH is a conservation organisation and, therefore, cannot resile from supporting other heritage conservation issues. That is a bottom line, to which all employees of SNH and its board members would sign up.

Mary Bryden (National Museums of Scotland): National Museums of Scotland is delighted to have the opportunity to respond to the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill. As members know, the organisation has a responsibility to provide visitors from all over the world with an understanding of Scottish collections, and it is in that context that we have considered the implications of the bill.

We have always considered the Gaelic dimensions of our collections to be very important, and members will see from their papers that we wrote our policy on the use of Gaelic seven years ago, in 1995. There are certain key points in the policy, including measures such as the presentation of information bilingually, where names of artefacts have the Gaelic in them and where using that language is particularly important to enhance the understanding of the collection. The policy also puts a lot of emphasis on the potential offered by information and communications technology programmes in identifying solutions to the challenge of providing additional languages.

We have no concerns about writing a five-year Gaelic language plan. In many respects, that would formalise much of our on-going work. Our paper highlights activities in some of the key areas mentioned in the bill, especially how we respond to external and media requests for information, and we like to think that our record for providing materials in Gaelic is good.

There is no point in suggesting that such provisions can be made without cost. National Museums of Scotland has worked hard to find external funding for several of our projects from the European Union and the National Gaelic Arts Project. A programme of additional activity would require increased funding.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I am delighted by the positive evidence of both organisations, which bodes well for the future. National Museums of Scotland's submission, which is very helpful, provides an interesting and detailed response to the question of what should be included in a Gaelic language plan. In fact, it more or less drafts a Gaelic language plan, as outlined in the bill. It is the first time that I have seen that done, and it is very useful. What difficulties did National Museums of Scotland encounter when drafting the plan and what resource implications would there be in fully implementing it?

Mary Bryden: Mike Russell has hit the nail on the head. The resource issue is most important. When drafting the plan, we considered the cost of providing CD-ROMs and estimated that it would amount to approximately £300,000. Another issue is to determine how best to encourage understanding of the Gaelic language and its role in a museum. That is why we decided to provide Gaelic information in, for example, sound guidebooks, rather than in label form. We felt that that approach also picked up on the oral tradition of the Gaelic language.

If we were to consider providing even more information in Gaelic, there would then be a challenge in terms of space. We in museums are concerned about information overload in displays. We must think carefully about how best we get across information about our collections.

We therefore chose to use Gaelic where there is a display that might have a Gaelic dimension. That is particularly important in the display in the Museum of Scotland on the forming of the nation. We used Gaelic expressions in that display. We have also used Gaelic where there is a particularly Gaelic version of the story that might be different from the Lowland version.

We have tried to think through the needs of our visitors and how we can be intellectually robust. Those were the types of issues that were up for debate when we were thinking through the plan in 1995.

14:15

Michael Russell: What is interesting about your answer, and the draft Gaelic language plan that you have given to the committee, is the way in which the language has encouraged and to some extent forced you to think of new and imaginative methods. The basic cost of producing the plan is only the cost of publishing a document, but of course there are knock-on operational costs. One might add that there are knock-on operational costs for your work in English.

Mary Bryden: Indeed.

Michael Russell: As it is envisaged in the bill, the Gaelic language plan will encourage organisations to change how they operate over a period of time, not immediately. Presumably you would treat that as a positive challenge.

Mary Bryden: It would be a positive challenge in the same way as we are having to consider how to address the needs of visitors from other countries. We have to make the collections as accessible as possible to as many visitors as possible.

Michael Russell: I turn to Scottish Natural Heritage. I found your submission very encouraging. Strangely, the most encouraging thing was one that might be taken as negative. It is the first sentence of paragraph 7:

"We have not taken, nor would we support, a universal approach to the use of Gaelic throughout Scotland or across all our activities."

From your oral evidence, I understand that to mean that your organisation is equally sensitive to the needs of other parts of Scotland—my colleague Irene McGugan will kick me under the table if I get this wrong—particularly in terms of the Scots language and the way in which that is presented in Scotland, and also the diverse cultural needs of the areas that you serve. Does your organisation see Gaelic as part of the pattern of serving all of Scotland?

John Mackay: I go back to what we said in our statement. The sentence you read out was not some negative statement against there being national secure status for Gaelic. We are mainly concerned about delivery and what SNH can realistically do on the ground, especially in the short term.

Bear it in mind that fewer than 1 per cent of our staff are fluent in Gaelic. That makes it difficult to consider delivering a full range of communicating services to the public across Scotland. We are also concerned about the point that you picked up from my introduction about serving different cultural needs across Scotland. We recognise that we can work best when we are working within an ambience of a number of committed organisations that have policies and committed local education authorities, for example.

It becomes more difficult for public agencies to operate on their own if all the different bits of the jigsaw are not in place. Our reservation is about what we might be expected to do for all Scotland if the bill were to be passed.

Michael Russell: I will press you on that a little. The bill anticipates a phased introduction, although that has been controversial and might change. The bill sees Gaelic as a national language and it will ultimately roll out across the nation.

You appear to be saying that you recognise the national language, and I support that; I am not being critical. However, you also know that the language is particularly important in areas of high sensitivity and high usage. Are you saying that, at this stage, your organisation's efforts would be directed primarily to those areas?

John Mackay: That is essentially what we are saying. We want to be cautious about making promises about what we can deliver in the near future because of the resources that we have. I am not talking just about financial resources; do we have enough staff who are fluent in Gaelic and who can deliver the right kind of service throughout Scotland?

Michael Russell: You are taking the same position as that taken by the National Museums of Scotland; the opportunity to create a language plan is positive and not negative because your organisation already has a part of that plan in place.

John Mackay: Absolutely. Although it is not written in terms of the language plan, SNH's policy as set out in the schedule to our submission could readily be converted into that format.

Michael Russell: I have a final question for both sets of witnesses. I must be clear about the answers from both sets of witnesses because this is stage 1 of the bill, and we obviously want to take it further. Do you support the general principles of the bill? From what you both said, I presume that you do not find any great burden with producing a Gaelic language plan, because both organisations are already doing so.

Mary Bryden: That is exactly right.

John Mackay: In relation to the last part of your statement, we are already quite close to that.

Michael Russell: And you are supportive of the general principles of the bill.

John Mackay: The general principles do not cause SNH any undue problem.

The Deputy Convener: Would you have written a plan in any case?

John Mackay: We would have revised our current policy, as we have undertaken to do, and which we will be doing shortly. We will obviously want to revise the plan in light of the changing political climate and in respect of our own experience as we have developed our work through Mary Maclean's appointment.

Mary Maclean (Scottish Natural Heritage): Since my appointment two years ago, the major part of the Gaelic policy has been a learning process. There is much that can be done, and much will be done. We will be reviewing the policy this year and it is hoped that we will make more of an effort because of the bill.

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I congratulate the witnesses on both the papers and the policies. As Michael Russell said, they are impressive and move in the right direction.

As currently drafted, the bill distinguishes certain areas of Scotland where it will come into force immediately. The other side of the argument has also been put to the committee, which is that the bill should apply nationally as soon as it comes into force and that people in the Gaidhealtachd do not like the idea of the bill applying to certain areas ahead of others. Do you have a view on that? Which way we should go?

Michael Russell has said that he is prepared to consider major amendments to move the bill in the national direction. Does that worry you or does it correspond with your thinking? The SNH document states that Gaelic signage and language are used where appropriate. If there were a duty on you to apply that across Scotland, would you find it difficult?

John Mackay: That might depend on the interpretation of the words "reasonable" and "practicable" in the bill. That is a key element. For example, to take Ian Jenkins's own area, it would realistically be difficult to provide any full Gaelic service from our Galashiels office. Indeed, there may well be people in the Borders who would be surprised at SNH doing that. There might even be some people who would say that SNH should reflect better that which is culturally more significant to more constituents.

However, the general principle is of Gaelic having a secure status. That, of course, is a political issue. It should perhaps be seen separately from the obligations on bodies on how they can deliver the provisions of the bill, especially at this early stage and given the limited resources.

Ian Jenkins: If organisations such as yours had to deliver in areas not in the Gaelic heartland, do you see problems because they might be driven to spend time and money in areas where it would not be hugely productive to do so?

John Mackay: If the guidance on what is reasonable and practicable was sensible, then we would not have any undue difficulties. However, there are good reasons currently why it is easier and more fruitful to work in those areas where a range of partners are already active in that field, such as the Gaelic media in the north, the schools system and other interests that are based in Gaelic-speaking areas.

Mary Bryden: Nation Museums of Scotland is, of course, a national body, but its museums tend to be in the central belt and the Borders. We are very anxious to respond to the needs of our

visitors. We would like to think that we are becoming increasingly visitor-focused, so we want to spend more time finding out where our visitors are coming from to ensure that we are providing a cost-effective service to visitors from all over the world.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): On the basis of your evidence, it is clear that a language plan for Gaelic is important. You have commented on other languages and talked about languages for visitors. Do you therefore think that a language plan that covers more than Gaelic is a necessity for a public body such as yours—even if it says that you do not have to do a great deal on some languages—because it would at least put everything in context, to allow you to review the situation in future, when you would take account of that plan?

Does the bill contain anything that will create difficulty for what you already do? Are you worried that it would remove some of the good work that you do? I ask that because part of the committee's task is to consider amendments to the bill. It would be useful to know whether the bill contains anything that might conflict with your work.

Mary Bryden: When we wrote our Gaelic policy, we also wrote a Scots policy, because we were as concerned about the Scots language as we were about the Gaelic language. Brian Monteith's point is important. There is no doubt that we are required to provide facilities in as many languages as we can, so we would want to balance the cost of providing Gaelic information with the cost of providing information in all the other languages.

John Mackay: Brian Monteith asked about other languages. We have made a little effort on Lallans and perhaps we ought to do more on that. I think that the practical view of most SNH staff—I am not expressing an official SNH view—is that the Gaelic language needs some impetus. Perhaps it would be wrong to bid to dilute what is happening, but we are concerned that we should take note of and do more on other cultural traditions. We are doing most on Gaelic now and we will want to do more. We see that that is a political imperative that is coming our way.

Ian Jenkins: We have been given an excellent brochure about the Museum of Scotland. Am I right to say that that brochure was value for money, because the translation and production were one-offs? Policy documents would be in a similar position. However, one problem would arise not when a video or book could be produced, but when staff dealt with people face to face and were expected to speak to people in Gaelic. We have talked about whether, if the bill's scope were widened, people could turn up in public buildings throughout Scotland and demand to be dealt with in Gaelic. Would not that be hugely expensive?

Mary Bryden: The Gaelic guidebook is a good example of a cost-effective way to tackle the challenge. We produced the guidebook in six languages and the Gaelic guidebook has sold particularly well. We produced sound guides in a range of languages, so producing the Gaelic sound guide was cost-effective.

Providing a front-of-house experience in Gaelic could be a little more challenging, but two of our group of 50 volunteer guides speak Gaelic, so we are considering that matter as we speak.

John Mackay: The point about oral contact is important. In talking to some of my area colleagues and managers in the north before I came to this meeting, I heard how the ability to speak Gaelic with a crofter was a critical bit of the process. I understand that we publish fewer longer documents in Gaelic now and that we are focusing more on shorter leaflets, because the demand for big Gaelic documents does not necessarily exist. Some of those documents—such as a guide to the sites of special scientific interest system—are not publications that everybody would consider a riveting read, whether in Gaelic, English or Lallans.

14:30

The Deputy Convener: I thank the witnesses for their evidence.

Our next witnesses are from the Welsh Language Board—John Walter Jones is the board's chief executive and Meirion Prys Jones is its head of language and planning. I warmly welcome you not only to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, but to the Scottish Parliament. You will have an opportunity to make a statement, after which members will ask you questions. Thank you for your written submission, which was most helpful.

John Walter Jones (Welsh Language Board): Thank you for your welcome, convener. It is a pleasure to be here.

I will briefly introduce myself and my colleague. Before joining the Welsh Language Board, I was a career civil servant. Meirion Prys Jones's background is in education, so if members have any questions on education, please direct them to him, because I claim no knowledge of that complex field.

The committee has copies of our written submission, which describes the detailed model of language planning that underlies the Welsh Language Board's strategy. It also seeks to explain what the board has accomplished in promoting and facilitating the use of the Welsh language in Wales and what it hopes to achieve in the future.

I wish to make two points before we answer members' questions. First, the board's relationship with the National Assembly for Wales is extremely important. I hope that members have received copies of "A National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales", which was published by the Assembly Government in 2002. The document looks to a future where there is a partnership between the board and the Assembly Government, with the latter

"setting the policy agenda and providing strategic leadership to sustain and encourage the growth of the Welsh language".

Some may regard that as a cosy consensus between the board and the Assembly Government. I have no problems with consensus—what is envisaged will not hinder the board's ability to criticise the Assembly. We understand the relationship between the board and the Assembly; we work on the arm's-length principle and we have been critical from time to time. Nevertheless, the relationship is vital to the board's achieving its goals.

The statement that I quoted was backed by an increase in the board's budget. The need for sufficient resources is vital to any minority language and the board will experience the benefits of that quantum leap in funding in the next financial year.

My second point is on the importance of investment in language. I note that the policy memorandum to Mr Russell's bill gives

"the additional cost to the taxpayer and the additional bureaucracy"

as reasons for not following the example of Wales in empowering a body to oversee the bill's provisions. I am prepared to concede that what is appropriate for Welsh in Wales is not necessarily appropriate for Gaelic in Scotland in all cases, but I stress that without the appropriate investment, properly directed, one cannot hope to revitalise any minority language.

Too often, investment in Welsh-medium or Gaelic-medium education or public services is perceived as investment in Welsh or in Gaelic. That perception is mistaken. Such investment should be seen primarily as investment in education or better service provision, rather than as something additional. Language is a part of society; it should not be seen as something that is apart from society.

Although the part played by legislation is important, it is not all-important. However, it is all-important to seek every opportunity and possible means to increase language use in the most practical way.

I would be very happy to answer questions from members.

Michael Russell: Thank you for your written submission. I have also had an opportunity to read the report that you recommended to us. I am grateful for the positive support that the document provides.

There are areas of difference, however, and it is important that we should consider those. The bill is unusual, for two reasons. It is unusual, first, because its proposer is willing to accept almost any amendment. I know that that has surprised many people—perhaps it reflects my keenness to have the bill passed. Secondly—and more seriously—the bill is unusual because, as you have correctly identified, it seeks to do part of a task that requires to be undertaken with the whole-hearted support and resources of government. The bill is not the ideal way of undertaking that task. It has been introduced because in the past four years no other bill has been introduced that endeavours to do that. The bill is a modest start to a process, rather than a complete process in itself. It does not pursue some of the recommendations of the Comunn na Gàidhlig report because those are outwith the scope of what a member can do through a member's bill.

I want to ask a philosophical question about enforcement, which was raised first in evidence from Professor Donald Meek. The Comunn na Gàidhlig report is now five or six years old. The Welsh Language Board is older than that. Do you accept that the spirit of the times has changed a little as regards the enforcement of legislation? We may want to discuss that. Should legislators be reluctant to create more edifices of enforcement if we can find a more consensual way forward? That reflects the founding principles of the Scottish Parliament, which favour consensus far more than conflict.

John Walter Jones: By all means, let us have a debate, but the short answer to your question is yes. I will not go back into the mists of time, but at no time between 1988 and the passing of the Welsh Language Act 1993 did the Welsh Language Board envisage having recourse to enforcement powers. The legislation contains provisions for referring disputes to the Welsh Assembly—previously, they were referred to the Secretary of State for Wales. We have used those provisions on two occasions positively, in an effort to assist the process of developing language schemes. We have not taken enforcement measures such as taking cases to court, as we do not believe that such measures would work. If we do not have the support of everyone concerned, we will not get anywhere. We have developed our policies on the basis of consensus and support.

We have not received support from all parties from the outset—we have had to work assiduously to obtain that. Looking through the papers for this

meeting, I was reminded of the situation in which we found ourselves between 1988, when the non-statutory board was established, and the advent of the Welsh Language Act 1993. That was a period in which we tried to tell people that there was not much to fear. We were entering a new era for the language and, understandably, people were concerned about the implications of that. No legislation had been passed, but people were concerned to know what duties would be placed on certain public bodies and individuals if legislation were introduced. They wanted to know whether rights would be affected. Those are all perfectly legitimate questions that need to be addressed. We ignore them at our peril, because if we do so we will fail to take people with us. Without people's support, Gaelic, Welsh or any other minority language will not make any headway.

If the committee wishes, it may think in terms of powers of enforcement. Personally, I do not. In Wales, we have proved that, without enforcement powers, it is possible to make headway.

Michael Russell: That is helpful. The Comunn na Gàidhlig report outlined a complex enforcement structure, which seemed appropriate at the time, but now seems inappropriate.

Leaving the enforcement powers aside, I believe that there are essentially two significant differences between the proposals from Comunn na Gàidhlig and the proposals in the bill. One relates to content. My member's bill could not deal with the complexities of education or broadcasting, which is a reserved matter. The law was equally complex. Therefore, I was able to deal only with the area where an individual member might be able to do something.

The second difference relates to the ability to refer to a responsible statutory body. Interestingly, you mentioned the development between the Welsh Language Board's having a non-statutory basis and its having a statutory basis. People might be surprised to know that *bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba* will have no statutory basis of operation, even though its membership has now been established. It would not be possible to incorporate the body into the bill as the body that makes decisions when matters are referred to it. Do you believe that we should endeavour to move more quickly to having a statutory body in Scotland than is likely to be the case?

John Walter Jones: My view is that there is merit in the Welsh Language Board's status as a statutory body. As you said, we started on a non-statutory basis, which continued for five years. In effect, there was not much difference between people's concept of a statutory body and their concept of a non-statutory body, except that we had a piece of legislation that clearly set out the

board's duties. We have gone a good way forward since 1993, not just because of the Welsh Language Act 1993, but because of the application of the spirit of the legislation in areas not specifically covered by the act, such as the private and voluntary sectors.

As I said, the fact that the board is at arm's length from the Government of the Welsh Assembly—or the Secretary of State for Wales in pre-devolution days—has merits. There are boards in most other areas of public life, whatever people's views on quangos—I still use that word because I am old enough to know what it means and what it implies to many people. There is merit in having a body that is specifically charged, in the case of the Welsh Language Board, to develop the ideas behind language planning. That is what we are talking about. I sometimes use the saying, "You cannot legislate a language into life, but you can legislate a life into language." It is the use that is made of legislation that is important and in that respect a statutory board is significant and beneficial.

Michael Russell: On the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill and what it seeks to achieve, two areas have been recommended for amendment. The first suggestion is that we remove reference to the ombudsman and replace it with reference to *bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba*. However, that is likely to be legislatively impossible, which I regret, as I would have supported the relevant amendments.

The second area relates to the implementation of the bill, which is a contentious matter. Although the bill would cover the whole of Scotland, it would be implemented in a rolling programme, the first part of which would be on enactment, with the rest subject to statutory instrument. There were two primary reasons for taking that approach, although I am not unsympathetic to changing it. The first was resistance in some parts of Scotland during the consultation phase—as you have indicated, that resistance can and, indeed, requires to be worked on over a period of time. The second reason related to the employment implications. Because of the lack of a sufficient number of suitably qualified people, it is hard to see how the bill could be implemented in the whole of Scotland immediately on enactment. If it were, the bill would become more honoured in the breach than in the observance and would therefore become a less effective piece of legislation.

Can you comment on the issue of the language in areas where it is not seen to be traditionally or currently strong and the issue of developing individuals for employment? You have faced both those problems in Wales.

John Walter Jones: You ask whether the bill should instantly apply to the whole of Scotland or whether it should be rolled out. The Welsh

Language Act 1993 applies to the whole of Wales, but, during its progress through Parliament, there were major concerns over how public bodies in parts of Wales could implement its requirements. That issue was subsequently left to the Welsh Language Board.

We then produced the green bible—"Welsh Language Schemes: Their preparation and approval in accordance with the Welsh Language Act 1993"—of which I will leave a copy. The one thing that we made abundantly clear from the outset was that the language schemes would be developed as and when authorities were in a position to implement them—we believed that there was no point in having a language scheme on paper that sat on a shelf gathering dust.

Michael Russell: Did the act provide for a time scale for that?

John Walter Jones: No. Under section 7, the board may notify public bodies of the need to prepare a language scheme. The board considered the bodies, be they local authorities or national museums, and decided, following consultation, on a priority list of those that could shoulder the burdens of the legislation. The board approached those bodies that had a language policy before 1993—

Michael Russell: Are you talking about bodies like the ones from which we heard earlier?

14:45

John Walter Jones: Absolutely. The other side of the coin was to discuss with authorities, which still had the duty to prepare language schemes, how and when the board could expect them to do so.

The board also made it clear that every language scheme would differ from the one before or the one after, and that every language scheme would reflect the nature of the body and where it operated. In other words, policy in south-east Wales would have to be radically different from the policy in a more Welsh-speaking area in north Wales.

That leads me to your second point, which was about employment. People were rightly concerned that it might become compulsory for them to learn Welsh in order to get a job in the public sector. That was not the case—it never was the case and it never will be the case. However, a high percentage of the work force in some local authorities in north-west Wales were Welsh speakers. Representatives of the board discussed with their unions and management how best to increase the number of Welsh speakers through Welsh lessons. No one lost his chance of promotion. No one was disfranchised in any way

because of the act. If they had been, the board would not have made any progress.

People must be confident that they can cope with the legislation. If a Gaelic language bill were rolled out to the whole of Scotland overnight, people would not be able to deliver its provisions. Therefore, that approach would be pointless. The legislation must be introduced gradually, according to the expertise of the relevant bodies. What is the point of a language policy if it is not being delivered properly?

Meirion Prys Jones (Welsh Language Board):

Training for people seeking to develop Welsh language skills has been mentioned. It is fair to say that, even in those areas where a minority of the population speaks Welsh, there has been a very positive response when employers have offered their staff the chance to learn Welsh. People see learning Welsh as a challenge as well as an opportunity to use the language in the workplace. The board has broadly welcomed that response.

Michael Russell: I have one final question. It is not about the general principles of the bill, which I have referred to several times. You have experience in language planning and you know how difficult it is to build up and develop a language that has been weakened over several generations. Without a Gaelic language act, is the prognosis for Gaelic poor? Would a Gaelic language act make much difference?

John Walter Jones: I am not sure whether I should answer that question, but I will.

Michael Russell: You will not be accused of interfering in our internal affairs.

The Deputy Convener: These are leading questions.

John Walter Jones: When the census results are released on 13 February, we will know the facts about your language and my language. Legislation alone will not change the fate of the Gaelic language overnight; it is part of the armoury of language planning and must be used in conjunction with everything else. Legislation should not just be at the disposal of the Gaelic language board or the Executive; it should be open to everyone else who has an interest in the Gaelic language and a part to play in its future.

Meirion Prys Jones: Language planning is not a science; it is based on common sense. We can identify certain hoops through which we must jump to provide a context in which a language can flourish. There is no secret to that. Legislation, education and community development are all important but, if a language is to survive, planning is needed to bring those elements together and to place proper emphasis on them. If one element is missing, survival is much more difficult.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Thank you for your written evidence. Mike Russell's penultimate point referred to the geographical coverage of the bill. The committee has heard various suggestions about how the bill could most appropriately be implemented. I have concerns not about an incremental approach but about an approach that is based on geography, as we have heard in previous evidence that there are substantial Gaelic-speaking communities in Glasgow, Edinburgh and, indeed, the Borders. You suggested implementing the bill according to the ability of the group to deliver meaningfully. It has also been suggested that we should consider size and concentration of population. Do you have a view on that?

John Walter Jones: The answer to that question depends on one's view of the language. If we regard the language as belonging to the whole of Scotland, even though it not spoken throughout Scotland, there is every justification for taking a whole-of-Scotland approach.

As I said, such an approach must be tailored. I have never been an advocate of concentrating on the more Welsh-speaking parts of Wales. In the early days, some people tried to push us in that direction. However, that approach would mean disfranchising Welsh speakers in the south-east of Wales, who have the same right to the language as others. Their children are taught Welsh as a subject as part of the national curriculum. They have as much right to the language as those of us who, for whatever reason, grew up speaking Welsh. I was lucky in that respect and would like to give everyone else the same right. However, we do that by taking an approach that responds to circumstances. It would be possible to take a whole-of-Scotland approach, but not overnight—that would be dangerous and foolish.

Jackie Baillie: That is helpful in shaping some of the discussions that we will need to have.

I am a great believer in the principle that legislation is not the end of the story. The Welsh Assembly ensured that there was an on-going commitment to the Welsh Language Act 1993 and that resources were available to back it up. I notice that the Welsh Language Board's annual grant has been increased substantially. I am sure that you have difficulty spending it, although you need not respond to that comment.

John Walter Jones: Our responsibilities are certainly greater.

Jackie Baillie: I want to get a feel for how you went about quantifying the costs of implementation—if you did. Although in the financial memorandum to the bill Mike Russell points to the estimated cost of producing a language plan, in reality legislation comes alive

when all the underlying costs of implementation are taken on board. I want to get a flavour of the process by which you assessed the costs of implementation of the Welsh Language Act 1993.

John Walter Jones: There are two sides to the question. First, there is the cost of implementing the act itself. Secondly, there is the budget of the Welsh Language Board. Believe it or not, people came up with figures for implementing the legislation before it was introduced. Some of those figures were as accurate as builders' estimates and they were proved to be wrong. The figures were used to support the argument of the scaremongers, who did not want legislation or to make headway with the language.

From day one, we have tried to normalise expenditure on the language. If we spend money on a child's education, it does not matter whether we are spending money on educating that child through the medium of English or through the medium of Welsh—the child will be educated and will cost the state money. We try to normalise people's approach to expenditure. Previously people had tried to put Welsh-language education in a box as Welsh-language expenditure. As long as they continued to do that, the language would have remained in a box and would have been marginalised. We wanted to mainstream the language. One way of doing that was to normalise Welsh-language education within the main education budget. Now the accounts of public bodies do not contain a line headed "Welsh language". That spending is now accepted as part of administrative costs.

There has been a dialogue between the board and the public sector about how to normalise expenditure. It is important to do what is reasonable and practicable. If we do not ask for too much, people are not frightened by the small amounts of marginal additional expenditure.

When we started as a non-statutory board in 1988, the Government of the day was in favour of privatisation. The chairman at the time was also the chairman of Welsh Water, which was being privatised. Welsh Water was privatised bilingually, at an additional cost of 0.05p per customer—although I am not going to enter into the debate on the merits of privatisation.

Did you ask me how we achieved the increase in budget? You did not, but I will tell you anyway. We achieved the increase in budget through almost 10 solid years of good performance since 1992. That was based on a combination of developing language planning as a tool for advancing the cause of the Welsh language, being realistic, carrying on the dialogue and, more important, trying to take the language out of politics and politics out of the language. I think that we have achieved that.

Any politician in Wales will agree that there is political consensus on the language. There are differing views, but by and large politicians of all parties now accept the language—it is an issue that they like to address. Within the Assembly, we have continuing dialogue with all the political parties.

We did well out of the last expenditure round but, as I said, the duties on the board and my responsibilities as accountable officer are a damn sight more than they were before the increase.

The Deputy Convener: How do you measure success? What difference has the board made in Wales?

John Walter Jones: Some will measure success on the basis of the figures that will appear at midday on 13 February—the census figures. There are many measures of success. We set targets and discuss them with our sponsor division and the minister in the Assembly.

Taking the sting out of the language is the biggest thing that we have achieved. The language is not the issue that it was when I started in the early 1980s. It is no longer a bone of contention. People now enjoy the language; if they did not, we would not make advances. That is one of the key factors that I use as an element to measure the board's success.

The way in which we have opened dialogue between public bodies and the board is another measure of success. I remember going with another member of the board—who is now a member of the Assembly—to some local authorities in the early days with voluntary guidelines for the use of the Welsh language in the public and private sectors. We were given the most hostile reception. However, when we launched a language scheme a few months ago, the local authorities were very pleased. We have made progress.

Ian Jenkins: Thank you for your evidence and the spirit in which you have given it. What you say has been inspiring. As your submission demonstrates, the thinking behind the entire project was that, if you did not do something, the language would fade away. Is there a critical point when that can happen?

As I read your submission and the figures about the distribution of speakers and percentages, I realise that Scotland is further down the line in terms of numbers. Some of us have been in areas where Gaelic has never been spoken, not where the language has been lost. Is there a critical mass beyond which we are dealing with a different animal in order to revive the language?

John Walter Jones: I do not think that there is a critical mass. The use of language in society and

the fact that there is a community of speakers are vital for language planning. In Wales, we have not fallen to the figures that apply to Gaelic speaking in Scotland. The number of Welsh speakers was in decline from the turn of the century until about 1981, when the census showed an increase in the number of Welsh speakers between the ages of three and nine. The 1991 census reflected a similar increase and carried it on to the next age group of nine to 16-year-olds. I hope to God that the next census carries on the trend further. If it does, I am not saying that we will reverse the language shift—I will never say that—but at least we will be seeing growth from the bottom up.

Trends can continue from generation to generation. One issue that we face is that of parents not passing the language on to the next generation. The Welsh Assembly has taken that very seriously and has provided a great deal of money to enable us to run a project in conjunction with health authorities, not to instruct parents, but to explain to them the merits of bilingualism and how children can be made bilingual. We have never asked any organisation in the public, private or voluntary sector to do anything unless we can help it. All our material is designed to help people to embrace the language and to make creative use of it.

I cannot give a figure for critical mass. However, it is important that there should be communities in which the language is used on a day-to-day basis. In Wales, such communities still exist, although they are becoming fewer and further between.

15:00

Mr Monteith: What effect have the Welsh Language Act 1993 and the Welsh Language Board had on other languages—apart from English—that are spoken in Wales? Have Welsh language policies had a knock-on effect on the use of other languages, such as the languages of immigrants who have come to Wales directly or via the rest of the UK? You have had some time to think about the legislation, which has its origins in the 80s. Has it had any unintended consequences, either positive or negative, that you wish to highlight to us?

John Walter Jones: I will explain why I am smiling when I try to answer the second question.

I do not think that I can answer the first question. All that I will say is that the Welsh language is a subject in the national curriculum and is therefore taught in every school in Wales. I am not saying that it is learned in every school in Wales, but it is taught. Every child now has an opportunity to acquire the Welsh language.

There was a point at which it was impossible to sell the merits of bilingualism. People said that

because they never had the opportunity to learn Welsh they were disenfranchised linguistically. We try to tell parents that if someone acquires one language, they can acquire three, four and more—as happens in every country on the continent. We try to place the Welsh language within the context of a basket of linguistic ability. People will use it in Wales and they will acquire other language skills that they can use in different linguistic environments. That is the way in which we try to convince parents and children of the merits of the language. Without a shadow of a doubt, employers realise that there are benefits to having bilingual staff within the work force.

One unintended spin-off from the legislation is the number of members of the Assembly who have decided in the past four years to learn Welsh. They have inspired their constituents to do likewise. People like me are inspired by the fact that members use Welsh as often as they can in debates—they have started to learn Welsh because they want to do that. No one has told them, “Thou shalt learn Welsh”; it is their decision to do so, and they are enjoying it. For me, that is a bonus and a pleasure.

The Deputy Convener: I thank Meirion Prys Jones and John Walter Jones for their evidence.

Next week, we will take further evidence on the bill from the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, Mike Watson, and from Mike Russell.

The Convener (Karen Gillon): I could see ripples of interest spread through the committee at the thought of members spontaneously speaking in another language, especially Gaelic.

Michael Russell: Some members already sound as if they are speaking another language.

The Convener: Some of us have difficulty with English. However, I am sure that it would be excellent for us to begin to try to speak other languages.

Jackie Baillie: We will follow the convener’s lead.

McCrone Agreement

The Convener: I ask Brian Monteith to introduce the correspondence that members have received from him.

Mr Monteith: The purpose of my letter was to give the committee the opportunity to consider how to deal with continuing communication to members, through e-mails and telephone calls, on the progress of the McCrone settlement.

Local authorities in some parts of Scotland have been worried about how to pay for the McCrone settlement. They believe that they do not have adequate resources and that the formula does not meet their needs. Members have been told that the McCrone agreement was finalised by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Executive, with contributions from local authorities. However, it is clear that some local authorities are experiencing difficulties. The committee must ascertain more detail about those difficulties.

It was brought to my attention recently that there are difficulties with settling how teacher training will continue through the continuing professional development courses and with the funding of those courses. I am led to believe that it would be worth considering the McCrone settlement, not from a party-political view—there is consensus on supporting the McCrone settlement and seeing it through—but with a view to ensuring that it progresses smoothly, that the consensus is maintained and that problems are identified at an early stage.

In my previous correspondence on the matter, I suggested that the committee might take evidence to facilitate the preparation of a report for public consumption, consideration by the Executive and debate in the Parliament. However, I am mindful of the time constraints—an election is not far away—and of the fact that the committee is dealing with various bills. Therefore, I suggest that the committee consider appointing a reporter to take written evidence from all the players and those members of the public and teaching staff who wish to contribute, so that a report can be prepared, which the committee could discuss and publish.

Michael Russell: I have some sympathy with Brian Monteith’s request—the McCrone agreement is central to the future of Scottish education. However, time is against us. The committee is set to have 10 meetings before Parliament is dissolved.

The danger of dipping into the McCrone agreement is that it is overarching and complex and parts of it have not been fully implemented. It would take a lot of time to consider the issues carefully. A short, sharp inquiry would not do the subject justice, which I regret, because that would

have been the right approach for the committee to take. The best that we can do is use our legacy paper to highlight the McCrone agreement as a major issue that must be examined closely, dispassionately and, as Brian Monteith said, non-politically. It will be up to the new committee's members to decide whether to follow that advice.

Appointing a reporter and having a couple of evidence sessions now would make little difference. That approach might also be slightly dangerous, because the resulting report would not shine a full light on the issue. Reluctantly, I do not support Brian Monteith's proposal.

Jackie Baillie: There is little to disagree with in Mike Russell's remarks. In the short time available before the election, the committee could not do the McCrone agreement justice, whether it used a reporter or full committee meetings.

Brian Monteith highlighted what appears to be a simple issue, which is the agreement between COSLA and the Scottish Executive on the allocation formula. The difficulty is that everybody involved agreed that the total envelope was sufficient to fund the McCrone settlement fully. Is the committee suggesting that money be reclaimed from local authorities? That suggestion has been made elsewhere.

Even with an issue that, on the face of it, seems quite simple, there are several complex options. It would be best to include the matter in our legacy paper for the new committee.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I agree with Jackie Baillie and Michael Russell. It would be valuable to look at the McCrone agreement, but it is still being implemented and much work remains to be done on it. We do not have time to consider it. The agreement needs a committee to look at it; a reporter would not be able to do the work required. The committee could mention such an inquiry in its legacy paper for the new committee.

Ian Jenkins: I agree. The issue merits something better than we could manage in the time available. The committee could only do something superficial, which is not the right way to deal with a project of such central importance to Scottish education. We could not take proper evidence—the evidence would be distorted and it would be difficult to draw it together because of the conflicting views. Given the time left before dissolution, the time that the committee could devote to the matter and the texture of the agreement, it would be too difficult for the committee to arrive at sensible conclusions. Although, like other members, I have sympathy with the idea, it would be impractical to examine the McCrone agreement now.

Careful thought needs to be given to how to consider the agreement, even after the election. It

is still being implemented and negotiations are continuing among the stakeholders. However, members should have a chance to consider it, if the new committee felt it appropriate to do so. The legacy paper seems to be the right vehicle for the matter.

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

My views are similar to those of other members. I understand that the Auditor General for Scotland has an investigation of McCrone as part of his work programme for the coming year. We ought to take that into consideration when we decide how best to tackle the issue.

The Convener: I have done some background work on the agreement, and Irene McGugan is almost right: the Accounts Commission for Scotland has the agreement in its proposed programme for this year. In addition, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education will examine it towards the summer.

COSLA continues to monitor the McCrone agreement and has told me that the key milestones have been met ahead of time and that the objectives that were set down are also being met. We are aware that negotiations with ministers continue on some of the financial issues. Importantly, the negotiating group, which comprises COSLA, the Executive and the trade unions, continues to meet and keep a watching brief on McCrone.

From the information that I have gathered over the past week, my view is that it would not be appropriate for the committee to become involved at this stage, but it may be an issue for a future committee.

Mr Monteith: I am rather disappointed with members' unanimous view that we should not proceed with my request. In a sense, the rationale seems to be that it might have been better to proceed with the original request that I made last year, when I had greater sympathy and support.

The committee is behaving akin to the way in which political parties behave when they request a royal commission, which is the lowest common denominator when something that might be contentious needs to be discussed.

It is quite right that the Accounts Commission should look at the McCrone settlement. There is a great deal of concern about the effectiveness of the way in which it has been funded and how it will operate formally. It is important that other bodies consider the settlement, but consideration by the Accounts Commission need not exclude consideration by the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. We would take a far wider view of the operation of the settlement. However, if we cannot produce a simple paper on the progress that has been made to date, let us make that an agenda

item for a future committee in our legacy paper. I hope only that we will not come to regret that legacy.

The Convener: With all due respect, the letter that you have submitted does not seek a report on the current situation. As I understand it, we have reached all the key milestones that we should have reached by this point under the McCrone settlement. A five-year or six-year plan will take five or six years to work through and, in the middle of that process, some things will need to be tweaked. However, no one is telling me that we have not reached the milestones that were supposed to have been reached by now.

15:15

Mr Monteith: From the language that you are using, convener, am I to assume that, in your view, we should not even consider the possibility of examining the McCrone settlement until the milestones have not been reached or that we should assess progress only in five years' time? I cannot believe that you are saying that—I hope that you will correct any misapprehension on my part.

Clearly, people are saying that difficulties are being faced at the moment. If we are to investigate those difficulties, we must consider the progress that has been made towards reaching the milestones. We must look back to define the McCrone settlement, the point that we have reached and how we have reached it. We must then identify any difficulties that exist. The committee could suggest additional work that may be required or changes that would benefit all parties. It would be impossible to provide a report, either from the committee or from a reporter, without examining the past. I did not feel that I needed to make that point in detail in my letter.

Jackie Baillie: Far be it from me to defend the convener, who is probably big enough—although certainly not ugly enough—to do so herself. However, it is entirely unjustified and wrong for the member to misquote the convener and then to provide a flawed analysis of the reasons for our taking—or being about to take—the decision that we are going to take. I heard every member of the committee say that time prohibits us from carrying out a comprehensive review and analysis of the McCrone settlement. I am talking about not just a statement of the current position, but an analysis of what has gone wrong—assuming that things have gone wrong and that difficulties have been experienced at local level—the nature of those problems, how they arose and how we resolve them. I am not interested in doing a quick, half-hearted piece of work that fails to examine all the issues.

Brian Monteith said that he raised this issue previously. Quite legitimately, members made the point that the McCrone settlement is not particularly new. There are issues that need to be worked through and milestones that must be achieved. That does not close the door on our conducting a review, but the practical issue is that the committee will meet only 10 times before dissolution. This is not the right point at which to undertake a comprehensive analysis of some of the complicated issues that arise.

The Convener: In fact, there will be only six meetings of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee before dissolution. There will be three meetings of the ad hoc committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill.

Jackie Baillie: I stand corrected—there is even less time than I said there was.

The Convener: We have a tight timetable. If, for example, the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill is agreed to at stage 1, the Parliament will require the committee to consider that bill at stage 2 within a very tight time scale.

Brian Monteith has proposed a substantial piece of work. If we are considering a full investigation by the committee—which is not what Brian suggested in his letter—it would be for a future committee to carry out such work. I cannot place an item on the agenda of a future committee, because no Parliament can bind its successor. However, in our legacy paper we can suggest that a future committee might want to consider the issue. If members of this committee are appointed to a successor committee after the election, I am sure that they will want to pursue the matter.

We will not progress the issue further, as I see no further support for the proposal.

Reporters' Inquiries

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is reporters' inquiries, a number of which are on-going.

On my inquiry into football, I have met several of the clubs and I intend to attend this weekend's Supporters Direct conference. Matters are progressing and I hope to report by the end of February.

Cathy Peattie: My report is ready to be written up. I have only one person still to see. I would have had the report finished, but personal circumstances at the end of last year held me back. I expect to produce my report by the end of February.

The Convener: The report on the Scots language has been completed and we are in the process of translating it. We expect publication to take place by the end of January or the beginning of February. I hope that we will be able to hold a substantial press launch.

Ian Jenkins: I have been remiss. I said that I would do a report on early-years education, which is a difficult issue for a single reporter to tackle. I do not feel that I am expert enough to come up with details and decisions on a complicated area. I will produce some sort of report, but it will not be as full as I intended at first.

When I raised the issue, my intention was that the committee should investigate it by seeking expert opinion and taking proper evidence. I am genuinely hesitant about making statements on subjects on which I am not an expert. I will try to put together a report that will fit the bill in the meantime, but I suspect that the issue should feature in the legacy paper. Early-years education is a big subject. I will draw together some of the main strands and let the committee decide what to do after that.

The Convener: Mike Russell has his hand up—perhaps he is doing a secret report.

Michael Russell: It would be helpful if Ian Jenkins produced a starter paper to accompany the legacy paper. We have not been able to tackle early-years education and it would be worth widening out a topic that we should have been able to address.

There are three missing issues. Mr McAveety was doing a report on popular music, which died when he left the committee; I presume that he has not done any work on it. We should probably close down that report formally.

I have forgotten the second issue, so I will go on to the final one. I have received an e-mail from Susan Duffy and I am ready to start my work on the report on the purposes of education, but I am

waiting for Brian Monteith's comments. He said that he would e-mail them to me.

Mr Monteith: I thought that Mr Russell was preparing a draft for me to comment on.

Michael Russell: No, I was waiting for your comments on the original draft.

Mr Monteith: I have done those.

Michael Russell: Could you e-mail them to me? I will then do a redraft and pass it on to Cathy Peattie, as agreed.

I have remembered the second issue. We have not managed to progress the issue of primary school closures.

The Convener: We are coming to that. There is some unfinished business in relation to rural schools, closures and guidance. We need to obtain a final reply. I have asked the clerks to take up the matter with the relevant minister, so that we can conclude it one way or the other. We will be able to take things from there.

Michael Russell: There was a rumour that COSLA had batted the issue back, saying that it could not deal with it, and that the Executive was considering a bill. We would not want to finish the committee's work without knowing what will happen next. Closures are still taking place. I spoke to someone at the end of last week about a possible closure and the first thing that they asked was, "Is the consultation process usually so biased against the parents?" Cathy Peattie addressed the issue in Argyll. We have repeatedly picked up dissatisfaction with the failure to follow procedures.

Cathy Peattie: The issue can be dealt with in guidance to local authorities, rather than in a bill. Mike Russell is right to say that COSLA batted the issue back. There is room for the Executive to consider the matter, which has been around for a wee while, and I would be interested to hear what the minister says.

The Convener: We will follow that up.

Roman Remains at Cramond

The Convener: Agenda item 4 is consideration of recent correspondence on the Roman remains at Cramond. Three of us, along with Ian Cowan, visited Cramond on a rather damp day in December. I did not follow the advice that I was given to bring the right shoes.

We have received further correspondence from Mr Ron Guild. For what it is worth, my view is that the City of Edinburgh Council, as the lead authority, should collate the information and that the convener of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee should not do so. Such a role would be inappropriate and would cause confusion rather than help matters. People are now taking responsibility and progressing the issue and it would be helpful if they were left to get on with things—that would be the right course of action.

Michael Russell: I concur. I am enthusiastic for the matter to be taken forward. The committee should have a continuing role in keeping an eye on things and helping Mr Guild, as we have helped him strongly through many difficulties in the past three years. However, I do not think that the convener, or any other committee member, could take on the role of co-ordinating activities—that is a job for the City of Edinburgh Council with Historic Scotland and the landowners. We should make that view clear to the council and also express our gratitude to Eric Milligan, who has been exceptionally helpful and positive. We should tell Mr Guild that the committee will always be his friend and that, if he wants to continue to deal with the issue, we will keep our eye on it. I am sure that we can pass on Mr Guild's case gift-wrapped to our successors through the legacy paper.

The Convener: I concur that Eric Milligan has been exceptionally helpful. He realises the importance of the Cramond site and appreciates problems in its potential development or non-development. I will certainly send him a note to thank him for his involvement, which has been useful. He has helped to progress matters.

Michael Russell: Perhaps we should encourage the local constituency member, who was also on the visit and was positive about it, to continue her active involvement. I am sure that she will want to do so—I am not criticising her. The committee can have a watching brief.

The Convener: I will certainly pass the information to Margaret Smith, who is the member for Edinburgh West. She has a close interest in the matter and we will let her know what we are doing.

Michael Russell: She was very helpful on the visit.

The Convener: She was. We will keep an eye on the issue and it will certainly be part of our legacy paper to a future Education, Culture and Sport Committee, should there be one after the next election.

Scottish Screen Review

The Convener: Agenda item 5 is the Scottish Screen review. Members will remember that when the issue was on our agenda some time ago, I undertook to pass any correspondence that I received to members and to put the matter on the agenda again. Members have the correspondence in front of them. Are there any comments?

Michael Russell: I would like to see the implementation plan. I read the report, which begs some questions as an internal review. Rather than raise those questions at the moment, I would like to see the implementation plan and perhaps discuss it at a future committee meeting. I think that the plan will be available in March, so we could discuss it then. Issues have arisen that are important for the future of the screen industries in Scotland.

The Convener: I will ensure that the matter is put on the agenda of a meeting when a gap arises in March. Do members agree to that course of action?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I thank members for attending and remind them that there is a stage 1 debate tomorrow afternoon on the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill.

Meeting closed at 15:28.

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