

# **ENTERPRISE AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 24 October 2001  
*(Morning)*

Session 1

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# CONTENTS

Wednesday 24 October 2001

	Col.
ITEMS IN PRIVATE.....	2001
DECLARATION OF INTEREST .....	2002
SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION.....	2002
Education and Training (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2001 (SSI 2001/329)	
LIFELONG LEARNING INQUIRY.....	2003
LIFELONG LEARNING INQUIRY (BRUSSELS VISIT).....	2026

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## ENTERPRISE AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE

24<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2001, Session 1

### CONVENER

\*Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP)

### DEPUTY CONVENER

\*Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con)

### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

\*Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
\*Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
\*Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
\*Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
\*Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP)  
\*Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)  
David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con)  
\*Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD)  
\*Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab)

\*attended

### THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED :

Allan Wilson (Scottish Executive Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Department)

### WITNESSES

Kenryck Lloyd-Jones (National Union of Students Scotland)  
Dec McGrath (Scottish Trades Union Congress)  
Rami Okasha (National Union of Students Scotland)  
John Park (A amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union)  
Grahame Smith (Scottish Trades Union Congress)  
Mandy Telford (National Union of Students Scotland)

### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Simon Watkins

### SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Judith Evans

### ASSISTANT CLERK

Linda Orton

### LOCATION

The Hub



## Scottish Parliament

### Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee

*Wednesday 24 October 2001*

*(Morning)*

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:01*]

**The Convener (Alex Neil):** Good morning and welcome to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee's 24<sup>th</sup> meeting in 2001. We have apologies for absence from David Mundell and from two members who will be late—Duncan Hamilton and Ken Macintosh.

I welcome Brian Fitzpatrick to the committee. This is the first subject committee of which he has been a member. He is being initiated in the best committee in the Parliament. As Brian replaces Des McNulty, I take the opportunity of paying tribute to Des's work on the committee. His expertise was welcome, particularly on the reports that we have worked on. We publicly thank Des for his contribution to the committee's work.

This morning, Judith Evans will clerk for the committee in place of Simon Watkins, who is otherwise engaged. She will be assisted by Martin Verity, whose claim to fame is being clerk to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee.

### Items in Private

**The Convener:** Under item 1, the agenda says:

"The Committee will consider whether to take items 5, 6 and 7 in private."

That is a misprint. Only items 6 and 7 should be mentioned. Do we agree to take them in private?

**Members indicated agreement.**

### Declaration of Interest

**The Convener:** I ask Brian Fitzpatrick to make any declaration.

**Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab):** I am delighted to be here and I am obliged to the convener for his kind words about my neighbouring constituency MSP Des McNulty, who is a comrade and a colleague. I declare an interest as a member of the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union and the Faculty of Advocates. I also inform the committee that I am a graduate and postgraduate of the University of Glasgow and that I share the services of a researcher with the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning.

### Subordinate Legislation

#### Education and Training (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2001 (SSI 2001/329)

**The Convener:** To assist us this morning, we have a figure who is well known to the committee—Allan Wilson, the team leader for the individual learning accounts and lifelong learning targets section of the enterprise and lifelong learning department. Does Allan want to add comments to the paperwork that we have?

**Allan Wilson (Scottish Executive Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Department):** We are removing the maximum number of 100,000 awards as a result of a policy review that the minister undertook. She is keen to avoid unnecessarily complicating matters for users and learning providers, who may find the change from one system to a second system to a third system unnecessarily difficult.

**The Convener:** Is it true to say that the minister is considering setting specific targets for target groups in future?

**Allan Wilson:** It is true to say that she is considering how best to support target groups. There has not yet been any decision on whether specific targets should be set for those groups as it is difficult to determine how to define the groups themselves, never mind the targets for them.

**The Convener:** Does the committee agree that there are no issues to raise in respect of the regulations?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## Lifelong Learning Inquiry

**The Convener:** We welcome three representatives of the National Union of Students Scotland: the president, Mandy Telford; the deputy president, Rami Okasha; and full-time officer Kenryck Lloyd-Jones, better known to his colleagues as Bell. Would you like to make some introductory remarks, Mandy?

**Mandy Telford (National Union of Students Scotland):** Absolutely. I thank the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee for having NUS Scotland along to give evidence and expand on our submission. We welcome the committee's interest in the future of lifelong learning in Scotland.

After full consultation with our members we have taken the opportunity in our submission not to list a series of misgivings or complaints but to offer a vision for the future and express the aspirations of the student movement. Although some of our proposals may seem more radical than others that you have received, we believe that they remain the answer to delivering lifelong learning in society. Nevertheless, we are pragmatic enough to take a gradualist approach. We seek a progressive agenda in further and higher education.

**The Convener:** I hope I am not being patronising but, having looked through the bulk of the evidence—we have received well over 100 submissions—the quality of the evidence from NUS Scotland puts it in the top five. It is absolutely excellent; whether or not one agrees with it, the quality is exceptional.

**Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** I echo those sentiments. To a hard-pressed, not awfully bright member of this committee, the clarity of your submission was refreshing and illuminating. It is as Alex Neil said: I may not agree with all your conclusions, but it is an extremely well informed and well argued paper. As a hard-burdened MSP, I give you my grateful thanks for facilitating our perusal of an important submission.

In paragraph 3.2 of your paper, it appears that the percentage of higher education students studying at further education colleges is higher than I had appreciated. What was the source of the statistic?

**Kenryck Lloyd-Jones (National Union of Students Scotland):** The Scottish Executive.

**The Convener:** Does that make it reliable?

**Miss Goldie:** I was interested in your comment in paragraph 4.2, which is of particular relevance to research in the enterprise economy. Do you

have any further thoughts on that part of your submission, given yesterday's publication by the committee of its report into the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council proposals? You may not have had time to consider that report, but the committee decided to conduct an inquiry into how SHEFC allocated its funding for the current year. We were fairly critical of the basis on which that proceeded. It covered both teaching funding and research funding. I wondered whether you had any further thoughts on that part of your submission.

**Rami Okasha (National Union of Students Scotland):** That is an area that is being explored in a number of Scottish universities, notably the postgraduate law schools at Strathclyde and Glasgow, which have effectively merged for their teaching of the legal diploma. In Aberdeen, the student associations at the Robert Gordon University, the University of Aberdeen and Aberdeen College will in the next few weeks suggest to their parent institutions that their engineering departments merge to form one centre of excellence. We think that the benefits for students of such spin-offs will be significant. Notably, there is a clear link between research and teaching. Good centres of research will be good centres of teaching. [*Interruption.*]

**Miss Goldie:** We are being serenaded.

**The Convener:** Perhaps that is the Justice 1 Committee.

**Rami Okasha:** Or perhaps a centre of excellence for music.

**Miss Goldie:** We should halt for a moment until we sort out the sound system.

**Rami Okasha:** Pooling resources between institutions will allow the Executive to target its funds to centres of excellence more effectively, which would have significant benefits for teaching.

**Miss Goldie:** Finally, proposal 3 of the submission from NUS Scotland concerns the possible creation of a single tertiary education system. Your submission says that you want

"to ensure the provision of further and higher education in Scotland is funded on an equal level".

In the context of that proposal, what does "equal" mean?

**Mandy Telford:** We are talking about parity rather than equality. At the moment, one of our biggest concerns is that 30 per cent of higher education students study for their higher education qualifications at a further education college and are funded at a lesser level than students who study at a university. To widen access, to encourage people into lifelong learning and to promote social inclusion, it is necessary to have a

single tertiary education system that is funded by a single funding council. That would ensure parity between courses at every level. We do not suggest that a medical degree should be funded at exactly the same amount as a higher national certificate in English, but we do look for parity across the sectors. The current divisions between part-time and full-time courses and between vocational and non-vocational courses are divisive. There needs to be a single tertiary education system that is funded by one council that gives funding parity to all courses.

**The Convener:** The colleges are funded under the standard unit of measurement formula, whereas the universities and institutions of higher education are funded in a different way. In addition to parity between courses—which is a slightly different issue—do you suggest that a single funding council should use the same formula to fund further education and higher education institutions?

**Mandy Telford:** That would be up to the funding council to decide; we are keen to look at outcomes. Whether higher education students study in a university or a further education college, they should be funded at the same level.

**Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab):** I was impressed with the submission. As all our witnesses will know, I worked in a further and higher education college for 18 years, so I am pleased to see NUS Scotland calling for parity of provision. However, I disagree with Mandy Telford that it should be up to the funding council to determine the formula. Part of the committee's inquiry is to make recommendations on such issues. We take evidence to help us do that, which is why NUS Scotland's evidence on that issue would be most welcome. I do not ask Mandy Telford to make a decision right now, but the committee does want to consider parity.

I also want to ask about what one might call volume training, which is the £435 million or so that we spend on skillseekers. Should the single funding council that NUS Scotland has proposed be responsible for that? At the moment, skillseekers are funded through Scottish Enterprise. When I read the submission, I wondered whether higher education, further education and volume training should be brought together.

I will let the witnesses think about that. I have a number of points. Shall I give them all at once, or would it be better to answer them one at a time?

**Kenryck Lloyd-Jones:** Please carry on. We will take notes.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** I am pleased to see that the submission made an important point about the need to consider unifying the methods of quality

assurance.

Funding is discussed in paragraph 10, on the last page of your submission. The current inquiry does not look at the funding of university places, but that is a major issue. I return to the question that was asked by the convener. How do we fund places? Do we use smart cards or do we consider individual learning accounts?

Many suggestions have been put to the committee. Your evidence is superb, but it would have been helpful if you had given us your views on where volume training sits and how we fund places. I wonder whether the convener would allow you to make a further submission, if you would agree to that, to address that point.

10:15

**The Convener:** The point is important and we would welcome further evidence. I should point out that the public address system has been switched off so that we do not have music playing on top of what we are saying this morning. Could everyone please speak a bit louder than normal?

**Marilyn Livingstone:** I was not aware of that.

Would you please give us something further in writing, once you have time to think it through?

**Mandy Telford:** We accept the invitation to give further evidence. We have consulted our members fully on the inquiry, which is far ranging. It is helpful that the committee asks specifics of us. We can return to the committee to answer your questions properly.

**Kenryck Lloyd-Jones:** We wanted to restrict our written submission to make it coherent, but other aspects of vocational education, including skillseekers, could be discussed. The ethos of our submission is to suggest that things should be brought under one roof. Planning for one area should not impact adversely on others of which we may be unaware. The only way in which planning can be done effectively is if the responsibility for both higher and further education is in one place.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** I have one final point. The committee is interested in gender issues in training. We received a report from Blake Stevenson a few weeks ago that looked at modern apprenticeships. From that report, we saw very clearly that few women are taking up modern apprenticeships and going into non-traditional areas. Do you have views or evidence that would help us with our deliberations in that area?

**Mandy Telford:** NUS Scotland is keen to see equality across all sectors of society. We have a women's unit that deals with such issues. We regularly encourage student associations, universities and colleges to look at the signals they are giving out about their courses. Are they

making them available as widely as possible to everyone? The school sector should also look at that. The issue is huge. We could give you more specific evidence on this issue.

**Bill Butler (Glasgow Annie Island) (Lab):** I want to record my thanks for the clarity of the submission and concur with the statements that have been made by my colleagues.

In paragraph 3.4, you state:

"There must be a degree of accountability for the vast investment made by Scottish society in the provision of further and higher education."

Would you care to elaborate on what you consider to be the correct degree of accountability that does not remove institutional autonomy? Will you elaborate as to the means that should be employed to achieve that degree of accountability?

With regard to paragraph 8.1, could you give examples of the disadvantages of the present system and describe the advantages of external accountability?

**Mandy Telford:** On the need for strategic direction, as we have called it, we believe that if the Scottish Executive and the Parliament—and, through them, the Scottish electorate—want to influence further and higher education in matters of equality and the fairness of internal procedures, for example, they should be able to do so. At the moment, the funding councils can only advise institutions on what they should do. We feel that the funding councils should be given more power to steer the institutions and implement what the Scottish Executive and the Parliament want. We make it clear in our evidence that we do not want to do away with institutional autonomy; we believe in institutional autonomy and understand why it is important. Nevertheless, it is essential that the funding councils be given more power to steer the institutions in the direction that the Scottish Parliament and the electorate want them to go in.

**Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab):** I am interested in your first proposal, which is the idea of funding councils having an active planning remit, and in what you said about the Aberdeen universities and colleges coming together to bid for a unified engineering department. The committee has several times come across evidence to show that severe skill shortages in specific areas—especially in engineering, technological and science subjects—are emerging in society. I would therefore be interested in your views on why the funding councils should be given an active planning remit. Do you think that they should be able to focus more sharply on filling some of those emerging skill shortages and steering more people into technological, engineering and scientific careers?

**Kenryck Lloyd-Jones:** These things are related. The present system depends on chance or the foresight of institutions. There should be an overview of where the skill shortages are. Colleges are not necessarily in a position to have that without assistance from a body that is designed to look into the shortages and ways in which they can be addressed. At the moment, there is no effective method of meeting the needs of Scottish society in respect of those skills, so a remit to allow the funding councils a steer and to allow information about the macro needs as well as the specific needs of each college to flow would be appreciated by colleges.

**Elaine Thomson:** Should funding mechanisms perhaps be altered to reflect that need?

**Kenryck Lloyd-Jones:** That would be one possibility.

**The Convener:** I would like to ask about the blurring of the boundary between further and higher education. What you say about that is absolutely correct. In the casework that we have undertaken so far, a common theme about the false division between further and higher education has emerged. You suggest that FE colleges should become colleges of further and higher education and that there should be one funding council for further and higher education and volume training.

It used to be NUS policy—certainly when I was at university, which is not all that long ago—that there should be polyversities. There could be an Edinburgh polyversity, for example, rather than two or three universities plus a network of colleges. Is that still NUS policy, and have you given any thought to that idea?

**Kenryck Lloyd-Jones:** We think that every academic institution in Scotland should be in the business of sub-degree qualifications as well as degree qualifications, for two reasons. First, there is tremendous wastage at the moment. When students drop out after three years of study without any qualification to show for it, that is a waste of their time and of society's investment, especially as it is an achievement to get through years one and two.

**Mandy Telford:** This is also about promoting the widening of access and lifelong learning to allow students to dip in and out of education. They could transfer whenever they saw fit and come back to education when it was right for them in their lives.

**The Convener:** Do we need 14 universities and 47 colleges to achieve that? Would we not be better off with, say, 15 polyversities?

**Kenryck Lloyd-Jones:** That is not something that we have ruled out but it was not discussed as



a policy proposal in the consultation. It has been pointed out that there is enthusiasm among students for co-operation between institutions.

**Rami Okasha:** Colleges in particular tend to exist within their community and have an associated community function. In that sense, they have a geographical identity and that has benefits for the colleges and for the communities in which they operate.

**The Convener:** There are no other questions so I thank you for your contribution.

I now call on the Scottish Trades Union Congress. I welcome Grahame Smith, deputy general secretary of the STUC; Dec McGrath, who is the development officer with the STUC lifelong learning unit, and John Park, who is a full-time official with the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union.

Grahame, would you like to make some introductory remarks?

**Grahame Smith (Scottish Trades Union Congress):** Thank you, convener. I should also add that, until recently, John Park was the convener of shop stewards at Babcock Rosyth Defence Limited. He has therefore been actively involved in many of the projects on the ground in Rosyth. I hope that he will be able to speak about them during this morning's session.

The committee has a copy of the STUC submission. The inquiry's remit is very broad and we would argue that the interests of the STUC and its affiliates impact on almost all aspects of education and training in Scotland. We have always taken the view that the STUC represents the interests of trade unionists as workers and as citizens. Our submission makes the point that lifelong learning has

"a variety of purposes and outcomes"

and it must not just concentrate on those of a purely economic value. However, our submission concentrates on lifelong learning in the context of the workplace, although our interests are wider than that.

We have been before the committee previously to discuss the issue and our submission does not reflect matters that we have discussed previously. That is not to say that we do not continue to be concerned about those issues. For example, the submission does not deal with unemployed workers but we are still concerned about that issue and it is a feature of our continuing work on lifelong learning in the trade union movement in Scotland.

The committee has asked us to speak in our capacity as consumers of learning and we are grateful to have that opportunity. Too often policy

makers ignore the interests of those who are participating in learning. We also have provider interests and I know that the committee will be talking to the Association of University Teachers (Scotland) and to the Educational Institute of Scotland later in the inquiry. We welcome that because those unions represent a large proportion of the teachers who work in our schools, colleges and universities.

It is, however, fair to point out that the STUC has affiliates that represent many of the non-lecturing staff—administration staff, cleaning and catering staff, maintenance and technical staff, and library staff. Without those people, our learning institutions would not be able to function and pupils and students would not have the quality of learning experience that we all agree they should have.

We make some points towards the end of our submission about the importance of meeting the learning needs of all those who work in learning institutions, having a stable industrial relations framework, and ensuring that there is proper co-operation between institutions and their employees if we are to have quality learning provision.

10:30

I will make one or two final points before I try to answer the committee's questions. The term "lifelong learning" has become synonymous with post-compulsory education and training. It is our view that a strategy for lifelong learning must identify and acknowledge the relationships between all aspects of our education system: day schools, further education, higher education, community education and the workplace. If we are to have a comprehensive and coherent strategy, the false separation that currently exists in the Government between education and training must be addressed and removed.

Two principles that we believe should underpin a lifelong learning strategy are: inclusiveness and the removal of barriers to learning; and partnership that recognises the variety of roles that different stakeholders, including the STUC and the trade union movement in Scotland, can play in bringing their experiences to bear.

In our submission, we mention a number of the approaches that may be taken and provide some detail on a number of the lifelong learning initiatives that the trade union movement has been involved with during the past few years. In particular, we refer to the work that we are doing to increase the demand from workers for learning by increasing unions' capacity to deal with learning issues and by developing the concept of the learning representative. We hope that learning

representatives will be given statutory underpinning by the Westminster Parliament and that they will be given time off for training and to represent their members. It is important that any strategy for learning in Scotland that seeks to address workplace content examines how we can put in place a framework that enables learning representatives to operate effectively to help to address the learning needs of people in the workplace.

That is enough by way of introductory remarks. We will try to answer questions from the committee on any aspect of our submission, or on other issues on which you think we may be able to express an opinion.

**Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD):** I have two questions. One relates to the point in your presentation about a strategy for lifelong learning. You mentioned the false separation that exists between education and training. Will you expand on that? More important, how would you address it?

**Grahame Smith:** In our submission we say that by its nature, lifelong learning happens throughout life, and what happens in the school system has an impact on how people learn outwith that system. What happens in the school system has an impact on how people learn in the workplace and on their capacity and willingness to learn. Unless we link all the interrelationships in our education system together in a coherent strategy, we are in danger of leaving holes in the strategy. We use as an example the work that has been undertaken under the broad heading of education for work, which links schools, workplaces, and further and higher education institutions. The way in which such work is handled in Government means that the coherence of the policy and links between school and work are not always identified and addressed in the development of policy.

Tavish Scott's second question was on how we would address the false separation. We have not addressed how that would be done structurally. Without getting into discussions about the reorganisation of Scottish Executive departments or Scottish Parliament committees, we identify reorganisation as an issue that must be addressed. At this point, we are not coming up with major solutions, but we ask that the issue should be considered as we discuss how to put in place a strategy for lifelong learning in Scotland.

**Tavish Scott:** I presume that if you have any thoughts on how to address the issue you will let us know.

**Grahame Smith:** Absolutely.

**Tavish Scott:** In your summary, you say that you have

"little confidence that workers will be able to take advantage of the opportunities available to them, without the support of a statutory requirement on employers to provide funding and access to training and learning."

Can you give the committee some evidence of that "little confidence" and the benefits that a statutory requirement would bring?

**Grahame Smith:** Workers who want to participate in learning often do not have the opportunity to do so—my colleagues might be able to give evidence of that—because they face barriers that are put in their way or that are not removed by employers. Those barriers include being unable to have paid educational leave and lack of employer support through funding for training courses or materials that are required for training. We identify the need to address that matter.

We identify in our submission that the STUC policy remains in favour of a levy on employers to fund training. However, other mechanisms might be identified. We know that colleagues in small businesses have examined the idea of business learning accounts. We have examined collective learning accounts and how they might be supported by employer contributions. It is fair to say that a number of employers—good employers—invest voluntarily in training, but since the removal of the statutory requirement to invest in training, many do not do so. If our economy moves into a significant downturn, it will be interesting to see how many employers continue to identify the need to invest in training as an investment in their work force, rather than as a cost that can be cut when times are hard.

**Tavish Scott:** Grahame Smith made an important point about barriers that might or might not exist. Has the STUC done research on that? Can you provide the committee with information that would help us to examine ways in which the barriers could be overcome?

**Grahame Smith:** We have not done detailed research. The research comes through the information that is fed to us from our affiliates and is reflected in the policies that we develop. John Park has mentioned to me that he has experience of that. A feature of the work that we have done is the recognition that workers face barriers.

**John Park (Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union):** The union learning fund projects are individually evaluated, as most members will know. The project and funding is being evaluated over a longer period. I hope that some research will be fed back from that. The barriers might not exist only for employees in the workplace; they might also exist for employers.

Grahame Smith spoke about economic downturn. There has been a significant downturn

at Babcock Rosyth over the past 10 to 12 years because of the demographics in the defence industry. Perhaps it is a cost for employers to provide training for employees, unless it is on-the-job training that is directly beneficial to the needs of the business. A way of getting round that and getting over to the employer that there is some credit in their employees participating in learning is the use of learner representatives. Giving learner reps an idea of the needs of businesses and individuals has been helpful. The learner reps have helped to develop partnerships and have been successful in winning round employers. Further research will be carried out.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** I was going to ask the question that Tavish Scott asked about a statutory commitment. I will develop that point. I am familiar with the impressive work that is going on with trade unions in learning in Fife. That is a good example. One aspect that I have been especially interested in—as has the committee—is the inclusiveness agenda. I previously worked in Fife on inclusiveness and barriers to access and I am particularly interested in that. The fact that women, ethnic minorities and people who have lower qualifications are, perhaps, less likely to receive training in the workplace worries me. It is interesting that you also say that.

Trade unions are pivotal to our access agenda, which is about trying to get people who have fewer skills back into training. The committee and I are concerned—if we are talking about an inclusive agenda—about how we reach people in the workplace who really want to participate in the lifelong learning agenda.

You talked about a statutory commitment and I did a lot of work on that. Will the trade union representatives expand on how we get through the barriers and get people on the first step? Evidence shows that when people get on the first step, they can be kept there. What advice can the representatives give the committee on how to make progress?

**Grahame Smith:** You are right to say that a statutory requirement on employers is only part of the process. Even where that exists, there is no guarantee that workers will take advantage of it—even if it is for paid time off. A number of factors that operate in the workplace mean that workers are nervous about participating in learning activity. We identified that in the submission.

One of the roles that the unions can play is in trying to assist workers in identifying what the benefits of learning are for them and overcoming some of the fears that they might have. If an employer makes proposals for introducing new learning programmes, there can be suspicion that it is something to do with downsizing, or that people's jobs might be under threat. People fear

that, because they have been out of learning for a significant time before they enter the workplace, they will not be able to cope with a new learning programme. They fear that somehow their abilities will be assessed and that that might put their job security under threat.

Unions can help to address a range of issues. The idea of the learning representative is important. That individual will be identified with the union. They will be trained and will have experience and knowledge of how to handle learning issues. They will be aware of the wider learning environment, will be able to assist people in identifying their needs—individually or collectively—and will help to have those needs met. As I said, statutory underpinning of the learning representative will be important. We believe that any strategy for lifelong learning must address how we put in place a framework in Scotland that helps to support the idea of the learning representative.

My colleagues might want to comment. Unions have addressed the matter practically. One of our affiliates, Unison, has introduced the return to learn programme. On our previous visits to the committee we explained the basis of that programme, which is designed to help to get people who have been out of learning for some time back into it. It teaches people how to begin to learn again. It is a gateway for them to get back into learning—learning that might be more advanced and related more directly to their employment circumstances.

**Dec McGrath (Scottish Trades Union Congress):** One of the major platforms for the promotion of learning is the individual learning account. If we quantify the number of individual learning accounts that have been taken up through the Scottish union learning fund, we can see that there has been a remarkable take-up. Irrespective of whether the cost is £150, £1,500 or £5,000, a raft of people still face barriers to learning. Financial inducement is not the problem or the barrier; the problem is the bad experiences that people had in their school days. That is exactly where unions come in to support, encourage and mentor people through those barriers and on to learning.

**John Park:** I spoke about the role of partnerships. Partnerships not just with employers, but with learning providers, are important. In Fife, there is an interesting partnership with Fife adult guidance. Dec McGrath mentioned individual learning accounts, which are a fantastic incentive for people to take up learning. Individual learning accounts, guidance and any action that will be taken must be connected. There is no point in giving people an opportunity to participate in learning and £150 to do a European computer

driving licence course, for example, when they have never touched a mouse in their life. That creates a problem and that person could be lost from training for ever.

10:45

The guidance services have been helpful. The AEEU project in Rosyth dockyard has run workshops for women, for people in trades and for people who have an age barrier to getting into information technology or into any broader learning. That project has provided services such as one-to-one interviews and psychometric testing to help people to take ownership of what they will do with their individual learning accounts and make them count.

**Grahame Smith:** Our submission also reflects the idea of partnership. What has happened at Rosyth is a good example of partnership working and we would like such partnership working to develop throughout the country.

We have tried to establish relationships. We have a strategic relationship with Scottish Enterprise, which allowed us to establish our lifelong learning unit, and Dec McGrath is on secondment from Scottish Enterprise to the STUC, but we want local relationships between enterprise companies and trade unions. They would mirror what is happening in Fife and allow unions and people in the workplace to use enterprise companies' expertise.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** I do not have another question, but I will make a comment. You made many crucial points. The committee is examining best practice and it would be good for the other committee members to have an outline of the project that you mentioned, because it uses good practice. The committee has been told that guidance and support are crucial.

**John Park:** Do you want a brief outline now?

**Grahame Smith:** Perhaps we could supply more detail to the committee.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** That would be helpful.

**Grahame Smith:** Several examples are emerging from work that is being done on projects that are funded by the Scottish union learning fund. We are reaching the end of that fund's first year and of the first set of projects, which will be evaluated. I am not sure how the timing for producing that information fits with the committee's timetable, but if we have information, we will want to supply it to the committee, because there are many examples that might be useful.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** You talked about individual learning accounts. That was a good piece of evidence for us, because it allowed us to

know how they work in Fife and other areas. It would help us to know how what you described is working, but not today—a written submission would be helpful.

**John Park:** That will be no problem. We have material that will be used in the wider evaluation anyway.

I will make a final point on Scottish Enterprise Fife. It had similar goals to those of the union learning fund project in Rosyth—to involve people and have them actively use individual learning accounts. If we had not spoken to people from Scottish Enterprise Fife in another forum, we would not have known about those goals. It was refreshing not to talk to Scottish Enterprise Fife about redundancies—I am being serious. That is a good example of new and helpful partnership working.

**Miss Goldie:** Part of your submission deals with the small amount of training in small and medium-sized enterprises. That situation is universally understood, but a practical problem also exists in many smaller businesses, for which the inescapable reason is that one employee might be essential to the continuance of the business.

How might education and training at the workplace be improved in those small and medium-sized businesses, particularly through the use of technology? Does the STUC have any ideas on how it—in partnership with local economic forums, local enterprise companies or local chambers of commerce—might enlighten employers about what is available and how it might be provided at the workplace in a form that would enhance opportunities for the employee, which could improve the performance of a business?

**The Convener:** Before you answer, Mr Smith, I inform you that four more members want to ask questions so we must speed things up a bit.

**Grahame Smith:** I will be as brief as I can. On Miss Goldie's final point, we recognise that there is a need for dissemination of information between employers, employees and other stakeholders, particularly information on best practice. Our submission suggests that some sort of strategic forum should be established. Strange as it might seem, I am not always in favour of more committees or bureaucracy, but there is a need for the different representative organisations that have an interest in the matter to come together to talk about issues. That does not happen at present, so there might be some mileage in exploring that option.

We are grappling with the lack of training opportunities in small businesses, but we do not have major solutions. If somebody had a solution, we would like to talk about whether it was

practical. The job rotation project is a good example of a project that has a lot of merit. It allows training of unemployed people in skills that enable them to take the place of people in small businesses, who can then participate in training that develops them in the context of their workplace and profession. There have been a couple of European-funded pilot programmes on job rotation, which we possibly mentioned when we attended the committee previously. If we did, we probably let the committee down by not sending the information on that project. The committee might want to consider that model.

**Miss Goldie:** Could that information be made available?

**Grahame Smith:** Not through us. We will try to ensure that the information is sent to the committee. The project is not unique to Scotland; I think that it was started in Denmark and other countries know about it.

**Miss Goldie:** My final question is on the proposal by the STUC for a statutory obligation on employers to provide funding for training and the possibility of what would be a levy. I have concerns about that, having been in business. Given the current state of the economy and the fact that about 90 per cent of our enterprises are small businesses, I fear that that proposal is regressive and would be seen by business as another tax. It might have the undesirable consequence of directing attention to reducing payroll.

**Grahame Smith:** My colleagues might want to say something about that and the impact of the skills shortage that we are experiencing in, for example, engineering and construction. Although those sectors have voluntary levies, they are not statutory. They might also want to speak about what happened to apprenticeships after the abolition of the industrial training boards and the statutory levy. I take the point about small businesses; our submission states that we would expect larger companies to participate in the levy and it identifies the problems that are faced by small businesses in funding learning. There are grounds for considering how public funding can be made available to support small businesses.

**John Park:** It is acknowledged that workplace learning is a problem in small and medium-sized enterprises. There is a role for larger companies that adopt learning representatives to become learning champions. I am talking about SMEs in the supply chain. Rolls-Royce in Derby is topical at the moment and is a good example of the ethos of having people to promote learning in the workplace.

Workplace learning is at the stage now that health and safety was a number of years ago. The

existence of health and safety representatives in the workplace has made a huge difference and the role of the trade unions in developing that could be repeated with the learning agenda.

**Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** I apologise to the convener and to the representatives of NUS Scotland for my late arrival—I was at another committee meeting.

I welcome the STUC's submission, particularly the statements on inclusiveness. Section 3 of that document states:

"The General Council believes ... that the aims and objectives of lifelong learning should reach beyond the economic."

The representatives of the STUC might wish to comment on paragraph 3.3, which states that the STUC contends that to date Government policy has focused overwhelmingly on employability skills, rather than on personal development.

I welcome the comments on statutory rights. Although it is a recent development, is there anything to be learnt from the statutory right to time off for study for 16 and 17-year-olds? How successful has that been so far?

**John Park:** I must confess that I do not have evidence of the success or otherwise of that initiative. We supported the idea of the statutory right to time off for study for 16 and 17-year-olds and we believe that it has been successful. It must be coupled with a number of other elements, such as placing a stronger requirement on employers to ensure that 16 and 17-year-olds exercise that right. The penalties on employers who obstruct that right are minimal and should be toughened. However, I do not have evidence and have not evaluated the initiative. If colleagues in the Trades Union Congress have done more work on the issue, we will pass it to the committee.

**Mr Macintosh:** Any information on the initiative's success, or even on its failings, would be welcome.

Marilyn Livingstone said that we would welcome more information on the scheme in Rosyth and I would like you to send that to us. However, I would like to know more about a particular point that is not covered in your submission. There are problems surrounding the issue of mass learning schemes and the need for individually tailored learning for all adults. Many of the schemes that Governments promote tend to be large schemes into which individuals are shoehorned. Are there lessons to be learned from the scheme in Rosyth with regard to individual flexibility and, perhaps, the funding of that?

**John Park:** This is the first time that there has been an onus on the individual to participate to this extent. The education process in Rosyth is to

do with the fact that people should not only participate in learning but understand what participating in learning could mean for them. In terms of employability, people might have picked up skills but not yet have the formal qualifications that would demonstrate that they had those skills. There is evidence that people who take ownership of their own learning are far more supple when it comes to taking on new learning initiatives that a company might introduce when it changes its business direction. There is benefit for the company and for the individual.

**The Convener:** I should point out that Westminster has a UK workforce development unit that is working on some of those issues. I have asked the clerks to ensure that we receive a report on what it is likely to recommend.

**Brian Fitzpatrick:** I am pleased, at my first meeting as a member of this committee, to be able to welcome not only a representative of my union but a constituent of mine. Members will be aware that Grahame Smith has slightly more experience of attending this committee than I have.

Like a number of my colleagues, I welcome the use of trade union influence to increase the take-up of learning at work. I support the upskilling of union representatives, which will boost the capacity of the unions to act as learning organisations. I welcome the idea of the ambassadorial role, which is set out in paragraph 3.8 of your submission; I would be interested in exploring that.

I am aware of the significant lead that unions have taken in Scotland in relation to the take-up of the independent learning accounts. I first became aware of the work of the unions in that regard with the Humberside experience. The trade union movement is to be commended for its work. I want to find out more about partnership working and in particular how the Scottish Executive, Scottish Enterprise and the other agencies compare with the bodies south of the border.

Annabel Goldie referred to learning centres as hubs. John Park mentioned the mentoring initiative that the AEEU has taken in relation to SMEs. As part of the new deal, the union has given support to SMEs, with the aim of encouraging them to take a more productive approach to learning and not to see it simply as an additional cost.

Is work being done, either under the auspices of the STUC or under the auspices of the TUC, with STUC input, on regional or sectoral bids to develop union-led initiatives for addressing strategic skills shortages? Elaine Thomson raised that issue and you touch on it in paragraph 6.10 of your submission.

11:00

**Grahame Smith:** The member has asked a number of questions—I hope that I will remember all of them.

In paragraph 3.8, we make the point that the unions have played a variety of roles in relation to learning. One has been to develop the capacity of union members as trade unionists and as citizens, to enable them to participate more effectively in our democratic structures.

It is fair to say that the partnerships that we have developed with the Executive over the past couple of years have been important. They have produced significant initiatives, one of which is the Scottish union learning fund. The working party that was established, which is chaired by the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, has been important in that regard. It has acted as a catalyst, enabling us to develop more effective partnerships with other organisations. We already have an effective partnership with Scottish Enterprise at a national level, but we need to develop that at a local level. There are a number of other organisations with which we could work more effectively. The working party has been an important catalyst for that.

An issue that the union learning fund has highlighted is the importance of bids on a regional or sectoral basis to address skills shortages. We have encouraged unions to consider how they might combine on a sectoral basis to consider such bids. It might be possible to make bids on a cross-border basis but, as members know, the English and Scottish funds are separate at the moment. However, there is growing co-operation between the STUC and the TUC in this area, and we are identifying ways in which to improve it. We want both to share experience across the border and to identify areas in which it would be appropriate to take initiatives on a UK-wide basis, as well as on a Scotland-wide basis.

**Dec McGrath:** I would like to provide the committee with some indication of the lack of local partnerships, particularly under the Scottish union learning fund. An evaluation of the union learning fund in England showed that, in its first year, 45 projects—64 per cent of the total—had training and enterprise council support. I emphasise that the support was from TECs. In the second year, 64 projects—61 per cent of the total—had TEC support. In the third year, 95 projects—only 18 per cent of the total—had TEC support. TECs have supported projects at the beginning; the need for their involvement has diminished over the years. It is interesting to note that, in the first year of the Scottish union learning fund, no local enterprise company was involved in any projects, with the exception of Fife Enterprise, which has offered some support to the relearn Rosyth project.

**Grahame Smith:** Fife Enterprise has added tremendous value to that project, which could have been added in other areas. This is not just about the LECs; the unions have also had a problem knowing how to work effectively with the agencies. We need to overcome that.

**John Park:** Effective partnership working should be developed as part of the strategy. At the moment, for example, there is ambiguity about individual learning accounts. There was some confusion about ILAs when they were first established, but people were listening and ILAs have since been developed. We are now dealing with a three-year programme and ILAs are being promoted in the workplace. However, that is all a bit like being told that you have a three-year warranty on your car but knowing only what you will get for the first year. There has to be a link between ILAs, what the enterprise companies are doing and the goals of the local colleges.

**Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I want to return to the vexed question of the investment obligation in larger companies. I accept totally what John Park has said about the advantages brought by training not just for employees but for companies as a result of what he described as the supple nature of the work force—"supple" is an excellent word. If we accept that, the question for the committee and ultimately the Parliament will be what level of obligation we impose. In other words, do we use the carrot or the stick? I understand that we are now talking about larger companies exclusively. If what you say about the advantage to the company is correct, what is it about the mentality of the response from the larger employers that means that there has to be an element of compulsion?

You say:

"The STUC believes that larger employers should have an 'investment obligation' placed upon them that would require them to invest, at least five per cent of their pay roll on training".

We need more detail on your definition of a larger employer. If you do not have it to hand, you can supply it in writing. Why do you specify 5 per cent of the payroll? What is the current spend under the voluntary arrangements? Most important, what is the European experience where companies invest at that level either on a statutory or voluntary basis?

**Grahame Smith:** Those of you who know the trade union movement well will know the way in which we make policy—it is not always the most appropriate method and some of the details do not emerge as required. That is not to say that we are not aware of the need to put the detail in. We are working with the TUC on that at the moment. If there is to be an obligation on employers, it has to be UK-wide. We are not advocating going back to

the bureaucratic system that existed under the previous arrangements for the compulsory levy. We are examining ways in which that bureaucracy can be removed.

At this time, I am unable to give Mr Hamilton the detail that he is seeking; I am not sure whether, according to our time scales and those for our work with the TUC, it will be possible to meet the committee's time scale, either. However, we will endeavour to supply you with whatever information we can.

I want to pick up a point that was made earlier in relation to the statutory obligation. I accept the point that Annabel Goldie made about small businesses. Past experience has shown us that there is value in larger businesses supporting smaller businesses because of the nature of the supply chain and the way in which companies recruit. In general, such support helps to develop the pool of skilled labour in the labour market. As well as some form of financial support from the Government to small businesses, there is an obligation on larger companies to consider how they might support smaller companies in the same industry.

**John Park:** Duncan Hamilton talked about the value of training to the organisation. I always go back to the example of Babcock Rosyth, because it is under the microscope just now. One of the needs of the business was on-going redundancy. The rundown of the submarine programme at Rosyth dockyard meant that there was no real need for nuclear safety engineers in the Fife community. We were looking for people with aptitude to give them the opportunity to retrain. We could not convince the company that there was a need for them to do something different just now because they were needed for the next nine months to carry out nuclear safety cases, but we convinced the group of individuals—20 people—to formalise their IT skills through qualifications. A quarter of them have now moved on to do something different.

There is a difference of opinion about what is happening between the larger organisation and those at the coalface—the people at the sharp end—and in human resources and training. It could be said that such initiatives would be easier to achieve in small businesses because the goals of the businesses are clear.

At Rosyth there is a skills shortage in certain trades—among electricians and software engineers, for example. There are also people with great aptitude who have gone on to get qualifications and have moved into an IT department or drawing office—that is an old term—or into another area where people are needed. Those first, tentative steps were taken by individuals, with encouragement from learning

reps. We are playing a long game and are at the early stages.

**Mr Hamilton:** I ask you to put yourself in our shoes: for anything to be taken forward or even presented to other organisations, anything that you can give us by way of a European comparison would be useful.

**Grahame Smith:** I accept that. There are European comparisons regarding a statutory right to time off or to paid educational leave. I can easily get you information on that. I accept your point about needing to consider examples from elsewhere to back up policies that might be proposed.

**Elaine Thomson:** We have covered some of what I was going to ask, so I will try to keep this short. I have a specific interest in skills shortages, which I believe to be arising all over the place, particularly in the technological and engineering sectors and in the oil and gas and the electronics industries. I believe that we have problems relating to a lack of continuing training and skills development for people in their 20s or 30s—after they have come out of full-time education or apprenticeships.

In the development of a structure to support lifelong learning, what balance do we need between something that an individual can develop and something that is run by employers? In the oil and gas industry, an enormous number of self-employed contractors is employed possibly through different agencies at different levels. Those contractors will go off and work for AMEC, Wood Group or Brown and Root, for example, but they will be working, say, on a BP or Shell project. The situation is complex and fluid. People are moving all the time from one project to another; they move in and out of this country. Given that, the challenge is to put something in place that supports continuing skills development. The situation that I have described affects an increasing number of people in today's employment market.

**Grahame Smith:** John Park has whispered to me that he has a good example of that. What you say suggests the need to develop a sectoral approach, to which Brian Fitzpatrick was referring. We would view such an approach as a consequence and a part of any obligation on the part of employers to invest in skills development.

**John Park:** The AEEU has been in discussions to consider the situation for offshore workers, who are to some extent excluded from lifelong learning—not just because of location, but because they want to spend time with their friends and family when they come back on the beach, as they say.

Through my discussions with representatives of

the national training organisations—NTOs—we have put together a joint bulletin to promote the benefits and skills that people need to progress as individuals. I have forgotten the precise word that was used, but it was a good description of what is happening. We are trying to acknowledge the fact that there is no drive among the organisations that employ people who work offshore to get them new skills, although there are skills shortages in certain areas. We are trying to inform people that they need certain competencies to reach certain levels and we are trying to inform them what they have to do to reach those levels.

We are at an early stage of discussion with all the NTOs that operate offshore: Opito, National Electrotechnical Training, the Construction Industry Training Board and the Engineering and Marine Training Authority, as well as Scottish Enterprise Grampian. That attempt to build up a strategy for the offshore sector forms part of our next union learning fund project, not only for individuals' lifelong learning but for people to get the competencies that are required to take the industry forward.

**Dec McGrath:** There are a couple of examples of current Scottish union learning fund projects. One is run by the National Union of Journalists, many of whose members are freelancers and so do not have access to training through employers. The NUJ is developing courses for its membership and is paying members through individual learning accounts. It is therefore acting as a developer and provider of training, and almost as a funder of training. That is a good, fluid example, which I hope can be sustained.

**Grahame Smith:** The other example is that the AEEU has established its own training college for that reason. Continued training is difficult for engineers who, because they operate in a changing industry, as Elaine Thomson described, cannot gather the skills.

**John Park:** SMEs also face difficulties, as they may not have the facilities and capability. The college is non-profit making and helps the union's vocational training.

11:15

**Grahame Smith:** Much of that activity has been funded by Europe.

John Park mentioned the NTOs. A change has happened in the NTO arrangements. Another important vehicle for addressing the issues is industry-wide partnerships, involving unions, employers and providers. Ensuring that the new arrangements for NTOs have a proper Scottish dimension will be important.

**Elaine Thomson:** I am pleased to hear you say



that you are thinking of becoming training providers. That is part of the answer, given the nature of the work force about which we have been talking.

You mentioned NTOs. A United Kingdom review of those is happening. Concerns have been raised with me about how that feeds into the Scottish level.

**The Convener:** What is happening is more than a review now. An announcement has been made that NTOs have been abolished and replaced with sectoral skills councils.

**Elaine Thomson:** It would be useful to the committee's inquiry to get some information on that and to understand how that interacts with us.

**The Convener:** I have asked the clerks to do that already.

I thank the witnesses. Their contribution was helpful.

## Lifelong Learning Inquiry (Brussels Visit)

**The Convener:** Item 5 is a report from the visit that Annabel Goldie, Duncan Hamilton and Elaine Thomson made to Brussels during the recess. Annabel Goldie will lead off with a verbal report—no doubt Elaine Thomson and Duncan Hamilton will supplement it. We will also get a written report.

**Miss Goldie:** While one or two committee members were sunning themselves in Lithuania and diverse other places, Elaine Thomson, Duncan Hamilton and I sojourned in Brussels.

As Alex Neil indicated, my oral report will be brief. The visit was interesting and raised more questions than it answered, so we have asked for a lot of supplementary information to be provided to us. That will form the basis of our written report.

Four meetings were scheduled. The first was not an auspicious omen. It was to be held in Rue Belliard 7, which we failed to find. In our highly dubious French, we failed to elicit any information from passers-by. Finally, after half an hour of searching for the building and despite noble attempts by Judith Evans, our clerk, to get more information, we had to abort the meeting. What we subsequently learned greatly reassured us.

**The Convener:** Is that when you caused a crash, according to Duncan Hamilton?

**Miss Goldie:** That is another issue altogether.

We were enormously reassured to learn after subsequent inquiry that the building has no number and no name and that no one can find it to attend meetings. I tried not to allow the incident to jaundice my attitude to the European Union.

What we found out from subsequent meetings was helpful. Basically, we realised that what is happening in the EU and what we are doing in the Scottish Parliament do not dovetail. The European Parliament Culture, Youth, Education, Media and Sport Committee has part responsibility for lifelong learning, as does the Employment and Social Affairs Committee. We were therefore trying to interface with a rather dislocated pattern, but we did our best.

It emerged from our meeting with the European Commission that it has published a lifelong learning memorandum. The next stage is to publish an action plan. We await more information about that, but we were given the impression that the action plan might be a slightly vague wish list. I do not know how much of substance will come from it.

Someone then attempted to describe to us responsibility for policy development. At that point,

we were collectively beaten—there seem to be four pillars, five policy priorities and six key issues, which do not necessarily link with each other or together. That is one area on which we are seeking further clarification.

More pertinently, I should add that there are different interpretations of lifelong learning in the European Parliament and the European Commission. That is an important issue in relation to our activity. The Employment and Social Affairs Committee seems to take a similar view to ours on what lifelong learning is, while the Culture, Youth, Education, Media and Sport Committee takes a cradle-to-grave view. The interface is not particularly neat.

On the matter of a coherent strategy, the employment and social affairs directorate-general, which administers the European structural funds, said that Scotland appeared to lack a coherent strategy for lifelong learning. That concerned us somewhat. Later on, however, the MEP we spoke to from the Culture, Youth, Education, Media and Sport Committee said that the UK has one of the five best lifelong learning strategies in the EU. There seems to be a slight communication difficulty there. We are seeking more information on that.

One positive thing, from which we drew some comfort, was the emphasis by Commission staff on the need for outcome measurement, for which they were seeking impact studies. An example of a measure that has been discussed is number of people still in learning X months after a publicly funded intervention, the intention being to show that the intervention had led to something.

The good news was that Scotland is a model for social inclusion; apparently it is regarded as one of the best in Europe. The Commission was impressed with work in Scotland in that regard and best practice in Scotland will be disseminated throughout Europe. That is a feather in the cap for what we are trying to achieve here.

Various other issues arose, such as gender, adult literacy and Europe-wide action on learning. To go back to the submission from NUS Scotland, work is going on to consider the transferability of qualifications throughout Europe. That seems to be inter-institutional, about which we had some concerns, because we did not see how that could operate without threatening the autonomy of institutions. We were also concerned about the practicalities of achieving the structure for transferability. When we questioned a committee member about that, we got the impression that sanctions to enforce it would be undesirable, although it was thought that discussions would result in a move towards sanctions. More information about that will no doubt be forthcoming—we certainly had one or two

questions about it. It was suggested that it might be worth while for the Scottish Parliament to consider Germany and the nordic nations, which have some models of excellence in learning. Again, we need more information about that.

That is a brief synopsis of a full and interesting visit. I hope that, when we get the further information that we have asked for, we will be able to draw those threads together and present a substantive written report.

**The Convener:** Do Elaine Thomson or Duncan Hamilton wish to add anything?

**Elaine Thomson:** I was pleased to hear that Scotland is at the leading edge in tackling social exclusion—the Commission is interested in hearing more about that. It feels like we need a more coherent and strategic overall policy—that fits in with much of the evidence that is beginning to come in. On the development of some sort of comprehensive lifelong learning policy, it was suggested that we consider the Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries and some of the German states as examples of places that have coherent policies.

Some interesting bits and pieces came out. For instance, we are increasingly aware that we have literacy problems—about 20 per cent of the population are thought to be functionally illiterate. We were told that, in England, people in that situation tend to be unemployed, whereas in Scotland, even someone whose literacy is not great may still be employed. I found that quite interesting.

It is sometimes difficult to keep in touch with the different organisations about what is going on at the EU level and what we are doing here. However, that contact is important, as those organisations provide the overall context for an awful lot of what is happening. One of the subjects under discussion is the development of a pan-European or pan-European Union qualifications framework. Although that is probably a good number of years off yet, it is the direction in which people want to go.

**Mr Hamilton:** I should emphasise that it is not accurate to say that committee members simply went to Brussels to find out what the EU strategy was and then brought it back with them to see whether the committee could catch up with it. In fact, what happened was quite the reverse. Most of the time, people told us that, as education was a matter of domestic policy, the issue was not their responsibility and they had almost no input into it. The committee should take some strength from the fact that we were more or less given the green light on this issue.

I want to flag up a couple of points that will be included in the written report. A rapporteur to the

Culture, Youth, Education, Media and Sport Committee produced a fairly damning report on the 1996 European year of lifelong learning. The report unpicked what the Commission had done to date and suggested what had been wrong with the project's focus and resource aspects. I found the report to be a useful starting point, as other committee members might do; if we know what the Commission has done wrong, we can perhaps avoid some of those mistakes.

It is worth reiterating that there is a difference between the criteria selected by the Commission—or the committee—and its priorities. We were not convinced that the criteria and the priorities were the same. Criteria are often selected on the basis of departmental responsibility instead of necessarily matching, for example, the top three overarching priorities. The bottom line is that, although there is a great deal going on in the Commission to note, we should not feel hampered in any way, shape or form. This is a question of not being driven by what is happening in Europe, but of learning from it.

**Brian Fitzpatrick:** Will information on European-wide university, college or professional qualifications be made available to the members who visited Brussels? We have some experience on this matter under the right of establishment. A body with which I am associated became tremendously upset and overheated at the notion that members of the Paris bar might be more willing to descend on the Scottish legal profession than to the bar in Newcastle or London. Aside from the fact that the market has a role to play in these matters, the right of establishment rules caused considerable excitement. As far as the committee and partnership working with the Government are concerned, it would be useful to get a handle on the matter. Are measures not going to be introduced until 2015 or so, or are they coming soon?

**Miss Goldie:** It is difficult to answer that question. As far as I understand it, the comments that were made to us solely concerned the provision of higher education in the European Union, which means that they were about institutions, not wider professional organisations or associations. I got the impression that the European Parliament committee had got its teeth into and proposed to progress the matter; however, it is difficult to speculate on the time scale.

Although it was not a scheduled event, the three of us sat in on the committee. What was it called again?

**Elaine Thomson:** Education.

11:30

**Miss Goldie:** It had a big long title. I do not know whether Duncan Hamilton has fully recovered from the experience. The interpretation was delivered in such a flat monotone that, if the interpreter could be imported to this country, he would be a cheaper option than Mogadon for the national health service. I dialled up the Italian version, which was akin to listening to Verdi. It was full of colour, excitement and expression, but I could not understand a word that the man was saying.

The interpretation meant that our brief visit to the committee, although interesting, was perhaps not the most enjoyable experience that the three of us have ever endured. It seemed to me that the committee takes on a topic—such as the one that we have been discussing—and then worries away at it, keeping it on the agenda until it comes up with something. All we can do is track where the committee is going with that matter, by reference to the committee itself or to the exceedingly interesting committee member whom we met, Dr O'Toole.

**The Convener:** I do not want this discussion to be prolonged, but I believe that Ken Macintosh has a question.

**Mr Macintosh:** Further to Miss Goldie's point, I have not quite got the idea of what that committee does. If it is an education committee, is it starting from a school-based focus—for example, on the international baccalaureate—rather than from degree-level qualifications? If not, is it looking at lifelong learning qualifications?

**Mr Hamilton:** I cannot remember the full name of the committee, but education is the least important aspect of its remit. It was made clear that education is a matter that is more for domestic consideration—the committee merely touches on the subject.

**Brian Fitzpatrick:** I have a supplementary question. Perhaps we will find out otherwise, but I doubt whether Mr Hamilton's point captures the notion. The European Union exists to ensure mutual recognition and the bringing down of barriers. There are real issues around this aspect of education. If a substantive piece of work is going on at European parliamentary committee level, I would like to see how it was scoped, who is having input into it and where it is going.

**The Convener:** That is the purpose of the teleconference that we are scheduled to hold with members of that committee in January. Once we get the written report, we will know what further questions we want to ask. The teleconference will be not with the whole committee, which has about 59 members, but with representatives of the committee. We are also considering involving

people from the Commission in that teleconference, as a follow-up to the Brussels visit.

**Mr Macintosh:** Can I put in a request for the same interpreter? I want to hear his interpretation.

**Elaine Thomson:** Some of the things that we asked to be sent to us can be distributed to the rest of the committee. Annabel Goldie might have mentioned this, but we were told that there was a memorandum on lifelong learning, which has been voted on. The European Parliament committee then received a response to that in the form of a communiqué from the European Commission. From that, national plans and targets are being developed, which are out to consultation with each member state—that was done in the UK this summer.

**The Convener:** The consultation came to this committee.

**Elaine Thomson:** Did it?

**Miss Goldie:** That was what I described today as a slightly vague wish list—which was a quote. That is how it was described to us. That is one of the things worth following up.

**Elaine Thomson:** The consultation ought to contain some stuff about the common qualification framework throughout the European Union.

**The Convener:** I think that we agree that we need the written report and the follow-up documentation. To add to the support that the clerks give us, we might ask—through the clerks—for one of the advisers to assist us with the key questions that we would like to ask in the teleconference in January.

**Elaine Thomson:** I have a minor, general point about making the most of a trip such as our Brussels visit. We found that the trip was useful but that it is worth doing a fair amount of homework before one goes. I would have found it more useful to have had a clearer view of the relationships between different organisations and what their remit was. Members who are going on such trips should have a clear idea of their objectives and what they are trying to find out. Otherwise, one can spend so much time trying to understand what the different bits and pieces are, that by the time one gets to that stage one is running out of—

**The Convener:** That is a good point. Can we agree that as a matter of course on any further visits we—through the clerks—organise some pre-visit research as part of the planning for the visit? I think that that is a good suggestion.

**Members indicated agreement.**

**Elaine Thomson:** We should also have a map with “X marks the spot”.

**The Convener:** Okay. That was a useful discussion.

Before we leave the subject of the lifelong learning inquiry, let me mention that we now have formal approval for the budget for the lifelong learning convention, which will take place on Friday 1 March. We hope that every member of the committee will put that date in their diary, because it is important that committee members participate in that all-day event at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre.

11:34

*Meeting adjourned until 11:43 and thereafter continued in private until 12:09.*

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