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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Thursday 7 February 2013

Session 4

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CONTENTS

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE
3rd Meeting 2013, Session 4

CONVENER

*Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP)
*Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP)
*Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
*Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
*Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Lloyd Anderson (British Council Scotland)
Frances Christensen (Confucius Institute for Scotland)
Angeliki Petrits (European Commission)
Luca Tomasi (European Commission)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Ian Duncan

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

European and External Relations Committee

Thursday 7 February 2013

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 09:00*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Christina McKelvie): Good morning and welcome to the third meeting in 2013 of the European and External Relations Committee. I make the usual request that all electronic devices and mobile phones be switched off because they interfere with the broadcasting equipment.

Under agenda item 1, I seek members' agreement to take in private item 6 on the Scottish Government country plans, and item 7 on our European Union Commission work programme report. Do members agree?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: We have a change to our plans this morning because our witnesses have been held up slightly. I therefore seek members' agreement to postpone item 2 until their arrival and to move straight on to item 3. Do members agree?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: The clerks will inform us when the witnesses arrive.

Foreign Language Learning in Primary Schools Inquiry

09:02

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is our foreign language learning in primary schools inquiry. Clare Adamson MSP and I attended St Elizabeth's primary school in Hamilton on Friday 25 January. Before I provide feedback on that, we will talk a bit about what happened on the day.

We arrived on Burns day, so the children not only gave us a demonstration of their fantastic command of Spanish and other languages, but gave a fantastic display of their knowledge and understanding of Burns and old Scots. It was a multicultural day.

I will pass over to Clare Adamson. I know St Elizabeth's well, so it will be nice to hear about her experience of, and understanding about, how the day went.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): First, I thank the headteacher, staff, pupils, parents and carers who were involved in the event at St Elizabeth's; it felt like the whole school was involved and everyone whom we met showed a great deal of interest in what we were there to do.

I really liked the school tour that one of the pupils took me on which gave me an opportunity to see a range of ages of pupils. We started in primary 1 and saw what they do in Spanish, and then we moved through to the senior school, where Spanish is incorporated into normal games and is part of literacy and numeracy teaching. It seems to be embedded in what they do in the classroom.

It was a useful visit and a fantastic experience. The school is wonderful and the pupils are a credit to everyone who has been helping them.

The Convener: I agree and would echo all those comments. I, too, thank the headteacher and all the teachers, parents and children. The children were the stars of the day—they were very engaged and demonstrated motivation and excitement in every exercise that they took part in, whether it was a game, in their mathematical or language skills or in welcoming us in Spanish in the morning.

The school also has a highly motivated and trained group of teachers, which is a clear demonstration that with the right leadership a school does not need millions in resources. You can see how a school can grow if it gets value and input from continuous professional development.

We spent a bit of informal time with the teachers in the staff room. Some of the sharing of resources

is very impressive. There are a number of research topics and link-ups with university language professors, of whom children could ask questions about culture and language. The situation is very impressive indeed and is a clear demonstration of the benefit that young people are getting from the programme. The visit was extremely positive.

We are happy to take questions from members. I see that Jamie McGrigor is champing at the bit.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Your visit to the school was obviously great and an interesting experience. Does the school specialise in Spanish? It is a primary school, so will pupils continue with Spanish at the next school that they go to?

The Convener: South Lanarkshire Council has continuity in language teaching. Spanish is one of the strongest languages—children learn it from primary 1 right through. Children are also learning French and we met the French tutor, who talked about the links between Spanish and French and how learning one can predispose pupils to being better at learning the other. The school has a clear path about the language that they want pupils to speak and it sets the language that it wants pupils to speak.

The school offers other examples and experiences. One of the things that came out of the meeting with parents was that the school will now start an after-school club for parents to learn other languages, so that they can understand and help their children with their language homework. There is a real community spirit and a willingness to look more widely at what is being done.

Jamie McGrigor: Where will the majority of pupils go to from that school?

The Convener: They will go to Holy Cross high school, which does Spanish.

Jamie McGrigor: Are pupils geared up to take that on?

The Convener: Yes. Spanish and French are the strongest languages, but children are interested in other languages.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): I thank the convener and Clare Adamson.

Do the children engage with Spanish children, using technology such as the glow website and Skype, so that they get direct exposure of Spanish being spoken by children of a similar age?

Clare Adamson: Teachers at St Elizabeth's talked about some of the projects that they are trying to get up and running in order that they can work in that way; getting such links going is a real priority.

The school has used technology in other areas—for example, science. The curriculum director—whose name I cannot remember—is a support teacher who is very keen to do that linking. Richard Tallaron pointed out to us that Scotland is small: there are as many primary schools in Paris as there are in all Scotland. There are huge opportunities for every primary school in Scotland to work towards making those links, which is an ambition of the people who are involved in the project.

It may be of interest to members that I visited classes in which the teacher had been trained in delivering languages, and a class in which the teacher had not been trained but could still teach Spanish with the support of her colleagues. There is a plan to get every teacher through the training programme, but her not having been trained did not seem to be a huge barrier to that teacher. She expressed delight at how much her pupils had taught her and kept her right, which is very interesting. Although the objective is for every teacher to be trained, not every one in that school has been.

Jamie McGrigor: Do the teachers think it necessary to have a language qualification?

Clare Adamson: The answer would depend on what you mean by a "language qualification".

Jamie McGrigor: I mean a qualification in speaking a language to a certain level.

Clare Adamson: I do not know about a qualification in speaking a language, but the teachers want the pedagogy of how to teach language, which does not necessarily mean that they need a skill in a particular language. They are interested in the technical teaching skill.

Willie Coffey: Did the teachers—or, even, the parents and children—offer the committee advice or tips that we should be mindful of in getting the policy right for Scotland's children in the future?

The Convener: The children absolutely love learning languages, which are incorporated into other lessons and games. Teachers who are on playground duty might hear kids counting and saying colours in Spanish and French when they are playing the games that are laid out in the schoolyard. The kids feel that incorporating other languages into everyday life helps them to pick up the skills. The teachers also feel that that is helpful.

When we went up and down the corridors, some kids said, "Good morning," while other kids said, "Hola," or "Buenos días." They all used their own style and had confidence. The main thing is that the children have confidence and are very relaxed about languages. They do not worry too much about whether they are pronouncing words right.

The teachers and parents said that, if they build confidence in kids, the learning becomes a bit easier, because the kids are keen and happy to learn. I watched a game and saw that even the quietest kids, who might not put themselves forward, got involved in it, because they had confidence in the subject.

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): I am sure that the students—I will not call them kids, because we are all students now—made no claims for resources, but did staff and parents suggest that there is a resource implication? Many schools seem to be managing so far with their current facilities; they organise subjects so that they can be managed. However, as more subjects are brought into the curriculum, will that create a resource requirement? If so, should we indicate that to the Education and Culture Committee?

The Convener: We spoke to a group of teachers who had been through the 12-week training course. There does not seem to be much impediment to doing that—the course is made available to those who want to go on it, although that depends on staffing resources and the ability to cover classes. The headteacher is willing to put teachers forward for the course.

It is really interesting that teachers are good at finding other ways of providing resources, a lot of which involved technology, such as twinning with other schools, speaking on Skype and using subtitled programmes that are produced in other countries, so that pupils hear the words in another language but see the meaning in English, which allows them to relate the sound to the word.

Mandarin is not taught at the school, but I spoke to a teacher who gave me the interesting fact that some young people with dyslexia find learning Mandarin much easier, because it is a symbol and sound language. It seems to lend itself much more easily to how a child with dyslexia learns.

Teachers will always say that they want more resources, but they did not raise that as a concern with us on our visit. As with the school that Hanzala and I visited in Dalmarnock, the teachers feel that, with a bit of extra money for CPD and for everybody to go on the 12-week course, they could manage from there.

09:15

Hanzala Malik: I have to say that that sounds quite positive, so far. I hesitate, because there might be an element of shyness among people about coming forward to say that there is a need for training. Training is always a valuable commodity, so to expect schools to meet the costs from their budgets would be a bit much. I wonder whether we can have some sort of consultation on the cost element.

If we are to encourage people to introduce languages in schools, and to encourage clusters in which the same language is taught at primary and secondary, there is an issue about resourcing. Previously, secondary schools might have taught other languages, but because primary schools are coming on board and doing what they can with their limited resources, there might be a resourcing issue. We need to be careful not to undermine the progress that has been made just because of a small amount of resource. We need to identify whether resource is required and, if so, how we assist people to tap into it.

The Convener: Jenny Goldsmith has just reminded me that, at our next meeting, we will hear from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities; perhaps that is a question that we should ask of the local authorities. On 18 April, we will have the minister, so we can direct a question on resourcing there. The only thing that I would say is that the pilot scheme is, I think, being funded to the tune of £4.2 million. [*Interruption*.] I am told that that is for next year, so a bit of resource is coming. We should certainly ask those questions of the local authorities and the minister, to see what their thoughts are.

Hanzala Malik: Good.

Clare Adamson: It is worth mentioning that, during the visit to the school, it transpired that, certainly for South Lanarkshire Council, no audit has been done of who is qualified across the local authority. Work might need to be done to establish the level of qualifications in our primary schools.

The Convener: Item 2 is further oral evidence for the inquiry. We have a panel of experts who represent European and international perspectives on the topic. I welcome the panel on behalf of the committee; we are delighted to have you here. We have with us Lloyd Anderson, who is director of the British Council Scotland; Luca Tomasi, who is a policy officer with the European Commission's directorate-general for education and culture; Angeliki Petrits, who is a language officer in the directorate-general for translation with the European Commission representation in the United Kingdom; and Frances Christensen, who is the general manager of the Confucius Institute for Scotland. You will have heard me mention Mandarin, Ms Christensen.

I thank the witnesses for their written evidence. We will go straight to questions from members. We have a number of questions on different aspects of our inquiry, but if there is anything that the witnesses think we should know, please just let us know when you are answering questions. That would be helpful.

Jamie McGrigor: In our meeting on 24 January, academics highlighted that teacher training abroad

is very different from the training here. They gave as an example the fact that Spanish language teachers learn English at degree level before they teach it. In what ways does the training of language teachers differ in other countries from the practice in Scotland?

Luca Tomasi (European Commission): Thank you for inviting us. The training differs in many ways; there is a wide range of teacher training in the European Union, especially for primary level. I have read the papers from your previous meetings, so I know that the debate throughout the EU is the same as in Scotland. It is about whether generalist teachers or specialists should teach languages to pupils in primary school.

Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages. In theory, it would be great to have generalist languages teachers who were fluent in several languages in addition to the main language of instruction, but that is not always the case, so it is easier to bring in specialist teachers and that has to be coped with. Ideally, generalist teachers should at least be able to show pupils that they can speak other languages, because the main teacher is a powerful role model for the pupils. If pupils who are asked to learn French, German or Spanish see that their teacher cannot speak the language, that is an extremely negative message to send out.

There is no ideal solution. No one in Europe has found the solution for providing language teaching to pupils in primary school or for teacher training. A combination of initial and in-service training for generalist teachers, accompanied by the use of language assistants or specialist teachers, is generally what is used.

Clare Adamson: My question is about how use of foreign language assistants in primary schools could help to address some of the issues that you mentioned. If the teacher does not have the necessary language skills, how could foreign language assistants be used?

Lloyd Anderson (British Council Scotland): Thank you for inviting me.

I will preface my response with some points about the British Council Scotland's work, because I am not an expert in provision of modern languages in schools. The British Council is working to connect Scottish schools with schools around the world to enrich education, to promote global citizenship and to build international trust and relationships.

In 2011-12, there were 1,000 international school partnership projects in Scotland, so we were reaching about 24 per cent of Scotland's schools. The British Council Scotland manages the foreign language assistants programme and the Fulbright teacher exchange programme on behalf of the Scottish Government. With the United Kingdom Department for International Development, the British Council is a co-founder of the connecting classrooms programme, which is a global education programme for schools. We also deliver the European Union funded school-linking programmes Comenius and e-twinning.

We are trying to do two things: to use our global work in education policy and reform to promote Scotland's excellence in education, and to offer opportunities for Scotland to learn from others. For example, in November 2012 we took people from Education Scotland to a conference in Beijing on learning for the 21st century.

The foreign language assistants programme provides opportunities for young people to work as language assistants in the UK and in 14 other countries. The aim is to improve the language ability of the assistants—the students from abroad who come here—and of the students in school, through exposure to native speakers. For us, it is important that the programme is about not just language but cultural awareness. The foreign language assistants bring their culture, their perceptions and their history and geography with them, which enriches the experience of kids in Scottish schools.

In the current school year, Scottish schools are hosting 69 foreign language assistants, which represents an increase of 11 over previous years. I will give a quick breakdown of the foreign language assistants: five teach Chinese—six, if we include independent schools; 38 teach French; 10 teach German; two teach Italian; and 13 teach Spanish. That comes to a total of 69. They are spread across Angus, the City of Edinburgh, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Orkney and South Lanarkshire councils. There is also, as I said, provision in independent schools.

We believe that those foreign language assistants are an extremely valuable resource, but their number has declined. Seven years ago, there were about 300 assistants, so there has been a marked drop. In the past year, there has been a slight increase back up to 69, which is still a low number.

The system of foreign language assistants is good for the assistants and for pupils. It works both ways; both sides win.

Language assistants also come to Scotland under the Comenius programme, although the numbers are much lower. This year, nine assistants have come from Italy, France, Spain, Slovenia, Poland, Greece and Hungary. However, that is an increase of three on 2010-11, when only six assistants came.

Clare Adamson: Is the fall in the number of foreign language assistants due to financial constraints or is it because people are choosing to go to other English-speaking countries?

Lloyd Anderson: It is due to a budgetary problem in Scotland. At the time when we had the high number of 300 language assistants, the money was ring fenced by central Government, but it has since been devolved to education authorities, so we have, with all the other pressures on their budgets, seen the money fall. Foreign language assistants are not particularly expensive, actually. It costs £1,000 a month for an assistant who can work in up to three schools, so they represent value for money.

Frances Christensen (Confucius Institute for Scotland): May I add something on Chinese language provision?

The Convener: Certainly.

Frances Christensen: I commend the British Council's foreign language assistant programme. Within the network of Confucius institutes, there are a number of schemes that see teachers coming to Scotland. Within our institute, we have seven teachers who work principally at the adult teaching level, but when we do outreach days and China workshops, they go into schools to stimulate interest in China. There is interest in Chinese language learning, but it perhaps needs more support.

I know that you will be hearing from the Confucius classrooms programme about its system with the Tianjin teachers, but something happened to me that arose from contact with students at Moray House. There are a good number of young Chinese people there who are studying for a qualification in teaching English, and some of them hold qualifications from Hanban, which is the sponsor of the network of institutes. That Hanban qualification means that they are qualified to teach Chinese language and culture. One young girl who has had that qualification for more than five years got in touch with me and said, "I am meant to go and use my training, but I've nowhere to go. Can I work with you?" I had just had an e-mail from a school in Fife, so I put the two of them together and she is going to the school once a week this term. She takes another Chinese girl with her and they are working with a class of primary 7 schoolchildren who previously had no access to Chinese language training and no cultural insight into China.

There are local opportunities to consider how we can use such links in the primary arena, at least in relation to Chinese language teaching. There is a great commitment on the part of young students to deliver that.

My concern is about the secondary level, where the General Teaching Council for Scotland qualification is a requirement.

Hanzala Malik: I am interested in the British Council's activity with regard to support for Scottish schools. You said that 69 schools are engaged in various languages. How many of them are twinned with schools overseas? Moreover, how many are twinned with schools outwith Europe? After all, we are not looking only at European languages. Your list of languages does not mention Arabic, Urdu, Punjabi or even Gaelic.

09:30

Lloyd Anderson: I should make it clear that 69 is the number of foreign language assistants who came to Scotland last year.

What you are referring to is covered by two other strands of the connecting classrooms programme, which, as I mentioned, has been designed and is funded in partnership with DFID and is managed by the British Council. We are working in more than 50 countries and the programme offers school partnerships, professional development courses, accreditation and the chance to share best practice. After the second of two application rounds that we had in the past year, we now have 51 schools that have been successful.

Under the original connecting classrooms programme, 46 Scottish schools were in partnership with one or more schools abroad. Five were connected to eight schools in India; 14 were connected to 19 schools in Bangladesh; two were connected to five in Afghanistan; three were connected with five in Pakistan; 10 were connected with Poland and Spain; five were connected with Mexico; and six were connected to schools in Malawi and Rwanda.

Under the global schools partnership, which is another part of the programme, 418 Scottish schools are in partnership with 418 schools abroad. Of those schools, 109 are in partnership with Malawi; 43 with Kenya; 18 with India; and 21 with Trinidad and Tobago. There are also 11 new Scottish school links under the new connecting classrooms programme, four of which are with India, two with South Africa, two with Ghana, one with Botswana, one with Namibia and one with Gambia. The programme is making school-to-school links worldwide to encourage pupils to become aware of schools in other countries and to provide opportunities for teacher exchange and development.

Hanzala Malik: What are the resource implications? Do the schools benefit from any resources either from you or from DFID and, if so,

what share of the UK-wide funding is allocated to Scottish engagement?

Lloyd Anderson: Scottish engagement in the connecting classrooms programme and the global schools partnership receives about 10 per cent or what you might call the population share of the funding. Schools receive money to allow the partnership to take place; the travel costs of visits are funded; and money is also available for information technology to enable schools to connect. As a result, resources are directly available to schools; in fact, we recently met teachers from around Scotland at a primary school in Glasgow to encourage more schools to take part in the connecting classrooms programme.

The problem is not so much resources as it is time. From what I have heard, teachers are saying that they have little time outwith the curriculum to develop these school links.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): Mr Anderson, you have said that foreign language assistants are value for money and have also highlighted the budgetary constraints in recent years. Can you put more flesh on those comments and tell us how important assistants are to the success of foreign language teaching in primary schools?

Lloyd Anderson: They are very important perhaps for slightly tangential reasons. From what I have seen, kids get excited and enthused by their presence. You might have, say, a French assistant talking about cooking and food, and they generally activate the kids' interest in other countries' customs, habits and culture.

You can go down one of two routes: either you make foreign languages compulsory or you enthuse and engage young people so that they become interested enough in a language to want to learn it. The unique thing about foreign language assistants is that they can pique pupils' interest in this or that country and, as a result, the pupils might want to go on and learn that country's language at a higher level.

Willie Coffey: Can you say something about Scottish children's broader experience of trying to learn another language and compare that with European or even Chinese children's experience of learning English? Perhaps European and Chinese children have more exposure to English language and culture than our own children, who might not have the same immediate experience of other European cultures and languages. How can we improve that experience in Scotland and engage parents, use social media and so on to assist our Scottish children in picking up another language more quickly?

Angeliki Petrits (European Commission): First, thank you for the invitation to give evidence.

The paradox is that, as native English speakers, Scottish children have both a huge advantage and a disadvantage. The huge advantage is that the language is so widely spoken that they can travel anywhere and do almost anything in the world; on the other hand, however, they are less exposed to other languages. As a result, you need to put more effort in and foreign language assistants present a very good opportunity in that respect.

Having been in the UK for only three and a half years, I do not have the insight of the British Council or the committee, but I was quite surprised by the discussion about generalist and specialist teachers in primary education. I remember a discussion at the language world conference in Manchester a few years ago, the conclusion of which was that it was better to keep generalist teachers and that a generalist teacher who had done a GCSE French course 20 years ago could with a few weeks' training do the job. I was a bit surprised by that. Speaking as someone who comes from a small country, is a Greek native speaker, has worked for the Commission for more than 20 years and has been exposed to all these languages, I feel that that cannot be enough. Coming back to what Luca Tomasi said about inspiring confidence in kids, I think that if you are not fluent in a language you cannot inspire anyone; doing, say, a French song for half an hour a week is simply not enough. As I said, language assistants present a very good opportunity in that respect.

Specialists could also be used. For example, language students who have had their year abroad could help teachers out with language teaching and talk to the kids about their experiences. Moreover, the fact that they are closer to the kids' age might create interest and make the approach a success.

One should explore different methods of language teaching, including the use of subtitles. I do not know whether primary school children will be able to read subtitles, but their huge advantage is that they let you listen to the foreign language. I remember how when I was a kid everything was subtitled on Greek television. I heard English all around me—even when I was learning French.

Now, thanks to social media—you even have social media websites in Chinese—groups can have debates in French, link with pupils and schools in France, Italy, Spain and Germany to organise visits and so on. When they visit each other, they become friends and want to communicate with each other. Those different methods need to be examined and more effort—more, indeed, than in other countries—needs to be made in that respect.

Lloyd Anderson: In November, we put out a press release about the fact that the lack of

language skills was limiting Scottish exports. That was on the back of a study called "Language Rich Europe—Trends in Policies and Practices for Multilingualism in Europe". The chapter on Scotland does not paint a very good picture. The primary schools look okay, but the number of people taking a foreign language at secondary school has dropped. Colleges look really woeful, and university departments are shutting.

The report says that Scottish employers are tending to circumvent rather than address the language skills need by saying that English is enough and exporting only to Anglophone countries or those where they can easily find English speakers. The lack of language provision was seen to be a barrier to export.

Willie Coffey: I hope that there is a growing awareness of the importance of European languages and Chinese in the fields of science and engineering. If people do not realise it now, they will realise soon that our scientists and engineers of the future will need some skill in another language. Do we need to do more to encourage our communities and parents to become involved in this process so that our children's experience is not just focused on the school, but comes through the home environment, social media or foreign language material on television? Do we have to broaden their involvement so that they do not experience foreign languages only in school?

Frances Christensen: There is a value in the family and the community supporting language learning, but I think that, if we rely on that, we are failing our young people. I understand that, in China and in Europe, language learning is much more immersive than it is here. We are almost tokenistic in our delivery of language provision. I was at school many years ago, so I will not cite my own experience, but when a child is trying to start learning a language, you can put them into an immersive environment and they will learn the language. However, we select only elements of that. The more that we can do using an appropriately qualified language assistant or a teacher who has a high level of language skill who can engage the children and supplement the lessons, the better.

We need to use the family and the community to create more opportunity for the language to be present in the children's lives, rather than giving them only 40 minutes of the language for the week or for those few days, but it would be wrong to use that as the fundamental part of language learning. I think that we are failing our children by not having a suitable level of provision. We have made steps towards that, but we have gone backwards because of a lack of funding, so we have lost ground in Mandarin when we should have been forging ahead.

Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): Reading the committee papers last night, I was interested in the examples of the connecting schools. It made me wonder whether there is potential for entire communities to be linked so that the kind of interaction that Willie Coffey is talking about—which involves more than just school-based teaching—can take place. Clubs and so on could be set up outside the school day that could complement what is going on in the classroom. Is there potential for that?

09:45

Lloyd Anderson: I mentioned that we had a meeting in Glasgow—I think it was at Dalmarnock primary school. The kids had put a map of the world on the wall with bits of string, each running from a country to a picture of a kid at the school. I was struck by that visual representation of the incredible range of countries from which pupils come in that one school, including Zimbabwe, Malawi, Pakistan and India. They were linking with schools in France. You are absolutely right: how do you draw in the communities that those children come from? At the moment, connecting classrooms very much concentrates on the schools, the teachers and the education.

Helen Eadie: There is potential.

Lloyd Anderson: Yes, there is potential. I would need to think about how you do that, but you see the potential in the range of countries that schools cover these days.

Luca Tomasi: The European Commission has a civil society platform on the theme of multilingualism. The report it presented in 2011 insisted on bringing the community into the school, especially for pre-primary and primary school, which, of course is essential.

There are so many aspects linked to languages, including economic growth and inclusion. It is essential for kids to see that their heritage language is valued and not associated with stigma, that there is nothing to hide from but, rather, it is something that they can be proud of. It is also essential to involve community languages in the holistic approach to language teaching at school. Of course, it is important that the teacher should be in control of those different aspects. It is also essential to have language teachers and assistants that are native speakers because it is artificial for a pupil to talk French to a teacher who is English or Scottish. They are playing a game; they are not doing the real thing because they are not communicating with a native speaker.

The fact is that we should be clear on the objective of language teaching. There are many interlinked objectives, which makes things more fascinating, but more difficult at the same time.

Jamie McGrigor: I have a couple of questions, which I will ask separately. The first is a fundamental question. How does the Scottish Government's one-plus-two proposal compare with those in other countries in Europe or beyond?

Angeliki Petrits: The proposal is the multilingualism policy of the European Union. It is both a communication and a proposal. Education is a national competence, so we cannot have any legislation imposing on member states and telling them what to do. However, we can make recommendations. Our recommendation is for mother tongue plus two other languages and that is implemented in every EU country. I do not think that there is any exception, apart from the UK.

Luca Tomasi: Ireland is an exception, too.

In 2002, member states were asked to take further action to improve the teaching of basic skills, including the teaching of at least two foreign languages from an early age. Heads of state and Government decided to do that at the meeting in Barcelona.

The fact is that the results are not that good anywhere in Europe, apart from some special countries, such as Luxembourg. Many pupils there come from Portugal and they, along with their families, are learning Luxembourgish, German and French. When they start learning English, it is their fourth language. Apart from such cases, the situation is not that good. We recently held a European survey of language competences. We published the results in 2012 but, unfortunately, not all member states took part. From the UK, only England took part. The results are not that good, for either quality or quantity, meaning that the level of the kids who took the assessment is very low—A1 or A2 under the common European framework of reference for languages. The share of pupils taking two foreign languages in addition to the main language of instruction is still very low everywhere in Europe.

We have a problem, and we must increase the number of people studying two foreign languages. It is not a theoretical objective—it is essential. These people will be on the labour market for the next 40 years, probably. We do not know whether they will need Chinese, Polish, Portuguese, Italian or other languages throughout their working life, so we must provide them with metalinguistic skills—the ability to keep learning languages and to keep adding other language competencies when they need them. It is essential that they learn more than one foreign language in order to make a difference.

Jamie McGrigor: You say that the Barcelona project does not appear to be working very well in other countries. Will there be a review as to why it is not working?

Luca Tomasi: That is a good question. One of the main reasons is that people think that English is enough—although people now realise that English is not enough. It is funny. Even in the United States, there is a growing awareness that English is not enough and that people need to learn foreign languages for many different reasons. In the United States there is a concern over security, and it is realised that people need to be able to speak Parsi, Urdu, Pashto and so on. There is also a need for people who can speak Spanish and other languages.

In New York, Mayor Bloomberg made an executive order asking the administration there to be able to communicate with the millions of people in New York who are not able to speak English well enough. It is now being realised that that is an issue there.

We are always a few decades late. However, member states are taking measures to improve the situation, because they realise that, although English is excellent for international meetings and for airports, it is not enough. If someone wants to sell to Latin America, they have to use Spanish or Portuguese.

Jamie McGrigor: My next question is about skills and resources. One of the Scottish Government languages working group's recommendations was that school teachers should have a language qualification at higher level. The Scottish Government has partly accepted that. The British Council has highlighted the decline of teacher teaching and the decline of support from local authorities, which is obviously due to funding restrictions. Should all future primary school teachers have a language qualification, as recommended by the working group? If so, at what level? How feasible is that proposal, and how long would it take to implement if we were to do that properly?

Angeliki Petrits: My answer is yes, as teachers learn maths and grammar as part of their teaching programme, they should also have a language, at least to C1 level, in order to be able to teach it in school, either alone or with a language assistant. That is my opinion. I understand, however, that there cannot be language assistants in every school. There could be a combination of the two, but I would say that teachers need to reach C1 level in order to teach a language.

Lloyd Anderson: Jamie McGrigor referred to the British Council. We think that there is a lack of qualified teachers and that that certainly is part of the problem. With Chinese—which is I think what

we were referring to—the issue is also about getting it into the mainstream curriculum, which comes back to Luca Tomasi's point. Deng Xiaoping opened the door to foreign trade with and investment in China in 1992. In 20 years, trade with China has increased dramatically and it is now the second largest economy in the world. The thinking about that, in terms of languages, is lagging far behind.

In Scotland, 6 per cent of schools teach Chinese, which means that 94 per cent do not. I looked at the American figures. The Americans are very pleased because 4 per cent of their schools teach Chinese. We should not beat ourselves up too much, but the change is very slow, compared to the speed at which trade flows are changing. We still see the dominance of French and Spanish in our languages, even though China is an important export and import destination.

Frances Christensen: I will add a clarification. My understanding is that the teaching of Chinese in schools to the level of achieving a qualification is principally in the private sector. Some state schools have made good progress—generally those that were early adopters of the Confucius classroom concept and that managed to secure and retain at least one teacher—but they are few in number. The number of pupils who are interested has dropped because there is a lack of teaching provision in secondary schools.

The 6 per cent may principally relate to the private sector. There are many opportunities to get a flavour of Chinese or do a taster course, but I would not count them and I do not know how they are quantified.

Luca Tomasi: I will come back to the question of sustainability and how we can afford things. There is of course a problem of teacher turnover here because of the need for those teachers who are already in place to do in-service retraining. New teachers certainly should be highly qualified.

There was a similar problem in eastern Europe when the switch from Russian to English happened. All of a sudden, plenty of Russian teachers were functionally unemployed and they had to retrain to teach English instead of Russian. The results were much better, even if the teachers were less good at English. The motivation for English was there and it had never been there for Russian.

Clare Adamson: I want to touch on an area that Mr Tomasi spoke about. I want to get to the philosophy of what has been proposed and the adoption of the one-plus-two model. We have taken a lot of evidence about transition issues and whether there should be a national strategy for particular languages. What I want to get to the nub of is this: if we get the one-plus-two model right in our primary schools and deliver it well, will it stand up on its own regardless of the languages that are taught?

10:00

Angeliki Petrits: All languages are accepted. It depends on the local situation. We are in Scotland, where Scots is important, for instance. It depends on the language of the neighbour and trade languages—every country is specific.

On the other hand, if I put on my employer hat, the EU has 23 official languages and 27 member states—and we will have 24 official languages when Croatia joins in July—but we have a hard time recruiting British citizens. About 4 per cent of EU employees are British citizens, but the figure should be around 14 per cent, given the population. Scotland is included in the UK, which is the member state, so I do not have figures for Scotland. One reason for that is the lack of language skills. To work for the EU, people need to have at least one foreign language, which must be one of the internal working languages of the Institution, which are English, French and German. That means that a British or Scottish person who is an English native speaker should have French or German to a good level, by which I mean being able to draft documents and speak fluently in meetings.

If someone wants to work as a linguist—as a translator, interpreter or lawyer linguist—they need two foreign languages. The second foreign language can be any other official language. There again, we have a hard time recruiting English native speakers. We keep organising competitions, but we do not have enough successful candidates for translators into English. That was not the case in the 1970s when the UK joined, but at that time languages were compulsory in schools. That is why it is important to have languages in primary school. We have to start early. If the pupils are not interested in languages, it is too late when they learn that there might be the opportunity to work for the EU one day.

That is my double answer. Any language is important but, for us, there are jobs in the European institutions for which we need British people. Because education in this country is so good, British people have all the skills, so it is a shame that they cannot work for us because of the language problem or deficit. That is a shame, because we need that input.

Luca Tomasi: The choice of language is not so much the issue. If someone learns more than one foreign language from an early age, they will be confident and will know that they can do it. I see

pupils coming out of the European schools in Brussels, and they are confident. When they choose university, they do not ask themselves whether they should go to Spain because they know Spanish or to France because they know French; they choose to go all over Europe because they know that, even if they have not studied Spanish, they will learn it, as they have already learned French, English, German or whatever.

Hanzala Malik: I was interested in the comment about employees in Europe from the United Kingdom. In Scotland, we are at a slight disadvantage, as we would have to polish up our English as well, so we are starting from a hard place as it is. Is there any positive action on employment in Europe for citizens from member nations such as the UK?

Angeliki Petrits: There is now a fast track at the FCO in London to train British citizens to pass the tests to work for European institutions. That has been done in the past and it is being done again, to prepare people and help them be successful.

Hanzala Malik: Where is that based?

Angeliki Petrits: It is in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London. You would have to contact it, although I can find out if you want.

Hanzala Malik: We would appreciate that information.

Angeliki Petrits: I can send it to the committee.

We co-operate. Two years ago, a big event was organised and David Bearfield, the director of the European personnel selection office—who is British—came. Universities were also invited, so that we could explain the possibilities and point out that we are lacking British citizens.

Hanzala Malik: We will try to help you change that.

Lloyd Anderson: Again, this is slightly to one side but, in a British Council-funded survey of business leaders by Ipsos MORI, a staggering 74 per cent of business leaders said that they could not find young people with the skills that they needed to operate on an international stage. In contrast, when students are surveyed, they see no need to know about other countries or languages. There is a huge gap between the supply and the demand.

Angeliki Petrits: At a conference, I heard an employer—I think that it was Bouygues, which is a big telecommunications company in France—say that he would value a candidate for a job in the UK who had a foreign language, which in that case would be French, although it was not advertised in the job description that French was needed. It was interesting that that employer felt that, although the employee might not need French in his everyday work, because he might work in a town in the UK that had no foreigners, the fact that he knew French or any other language would mean that he was more open to difference and more flexible. He would serve customers better, because he would be more sensitive to differences.

When people know a foreign language, they know that there are differences, different cultures and different mentalities. I had never heard before that interesting argument in favour of having another language—that it would make someone a better employee.

Roderick Campbell: I would like to talk a little about the difficulties in ensuring continuity between primary and secondary schools. Can a firm link be established between primary and secondary schools, without limiting the options that are available as extra languages? How do we approach continuity?

Luca Tomasi: There is always a trade-off between having a broad choice of languages that offers all the languages that people might want in primary school and the possibility of sustaining that in secondary school. That must be part of a strategy, which is really needed. That very much depends on what is insisted on.

Until recently, there was opposition between those who are in favour of language awareness and exposing pupils to as many languages as possible in primary school and those who support teaching languages in a proper, formal way—that is Michel Candelier against Richard Johnstone, for example. That is not a real opposition, because we can have both things at the same time. We can expose pupils to several languages, although of course that should not be 175 languages, which would just confuse them. However, we can certainly mention different languages and explain to pupils how languages deal with different linguistic categories.

If we want students to reach a decent level by the end of compulsory education, it is important that languages are not dropped at the end of primary school. Getting a decent level of foreign languages for everybody at the end of compulsory education is a question of equity. All over Europe, that is becoming a luxury. People who are well off can send their children to the UK or Ireland for their holidays and can afford private classes, whereas others are left with what schools can provide. That is rather unfair.

It is essential to have a strategy for teaching languages in primary and secondary school. Of course, what is provided cannot be the same, and people move around. Choices have to be made.

One school might provide only English, French and Spanish, while another might provide German, Polish and Chinese. When parents move, pupils have to adapt and find a way of picking up what they have lost. The same applies when pupils move from primary to secondary school. That will never be very easy or a seamless transition. I think that the reform that is planned in Scotland is excellent—it is very good news—but it should be combined with something else in secondary school.

Lloyd Anderson: I add that, in England, in evidence to a consultation on a draft order to make foreign languages a statutory subject at key stage 2, the British Council made the point that the difficulties with the transition from primary to secondary school are caused by inconsistent foreign language teaching at primary level. It was thought that making foreign language teaching compulsory at key stage 2 would save time that a secondary school would otherwise have to spend at key stage 3 to bring all pupils up to the same standard in the foreign language that was to be taught at that stage. However, if only one foreign language was taught at key stage 2, that benefit would not be realised unless all pupils learned the same foreign language, which was not what was being proposed.

Therefore, the conclusion was that, under those circumstances, the compulsory teaching of a single but unspecified foreign language at key stage 2 would be unlikely to achieve the stated aim of easing the transition to secondary school. The British Council's proposal was that it was more a question of giving pupils at primary school linguistic ability than it was of seeing such teaching as a starting point for learning a specific language at an earlier stage, which I think is the issue that we have been discussing.

Roderick Campbell: Do you think that it would be better to manage that transition at a local level or throughout Scotland?

Luca Tomasi: In my view, it must be managed at local level, but with a general policy for the country.

Every pupil will have different linguistic needs in their further life. Ideally, every pupil should be able to progress and to take up different language competencies at a different speed, but no one can afford that. It would be nice if that were possible. New technologies make that possible to an extent—they can provide extra teaching of languages, extra opportunities and extra exposure to foreign languages that would have been unthinkable 10 years ago—but what can be done in the classroom is limited. I think that it is better to have a reasonable choice of languages in primary school rather than have an extravagant choice in primary school and then reduce that to a very limited offering in secondary school.

The Convener: I think that Jamie McGrigor has a supplementary.

Jamie McGrigor: You talked about the Comenius assistants. How can we reverse the trend of one-way traffic of FLAs, so that more FLAs come to Scotland to work?

Lloyd Anderson: You are absolutely right that the number of English language assistants who go abroad is much higher than the number of foreign language assistants who come here. It is a budgetary problem at the level of the education authorities. They would need to put up more money to encourage more foreign language assistants to come.

Jamie McGrigor: You made the point that you thought that FLAs are very good value.

Lloyd Anderson: Yes, I do.

Jamie McGrigor: Everyone seems to think that the use of assistants is a great idea, so how can we encourage it?

Lloyd Anderson: I do not know the mechanism by which we can make that happen; we just need to encourage education authorities to ring fence some of their budget for it.

10:15

Luca Tomasi: In the new education and culture programme for 2014 to 2020 that we are discussing with the European Parliament and the Council, which might be called Erasmus for all, there will probably be much more money for mobility, including for language assistants. That could help to facilitate language assistants and Comenius assistants coming here.

Lloyd Anderson: Another way of dealing with it is to reverse what has happened, bring back a centrally funded option and ring fence the money.

Jamie McGrigor: In some countries, language tuition starts before children go to school. Is that a good approach, and is there a place for it in Scotland?

Luca Tomasi: It is definitely a good approach. We published a policy handbook in 2011 on language teaching at pre-primary level. Of course, there are always conditions. We have to approach it in the proper way. We cannot expect to teach languages in a formal way to pupils at pre-primary level. We have to involve them in games and sing songs. However, the results are excellent.

The younger kids are, the easier it is for them to learn languages. When we are born, we are able to learn all languages in a wonderful way, and then we restrict our ability to learn languages as

we grow older. We can keep on learning languages as adults, but in a different way, because we learn through grammar, rules and exercises. If we can take advantage of the ability of young people to learn languages, that is excellent. We have to train people to teach and encourage language acquisition at an early age, but that can certainly be done in Scotland—why not?

Jamie McGrigor: Is there a simple method for parents to help in that respect?

Luca Tomasi: Yes. It is mainly a question of motivation. The problem is that, in the UK and particularly in Scotland, common sense tells parents that they never needed languages so why should their kids need them? Luckily, however, attitudes are changing everywhere, including in Scotland, and parents can certainly help a lot.

I was a lector of Italian in Oxford 30 years ago, and when I asked the people at the nursery school where I put my child what I should do for English, they told me, "You can shut up. We do the English teaching. You speak Italian to him." If possible, young people should be exposed to native speakers of different languages. Parents can help, but only to a limited extent if they are not fluent in the foreign language.

The Convener: Helen Eadie has a supplementary question.

Helen Eadie: Does the European Commission have a register of all the funding applications that have come from Scotland in connection with programmes to assist with the training that we are discussing? Could you share that information with us?

Luca Tomasi: I must ask. The information is probably held by country, but I am not sure that it is held by region. However, I will inquire and let the clerk know.

Helen Eadie: When you provide that information, can you also give us information on any funding programmes that are available but have not been applied for?

Luca Tomasi: Yes.

The Convener: I want to ask about how other EU member states fund language learning in schools. Here, it is funded through Government and local authorities, with partners in key areas. Could you give us an insight into how other EU states fund their language learning?

Angeliki Petrits: Language is like any other basic skill. The way maths is funded, languages are funded. It is considered a basic skill, especially English. There is no specific funding for languages. They are considered to be important, so they are like the other subjects.

Luca Tomasi: Until the end of February, you can still apply for a language-specific key activity under the lifelong learning programme. Under the new programme, however, there will be no language-specific action, and languages will have to compete with all other subjects.

The main condition is that Europe finances initiatives with a European dimension—they are never just for Scotland, England or wherever. There is always a combination of different countries applying, with beneficiaries and promoters from different countries taking part.

The Convener: I think that we have a final round of questions from Willie Coffey.

Willie Coffey: My questions have been asked, so I am happy to leave it at that.

The Convener: Are there any other quick questions? We are just about out of time.

Is there anything that you would like to add?

Lloyd Anderson: I have a list of the 30 Scottish schools that are involved in multilateral Comenius agreements, if that is of any help.

The Convener: That would be helpful.

Angeliki Petrits: My role in the UK is to promote language learning. We liaise with different stakeholders throughout the country to foster language learning. We work with CILT—we work with SCILT in Scotland, but more with CILT in England—and with universities for routes into languages through different organisations. We take part in fairs, we talk to kids, we go to universities and so on. We organise various events. You know that we are there, and if you need support, we are happy to help.

Frances Christensen: Chinese is clearly one of the harder languages to learn, as is acknowledged in studies. It takes longer to acquire the four skills. Early learning of Chinese would be hugely welcome.

As far as investment is concerned, Scotland has more Confucius institutes per head of population than any other country in the world. They are funded by an offshoot of the ministry of education, Hanban. We are in a unique position. If we can garner our resources in such a way as to use the Hanban resources and the commitment that has been shown to Scotland at least to bring Chinese to the level of the European languages, we can affect the economic future of our country greatly.

The Convener: Thank you for your evidence, which has been enlightening for us. The additional information that you have offered to give us will be extremely helpful for our deliberations. We will have representatives of local authorities coming before us soon, and the minister will be coming in April. The evidence will inform our questions to the

people at the delivery end, and it has been very helpful. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much.

10:23

Meeting suspended.

10:31

On resuming—

"Brussels Bulletin"

The Convener: Welcome back. We will move swiftly on to agenda item 4, which is the "Brussels Bulletin". As usual, Dr Ian Duncan will talk us through the bulletin, then questions will follow from colleagues.

Ian Duncan (Clerk and European Officer): There are four broad issues that I want to touch on briefly. I have also given members an additional paper, which was written by Fabian Zuleeg, the chief economist of the European Policy Centre, who spoke to the committee previously. That is a taste of a more thorough paper, which will be coming to the committee shortly, about the multi-annual financial framework negotiations. That is important; the title of Fabian Zuleeg's paper gives it away—"Horse-trading Europe's long-term future? Will infrastructure and research investment be sacrificed in the MFF negotiations?" It is worth reading the paper. The report states:

> "France, as well as Mediterranean, Central and Eastern European countries benefiting from the traditionally large areas of EU spending, in particular the Common Agricultural Policy and the Cohesion/Structural Funds, demanded further protection of these areas. This form of negotiation turns the budget into a zero sum game—and something will have to give."

The fear is that it will be the infrastructure and research part of the budget that has to give.

I will touch briefly on fisheries. I am sure that members will have read in the papers that the European Parliament's fisheries committee yesterday reached agreement on its report into the common fisheries policy. There are a couple of big things to note. The report calls for a discard ban within three years, which will be important; a move away from the quota-allocation system towards the maximum sustainable yield approach; and a move towards regional management. It is important to note that that is only one side of the co-decision process; the council has yet to come back with what it wants to achieve. Without the detail, quite a few of those things seem slightly aspirational. For example, regional management is a great title, but the test will be how regional management is to be delivered.

I have provided in the bulletin clickable links that give the full timetable on each of the components of the CFP, so members can look at those, should they want to dig into the topics a bit further.

Mackerel is an issue that Hanzala Malik has been tracking for some time. There was a lot of interest in the press on the issue after the committee's previous meeting. Members will have noticed in the bulletin that Richard Lochhead, the

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, has tried to progress the issue by calling for an international figure to step into the negotiations.

I will say a couple of things by way of background. I was in Brussels last week chatting to various people, and the reality seems to be that nothing will happen this year—that is the feeling among the people who are involved in the discussions. There are several reasons for that, including the fact that the upcoming Icelandic election will stop things progressing, and the Norwegian election at the back end of the year will also be a factor. As I said at the previous meeting—I want to be clear on this—there is a bigger issue around importing of Icelandic fish into the north-east of England; that is another angle on the matter. The imports are less into Scotland and more into the north-east of England. It is a problem.

At the moment, the Icelandic fisheries minister has imposed what he is terming a "unilateral" cut, and is matching the 15 per cent cut that the EU and Norway have previously agreed. Iceland will impose a 15 per cent cut in its own fishing but—this is why it is slightly meaningless—Iceland caught 2,000 tonnes of mackerel in 2011 and 146,000 tonnes in 2012, so a 15 per cent cut from 146,000 tonnes is not that significant a cut when, not so long ago, the total catch was only 2,000 tonnes. You can immediately see why there is a bigger issue about conservation, and why Marine Stewardship Council accreditation was lost; the stock is no longer safely being harvested within the limits that were set by the scientists.

Progress will be slow on the matter. That is not to say that we are not going to continue to push for more information from all the people from whom we need to get it, but that is the background from my trip to Brussels.

Hanzala Malik: I find it ironic that Scottish fishermen and their families sacrificed much of their industry in trying to save those stocks but those stocks are now being gobbled up by others. There is a moral issue here. The European Union has a responsibility to safeguard our fish. We did what the EU asked us to do; now, it needs to do what we ask it to do, which is to protect our stocks. The committee must take action. We should speak to the cabinet secretary so that we can do more than just allow the European Union to let the issue roll on without end. On the political niceties, we will have to swallow our pride and deal with the issue. If that means upsetting people, so be it. We cannot afford such wholesale capture of those fish, considering that we made the sacrifice in the first instance.

Ian Duncan: You have summed up the problem perfectly. The sacrifices that people in the north-east made were great. A fully sustainable fishery was created out of those sacrifices, to the extent that it was accredited by an international body as being harvested according to the sustainability rules. Now, their good work is being undone, and that is a travesty. We can make more approaches to the Scottish Government, which is fully on board with this—there is no closed door there.

The Convener: For the sake of protocol and politeness, we should check what other committees are doing. I think that a bit of work is being done in this regard.

Members *indicated agreement.*

Jamie McGrigor: On Hanzala Malik's point, with which I absolutely agree, surely the difficulty is that the sanctions would hit our demersal fishermen and processors—the white-fish processors—very hard as they depend on so much white fish coming in from Iceland and the Faroes. If we have a ban, we will be cutting off our nose to spite our face.

Hanzala Malik: With all due respect, I am not saying what we should suggest to the Government; I am suggesting only that we need to address the matter. It is a question of what measures our Government deems fit and proper. That is the line I would take. We should not necessarily go down the ban route.

Ian Duncan: That is absolutely right. Imports of white fish are important to the UK and are processed primarily in the north of England. Most fish fingers are made from cod from Icelandic waters, I imagine, although I do not know for certain. The principal export of Iceland is fish and fish-related products. The second export is raw aluminium. Its balance of exports is 40 per cent fish and 30 per cent aluminium.

Jamie McGrigor: I have one more question. I am sorry to bang on about this. You spoke about the discard ban, which everybody has been asking for, except Scottish fishermen, who do not want a complete discard ban, do they?

Ian Duncan: I think that Scottish fishermen are fearful that a ban that was not implemented well would have perverse and unintended consequences. As members know well, Scottish fishermen have gone far in that direction and have worked to demonstrate their efforts through use of on-board cameras and real-time recording. They want to ensure that the discard ban is right and functional rather than its just being adopted in order to get the headlines. I do not think that they are in any way against the ban. They, too, see the wrongness of discards, but they want to ensure that the ban does not just lead to a quick headline or is unworkable.

Jamie McGrigor: I presume that there must be a market for what will be kept that has not been kept in the past.

Ian Duncan: Yes. If a zero-discards policy is imposed, all that is harvested from the sea must be landed and something done with it. That calls into question what market would be used. Much would not be processed through the domestic consumption market but would go to other parts of the fish processing and fishmeal markets and so forth. The issue must be resolved.

The hope is that fishermen would, by the imposition of such a ban, be discouraged from harvesting too much. As you can imagine, that is difficult because a net is put in the water—it is not as if fish are being picked out of a tree—and fishermen must rely on their skills and cannot be certain what they will pull out of the water. There are challenges. Members will be aware that the discards figure in some fisheries is about 25 per cent of the fish that are taken from the sea. Those fish return to the water dead.

Willie Coffey: I hope that the committee is fully supportive of Richard Lochhead, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, in his long attempts to press the case for the Scottish fishing industry not only in Europe, but with the UK Government.

Why are we in this position? Is there any scientific basis to justify one side of the argument against the other? On the face of it, it seems ridiculous for Iceland to go, in a year, from catching 2,000 tonnes to catching 146,000 tonnes, which it would no doubt say it could justify on the basis of evidence. Where is the scientific evidence? Is there no common framework in Europe to establish the scientific evidence to formulate a sustainable policy with our partners in Iceland.

Ian Duncan: I imagine that somebody could write a small book in answer to that. I will roughly sketch out the position. Is there science to support what Iceland is doing? No. However, Iceland would contend that its science supports its position. Whose science is bigger depends on your persuasion.

The big difference is that, in the past, because there were no or few mackerel in Iceland's water, Iceland was entirely indifferent to the stock and therefore did not sign up to the agreement at the time, which would have meant that it was a major player in the allocation. The agreement is governed through the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which sets out the negotiation structure.

What seems to have happened between about 2010 and today is that the migrating patterns of mackerel have shifted. Previously, there were almost no fish in Iceland's waters, whereas now they are in those waters for a part of their migration cycle. Iceland's argument is that something has changed and therefore something must be done to address that to its benefit. You can see Iceland's logic, which is that fish are now in its waters. The bigger issue, of course, is that when the fish are in its waters, they are not at their best. That poorer-quality mackerel is being harvested in great quantities, the markets are being flooded and prices are being undercut. There are lots of tangles and issues.

There is no doubt that there is no science to support that level of take from the sea and the actions of the Icelandic fishermen or Government. The fear is that the stock could collapse in a short time.

Willie Coffey: You referred to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment's request for a mediator to intervene. Is that progressing? Is there a basis for putting scientific evidence at the heart of mediation in order to persuade both parties to agree?

Ian Duncan: The cabinet secretary made that request at the fisheries council last week. There is recognition that something must be done to break the logjam. The slight concern relates to other domestic issues; for example, the election in Iceland will mean that nothing will happen before the election because no one will come forward and take any hits or make any moves in that direction.

The claim is that Iceland has acted to create, in a sense, a background. It is almost as though it has harvested a titanic fishery as much as possible in order to be able to say that it can cut that amount by 50 per cent and show that it has made a big sacrifice, but still have more than it had before.

The Norwegian election will slow things down, too, because its politicians do not want to be seen to be giving anything away before an election. To some extent, politics in other parts of the north-east Atlantic will intervene with a swift solution. Richard Lochhead's intervention was sound and sure, and there is no doubt that what he proposed would help, but solutions may unfortunately hang on elections elsewhere.

10:45

Roderick Campbell: I will be brief, because my questions have largely been dealt with. Further to what Willie Coffey said, I remind Hanzala Malik of the good efforts that Richard Lochhead has made, but when it comes to getting tough at state-to-state level, that is obviously the role of the UK, and there is a limit to how much our cabinet secretary can do.

I have a question about domestic politics in Iceland. Post the election, are any of the Icelandic political parties likely to give ground on the issue? I accept that that is a matter of speculation.

Ian Duncan: It is a challenge. The major industry of Iceland is fish and every aspect of fish, so it is woven through every one of the political parties to be defenders of the fishing industry. Iceland would argue that the policy that it has adopted—certainly with regard to its white-fish industry—has been better than the CFP. The CFP has not been a success, as everyone happily concedes. It is extremely hard for the Icelandic fishermen to agree to follow the EU's rules when they have not been that successful to date. Curiously enough, the mackerel fishery is the exception to that—it is sustainably managed.

No Icelandic party will give any ground before the election. It is to be hoped that, after the election, Iceland will accept a significant cut to what is a titanic fishery. According to the original agreement, its share of the fishery is marginal. It would like to have about 17 per cent of the fishery. To bring that about, primarily Scottish and Norwegian fishermen would have to sacrifice their entitlement. Progress will be more difficult this year because all the quotas have been allocated. For matters to progress, quota would have to be withdrawn from people, thereby slightly gumming up the works. That is not to say that such things cannot be done; it is just that it will be a challenge to do them.

The Convener: Will you go through the rest of the bulletin?

Ian Duncan: I put in quite a bit of information on the common agricultural policy. Members will be pleased to hear that more than 7,000 amendments have been proposed to the original document, which is quite a significant number.

There are a couple of issues to which I draw the committee's attention. A 25 per cent bonus on direct payments to farmers who are under 40 has been recommended, which is aimed at encouraging younger people to come into farming. That will be quite important. In addition, adjustments have been proposed to the way in which subsidies are given to larger farms.

An important development that often gets lost in discussion of the CAP is the move towards equity between the new member states in the east of Europe and the existing member states, which will mean that the existing member states—to France's frustration—will get less money and the new member states will get more. That has gone through. I included the statistic that in countries such as Latvia, farmers get 33 per cent of the EU average, so they get the fuzzy end of the lolly in comparison with those countries in the west that are better at negotiating.

Another small point to note relates to the transposition of EU law. We often get information from the Scottish Government about how well the Scottish and UK Governments are doing in transposing EU law. The Scottish Government is very good at that, but the Government in Northern Ireland has dropped the ball slightly with regard to the implementation of the provisions of the EU electricity and gas market rules. The bulletin gives an idea of what happens when a country does that. The European Court of Justice will be requested by the Commission

"to impose a daily penalty payment of €148,177.92 on the UK".

The UK will have to pay that and will claim it back from Northern Ireland. That is a reminder that if a country does not transpose EU law, it ends up sacrificing a lot of money per day.

I am happy to take questions on any of those bits and pieces.

The Convener: The negotiations on the EU budget are happening now. Do you have any intelligence on how they are progressing?

Ian Duncan: They are literally happening now—there is a meeting today. There is a lot of speculation about what the budget will look like. The reality is that ground will have to be given. There is a tension between those who are net contributors to the budget and those who are net recipients. As members will appreciate—I pointed this out—there is some concern that the things that we think are important, such as infrastructure projects, connecting Europe and the horizon 2020 project, could all be sacrificed as member states solidify their support for the CAP. France is determined that the CAP should not fall. If the CAP—which accounts for about 40 per cent of the budget—does not fall and the budget is capped or reduced, something will have to give. The fear is that what will give is funding for things that one might contend—although the French might disagree—that the EU could most do with investing in.

The committee will get a full report on that at the next meeting. I have given a taster, because I knew that I would not have picked up enough information to give you a full rundown of the issue this week.

Jamie McGrigor: I imagine that the cap on payments to enormous farms, which receive huge subsidies, will save an enormous amount of money. As far as you know, will that money go back into the CAP pot?

Ian Duncan: The top-level figure is set in the multi-annual financial framework discussions. After

that, the allocations are sorted out. If less money is spent on one aspect of farming, the money will remain in the overall allocation for farming, so it can be spent on different areas.

Jamie McGrigor: An important point for a lot of hill farmers is that

"The report determined that farms with under 10 hectares of arable land should be exempt"

from the greening policies. That will affect a lot of Scotland.

Ian Duncan: You will remember that, when CAP was discussed earlier, the big move was to make it a very green CAP. However, it seemed that doing so would impose restrictions and rules that would have created a lot of bureaucracy for very small farmers, who do not have the capacity, time or effort for that.

Jamie McGrigor: It seems as though Europe has listened for once.

Ian Duncan: It does—absolutely.

Roderick Campbell: I will discuss plan bee. I understand that only about 1 per cent of all the pesticides that are used in Scotland are neonicotinoids—I hope that I have pronounced that right. How likely is the expert committee to agree on a ban—I understand that there is still a divergence of opinion—that the Commission can bring into action by 1 July? Is that still contentious or is it likely to go through?

Ian Duncan: I think that the measure will go through. You are right that the use of such pesticides is limited in Scotland, but they are big in England. There is no doubt that the UK Government is lukewarm about pushing the measure forward. However, it is recognised more widely across Europe that bees are an integral part of the farming world, so something needs to be done, and a body of research suggests that a link exists.

Because the proposal is going to an expert group, it is proceeding in a different way, so it does not have to go through all the hoops that would normally apply to legislation. There is every possibility that a ban could be adopted by the summer, which would be in time for the bee season.

The Convener: On gender balance, we should recognise that the published figures show that the percentage of women on boards of publicly listed companies has risen from 13.7 per cent in January 2012 to 15.8 per cent, which represents the highest year-on-year increase. I see that conversations about setting an objective of a 40 per cent minimum are on-going. We should recognise the slight rise but also recognise that the boards of 25 per cent of the EU's largest companies still have no female representation. We should keep highlighting the issue.

Ian Duncan: Absolutely. You will recall from previous discussions that the desire to create a stronger legal base for progress was not warmly welcomed across the EU, so the push became far less strong. The highest year-on-year increase is commendable, but 15.8 per cent is not very high in comparison with the expectation of 40 per cent. The highest figure that has been achieved would need to be doubled to get to what is thought to be a sensible place to be. A lot of progress has yet to be made.

The Convener: A lot of work has to be done.

Another point to recognise in the "Brussels Bulletin" is that Latvia has passed a law to adopt the euro. I applaud Latvia's optimism and wish it well.

Roderick Campbell: I do not want to dabble too much in Latvian domestic politics, but is the fact that Estonia has the euro a consideration?

Ian Duncan: Yes, it probably is a consideration. All the Baltic states planned to join broadly about the same time. Estonia made good progress before the financial crisis appeared on the horizon. At that point, the other Baltic states slowed down and reduced the energy with which they were pushing forward. Estonia was already within the euro zone. Latvia's economy is now very successful and is showing significant growth, so the country feels ready to adopt a currency that will help it in the wider markets. You are right that there is a lot of intra-Baltic competition to push these things forward.

Jamie McGrigor: On that issue, does Croatia have the euro yet?

Helen Eadie: It is not in the EU yet.

Ian Duncan: Not yet, but it is committed to joining.

Jamie McGrigor: No—it is in the EU, but not the euro zone.

Helen Eadie: No, it is not. It joins the EU in July.

The Convener: It joins on 1 July.

Ian Duncan: Croatia's arrival in the EU is on 1 July, and it has made a commitment to join the euro.

Helen Eadie: It uses the euro, though.

Ian Duncan: Yes, in effect it does, but it is not formally a member.

Jamie McGrigor: But it does not use the euro at the moment.

Helen Eadie: It does. I have been to Croatia, and the euro is used extensively.

Ian Duncan: That is informal.

Jamie McGrigor: It still has its own currency.

Helen Eadie: It is not a member of the EU, but it uses the euro.

Ian Duncan: The Balkan states have unusual currencies.

The Convener: A number of countries that are not in the euro zone use the euro.

Jamie McGrigor: So they use both?

The Convener: Yes.

Ian Duncan: There are certainly some that use the dollar, although it may sound strange.

The Convener: When I was in Montenegro last year, I could have used a number of currencies, and people were very receptive to them all.

Ian Duncan: Yes. The reality is that people want to use currencies that are worth something.

The Convener: Yes—if it is a fully transferable currency such as the euro, the dollar or, dare I say it, sterling or the yen.

If that is everything on the "Brussels Bulletin", are members content to pass it on to relevant committees for consideration and to highlight the point about fisheries to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Horizon 2020

10:56

The Convener: Item 5 is horizon 2020, on which we have a detailed paper, which is the first update from the Scottish Government. Following publication of the committee's report on horizon 2020 in 2012, the Government agreed to provide updates on the issue. Do members have any comments on the update?

Helen Eadie: It is a huge paper. I think that the Government was trying to drown us in paperwork. Perhaps we could return to the issue at another meeting, because I did not get through it all. I read the other papers, but not this one. It is very small print, too. It will need a lot of digesting, so perhaps we could come back to it.

The Convener: When I discussed the paper with the clerks at the beginning of the week, the suggestion was that we should thank the Scottish Government for such a detailed contribution but perhaps suggest that we have a more summarised version in future. However, you are absolutely right that we should perhaps take a more detailed look at it later.

Helen Eadie: I am not complaining—it is wonderful that the Government is willing to give us the information—but we just could not digest it in the time between receiving the paper and today. The issue is not even digesting it; it is just being able to read it all.

The Convener: Perhaps we should get another slot at a future meeting to consider the paper, to give us a bit more time. Are members happy with that?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Are there any other comments on the paper?

Ian Duncan: For a future meeting, we can bring members a more synthesised or summarised version. With the next instalment from the Government, we will suggest that it might wish to give us a more synthesised version in the first place.

Helen Eadie: It is important and helpful to have the paper, so I do not diminish or criticise in any way. I am just saying that the practical reality for members is that we have not had time to read it all. I would value the chance to consider the paper again at another meeting.

The Convener: We will consider it at a future meeting.

We agreed at the beginning of the meeting to take item 6 in private. I thank the members of the public for attending.

10:59

Meeting continued in private until 11:25.

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