



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Thursday 18 April 2013

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EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE
7th 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:

Dr Alasdair Allan (Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages)

Sue Langlands (Scottish Government)

Tim Simons (Scottish Government)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Jim Johnston

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

European and External Relations Committee

Thursday 18 April 2013

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 09:02*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Christina McKelvie): Good morning and welcome to the seventh meeting of the European and External Relations Committee in 2013. I make the usual request for all electronic devices to be switched off—otherwise, the broadcasting people will not be very happy.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on whether to take item 6 in private. Do colleagues agree to do that?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Foreign Language Learning in Primary Schools Inquiry

09:02

The Convener: Item 2 is our foreign language learning in primary schools inquiry. One of our committee members, Helen Eadie, will give us feedback on her visit to Donibristle primary school.

Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): It was a welcome if belated visit—we were quite late in the programme of visits to schools—but we were pleased to meet the enthusiastic teachers, and we captured the fact that they are very much encouraged by the prospects of more developments in this area.

The school has a high proportion of teachers who were trained under the modern languages in primary schools initiative in French and German. They highlighted the point that, for some of them, a significant period has elapsed since that training. Some teachers at Donibristle, like those at many other schools in Scotland, are not MLPS trained, but they teach languages nevertheless, because they have the expertise.

The issue of continuity from primary school to secondary school was raised, as it was in other evidence that the committee has heard, although Donibristle has not experienced any problems of transition for those children who wish to carry on with their language training when they move to secondary school. The staff mentioned, however, that the local secondary school might move its emphasis to Spanish. When my daughters were at that school, it taught German and French. It is interesting to note that Spanish is not taught at the primary school, so that is clearly an issue.

The teachers noted a great variation in the levels of language skills in the primary school cluster feeding into the local secondary school. They find it frustrating that pupils with more advanced knowledge from Donibristle could be held back by those from other schools with lesser abilities. I take it that that issue applies in other areas across Scotland. The local secondary school has an arrangement to allow a specialist languages secondary teacher to work with Donibristle pupils, which everyone finds helpful.

The teachers highlighted some particular issues. In recent years, the local authority began a policy of having composite classes to save resources, which has made the class teaching much more challenging. Foreign language students assisted the language teachers in previous years, which the teachers found very beneficial.

Languages are taught with some level of immersion. For example, primary 7 created a

French cafe when students were studying the topic of food. The teachers thought that the immersion technique is important, and that it is more purposeful and effective. We have also heard about that in evidence from witnesses. However, that is challenging in what is an overcrowded curriculum, which the teachers felt is an issue.

The Donibristle teachers liked a model that is used in Canada, where teachers can take one year out in every five to work abroad, learn new skills and travel. Their pay is lower overall, however, with four years' pay being spread over five years. That is an interesting example that the teachers highlighted for us. The Donibristle teachers felt that that lower pay is more than compensated for by the ability to recharge and learn new skills in that year off. As we know, everyone faces the possibility of burn-out, especially in the teaching profession and some other more intense professions. The teachers felt that that option is an interesting one, and I think that they would like it to be developed here.

The teachers also supported a pilot at another Scottish school for introducing Latin, on the basis that it encourages the learning of language structure. They emphasised that Latin is at the root of many languages across Europe.

On input from the community, the teachers felt that parents do not have a great deal of input into language classes, unlike the examples that you came across on your visit, convener. Parents are involved in other types of classes, however, and they have often helped to promote cultural events such as Diwali or Chinese new year.

A wide range of nationalities and languages are represented by the school pupils and their parents, including Polish, Russian, Hungarian, Norwegian, Mexican, Urdu and Welsh—as well as Scottish. The teachers said that parents often discourage children from speaking in their mother tongue if it is not English, as they believe that speaking English is more important.

I discussed the Scottish Government's one-plus-two language proposals with the teachers, who thought that they will have a great impact on what training is provided, especially to new teachers. The teachers thought that having trained teachers delivering their own language class is a more effective way of language teaching than having a peripatetic specialist, as permanent teachers have a better knowledge of their class.

The issue of European Union funding was raised. The teachers thought that knowledge of EU-funded opportunities is usually acquired randomly, with no systematic, universal approach. That is perhaps something to feed back to the Scottish Government, as it is an issue. The

teachers were not aware of the information from the British Council. One teacher had been on an EU-funded visit to France for a teacher training course through an opportunity that was highlighted by *Le Français en Ecosse*. She described the application form as difficult, however, and she gave up a week of her holidays to go so that the school did not have the problem of back-filling her post.

The visit was very helpful. Although it was late on in the programme of visits, it was very useful. I thank Jenny Goldsmith in particular for coming with me and helping me with the visit.

The Convener: Thank you. Does anyone have any questions for Helen?

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): Did the school use any particular information technology equipment to assist the teaching of languages?

Helen Eadie: They did not show us any and I do not recollect them talking about it, but I am sure that it is one of those things that just did not come up in the conversation. If it is of special interest to you, we can always make contact with the school and ask about that.

Willie Coffey: Thank you.

The Convener: Thank you for your feedback, Helen. I know that you said that it is late in the inquiry, but it is still valuable feedback because we have a patchwork across the country of different bits of information that schools have or do not have—it is helpful to see that and incorporate it into the recommendations that we will make.

Helen Eadie: They were enthusiastic but they recognised the challenges that there are.

The Convener: Item 3 is also on the foreign language learning in primary schools inquiry. We are delighted to have on our panel Dr Alasdair Allan, who is the Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages. I could see your brows knit together, minister, when you heard about the teaching of Scots so maybe we will hear something from you on that. I also welcome the minister's supporting officials: Tim Simons, who is head of the curriculum unit in the Scottish Government; and Sue Langlands, who is head of the languages team in the curriculum unit. We will go straight to questions, unless the minister has some brief words to say.

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): I thank the committee for the opportunity to be here to talk about the learning and teaching of languages in Scotland's schools. I am aware that your inquiry has received a great deal of interest and comment in the media and beyond. I am pleased about that because, needless to say, in

the world we live in the importance of languages must not be underestimated.

As somebody who has quite an interest in languages in general—you alluded to that, convener—I believe that the case for more language learning is self-evident. An ability and a willingness to pick up other languages is hugely beneficial to young people, both culturally and economically in their future lives. There is plenty of evidence that multilingual young people have a competitive advantage in the job market. That is true of global companies that need to be able to do business around the world; it is also increasingly true of the job market within Scotland, which we often forget. A job may well go to somebody who happens to have an ability in languages because of that competitive advantage—because of their ability to converse in another language, whether it be German or Polish, or to make a phone call in Spanish.

I believe that now is the time to create a cultural and educational environment that attracts children and young people to learn other languages and, crucially, to expect it to be the norm. The Government, as ever, is determined to be ambitious—and being ambitious is a good thing. We had a manifesto commitment to create the conditions in which every child would learn two languages in addition to their mother tongue. It is vital that children are given such opportunities and the report of the languages working group presented strong arguments for giving children the opportunity to learn languages at a very early age.

The Government agrees with the working group and will strive to make it possible for young people to start to learn a second language from at least primary 1 and to learn a further language from primary 5 onwards. I acknowledge that delivering additional languages from primary 1 is a bold and ambitious objective. There will be significant challenges for schools, but it can be done. Some schools are already providing such early access to language learning. I visited schools such as Sacred Heart primary in Glasgow, where I saw deeply committed staff teaching not one but four languages, with all pupils learning at least one language from primary 1. I know from what we have just heard from Mrs Eadie that the committee has visited many such committed schools around the country.

As a Government, we certainly recognise that an earlier start to language learning might raise challenges for a school's capacity to deliver. Some teachers might not have language training while others might wish to update those skills, so it will be essential for local authorities to provide an accurate picture of their existing provision and to use that to plan ahead. The policy is a national one, but it is clear that its successful

implementation will depend on local authorities' drive and determination to make it a reality. I do not see local authorities being passive consumers of the policy—from all that I can see, they are active and enthusiastic partners in its development.

09:15

There has been a lot of discussion about funding for languages policy, and I am sure that there will be more of that today. I take the opportunity to clarify what the £4 million that has been allocated for this budget year is for. Some witnesses who have given evidence to the committee have referred to the £4 million as being

“a drop in the ocean”—[*Official Report, European and External Relations Committee*, 7 March 2013; c 994.]

and have said that more is needed to implement the policy. Interestingly, no one has been able to put a monetary value on what amount of money would be enough. I suspect that that is partly because we are not starting from scratch. As Mr Coffey pointed out, we are not suddenly bringing languages into primary schools where there has previously been no provision. Crucially, we are not suddenly bringing teachers into primary schools where teachers have been a novelty.

We know that there is a lot of good practice in learning out there. To be clear, the £4 million is initial funding for local authorities to start to take forward our aims—it is equivalent to and in addition to the previous languages fund, which local authorities continue to receive in their funding package. The aim is to support local authorities to deliver the commitment over two parliamentary sessions—that is, by 2020.

Local authorities are best placed to decide how to spend the additional £4 million this year. It could be used for training teachers or creating opportunities for teachers, or for foreign language assistants. It is for each education authority to make those decisions. Feedback on how the money is deployed in 2013-14 will be important in determining what funding is needed in subsequent years.

Our commitment to an ambitious—I use that word again—new direction in language learning sends a very strong signal that Scotland is open to business and to the world. I hope that that ambition excites and engages not only those who have an interest in language learning but everyone who wants the best for our young people.

The Convener: Thanks very much for that, minister.

You have answered my first two questions—

Dr Allan: I apologise.

The Convener: Thank you for that.

I would like to open out one of the questions and the answer that you gave to it. Many people said that the funding was not sufficient and commented on how it should be spent, from training teachers to providing materials. I welcome your remarks on that. Given that local authorities have ultimate control over how the money is spent, some of the witnesses had concerns about whether it would be ring fenced and channelled towards language learning. There was concern that if the money goes into the general local authority pot, it will not reach its final destination, which is to be used to teach our young people languages. Can you give us an insight into that?

Dr Allan: Local authorities have the enthusiasm to pursue language learning in primary schools. Increasingly, there will be an expectation among parents and communities that the money be used for that purpose. I see no evidence that local authorities are minded to divert the money in the way that you indicated. I think that local authorities recognise the scale and the worth of the project. Although we have moved away from a culture of ring fencing in most—although not all—areas of local government funding, my strong impression is that the will exists to ensure that the money is used for the right purpose and the purpose that I certainly intend that it be used for.

The Convener: As far as the best-value element of how those funds are utilised is concerned, some witnesses suggested that a hub approach should be adopted. Judith McClure from the Confucius institute mentioned that hubs, which have been talked about for a long time, are now being realised. In my constituency, Hamilton grammar school has a highly successful Confucius hub. Are you minded to recommend a hub model as the best approach, or would you prefer to leave it to local schools and local learning communities to decide what they need?

Dr Allan: It is obviously up to local authorities and schools to make such decisions. Officials are probably more able to talk about this than I can, but it is clear that the hub model is being used to an increasing extent, not just for Chinese languages but for other areas of the curriculum in which schools work together. For instance, where clusters of schools work together—I am seeking not to anticipate another question but to address a point that was raised earlier by Mrs Eadie—the schools are in a good position to ensure that there is a progression from primary to secondary that makes sense.

Perhaps one of my colleagues can talk further about the hub model.

Tim Simons (Scottish Government): In addition to the Confucius classroom hubs, we are

funding literacy hubs this year. That funding goes to five local authorities that have expertise and have introduced innovative models for delivering literacy. We started funding those hubs last year, and the funding is carrying on this year.

It is for each local authority to decide how best to make progress. When local authorities do their audits, some of them may come to us and say that the provision would best be delivered through a hub, which could then be used to provide innovative solutions that could also be farmed out to other schools in the local authority area. Primarily, it is for local authorities to decide how best they wish to take the matter forward.

The Convener: Does Helen Eadie have a supplementary question on that topic?

Helen Eadie: I am personally very supportive of the initiative—I think that it is excellent and the right way to go—but I am still worried about the funding. I would be grateful if you could clarify what you said in your preamble. You said that the £4 million that is being provided will be in addition to existing funds. Can you or your officials tell us what those existing funds are? How much—

Dr Allan: First—

Helen Eadie: How much do they amount to?

Dr Allan: I beg your pardon for interrupting you. Yes, the £4 million refers to this financial year and is in addition to the languages fund, which was already wrapped up in the allocation for local authorities.

The crucial point is that I want us to emulate other countries in Europe—in fact, every single other country in Europe—where language learning is regarded as the norm. Without in any way taking away from the scale of the task that we face, I say that we want to get to a situation in which we almost do not ask that sort of question. We do not ask how much the Government provides to ensure that mathematics is taught in primary schools. Some might ask that question, but it is generally taken as a given that learning mathematics is part of the primary school experience. We want to get to a situation in which it is taken as a given that children coming out of primary school will be expected to have had some exposure to other languages.

To answer the question, I am talking about this year's budget. The £4 million is in addition to the languages fund, which was already wrapped up in the local government settlement. I do not want to anticipate future years for the reason that I am not Mr Swinney and I do not intend to anticipate future budgets. For this year, I can say that that is how the budget stands.

Helen Eadie: I am sorry to come back, but you did not answer my question. You talked about the

£4 million, but you did not give the global amount for the existing fund in the overall budget in Scotland. If you cannot answer that, I hope that one of your officials can do so.

Dr Allan: I am sorry if I misunderstood you, Mrs Eadie. As I said, £4 million has been allocated anew on top of an existing £4 million.

Helen Eadie: Is that the existing amount?

Dr Allan: Yes; it was £4 million.

Helen Eadie: So there is £4 million plus £4 million, which is £8 million. Is that what you are saying?

Dr Allan: My officials might want to confirm this, but £4 million was already in the allocation for local authorities.

Tim Simons: Previously, there was a ring-fenced budget called the languages fund that was allocated to local authorities on a distribution model. At the time of the concordat with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, that fund was wrapped up—it was not ring fenced—in the overall grant-aided expenditure package that goes to local authorities. It is now for local authorities to decide how to utilise that. To confirm the minister's point, it was £4 million plus another £4 million, which is £8 million.

Helen Eadie: Has a guidance letter on that gone out to every local authority? When we visited Donibristle school, for example, I got the impression that the teachers there did not know anything about that funding. I am just anxious about that.

Dr Allan: It is certainly not kept secret from local authorities or anyone else.

Tim Simons: Yesterday, we were discussing the new £4 million with COSLA. Obviously, we need to talk to COSLA about the distribution model that will be utilised. Local authorities know about it; it is coming.

Helen Eadie: Sorry to interrupt you, but was it the education conveners whom you were discussing that with?

Tim Simons: We were talking to officials in COSLA.

Helen Eadie: Officials but not councils directly.

Dr Allan: Perhaps I should clarify that the money has been made public, so education conveners will know about it. It has not been kept private in any way. Local authorities and COSLA have been made aware of it. Obviously local authorities will wish to share the information internally with education conveners and others, but it has not been kept from anyone.

Helen Eadie: I want you to succeed with this and I am not just asking these questions to be difficult, but the impression that I got is that not everyone is getting the message, especially those at the grass roots. At Easter, I visited five countries across Europe and I can say that you are absolutely right to say that elsewhere in Europe everyone from the age of five and upwards is getting that language teaching, even in eastern European countries that we think are behind us. The policy is right, but we want to make sure that the measures are in place that will enable it to succeed.

Dr Allan: I certainly agree with all that.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Is the £4 million being allocated among the 32 different local authorities?

Dr Allan: It is for Scotland.

Jamie McGrigor: Yes, but is the total £4 million among 32 local authorities?

Dr Allan: Yes.

Jamie McGrigor: Is that going to be distributed on a per head basis in those areas?

Dr Allan: That will be up to the local government settlement. Tim Simons can talk about that.

Tim Simons: The distribution model for that is what we were talking to COSLA officials about yesterday. COSLA will come back to us with proposals for how the money can be best and most fairly distributed among the 32 authorities, whether it is done on a per head basis, on a pupil or teacher basis, or on a school basis. COSLA will have to consider all that and no doubt it will take the decision to its executive and councillors to agree on the best funding model. They know that it is coming and that it will be £4 million among 32 local authorities.

Jamie McGrigor: I am sorry to ask you this again, but how is the £4 million that is already there distributed? Is that done on a per pupil basis?

Dr Allan: It is wrapped up in the local government settlement so it is decided using the same formula as is used for the rest of the local government settlement for local authorities.

Jamie McGrigor: So the new formula will be the same idea.

Dr Allan: We are seeking to agree a new distribution formula with COSLA. That is under discussion at the moment.

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): Is the additional £4 million also going to be ring fenced?

Dr Allan: As I say, the direction of travel is for not ring fencing. There are no indications that that is the way we are likely to go. However, there is strong pressure and a strong will to make sure that the money is used for languages.

Hanzala Malik: Thank you.

The Convener: I have one final question, before I open it out to the other committee members. You will be aware of the Higher Education Academy report that was published yesterday. It is a review of the state of Slavonic and eastern European studies in higher education. The committee's focus is on primary education, but we have been made aware of interest in that issue among outside bodies, so could you comment on it?

Dr Allan: In relation to Slavonic languages specifically, universities are autonomous bodies and ministers do not have a direct say in how they run their courses, so it might be inappropriate for me to attempt to do that.

The wider coverage suggests that, because Scotland is having a constitutional debate, we are no longer learning languages. The body to which the convener referred did not make such comments, but some wider press comment has been wide of the mark. We are doing quite the reverse. We are having a national debate about how we ensure that people learn languages. However, I do not have a direct say about the way in which universities teach their courses.

The Convener: As a matter of interest, at one of the primary schools that the deputy convener and I visited in Glasgow there was a young woman from a Russian background who had started a Russian club. Russian was being taught in class, but parents and pupils were also coming to an after-school club to learn Russian. Some of the comments we heard yesterday were about the teaching of a Russian higher, but at primary school level we have seen enthusiastic young people using the skills of their mother tongue to inform and peer-educate their contemporaries in the classroom and their parents and teachers.

09:30

For me, the evidence that we have received from the inquiry is not about qualifications; it is about confidence. We must build on that confidence in our young people at the earliest stage. In the case of Russian, the small acorn that we saw will grow pretty well. That was for your information more than anything.

Dr Allan: What you said about confidence is relevant. We cannot anticipate what line of work people will have, or even what country they will live in, from encountering them at the age of five in

primary 1. However, we can try to give young people the confidence that learning languages is a natural thing to do. We can also try to ensure that, throughout Scotland, a fairly wide range of languages is taught.

By teaching languages in primary school, we are trying to give our young people the idea that going on to learn languages, whether for work or cultural reasons, is a normal thing to do. That has not been the expectation traditionally, although it is beginning to change thanks to the hard work that is being done in primary schools. Confidence is certainly key to it.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):

Can you see any crumbs of comfort for the Slavonic and eastern European languages in how the primary one-plus-two model is being implemented? Is it possible that, in at least some primary schools, we might want to incorporate an emphasis on those languages?

Dr Allan: As I indicated, we want to broaden the languages that are taught in schools. The working group that reported on the matter said it did not want to try to come up with a hierarchy of languages that are more relevant than others. A wide range of European and non-European languages may feature in the schools in future, including, perhaps, Slavonic languages, but that depends entirely on the presence of teachers who are confident enough to engage with those languages.

If a school is able, at least at primary level, to incorporate into its work a community language that children bring to the school, that should be given some recognition when we talk about the one-plus-two model. Community languages are important, too.

Hanzala Malik: What will the Scottish Government do about increasing the number of foreign language assistants in Scotland's schools? Will schools qualify for additional resources to encourage them to go down that route?

Dr Allan: There has rightly been a lot of comment about the decline in the numbers of foreign language assistants who are provided in schools. We have managed to stabilise figures this year thanks to quite a lot of contact with a number of European consulates in Edinburgh, the British Council and other bodies.

In answer to your question on funding, I would like to think that some local authorities may wish to use some of the £4 million that is being provided on foreign language assistants. They are good value for money, it must be said. I recognise the points that have been made on the issue—it is up to local authorities how they want to prioritise the use of that money—but there is no bar on the

money that is being provided this year being used to appoint foreign language assistants.

Hanzala Malik: What is the Scottish Government's opinion on whether the budgets for foreign language assistants should be ring fenced in some instances to encourage the employment of FLAs because of special circumstances, particularly in rural areas, where staff are under a lot of pressure?

Dr Allan: I have indicated that there is no real likelihood of ring fencing in any of those areas. It must be left up to local authorities to decide whether foreign language assistants or some other aspect of language teaching is their priority.

It is recognised that rural schools must be flexible, as they have always been. They face particular challenges but they can operate flexibly. For instance, a number of rural schools bring in people from the community who have languages, whether community languages or European languages, to help with the task of teaching.

Some members mentioned co-operation between schools. Perhaps my officials can come in with more information on the curriculum in rural schools.

Sue Langlands (Scottish Government): It is fair to say that rural schools will need to think creatively about how they deliver on the challenge, just as they need to do with existing curricular pressures.

One of the committee members—I forget who—mentioned information and communication technology. There is certainly a lot of potential to do more in that arena to support language learning, particularly in rural environments. Many schools already take advantage of e-twinning, which, although it is not the same as language teaching and learning, indicates the way in which some developments may support the policy, particularly in a rural environment.

Dr Allan: It is worth saying that a number of rural schools, especially neighbouring schools, already co-operate—as Sue Langlands indicated—through glow and other means on all sorts of things in the curriculum.

I visited a school recently where the pupils were communicating with a school in Zambia. They were using English rather than learning a foreign language, but it was an eye-opener for the children when it was explained to them that the people at the other end had to get two buses and walk three miles to get to a computer. All those things can come together, and language learning—not in that instance but in many other instances—can open children's eyes to all sorts of things about the world around them.

Tim Simons: I will come back on Hanzala Malik's point about FLAs. I pointed out in my evidence to the committee in early January that the £4 million could, if it is used for foreign language assistants, result in some 500 assistants coming to work in schools. We spoke to one local authority that wanted to know more about the £4 million for this year, and the authority confirmed that it will now take on foreign language assistants, which it did not do previously.

Some authorities are thinking about the advantages that foreign language assistants can bring to their schools. A foreign national can not only speak the language but tell children about their country and what happens there, so they will be delivering a global citizenship agenda. Local authorities could well use the funding for foreign language assistants and benefit in many areas as a result.

Hanzala Malik: That brings me nicely to my next question. How can the Scottish Government assist schools to tap into the European funding that is available? I understand that the funding is underused and underapplied for, particularly by Scottish schools. Could the assistants be brought in without authorities tapping into the £8 million that they are going to get? I hope that the schools could bring in new moneys. What—if anything—is in the pipeline to encourage that to take place?

Dr Allan: European money would be new money, and we can certainly try to simplify the process, particularly for the Comenius programmes. There are also the Erasmus programmes—the new Erasmus for all programme will, from 2014, take in both the Comenius and Erasmus schemes. There is much that we can do to promote those schemes; perhaps Sue Langlands can say more about them.

Sue Langlands: I am happy to support what the minister has just said. We recognise that there is a challenge for teachers and local authorities in getting through some of the related bureaucracy, and we would view that as a key plank in freeing up more resources at a European level.

It is of course possible to pay for more foreign language assistants, and they are very good value, but it would also be possible to secure Comenius assistants to do similar—if not identical—work in schools, with great benefits and possibly at reduced cost.

Some of the work involves negotiating the bureaucracy. We fully intend to work with the British Council and other relevant organisations including SCILT—Scotland's national centre for languages—to try to negotiate better so that we tap into more resources. It is clear that there is potential for us to do so.

Hanzala Malik: I was keen to hear about the path that we would take. How do we encourage schools to participate in that? Are we going to set up a system—or a cluster of schools—in which schools can contact someone centrally for assistance, so that we are not trying to reinvent the wheel every time a school wants to apply for something?

Dr Allan: Again, I do not want to say that I have an answer to that yet. The issue is being worked on, but we want to avoid the situation that we have had in the past in which—it would be fair to say—Comenius has been underused. We want to find out why that is the case, and if Government can do anything to simplify the process and bring schools together we will certainly try to do it.

Hanzala Malik: That is very helpful.

The Convener: I will bring in Helen Eadie, because she has a number of specific questions about Erasmus and Comenius.

Helen Eadie: When we visited Donibristle primary school, we heard not only about the issue of getting time off but about the need for back-up support. Perhaps we should make representations to Brussels on this matter and say that, although it is fine to provide a package of financial support for teachers to travel to other schools across Europe, another issue that has to be addressed is how schools get back-up funding to allow that to happen. Should part of that funding come through the Erasmus programme? You cannot simply take a teacher out of the equation and leave the school without them—someone somewhere has to pay. As I have said, those kinds of representations could be made to Brussels when programmes are being reviewed.

There is also an issue about publicity for these programmes. For example, the teachers at Donibristle said that it was very random; indeed, we heard the same from some witnesses. We are very keen for the programme to succeed.

I suggest that the minister look at a report that came before the committee and which looked at all the funding programmes across Europe, and I appeal to him to raise with other ministers the fact that there is certain EU funding that we are not working hard enough to access. I am not being critical of officials—having done it myself, I know how extraordinarily difficult it is to access that funding—but we need to get a really good handle on that matter. As Hanzala Malik has suggested, we need centralised advice and support agents who can help with the issue and publicise the programmes properly.

Dr Allan: If the major audit of modern language provision in schools that is under way highlights the problem of teachers finding it difficult to access some of the courses and activities because of the

issue that you mentioned, we will certainly want to discuss the matter with local authorities and, if necessary, Brussels. My officials might want to say more about the issue.

Tim Simons: From previous experience, I am well aware of the many opportunities for teachers to visit other European or international countries, but it is very difficult to get the publicity out to teachers who are, after all, very busy individuals. Some are interested in such opportunities, pick them up and take advantage of them; it is a bit ad hoc but bodies such as the British Council are forever doing their best to advertise them. For example, the website of British Council Scotland, which administers the Comenius programme for us, contains lots of information. It is partly about negotiating the bureaucracy, but another question is whether teachers are absorbing the information that has been provided for them.

We are also setting up a strategic implementation group that we will co-chair with the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland. The association representative on that group—Stirling Council's director of education, Belinda Greer—will be able to go back to her 32 fellow directors, pass on the fact that these opportunities exist and ask what they collectively are doing to take advantage of them.

There are a couple of strands to this issue. It is a question of publicity and information, but at the end of the day it is the teachers who will benefit from the opportunities who need to find out about them and make the most of them.

Sue Langlands: There have been a number of questions about the additional £4 million in the current financial year and what authorities might spend it on; perhaps some of it will be used to free up teacher time. As we know, teachers are incredibly busy people and we need to enable them to have some discussions and digest the information. The information is available, but it takes time to consider it and put together a plan to act meaningfully on it at teacher, school and authority level.

09:45

Dr Allan: Given that, as Tim Simons pointed out, teachers lead busy lives, I think that—to use the jargon—signposting teachers towards and helping them find what is available is a major exercise that would be useful and worth doing.

Helen Eadie: One big challenge is how we mobilise and motivate not just children in schools but all Scottish citizens to get on board with this initiative. How do you intend to promote the one-plus-two model among schools and citizens to try to change their attitudes? I am as guilty as anyone else is of this but our attitude when we go abroad

seems to be, “We speak English, so everyone should follow”—and clearly that is not sufficient in this modern world.

Dr Allan: I have noticed that when I visit schools teachers of modern languages quite regularly put the argument—actually, it is more of a fact than an argument—that 75 per cent of the world’s population do not speak English and that most of the other 25 per cent speak it as a second language. When young people and their parents are presented with that fact, it comes as quite a revelation.

Some of this work comes down to education in its broadest sense, but it also comes down to the relationship between schools and parents. In the really good examples of engagement with parents, schools bring parents into the classroom and it does not take long for them to realise that something dramatic and new is happening and that school nowadays is different from when they went.

What we are discussing will require a cultural change; it will not happen overnight but key to the change is what happens at school level. Much as I would like to believe that parents throughout Scotland hang on my every word when I talk about curriculum for excellence, I suspect that ultimately they believe and listen more to the information that comes from schools. As modern language learning becomes more and more of a feature of life in primary schools, parents will become more conscious of it.

As a more general response to your question about attitudes, I would like to think that they are beginning to change slightly. People are more used to hearing someone speaking another language in the street, more used to travelling and more used to the idea that the world might be a multilingual place than they were 30 years ago. Of course, what might be the weak link in this is the fact that so much of what we see on television comes from America or is in English. Culturally, we have to start watching a bit more “Borgen”.

Helen Eadie: Or “The Killing”.

Dr Allan: Indeed.

Willie Coffey: Good morning, minister. I have a question about IT. According to some of our witnesses, their experiences of using glow have not been particularly successful. As someone who worked with Learning and Teaching Scotland—or what is now Education Scotland—for many years and who has seen the successful implementation of technology and its impact on learning and teaching, I wonder whether you can tell us a wee bit about glow and how we plan to deploy it more effectively to assist the teaching of modern languages in primary schools. I think that it can have a major impact; indeed, I know from

experience that Education Scotland has incredible skills and abilities that can make a real impact on this matter. In short, where are we with glow and what impact can IT have on learning and teaching?

Dr Allan: My impression is that as glow develops and changes, which it is clearly doing, particular aspects such as the authentication process for getting into it will become a lot more user-friendly. I can see the demand for its services increasing in schools.

I certainly think that glow lends itself particularly to language learning because of the ability that it gives to speak to somebody in Germany or Japan, for example, or to pool activity, particularly in small schools, listen to your own voice and do all sorts of things. Given the changes to make it more user-friendly, I can see more of that kind of activity happening.

Willie Coffey: Do you see glow being extended so that it can be used widely and, perhaps, so that people can access materials at home? You mentioned the American TV experience, which I think is very relevant to the task that we face in giving our children the opportunity to experience other languages and so on. Do you see glow broadening so that we can have much more access to materials at home?

Dr Allan: I think that culturally we are beginning to see parents accessing electronically the work that their children do at school and seeing what is happening in the school. Glow certainly has a role in that regard.

Other things are also beginning to happen, such as the use of own-device technology whereby people bring their own phones into school—I appreciate that not everybody has them—and engage with what is happening in the classroom in that way. More and more schools are introducing wi-fi in the building to allow people to bring their own technology into the school. I think that the culture in schools is changing very quickly, and glow seeks to keep up with that. As I said, languages lend themselves well to that kind of experience.

Sue Langlands: I do not think that we have mentioned much today—and we have possibly not done so much on previous occasions—the potential for interdisciplinary learning to take forward the commitment to the one-plus-two languages model. ICT is just one area where the possibilities are probably limitless for how one might motivate, excite and encourage young people to use languages creatively and in ways that they feel are relevant to modern life and work.

The Convener: There is a great example in St Elizabeth’s primary school in Hamilton, which the minister has visited with me. The school used a

programme with a link to the University of Glasgow for its science projects in which the pupils asked questions of a professor of science but the answers came back from an avatar in the shape of Yoda. The kids absolutely loved that experience.

The teachers who were using the system for science suggested to the language teachers that they could use something similar for languages. Those teachers then started to set up a similar programme with a professor in one of the universities to answer questions in foreign languages. However, I do not think that they have agreed on the avatar yet. Certainly, Yoda was very popular in that school.

That is an example of interdisciplinary practice whereby something used in science has been used in another subject—and it might bring both together at some point, too. It is a great example of teachers innovating.

Dr Allan: That is all true and pertinent. We talk about the crowded curriculum and how we can fit languages into it, but of course languages are not only a subject but a medium: a means of communicating something else. You do not talk about French in French; you might do so, but you are more likely to talk about what is going on in the world around you in real life if you are using another language.

For instance, the experience of Gaelic-medium schools shows that the success of such schools is not that they sit and talk about Gaelic verbs all day—there are only 11 commonly used irregular ones—but that they talk about science, history or maths in Gaelic. I am not suggesting that there will be the same kind of experience in primary schools that are not immersion schools in the way that Gaelic-medium primary schools are, but I think increasingly as glow rolls out we will see children using the language that they are learning for something practical in the classroom. That is a conceptual leap that we have to begin to understand as well.

The Convener: That is exactly where St Elizabeth's was—when my colleague Clare Adamson and I visited the school we found that they had decided that everyone would speak Spanish for the day. That was not done just during Spanish lessons; it was done for whatever lessons were going on, for whatever games were being played, and for describing what the children were having for their lunch—they all had a discussion in Spanish about what was in their packed lunch. They were five and six-year-olds, and we were mightily impressed but heartily embarrassed, I have to say, by our skills in comparison.

The game of Twister is also quite interesting in Spanish, especially when you do not realise that it

is your hair that you should have on the red, and when the local journalist takes a photograph of you.

The school would have a French day, an Italian day or a Spanish day, and everything that day would be done in that language. That leap has been made in that school. It was a great example.

Roderick Campbell: Minister, we heard evidence about the importance of primary school teachers having a language qualification. What is the Government's current thinking on that issue?

Dr Allan: There is a debate within the teaching community about it. The debate has been raised in the past about whether a language—or indeed a science qualification—should be required for entry to teacher training degree courses. The prevailing mood at the moment is that there are opportunities to provide languages during initial teacher training. Where courses have been offered in modern languages, the take-up and enthusiasm have been high. I suspect that that will only increase once people see, as they have already begun to, that modern languages will routinely form part of the primary school curriculum.

I do not know whether that completely answers your question—the officials might want to come in—but the sympathies of the teaching profession are more with providing opportunities to learn languages during the initial teacher training.

Tim Simons: The General Teaching Council for Scotland is consulting on the issue at the moment. The languages working group recommended that all primary teachers should have a language higher either on entry to or exit from their teacher training course. The GTCS is consulting on that proposal, and I think that the consultation ends in June.

It is a decision for the GTCS. I think that the general feeling is that by making that requirement we might exclude some potential students who would otherwise be extremely good teachers. As the minister mentioned, there has been a debate about whether primary teachers should also have a higher qualification in a science to enable them better to deliver science education. The jury is out on the issue.

Dr Allan: The reason why it was one of the few recommendations of the working group that the Government only partially accepted was because we respect the role of the GTCS to have the debate before we step in. To some extent, it is the teaching profession itself that has to answer the question.

Roderick Campbell: In response to the national partnership group report, the Government supported the establishment of formal partnerships between local authorities and

universities as a way of enhancing the early stages of teacher training. How is that progressing?

Dr Allan: I will have to defer again.

Sue Langlands: I fear that we may not be able to provide the full story on that at this morning's meeting, but we are happy to find that information and be in touch.

Roderick Campbell: It would be helpful if you could provide that information.

Dr Allan: We can certainly come back on that.

Roderick Campbell: Are any other initiatives under way to support teacher training and CPD for languages, both for existing and new teachers?

Dr Allan: Part of the examination of what needs to be done on languages in primary schools is an assessment of what skills already exist. There will be people in primary teaching who have formal qualifications in languages; there will be people who have languages who have never really used them in teaching; and there will be people who have an aptitude or an interest in using languages in primary schools. We first need to assess what those talents and aptitudes are.

There is also a recognition from the outset, which featured in the working group's recommendations, that we cannot pin all that cultural change on new generations of teachers and their initial teacher training. We have to consider the opportunities for continuing professional development from a relatively early stage and recognise that languages will be a major part of continuing professional development for primary teachers.

10:00

Roderick Campbell: Some witnesses have told us that lessons could be learned from what happened in the 1990s with regard to the low priority that language teaching was given, the lack of resources that were devoted to it and the failure to track teachers who had been trained. What do you say to that?

Dr Allan: My point about trying to assess the skills that exist is partly to do with tracking the aptitudes, abilities and training that teachers have. I would not say that we want to track all teachers in relation to every aspect of their continuing professional development, but it would be a waste of resources if local authorities did not have some idea of where to find people, particularly with regard to schools co-operating more closely in future.

Tim Simons: One of the bodies that we fund is Scotland's national centre for languages—SCILT. This year, it is running pilot projects for us in

schools, which were mentioned previously. On its website, it has made available a special resource for local authorities, which is a toolkit that contains issues that they should take into account when they examine what their current provision is and how it can best be delivered in the future. There is quite a lot of resource going into that. SCILT is going around the country to advise local authorities on the issues.

Education Scotland, the national education body, is providing a lot of support to local authorities to help them to examine how they can deliver the policy.

Hanzala Malik: You have raised an interesting point, minister. There might be an opportunity to tap into existing resources. For example, we could encourage recently retired teachers to return to teaching to focus on languages, even if it were only part-time work. Similarly, we could develop refresher courses for teachers who have left the profession so that they could take up teaching posts again. That would assist us in trying to plug the gaps and make up the shortfall, and it might give us an opportunity to fast-track what we are trying to achieve.

Dr Allan: That is certainly an interesting idea. It is important to say that we are talking primarily about upskilling primary teachers who are already in post, who know the classes and who are likely to use modern languages in the day-to-day life of a class. However, I am sure that Education Scotland will want to consider whether there is scope for taking advantage of that suggestion.

Jamie McGrigor: You said that the idea of future primary teachers having language qualifications had been partially accepted by the Scottish Government, but had been referred to the GTCS for its consideration. I accept that, but when will the GTCS give its verdict? Have you told it that it must give you its thoughts soon? Obviously, the issue is important.

Dr Allan: I have not instructed the GTCS to come to a view. It should be said that this is a debate that it is already having. It is not a debate *sine die*; I think that it is due to come forward with a view relatively soon.

Tim Simons: The consultation ends in June. I think that its new framework would be put in place for 2014.

Jamie McGrigor: So, will the GTCS come back to you to say whether it thinks that the suggestion is a good idea?

Dr Allan: Yes.

Willie Coffey: Let us focus on the roles that communities and parents could play. During our inquiry, many teachers have supported the idea of better and increased involvement of communities

and parents at home. Are there any ideas or proposals for how schools could best put that into practice? I asked some of the children whom I met on my visits to schools specifically what exposure they had to foreign languages at home; some said that they did not have any. We have mentioned the impact that IT could have and the significant role that it could play. Is there any other advice that we could offer local authorities and schools to widen that impact and to involve communities and schools in the initiative?

Dr Allan: To some extent, the obvious answer is that schools could—as they now often do—count how many languages are spoken in their pupils' homes. In the Western Isles, which I represent, the local authority came up with a list of 16 languages without trying very hard. Children can be made aware of the existence and importance of other languages through learning—it is often a revelation to them—who are the children in their classes who speak other languages to their parents. That can be tremendously worth while.

Willie Coffey: During one of my school visits, I was told that one of the children wanted to learn American.

I detected that parents want to be more helpful, even although they do not have a second language. They are looking for connections to assist them and are very supportive of the initiative. They want the school to do something with the local community or to invite parents to be more participative. I am looking for suggestions or advice from the Scottish Government that could assist in that process.

Dr Allan: The Government constantly does things to encourage community relations and diversity, and we encourage schools to think about those issues. Sue Langlands may want to talk about that.

Sue Langlands: Schools already face a significant challenge in respect of how best to engage parents and communities in the education of the children and in the life of the school. I am the parent of a primary 1 child, and it has been interesting to see what parental involvement the school expects. My husband and I have been informed of what is going on and have been invited to events. We routinely receive communications on literacy and numeracy, and we are invited to attend assemblies, science fairs and events across a range of curricular areas. I hope that it will, in a few years, be the norm for such information also to be flowing on matters around learning other languages. Besides a few words to spell at home, children might be expected to practise foreign words. It is about the mainstreaming that the minister has alluded to; I view that as being part of the existing challenge of

engaging parents and bringing them into the substance of their children's experiences in the school.

Dr Allan: On mainstreaming, I suspect that if 11-year-olds in Germany came home without some ability in English, or if 11-year-olds in Italy came home without some ability in French, their parents would be knocking on the door of the school—just as, in Scotland, people would be knocking on the door of the school if 11-year-olds came home without some ability to count. We are talking about a cultural change that is that big.

Willie Coffey: Thank you. That neatly brings me to my second question about how we can fit it all in. During the course of our inquiry, a number of contributors have said that schools are really busy and that the curriculum is already so tight that they wonder how they can fit in one language, let alone an additional one. What are your thoughts on how we can make the curriculum as flexible as possible to enable that to be done successfully?

Dr Allan: I do not want to downplay the extent to which that will require work and planning. I acknowledge that teachers are very busy people. You mentioned flexibility, which is key to all this. The curriculum for excellence in primary schools is all about flexibility and allowing teachers the scope to bring in new material to allow children to learn at their own rates. It is all about ensuring that there is cross-curricular work.

As I said, if there is one subject that lends itself to cross-curricular work, it is certainly languages, which can be used to talk about pretty much anything. Of course, that is easy to say in advance, and I appreciate that training, planning and work will have to be done, but it would have been difficult to take this approach if we had been working under a system that did not have the flexibility that curriculum for excellence provides. It would be difficult to do it if we were working with a system that sought, as the French education minister does, to plan out hour by hour what happens in every school, every day. The approach is possible only if we allow teachers discretion. Curriculum for excellence makes it possible.

Willie Coffey: I am encouraged by that. I would like to share another example with the committee and the minister. When I visited Kilmaurs primary school in my constituency, the children were doing a physical education lesson, but with a French theme. A few years ago, that would have been unthinkable and people would have wondered why we would ever do such a thing, but it is now happening. It was encouraging to see the children doing physical exercise and using the medium of French to achieve that.

Dr Allan: That is true. I have mentioned a prime example of that, which is Sacred Heart primary

school in Bridgeton in Glasgow. When I visited the school early on in the exercise, I found that French, German, Spanish and Italian were being used at various points in the school day, although not all by the same children. Those languages were incorporated into other work in the school. That is another conceptual leap that we have to make. If we look at all the other European countries that we talk about as being better than us at languages, we find that the reason for it is that children there do not sit and learn about languages; they use languages in school. That is crucial.

Jamie McGrigor: The committee has heard in evidence concerns that children who are going from primary to secondary school sometimes have difficulty continuing the languages that they have been learning in primary. Resolution of that must be one of the keys to the Scottish Government's one-plus-two proposal. Research by Scotland's national centre for languages has highlighted that only a third of primary schools have a languages transition plan with their secondary school. How can continuity in language teaching between primary and secondary school be strengthened?

Dr Allan: I certainly agree that, unless we crack that one, we will not solve the problem. Everybody now acknowledges that there has to be progression between primary school and secondary school. Local authorities and schools acknowledge that and are getting better at solving the problem. We have acknowledged it on a range of fronts. Thought has been given to that in a way that never used to happen on all sorts of areas of the curriculum. Previously, no real consideration was given to what happened to people going from primary to secondary on any front. However, certainly on languages, I agree that we need to ensure that knowledge of a language that children have gained in primary school does not go to waste in secondary school.

For that reason, the feeder schools, or the clusters of schools that feed secondaries, must co-operate. That will also require that all sorts of thought be given to workforce planning and other issues. However, the languages working group was clear that the problem has to be solved, and I completely concede that the Government and local government must work together to ensure that it is solved in the coming years.

Jamie McGrigor: Should the Government therefore have a national strategy, even though it might be managed at local level, to provide that continuity? Otherwise, parents who want their child to continue with a language might have to move from one area to another for that to happen.

Dr Allan: I suppose that the national strategy is, first, curriculum for excellence and, secondly, our current work on a languages strategy. It will be

down to local authorities to ensure that it works, because they are the education authorities, but in my view the two activities of Government that I have mentioned—they are big activities—certainly count as a national strategy.

We have to ensure that what children do in primary school counts for something in secondary school. With that in mind, Education Scotland is considering progression and will come forward with more detailed thoughts—not just on how to ensure that happens, but on how to ensure that it is measurable, as well.

10:15

Jamie McGrigor: You talked earlier about companies that do business across the world. I have seen a list of languages that seem to be most in demand; the top three are French, German and Spanish, with Mandarin creeping up the scale. Will the national strategy consider what languages pupils should get in the one-plus-two model that are practical in relation to promoting Scottish business or trade, or which are just generally practically useful? I do not suggest that any languages are not practically useful—it is good for children to learn any language—but will there be a strategy on the languages that children should learn in schools?

Dr Allan: My earlier point that it is beneficial to have available a reasonably wide palette of languages is based on the idea that we do not know where a child will end up in their life. I agree with the point about the languages that are important and which are increasingly being taught in schools. Spanish is increasingly popular and, from a very small base, Chinese languages are becoming more popular in schools. Effort is going into those areas.

The working group did not see a hierarchy of languages; that was partly to do with the fact that we must work with what we have, the people we have and the interests that people have. There was also a recognition that having available in schools across the country a wide choice of languages is more likely to engage the interest of young people.

To come back to something that Jamie McGrigor alluded to, it is partially about attitude and ensuring that people have confidence about learning other languages. It may be that a person in their career thinks back to what they did at school and the language that they did in primary 3 or 4. However, it may be that they learn a completely different language—a language that their teachers had never thought of—but because, like most people in Europe, they were exposed to language learning in primary school, it comes

naturally to them and they are not embarrassed to try. Those are significant things.

Jamie McGrigor: You will know that there is an obvious difference between large urban schools and rural primary and secondary schools. How will you bridge the gap that will appear between a very large school with better funding, which can have more teachers doing different languages, and smaller schools, which as far as I can see are going to be limited in their resources? We might get different classes of schools as far as language learning is concerned. Is there any way in which that gap can be bridged?

Dr Allan: I appreciate that danger, but it is anticipated that in primary schools teaching of modern languages will be done primarily by classroom teachers and so there is, to some extent, a level playing field. However, I fully appreciate that the complexities of what we ask of schools and teachers means that there are particular challenges in rural areas or in small schools, which is why there is co-operation among schools on a number of fronts. Tim Simons will talk more about rural schools, which are going to be an issue more generally in the coming days.

Tim Simons: In other European countries small rural schools produce young people who are able and open to conversing in other languages. To go back to what the minister said about the change of attitude and the transformational change in the approach to languages, that is the norm in other European countries whether that is in urban schools or in small rural schools. That is the kind of change that we want to replicate here.

Dr Allan: Without being glib, I say that you can see that attitude replicated around Europe, as Tim Simons has pointed out. When I was in Luxembourg a few years ago—everyone tires of my citing this example, but I will cite it again—I was astonished to find that small pre-school units all advertised that they operate in five languages: Luxembourgish, German, French, Portuguese, which is the main immigrant language, and English. If a small pre-school unit for 40 kids can manage that, that suggests—I am not saying that we can manage it tomorrow—that small schools as well as big schools are capable of doing good things in this area. However, I do not underestimate the challenges.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): The committee received evidence on the importance of capacity building for language learning among young people. That is well understood by the committee, but we also have questions about the economic advantages of language learning and about the role that that might play in supporting economic development in Scotland. One concern that has been raised is that we have a self-fulfilling tradition of teaching only

certain languages. If you can learn only French and German at school, you are more likely to go on to study those languages, which means that we have teachers only of French and German. Did you work with academia and business to look at how what you have described as the “palette of languages” might be expanded to ensure that we meet the country’s economic demands as we go forward?

Dr Allan: That is an important point. As I mentioned, it is interesting to see that there has been a rise in interest in Spanish among young people. To some extent, there has also been a welcome rise in interest in Chinese languages. We need to do more in that area; I am sure that it is an issue that we will want to look at.

Another significant point is that, as you mentioned, there was previously an assumption that only those who study languages at school might go on to study languages at university. Looking around Europe, we do not see that assumption. For instance, it was previously assumed that language study at university was essentially a literature course, in which people learned about the corpus of poetry and prose in that language’s literature. Such study certainly has a very honourable place, but that is not what everyone who learns Italian wants to do.

That is why, just this week, the Government launched for schools a new modern languages for life and work award, which is designed for people who do not want to do a literature course or take the language to degree level, but want to be sufficiently fluent to go and work abroad for a year—or for the rest of their lives. We need to encourage not just diversity of languages but diversity in the kinds of language courses that we make available to people, who might want an academic course or a very practical conversational course.

Clare Adamson: I have a supplementary question on that. We have talked about how the community could become involved in schools and there may already be a model for parents to become involved in setting up groups in primary schools, but the business community may also want to be involved. Some evidence has suggested that there might be a keen interest among local businesses for becoming champions within schools. Have you looked at how that might be facilitated?

Dr Allan: It is certainly interesting that the business community seems to regard our approach very positively. For instance, the Confederation of British Industry has made positive comments about how the policy could reverse the decline in teaching of modern languages and could be good for commerce. I certainly think that there is, at local level, a place

for inviting into schools people who, alongside the teacher in the classroom, could talk about the role of language in business. I think that there have been some efforts in that direction already in some schools. Sue Langlands might be able to talk about that.

Sue Langlands: Absolutely. When Rebecca Trengove from Axon gave evidence, she talked about the positive relationships in certain areas. She said something that struck me as being relevant about how it depends heavily on the nature of local communities and local employers. Some communities are well placed and have major employers for which particular languages would be relevant. Such companies can suggest themselves to the authorities and schools in their areas to provide those languages.

There are a lot of creative possibilities in that approach; it ties in with the wider youth employment agenda and with skills development in the young workforce. We certainly expect it to grow. We need to think about how promoting the one-plus-two strategy can be part of that.

Helen Eadie: A parallel example is the work that Shell has done on science throughout Fife, where it has introduced a science week, which usually takes place during May. Shell pays for children to be bussed to a central location; it has all sorts of science projects at a place called St Colme house near Aberdour. Perhaps we could generate that kind of excitement among other big companies in getting them to celebrate language work annually.

I have a second point on creativity. Clare Adamson mentioned capacity building. What discussions is the Government having with other funders, such as the Big Lottery Fund? An idea that excited me when we heard from witnesses was that, by using IT equipment, we might be able to get communities here to link to communities abroad. That is what came through as the witnesses spoke. I am not sure that they actually said that, but the idea formed in my head. However, somebody would need to fund it.

I chair the industrial communities cross-party group. It might be pertinent for some of the areas that need regeneration to apply for funding to, for example, the Big Lottery Fund to link grandparents, parents and children up with other parts of the EU. However, it would need some kind of prod from the Scottish Government to the Big Lottery Fund to get it to accept that as a possibility. I ask the minister to consider that—not to commit himself to it, but to consider that.

Dr Allan: It is interesting that that brings us back again to the issue that was raised a number of times about how we engage wider communities

and families in understanding the policy as an important transformation in schools.

I cannot speak for the Big Lottery Fund, but we want to keep all options open. Anything that we can encourage within communities to foster links with other countries and languages and ties in with what our children are doing in school must be positive.

The Convener: I would like your comments on another piece of anecdotal evidence. Yesterday, I had the great privilege of being in my constituency when Scottish Power opened one of its new offices. There are about 600 staff across that campus and there is potential for the number to go up to 900. I spoke to the education officers and recruitment officers there, because it struck me that the schools in Hamilton and the surrounding area might be teaching Spanish, and that Iberdrola—the parent company—might be looking for young people who speak it because the employment opportunities for them would be much wider across the whole business.

When we know that there are potential business champions in our communities, we have a responsibility to think about how we can realise that potential. I have set up meetings with key people in Scottish Power at the Hamilton campus in order to try to tie them in with the local schools. The company has a science, technology, engineering and mathematics officer as well—Willie Coffey will ask you a final question about STEM—so I hope to tie all those key people in together and then to tie them up with the local schools so that young people not only get involved in the science of energy but consider that it could be a career path for them and that the way to do that would be to be able to speak Spanish. That is just a pertinent, up-to-date experience that I have had.

10:30

Dr Allan: That example reinforces why it is probably not useful for the Government to decide on a shortlist of languages that must be taught everywhere. It probably proves the point that, whether we are talking about community languages, traditional languages, employers or local factors, local authorities should be allowed a lot of discretion, which is a good thing.

The Convener: I know that we have reached the time at which you need to go, minister, but we have a brief final question for you, if that is okay.

Willie Coffey: I invite the minister to look forward to the future, particularly for science and engineering students. Are we doing enough to encourage science and engineering students, particularly those who are going through universities, to combine STEM studies with

studying a language? In a previous session, I asked Robin Parker how many science and engineering graduates are coming out of Scottish universities who have studied a language—and not necessarily to degree level, as you have mentioned. We are unsure what the position is. Should we be doing more to encourage undergraduates to combine science and engineering with languages? If we think that that is the right thing to do, how successful could we be at doing it?

Dr Allan: I do not know the figure that you are looking for, but we can try to find it for you.

Probably the biggest thing that we can do to encourage people who are doing science and other subjects to combine them with a language course is to have that model in operation in schools, so that people who are doing highers in physics and chemistry do a language for life and work course in Italian or German. That might lead them to do something similar in university. That is probably where things have to begin.

Willie Coffey: Is the curriculum at school flexible enough to allow science students to combine their subjects with modern languages?

Dr Allan: The new awards that were launched this week definitely are. People might take those courses in third or fifth year, and they can certainly combine them with highers that have nothing to do with languages or literature. I would like to see that kind of flexibility introduced to our system in schools and universities.

The Convener: Okay. I thank the minister very much for his attendance and evidence. We took you over your time, but we have certainly found the session to be very interesting. You have answered some of the key points on funding that we needed to know about. Our clerks will get in touch with your officials and do some follow-up work, which will be valuable for the outcome of our report.

10:32

Meeting suspended.

10:40

On resuming—

Scottish Government's Country Plan for China and International Framework

The Convener: We move on to agenda item 4. Helen Eadie and Roderick Campbell will feed back on their visit to Todd & Duncan, which is a textiles company in Kinross.

Helen Eadie: I will let Roderick shine first.

Roderick Campbell: Funnily enough, Helen, I was going to ask you to shine first.

A major problem is that the visit was quite a while ago and it has sunk into the recesses of my mind. My main impression was of a company that had come back from the dead courtesy of being owned by the Chinese. The Chinese management seemed somewhat distant, which the company liked. Because yarn is being obtained and cashmere spun in China, the company is—to a degree—in competition with the firm that owns it. The company was keen to keep to itself its trade secrets on how it managed the process, so it was a bit odd.

The strongest message that I received was that Chinese exporters of yarn and garments can obtain a 16 per cent export rebate, whereas Todd & Duncan cannot access any such rebate, so it is at a competitive disadvantage. In trying to sell the spun yarn on the market, it has to rely on its quality, expertise and, in particular, the wide range of sophisticated colouring with which it dyes the yarn. We had the opportunity to see what is an impressive process.

The company exports a lot of yarn to Italy and makes regular overnight trips with spun yarn to Hawick. It is a specialist area, the business is relatively small and it seems to be working well. Obviously, we should take our hats off to the Chinese for rescuing a business that was in difficulty. The work also provides a job market in Kinross.

Those are probably the main points that struck me that I can recall. Helen might wish to carry on from there.

Helen Eadie: I want to return to the 16 per cent export rebate, because that is an important issue. Under World Trade Organization rules, the rebate rate was meant to be reduced to nil. However, the rate in China increased at the time of the economic downturn, which has placed our Scottish companies at a disadvantage. Perhaps we could write to the appropriate minister to say that we are concerned about that and to ask them to raise the matter with the Westminster Government.

Somebody somewhere should be shining a torch on that matter. If World Trade Organization rules are ones that we should all be signed up to—and apparently China agreed to those rules at some stage—China should be party to that agreement, too, but it would seem that it has not followed those rules.

10:45

The other issue that struck me from the visit related to the Scottish Government's regional selective assistance grants, although I know from my general knowledge that some of that is governed by European Union rules and guidelines, so there is perhaps not a lot that the Government can do. The company competes mainly against Chinese and Italian-owned textile firms, which have benefited from regional selective assistance, whereas our indigenous Scottish companies cannot benefit in any shape or form from that. There is an issue there, which we should perhaps reflect in our report when we come to write it. Todd & Duncan said that it has never been able to qualify for any assistance from any Government agency, due to the size of the company, its turnover and the number of staff that it employs. Perhaps we can think about that.

Representatives of the company said that it had worked with a university on training but that, because of the resources issue, it had to pull back from that. The company highlighted its previous relationship with the job centre. The way in which things used to work was helpful for the company, as it could phone up and get workers on tap almost immediately. Now, the remoteness of the job centres has led to a loss of the personal contact and understanding that the management used to have. We were asked to consider some of those key factors, which the company has to cope with in developing its work.

The company would like to have its own label so that it could have a much higher profile. I saw some of the products when company representatives took us to the factory shop. Anybody can visit the factory shop, and there are good prices there. It would be really good if the company could develop its own label—a Todd & Duncan label of origin, which its representatives thought might help the company to strengthen its market hold.

The issue of language was raised, which was the primary purpose of our visit. We heard that the company found it a disadvantage not to be able to converse in a variety of languages, particularly Chinese. It had to rely on local people in China for help.

The visit was worth while, though short, and the management were helpful and forthcoming. I hope

that we can pursue some of the lessons that arose, and that we can perhaps help the firm in some way.

The Convener: There are a lot of things to consider there, and a number of issues that we can raise with the minister when he comes before us and that we can include in our report. We should follow up all those points in our evidence taking.

One thing that sprang to mind in relation to language learning is that, if Todd & Duncan is not currently a member of the collective learning partnership, we should perhaps encourage it to join, as the partnership offers the teaching of foreign languages to staff. Other companies that I know have benefited greatly from that, with Spanish being one of the languages that has been taught. Perhaps we can get the relevant contact details to Todd & Duncan so that it can train its staff, or so that its staff can receive training via the local college.

Jamie McGrigor: Helen Eadie said that Todd & Duncan wants to use its own label. What label does it use in the factory shop? Why can it not use a Todd & Duncan label?

Helen Eadie: My impression was that it uses a Loch Leven label at the moment. It sells the yarn back to the parent company in China, which then negotiates with a whole spectrum of hand knitters and others. Italy is one of the places where the knitted products are sourced and another is Hawick in the Borders. It is down to the parent company to determine that.

Jamie McGrigor: At the factory shop, the label just says—

Helen Eadie: Loch Leven, I think.

Roderick Campbell: Yes. A lot of the stuff that is exported indirectly—from Hawick or Italy—has Hermès or Chanel labels on it.

Jamie McGrigor: And it will be priced accordingly.

Roderick Campbell: Yes.

Helen Eadie: The prices were phenomenal. I pointed to one garment and naively gave the price that I thought it might be, but I was miles away from the mark. The price was \$1,000. It looked superb, but that is another world from Scotland.

The Convener: We can note all those points and take them forward in the course of our inquiry.

“Brussels Bulletin”

10:49

The Convener: We now come to the “Brussels Bulletin”, which has been compiled by Scotland Europa. I am happy to hear of any issues that members want to raise on that. We take on board the new process of getting answers to those questions.

Jamie McGrigor: I have a question that nobody here will be able to answer. The bulletin states:

“The Special Committee on Agriculture has formally confirmed the Council’s negotiating position on the four draft Common Agricultural Policy ... reform regulations.”

However, it also states:

“The European Commission has requested a further €11.2 billion for the EU Budget”

and that the MEPs say that they will not finalise the multi-annual financial framework until that has been worked out. How on earth can a budget be set for the CAP without a budget being set for the whole MAFF? It was meant to be done in 2014, but it is now going to be done in 2015. Farmers in Scotland are worried about that.

The Convener: From my experience on the committee, I believe that the previous year’s budget would stand. If a budget for the following years cannot be agreed, whatever budget there is now will carry on. My question would be: why does the Commission want an additional €11.2 billion when there is extreme stress on the budget in the first place?

Jamie McGrigor: That is a good question.

Helen Eadie: I was interested in the item about banking sector reform and the proposals from Arlene McCarthy in a draft non-legally binding report on reforms to the EU banking sector. The bit that really interested me was the report’s advocacy of a

“mandatory separation of banks’ retail and investment activities.”

I wonder whether we can find out, through the new process and from whoever is going to advise us, the likelihood of that becoming EU law. I would welcome it as a step in the right direction, but I wonder about the political reality of its becoming a reality.

The Convener: On the issue of the new process, is someone taking note of our questions so that we can get them to Scotland Europa?

Jim Johnston (Clerk): Yes.

Helen Eadie: Incidentally, I think that the new word is not “gangsters”, but “banksters”.

The Convener: I see the connotation in that, but it is probably best not to comment.

Willie Coffey: Is it possible to push a few questions in the hope that we can get some answers at a later stage?

The Convener: We can ask the questions and the clerks can put them to Scotland Europa.

Willie Coffey: I do not expect answers today. The first issue is on the subject of broadband, which the committee has covered a few times. On page 12, we are told of

“the aim of cutting by 30% the cost of rolling out high speed internet.”

I do not know what to take from that. Does that mean a budget cut or is the intention to try to reduce the charges for providing high-speed internet across the European Union? I am not quite sure what that means, although it sounds encouraging. We know from a previous “Brussels Bulletin” that a substantial cut in one of the budgets was going to help to establish that kind of infrastructure throughout the European Union. That was worrying to some members of the committee. Any follow-up information on that would be welcome.

The Serbia and Kosovo situation that is mentioned on page 13 must be one of the most depressing stories to continue to read. The EU deadline for encouraging Serbia and Kosovo to reach some kind of accommodation and agreement about the way forward passed a couple of days ago. Kosovo has now been recognised by nearly 100 members of the United Nations, 22 of the 27 EU members and a high number of NATO members, but it still faces difficulty with its neighbour Serbia in trying to reach a resolution. It is easy and glib for me to suggest that they should get on with it, but I feel bitterly disappointed and worried about the future.

We know that Serbia’s accession process is ahead of Kosovo’s. Minds in the European Union must be wondering what to do about that and whether they should proceed with the process for Serbia in the absence of an agreement with Kosovo. That is unlikely to happen, given that the European Union policy chief, Catherine Ashton, has already said that the EU is unwilling to do that and import another frozen difficulty, in the way that we did with Cyprus, which is still a divided community. I do not think that there is any appetite in the European Union to do that while the dispute continues between Serbia and Kosovo. Scotland has a good and warm relationship with both countries and we have had visitors from each. My heart goes out to both countries. I hope that they can achieve a solution and that, ultimately, Kosovo can achieve the worldwide recognition that it deserves.

Roderick Campbell: I want to make a comment rather than ask a question. In the light of the Conservative Party's seeming hostility towards the European convention on human rights and of possible withdrawal from it, I am interested in the comment on page 11 of the "Brussels Bulletin" about the possibility of the EU joining the ECHR in its own right, which would require the unanimous approval of EU member states. I wonder what the UK Government's position is likely to be on that issue.

Helen Eadie: I support what Willie Coffey said about broadband. I am absolutely at one with him on that. Up to the end of March, we had approximately £28 billion at our disposal across the EU for developing broadband. I would be interested to know from European Commission officials exactly how much of that was spent. Perhaps our people in Brussels could give us the answer.

I had the good fortune to visit Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia and Hungary during the Easter break. When I spoke to locals in Serbia they were, by and large, very keen to join the European Union. As Willie Coffey said, Serbia visited the Scottish Parliament and it, too, was very keen to join the EU. As long as the dispute between Kosovo and Serbia continues, it could be some time before there is any development on the issue. It would be good to hear whether any of our Brussels officials have intelligence about the position since 16 April. It is in the interests of all of us to find out what is happening in such countries.

That part of eastern Europe has the most amazing architecture and is well worth a visit. My favourite place is Budapest, although there are worrying political concerns with Hungary. I wonder whether colleagues round the table share those concerns—perhaps we could have a briefing on that situation in due course. Democracy in Hungary seems to be breaking down seriously.

Hanzala Malik: Helen Eadie's comments are important. We have seen democracy break down in Greece and Italy and in other countries where non-elected presidents and Governments have been in place in mature democracies. There is a serious shortfall of democracy across Europe just now. Historically, Serbia has not had a good rapport with its neighbours, so it is important that agreement is reached before Serbia can be considered to be part of the European Union. A country cannot bully its way to the table or into nationhood. That needs to be done with consensus and through peaceful means and it must be democratically approved.

I am disappointed that the two countries have not been able to come to an agreement. Although we in the Scottish Parliament do not have jurisdiction over how that happens, we can

certainly share our concerns. Perhaps we should seek to make some sort of representation to the UK Government to encourage it to help to broker peace across Europe. The European Union is going to be a dangerous place to live in if we cannot achieve peace in this day and age. A huge number of human lives have been lost in the heart of Europe, and we cannot allow that to happen again. Given the importance of the issue, we need to encourage our Government to take some serious steps and support a peaceful resolution in that part of the world.

11:00

The Convener: A breakdown in democracy is dangerous for us all.

Roderick Campbell: I am interested in the recent European Court of Justice ruling on environmental impact assessments, as a result of which the threshold that member states put in place for deciding which projects are to be assessed must be based on the potential environmental impact rather than on quantitative size. I simply wonder what the Scottish Government will be doing in light of that ruling; I suppose that I could raise the issue in a written question, but it would be helpful if other information was forthcoming to amplify this little paragraph in the bulletin.

Clare Adamson: With reference to Portugal, page 2 of the bulletin states:

"A court ruling has deleted €1.3 billion of austerity measures".

I am not sure whether the court ruling is internal to Portugal or whether the European Union has taken that interesting decision. I am in complete sympathy with Portugal, which is struggling with austerity, and I find it worrying that there will be further health, education and social security spending cuts in a country that is already suffering from crippling levels of youth unemployment.

Willie Coffey: I believe that internal Portuguese courts have declared some of the cuts to be unconstitutional. Perhaps someone should have thought of that before the cuts were proposed, but that is another story.

On the Serbia and Kosovo issue, the progress towards any reconciliation will inevitably be painful, but not half as painful as the alternatives, given where both countries have come from. I would welcome some kind of briefing about what has happened and is happening there. I know that we all have MEPs in the European Parliament and I am not quite sure who would be the most appropriate person to give or send us a briefing, but I would really appreciate such information before we make any submission or offer our help and support.

Helen Eadie: I support that suggestion, convener—it sounds like a good move. We should also look at anything that we can do to forge closer links; after all, although we might not be able to offer direct help, we might be able to influence things indirectly.

The Convener: I certainly think that we should pick up the structural funds issue and the fact that we managed to negotiate a better settlement for Scotland than had been expected. Things were a bit scary for a while.

I note that the Commission has proposed new rules to make it easier for international students and researchers to live and work in the EU, but I believe that they will apply to everywhere in the EU apart from the UK. Given the pressures on our colleges, universities and businesses, we should raise the issue directly with Scotland Europa as well as with the UK Government. If the EU is proposing new rules to make the process easier while, in contrast, the UK Government is tightening the rules and making things much more difficult, it will have an impact on us all.

It might also be worth while to have a briefing on the European Commission's most recent employment and social situation quarterly review to find out where that is going and its impact on other countries, specifically those in the EU. When, at the end of this meeting, we recommend the bulletin to other committees, we should also agree to make the Education and Culture Committee aware of not only the situation with international students and researchers but how we are dealing with horizon 2020 in Scotland.

Finally, before I let Helen Eadie in, I simply want to back up all the comments that have been made about Kosovo. As well as highlighting a human rights issue in that respect, I note that, as with the situation with international students and researchers, the EU is taking a step forward while the UK Government is taking a step back.

Helen Eadie: Venture capital and social entrepreneurship funds are mentioned on page 9 of the bulletin. I wonder whether we could have a wee bit more of a briefing on that matter, given that social enterprise is a big issue for all parties in the Scottish Parliament. The information in the bulletin is very technical and I wonder what the implications will be for our social enterprises in Scotland. I attend Council of Europe meetings, but I have not seen the issue on any of the agendas. It would be helpful if someone could provide us with more information on what this will actually mean for people.

The Convener: Are members content to send the "Brussels Bulletin" to other committees and to highlight the points that have been raised?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I commend Scotland Europa and thank it for doing a great job in putting together a really detailed and well-drafted bulletin.

Jim Johnston will update the committee on where we will go next and how we will get answers to our questions. I think that the conversation that we have just had clearly demonstrates the committee's need for a European officer who can answer some of our questions directly. At present, the Scottish Parliament information centre and the clerks are doing a lot of running about to find information and briefings for questions that we could have had answered immediately.

Jim Johnston: It might be helpful if I clarify the process. The clerks have taken a note of members' questions, which will be forwarded to Scotland Europa in Brussels along with a copy of the *Official Report*. We will ask it to provide as many of the briefings that have been requested as it can. I hope that we will be able to get that information to you for the next meeting. If that is not possible, we will get it to you as soon as we can thereafter.

The Convener: Are members content with that?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: As agreed at the beginning of the meeting, we will now move into private for agenda item 6.

11:06

Meeting continued in private until 11:22.

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