



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 22 January 2013

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**Tuesday 22 January 2013**

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**EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting 2013, Session 4**

**CONVENER**

\*Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)

\*Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

\*Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)

\*Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)

\*Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD)

\*Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Christina Andrews (University of Stirling Students Union)

John Boothman (BBC Scotland)

Freddie fforde (University of St Andrews Students Association)

Ken MacQuarrie (BBC Scotland)

Bruce Malcolm (BBC Scotland)

Professor Gerry McCormac (University of Stirling)

Professor Sir Jim McDonald (University of Strathclyde)

Malcolm Moir (University of Strathclyde Students Association)

Sir Timothy O'Shea (University of Edinburgh)

Garry Quigley (Students Association of the University of the West of Scotland)

Professor Seona Reid (Glasgow School of Art)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Terry Shevlin

**LOCATION**

Committee Room 4



## Scottish Parliament

### Education and Culture Committee

*Tuesday 22 January 2013*

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:15]

### Decision on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Stewart Maxwell):** Good morning. I welcome members to the second meeting of the Education and Culture Committee in 2013. I remind members and those in the public gallery to ensure that all electronic devices, but particularly phones, are switched off at all times.

The first item of business this morning is consideration of whether to take an item in private. Do members agree to take item 4 in private?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## Broadcasting

09:15

**The Convener:** Item 2 is an oral evidence session on broadcasting with BBC Scotland. This follows a round-table session that took place last January, following which the committee took evidence last May from Mark Thompson, the former director general of the BBC. The committee invited the next director general, George Entwistle, to give further evidence last autumn, but the BBC declined that invitation. Subsequently, the committee took evidence from the National Union of Journalists and the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union. Following that session, the committee asked the BBC to appear before it again to discuss the various concerns that the unions had raised with the committee. The BBC declined that invitation to give oral evidence but provided the committee with written evidence that discussed the unions' submission to the committee.

As the committee is aware, I then wrote to Lord Patten, the chairman of the BBC trust, offering the BBC the opportunity to attend the committee to discuss the substantive issue of programming capacity at major events and other matters. Lord Patten agreed that BBC Scotland senior management would attend the committee.

I therefore welcome to the committee this morning from BBC Scotland Ken MacQuarrie, director; John Boothman, head of news and current affairs; and Bruce Malcolm, head of Commonwealth games 2014. Good morning, gentlemen. I invite Mr MacQuarrie to make some opening remarks.

**Ken MacQuarrie (BBC Scotland):** Thank you, convener. Before we come to questions, I thought that it might be useful to take stock of what BBC Scotland has achieved in the past few months. Since we appeared here last May with the director general, we have reported our most successful ever business year. That is despite the well-documented challenges that we have had from the licence fee settlement and, of course, the very serious issues surrounding Jimmy Savile.

The Deloitte economic impact survey, which some of you may have read last week, revealed that, for every £1 of licence fee, the BBC delivers over £2 of value back into the economy, equating in Scotland to around £410 million for the financial year 2011-12. We now produce 9 per cent of the BBC's network television spend in Scotland, contributing £80 million-worth of business for the Scottish creative economy. That resulted in our network television rising to a record 882 hours, which is a rise of 52 per cent in just two years.

Last week, the First Minister acknowledged the success of that achievement.

That has been achieved through programmes such as “Mrs Brown’s Boys”, which is produced at Pacific Quay and has become one of the most popular BBC sitcoms in recent times. It was also helped by the move of “Waterloo Road” to Greenock, which brought a further £20 million investment over two years as well as 200 jobs. I am pleased to say that 10 per cent of those jobs are based in the Greenock area and 90 per cent are based elsewhere in Scotland.

On 14 January, we launched BBC 1 Scotland HD. We have also collected a significant number of industry awards, including a Foreign Press Association award and a Scottish BAFTA for Mark Daly—one of seven Scottish BAFTAs that we won—and three United Kingdom Grierson awards and an international Emmy for our Terry Pratchett documentary.

We are aware that the committee was previously concerned about changes to our radio news schedules, but all the indications so far are that those changes, which have increased the amount of news that we offer, have been welcomed by our audiences. They include changes to our weekend offering, which includes a new two-hour “Good Morning Scotland”.

I would like to address the issue of the appearance of BBC Scotland before this committee. It was suggested in the autumn that we were being disrespectful to the committee. That was not our intention. As you know, we provided detailed evidence to the committee in January last year, and again in May. In October 2011, we gave evidence to the Scotland Bill Committee on the impact on BBC Scotland of the licence fee settlement.

You are aware that the freeze has resulted in a budget reduction of £16 million over the period to 2017, resulting in a required reduction in post numbers of between 100 and 120 from a workforce of around 1,250. A number of those posts have already been closed: 39 were closed last year, and another 35 will be closed by March 2013. In the case of a number of those post closures, appeals have been lodged. Those are currently in train. However, we envisage no more post closures in news and current affairs under the delivering quality first process.

When we wrote to the committee in October, we said that we felt that we had already provided substantial information—as much as we could at the time—on the impact on BBC Scotland of the licence fee settlement and our response through DQF. However, we noted that we were happy to return at a future date to update on developments and, in the light of the matters that we have in

hand, I am delighted to be here today. We also said that it would not be appropriate to enter into discussion on industrial relations matters in a public forum. That is why I refer to the on-going appeals process and the importance of that point.

In your letter to the chairman of the BBC trust, convener, you indicated that the committee is now considering a report on the ability of BBC Scotland to manage major events. As the chairman outlined in his response, we are happy to attend and to answer any questions that the committee may have in that respect. I hope that we can do so in a spirit of co-operation and in the knowledge that we are all endeavouring to produce the best possible output for audiences here in Scotland.

Major events are very much at the front of our minds, following on from our coverage of the Olympics, which received considerable praise. Our fervent desire is to use the expertise that we gained in the Olympics as we prepare for next year. In 2014, we will cover not only the Commonwealth games and the independence referendum but world war one commemorations and a host of other events. Our planning for those major events is already well in hand.

I am confident that we are well placed to manage the challenges that we face and those that we will face going forward. Last year, 2012, was one of our most successful years to date and I have no reason to think that we will not continue on that path this year, next year and beyond.

**The Convener:** Thank you, Mr MacQuarrie. I am sure that the committee recognises the difficulties that BBC Scotland faces in the current financial climate. However, we wish to address a number of matters that were raised with us in the autumn.

I start off with a letter that you sent to us on 30 October in response to the trade unions’ evidence to the committee earlier that month. At point 3 in that letter, you referred to Mr Murray saying that, in his view, there has been a staff cut of 60 per cent in radio news and current affairs. You said:

“This is simply not true.”

There is clearly a divergence of opinion between you and Mr Murray, who is representing one of the trade unions. Will you explain why, in your view, his statement is incorrect?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** For the detail of the figures in relation to the staff cuts, I turn to Mr Boothman.

**John Boothman (BBC Scotland):** I was quite disappointed by Mr Murray’s evidence. I was quite surprised to see that he was here. I know that he has a capacity as a member of the NUJ executive, but Mr Murray left the BBC under voluntary redundancy some 18 months ago and has taken no part in any management and union meetings in

the past year. I say that not out of disrespect for Mr Murray but to put it on the record.

**The Convener:** That is now on the record, Mr Boothman, but clearly it is a matter for the unions to decide who they send as their representatives, in the same way as it is a matter for the BBC to decide who it sends.

**John Boothman:** That is right. As I said, however, he has taken no part in any management and union meetings in the past 18 months. That is an important point for us to put on the record.

There have been staff cuts in news and current affairs at Radio Scotland, just as there have been staff cuts across the departments. We recognise that. I came here nearly a year ago and outlined what those were. However, no programme in news and current affairs has had a staff cut of 60 per cent.

**The Convener:** Over what time period are you talking?

**John Boothman:** We came here a year ago and discussed these matters. The timeframe that we have been talking about is the five-year timeframe from the last year of continuous improvement through the whole of DQF to 2017. No programme has had a staff cut of 60 per cent, or anything like it.

**The Convener:** Okay. You have made your position clear. Let me go over the figures that I have been given, and let us see whether we can shed some light on the disagreement.

I am talking about a timeframe between 2006 and 2012—that is, the past six years. GMS staffing went from, in 2006, one editor, two senior broadcast journalists, three broadcast journalists and one content assistant, to no editor, one senior broadcast journalist, two and a half broadcast journalists and no content assistant. That represents a cut of 50 per cent in the number of posts. It is not 60 per cent, but it is not 15 or 20 per cent, which I think is the figure that you gave.

I could go through all the figures, but I will give a particular example. Between 2006 and 2012, there was a cut to daytime staffing of 69 per cent, with a cut to weekend staffing of 25 per cent, and that cut will increase. There was a cut to news desk staffing of 43 per cent, with a cut to weekend staffing of 60 per cent. Are those figures incorrect?

**John Boothman:** Yes.

**The Convener:** What are the figures, then, between 2006 and 2012?

**John Boothman:** I do not generally recognise the figures that you have just presented to me, but let me talk about daytime programming, for example. Since 2006, an entire new programme

has been added to the schedule—the John Beattie programme at lunch time—which has staffing round about it. It is the case that some of the staff who work on that programme also work on the evening news programme, but to me that represents value for money. It means that we can have staff working across programmes, which we believe is a good thing. In the same way, staff on “Reporting Scotland” work on a lunch-time programme and a tea-time programme. Those things are worth while.

Off the top of my head, I note that, for example, you have not mentioned people such as Huw Williams, who is the dedicated news correspondent to “Good Morning Scotland”. He is not included in your numbers. We are satisfied with the numbers that we have round about “Good Morning Scotland”. It is our flagship news programme and we have added extra output to the programme on a Saturday.

There is no effect on our audience in terms of any of the things that Peter Murray or anybody else has alleged to the committee. I cannot give you those figures off the top of my head, but I am happy that we have a satisfactory number of staff round about the programmes. I outlined a year ago that we would go through a period when staff would be working across our output, but what is happening in radio in relation to that has been happening in television and other areas for a long time.

**The Convener:** I am quite surprised by your response. The figures that I have been given are fairly detailed about the dedicated posts that the BBC used to have on GMS or other parts of your service but which no longer exist. I am surprised that you seem to suggest that the figures are incorrect.

Can I move on to—

**John Boothman:** Convener, if you wish to present me with those figures, I will be happy to have a look at them. They are new to me. They have never been presented in the form that you have presented them to us by the trade unions in BBC Scotland.

**The Convener:** I am sure that you can read the *Official Report* and those figures will be available to you there, but I am happy to provide them to you.

**John Boothman:** I am happy to do that, but let me tell you that, in the form that you are suggesting, those figures have never been presented to us in any management and union meetings at BBC Scotland.

09:30

**The Convener:** Let us take some specifics. Does GMS currently have a dedicated editor, on day shift?

**John Boothman:** No.

**The Convener:** Did it used to?

**John Boothman:** Yes.

**The Convener:** Right, so the figure that I read out is correct.

**John Boothman:** Yes, but what is the implication of what you are saying? Are you saying that you do not think that there is proper editorial control over GMS?

**The Convener:** No. You said that the figures that I read out are incorrect, so I am going through them one by one. You have said that that one is correct.

**John Boothman:** Okay. On you go.

**The Convener:** There used to be two senior broadcast journalists on GMS on day shift; there is now one. Is that correct?

**John Boothman:** No, it is not correct.

**The Convener:** What is the situation?

**John Boothman:** What do we have? We certainly have a senior broadcast journalist who works overnight, and there will be another senior broadcast journalist on day shift. We are not exclusively talking about work during the day. Obviously, GMS has staff who are planning the programme the night before, as well as staff on the morning of the programme.

**The Convener:** Are you talking about the early shift staff?

**John Boothman:** No, there is an overnight staff.

**The Convener:** Let us look at other programmes. Until fairly recently, "Newsnight Scotland" had two correspondents with two days' work on a story. I understand that the current plan is to remove those posts. Is that correct?

**John Boothman:** No. "Newsnight Scotland" still has that level of staffing.

**The Convener:** And the plan is not to remove them?

**John Boothman:** We have not talked in detail to the staff about what the plan will be.

**The Convener:** Is there a plan to change the current number of staff on "Newsnight Scotland"?

**John Boothman:** Yes, there is.

**The Convener:** Is a reduction planned?

**John Boothman:** We will discuss that with the unions and the staff.

**The Convener:** Does that mean that you are not able to say what the reduction will be?

**John Boothman:** It would not be appropriate to discuss details of staffing on a programme such as "Newsnight Scotland" without first discussing the matter with the unions and staff.

**The Convener:** What you say is entirely appropriate, but I am slightly surprised. This is the end of January and you said that all the posts would be going by March, but you say that you have not yet discussed the matter with the unions.

**John Boothman:** The posts that we are talking about in the context of our DQF process will be going by the end of March.

**The Convener:** Given that it is the end of January, I am slightly surprised that you have not yet discussed that with the unions.

**John Boothman:** I have not discussed individual details. We have a directors liaison meeting with the unions tomorrow or the day after and local-level negotiating meetings are coming up, but none of the changes that you are talking about has been suggested to the staff.

**The Convener:** Okay.

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** Given the exchanges that we have seen, including your letter of response to the trade unions, how are industrial relations and morale at the BBC?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** Two days ago, we had a directors liaison meeting with the joint unions, which Paul Holleran attended. It was a very full meeting and we were discussing the totality of our business across BBC Scotland—such meetings between me, as director, and the joint unions regularly take place. The tone and atmosphere of the meeting two days ago were positive and convivial. Paul Holleran paid tribute to the good work that is being done in the context of attempts to redeploy the staff in BBC Scotland who were under threat of redundancy. I cannot characterise the meeting as anything other than positive. That is the most recent evidence that I have of an exchange with the unions.

**Neil Findlay:** The festive period has made people feel a bit better, because that is certainly not the impression that the committee got prior to the festive period. Has a staff survey been done recently at the BBC? If so, can we have a look at it? What was the response?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** There has been a recent staff survey and we have a plan to deal with all the departments and address the issues that were raised in it. The survey was of staff in the BBC as a whole; it was not particular to BBC Scotland.



BBC Scotland is part of the overall BBC staff survey.

**Neil Findlay:** Can we see an analysis of the impact on staff in Scotland and how people feel about the organisation and the changes that are being made?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** The staff survey goes into a certain level of detail department by department. We note your request for that information and will respond in writing with what we think is appropriate within our overall policy region by region and area by area in the BBC.

**Neil Findlay:** In the spirit of the thawing industrial relations that you referred to, could we have a joint communication from you and the trade unions to ensure that there is agreement about what is said?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** With regard to sharing our plans and responding to the staff survey, we are always happy to take input from and consult the unions on the matter. Indeed, we have a series of regular meetings in which such issues are covered. However, the communication will not be a joint one as it is the management's responsibility to address any positive or negative matters that are raised in the staff survey.

**Neil Findlay:** Convener, when the committee receives that communication from the BBC, can we ask the trade unions to comment on it?

**The Convener:** We can do that. I am sure that we will come back to these issues in the course of the session.

**Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** You will be aware of an article in this morning's *Scotsman* suggesting that the likelihood of a strike among news journalists in the BBC is quite high—

**Ken MacQuarrie:** I am sorry—I missed a couple of words in your question.

**Clare Adamson:** You will be aware of an article in this morning's *Scotsman* suggesting that relations have reached such a point that a strike among news staff might happen in the very near future. Have the staff been given a public opportunity to discuss these issues with you? If so, can that meeting also be described as "positive and convivial"?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** Staff have had a number of opportunities with the direct leadership of the area that they are in. Are you referring in particular to the staff survey or to industrial relations, as it were?

**Clare Adamson:** Have the staff been able to raise concerns? It has been suggested in today's *Scotsman* that tensions are very high. Has there been a public meeting—well, not a public meeting

but a meeting with you at which staff have had a chance to air these views?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** I recently had a session that was open to all staff and at which we had a very full discussion about a number of different issues, ranging from the impact of Savile to the impact of DQF. How would I characterise the meeting? It was open and honest on both sides. Let me put it this way: the staff who attended the session, many of whom were from the newsroom, came up to me afterwards and said that they felt that the exchange had been very positive and that they were very happy with it. I should also point out that these staff are without fear or favour, by which I mean that they had no reason to tell me that. Of course, I do not want to imply that the exchange of views was not robust—it was.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Mr MacQuarrie, can I just ask about the quality judgments—

**The Convener:** I am sorry, Liz, but I want to stick with the staff survey for a moment. Is your question related to that?

**Liz Smith:** It is, but I will come back to it if other members want to go first.

**The Convener:** Given that Mr Findlay has raised the issue, I want to ask a specific question about the staff survey and morale. Let me quote two statistics from a staff survey that I believe was conducted in 2010. The percentage of BBC staff agreeing with the statement

"I believe that my manager means what s/he says"

was 67 per cent, while the figure for staff in the BBC Scotland news department was 41 per cent. The percentage of BBC staff agreeing with the statement

"Senior leaders in my division behave in a way that is consistent with the BBC Values"

was 45 per cent, while the figure for BBC Scotland news staff was 17 per cent. Are you not shocked by that figure? Given that only 17 per cent felt that their senior leaders behave in a way that is consistent with BBC values, how have you responded to that survey and how have you dealt with what I think is an appallingly low figure?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** We obviously take seriously any staff survey and any data that we have about how our staff are feeling. We have a clear action plan that involves dialogue and working with staff to ensure that there are various fora for their concerns and that there is absolute clarity on the information that is available to them. We respond, as any organisation would, with a positive plan to address the issues raised. That, in sum, is how we approach it.

**The Convener:** Again, I am slightly puzzled by that response. A reasonable number of people have spoken to me in advance of the meeting, and the one thing that they all said, which was consistent across every communication that I have had, was that there is a complete lack of communication by BBC Scotland management: staff are not being told things, issues are not being addressed, dealt with or responded to, they are not being informed about what is going on, and morale is at rock bottom. In the survey, which was nearly three years ago, only 17 per cent agreed with that statement about senior leaders behaving consistently with BBC values. How can you respond in the way that you have just done, given that figure and the responses that I and, I am sure, other members have had?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** I think that you are referring to a particular department. Is that correct?

**The Convener:** Yes. I am referring to BBC Scotland news.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** We respond by looking at morale across the whole of BBC Scotland; news is only part of the operation. We look at our figures in relation to other nations and other parts of the BBC.

In the recent staff survey, the new set-up at Salford was the highest scoring area. We are broadly in line across the rest of the BBC. I do not, for a moment, minimise the importance of looking at the statistics, taking cognisance of them and addressing them. We do that in an absolutely open fashion with staff.

Although you indicate that there is a lack of communication, we have communicated the staff results clearly. Staff are regularly communicated with. As is the case with any organisation, we have a regular system of internal communications and we work, all the time, to get the optimum internal communications by responding to staff needs and being accessible and available at any point to staff who want to raise an issue.

**The Convener:** I would like clarification on a point that you raised a moment ago. When will the departmental breakdown of the most recent staff survey be published?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** I will come back to you with a figure on that, but we are looking to give individual heads the figures for their own areas and departments, which are to be used as the basis for their team briefings.

**The Convener:** Does that mean that the figures will be published soon?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** They will certainly be published soon, but I will not give an exact date until we have completed the work internally.

**The Convener:** I understand that.

**Liz Smith:** Quality is obviously the most important thing for programme standards, particularly in light of the Savile report's serious concerns. Will you tell us a little bit about the criteria that you use to make judgments about the quality of the programmes that are delivered?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** We carry out a variety of quality surveys, one of which is called the appreciation index, which provides a qualitative score for programmes. Typically, we measure reach, share and the quality of the programme. We also have various bespoke surveys that look at whether the programme was regarded as innovative. Parallel work is undertaken by the BBC trust in that regard, on what is referred to as "fresh" and "new". The areas that we measure include originality, impact and the extent to which the audience enjoyed the programme. We often measure online whether people would recommend the programme to a friend.

We have different systems for radio and TV—it depends on the platform—to try to get the best available data. It is something that we do with the utmost seriousness and we probably have more qualitative data on our programming than any other organisation in the UK.

09:45

**Liz Smith:** Are you satisfied with the results of the analyses of the quality? Are there any concerns about the quality of programmes among either management or staff?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** We continually aspire to hold and improve the quality. As the director general said when we were here in May, we can see a rising graph on the qualitative scores for output.

**Liz Smith:** Is that on all the scores?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** Yes, as far as output is concerned. There is no doubt that the issues around Savile affected trust in the organisation as a corporate body. We measured that as well. However, the audience distinguishes between the BBC corporately and its content. For magnificent programmes such as "Africa" and "Mrs Brown's Boys", as was mentioned, we have had record content scores for audience enjoyment and comedy.

For each programme, we analyse the qualitative scores, look across a range of different criteria and look at the extent to which the audience is using the iPlayer to view a programme again. We take all that data and rigorously test it. In no sense are we ever complacent on quality; the quality of our programmes is what we live to deliver.

**Liz Smith:** Given the earlier discussions, am I correct that the real concern is not about the quality of the programmes and that it is much more about employment and morale in the sector? Am I correct that the quality of programmes is not at stake or causing concern among staff?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** For the benefit of the licence payer the licence fee has been frozen since 2010. We will be able to offer the exact same payment until March 2017. In concert with that, the BBC has taken on responsibilities regarding the World Service, S4C, BBC monitoring, local television and so on. More than £700 million will be taken out of the budget over that period. As I said the last time that I was here, that level of change is not easy; it is difficult and it causes uncertainty among staff.

Allied to that, we are also in perhaps the most competitive industry in the UK, with regard to the number of our competitors, and in the fastest changing industry in the UK, due to audience behaviour and the way in which they use technology.

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** Is it all right to move on to another subject?

**The Convener:** I would like to stay on this one for the moment. Does Joan McAlpine want to ask about this subject or a different one?

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** I want to ask about benchmarking between Radio Scotland and Radio 4.

**The Convener:** We will come back to that. Clare Adamson has a question on the same area.

**Clare Adamson:** You mentioned benchmarking against other areas in the BBC. I have in front of me figures from the BBC trust's national radio review. I suppose that the ultimate judge of quality for radio is the listening figures. Between 2007 and 2012, the Radio Scotland budget for content delivery was cut from £29.5 million to £23.2 million, which is a cut of almost 20 per cent. Worryingly, at the same time the listening figures dropped by 11,000. In comparison, Radio 4's listening figures increased during that time.

Given that there has already been quite a substantial cut to content in the area, can you assure us that there is the capacity to continue to deliver quality programming?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** Are you talking specifically about radio?

**Clare Adamson:** Yes.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** It is a constant discussion for us, first, to ensure that we innovate, refresh the schedules and have new programming in. Over the past couple of years, we have been able to bring in more than 50 new dramas since we

brought drama back into the schedules for Radio Scotland. We also had Billy Kay's programme "The Cause: A History of Scottish Nationalism", which I know was well received by some members of the committee. We are constantly looking not only at innovative documentary but at our specialist news and religious programming, which has won awards. Our sports output over that period has also received awards.

The holy grail, if you like, for Radio Scotland is to continue to drive the quality up and to offer, as we do, programming to the UK networks, including classical music for Radio 3. We are delighted with the success of our orchestra. We were able to protect it to a large extent throughout the DQF process. We are delighted with the range of programming that we offer in particular to Radio 4, which has a trusted and strong relationship with BBC Scotland staff. In all of that, we have opportunities to develop and refresh staff and to produce a range of new programming across each and every genre.

We are also proud of what we are delivering this week for Celtic Connections, which reflects its 20th anniversary. We will continue to deliver that programming and to offer the specialist music expertise that comes on Radio Scotland in the evenings. As a consequence of the service licence review, we are ensuring that we have much more of a speech-based offering during the daytime.

**Clare Adamson:** I have a supplementary question. You mentioned the World Service. Obviously, part of the reason why we are where we are is the fact that the World Service is now fully funded by the licence fee. As we move forward to the big events in 2014, how has BBC Scotland's relationship with the World Service changed? What opportunity is there for BBC Scotland to work with the World Service and ensure that it is broadcasting what is happening in Scotland?

You also mentioned technology, so I will switch from the issue of radio to a comment on the iPlayer, which still has a distinct lack of Scottish content. For example, we cannot watch "Politics Scotland" on the iPlayer. Obviously, there is quite a bit of international interest in what is happening in Scotland at the moment. I have found no valid explanation as to why there is not more Scottish content on the iPlayer.

**John Boothman:** I will start by talking about both the World Service and the big things that have been happening in BBC World television, and the relationship that BBC Scotland has with both of those in relation to news.

As some members of the committee might be aware, one of my colleagues, Glenn Campbell, has been working in London with the World

Service over the past three months, cementing the very good relationship that we now have with it.

By way of an illustration, one of the most successful programmes in news and current affairs in recent months was a documentary called “Martha, Meals and Malawi” that we made with Martha Payne from Argyll, in which our reporter Laura Bicker went with Martha and her family to Malawi. That programme achieved an audience of 350,000 on BBC Scotland.

In the past, such a programme would probably have got only one showing on BBC Scotland. However, we recut the programme and put out a different version at Christmas. Partly as a result of our relationship with BBC World, I think that the programme received 12 TV showings on that channel, going out in America and China, for example. I do not know whether anyone saw the programme but it showed people in different parts of the world who had followed Martha’s example. It also had the same number of showings on the BBC News Channel. It was shown in October when it first went out and the recut version was shown in December. That is all part of the new and developing relationship that we are trying to achieve with the BBC World Service and in television with BBC World.

We have also developed the relationship with regard to a number of BBC Scotland investigative programmes. For example, the whisky programme that I heard Ms McAlpine commend on television at the weekend was, I think, shown seven times on the BBC News Channel a couple of weeks ago. Programmes that tell Scotland’s story to the world are new—they have been around for only a couple of years. For the past couple of months, one of my colleagues, Marcus Ryder, who is the editor of our investigations team, has been talking to people in the World Service, in television, in radio and at the BBC News Channel to further cement that relationship and ensure that all the investigations that BBC Scotland makes purely for a domestic audience find a much wider place. Martha Payne’s story also featured significantly on World Service radio, which broadcast a series of items on school meals around the world.

At the end of the day, a story that began as a simple news report in Argyll has travelled the world. Given the way we used to operate a couple of years ago, it would have been confined to Scotland.

**Clare Adamson:** What about the iPlayer?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** BBC Scotland already has a huge amount of content on the iPlayer, but we will increase it to ensure that absolutely everything that we have is on it or is available to view again. The BBC’s overall mission is, with maximum convenience and at the maximum quality, to give

all audiences the chance to view programmes within the seven-day window.

**Neil Findlay:** Among the political and media classes, there is a view that “Good Morning Scotland”, in particular, is creaking at the seams. Do you compare the quality of that programme against the quality of programmes on Radio 5 and Radio 4?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** There are two ways of comparing quality. First of all, there is clearly an element of subjectivity in pronouncements that are made by individuals on, say, “Good Morning Scotland”, but we try to measure the data that we have on the behaviour of the audience for that programme, and its audience is holding steady. We want to continually refresh the diet of programming to show that we are listening to the audience and to ensure that we are offering what they need from the programme and the information that they believe to be essential. I believe that the programme and its staff and presenters do all of that excellently. Nevertheless, the essential way to assess quality is to measure audience response to the programme.

**John Boothman:** When I last gave evidence to the committee almost a year ago, one of the big issues that members wanted to discuss was the change in our weekend schedules, of which politicians and the media alike had made much criticism. The change only happened in the autumn, but I believe that we have a much stronger offering at the weekend than we ever had before. For a start, we created a new two-hour “Good Morning Scotland” on Saturday with Derek Bateman and Isabel Fraser. I do not know whether the committee has any views on the programme or the individuals concerned, but I think that it is a terrific offering and is much better than what we had before.

10:00

“Good Morning Scotland” provides an incredible service—it reports what is happening not just in Scotland but throughout the UK and internationally. As we have said here before, it has access to the BBC’s expertise all around the world. Journalists from the BBC’s coterie of correspondents around the world appear regularly on the programme. We broke some incredible stuff on “Good Morning Scotland” last week. My colleague Glenn Campbell was in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. We had an interview about independence and what it meant in Czechoslovakia with the Deputy Prime Minister of Slovakia, followed the next day by an interview with the Czech foreign minister. That is just one example of what has already been broadcast and what we can expect in the next few months from “Good Morning Scotland”. It is a first-class

programme and, as Kenny MacQuarrie says, the audience is holding up. In that respect, we are very proud of it.

**Neil Findlay:** Some of what I am saying is anecdotal. One issue is that people may tune in for a short period—they listen to 15 minutes or whatever and then tune in to Radio 5 Live or Radio 4. Can you track whether that is really happening or whether people are sticking with the programme for longer?

**John Boothman:** I am unashamedly in favour of that behaviour, in so far as it means that the BBC is offering audiences in Scotland a choice. There is nothing wrong with that. At the end of the day, if people tune in to “Good Morning Scotland” to hear what is happening locally or throughout Scotland and then choose to tune in to Radio 4 or Radio 5 Live for something else, that is fine.

I listened to “Good Morning Scotland” from 6 o’clock this morning and I thought that it was absolutely terrific. There were two first-class reports from local correspondents about the weather situation. The first was about what was happening to schools, roads and so on in Grampian, and then another correspondent did the same for the Borders. I then had a dose of what was happening in the international situation. Sometimes I dip into 5 Live and the “Today” programme. That is the choice that the BBC provides and we are very proud of it.

**Joan McAlpine:** I want to talk a bit more about benchmarking, particularly between Radio Scotland and Radio 4. When Iain Macwhirter came before the committee in January last year, we asked him whether, to the best of his knowledge, any proper benchmarking exercise had ever been undertaken. He said:

“I once raised the issue with a senior BBC executive, who told me that Scotland has a tenth of the population so it gets only a tenth of the budget and programmes are made at a tenth of the cost.”—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 24 January 2012; c 653-4.]

Is that accurate?

**Bruce Malcolm (BBC Scotland):** We talked about this the last time we were here. No, it is not accurate—it is far from accurate. As Mark Thompson said the last time he was here, Radio 4’s budget is about three times the size of Radio Scotland’s budget, although Radio 4’s audience is about 16 times the size of Radio Scotland’s.

**Joan McAlpine:** How do you benchmark between the different programmes?

**Bruce Malcolm:** As we said last time, we do it with numbers and with meetings. Radio people meet—for example, Jeff Zycinski sits in a radio network controllers group—and share information

about how things are staffed and run; we also try to share best practice.

**Joan McAlpine:** We have been given figures for “World at One” and “PM” staffing compared with staffing on John Beattie’s show and “Newsdrive”. “World at One” and “PM” have two editors, six broadcast journalists and one assistant. They are on air for an hour and three quarters; Johnny Beattie’s show and “Newsdrive” are on air for double that and yet have half the staff.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** If you give us those figures, we will be happy to respond later with a detailed analysis of them.

If you are asking whether there is a difference between the staffing on, for example, the “Today” programme and the staffing on “Good Morning Scotland”, as the director general said, yes there is. The programmes’ remits are subtly different and we have been clear about that. I did not recognise the figure of one 10th of the budget that you said that Iain Macwhirter had from a senior executive.

**Joan McAlpine:** Will you give us a breakdown of the staffing of John Beattie’s show and “Newsdrive”, compared with staffing on “World at One” and “PM”? Will you write to the committee with those figures?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** What I want to do is see the figures and then look to assist the committee as best we can, while not revealing information that it would be reasonable for us to withhold from commercial competitors.

**Joan McAlpine:** Right.

Clare Adamson mentioned the BBC trust’s review. There was a BBC trust service review of network radio and a separate survey of nations radio in 2011. It is difficult to get away from funding. As Clare Adamson said, the funding for Radio Scotland was cut from £29.5 million in 2007-08 to £23.8 million in 2010-11. Over the same period, Radio 4’s budget grew from £81 million to £86 million.

As we have been told, in the context of delivering quality first the budget for Radio 4 will be preserved, because it is the jewel in the crown of broadcasting. You are head of BBC Scotland. Does it strike you as a little unfair that your jewel in the crown, Radio Scotland, has had a severe cut to its budget and will have more cuts, while its equivalent, Radio 4, is being protected?

**Bruce Malcolm:** We talked about Radio 4 the last time that we discussed the matter with the committee. The facts are that the average BBC saving is 20 per cent and BBC Scotland’s is 16 per cent. Radio Scotland has a saving of about 13 or 14 per cent over the period and Radio 4 has a

saving of 11 per cent. There is a small difference of 3 or 4 per cent in the savings targets for Radio 4 and Radio Scotland.

**Joan McAlpine:** With all due respect, that is not what the figures in delivering quality first say. They show a cut for Radio Scotland but no cut for Radio 4.

**Bruce Malcolm:** Where did you get those figures from?

**Joan McAlpine:** From the BBC trust.

**Bruce Malcolm:** I think that they are historic figures and not the figures to 2017. I do not recognise the figures; as far as—

**Joan McAlpine:** We know from the service reviews that Radio Scotland's budget has been cut in cash terms and Radio 4's budget has grown in cash terms. You cannot dispute that.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** I think that I would like to see what is included in the figures on Radio 4. We need to do a like-for-like comparison, to see whether, for example, Radio 4 Extra, the new Radio 4 service, is included.

**Joan McAlpine:** As part of the service reviews, audience research was done. Listeners were generally positive about Radio 4, but according to the service review report, Radio 4 is

"perceived as a very metropolitan and London centric station",

with a penetration of just 12 per cent in Scotland, compared with 20.8 per cent in England, where penetration tends to be biased towards the south of England. Radio Scotland's penetration was found to be higher in Scotland than Radio 4's is in England.

Given that profile of the station, is it not wrong that Radio 4's budget is being protected and has risen during the period in which Radio Scotland's budget has been cut?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** The cuts or efficiency savings that Bruce Malcolm talked about are comparable—13 or 14 per cent versus 11 per cent. They are in the same territory. In relation to Radio 4, successive controllers have been aware of the bias towards the south-east that you mentioned, which is something that Radio 4 is working to address.

On Radio Scotland's penetration, Radio Scotland is the national radio service and we are proud of its audience figures. Radio Scotland gets around 1 million listeners per week and is second only to Radio 2, which is a very popular music station, of course.

Remaining watchful on Radio Scotland's performance in relation to the audience and the issue of quality is what concerns me most. In an

organisation on the scale of the BBC, we can get into relative comparisons and minute analysis of one service versus another. What is important to me is that we have the ability and the funding to deliver Radio Scotland—

**Joan McAlpine:** With all due respect, that is a wee bit waffly. The figures speak for themselves. Radio Scotland's budget has been cut from £29 million to £23 million over the same period in which Radio 4's budget has risen, and, lo and behold, Radio Scotland's audience figures have fallen while Radio 4's have increased in the same period. Surely money must matter.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** Our audience figures have held constant over that period, as far as our data is concerned, in terms of the reach of Radio Scotland. The—

**Joan McAlpine:** Sorry. If I can just come back in—

**The Convener:** Please be very brief. Other people are waiting to come in.

**Joan McAlpine:** Okay. The Radio Joint Audience Research figures for September 1999 to September 2012 show that Radio Scotland's average weekly reach dropped by 11,000.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** We need to consider the numbers that we are talking about. In any survey such as those carried out by RAJAR, there is an element of confidence. In relation to the variable of confidence within the data concerned, 11,000 out of a reach of 1 million is not statistically significant.

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** When Mark Thompson gave evidence to the committee last year, he told us that BBC Alba would be exempt from cuts but BBC Scotland would not. Will you remind the committee why that is the case?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** Not only was BBC Alba exempt from cuts but, as I said earlier, we wanted to ensure that there were the minimum cuts in the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and our locally based services in areas such as Shetland and Orkney. We took the view that the new service, BBC Alba, which was launched in the context of a realisation of the sort of economy that we would be working in, was delivering as effectively as it was reasonable to expect. We did make some efficiencies with Radio nan Gàidheal, which is the Gaelic language radio service.

It was a matter of looking at the budgets, at the way in which we were working, at the output, at the service licence and at what we had to deliver, and making an operational judgment call. That is what we do day in, day out, week in, week out and year in, year out.

**Neil Bibby:** The referendum that will happen next year is a major event. Will you tell us a bit

more about what you mean by quality programming on the referendum? Will it involve high-profile journalists from the rest of the UK, with people such as Eddie Mair and Gavin Esler, who are Scottish, coming up to do programmes here?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** When we were last here, the director general noted that, as I have said publicly, the referendum will be the most important constitutional event in these islands in 300 years. We note its absolute significance as a major story not only in Scotland but in the UK and globally. Our aspiration and determination is to cover the referendum with quality, range, depth and analysis, and to place in an independent and impartial manner the best possible information and journalism before each and every sector of the audiences that I mentioned. I am absolutely confident that we will do that. We have a complete and total determination to do so.

10:15

**John Boothman:** Let me put it this way, Mr Bibby: BBC Scotland will go anywhere at any time to any place to ensure that this referendum is covered properly. I have been very satisfied with BBC Scotland's news and current affairs coverage so far; indeed, I am sure that many of you are familiar with some of those programmes on radio and television and online.

Only last week, we announced the introduction of a new fortnightly webcast, the first of which took place on Friday and featured Blair Jenkins, the leader of the yes Scotland campaign. He will be followed in a fortnight by Blair McDougall, the chief executive of the better together campaign. As Ken MacQuarrie has said, we hope to provide through those webcasts a range of voices on a range of issues to try to explain to people not only in Scotland but across the UK, and anyone else who cares to look, the issues that people in Scotland will be voting on.

Moreover, next Monday, "Newsnight Scotland" will begin a series of innovative debates that will air at 10.30 pm and which will take Newsnight UK off the air once a month. We will hear, for example, what Scotland's ethnic minorities—the Asian, the Chinese, the Polish and the Lithuanian communities—think of the independence issue. I mentioned that Glenn Campbell has been in the Czech Republic and Slovakia; I am sure that it is no secret that later this week the Deputy First Minister will visit Dublin, and my colleague Raymond Buchanan will be there when she speaks to the British Irish Chamber of Commerce.

We are also looking forward to providing proper coverage of the visit of the Quebec Prime Minister in the next couple of weeks. Indeed, as you will know—and this is another good example of how

BBC Scotland can tell the story of the Scottish referendum to the world—my colleague Glenn Campbell went to Quebec a year ago and, when he returned, we ran on "Good Morning Scotland" and "Newsnight Scotland" his interview with Michael Ignatieff, the former Liberal leader. The next day, we were surprised to find that the interview was the lead story in the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's 6 o'clock news and that it generated more than 1,500 articles centrally and across the provinces in Canada.

In line with some of the things that we have been doing, many of you will know that my Gaelic colleague Niall O'Gallagher has visited Catalonia twice to cover what is happening in relation to the referendum not just for BBC Scotland but for BBC Alba as part of the increasing co-operation between BBC Scotland's two arms. Bearing in mind value for money, of course, we plan such forays very carefully and do them in a very efficient way.

At this point in time, we are gently racking up our coverage of the referendum within our existing output—and indeed are doing a wee bit more than that. As I am sure the committee will be aware, some landmark things are happening. For example, in the next couple of months, the Electoral Commission should deliver its version of the question to the Parliament and, at the beginning of March, the referendum bill and the bill enfranchising 16 and 17-year-olds will be published. Around those occasions and as part of our attempt to get to and have debates in other parts of the country, we will have at least one big outside broadcast debate somewhere outwith Pacific Quay. It will be a bit like our debate in the Motherwell theatre in November, which involved 16 and 17-year-olds and featured Professor Tom Devine.

We are looking forward to the referendum; we have big plans for it. We can do lots of things in our existing output and with our existing capacity—and we are doing them.

**The Convener:** Joan McAlpine has a very brief question.

**Joan McAlpine:** We understand from your previous written evidence on covering the referendum that you will apply for fixed-term funding. When will you apply for that?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** A steering group for the referendum funding has been extant now for some 18 months. The group involves every division of the BBC: it ensures that each division understands the importance of the referendum and that it has plans in place for the event in its extant output. In addition, as with every other part of the BBC, we will ask for extra investment specifically for the referendum. That process, which will take place

for every division and every single part of the BBC, is on-going.

**Bruce Malcolm:** We will bid imminently for that extra money.

**Joan McAlpine:** Can you tell us when you will do that?

**Bruce Malcolm:** We are working on the bid just now, so it will be over the next couple of months.

**Joan McAlpine:** Right. When will the extra funding kick in?

**Bruce Malcolm:** Some of the funding has already kicked in—we are applying for funding for the referendum and the Commonwealth games. We have already bid for incremental funding to set up teams and so on. For instance, teams that are funded from the centre are already in place for the Commonwealth games.

**Joan McAlpine:** You are saying that you have already got some of the extra funding for the referendum.

**Bruce Malcolm:** No, it is for the Commonwealth games, as in the example that I gave.

**Joan McAlpine:** Right. When will the extra funding for the referendum come?

**John Boothman:** I will come in on that. There was a little confusion in the evidence that the trade unions gave when they were here in November. I expect that any funding that we get in for a referendum project will come towards the latter half of this year.

**The Convener:** Can I just clarify this point with you?

**John Boothman:** Sure.

**The Convener:** You are right that there is some confusion around the issue. I refer to point 7 in your written submission in November, which referred to the evidence that the trade unions gave in October. In the last sentence of your response to Mr Murray's comments on the referendum and it being business as usual and so on, you said:

"What we did say, categorically, was that the money for both the Referendum and the Commonwealth Games would not be available now to offset the post closures that are currently required."

That was your evidence then, but you seem to be saying something slightly different now. You have said that the referendum money is not available but that the Commonwealth games money is available.

**Bruce Malcolm:** Just to be clear, what I said is that we have money to set up a project team for the Commonwealth games. It is a limited number of posts to help with the planning, which has been in place for a few months.

**The Convener:** Where did that money come from?

**Bruce Malcolm:** That came from the centre.

**The Convener:** Sorry, but what is the centre?

**Bruce Malcolm:** It is BBC London. It is from the finance committee and is corporate funding to finance a project team to set up the Commonwealth games project.

**The Convener:** Just for clarification, that is for your post, Mr Malcolm.

**Bruce Malcolm:** And two or three others.

**The Convener:** And the three posts have been filled, as I understand it, by you, Sharon Mair and Kevin McCormick. All those posts have been backfilled, so the money has been used to set up the three of you—I do not know whether there are others—as the Commonwealth games team.

**Bruce Malcolm:** We have been set up as the first team to allow us to prepare the finance case and submit it over the next couple of months for the full funding bid for the Commonwealth games. The point about the funding that we will bid for is that we will get it over the next month or two, but that does not mean that the funding kicks in and is all available from then. We will plan that funding, which will ramp up over the next period. Obviously, we will need a lot more staff for the 11 days of the Commonwealth games than we do a year beforehand. We are submitting a phased plan, which is the basis of our investment and which will form the funding. Obviously, that will ramp up both for the referendum and the Commonwealth games over the period.

**The Convener:** But I would imagine that in excess of £200,000 a year for the current posts is available now. Is that not right? Your written evidence said that it was not available.

**Bruce Malcolm:** A limited number of posts are being funded from now.

**The Convener:** Therefore, some money was available to set up those posts, which was Commonwealth games money but not referendum money. However, you said in your written evidence that no money that was available for the referendum or the Commonwealth games could have been used to smooth out the job losses.

The reason that I am asking about that is that your previous written evidence was that you could not or would not smooth out the job losses over a period of time and that they had to be up front. I am trying to understand why you could not have smoothed out the job losses over several years and used natural wastage and so on as the way to do that.



**Bruce Malcolm:** As I have said, probably three or four posts have been funded. They have been advertised and filled by people whose posts will be backfilled, so there is an opportunity for staff—particular types of staff. The roles are financial, so we are looking for people with finance qualifications. Those opportunities are available but, given the nature of the posts, I very much doubt whether they will help with any of our proposed redundancies that are in the news.

**The Convener:** So money was available to create and fill those new posts, but it was not available to smooth out the redundancy situation.

**Bruce Malcolm:** All that I can say is that we need to plan for the Commonwealth games effectively, which I think is what you are asking us to do. We need a team to do that, which is what we have put in place.

**The Convener:** I am glad that you said that. Do you not need a team to plan effectively for the biggest blah blah blah in 300 years, as Mr MacQuarrie said? This is the most important news and current affairs story in 300 years, but you do not have money available for the referendum yet.

**Bruce Malcolm:** John Boothman will answer that, but let me just point out that we have a news team. The Commonwealth games is a one-off thing that BBC Scotland does not usually cover, and it is not unreasonable to assume that we need some staffing resource to set up our coverage. We have existing news infrastructure and staffing, with a head of news, editors and so on, who are planning for the referendum.

**John Boothman:** Let me try to add a bit of clarity. There are four different points. In my last answer I illustrated what was meant by business as usual. Just so that there is not any confusion, let me say that business as usual is doing the kinds of things that we announced last week and the other things for which we have money and resources available to organise, such as debates, a new website and various excursions to different countries where we can cover anything relevant to the referendum on a short-term basis. That is the business-as-usual part.

Regarding project money in the referendum period, as I said in a much earlier answer, we have a plan involving where we are now and what coverage we think is appropriate. We think that we have done pretty well so far, and as I suggested we are ratcheting up our coverage a bit.

I went on to say that there are some landmark things happening. I suspect that the next part of our coverage, in which coverage will perhaps start to increase—on top of the business-as-usual approach that we have adopted so far—will probably be when the Parliament meets after the October recess. At that point we will get a

Government white paper and we will probably be a year from the referendum, so you can expect that the BBC will start to cover the referendum in more depth and detail. I suspect that when the Parliament meets again in January we will really start to cover the referendum at a higher level.

We have also had discussions with the Electoral Commission on what may happen, but everything is hypothetical as we do not yet have a date for the referendum. We do not know whether it will take place on a Thursday or a Saturday. We need that kind of information to inform our planning, but, broadly, that is where we are and where we are going. *[Interruption.]* Bear with me, convener. Those are the kinds of timetables that we are talking about regarding business as usual and projects.

The other thing that is important to understand is directly relevant to the convener's question about project teams being in place. Bruce Malcolm made the point that the Commonwealth games are different. He can say more about where we are on the games but I know that we are looking at new infrastructure to provide maybe 15 live streams—as we had live streams during the Olympics—across 14 locations and all the planning that that needs. We are talking about developing relationships and working out arrangements for how we cover things with staff in London for network coverage and with staff in Salford with regard to some sports coverage and what all the English regions might want as well as what BBC Scotland might do itself. Technical and project teams need to be in place to do those things.

10:30

The Commonwealth games is a very different beast from the referendum. There is the question of how much to pay for rights, which has been dealt with. There are also questions about the relationship not only with other parts of the BBC to make the event work in the same Olympic mode but with the host broadcaster. That is not the BBC, which is the domestic rights holder.

We are clear where we want to go with our referendum coverage. As I said a year ago, there will be rich and more in-depth online coverage, debates and documentaries. We are in the phase of working out what that will be, and I am not at liberty to say any more. We are talking to all our colleagues not only in the network but in all the nations. The Commonwealth games and the referendum are two different things that require two different solutions.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much for that comprehensive answer. I apologise to members, because there is an awful lot of stuff that we have not covered but I want to finish with a couple more

questions. I will be quick, and I hope that we will get quick answers before we move on to the next agenda items.

I want to understand the position with local TV. There are 21 pilots across the UK, two of which are in Scotland—in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Material will be bought from the local projects or local pilot TV stations through a £5 million fund that is top-sliced from the licence fee, £300,000 of which is allocated to Scotland. My understanding is that STV has said this week that it does not wish to use that because it wants to run the project as a commercial operation from day 1. What is happening with the £300,000 earmarked for the purchase of local TV in Scotland?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** There are two tranches of local TV. The first tranche involves the Edinburgh and Glasgow franchises, which are being delivered; the second tranche involves the four other local franchises in Scotland. STV has stated, on the back of the successful award of the franchises, that it does not wish to participate in that funding mechanism. We will meet STV to clarify its position. Indeed, we have a series of meetings with STV because we have an agreement and formal partnership with it in which we co-operate across our news gathering, and local TV will be part of the on-going discussions. Once we have had that meeting and the position is absolutely clear, we will discuss within the BBC where that funding is allocated.

**The Convener:** Thank you for that. Will the £300,000 be available to BBC Scotland to use?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** No. I said that we would have a discussion about where that money is allocated.

**The Convener:** I want to clarify that so that we are clear. Will the £300,000 that was allocated to purchase local TV in Scotland but which will not be used for that be available to BBC Scotland to use for other productions in Scotland or whatever else you want to use it for? Is that the case, or when you refer to the BBC are you referring to the corporate BBC?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** We have not yet had the discussion with the BBC corporate about the allocation of that funding; the first step will be to have full discussions with STV.

**The Convener:** I understand that. I am trying to figure out where the money is going.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** If you are asking for an assurance that the money that STV would have received will come through BBC Scotland, I cannot give you that assurance at this point.

**The Convener:** That worries me. The £300,000 is an allocation for spend in Scotland, but you are now saying that you cannot guarantee that it will be used by Scotland. Some £5 million comes out

of the licence fee, which Scottish licence fee payers contribute to, but the £300,000 that was coming back to Scotland is now not coming back.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** I did not say that the money is not coming back; I said that I cannot give you an assurance. First, STV has made its position clear but, because that happened only recently, we have not had a formal meeting with it. Once we do so, we will have a formal meeting in the BBC to examine the particular circumstances that arise. I am not saying that the money will not come to Scotland, nor am I giving you—to be straightforward—an assurance that it will.

**The Convener:** When the meetings have taken place, will you tell the committee where the £300,000 went?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** The BBC will make a statement in relation to the overall funding of local TV, which will include the arrangements for Scotland.

**The Convener:** Thank you. I have a couple more quick questions. Has spending on freelancers also been cut by 16 per cent over the period in which core staff have been cut by 16 per cent?

**Ken MacQuarrie:** Sixteen per cent is the totality. In delivering the 16 per cent savings, there will be an impact on the freelance effort that we employ.

**The Convener:** Do you expect your spend on freelancers and your spend on core staff to go down by equivalent amounts?

**Bruce Malcolm:** We cannot say that. There are different plans in each area—whether we are talking about drama, factual, news or radio programmes—and the proportion of freelancers differs significantly in each area.

**The Convener:** Will spend go down?

**Bruce Malcolm:** It will go down, but not necessarily proportionally.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** As I said, of course, 200 extra jobs will come in on “Waterloo Road” during the same period. The economy is changing. The Deloitte survey recognised that the fastest area of growth in the UK in terms of the contribution to the network economy is in BBC Scotland. I am proud of what we have achieved in value added and of what the BBC is delivering to Scotland.

The figures have a huge impact on the freelance community in total, but if you are asking whether there will be an impact on freelancers on local programmes for BBC Scotland, the answer is yes.

**Joan McAlpine:** It is laudable that you are getting extra spend for network. However, you seem not to be giving priority to covering things

that matter to people in Scotland, such as the work of the Parliament. Although education is fully devolved to this Parliament, I understand that you will no longer have a dedicated education correspondent for Scotland. If we consider UK-wide coverage of education—which is education in England—you have Angela Harrison, Sean Coughlan, Katherine Sellgren, Judith Burns, Reeta Chakrabarti and Hannah Richardson, who all cover education.

**John Boothman:** Education is a big issue in Scotland. There is debate not only about the curriculum for excellence but about early years, tuition fees and so on. The committee will consider the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill later in the meeting.

No one likes doing any of the things that we are having to do in relation to staffing. We mentioned that appeals are going on in relation to what is happening with staff.

We took a decision that I think was logical, which was to merge the education and local government roles. In future, it will still be possible to use our parliamentary staff to cover anything that happens in the Parliament in relation to education, as sometimes happens already, while at the same time covering packages and stories in localities through our local government and education correspondent. Our not having a dedicated education correspondent will not mean that we stop covering education stories; it means that we will cover them in a different way.

**Neil Findlay:** I make the plea for local government that Joan McAlpine made for education. The Government cuts are having a massive impact on local government, but the local government correspondent's role is being diminished because they must also dabble in energy, business and all the rest of it. I worry that the diminution of the role will have an impact on what is reported. Local government services are the services that most affect people.

**The Convener:** Just to follow that up, I think that we all share a desire to have a robust, sound and financially stable but proactive rather than reactive BBC. To sum up the concerns, they are that, in effect, the cuts will lead to a situation in which we have packages from the network and reactive rather than proactive journalism. Do you recognise that fear?

**John Boothman:** Of course we are concerned about those things. None of the decisions has been easy, but they are a result of the financial situation that we find ourselves in. However, an important point for me to end on is that we have had some great journalism in BBC Scotland in the past year that exceeded some of the things that went before. We have won awards for

programmes and investigations such as the Rangers documentary, which for the first time ever won a Foreign Press Association award for Mark Daly, who was the reporter on the story. We also won a BAFTA award for that programme. We are currently engaged in what I am sure will be a very good programme, which will go out next week, about disability and the Government's proposed changes to employment and welfare.

We do 10 investigations on Radio Scotland every year. A notable highlight from the past year was Elizabeth Quigley's programme about pregnancy and degenerative disease. We are doing award-winning journalism at BBC Scotland, and some of the weightiest and most authoritative journalists work for us, such as our political editor Brian Taylor and our business editor Douglas Fraser. I mentioned Mark Daly, but we also have people such as Colin Blane, Glenn Campbell, Raymond Buchanan and Pauline McLean, who produces fantastic stories on the arts. In the past few days, Eleanor Bradford has been doing interesting things on the health service. I am very proud of the news and current affairs department.

For me, the picture that the unions presented at the most recent meeting was not a true picture of what is happening. I prefer to look at things through the other end of the telescope. I am optimistic about our ability to cover the Commonwealth games, the referendum and all the other things that will happen in 2014, whether that is the 50th anniversary of the Forth road bridge, the anniversaries of the first and second world wars or the Edinburgh festivals, which we cover well every year.

We are optimistic. Although we are not without our challenges and difficulties—we are where we are on them—we think that we will produce not just a first-class service for audiences in Scotland but something that we can be proud of across the UK and that tells those important stories to the rest of the world.

**Ken MacQuarrie:** We welcome the challenge and scrutiny from the committee. We have discussed time periods and compared budgets year on year and over a five or six-year period, but I ask the committee also to note BBC Scotland's considerable achievements across the platforms, whether that be "Waterloo Road", the start of BBC Alba, the technology investments that we have made at Pacific Quay, the resource that we have put into each service and platform or the development of our online services. Whether we are talking about drama, children's, factual, investigations or a world-class orchestra under the leadership of Donald Runnicles, Scotland can be absolutely proud of the service.

I assure the committee that we will deliver output in 2013 and 2014 that will thrill the

audience for the events that we have mentioned and that will also meet with the approval of everybody who has a stake in the success, and the successful coverage, of those events. We have a complete and total determination to do that.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much for that. I think that we all share those ambitions: BBC Scotland has a proud record, but we want to ensure that the quality and the record are not lost. That is our ambition as much as it is yours. I thank you for coming.

10:44

*Meeting suspended.*

10:48

*On resuming—*

## **Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1**

**The Convener:** Under our third agenda item this morning, we will take formal evidence on the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill. We will hear evidence from two panels. The first panel is made up of Professor Gerry McCormac, principal and vice-chancellor of the University of Stirling; Professor Sir Jim McDonald, principal of the University of Strathclyde; Sir Timothy O'Shea, principal and vice-chancellor of the University of Edinburgh; and Professor Seona Reid, director of the Glasgow School of Art.

I apologise for the slight delay in starting this session. Liz Smith wants to raise a particular point.

**Liz Smith:** Thank you, convener. As you know, I wrote to you yesterday about two concerns that I have about the scrutiny procedure for the bill. The first of those is about the availability of the written evidence that we have received. I understand that 75 to 80 submissions have been made to the committee. However, only some of those are available to us and a substantial number—about 50—came to us only at lunch time yesterday. That makes our job rather difficult, because it has been hard for us to ascertain the overall views of both sectors. This morning, we are taking evidence from people in the higher education sector, but it has been difficult for us to discern the different views in that sector in the information that we have.

My second concern is on what I believe is an important aspect of the bill. The committee will have to make a judgment on whether to enshrine governance in the bill. As I understand it, we will have to make a value judgment on the forthcoming code of governance, which the chairs will prepare, but it will not be available to us for two months. It will be difficult for us to make a judgment—in fact, I do not think that we can do it without the code being available to us.

**Neil Findlay:** I strongly agree with Liz Smith. We raised the issue at last week's meeting, and the situation remains the same. Without the document, we will have great difficulty in scrutinising what is proposed.

**The Convener:** I thank members for raising the issue. Clearly, we raised it last week, and I thank Liz Smith for raising it directly with me yesterday.

On the first concern, the written evidence that has been submitted so far was supplied to members yesterday lunch time, as Liz Smith said. That was not enough time for us to go through it

properly for this morning's meeting. I accept that the timetable is tight, but I hope that members will understand that the information and evidence were given to them as quickly as possible.

Liz Smith is quite right: some submissions are not yet with us and the individuals have asked for an extension. Given that we require the information in order to carry out our job, we have agreed to an extension, but we want the information to come to us as quickly as possible so that we can carry out our work.

As Liz Smith will be aware, I also said in my reply yesterday that we will leave the door open to call further witnesses as we go through so that, if it is necessary, we can either call witnesses back or call new witnesses, as appropriate, later in the stage 1 process. That will be difficult for us, but I am sure that, if we wish to do it, we can manage it.

On the code, the bill team said at last week's meeting that the intention is to make a draft available by stage 2. My only comment is that it is not unusual for codes, guidance and so on not to be available during the passage of a bill. This is not the first time by any means. I am sure that members who have been here for a few years have witnessed that. However, if the committee deems it necessary to call witnesses later in the process on that basis, we will leave the door open to that. It is unusual, but it can be done. We could call witnesses at stage 2, to take oral evidence on the code once it is published, but it would be better to take a decision on that nearer the time, once we see the information.

I thank members for raising those concerns with me, and I thank the panel for their indulgence.

Before we begin, I remind the panel that not everybody has to answer every question. If you do not need to answer, please feel free to remain silent on any point that you wish. We seek as much information as possible, but there is no point in going over the same ground if it is not necessary to do so. We will try to keep our questions to particular sections of the bill, as we go through it.

We will start with university governance, and Liz Smith will begin.

**Liz Smith:** Thank you, convener. When Professor von Prondzynski's review was published, the recommendation was that a code of governance be set up, and the indications are that the universities are happy with the suggestion of a Scottish code. However, the bill proposes to extend ministers' powers considerably further than the von Prondzynski review recommended. Will panel members give us their reflections on that?

**Sir Timothy O'Shea (University of Edinburgh):** I will answer first and then I will see whether any of my colleagues wants to pitch in.

In the universities, we regard engagement between the chairs of our governing bodies—to whom we are responsible as principals—and the Scottish Government on a code as a productive activity.

This is a good hook for me to express our principal anxiety about the bill. We support the bill's intentions with regard to widening participation and having greater efficiency in the sector and greater accountability, which all make very good sense to us. At the same time, we are well aware that Scottish universities are seen as particularly successful in world terms and that outside commentators relate that success directly to the responsible autonomy that we discharge.

In recent years, I served for four years on the strategy committee of the excellence initiative that is designed to improve the German universities; and recently I had the honour of being the deputy president of the French *investissement dans l'avenir* endeavour, which is about improving the quality of the French universities. It is made explicit in France and Germany—it is also clear in the Republic of Ireland—that people find the way in which our universities discharge their responsible autonomy to be one of the key reasons why Scotland's university system is so disproportionately successful. Our ability to create subsidiary companies, for example, and to engage with each other in pooling partnerships, without recourse to ministerial control, is seen as a key success factor.

As I said, we support the bill's overall intention, but we are anxious that there might be, inadvertently, a reduction in responsible autonomy and that a future Administration could intervene in a way that would be unhelpful to the success of the universities in meeting their targets for widening participation and research.

As this is a fundamental point, I wonder whether Sir Jim McDonald would like to comment on it as well.

**Professor Sir Jim McDonald (University of Strathclyde):** I will do so if I may, convener, unless there is going to be a supplementary question.

**Liz Smith:** I was just going to ask you about something in your written evidence.

**Professor McDonald:** I absolutely agree that the strong governance and transparency with which we discharge our responsibilities are fundamental. It is certainly the intention of the review of governance to ensure those.

I echo Tim O'Shea's concerns about ensuring that there is a balance between our responsible autonomy, which we will no doubt speak about over the next half hour or so, and the scrutiny to which we correctly present ourselves and which holds us to account. However, in all of this, I am sure that there are other matters on which I should present myself to Liz Smith.

**Liz Smith:** On that point, Professor McDonald, you said clearly in your written submission that you felt that autonomy was crucial for innovation and you gave some examples of how you felt innovation had worked as a result of that. To take up Sir Tim O'Shea's point, the overall scenario is that the world HE sectors that are doing particularly well are those with enhanced autonomy that is fairly free of the state. That is shown by figures from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the World Bank, and by other statistics. Is it inappropriate for the Scottish Government to consider moving in the other direction, so that there will be enhanced powers for ministers in relation to HE?

**Professor McDonald:** I welcome your recognition of the issue. The Shanghai tables of universities that perform best on the international stage show that those with greater autonomy perform better. The World Bank has also presented statistics on that, which the committee may be aware of. I reiterate that there is no separation between strong governance, absolute autonomy as we pursue our strategies and the transparency with which we must present ourselves and success. We must keep that balance in mind.

Tim O'Shea gave you an example from Edinburgh. In my own case, having the autonomy as an institution four years ago allowed the University of Strathclyde to recast its mission as an international technological university. In so doing, our court held us to account and put us through the mill on having an evidence-based strategy, as did our students and our union colleagues. On that journey of resetting our strategic intention, we were scrutinised by all the key stakeholders, including our Government partners. I stress the word "partners", because I value the partnership with Government and Government agencies, which is part of our story in Scotland. It is not something that I would want to see disturbed, because it is excellent. For example, we work with the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. The context in which Scottish higher education is evolving provides a supportive platform.

On Liz Smith's earlier point, the governance review is right and proper. It is correct that we are

held accountable for the proper execution of our roles and responsibilities and the expenditure that we make. In all of that, though, there is evidence for autonomy in Scotland in determining a future that serves a Government strategic and policy-led purpose. The world-class institutions that we have in Scotland, including in Edinburgh, are testimony to the value that we are already playing back into the system.

11:00

**Liz Smith:** That has come through in virtually all the submissions that we have to hand from student associations, staff, principals and chairs. Obviously, the overall objective is to maintain that excellence within Scottish universities. The issue of autonomy—or responsible autonomy, to use your phrase—is appropriate.

Drilling down a little bit further, last week we had the bill team here. In the submissions that we have to hand there has been a lot of concern about the distinction between the definition of "governance" and of "management". In most of the submissions, there seems to be considerable reluctance to having "management" written into the bill. Why is that inappropriate?

**Professor McDonald:** It is not just the rhetoric in defining the difference between strategic leadership and management; it is that management is about delivery of a pre-approved strategy, and I would like universities to be tested on their strategy and their contribution to an aligned opportunity in Scotland. Management is really inside the machinery of the institution.

The policy intentions of the bill are clear and we support the principles. In drafting it, we must ensure that there is clarity on the purpose—what we are trying to achieve. The distinction between responsible autonomy and management of the institutions is important. If we have the trust and confidence that should be required of and in the sector, there is a chance to ensure that this is not just about running the organisations but about properly recognising the strategic alignment and opportunities for Scotland.

**Liz Smith:** Have you asked for the removal of the term "management" because you fear that taking that too far would impinge on strategic governance and perhaps on the academic work of your institution? Is that the main reason why you have asked for the word to be removed?

**Professor McDonald:** Yes.

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** That is exactly right.

**Professor Seona Reid (Glasgow School of Art):** I want to pick up on Jim McDonald's point about the importance of responsible autonomy enabling a diversity of sector that we do not

necessarily see elsewhere. In a small institution, the nature of the governance and management will be different from that in a large institution, but it will espouse, comply with, support and endorse the same principles of governance.

All universities, whatever their size and nature, support the code of governance whole-heartedly. However, enshrining it in legislation risks it being misused by future Administrations to apply a uniform governance model that would be inappropriate in a diverse sector.

**Liz Smith:** I will finish with a question on diversity. What would you like to see within the code of governance that is being developed that is not within the current UK code but that you do not want to be enshrined in legislation? What is the advantage of having a new Scottish code of governance?

**Professor Reid:** I think that it can speak to the other forms of accountability that exist within Scotland—it can be specific about the context. It is difficult to see where the principles would differ from the code in the UK.

**Neil Findlay:** I am having difficulty picking up why it might only be future Administrations that might misuse the powers that are given to them.

**The Convener:** I think that that is quite clear. *[Laughter.]*

**Neil Findlay:** I am confused by that.

The evidence from Universities Scotland, which we received only very late yesterday, says:

“We do not see a need for the higher education provisions in the Bill, which create new and in some cases quite extensive and unspecific powers over higher education institutions.”

Really it is saying that there is no need for the bill. Is there a need for the bill?

**Professor Gerry McCormac (University of Stirling):** As my colleagues have commented, the policy objectives of the bill are laudable, but we do not feel that legislation is necessarily required to give effect to those objectives. The sector has been particularly successful in a range of areas, including widening participation and some of the other issues that are addressed in the bill, without the need for specific legislation.

**Neil Findlay:** Perhaps the other witnesses could just nod if they agree with that, because that will save some time.

**Professor McDonald, Sir Timothy O’Shea and Professor Reid** *indicated agreement.*

**Neil Findlay:** That is fine. We have clarified that the panel agree.

**The Convener:** That makes it slightly tough for the staff producing the *Official Report*, though.

**Neil Findlay:** It can state, “They all nodded.”

Therefore, how can we ensure that the aims are achieved without legislation? People have spoken about the grant letter and that kind of stuff. Finding out how you see the aims being achieved without legislation is key to our deciding whether we need the bill.

**Professor McDonald:** You have clearly picked up on the point that existing measures and mechanisms allow the universities to be properly overseen and held to account. You know about the letter of grant and the financial memorandum. More recently, outcome agreements have been introduced by the Scottish funding council, led by the Scottish Government. Some of those agreements are very detailed and they will evolve, as they have been in place for only a year. That has been a learning process for the funding council and the sector, so we will evolve and refine the way in which the outcome agreements sit alongside the institutions’ autonomous missions. I remind the committee of the context in which the agreements have developed. Individual institutions have made commitments on widening access, knowledge exchange and patterns of provision.

Through the conditions of grant and the memorandum that sits alongside that, and through the outcome agreements, we believe that the mechanisms exist to allow us to be held to account and to deliver on and add value to the public expenditure on universities.

**Neil Findlay:** Some institutions have failed miserably to extend or open up access. Will the process that you have set out force them to change?

**Professor McDonald:** I do not accept the premise of that. Every university that I am aware of works hard to ensure diversity in its population of students. We have seen a great deal of innovation over the past few years, and not just through the outcome agreements, although they have certainly focused attention. There has been plenty of innovation and engagement with society and broader socioeconomic communities over the past few years. I do not recognise that there has been failure. In fact, it is quite the opposite—I would say that there is a great deal to commend the sector at large, in different ways. As Seona Reid mentioned, there has been no single approach to widening participation. Some of the value has been in the great deal of innovation from different universities, which has informed the sector more broadly.

**Neil Findlay:** I might be missing something, but 2.2 per cent of University of Aberdeen students are from the most deprived areas and the figure for the University of St Andrews is 2.6 per cent. I

do not know what measure of success that could be allied to.

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** The universities would not accept your notion that we have failed miserably. The 20 per cent most deprived areas in the Scottish index of multiple deprivation is one available measure, but a variety of measures exist that must be taken into account. The SIMD 20 is an imperfect measure because it is a postcode measure. Another measure, which we use strongly at the University of Edinburgh, is whether residual family income is low. Other measures include whether the family has ever had anybody at university and whether the student is at a low-achieving—in terms of university success—school. There is also the overall family context and whether, for example, the potential student has serious caring responsibilities.

The University of Edinburgh is the key leader in the Lothians equal access programme for schools. Last year, it had 1,200 participants who were not expected to go to university but who went on to university-level study at various universities in Lothian. Of them, nearly a third—371—went to the University of Edinburgh. The university also took in 130 students through the Scottish higher education partnership. Sixty-two students entered last year through our innovative pathways to the professions scheme, whereby students in medicine, law or architecture partner with students who are not expected to go to university, and 93 adult returners successfully entered. The University of Edinburgh gave out more than 1,000 substantial bursaries and scholarships for new entrants last year.

That success and that commitment are demonstrated across the sector, so we do not accept your characterisation, which is based on a single measure, which does not capture access needs. If we used the measure that the deputy convener suggested, it would tell us that there are no access students at all in Shetland, because there are no SIMD 20 postcodes there.

The debate must be conducted in a proper way and the whole range of measures must be considered. The commitment of the Scottish universities to widening participation is total, and we have had demonstrable success over the past 10 years.

**Neil Findlay:** I used the figures that have been presented to us; I am sure that the other criteria that you suggested are relevant. However, I suggest, with respect, that the Government is seeking to legislate partly because of the approach that you are presenting. The Government thinks that things have not gone far enough so it must legislate. That is the reality.

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** I am sorry, deputy convener, but we have all voluntarily engaged in outcome agreements that have explicit targets on widening participation.

**Professor Reid:** I will give figures from the sector. Over the past six years, there has been a 16.9 per cent increase in SIMD 20 university students. There are 3,053 more students from those postcodes than were at university six years ago. The figures are misleading in the terms in which they are being presented.

There has also been an increase in state-school participation and in the number of full-time undergraduate degree entrants with socioeconomic classifications of 4 to 7. If we use SIMD 20 and other indices, we see that the number of students who are coming from the most deprived backgrounds is increasing. That is happening in response to the programmes that every university is undertaking.

Those are not easy wins. We need to recognise that, particularly in Glasgow, we are talking about schools in which 4 per cent of leavers enter higher education—that is a very low rate. All our work is about trying to work with partners in education and further education to increase the figure by increasing aspirations and the bridging activities that allow us to get people with higher aspirations into higher education, whatever that higher education might be.

**Professor McDonald:** On the evidence base, some of which the committee will have and some of which it will not have, I reiterate Seona Reid's point. Many initiatives predate outcome agreements, which shows that, on the basis of responsible autonomy, institutions in the sector have been working together as well as individually. In my institution, the University of Strathclyde, we grew our MD 40 entry to first year from 687 to 736 people between 2010-11 and 2011-12 and we seek to grow the number further. Among the research intensives, we have the highest number of MD 20 entrants into university.

I am proud of that. Such work is part of our social mission and I am sure that other universities recognise their role in supporting gifted young people, regardless of their socioeconomic background, to achieve their potential at university.

Of course the sector wants to do more. You will have seen from the universal sign-up of principals to the principle of widening access that institutions are keen to push on with that strategic objective, for ourselves and to help to meet the Government's objectives and ensure that we produce more school leavers who are ready for university and for the workforce as we build a knowledge-based economy.



**Neil Findlay:** I am aware of Strathclyde's long-standing commitment to widening access—you even let me in. [*Laughter.*]

11:15

**Professor McCormac:** In 2006-07, the University of Stirling admitted 538 students from SIMD 40; in 2010-11, it admitted 710. Through the recent outcome agreement with the Scottish funding council, we have again agreed to increase by 135 the number of students from those categories during the year and to put on special courses during the summer to ensure not only that they enter university but that they actually succeed, are retained in the sector and go on to complete their studies. That is crucial, and all my colleagues in all of Scotland's universities are making enormous efforts to ensure not only that we admit students but that they have a successful experience and exit university with a qualification.

**The Convener:** We have strayed into the issue of widening access. We will come on to that but, for the moment, I want to bring the questioning back to the issue of governance.

In his opening remarks, Timothy O'Shea cited pooling and subsidiary companies as a couple of examples of what autonomy allows you to achieve. In what way would a Scottish code of good governance interfere with that activity?

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** It might not, but it seems to us that the current negotiations between the chairs—as principals, we are, of course, accountable to the chairs—and the Scottish Government on a voluntary code are the appropriate way forward.

**The Convener:** So you have no evidence that a code of good governance would impact on your organisations' ability to continue to carry out that work.

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** It all depends on its shape. As I have indicated, I spend some of my time giving advice to other higher education systems, particularly those in Germany and France. If you were to task me with writing a governance code that reduced autonomy, I could do that for you—after all, many German universities cannot set up subsidiaries—and if you were to task me with writing a governance code that increased autonomy, I could do that, too.

**The Convener:** But do you expect any code of governance that might be produced to reduce your ability to do any of those things?

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** It has to be an anxiety, particularly if the legislation is underspecified. I heard the deputy convener make a wee joke about the current Government, but the universities have had a very constructive engagement with the four

Governments since devolution and have flourished in comparison with other European and indeed the English higher education systems. However, the anxiety is that if a future Government were given the apparatus to intervene in our management or governance structures it might choose to do so. If you look around Europe, you can find examples of countries where the Government or, indeed, regional Governments have intervened in universities' governance and it has usually been unhelpful.

**Professor McCormac:** We currently adhere to a code of good governance and utilise it fully in our organisations. Seona Reid was right to point out that a Scottish code of governance would contextualise that and ensure that the different circumstance in Scotland was respected. It is worth examining that matter.

Beyond that, however, the passing of legislative powers restricting our capacity as organisations to reflect the diversity of mission that is of huge benefit to Scotland and the Scottish economy poses a real risk to the sector. As has been said, other countries look to emulate our autonomy, because they recognise the success of the higher education system in the UK and US. As Sir Tim O'Shea has said, Germany, France and others are trying to give their universities more autonomy to make them as successful as we are and we would see it as a retrograde step to pass legislation that might reduce the university sector's autonomy.

**The Convener:** I am glad that you mentioned the current code, which I am sure that you all abide by, because I am struggling to understand why there should be such an issue about a new code.

As the debate that took place among committee members before we started to take evidence bears witness to, the code is not in the bill but is separate from it. It is referred to in the bill, but the detail of the code will not be included in primary legislation. What is the source of your anxiety? What is your main problem with the new code?

**Professor McCormac:** Under the bill, ministers would have control over whether the unspecified code was utilised and might put in place some other code. That is where our anxiety lies. We are not anxious about looking at, reflecting on and reviewing what we do, because that is a constant process. We do not know what the new Scottish code of governance might look like. We are open and receptive to seeing what it says. Our concern is about legislation that would pass to ministers the power to control that.

**The Convener:** What opportunity have higher education institutions had to input to the development of the new code?

**Professor McCormac:** I think that all HEIs have been visited or are in the process of being visited by the consultants who have been appointed by the chairs in Scotland. I think that student bodies and a wide range of other stakeholders are engaged in that process. The consultants have not yet visited the University of Stirling; I think that we are due for a visit in the next few weeks.

**The Convener:** So everyone has been visited and asked for their opinion of and input into the new code.

**Professor McCormac:** They will have been by the end of the process.

**The Convener:** Before the code is published. Okay.

I have a final question on governance. Is there a difference between your level of anxiety about the term “governance” and your level of anxiety about the term “management” as they are expressed in the bill?

**Professor McCormac:** Governance is about setting the policy and strategy in the way that Sir Jim McDonald articulated eloquently. An anecdote that is told is that the boat is steered through governance and rowed by management. That is very much the case. Management is about the operation and optimisation of the strategic plans. Governance and management are very different things. It would not be in the interests of the institution to have interference with the management.

**The Convener:** Last week, a member of the bill team—Tracey Slaven—said in evidence to the committee:

“The phraseology in the bill refers to governance and management. Discussion with the sector has indicated that the focus on strategic management may have some unintended consequences and that that has gone slightly wider than we anticipated. We are therefore happy to talk with the sector about the detail of that as we get to stage 2.”—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 15 January 2013; c 1746.]

From that, it sounds as if the Government is reconsidering the position. Is that your understanding?

**Sir Timothy O’Shea:** Yes. I met Tracey Slaven yesterday and that was my exact understanding.

**Professor McDonald:** That is helpful.

**Sir Timothy O’Shea:** It is very helpful.

**The Convener:** It is helpful.

Do members have any more questions on governance before we move on?

**Neil Findlay:** Some of the submissions, particularly the one from Universities Scotland, refer to concern about ministers having more

power in other areas. Will you explain some of your concerns about such centralisation?

**Sir Timothy O’Shea:** I will make an opening comment on that, and then my colleagues might want to respond.

Scotland’s higher education system is very particular. Unlike the system in England, we do not allow institutions that do not award the PhD degree to have the title of university. The Open University in Scotland is an important part of the offering in Scotland, and we have two highly successful art schools. We also have the University of the Highlands and Islands, which is particular to and highly appropriate for the north-west of Scotland, and for which there is no obvious model in any other part of the country.

We are anxious about that diversity. There are tremendous differences in scale—for example, the University of Edinburgh is about five times the size of the average British university, but some of the other Scottish universities are just a proportion of that size. That diverse system is working well, so we would be anxious that an attempt to systematise might inadvertently be unhelpful, for example to the art schools with their particular missions, to UHI or to the big universities such as Strathclyde, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

**Professor McDonald:** I want to return to the question of concerns about governance. I do not want to be too historical, but the western tradition of establishing institutions that are autonomous and free from the fear of input or direct steerage from Government, the media or other special interest groups is a fundamental principle that is at the heart of what universities should be about, not only in Scotland but internationally.

On governance and scrutiny in particular, we recognise that the committee is well informed. However, I just want to remind us that as well as having independent lay members of the university court, we have the senate, which is the supreme group that looks at academic autonomy. Over the years, the universities, including my own, will go through scrutiny from the Scottish funding council, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education Scotland, independent accountants, the university court audit committee, bodies regulating the professions—be that in humanities, science, engineering or business—and independent external advisers.

Through all that, the universities sector is perhaps one of the most scrutinised sectors in society. We must continue to be scrutinised and to be accountable, but I want to ensure that we understand that as well as the correct governance review that we are going through, the platform for scrutiny, testing, challenge and accountability is well built and is there for historical reasons.

However, for the universities, independence of thought and the ability to challenge Government, society and thinking are fundamental and precious, so we must protect them.

**The Convener:** Thank you. I want to move on to widening access, an issue that we have already strayed into. George Adam will start the questions.

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** Thank you, convener, and good morning, gentlemen. I will ask a question that is similar to one that I asked the bill team at last week's meeting. Widening access is about retention, as well as access. After the students' initial challenge of getting into institutions, the challenge for the institutions is to retain them. I would like to hear how you deal with that.

As has been said, various universities are good at getting students from a variety of backgrounds. For example, in my constituency in Paisley, the University of the West of Scotland is particularly good at that. If we are giving extra funding to ensure that we get more people involved in higher education, why do we not put all the money into an institution such as the UWS and just say, "You're good at this—you continue"? Why are we almost rewarding the failure to an extent of some of—not all—the ancient universities, whose record on widening access is not that great?

**Neil Findlay:** Convener, may I make a point about that?

**The Convener:** Yes, briefly.

**Neil Findlay:** My understanding is that there is no provision in the bill for extra funding for widening access. That point might be helpful for the discussion.

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** I do not think that the notion of rewarding failure makes particularly good sense in this context. In the recent bidding for access, we have mechanisms that the Scottish funding council introduces, at the behest of the Scottish Government, which provide extra resource for the successful recruitment and retention of widening-participation students. Therefore, there is no sense in which anybody is being rewarded for success, but there are funding mechanisms—it is appropriate that they exist—that take into account the fact that the widening-participation students will on average require more money. They will require more resource prior to coming to university and more resource when they are at university to ensure that they are successful; that is entirely appropriate. I do not think that there is any way in which someone could suggest that the current funding mechanisms for widening access are rewarding failure.

11:30

We have a set of arrangements that have been voluntarily agreed by the universities with regard to the extra resource necessary to improve our position on widening participation. After all, there are three phases—recruitment, preparation for study and extra support during study—all of which require resources. In that regard, the Scottish funding council's current mechanisms are appropriate and I think that the universities are successfully using them to improve the position on access.

**Professor Reid:** We should approach the issue of widening participation on the principle that all students, whatever their background, should have the same choices as all other students. If we are challenged in that area, it is our responsibility as institutions to ensure that we work hard to remove barriers, raise aspirations and make those choices available.

**Professor McDonald:** The UWS has been mentioned, and I have to say that what Seamus McDaid and his colleagues have been doing there is an excellent success story.

Going back to diversity and the successes that each university is able to present, I realise that how the rest of the panel perceives the issue is another matter but I believe that every university has a compelling story to tell about how seriously it has taken the issue of widening access. Strathclyde, for example, is actively seeking a meaningful partnership with its own students. I know that our student president will give evidence very shortly, but I should mention that the university's students association has innovated the StrathGuides programme, which makes a direct connection with Strathclyde's interest in schools with low participation rates.

As Seona Reid said, we should celebrate diversity and the innovation that is generated at the Glasgow School of Art, at Edinburgh, at Stirling, at Strathclyde and so on is something that we all share. Indeed, Universities Scotland's committee and engagement structures mean that if Gerry McCormac, say, discovers a certain approach it can be shared with the rest of us. Of course, the breadth of activity that we have through the responsible autonomy approach allows us to examine particular approaches and find out whether they can work for us given our geography, our region's societal and economic make-up, and so on.

Harry Burns talked very recently about socioeconomic challenges in and around Glasgow, and Strathclyde has a particular chance to engage with those in SIMD 20 and 40, what with the number of underprivileged and talented young people we might be able to elevate into

these opportunities. Again, there is no homogeneity in Scotland. Because the socioeconomic mix is different, universities will take different strategic approaches; however, the innovation that comes with diversity is an approach that we all share and can celebrate. The UWS has taken a number of exemplary approaches of which we are aware, and where we can we will try to take the best of them in the context of what we as individual institutions are trying to achieve.

**George Adam:** I am probably going to the other end of the scale, but another very media-led question relates to the possibility of high-achieving students being displaced as a result of efforts to widen access. Obviously, some kind of balance is required.

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** The fact is that universities have a limited number of places and that working hard on one constituency will change the balance. The mediating factor is that this coming year the Scottish Government is providing an additional 1,700 places, which will be focused on widening participation and will therefore not result in displacement. Inevitably, however, something will happen if you have a limited resource and change the mix.

**George Adam:** It is a competitive environment.

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** It is highly competitive.

**Professor McCormac:** The additional 1,700 places that Sir Tim O'Shea has just alluded to are spread across all the universities. We have all agreed to take on additional students and to put in place support mechanisms to ensure that they are given every opportunity to succeed. As that cohort moves through the system, we will be held to account for successful retention of those students and the successful completion of their courses. We have managed to do all that without legislation.

However, the bill seeks to enshrine that in some way in legislation. As we enter into the process, we do not know how the cohort and the individual students who are going through the system will respond. The bill provides more of a straitjacket for us to operate within. However, we would like to have the flexibility that currently exists to be responsive to the needs of the individual students and society.

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** Displacement is a charged notion. Over the past 100 years, the mix of students going into universities has changed. If we look at the statistics, we see that the big displacement—it is startlingly big—is one with which most people would be comfortable: we have moved from a position in which women were a small minority of university students to one in which female students are the majority. We could

regard that as being more appropriate and gender fair or, if we wish, we could use the language of displacement and say that boys or males have been displaced from university by women. However, if we look at the statistics from 1945 and random years until now, we see that the change has been quite dramatic.

**Joan McAlpine:** I have some questions about some of the specific measures that you use, or could use, to widen access.

What are your views on interviews? It has always struck me as strange that universities in this country do not interview more and tend to rely on paper qualifications. Some of the ivy league American universities—Massachusetts Institute of Technology is the one with which I am most familiar—put a lot of resources into interviewing all the students so that they can judge their potential, as opposed to judging it just by what is on paper.

Obviously, someone who went to a high-achieving, fee-paying school would be more likely to have straight As than somebody who went to a school that was in more difficult circumstances, who might not have quite such a fantastic set of results. How someone has performed against their peers and against the circumstances in which they found themselves can come out only in interview, as can the young person's potential. Why do you not interview more?

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** I will offer a starting comment, mostly from the point of view of the University of Edinburgh.

There are two reasons why we do not interview more. First, the data from universities in the UK system that interview—such as the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge—does not give one comfort that that process would help us with widening participation. There is a certain amount of scepticism about a 20-minute or half-hour interview.

The University of Edinburgh has about double the applicants that the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge have together. We have about 50,000 applicants, nearly all of whom, to judge by their paper qualifications, would be competent to come to the university. It would really not be feasible to run 50,000 interviews. My colleagues would not be doing anything else; we would have to stop teaching for a couple of months.

Therefore, because of volume and the apparent reliability of the interview technique, one is fairly sceptical about interviews.

**Professor McDonald:** I agree with Tim O'Shea. However, there are examples of interviews being applied. It is anecdotal, but the evidence exists if you are interested.

I am an ex-head of department in electronic and electrical engineering. Every applicant who indicated that electrical engineering at the University of Strathclyde was one of their choices was interviewed. It was a big overhead, but it gave us some insight into the broader mix and some of the depth. However, the care that had to be taken in that process meant that, to be fair to all those individuals, a diverse interview team was necessary. As a consequence, we had to take enormous care to ensure that we did not introduce any accidental disadvantages en route. Nonetheless, interviews can be appropriate.

Another example relates to our outcome agreements and is an example of us innovating. We have not mentioned it, but it concerns how the sector adds value to economic growth in Scotland. In the University of Strathclyde, we are about to launch the engineering academy in direct response to a stated requirement from business and industry, particularly around the Glasgow area—Babcock International Group plc, BAE Systems, Scottish Power and SSE plc.

In many ways, we are going to have two-year interviews with the youngsters who will come through the college sector. Again, we have to be subtle and also innovative in understanding how to pre-select and how to engage with our partners. All the universities that are at the table today—and, I dare say, most universities in the sector—have meaningful partnerships with their colleagues in the college sector.

Although we have the new regional restructuring, which in and around Glasgow will mean four groups, some of which were previously three separate colleges, at steady state, the 400 kids will be prepared and pre-qualified, as it were, through the colleges, but they will also be interviewed and, more important, supported and developed by the industry partners that get alongside us and our college partners.

I would say that a mixed approach needs to be applied. We need to be subtle and to apply different techniques as and when they are appropriate.

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** If we take the intention behind your idea of interviewing and characterise it as direct engagement with widening-participation students, that is certainly what we should do. In our successful Lothians equal access programme, we have directly engaged with 1,200 potential university students. A part of that might be something like an interview to encourage them to raise their aspirations, but it is not a question of having a big queue of students and giving them 15-minute interviews. To take the spirit of your question, I think that the key is for us to engage directly with potential widening-participation

students, but not to attempt to interview the entire set of applicants for the sector.

**Professor Reid:** Because we are tiny, we interview, and we consider portfolios and not just academic qualifications. Interestingly, the interview is the most contentious part of the process. In the research, the jury is out on whether interviews are a fair means of selecting candidates. There is some evidence that they are not and that they can be discriminatory as well as supportive. There is no single approach to admissions that supports widening participation.

My colleague to my right has not mentioned it, but the University of Edinburgh has an effective system of contextualised admissions whereby it scores differently applicants from particular postcodes or backgrounds in order to acknowledge that academic achievement might be less well developed in some schools and areas than in others.

**Professor McCormac:** Admissions is a particularly complex area and it is exactly the sort of thing that we see the institutions having responsible autonomy and control over, rather than having something done to us. It can involve, for example, portfolios of artwork, proficiency in music, grades in an exam or a wide range of other things. There are professionals who have spent many years assessing the capacity of students. When we admit a student, it is not just about their getting over a hurdle to get on to a course. It is about our assessing the individual's competency and ability to complete the course, so that we are not setting people up for failure. The process is complex, and we try to execute it as fairly as possible.

**The Convener:** Thank you. We move on to section 4 of the bill, on the tuition fees cap. Neil Bibby will start us off.

**Neil Bibby:** A number of bodies, including Universities Scotland and the University of Stirling, in its submission, have said that they are broadly content with section 4. Do you support the intention to have a cap on fees for rest-of-UK students? If so, why do you support it?

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** What is in the bill is in the spirit of the voluntary agreement that I, as acting convener of Universities Scotland, negotiated with the cabinet secretary. That voluntary agreement, which is capping us on a year-by-year basis compared with England, Wales and Northern Ireland, has met the desired intention, which is that we wanted there to be no dramatic swings in numbers. We wanted there to be no dramatic reduction in rest-of-UK students, and no dramatic increase.

Our view is that that is a strong success, if I can express it in that way. The data for entry in 2012

and—now that we have passed the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service deadline of 15 January—likely entry in 2013 show that the fee regime that was put in place has exactly met the Scottish Government's policy objective, which the universities supported. Therefore, we are content with continuing on the exact basis that we are on at present.

11:45

**Neil Bibby:** Do your universities receive more money from giving degrees to rest-of-UK students than they receive from giving degrees to Scottish and European students?

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** We have to account for the whole situation. If I can speak particularly about Edinburgh, we have committed to having the best bursaries in the United Kingdom, partly because we are committed to widening participation and partly because we were concerned about the possible flows. As I said, about 1,000 of our intake came in with bursaries. The highest amount that we provide to support students is £33,000 over the four years, and the scheme is uncapped. At Edinburgh, we have also committed many millions of pounds to a new personal tutor system to provide support. Overall, the financial position is neutral, and the pattern of students from different parts of the United Kingdom coming to Scotland shows that the Government's policy objective has been met and that the universities are in the appropriate place.

**Neil Bibby:** Do you receive more money from English students who study at Scottish universities than you receive from Scottish and European students?

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** It is a bit more. As I said, we have been investing heavily in bursaries. At Edinburgh, we are dramatically improving our position on bursaries for Scotland-domiciled students.

**Neil Bibby:** You say that the funding from English students is "a bit more". Am I correct that your university and others are marketing themselves to English students to come and study in Scotland?

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** I can speak for Edinburgh university on the issue, but not for other universities, so I will let my colleagues comment on that. Edinburgh wishes to maintain the current balance of Scottish, European Union and RUK students, and we have been broadly successful in achieving that.

**Neil Bibby:** Obviously, there is a concern that the Scottish Government wants to widen access, but the number of English students coming to Scottish universities is increasing. As I understand

it, there is no additional money for widening access, so there will not be a huge increase in the overall number of places. Therefore, the displacement issue has a potential impact on widening access. We must also consider the potential for an increase in the number of rest-of-UK students to improve your financial state.

**Professor McCormac:** To take the situation at the University of Stirling last year as an example, we had funding for 212 rest-of-UK students taken from us by the Scottish funding council. Our expectation was that, by charging fees to students from the rest of the UK, we would replace the resources that were associated with those 212 students. We recruited 180 rest-of-UK students to Stirling, which leaves us with a deficit in the overall sums of money.

As we said, 1,700 additional places have been provided this year across all the universities in Scotland to admit students from the SIMD 40 group. I imagine that the money that was withdrawn from rest-of-UK students in some way enhanced the coffers that allowed that process to take place.

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** If you compare the 2012 statistics for the Scottish higher education system with those for 2011, you will find the position to be broadly neutral, with a very modest increase in rest-of-UK, Scottish and European Union students. We have heard the First Minister contrast Scotland's positive position with the position in England. The point is that the position in Scotland is available; all you need to do is look at the statistics, which are readily available and show a small positive change in the numbers and a larger change with regard to the success of widening participation.

**Neil Bibby:** I agree that we need to keep an eye on the statistics to see how things are progressing.

One of the submissions suggests that the bill is unclear about charges for Welsh students. What is the current set-up for such students? Are there any comments on the matter?

**Professor McCormac:** I believe that only a very small number of Welsh students come to Scotland but, in funding terms, they are treated exactly like other rest-of-UK students such as those from England or Northern Ireland.

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** Just to elaborate slightly, I point out that students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland are treated in such a way that they end up in exactly the same position with regard to the personal demand on their finances. The concern with the drafting of the bill was that, inadvertently, Welsh students might not be treated on a par with English and Northern Ireland students. Of course, that is not the bill's intention;

the point is well understood by its drafters and will be fixed.

**Neil Bibby:** Okay.

**The Convener:** Clare Adamson has some questions about section 14, which relates to the review of fundable further and higher education.

**Clare Adamson:** The bill's policy memorandum says that the aim is to allow the Scottish funding council to review provision of fundable further and higher education to ensure that education is being provided by post-16 education bodies in a coherent manner. We have talked a lot about autonomy, but I note that the memorandum also mentions duplication of effort, regional pressures and competition. What are your views on that matter?

**Professor McCormac:** As things stand, education provision is demand led; in other words, students choose the universities they would like to go to and, in response, we put on courses or end those that are no longer required. If we were to flip that over and put in place a supply-led model, in which there would be a framework for making decisions on what courses would be offered and in which regions and students would simply choose not to turn up, it would be hugely disadvantageous to the sector. As a result, we suggest that the current demand-led model is practical and fit for purpose.

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** I want to reinforce those comments. If you look at the statistics for universities in the post-war period, you will see that Government interventions to—as it were—predict demand have very often been unsuccessful. The simple approach is to trust students; assume that, when they decide to go into computing, psychology or creative arts courses, they are being rational; and ensure that universities as autonomous institutions respond to that demand as quickly as possible. If you look around the world, you will see that demand-led university systems are much more successful in providing appropriate tertiary education to their students than systems in other countries in which Government departments attempt to predict the economy's future needs in some precise way and instruct the universities about the number of places that there should be in this or that subject.

**Professor McDonald:** Let me build on that point, which I agree with. The student voice on the quality of provision, students' selectivity and their experience of programmes are increasingly important. An obvious national programme is the national students survey, which indicates how students have been taught and their perception both of what they received and of the quality of the spend on educational or pedagogical materials, whether that be on library or other support

activities. Of course, students' employability and employment at the end of a programme are also important, so in the performance of programmes we are not dealing with a closed system. Students make value judgments and, in making their career choices, they will look at universities' specialisms, which are quite different. That comes back to the point about diversity of provision. However, I think that it is important and correct—I am sure that you will hear more on this shortly—that the student voice on the quality of provision and the student experience is becoming ever more important, and that is to be welcomed.

**Professor Reid:** It is worth saying that universities do not exist in a bubble, as they engage with a very wide range of stakeholders. Universities can also anticipate trends within society and identify areas where new programmes and new areas of demand may open up. That is the appropriate way in which to identify the shape of higher education, both for the stakeholders who depend on it and for the student applicants who will benefit from it.

**Liz Smith:** I have a quick question on that section of the bill in response to what you have just said about provision being demand led. Obviously, that varies between higher education and further education, not least because FE receives something like 75 per cent of its funding from the public purse, whereas for HE the percentage share that comes from public funds is diminishing. Would that section of the bill be better if the issues were separated out, so that HE was dealt with slightly differently from FE?

**The Convener:** A yes or no answer would do.

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** We would be reluctant to pontificate on what is appropriate for the colleges, but we are very clear that student demand and student choice are fundamental as far as the universities are concerned. We need to have autonomous institutions that can quickly respond to student demand. If you look at the pattern of demand over the past 50 years, you see that student demand varies quite dramatically. Very sensibly, we now have a great demand in the creative arts and in my own area of computer science, which hardly existed 30 years ago. We do not feel able to say how things should be done for the colleges, but we are very clear that the universities should be able to engage directly with the student voice on the pattern of provision that we provide.

**The Convener:** Colin Beattie will move us on to the next question, which is on college regionalisation.

**Colin Beattie:** Professor von Prondzynski's "Report of the Review of Higher Education

Governance in Scotland” states that Scottish universities should

“engage proactively ... with further education institutions and any new governance structures that may be put in place”,

which is obviously a reference to the regionalisation of colleges. To what extent has that been happening already? Is that planned to happen?

**Sir Timothy O’Shea:** There is an awful lot of activity. At the University of Edinburgh, we particularly engage with what were the separate Edinburgh colleges both on articulation and on planning routes. I am confident that all the Scottish universities engage with colleges, which may not always be local colleges. For example, the University of Edinburgh is a long-standing supporter and partner of the University of the Highlands and Islands. We were a sponsor and supporter of the UHI before it achieved university status, although it is obviously a large distance away. I served on the academic board of the UHI and we have a very close and productive relationship with Sabhal Mòr Ostaig on Scottish studies and Celtic studies.

**Professor McDonald:** It is a good question, but that is an excellent example of how, over the past two years, the HE and FE sector has very effectively self-organised while acknowledging its autonomy and responsibilities.

I have the privilege of chairing two of Scotland’s research pools, in engineering and in energy. The latter involves a partnership across all the universities and there is also a college articulation.

Two years ago, there was a clear demand statement from the energy industry—oil and gas, offshore renewables and grid—that we need to invest in Scotland over the next 10 years around £50 billion in infrastructure, which will be critically dependent on high-quality and high-end skills from universities in the form of PhDs and MSc and BSc degrees and the research outputs that flow from the pools, which are conjoined in the partnerships that have been mentioned.

12:00

However, what is critical for the skills agenda is the requirement for a large number of modern apprenticeships, with people with higher national qualifications. As a consequence, and stimulated by the Scottish funding council in partnership with the energy technology partnership that I chair, the colleges self-organised into what they call the college energy skills partnership, which covers all Scotland and addresses a national opportunity for a global market. As a result, we have the potential for pull-through now of thousands of new modern apprenticeship jobs from the colleges. Many of

those young men and women who will start their lives in the colleges will find themselves in industry, but a significant proportion of them, some of whom are represented here today, will flow to the universities to pursue a higher-order degree, with a good chance of employment at the end of it.

All of that came not from a nationally driven agenda but from an opportunity provided by the SFC, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the universities and colleges working together effectively. It is an absolute exemplar of how the self-organising approach to opportunity leads to an excellent result.

**Colin Beattie:** Would you say that on the back of that, duplication among the different institutions has been eliminated?

**Professor McDonald:** I would say that there has been greater co-ordination and complementarity. On duplication, one cannot judge by a programme’s label what its detail might be. For example, in electrical engineering, the specialisations in institution X could be quite different from those in institution Y. Both will produce a BSc degree or an HND in electrical engineering, but the individuals’ educational experiences and their relevance could be different.

Again, what I am saying is more about co-ordination and partnership. The HE and FE sectors are showing that they can work together effectively. International opinion supports the view that pooling is an exemplar of how universities can work together to complement each other. I do not wish to make this an energy lecture but, for the University of Edinburgh and the University of Strathclyde, Tim O’Shea and I have regular strategic meetings with our research leaders to ensure that we complement each other in what we pursue and do. That then flows out to our colleagues in the University of Aberdeen and Heriot-Watt University, so that when we present the Scottish higher education scene on the international front, we present a coherent activity.

Universities and funding councils from around the world come here because of what we do together, which is to take an autonomous, responsible approach to concentrating on our separate missions, while working together to present much greater value.

**Colin Beattie:** Would I be correct in interpreting what you say as meaning that you have pursued the opportunity for shared services and resources within the group of universities?

**Professor McDonald:** Yes. Without going into too much detail—because of commercial confidentiality—I can say that Strathclyde and Aberdeen are in the process of making a significant joint investment in an enterprise



resource planning system for the operations of our universities.

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** Colin Beattie's question about shared services is a good one. Our universities have a really strong leadership position because of shared services. In joint procurement, we have a robust, jointly owned operation through which we do much better than any other group of organisations in the public sector or the quasi-public sector. I chair the joint information systems committee, so I know that the networking in universities is entirely run as a shared service. Through the Scottish higher education digital library—SHEDL—we share a lot of electronic journals, which reduces cost and improves access. Shared services are an important area for us, and the universities are conspicuously successful in putting together shared services.

**Colin Beattie:** Clearly, college restructuring changes the game plan throughout Scotland. What are the positive and negative implications for universities of college regionalisation?

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** A simple positive would be that it makes things easier. It means that there are a smaller number of points of contact with larger colleges.

In Edinburgh, I now relate directly to Mandy Exley, who heads the new Edinburgh College. Before, it was slightly more work to relate to the three colleges that were immediately nearby and then the other three colleges that were a bit further away. It certainly makes it a little bit easier for us.

The relations are good. I mentioned the Lothians equal access programme and the 1,200 students who, through that, have gone into university. Almost 500 of the people who went into that programme went to colleges and about 100 coming out of colleges came to the University of Edinburgh.

With fewer points of contact, it will be easier for universities to manage their relationships with the college sector.

**Professor McDonald:** The immediate challenge is the transitional phase that we are in just now. We are supportive of, and very appreciative of, what the colleges are doing and going through.

I will mention another example of co-ordination and partnership. I talked earlier about the engineering academy that will be launched this year. In an interesting natural evolution, through the early part of the year, we co-ordinated our outcome agreements with the college groupings that are working with us in the University of Strathclyde.

That was a good indication of the strategic alignment. The university showed leadership but, in order to work most effectively, the colleges decided—they were not guided by us—to align their outcome agreements to give a much more coherent and credible proposition to put to the Scottish funding council for making the investment.

The biggest challenge just now is the transition phase that the colleges are going through. It will not take too long—perhaps the next year—before the new mode of operation starts to settle down.

**Professor McCormac:** If you talk to any of the universities in Scotland, you will find that the relationships with colleges are strong.

For example, the University of Stirling works closely with Forth Valley College. We have a number of programmes. To go back to the point about being demand led, those programmes are created in response to student needs. We work closely together to ensure that we meet the needs of the individual students, who seek skills sets and education that will lead them to employment. We also engage with the business sector, examine their projections for the skills sets and sorts of workforces that they will need and then respond to those.

The integration of universities and colleges and the connections through to industry are strong across the sector. That is done by institutions on the ground, without the need for any legislation to force us to do it.

**The Convener:** I was going to move on to questions on the next section of the bill—section 15, which is on data sharing—but I notice that the University of Stirling's written evidence says:

"We understand that this provision is not intended to apply to universities."

**Professor McCormac:** Sorry, is that from our submission or the one from the students union?

**The Convener:** It is from yours. On section 15, it says:

"We understand that this provision is not intended to apply to universities."

I can see nothing about that in the bill.

**Professor McCormac:** Yes,

"From discussion with Scottish Government we understand that this section is not intended to create new duties on higher education institutions, since existing data collection and sharing is assumed to be adequate."

**Sir Timothy O'Shea:** Are you quoting from the Universities Scotland submission?

**The Convener:** No, I am reading from the University of Stirling's submission. It may be in other ones as well.

**Professor McCormac:** Yes, it is a duplication of what was said in the Universities Scotland submission.

**The Convener:** I am just trying to clarify the matter, because there is nothing in the bill to say that section 15 does not apply to universities, and paragraph 45 of the policy memorandum says:

“When a provider of learning or training enrolls a young person they will share a record with SDS of that young person’s enrolment along with other agreed fields.”

Where does the understanding that it does not apply to universities come from?

**Professor McCormac:** I could not answer that question at this point in time. Perhaps one of my colleagues or someone from Universities Scotland could do so. Is it permissible for Alastair Sim to comment from the public gallery?

**The Convener:** It is not.

**Professor McCormac:** We will get you the information.

**The Convener:** I am sure that the information can be provided to us after the meeting. We will finish there and not ask you any questions on data sharing, if it does not actually apply to you.

I thank you very much for attending. We were slightly rushed, but I appreciate you taking the time to be with us this morning.

**Sir Timothy O’Shea:** We thank the Education and Culture Committee for an interesting and thoughtful set of questions.

**The Convener:** I suspend the meeting briefly.

12:09

*Meeting suspended.*

12:12

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** I welcome our final panel of witnesses, who are Christina Andrews, vice president education and engagement, University of Stirling Students Union; Freddie Forde, association president, University of St Andrews Students Association; Malcolm Moir, president, University of Strathclyde Students Association; and Garry Quigley, president, Students Association of the University of the West of Scotland. We are running slightly later than intended, so I apologise for keeping you waiting. Given that you have sat through all the evidence and heard what the principals had to say, I hope that you can say whether you agree with that previous evidence. We can then move quickly on to areas of disagreement or any additional information that you would like to provide.

We will begin with Liz Smith, on university governance.

**Liz Smith:** Will you comment on the intention to legislate on the question of governance and management?

**Malcolm Moir (University of Strathclyde Students Association):** Our written submission states that, in the main, we welcome the intention to legislate. The principals said that they do not feel that it is necessary but, at Strathclyde, we are in the main in favour of it.

**Liz Smith:** Can you tell us why?

**Malcolm Moir:** Beyond the fact that it helps students associations to lobby universities, it is really because the measure will ensure that the system is sustainable.

**Liz Smith:** Can you give us an idea of why, in academic, educational, economic or social terms, legislating for a code of governance would help the universities and therefore be in tune with students’ needs?

**Malcolm Moir:** You have put me on the spot. Can you repeat the question?

**Liz Smith:** We have an overall agreement in all the submissions that I have seen—from students, members of staff, principals and chairs—that the overall ambition is to sustain Scottish universities’ educational achievements, which are significant, and to enhance their economic and social achievements and diversity. Will you explain why you think that having a code of governance in the legislation would help that process?

12:15

**Garry Quigley (Students Association of the University of the West of Scotland):** It would show good practice across the sector. We have met the consultant who is working for Universities Scotland and discussed the things that we like in the von Prondzynski report—for example, ensuring that the chair of the court is as independent from the senior management team as possible, and ensuring that the student president is involved in the selection of the principal. There is disagreement among student bodies about the role of the rector and whether the rector’s involvement is the best way of ensuring that students’ views are heard in the university court.

On the university principals’ submissions on governance and management, we do not think that there is anything in the bill that would infringe on the management of a university. For example, access agreements are very much fitted around a university’s local context and ultimately have to be signed off by the university court. At the UWS, for example, outcome access agreements very much

fit the local context and the need to address issues of retention.

To answer your question, the approach is to ensure that there is good practice across the sector and that good governance practice is shared across all the universities in Scotland.

**Liz Smith:** Do you therefore disagree with the principals from whom we heard this morning, who said that they would like to see “management” removed from the bill? Would you like to see it in the bill?

**Garry Quigley:** I go back to my point. I do not know whether there is anything in the bill that infringes on management, so we would possibly agree on that. The point is that some of the issues that were outlined in the von Prondzynski report—for example, in relation to access agreements—are very much decided by the institutions, not by the Scottish Government or the Scottish ministers.

**Liz Smith:** Last week, the bill team put the point to us—this is also mentioned in the submissions that I have read so far—that there is a bit of an issue around management involving the day-to-day running of some of the universities’ procedures and that, if taken to a fuller extent, what is proposed would start to impinge on the institutions’ academic freedom. Would you be quite happy with that?

**Garry Quigley:** We support academic freedom.

**Liz Smith:** Okay. Thank you very much.

**Freddie fforde (University of St Andrews Students Association):** In general, to echo sentiments that have been expressed about the von Prondzynski report, I think that it is helpful that this discussion has come up, because different customs have grown up in many individual universities, some of which are appropriate and some of which are not. I refer to the evidence that we gave last week to Dr West, who collected our thoughts on the matter.

I ask for a bit of clarification on the specific issue. I am not that experienced in the area, so forgive me if I am asking you to go over old ground. I have a question about the wording of proposed new section 9A of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005, which states:

“The Scottish Ministers may ... when making a payment to a higher education institution under section 12(1), require the institution to comply with any principles of governance or management which appear to the Scottish Ministers to constitute good practice in relation to higher education institutions.”

My reading of

“any principles ... which appear to the Scottish Ministers”

is that it is a little vague. Can you elaborate for me how that might work and who those ministers might be? Is it—

**The Convener:** For clarity’s sake, I should say that we ask the questions and you answer them.

**Liz Smith:** That is a good question for the ministers.

**The Convener:** It is the Scottish ministers who are referred to.

**Freddie fforde:** I am uncomfortable with that bit.

**The Convener:** Let us explore that matter a little bit, then. I am sorry for interrupting Liz Smith.

**Liz Smith:** The question is very good, and we will put it to the cabinet secretary when he comes to give his evidence.

What you have said ties in with what Garry Quigley said. There would be an issue for some people, and he said that he is in favour of academic freedom. There would be an issue if some of the exercise of that power was taken too far. At what stage would that be, though? What are you comfortable with?

**Freddie fforde:** I find the wording ambiguous as it stands, if further questions are not asked.

**Joan McAlpine:** I am interested to know what the other representatives think. Do they feel that the wording is ambiguous?

**Malcolm Moir:** We think that the word “may” makes the provision seem almost optional. We would prefer to have a requirement, so we would substitute “may” with “must”, to make the wording more concrete.

**Christina Andrews (University of Stirling Students Union):** I do not have anything to say about the provision.

**The Convener:** We will move on to section 3, which is about widening access. I ask George Adam to kick off.

**George Adam:** You will have heard everything that the principals said. As I am Garry Quigley’s local MSP, he continually has a go at me about ensuring that we widen access, which I know is a big thing for the NUS nationally. The UWS’s figures in relation to the most deprived 20 per cent of data zones are quite good. However, a lot of the ancient universities do not seem to be as good at recruiting from such data zones and widening access. What are your thoughts on the way forward for widening access to universities?

**Garry Quigley:** I will tell the committee what we at the UWS are doing. You are right to say that we have a very good record on widening access. Just under 25 per cent of the students who come to the

UWS are from an SIMD 20 background, but we should not be the only one, or one of only a few, to recruit such students. More universities must ensure that opportunities are available to all.

The UWS has strong engagement with the south-west articulation hub—for example, a lot of students articulate into third or fourth year. Although we are a regional university, we are still rooted in the communities of Ayr, Dumfries, Hamilton and Paisley. We have a high number of part-time students, many of whom come from the most impoverished backgrounds. It is fair to say that the university has a good relationship with us as the students association. We do various activities that help to widen access to students in local areas.

Where we fall down is on retention. Our record on access is good, but our retention levels are poor. I refute the point that widening access means high drop-out rates. Glasgow Caledonian University is a good example of an institution that widens access but has a good record on retention. If all universities are to widen access, everyone acknowledges that the right level of support must be provided, to ensure that students are retained.

In the past two years, we have called for a national research project that looks into the student experience in Scotland and asks why students drop out. We would hope that that would give us answers and solutions to improve retention rates overall.

I will let the other folks discuss the projects that they are working on to widen access.

**Malcolm Moir:** The University of Strathclyde is reasonably good on widening access—about 13 per cent of admissions are from the SIMD 20 group. We welcome the additional places that have been funded this year at the ancients—the additional 20 places at the University of St Andrews, which were in the news, will represent quite a percentage increase.

I echo what Professor Sir Jim McDonald said. Progress is being made, and we have to start somewhere when figures are released. The key is to ensure that progress continues in years to come.

At Strathclyde, we are working with the university on a major project, and we are running one ourselves—StrathGuides—which the principal mentioned. That involves engaging with local schools in which a low percentage of students enter higher education institutions to encourage students to think about education beyond high school and to teach survival skills for university, such as budgeting and lecture note taking. The aim is just to show that it is possible and that they can easily go on to university if they wish. We hope that the majority of the 40 additional spaces

for which Strathclyde has received funding for widening access will be filled by people from SIMD 20 areas, rather than SIMD 40 areas. Obviously, as we are in Glasgow, we are situated quite well for that.

**Christina Andrews:** Widening access is important to us all. Institutions are starting to make headway on that but, as always, progress tends to be slow, and the student unions and associations want to speed it up a little. The University of Stirling tends to sit in the middle ground on the number of people that we get from the SIMD 20 areas, but our retention figures are also in the middle ground. It is important to have a balance between the two. The statistics show that the UWS and GCU both have high access rates but, on retention, the numbers start to differ. For Edinburgh and St Andrews, the numbers on access are similar, but the retention rates are different—Edinburgh has a slightly higher retention rate than St Andrews. In looking at widening access, we must consider what support is available and ensure that institutions are appropriately supported to cope.

**Freddie fforde:** Christina Andrews finished on the exact issue that I want to talk about. It is the elephant in the room. I represent the institution that has by far the worst record on the issue. We are all aware of that and agree that we have to do more. If there is one thing that I want the committee to walk away with today, it is how different each institution is—the reason why I am here is to emphasise that. We have talked about the different programmes that universities have. St Andrews has to do a lot more, but it needs support with that, because we do not have an urban area to draw on. I am not surprised that we have low numbers of people from areas of multiple deprivation and that widening participation is a challenge for St Andrews, because we are in the middle of nowhere. To the north, in Dundee, there are two universities; in Edinburgh, there are at least another two or three; and, of course, trying to get students over from Glasgow is a big challenge.

I am sorry for indulging in such personal experience, but what I really want to come out of the process is that universities—particularly St Andrews, as that is where my experience comes from—are provided with the right kind of support to implement their widening participation programmes. I know that the proportion of money that is spent on the outreach work that we do, such as summer schools, is not very big in comparison with the resources that are spent on other matters. I urge the approach of taking each institution on its merits and challenges, and having funding agreements that reflect those specific challenges. Funding should perhaps be contingent on what works for each university. For outreach programmes in schools, we have to go a long way

to reach potential students. We need more money to be invested in that, based on evidence of what works. That would be much more helpful.

I feel rather embarrassed for my students that we get kicked the whole time. Students come to me complaining that they feel that they are being positioned in the media as the wrong kind of people and that St Andrews students do not care about people who are not from the same background as them. That is just not the case. In defending my constituency, I find that to be an enormously difficult challenge. I apologise again for giving my personal experience, but we need more understanding of the particular challenges that we face, rather than a general blanket approach.

12:30

**George Adam:** To be fair, when I have asked about St Andrews, I have said that questions about St Andrews have been media-led, given that it is easy to look at the figures for those who go there.

According to the principals, they were getting to this stage slowly but surely and without the need for legislation. However, I think that a look at some of the figures suggests that legislation is needed to widen access. Do you agree?

**Garry Quigley:** I do not agree with the principals' views. Indeed, the NUS report states that we have been waiting 40 or 50 years for a record that we can be proud of.

**Neil Findlay:** I do not think that any reasonable person is having a go at individual students at St Andrews, although we might be having a go at the defences that are put up, often by the institution, as reasons or excuses for not making progress. Forgive me for being somewhat critical, but it appears that you might be buying into that when, for example, you say, "St Andrews is in the middle of nowhere". It is not exactly too far from Dundee, Kirkcaldy or the rest of Fife, and I think that we need to be a bit wary of St Andrews trotting out yet another excuse.

In its submission, the University of Stirling suggests:

"the process for developing outcome agreements did not adequately involve students and has led to outcome agreements with little to no student input."

Is that a general feeling across the board?

**Christina Andrews:** I wrote that partly because, as you know, sabbatical teams tend to change year on year. Last year, it was agreed by the president and vice president at academic council—after which the issue went to the court—that the principal would decide about outcome agreements in the principal's strategic group,

which has very few members. It is all very well for people to say, "The students on the court ticked this off, so it's absolutely fine," but the fact is that, although the University of Stirling is trying to get in more students from SIMD 20, it is not getting in enough and needs to be more ambitious.

**Garry Quigley:** All outcome agreements tend to get signed off at the court, which has two student representatives. However, we do not have much of a chance to make any input into those agreements. Even though we broadly agree with and support everything in the agreements, we think that there should be more space in the process for involving students. After all, we are important stakeholders in the university.

**Malcolm Moir:** I agree entirely. We would welcome the chance for the students association to have more input. Of course, things start to get complex when you try to work out how that would happen, given the difficult nature of these documents. As Christina Andrews pointed out, the teams change every year, so I and my predecessor wrote a joint letter to the principal setting out what we were looking and hoping for in the outcome agreements. However, it is difficult to make any input beyond that. We sit down in various meetings to discuss education strategy and so on and through our two representatives on the court we sign off the agreement but we would welcome more input into its drafting. As I have said, though, I do not know how that would be done.

**Freddie fforde:** Can I just register my agreement with that by nodding my head?

**Neil Findlay:** That is fine.

**Liz Smith:** All four principals told us quite clearly that although SIMD is important it is not, on its own, the most accurate document. Indeed, they all gave examples in that respect. If memory serves, I believe that Seona Reid said that, in the past six years, there had been a 16.9 per cent improvement; the principal of the University of Edinburgh outlined quite a long scenario about how Edinburgh has improved; and we heard the same from Stirling and Strathclyde. Do you agree that these are important criteria that can be worked on to benefit people from different backgrounds and that they might be even more successful than a simple examination of the SIMD analysis?

**Garry Quigley:** We would welcome moves to get a much truer description of where a student is coming from. To be honest, the response that you mention was a sign that principals do not want to make improvements when it comes to widening access. We have been talking about the issue for too long. We cannot afford any more delays in finding out a true picture of the student profile.

**Liz Smith:** Do you dispute the figures?

**Garry Quigley:** There are flaws in a system that looks at postcodes. However, that is the only system that bodies seem to use at this stage.

**The Convener:** We will move on to the issue of the fees cap.

**Neil Bibby:** What is your position on the provision in the bill to put a cap on fees for students from the rest of the UK? What do you believe that cap should be?

**Freddie fforde:** I should first of all make clear that one of the reasons why I do not know my colleagues on the panel very well is that they are members of the NUS and I am not. That clarification might be helpful. They will represent the NUS's views, but I will not.

As I understand it, there is a proposal to make the cost of a Scottish degree the same as it would be south of the border—that is, you would get four years for the price of three. I hope that I have not misunderstood the position. I think that that is absolutely right. I do not think that there should be a difference, for the reasons that have been laid out previously.

I have a concern, however. I will find out on Friday whether our union is going to be rebuilt, which will be a huge project. We need a new sports centre. All our accommodation is falling to bits. My concern is that, without extra support from the Government, the four-for-the-price-of-three approach will create a huge funding gap—of millions of pounds—which might lead to an impact on front-line student services of the sort that I have just mentioned. Although I absolutely agree with the principle of the fees being no higher in Scotland than they can be south of the border, I worry about what will be done to make up for the loss in revenue for universities and how that will impact on services that my students would expect.

**Malcolm Moir:** We are here representing our students associations and not the views of the NUS.

Strathclyde welcomes the fees being capped, so that students from the rest of the UK are not spending more on their education than others are. Strathclyde has set the cap at around £27,000, which comes to £6,000 or so a year. That is great.

Fortunately, we are in quite a nice position in that we are not talking in the millions, as it stands. The sums will not break the bank, if that makes sense.

We welcome a cap across the country. We think that it should not cost more to go to university in Scotland than it costs south of the border.

**Garry Quigley:** We come at this from an interesting perspective, as we have a very small

number of students from the rest of the UK—around 200.

I echo Malcolm Moir's views. We support a cap that means that it is no more expensive to study here than it is to study down south.

We believe that there should be some sort of support and bursary packages. If the core message of the bill is to widen access, we must ensure that that includes students from the rest of the UK, so we do not end up with only the wealthiest students coming to Scotland to study. Again, a portion of the fees that are brought in has to be ring fenced for bursary and support packages.

We have only about 200 rest-of-UK students studying at the UWS, so the amount of funding that we could gain under that system is limited in comparison with what could be gained by an institution such as the University of Edinburgh, which has a high number of rest-of-UK students. We ask that the system be monitored to ensure that the amount of cash that Edinburgh can generate is not so much greater than the amount that the UWS can generate.

**Christina Andrews:** I echo what everyone has already said. There should be a cap on the fees that rest-of-UK students can be charged. However, I noticed that there was a reference to a fee cap within each academic year. It is important to consider what students will get from coming to Scottish institutions. As far as I am aware, most students will come to do a bachelor's degree and end up doing an honours degree. That needs to be taken into consideration, because it means that the students need that additional year. It is also important to consider whether a fee is charged for the award that they will receive when they complete their course.

**Malcolm Moir:** Our stance is that there should be no fees and, in an ideal world, there would be no fees for education—it would be free for everyone. That would be the real solution for widening access—no fees for any students. That is Strathclyde's stance, at least, and I hope that it is the stance of all students associations across Scotland and the UK.

**The Convener:** Do you mean no fees for rest-of-UK students as well?

**Freddie fforde:** Yes—equal for everyone. It is like that across the EU, anyway.

**Malcolm Moir:** I will go as far as to say that free education across the world is what students associations would be looking for.

**The Convener:** We will stick to trying to control the situation here.

**Malcolm Moir:** Right.

**The Convener:** Well, today Scotland, tomorrow the world.

**Malcolm Moir:** We have to start somewhere.

**The Convener:** Indeed.

**Clare Adamson:** I know that you all heard the question earlier about the Scottish funding council reviewing higher and further education with a view to ensuring that education is provided in a coherent manner across the sectors. Do you have a position on the premise on which that is based and how you see that moving forward?

**Garry Quigley:** There are two ways to look at it. First, it places a lot of power in the hands of the Scottish ministers. We would support it if it could stop a situation such as the one at Strathclyde a few years ago, when courses were removed. We would be less likely to support it if the Abertay issue arose again, when certain institutions were being forced to merge, without the consent of the two institutions.

**Christina Andrews:** I completely agree with what Garry Quigley said. It makes sense to review higher education. It is important that it will be a review of higher and further education, because it is about education as a whole—that is how I see it. Some people will say that what could happen is that certain courses at different institutions will be cut, because too many people are applying to them and we do not need them. However, the opposite can be said, because it is about protecting the courses that we need at the moment. For instance, if we suddenly need more nurses or more modern language teachers, more places can be created for those who want to go on a nursing course or a modern language teaching course, and so on.

**Clare Adamson:** The previous panel definitely talked about delivering a student-led demand system at the moment. Do you all feel that that is the situation at the moment?

**Christina Andrews:** It was mentioned before that there would be a change. At the moment, it is about meeting the demands of potential students. What could happen is that there will just be all these places and it will just be hoped that students take them. I do not think that that will happen. I hope and presume that it will always come down to demand and what people need but also what the country needs.

**The Convener:** I presume that you agree that it cannot just be demand led? We cannot all get what we want. As you indicated, there are clearly demands from industry and business for students and graduates in certain sectors. There is a limited pot of money and there are reasons why we cannot have a completely demand-led system. I presume that you accept that it is a balancing act.

**Christina Andrews:** Yes, I accept that. It is a balance between everything.

12:45

**Malcolm Moir:** We welcome section 14 but, from our perspective, we have to be cautious in the sense that it could protect courses and local provision but it could also cut them. The cost is another factor.

**The Convener:** In that case, what is your response to the following comment in “Putting Learners at the Centre—Delivering our Ambitions for Post-16 Education”? It states:

“there is too much duplication and unnecessary competition within ... regional universities.”

That would tend to suggest that something has to be done about that, or that there has to be some sort of intervention.

**Garry Quigley:** There still has to be a local context. At the UWS, we sometimes have the same courses at Hamilton and at Paisley. The distance between them is small, but one of the features of widening access is that—to use the phrase—people should have a university or college on their doorstep, so I suppose that that helps with that aspect.

**The Convener:** Does anyone else want to comment on the quote that I read from “Putting Learners at the Centre”?

**Malcolm Moir:** I am a strong believer in the free market and competition. This is my personal opinion. If a number of institutions provide the same form of course, they will strive to be the best and to deliver the best education that they can. I believe that that is a good thing.

**The Convener:** Thank you. We move on to questions on regionalisation and its impact on universities, from Colin Beattie.

**Colin Beattie:** I think that all the members of the panel were here when the universities gave their opinion on the subject earlier. Perhaps you could comment from your perspective on the positive and negative impacts of college regionalisation in relation to Scottish universities engaging with the colleges, and on whether there is any sign of institutions sharing resources and so on.

**Christina Andrews:** Could you repeat the question? Sorry.

**Colin Beattie:** Sure. Maybe I will break it down. What are the implications, positive and negative, for the universities engaging proactively with the colleges in terms of their regionalisation?

**Garry Quigley:** What we are looking for in any discussions about the college regionalisation is

recognition of the fact that a high number of college students come straight to the UWS and we want that to be protected. We are also looking for the articulated groups that I mentioned earlier to be sustained and possibly to be extended so that college students could articulate into Strathclyde or Edinburgh as well. Those are the two key features that we would be looking for under the programme.

**Malcolm Moir:** With regionalisation, there is potential for students associations in the colleges to be more effective. Either last night or this morning I was reading through the explanatory notes, and I believe that having members of students associations on the boards will be a great thing. It will help us to work with those students associations. It is not just the institutions that need to engage with the regionalised colleges. The students associations will be able to work together better.

**Garry Quigley:** From our experience as an institution that merged a few years ago, one of the lessons that we learned as students was that it is important to have enough time and that students' views must be listened to. During the merger process, the previous sabbatical officers felt that their views were not taken on board. Students should be involved in the merger process.

**Christina Andrews:** When it comes to institutions working together, I know that the University of Stirling is doing a lot more to work with Forth Valley College. Last year, a degree was introduced that is provided by the University of Stirling but three years of the course are done at the Forth Valley College campus. In the last year, the students come to the University of Stirling campus. It is good and positive that the institutions are looking into different things they can do.

Malcolm Moir made a great point when he said that it is not just about institutions working together. It is also about student unions and students associations working together to ensure that students are getting everything that they need.

**Freddie fforde:** I do not know enough about this to be able to add anything.

**Colin Beattie:** From what the university principals said, it seems that, as you stated yourselves, there is already a fair degree of exchange between colleges and universities. Will there be more opportunity to share resources with the regionalised colleges than at the moment?

**Freddie fforde:** You made a point about student associations. That seems to me to be an obvious and helpful link. It jumps out at me as making sense.

**Garry Quigley:** A large number of UWS students study in the college and vice versa. If the regionalisation agenda fits that purpose, it would be welcomed.

**Malcolm Moir:** The University of Strathclyde is working closely with some colleges on articulation. I am not able to speak for the university on sharing resources. I imagine that that would be welcomed, but the cuts that are happening in colleges will not help the resources and universities will not be able to make up for the £36 million of cuts.

**Colin Beattie:** I was not suggesting that the universities would subsidise the colleges.

**Garry Quigley:** If resources are shared, we need to ensure that the university students who study in the college or vice versa are not forgotten about because they are not on the main campus. Too often, we hear that the UWS students at the City of Glasgow College feel that they are not represented or not given the same level of support as students who study at the main campus.

**Clare Adamson:** I have a quick question about what the witnesses said about the integration and joint working between the colleges and universities. They said that, although work has been done on widening access, it is not happening quickly enough. Work on integration between colleges and universities is going on, but is the pace of change quick enough?

**Freddie fforde:** No.

**Malcolm Moir:** No.

**Garry Quigley:** There seems to be indifference in the relationship between some universities and colleges. It seems to be much easier for a student coming from a college to articulate into advanced entry to UWS than to the University of Edinburgh, perhaps. Every university must play its part in widening access and in articulation.

**Freddie fforde:** Contextualised admissions and recognising different entries into university come into that as well. Ultimately, one university can take only so many Scots. It is easy for a university to say that it will take the applicants with five As, of which there is a hugely disproportionately lower number in the lower SIMD groups, if we are using that measurement.

For contextualised admissions to work, there needs to be more assistance for, or pressure on, the universities—however you want to do it. When I have talked about it at my university, the reaction has been, "Well, sometimes, maybe." There needs to be some form of coercion to recognise potential. It would also be useful to share best practice across universities—for example, sharing certain situations in which interviews have not worked.



**Malcolm Moir:** If contextualised admissions are the same across the board, there is no longer an issue. As Freddie fforde said, there are only so many people so, if the University of Strathclyde looks to increase its percentage of students from SIMD 20 or SIMD 40 backgrounds but does not increase its outreach, it might find that it is taking some of those students away from Glasgow Caledonian University. However, it would be fantastic for Scottish education if we could increase the outreach and, through standardised contextualised admissions, increase the number of people who are interested in education, want to apply to university, are able to do so and have potential.

**The Convener:** We are almost out of time, so I will ask a final question and I ask each of you for a short answer. What are your hopes and expectations for the bill? What do you hope will come out of it in terms of benefits for students at universities? I will start with Malcolm Moir and work along.

**Malcolm Moir:** Widening access is the main issue. I want to be able to sit down in university meetings and say, "This has been legislated for. You need to work with us on it. We have these additional places, so what are we going to do? How is it going to happen?" We can talk about why for so long, but we need some sort of leverage that allows us to ask, "How are we doing this?" That is the main thing.

**Garry Quigley:** I have the same hope about widening access, but we need to bear it in mind that widening access is about not only getting students into university, but retaining them and allowing them to graduate at the end. We need to be more aware of the reasons why students drop out and to be more prepared for the potential pitfalls of widening access. I hope that the institutions, the Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament and student associations start to discuss what more they can do to help retain students from all backgrounds at university.

**Christina Andrews:** Good governance is about having transparency in institutions, which I think will come from the bill. Widening access is about all the universities working together to improve the intake. They should not only encourage students, but support them when they get there. I hope that the bill will encourage that.

**Freddie fforde:** As I said earlier, my main concern is to ensure that there is an understanding of the different challenges that different universities face. Obviously, I am reflecting my experience here, but I must resist what Neil Findlay said earlier about me recycling old arguments. The University of St Andrews not having the kind of local population that is found in the University of Glasgow, for example, is one

instance of a particular local problem. There are different local problems at different universities.

What I hope for is an understanding that we are not enemies here. I hope that the student associations, the universities and the Parliament can work together to analyse the problems and come up with a sophisticated and mature solution, rather than viewing it as about being confrontational, with one versus the other. The problems are much more complicated than that. I referred earlier to ambiguity in the bill. The question seems to be what we can do to get one solution that looks good. Every institution is different, though, and the sooner the Parliament appreciates that different solutions will work in different contexts, the better.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much. I thank you all for coming this morning.

Just before I close the meeting, I give apologies from Liam McArthur, who has been delayed by transport difficulties. He had hoped to be here, but he has unfortunately failed to manage that. He has emailed me his apologies.

I close the meeting to the public.

12:58

*Meeting continued in private until 13:04.*



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