

ENTERPRISE AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE

Wednesday 19 December 2001
(Morning)

Session 1

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ENTERPRISE AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE

30th Meeting 2001, Session 1

CONVENER

*Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (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:

Murray McVicar (Scottish Parliament Information Centre)

WITNESSES

Malcolm Barron (Institute of Career Guidance)
Anton Colella (Scottish Qualifications Authority)
Catriona Eagle (Institute of Career Guidance)
Linda McKay (Scottish Qualifications Authority)
Jo Noblett (Institute of Career Guidance)
Aileen Ponton (Scottish Qualifications Authority)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Simon Watkins

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Judith Evans

ASSISTANT CLERK

Linda Orton

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee

Wednesday 19 December 2001

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:02*]

Items in Private

The Convener (Alex Neil): I welcome everyone to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee's 30th meeting in 2001. We have apologies from Tavish Scott, Elaine Thomson and Kenny MacAskill.

Agenda item 1 is to consider whether to take items 4 and 5 in private. Item 4 is our work programme and item 5 is our draft lifelong learning report. Does the committee agree to take those items in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Lifelong Learning Inquiry

The Convener: We will take two sets of evidence to our lifelong learning inquiry. First, I welcome witnesses from the Scottish Qualifications Authority, with which we are very familiar, for obvious reasons. It is nice to see the witnesses again. I hope that a positive tone will be adopted on the future of lifelong learning. I welcome Anton Colella, who is the director of the SQA and who will introduce his team and make introductory remarks. We have received your written evidence. After you complete your introduction, we will ask questions.

Anton Colella (Scottish Qualifications Authority): On my right is Aileen Ponton, who is general manager for qualifications and assessment development. On my left is Linda McKay, who is principal of Falkirk College of Further and Higher Education, a member of the SQA's board of management and chair of the SQA qualifications committee.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to give evidence to support our written submission to the lifelong learning inquiry. We recognise the need for a national focus on activities that are associated with lifelong learning. That is essential for articulation, cohesion and consistency in a learning and qualifications framework and strategy.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority is in a unique position to contribute to the development of that strategy. In the SQA, Scotland has a single body with the awarding and certificating roles for qualifications that are offered in schools, colleges and workplaces. We possess a wealth of experience that has been gained from developing and maintaining that vast network of awarding activity, especially in vocational qualifications and professional awards.

Recently, we introduced professional development awards for call centres, for learning centre operators for the Scottish university for industry and for college lecturers and assessors. We also recognise that much work must be done to promote and support work-based learning in a way that makes its recognition and funding more mainstream. Similarly, the flexibility of our Scottish vocational qualifications must be supported by equally flexible funding.

As for social inclusion, we ask the committee to note the positive impact of the recent introduction of the new national qualifications. Between 1999 and 2000, the number of entries from special schools and colleges for access courses increased fourteenfold. We expect such interest to grow as centres strive to meet the needs and aspirations of returning learners.

The certification of learning can be used to motivate, support and add structure to a framework, but if there is to be a national lifelong learning strategy, it must be supported by an integrated quality assurance system. To that end, any national strategy can draw on the SQA's experience of its formal function of accrediting vocational qualifications. Such a model may also be considered in the implementation of the Scottish credit and qualifications framework.

The Scottish qualifications certificate—the SQC—provides a cumulative record of achievement that will follow students from school to further education and into employment. We ask the committee, in exploring the options for recording learning, to consider that model as a way of providing a record of learning and achievement in a format that is accessible to learners, learning providers and employers.

The promotion of lifelong learning needs to go hand in hand with the development of a mechanism that records formal qualifications and recognises partial, experiential, leisure and work-based learning.

The Convener: I will kick off. The other day, Anton Colella and I attended a conference on the Scottish credit and qualifications framework. During the inquiry, the committee has heard much evidence about routes and pathways to accreditation and to qualifications and about the mutual recognition of accreditation and of qualifications. Will you expand on how you expect the Scottish credit and qualifications framework to develop? Should it become all-encompassing in further and higher education?

Anton Colella: The SCQF has undergone what we consider a process of development to what we call the implementation stage. At the conference on Monday, we saw the kick-off that followed the introduction to the framework a couple of months ago.

The framework provides a facility and an opportunity for all learners—from school to postgraduate and doctorate levels—to find their qualification in a single national framework. The convener is aware of how envious our European partners will be of such a framework.

Implementation is the challenge. The development partners and the joint advisory committee for the Scottish credit and qualifications framework recognise that to develop the SCQF and ensure that there is national buy-in from the two relevant Scottish Executive departments, we must do considerable work that moves away from the development partner interface to national buy-in, certainly from the Executive, and from all professional bodies and learning providers. Higher education, the SQA and further education must all

share the same table.

I will develop comments in our submission. The SCQF provides a tertiary forum for determining the future placing of qualifications. We do not yet have the facility to credit-rate existing or new qualifications. At the conference on Monday, the convener will have noted professional bodies' concerns about where they will appear in the framework, who they will be credit-rated by and how quality assurance will be provided. In recent discussion, one of our concerns has been who owns the framework. Is it owned by the development partners or by national policy? If national policy owns it, the framework must have a national focus and full Executive support, not only at this stage but throughout the implementation process.

Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): My question is a variation on a theme,

because it concerns the aspects that are under discussion, particularly

"the value of informal learning"

and the

"importance of managing the accreditation of prior learning",

to which the SQA's submission refers.

The challenge is formidable. Can it be approached in phases? Is the first challenge examining existing qualifications in all their multiple forms and asking how we make sense of them, by recognising formally that A equals two Bs, for example?

Anton Colella: Yes.

Miss Goldie: Is the next phase examining the wider spectrum of learning in multiple forms and asking how we quantify that in a recognisable form?

Linda McKay (Scottish Qualifications Authority): My answer is yes and no. Existing qualifications should supply structures to work with, but sometimes having a blank page provides advantages. Given our position with the SCQF and the opportunities that it provides, starting to design in the context of the SCQF and taking account of credits from day one provides opportunities in relation to informal aspects of provision and new routes into the SCQF, where barriers may be less entrenched and where more opportunity may be available.

I do not necessarily expect us not to reach that stage of involvement in the SCQF until after we have sorted out the technical aspects of other qualifications. We may work in parallel and not in phases. Some excellent opportunities are available. I attended the conference on Monday and could see enthusiasm from community

partners, for instance, which will offer opportunities. It would be a great shame to hold some of that back while waiting for the FE-HE interface, for instance, which involves some tricky issues, but which has momentum towards the routes that we have long wanted to be put in place. It would be a pity to have a sequence. I would rather that we made progress.

Aileen Ponton (Scottish Qualifications Authority): I agree. Much expertise exists on how to produce models that take people along that road. In our submission and in Anton Colella's introduction, the importance of vocational qualifications to the framework was mentioned. Where we place Scottish vocational qualifications in the SCQF is an issue. They are different, because they are not time-bound and do not concern notional times of learning. Those qualifications involve a range of partners and take us into the United Kingdom perspective. We will learn things from that work that will allow us to spread out into more informal learning, because Scottish vocational qualifications are more closely aligned to that part of the framework.

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): The SQA's evidence was helpful and interesting. You considered social issues as well as economic issues, which helped the committee, so I thank you very much.

I had planned to ask a question about the Scottish credit and qualifications framework, but that question has been well answered. Your submission refers to targets that are linked to learning. If we introduce a set of performance indicators, how do we ensure that they do not skew learning? As I keep asking, how do we ensure that learning drives funding and that funding does not drive learning? How would you advise the committee on ensuring that performance targets measure added value and do not affect the quality of learning and teaching?

Linda McKay: That is a difficult question, which people have considered for a while. I do not pretend to have an answer, but perhaps I have one or two insights. The starting point is having good quality consistent data throughout the sectors and the levels. At present, various components of the education and training community in Scotland do not hold robust, comparable data on the same matters.

The SQA is part of that complex picture. Indeed, we have learned a lesson from the significant difficulty that we met during the 2000 certification of interfacing with those who use our services and who have their own services, where data is not well matched or consistent. At the starting point, there is an issue to do with data and consistency of terminology and interpretation. Before we begin to build, we must decide what we mean by added

value on that baseline. I think that that is the national starting point.

10:15

The committee has posed the questions and, in a sense, it is in a position to determine the strategy and the priorities. Those priorities are not necessarily a distortion of learning—the issue is to do with the emphasis of what we are saying nationally through the consensus that we are determining, which would translate into resources and priorities for development through the joint advisory committee. The best way of determining appropriate indicators is to consult those who will deliver those indicators and who understand the meaning of the terminology and the implementation issues that arise when those indicators are used and interpreted. The indicators cannot be arrived at in isolation—they must come out of consultation. Many parts of the education community have dealt with imposed indicators, and we have seen the consequences of the difficulties of working through those indicators. Usually, the best practice is to reshape and amend. A good example of that is the difference between achievement and attainment that was introduced through the review framework for further education of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education. That difference was introduced to ensure that we recognised the starting point and the steps beyond it, rather than concentrating on a particular performance indicator that is, if you like, a snapshot in time. There is a lot of evidence about how, by mutual consent and through consultation, indicators that are less likely to be distorted and that are meaningful to those who will use and deliver them can be arrived at. The potential for distortion arises where the indicators link into other issues, such as structure and funding.

Anton Colella: We support that point, in that targets will assist the committee and the nation in ensuring that we remove duplication from the system. Within the SQA, we know that we can provide management information that determines exactly where activity is taking place. Within the learning environment, we must ensure that we know where activities are taking place and where the funding follows to make sure that duplication is avoided. I know that that concern has been raised with the committee before.

Marilyn Livingstone: The milestones that are linked to funding for the vocational qualifications that you just mentioned definitely distort the delivery of such training programmes—at least, that is the evidence that we are being given. What are your views on that point? If performance indicators are introduced, should the system be simplified, with the same indicators being

introduced across the board, rather than there being different sets of targets?

Aileen Ponton: I am happy to respond to that point. Although you are right to say that there have been difficulties, the system in Scotland is better than that elsewhere in the UK. Our targets are much more flexible and are not as time-bound or rigid as targets elsewhere. The problem is probably one of consistency. Scottish vocational qualifications, which are the main qualifications in the regime that you are talking about, have changed quite a lot over the past five years. The way in which funding has been linked to them has not been reviewed and perhaps that issue should be examined to understand how the funding follows the candidate. It is quite clear that people undertake those qualifications in different ways, depending on the nature of the qualification. For example, if they take a qualification as part of a skillseekers or modern apprenticeship programme, the situation is structured, and the funding follows that. However, the situation is different if they are in employment and are taking the qualification to upskill or to develop skills. We must consider which approaches suit SVQs, as the way in which they are delivered has become much more flexible. We must consider the best fit for purpose.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): I want to explore the issue of diversity and duplication, as we hear conflicting views about whether there is diversity or whether there is duplication. Is there significant duplication?

Linda McKay: I want to clarify the question. Do you mean duplication of provision or of services? Those questions probably have different answers.

David Mundell: We should consider both.

Linda McKay: As a responsive body, the SQA endeavours to meet the needs of a diverse range of clients, including employers, colleges and, increasingly, the community. It is important to tailor provision to client need because that leads to choice and diversity, which is a strength of the way in which qualifications have developed in Scotland. The other side of that coin is that the more we tailor provision to meet the needs of particular groups—the more responsive the system is—the more likely it is that we will have fine distinctions between the models that are developed for different needs and different client groups. That balance and tension is healthy, but it must be tested more rigorously when there is a genuine case for introducing new and additional provision and when existing models are to be tailored and developed further.

After the expansion of the unitisation of national provision, the SQA did a lot of work to pull back from what was a diverse portfolio to something that was rationalised and more sensible from the

point of view of deliverers and the client group. We must keep that in view constantly. Rigour is introduced because diversity and choice nearly always bring cost. One thing we have begun to learn about introducing new qualifications and expanding the portfolio is that we must examine the portfolio to determine whether it contains qualifications that no longer have a shelf-life and which should be rejected. At the same time, we must consider whether the changes that are being introduced are sustainable and affordable and we must talk to the various client groups about the costs—which we all pay—of implementing the changes.

There is a clear balance. Whether we have always got it right is open to question. It is too simplistic to suggest that we can simplify and narrow the portfolio while expanding into areas in which existing qualifications do not meet needs. There is no easy answer, but that tension must be at the centre of our decisions.

Anton Colella: If the committee will indulge me, I can wear another hat—I am a secondee to the SQA, but I am also the deputy head teacher of a secondary school in Castlemilk. It can be complex to assist students to identify pathways to accessing post-school education. The portfolio of learning opportunities in Scotland is immense and the SQA's portfolio is immense. The challenge for the SQA is to make our portfolio accessible and understandable in terms of pathways so that employers, FE colleges and other learning providers can use them and can communicate. From the learners' point of view, we must ensure that by simplification we do not narrow provision, but instead provide clear information and communication about the diversity of qualifications.

David Mundell: What about the duplication of providers?

Anton Colella: That is a complex issue. A geographical area could have a number of providers that accommodate the variety of needs of learners. We are not in a position to give a view on the diversity of providers. The SQA is responsive to whoever wants us to provide qualifications.

Aileen Ponton: Perhaps the debate about lifelong learning strategy, provision and access could be taken forward by finding a way of aligning it with the debate about the qualifications framework. Over the past few years, the SQA has been asked sometimes to respond to specific initiatives or to provide a route into a qualification for a specific group of people, for a social inclusion agenda or whatever.

We can be as flexible as possible in doing that, while being careful about adding to the framework

and potentially making it more complex because we are trying to include more people within it and keep up access. That is why it is important that, to progress with a lifelong learning strategy, discussions about the framework, the providers and the learning opportunities should run in parallel. That would reduce the potential for the kind of duplication that you talked about.

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I have two questions. The first picks up on your point about the diversity of providers. In your written submission you referred to the

"so-called 'vendor qualifications' — the qualifications offered by companies such as Microsoft and Cisco."

You said that, through the interface of Government and the business community,

"The national strategy should acknowledge this"

What do you mean by that? You said also that in those cases

"we shall extend an element of quality assurance."

How do you do that? What kind of tie-ups do you have already with that sector of the industry? Is there a sense in which that is almost beyond your control? What happens if we try to put in place a national strategy to take account of that? That is the first question.

The second question is to clarify the penultimate paragraph on the penultimate page of the submission, in which you talk about the future of the SCQF.

"It is also important to avoid initiatives developed or led by UK agencies having design characteristics which are incompatible with the distinctive Scottish learning environment."

What do you mean by that?

Aileen Ponton: I will take the second question first because it has an impact on the first question.

One issue is that the SQA works directly with the Scottish Executive and has responsibility for the Scottish qualifications framework as distinct from the Scottish credit and qualifications framework. However, the SQA also has to work with a range of providers, some of which are UK providers such as an UK company or training provider. Education and training initiatives emanating from the Government south of the border have an agenda and shape to meet the needs of the national qualifications framework that is regulated south of the border, but employers and providers often want to roll out those initiatives throughout the UK.

On occasion, such initiatives and qualifications do not sit well within our framework, nor match well with how Scottish qualifications are delivered. For example, there have been recent initiatives to change the shape of modern apprenticeships for England and Wales. Those changes have

included types of specified off-the-job learning and the development of what have been called technical certificates. Those qualifications have been developed to meet specific needs within the national qualifications framework for England and are regulated by a body that is not the SQA. If the technical certificates were imported into Scotland and moved into modern apprenticeships up here, there would be two difficulties. First, they might not match well with the way that provision is delivered in Scotland. Secondly, they are not regulated by the SQA.

Those are issues about initiatives that emanate from other parts of the UK but have a potential for UK-wide delivery. There are ways of managing them, but we must carefully consider all the time what kind of framework we are developing.

Mr Hamilton: That is useful. How can that be monitored? If a national strategy is to be put together, what would be the best way to ensure that what you have described does not happen?

10:30

Aileen Ponton: There are measures in place. SQA has quite formal relationships with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, which is the regulatory authority for England and parts of Wales and Northern Ireland for national vocational qualifications. There are joint developments and relationships through which we share expertise and understanding of where qualification frameworks are going.

One issue relates to funding and the qualifications that appear within the funding regime in Scotland. National vocational qualifications, for example, can be funded in Scotland as part of the skillseekers programme and modern apprenticeships. That is understandable as they have been developed as part of a UK framework. However, other qualifications under that system may look to engage in our funding system. We must consider that.

We must have continuous dialogue with regulatory authorities throughout the UK, not just about that issue but for the SCQF. We are considering the Scottish qualifications framework and the Scottish credit and qualifications framework, but there are other frameworks in the UK. The work force in some sectors in the UK is potentially mobile and we need to be careful. A number of mechanisms are in place, but we need to continue to monitor.

Mr Hamilton: I also asked about Microsoft.

Aileen Ponton: There will always be situations in which there are advantages in partnership arrangements with other organisations. SQA has a

partnership arrangement with Microsoft. We must recognise that, to provide a flexible framework that meets the needs of a wide variety of learners, sometimes we will not necessarily be the best provider in our own right. Others out there may do a good job in a particular area. There must be a relationship that ensures that there is a quality assurance mechanism. There are different ways of assuring quality through partners or providers and there are a number of examples of how we have built up and developed partnerships. Those examples take us into areas such as vendor qualifications.

Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): Your submission discusses what the lifelong learning strategy for Scotland should encompass and who should deliver it. I want to tease out what it says about continuing professional development. On page 3, it says:

"Professionals undertaking CPD must be seen as being part of the same national initiative as those undertaking basic skills as part of a second chance to learn scheme."

Your submission also touches on the issue of ownership. Is what is said intended to instruct a bid, as it were, in respect of a qualifications framework on CPD work, or is the submission simply asserting that we should ensure that people realise that it is not just those who are returning to learning who are undertaking lifelong learning?

Anton Colella: We are simply saying that CPD and initial learning are both learning and that we want to put them together. Whether a person is at school, college, work or not in work, as a nation, we are learning, even if learning is part of a person's contract—for example, a lawyer could spend 35 hours a year learning.

Brian Fitzpatrick: I was thinking of my own professional body—I declare an interest in the Faculty of Advocates—in which most training is not compulsory. Like physicians and surgeons, the bulk of our training happens when people have gone beyond the compulsory element. I think that that body would be concerned at the suggestion that it should be embraced under some national initiative. I take it that when you say "initiative" you do not have a particular initiative in mind, but mean some national endeavour towards lifelong learning.

Anton Colella: Yes.

Brian Fitzpatrick: Thank you.

Linda McKay: Of course, the SCQF is trying to create opportunities to ensure that there is full recognition for continuing professional development. Several professional bodies consider that to be a distinct advantage. There is opportunity for some dialogue rather than for a bid.

The other point that the submission makes is

that for a while there was a danger that the term "lifelong learning" had been hijacked in a way that was unhelpful to the creation of a future strategy. That was being targeted at a particular level, which the SQA found to be unhelpful in promoting an overall approach to lifelong learning.

Brian Fitzpatrick: I got that.

I have a point of clarification. In the section of your submission on duplication, confusion and overlap, you say:

"The term *lifelong* seems to belong more appropriately to those who access the provision – the learners – than to the provision itself."

I want to tease that out. I do not find that to be a reflection of the current situation, but I hope that that is where we will end up—the learner will be in pole position in lifelong learning. A major aspect of our inquiry is establishing who instructs and decides what shapes lifelong learning—the provider or the learner. I did not follow your submission on that point.

Linda McKay: At the end of the day, both the provider and the learner shape learning. Sometimes learning providers or funders are in a position to ask the SQA to put in place provision that meets their needs. Given the economic development agenda, that is a line that the SQA wants to continue to pursue. It is appropriate for the SQA to respond in that way. Similarly, the needs of individuals have to be taken into account and the organisation must consider the social element. We are clearly attempting to secure opportunity for individuals within a learning framework that allows for progression and articulation in a way that is clear and meaningful. However, the individuals will not always determine the exact nature of the opportunities.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): Please excuse my voice. I am a new member of the committee and I seek guidance from the convener about whether I should declare any interests.

The Convener: My advice is: if in doubt, declare.

Rhona Brankin: I am currently on unpaid leave of absence from Dundee University.

I want to take forward the discussion on parity of esteem between vocational and more academic routes. What is the role of the SCQF in that and what are the main institutional barriers to achieving parity of esteem?

Anton Colella: The implementation of the new national qualifications has gone a considerable way to achieving parity within schools and the FE sector. It is clear that in the national qualifications element of the SCQF there is no distinction between vocational and academic qualifications.

The more that model can be extended across the framework the better. Parity of esteem is evolving in placing our distinctly Scottish vocational qualifications within the framework. We recognise that a great deal of work needs to be done to ensure that parity is recognised.

Aileen Ponton: That is a very helpful question. The SCQF can contribute quite a lot to that debate. Looking across a framework that encompasses everything and being able to credit and level everything in that framework, making no distinction between academic and vocational qualifications will do a lot to embrace parity of esteem. There is a specific issue relating to the promotion of that idea. Quite a lot can be done to place qualifications equally within the framework. We and other partners can do much to have the right kind of debate with the right organisations about where their qualifications fit to achieve parity of esteem.

However, a promotional message—which underpins lifelong learning—is required, and that is the importance of any type of learning opportunity or qualification opportunity, regardless of its nature. Obviously, in the grand scheme of things vocational qualifications are a newer breed of qualification. Even newer are learning opportunities that are simply that—learning opportunities. There are major roles for a number of organisations in finding the right kind of messages to promote not just parity of esteem but parity of access and parity of learning, and to promote the weight and value of each opportunity. The SCQF will do quite a lot with that, but other agencies will also have to be involved.

Linda McKay: I have been introduced as an FE college principal and have declared an interest, but I am speaking now wearing my SQA hat. One of the obvious areas that people point to is the FE-HE interface, and the need to make sure that we have effective articulation. The SCQF is beginning to provide that opportunity, but a lot of dialogue has to take place to make meaningful arrangements that are easily understood by participants. At the moment, geography and timing often play a significant role in deciding whether a two-plus-two model or a one-plus-three model is available to individuals. A lot of work remains to be done.

In terms of what qualifications can do, there must be more effective dialogue about the interface and the matching components that are needed to take someone with a higher national certificate or a higher national diploma into two-plus-two and into the third year. It is not automatically the case that there is a tidy match. One of the things that people are concerned about is the pressure on HNC and HND to meet the vocational needs of employers, who until now

have been the main source of specification of those qualifications, while at the same time articulating effectively into academic routes. It is important that we do not lose the vocational component and the recognition of the role that those qualifications have had in delivering effectively skilled people to appropriate levels in employment. We should not lose those as we seek to improve articulation. It is likely, therefore, that we need additional component adjustments to ensure a smooth transfer and pathway that will work also for the university sector.

Rhona Brankin: How do you see higher still contributing to the process?

Anton Colella: Higher still will make a fairly dramatic contribution at school level, and increasingly within FE. We are seeing an increasing uptake in FE, and within schools we are seeing more uptake of direct vocational qualifications. The traditional diet of subjects that many of us experienced at school is broadening all the time. Depending on the facilities that schools have, we are finding significant vocational input, with the same parity of esteem, the same certificate and the same grading. We can only go upwards. The young people of Scotland will benefit greatly, in particular by making sure that those who take a vocational route have equal parity with their peers who take a more academic route.

The Convener: Thank you. That was very helpful. Your written and oral evidence are much appreciated.

Before I invite the Institute of Career Guidance to give evidence, as we have just heard from the SQA I will mention to committee members that if they read the Executive's consultation paper on the governance of the SQA, they will see that what it says should be done is almost word for word what was in the report from this committee last year. It proves that the hours and hours that we spend in this committee from time to time influence matters and pay off.

We will now take evidence from the Institute of Career Guidance. Malcolm Barron, who is president of the institute, will lead. It is nice to see Malcolm and I ask him to introduce his team and make any opening remarks.

Malcolm Barron (Institute of Career Guidance): I will make my remarks brief on the basis that the committee will want to ask questions this morning. I am the president of the Institute of Career Guidance, which is a UK body. I am also the chief executive of Fife Careers.

Catriona Eagle, who is sitting on my right, is a member of the institute and has been the chief executive of Argyll and Bute Careers Partnership. She was on the Duffner committee and I thought

that that experience might be useful for the committee.

I know that the committee was keen to hear from practitioners. Jo Noblett, who is sitting on my left, is a practitioner in Careers Central, but is also a Scottish office bearer within the institute.

We seem to be declaring interests all over the place. I had better say at this point that I am a regional manager for careers Scotland. Catriona Eagle might want to comment as well.

10:45

Catriona Eagle (Institute of Career Guidance): I am the director of careers Scotland in the Highlands and Islands.

Malcolm Barron: The only comment that I make on our submission is that it was intended to give background. It was not intended as a submission for the purpose of the committee's inquiry. My understanding was that the committee wanted to ask questions from a consumer point of view. We made the submission on that basis.

Marilyn Livingstone: I have two questions.

As we are declaring interests, I declare that I am on a career break from Fife College of Further and Higher Education at present.

Brian Fitzpatrick: That will be for a long time.

Rhona Brankin: You hope.

Marilyn Livingstone: I hope that it will be a long break.

In the new structure that is being implemented, there is a local worry about what teeth the local advisory boards will have. It is important that they have a major role to play. What are your views on that?

May I ask both questions at once, as that is probably easier and will give the witnesses time to think about them?

The Convener: Yes, of course.

Marilyn Livingstone: The committee has talked a lot about how we can put the student firmly at the centre of the lifelong learning strategy and how we can ensure that learning will drive the funding. One of the areas that we have explored is that of an entitlement for everyone, which will form the basis of the strategy. If we were to think along those lines, guidance and counselling would be crucial, as it is at the moment, for ensuring that people had the right information to make the right choices. How do you see careers Scotland being able to support that?

Those were two simple questions.

Malcolm Barron: Questions are never simple. I

am talking wearing my Institute of Career Guidance hat. However, I have experience of local advisory boards, which indicates that they have teeth already and that they have shown them. The boards are clear in their understanding of what they want from their areas. They are also clear about the demands that they will place upon the new organisation. On that basis, I do not have concerns about their ability to ensure that we get national consistency in standards. I said in our submission that if we did not want such consistency, we would not be going down this road. We also need sensitivity to local needs. Boards are clear about the requirements that they have for their areas, and they have voiced those requirements quickly. The role of the local advisory boards has not been an issue so far.

Catriona Eagle has had the benefit of working with the local advisory boards, and she might want to add to what I said.

Catriona Eagle: Marilyn Livingstone is right that some members of local advisory boards had questions about their role. It was difficult to give them clear answers about that at the early stages. I said to them clearly that they needed to be the champions of their locality, which is what we are referring to in the Highlands and Islands. They need, in effect, to bend my ear, as I am the director of careers Scotland in the Highlands and Islands, if they feel that a policy or strategy that we are suggesting might not work in their locality. They know the locality best. They have that voice and have to take on that role.

Marilyn Livingstone: Thank you.

Malcolm Barron: Marilyn Livingstone's second question was about entitlement and the importance of guidance and counselling. I agree that that is crucial. In negotiating a programme or trying to use that entitlement, some individuals are not best placed to know all the options or what the most appropriate item for them is. They need to be worked through that.

Given the scale of the exercise, which we in lifelong learning see as considerable, the all-age guidance service that we are developing in careers Scotland will assist in that process, but others must also contribute, because individuals will not approach only their guidance practitioners for such information and advice. They will approach other people.

Careers Scotland must ensure not only that it has the skills, abilities, information and background to support those individuals, but that it informs other influencers, who are crucial. Jo Noblett has issues in relation to parents and to front-line teachers, who are often students' first point of contact for such information and advice.

Marilyn Livingstone: Supply and demand is an

issue. We need a policy and an infrastructure. Do you have thoughts on how that would work? If someone's entitlement was different because they had special learning needs or if they needed extra support because their training was particularly expensive, how would that work into an entitlement?

Malcolm Barron: I am trying to think of what you are driving at.

Marilyn Livingstone: I ask genuinely what your view is.

Malcolm Barron: It is difficult for young people to grasp and to be prepared for the fact that they have a sum of money that they can spend on various things. That might be particularly difficult for those with special needs, who would require much support to understand what they were being asked to do. In the main, those decisions would not rest with the learner; they would be more likely to rest with the provider or the support for that provider. I am not sure whether I answered your question.

Marilyn Livingstone: Perhaps I did not explain myself very well. If we gave everyone a five-year entitlement as credits or as SCOTVEC credits—or whatever is decided—that entitlement would need to have room for additional funding. It would not be basic. Who would enhance a credit? Would the careers service have a role with individuals, or would a central infrastructure policy unit enhance a credit?

Catriona Eagle: That is a really interesting question, which is quite difficult to answer. The careers service has been involved in such work before. The issue of endorsing young people for special training has been raised. We work a great deal with young people, and we do that more now because of the inclusiveness projects that arose from the Beattie committee's work.

Key workers will have a close link with individual young people and will have an intense working relationship with them over a period. Key workers will be in a good position to judge young people's needs. Translating that into a prescription for a young person and having a key worker say, "I have diagnosed your needs and this is my prescription" has attractions, but might also have difficulties. We would need to think through the implications.

It is crucial that workers from careers Scotland retain the role of the honest broker—the neutral stance that focuses on the individual's needs and helps the individual to find their way through the potential maze of provision.

Miss Goldie: Basically, your function is to get round pegs in round holes, is it not?

Michael Barron: We certainly hope so.

Miss Goldie: What do you see as the obstructions at the moment? You state in your submission that, in order to improve the quality of the service, you must ensure that

"the perception held by some clients, or their intermediaries, of a lack of parity of esteem between vocational and academic qualifications, does not negate the even handed and client focused information and guidance we strive to provide."

That implies that you have identified a deficiency and are trying to ensure that, in the provision of a professional service, you do not allow that deficiency to prejudice the advice that you give. Can you tell us more about the deficiency?

Catriona Eagle: Society in the UK and possibly internationally is moving in an interesting direction. There is an apparent—I say apparent because the issue is all to do with perception—favouring of higher education in the sense that there is a general tendency to say that higher education is excellent and is what everyone should be aiming for. People believe that the higher the qualification, the better it is.

I pass no judgment on that view; it is simply the widely held view in our society and many incentives are based on it. Human nature being what it is, people, particularly those who work with young people, occasionally resort to a carrot-and-stick approach. Although we all know that it is not necessarily the case, young people are told that if they do not work hard now, they will be unable to go to university and therefore will not get a good job. Occasionally, they may be told that, if they do not work hard, they will end up on the skillseekers programme. The issue affects not only young people but adults.

We work hard to overcome that attitude in the direct relationship that we have with the client and by working with parents and teachers. However, the attitude is pervasive. It relates to the discussion about parity of esteem that you had with the representatives of the SQA. Much work is being done to lessen the problem, but it is an issue that can get in our way.

Miss Goldie: What sort of work is being done to resolve the situation?

Catriona Eagle: The representatives of the SQA mentioned some of the work that is being done to bring about a parity of esteem between the various qualification routes and pathways. Initiatives such as the development of higher still are beginning to remove the notion that there is a two-tier provision. That is bound to help, but such measures take some time to work through, because the parents and teachers of young people have grown up with the two-tier model and parents, in particular, tend to want their children to have the educational experience that they had, if it

was good, or not to have it, if it was bad. One of the obstacles to ensuring that the attitude changes is the way in which we reward such thinking. If it is perceived that rewards—more money or higher status—will be achieved by going in a certain direction rather than another, the attitude will be reinforced.

11:00

Jo Noblett (Institute of Career Guidance): I want to make a point about all the qualifications that have been discussed. As a practitioner on the ground, I deal with a large number of young people who have no qualifications at all. When it comes to the type of jobs that we are looking for for those young people, employers—rather than considering their academic qualifications—will look at whether they will get up in the morning and come to work and whether they will be reliable. It does not matter how many qualifications—VQs or standard grades—someone has. Employers are not interested in that. They want to know whether someone will be reliable and value for money. We must consider whether employers understand the qualifications. I do not think that they do.

I hope that members see what I am getting at. As a practitioner, I face that all the time. Employers still ask me whether potential employees have O-levels. I tell them that O-levels went out a while ago. They do not know what intermediate 1 and intermediate 2 are. We ask young people to stay on longer to learn. What is the benefit of that when they could get practical work experience through skillseekers?

Rhona Brankin: I have forgotten what I was going to ask. I am interested in that last point because it resonates with my experience.

The Convener: You get up in the morning.

Rhona Brankin: Only just, at this time of year.

Brian Fitzpatrick: Your name is not Kenny MacAskill.

Mr Hamilton: Oh, that is controversial.

Rhona Brankin: I am interested in the place of careers guidance in lifelong learning. I think that careers guidance is important for lifelong learners, with support and advice for people who enter into that morass. In a situation where we do not have endless resources, what is the main priority for careers? Is the schools sector the priority, or is it lifelong learners? Can we do everything? How can we best deliver the careers service in a way that encompasses the role that guidance teachers play in schools, while ensuring that people in lifelong learning have access to counselling and support?

Malcolm Barron: There is a lot in that question. On careers guidance generally, the professional

assessment would be that it should be available to all. However, we all deal in the real world, with its limited resources. Among the things that we want to achieve is to provide the young people who are often the most ill informed, because they have no experience, with some preparation for and understanding of what to expect on leaving education and entering the labour market. We must foster certain skills in conjunction with schools and guidance staff and must make young people able to make effective choices.

We all recognise the extensive number of career changes that people make over time. Those changes can be enforced—through redundancy—or can result from people returning to the labour market after a period out of it, for whatever reason. Those people often need to have what is happening in the labour market reinterpreted, because they might have been out of it for some time. The Duffner committee recognised that limitations could affect the development of the all-age service and that the priorities should be those who are most at risk—the socially excluded or disadvantaged, for whatever reason, and those under the threat of redundancy. Such groups represent the lifelong learning priorities. As Catriona Eagle was engaged in that discussion, she might wish to add something.

Catriona Eagle: The Institute of Career Guidance would say—it was the view of the Duffner committee, too—that in an ideal world career guidance would be made available to everybody who would like it. Generally speaking, career guidance should be made available to everybody, because it helps to provide a more focused group of people and improve the operation of education, training and the labour markets and so on. However, realistically, as Malcolm Barron has pointed out, that is difficult to provide as it is very costly.

There are two ways of dealing with the situation. The first is to prioritise, and in the end the Duffner committee somewhat reluctantly suggested a list of priorities, feeling that such a step was sensible and realistic. That list contained the groupings that Malcolm referred to.

Secondly, we must focus the way in which we work. People require different levels of intervention; some require fairly straightforward intervention that might involve the clarification of certain information, whereas others will require something more complex and in-depth. We must begin to differentiate what people require, for example, by focusing our diagnosis to point people in the right direction; pull in partners more effectively by allowing them to take over some of the less complex aspects of delivery; and explain to our customers what they can expect from career guidance.

Unless people have had experience of career guidance, it is very difficult to understand what it is and what it can do for them. As a result, we must find ways of explaining more effectively to people how such guidance will help them and then help them to differentiate between options and locate the piece of the jigsaw that they require. By doing that, we can begin to manage demand. If we simply open everything up and say that we are an all-age service—which is effectively what careers Scotland is—there is a risk that demand will be huge because people will not want to miss out on anything. We have to manage that demand by educating our users to know how to get the best out of what is available.

Rhona Brankin: Are you saying that the priority within the school system would be the youngsters who will enter the labour market early?

Malcolm Barron: No. The point is the level of support that Catriona Eagle just mentioned. Youngsters with good support and understanding are able to make sensible decisions and might need only additional information or advice to help them through the process. However, some youngsters might be very confused. Although they might be able enough, they are presented with so many options that they do not know which is the best for them and must be taken through the process. Furthermore, some youngsters are extremely disadvantaged and have many issues that must be addressed. They must be supported not just by us but by other practitioners working with them collectively to help them make that transition, become employable and operate effectively in the labour market.

Jo Noblett: We also need to work more with parents. We are trying to set up a scheme that allows us to work with unemployed parents who have unemployed children to ensure that they also understand the labour market. That is very difficult. As parents are supposed to have the most influence on their children, we should be targeting them and giving them the wherewithal to help their children. Although they honestly want their children to find work, that might mean that they lose some of their benefits. As a result, we have many barriers to address.

Rhona Brankin: Will the development of the online service meet fairly straightforward needs of learners, or will it also meet more complex needs?

Malcolm Barron: That is a fair description. We are hoping to develop that sort of segmentation of services.

The Convener: As three members still want to ask questions, we need to make the questions and answers a bit shorter and sharper.

Mr Hamilton: I always get the short, sharp questions.

I have one comment and two questions. *[Laughter.]* Okay—I have one short, sharp comment. I am slightly ill at ease with some of your comments concerning your approach. I understand the point about social inclusion and trying to make the best of what people have, and the problem of stigmatising people who feel that they are a failure as they are not going on to university. I understand your point about parity of esteem.

The part of your role that is missing is the aspirational aspect. Part of the battle for parents and any of the educational or careers services is to be that aspirational champion. Too often in Scotland, that does not happen. Could you comment on that?

On my next point, I had not realised that we have corresponded in the past on this issue.

The Convener: We will not go into that.

David Mundell: It was short and sharp.

Mr Hamilton: Especially the answer.

Clients in the Highlands and Islands with learning difficulties have talked about the dreadful nature of the provision of the service, because there were not specially trained people there to help them. Given that it is a disadvantaged area and a disadvantaged group, has significant progress been made?

I noted that Future Skills Scotland, or the labour market unit, did not merit a mention in your submission. You state that the provision of labour market statistics is crucial. What formal link exists to ensure that it is an absolute certainty that the information is passed on and is not down to chance?

Malcolm Barron: I will deal with Duncan Hamilton's first and third questions and step aside while Catriona Eagle deals with the second one.

You are right that one aspect is to give people aspirations. Careers advisers have to tread a fine line between giving people a realistic understanding of what to expect and motivating them to go for it. We all have the experience of people telling us that we told them they would have great difficulty doing something, but they have done it. Nobody wants to hear that more than we do. It is about encouraging people, but also giving them realistic advice. The other thing that they will come back and say is that we told them that they should go for it and look what has happened because they did not make it. We must strike the balance. We want to raise aspirations, because our mission is to be ambitious for Scottish people.

On your point about the labour market, I give you the reassurance that we have forged links with

careers Scotland and Future Skills Scotland. That linkage is one of the first benefits that we have enjoyed. Plans are in place. We have done the labour market audit. The general feeling is that much labour market information exists. The difficulty is translating it into something that is readily understood by people on the front line, especially clients. We must focus on that. We are trying to create information that includes a national dimension and a local dimension and is easily readable, with a reading-age level of five.

Catriona Eagle: On Duncan Hamilton's point about disadvantage in the Highlands and Islands, potentially the vast majority are disadvantaged in engaging in education and learning there, because of the geography and access issues. Therefore, when we work out how to prioritise support for the disadvantaged, it is difficult to determine who they are. Provision is still an issue. We are especially short of provision for young people with special needs, but we are short of provision generally in the Highlands and Islands, so the problem is not restricted to those with special needs. That applies to adults as well.

Is provision getting better? Yes. Can it get better still? Yes. What are we doing to help? We are working on the development of the key worker role in the inclusiveness programmes. We will be able to describe better what the issues are and therefore help providers to be more focused in what they can provide, how they can help and how they target resources. The fact that we will be working so closely with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, which in turn works closely with the university of the highlands and islands, the training providers, the Scottish university for industry and so on, means that we can begin jointly and collectively to have a better, more co-ordinated approach. That also relates to matters such as community planning and community learning strategies. We are beginning to harness everybody's activity and potential so that we will improve the provision for those who most need it.

Brian Fitzpatrick: For some of us, disadvantage is not just a matter of geography. I was interested in what Jo Noblett said about intergenerational unemployment. I was examining the quinquennial figures for my constituency from the Office for National Statistics last night. We have eliminated long-term youth unemployment and have made massive inroads into youth unemployment. However, I am aware that that is a difficult cohort. The reality in my constituency is that there are households in which everyone works and households in which no one works.

I was interested in what Jo Noblett said about getting parents involved with the careers service in relation to careers advice for more difficult kids. I am concerned about the gap between post-

compulsory education and those who are not job-ready and not even modern-apprenticeship ready. Marilyn Livingstone talked about special needs kids as a discrete group. How might we achieve better outcomes for such households?

11:15

Jo Noblett: We can do that by going out into the community and not staying in the careers office. I do not work in a careers office. I work in social inclusion, in places such as the Raploch estate and Cultenhove. The people are very nice—they want to work, but they do not know how to go about it. That might seem strange to us. This is about working with young people out in the community, going round to their homes—even trying to create a self-help group within the home—and building on such relationships. It takes a long time to get in there to do that, however; it does not happen overnight. That is what I am building on at the moment. It has taken me a year to get young people to acknowledge my presence in the community centre. However, I persist and I keep going there.

Brian Fitzpatrick: Do you see yourself as a kind of gateway for people, in the sense that you are opening up to them the options in relation to where they might go? Where does making them ready to go fit in?

Malcolm Barron: It is about employability. What is fascinating about what Jo Noblett is doing is that it recognises that much employability, particularly of young people, stems from the support and social training they have had over a number of years within their communities and from their parents and so on. Some young people have missed out on that. Their parents do not necessarily have such skills or know what those skills might be. That is why the holistic approach that we are seeing here is fascinating and should be built upon. One of the things we want to do at careers Scotland is to capture that kind of good practice and roll it out into other communities. It is clear that the barrier is often to do with parents' understanding of what they need to do. That is an example of an area in which we can try to help. Jo Noblett will tell the committee about employability skills.

Jo Noblett: I do a lot of work with the social work department and the criminal justice system in relation to drugs. There is no way that I can do it all myself. We are trying to get young people to a certain level. The question is, when is it appropriate for me to start working with them?

Brian Fitzpatrick: It is almost like being a case manager.

Jo Noblett: Yes.

Brian Fitzpatrick: Where does the case manager sit? Does that depend on the needs of the particular youngster?

Jo Noblett: Yes.

David Mundell: Your evidence has been very refreshing. The sort of thing that Jo Noblett is doing is something that we should perhaps consider more closely. It is a complicated world for parents as well. It is easy for parents to think, "If I just get my child into university it'll be all right, but if I don't get them into university I'll have failed somehow." Members have raised many issues to which we need to return. The feedback from employers in the seminar that we held as part of our case study was that they were less interested in people's qualifications than in their capacity to do the jobs that they were being asked to do.

I want to ask about the general objectivity within guidance. Organisations have competing agendas and must get X people on to programmes and get boxes ticked. Are you satisfied that the system delivers objective advice to youngsters and the wider learning community? Do many people have objectives that they consider before they consider the learner?

Malcolm Barron: Impartiality is enshrined in careers guidance practitioners' values and principles, and it has been endorsed by the Duffner committee and the Executive. The professionals who deliver the service take impartiality extremely seriously and we are aware that it must be enshrined in any new practices. Any individual who is sitting in front of a careers adviser expects that adviser to do the best for them and not to be influenced by people sitting behind him or her saying that they must get so many in here and so many in there. Those various siren voices usually blot one another out, and the adviser is able to do what is best for the individual. I am convinced that careers advisers work impartially.

David Mundell: The various providers are obviously not impartial, but is there a problem of them trying to get people on to their courses just to make up the numbers? Is that difficulty merely imaginary?

Malcolm Barron: In certain learning areas, incentives were offered to recruit substantial numbers. However, it is now acknowledged that that was not appropriate and that there is a need to consider achievement, final outcomes and the way in which people will progress.

The Convener: I thank the witnesses for their written and oral evidence, which has been very helpful and much appreciated.

Tourism (Research)

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is research into tourism. First of all, I would like to say that the article that appeared in *business a.m.* yesterday was not a leak from the committee. Somebody had obviously read our paper and was under the illusion that we were going to hold a tourism inquiry between now and the summer. That is not the case: our plan has always been to hold a tourism inquiry some time in the autumn once the new management team at the Scottish Tourist Board has had time to get its feet under the table and take whatever action is necessary to sort out the organisation and the industry.

To help inform our inquiry, we agreed in October to commission some research into the promotion of tourism in other countries. Members have before them a copy of a draft proposal. Murray McVicar from the Scottish Parliament information centre is here. He has been extremely helpful generally, and particularly helpful in preparing the proposal. Are there any comments on it? Is everyone happy with it?

David Mundell: I have one concern. One of the areas from which we draw most tourists is England, so we need to consider what comparable areas in England are doing in relation to tourism. That might be part of our inquiry. We should not consider only overseas visitors.

The Convener: That is a fair point.

Brian Fitzpatrick: In considering Catalonia, Bavaria, the United States and Australia, it is important to consider state and federal interactions. It would be useful to know how Catalonia and Bavaria feed into the national tourism organisations. The paper covers the usual suspects at one end of the spectrum, but it would be interesting to have that other information as well.

Rhona Brankin: I want to ask about the comparative element of the study. What criteria will be used to determine which other countries will be studied?

Murray McVicar (Scottish Parliament Information Centre): We can do that in two ways: we could specify the countries and areas that we want the researchers to examine, or we could ask the people whom we invite to bid to specify countries and to justify why those countries are comparable to Scotland.

If the committee wants to steer the study toward a particular line of research, elements such as climate, landscape, heritage, resources and the extent of niche, rather than broad-based, marketing are the factors that would identify a comparable profile.

Mr Hamilton: My only comment is to highlight the points that impact on the success or otherwise of the tourist industry that are not the result of tourist actions. I am not sure that they will be covered in the study. For example, if we examine the macroeconomic picture and find that the exchange rate is disadvantageous, a tourism minister could not necessarily change that. Can the remit of the study be changed to involve factors such as that?

Murray McVicar: We could ask the researchers whether it is possible to examine that.

Mr Hamilton: The tourist industry would find it odd if we did not examine one of the biggest problems that its members raised with us.

Murray McVicar: The study will examine a wide range of factors to produce the broader picture. It will not only examine what ministers are doing. We could feed that element into the study.

Mr Hamilton: I do not—

The Convener: Order. Rhona Brankin was next to speak.

Rhona Brankin: We must be careful that we do not end up with a massive unfocused study.

Brian Fitzpatrick: I echo that. We do not want to get involved in arguments—we all have an idea of where the study will end up.

I want to make a point about infrastructure. It strikes me that the market that we miss in Scotland is the niche market, not the Dublin or Paris weekend market. I might have a free weekend and want to go away somewhere. And if I want to get a bed in Ross and Cromarty, I must phone up Mrs McGlumpher or find out whether she has free beds from a notice tacked on her wall. I might decide that that is too difficult.

The Convener: I am sure that VisitScotland would tell you that that is not the case. People visit its website and—

Brian Fitzpatrick: People do, but they do not get very far.

David Mundell: You find out that no accommodation exists.

Brian Fitzpatrick: Exactly. Although I have had great times with Mrs McGlumphers, I want to make a serious point about how we could make it easier for people around the country to take a break in Scotland. That is the point that David Mundell made. What is important is how our infrastructure competes internationally. If it is too difficult to go to Wester Ross, I will go to Dublin, Paris or Amsterdam. I would be interested to have information about infrastructure from the study.

Miss Goldie: I was told recently by a major

retailer that tourist agencies niche-market to potential visitors in other countries. That includes Christmas shopping promotions. However, people who are not members of the tourist board are not included. For example someone—not Mrs McGlumpher—in Iceland might go on to the web looking for information about Scotland and find that Glasgow has only three shopping centres. That remarkable situation arises because only those three centres belong to VisitScotland or whatever. That is another deficiency of the system.

David Mundell: One aspect that is important is how VisitScotland deals with perceptions from outside Scotland. If people perceive that Scotland is wet, expensive and has three shops, it is important that VisitScotland knows that.

The Convener: I am not sure that we need primary research on that. VisitScotland and Scotland the Brand have both conducted fairly extensive and expensive surveys on those matters. We do not need to spend public money on such research—it has already been done.

David Mundell: I wanted to ensure that the information was available.

Annabel Goldie mentioned the structures of tourism and travel agencies in other countries. We must ensure that what we are offering on that stage can be purchased. As we know, the United States has a very institutionalised and structured tourism market. If someone does not slot into the box as required, they are not in that market.

The Convener: Murray, can you accommodate all those points within the terms of reference?

Murray McVicar: Yes. The inquiry will be fairly lengthy and will take much evidence from different sources. The purpose of the research is for us to learn lessons from practice in other countries. That should be the focus of the research and one of its concrete outcomes.

11:30

Rhona Brankin: The choice of comparators is critical if the research is to be of any use to us. I do not know what stage has been reached in the bidding process, but I am keen for the researchers to tell us which countries are proposed as comparators and what criteria have been applied.

Murray McVicar: We could do that or the committee could just tell us which areas and countries it wants us to consider; the committee could choose.

Rhona Brankin: That would be difficult, because I have not done any research into tourism. I would prefer the committee to set the criteria.

Murray McVicar: We can set the criteria in the bid. In bullet point 2 on objectives, on page 4 of my paper, I identify what I think would be the relevant factors. I would be happy to clarify those factors or to add to them.

Miss Goldie: One of those factors is “size of country”. What do you mean by that?

Murray McVicar: That refers to the size of population or the geographical size of a country.

Miss Goldie: We must be clear about the parameters. The size of a country is meaningless if its population is tiny. There must be some consistency in the definitions.

The Convener: I presume that you mean that we must use countries of a roughly comparable population and geographical size.

Murray McVicar: That is right. That factor is intended to apply to Ireland and the nordic countries, which are roughly comparable in those terms.

The Convener: Okay. I suggest that we agree to the proposal in principle, but we will circulate a revised version that takes into account members’ suggestions. We will agree to the proposal subject to those amendments being made. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Murray McVicar: We will have to circulate the revised version to the committee as quickly as possible.

Brian Fitzpatrick: We should not forget the point that several members have made concerning our position as part of a larger entity. That must be emphasised in the identification of comparators during the first stage, as well as at the second stage.

The Convener: I think that Murray McVicar has acknowledged that.

Murray McVicar: Yes.

The Convener: Thank you very much. We agree to the proposal subject to those amendments.

As this is our final meeting of 2002, before we move into private session I express the committee’s gratitude for the tremendous work rate of its supporting staff. I thank Simon Watkins and his team of clerks. I thank Linda Orton, in particular, as this is her last meeting before she moves on to pastures new in the chamber office. I also thank the staff of the official report, who must always sit in silence but whose role is absolutely crucial. Finally, I thank the research and information group, particularly Murray McVicar and Terry Shevlin, who have been of tremendous support to the committee throughout the year. On

behalf of the committee, I express our thanks to all the support staff. Under parliamentary rules, we are not allowed to buy them any presents—which is tremendous, as it saves me a bob or two—but we appreciate all the work that they do for us.

11:34

Meeting adjourned until 11:40 and thereafter continued in private until 12:35.

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