The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 11 March 2014

Session 4

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EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
7th Meeting 2014, Session 4

CONVENER

*Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)
*Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP)
*Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
*Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
*Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)
*Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD)
*Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

John Boothman (BBC Scotland)
Brian Donnelly (respectme)
Ken MacQuarrie (BBC Scotland)
John Mullin (BBC Scotland)
Tony Rafferty (National Parent Forum of Scotland)
Professor John Robertson (University of the West of Scotland)
Laura Tomson (Zero Tolerance)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Terry Shevlin

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

Education and Culture Committee

Tuesday 11 March 2014

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 10:03*]

Broadcasting

The Convener (Stewart Maxwell): Good morning and welcome to the seventh meeting in 2014 of the Education and Culture Committee. I remind all those present that electronic devices should be switched off because they interfere with the broadcasting system.

Our first item is to take evidence on broadcasting. The committee published a report on broadcasting last May, which focused on BBC Scotland's capacity to handle forthcoming major events—namely, the referendum and the Commonwealth games. We will take evidence from representatives of BBC Scotland later, but first we will hear from Professor John Robertson.

In February this year, Professor Robertson published research on the BBC's and STV's coverage of the referendum campaign, which will, of course, be of direct relevance to our later discussions. I welcome him to the committee and invite him to make a brief opening statement.

Professor John Robertson (University of the West of Scotland): Thank you very much, convener.

I thank the committee for allowing me to give evidence, because much has happened in the month or so since I released the research paper. Much of that has been quite upsetting for me, so I want to begin by saying some fairly strong things about my experience in the past month or so.

First, I condemn the behaviour of BBC Scotland's department of public policy and corporate affairs in suppressing the dissemination of my research, circulating an insulting and ill-informed critique of it directly to my principal—it went straight to my principal, bypassing my head of school and my dean—and circulating that to everyone who sent an email complaint about its coverage of the referendum. The audience is not always here for that condemnation. I appreciate that you are not part of that.

I am sorry if this seems a bit dramatic and over the top, but it has been a very stressful month.

Secondly, I condemn the silence and collusion of almost all Scotland's mainstream media in disappearing my research, despite its massive online presence. That online presence is a news item that has been ignored. I have my suspicions about why that happened, but I do not know for certain.

Thirdly, unfortunately, I condemn the silence of almost all Scottish academics with an interest in the field, who might have been expected to challenge censorship of intellectual material.

I have been personally hurt by the combination of threat from a powerful institution—there has been no horse's head in my bed yet; I suppose that that is always something—and abandonment by the mainstream media and academia, other than my immediate colleagues, whom I must thank.

I interpret what has happened as an attempt at thought control in a democracy—and the one that I like best of all democracies. I am very upset by that.

I am happy to respond to any questions.

The Convener: Thank you very much, Professor Robertson.

The main issue that we want to discuss is your research, which you mentioned. I will ask a general opening question. Will you lay out for us some of the findings of the first year of your research? I know that there is a two-year programme. As you said, you published the first year's findings around a month ago.

Professor Robertson: My research shows a crude quantitative imbalance between the number of statements that have been reported that we could see as supportive of the yes campaign and those that we could see as supportive of the no campaign. I appreciate that there is a high degree of subjectivity in all that. All social, political and historical research is subjective.

I am committed to a kind of research that is often referred to as grounded theory. I take it very seriously and try to hold back as much as I can. I have taught students about it for 30 years. I teach them about the importance of not leaping in the way that, I am afraid, journalists often do.

That finding seemed to grab everybody's attention. Yes campaigners on the web immediately flew up into a fury of saying, "Ah, evidence at last: a 3:2 ratio." My feeling was that the 3:2 ratio was not very important, because a lot of it was down to people simply saying, "Well, let's hear what the Liberal Democrat says" and "Let's hear what the Conservative says." That led to an imbalance of a quantitative nature.

Three or four items were far more important and drew less attention, one of which was sequence. There was a common tendency to begin with bad news during the research period. There is a lot of

evidence that audiences are quite resilient to political messages, but they are less resilient when it comes to the economy. They are much more likely to believe bad-news stories, so beginning with bad-news stories about the economy, job losses and so on has a disproportionate influence. There was a tendency for "Reporting Scotland" especially to begin with bad-news stories more often than the other channels.

I have been producing a snapshot of what happened in February. The picture for "Reporting Scotland" for February massively improved, in the period after the row about my research blew up. I will not necessarily claim credit for that change, but the imbalance picture for BBC 1 has dramatically worsened. It is almost as if BBC 1 has entered the fray to present bad-news stories.

The personalisation of the campaign in relation to the First Minister and the conflation—journalists mentioned this at the weekend—of the yes agenda with Alex Salmond's personal wishes and his face on screen were disproportionately done. We hardly ever heard the suggestion that Alistair Darling wants this or that. With due respect, I think that both are capable of being made into figures of fun by the media where that is the intention to do so.

I thought that that approach was imbalanced, as was the undue respect that was shown to political organisations such as the Office for Budget Responsibility and the Institute for Fiscal Studies. The idea that such organisations are impartial is deeply wrong. Any social scientist will provide you with evidence that they are political animals, whose research should be treated with the same caution as research that comes from the Scotland Office is treated.

I am in danger of forgetting, but I think that those are the main points.

The Convener: That is fine, Professor Robertson. I am sure that we will get into the detail when members ask questions.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Professor Robertson, thank you for your opening remarks. We have all taken on board your comments about what has happened since your report was published.

Professor Robertson: I should say that I have been promoted in the interim. I thought that that was delayed—it took months and months, and I wondered whether I had shot myself in the foot. However, my new principal is Australian and I do not think that he gives a 4X about any of this.

Clare Adamson: You said of the methodology that you used:

> "The coding which led to the evidence of bias emerged from a grounded theory/phenomenological approach which allows the data to speak."

Will you talk about where else the methodology has been used and why you chose it?

Professor Robertson: The methodology is long-standing in the social sciences—it was used as far back as the 1970s. Around the time I was an undergraduate, there were the beginnings of a shift from a more positivist approach—rather arrogant social scientists thinking that they knew what was in the evidence before they went looking for it. I am not crawling when I say that feminist methodology has been very influential; there is a strong suggestion that the move towards a more qualitative approach, which allows the evidence to emerge rather than be selected, was driven by the greater presence of women in social science research.

Clearly things cannot be perfect, but that can be the intention. Ian Bell, who is the only journalist who is really mentioned in my research, commented on my commitment to fairness and self-awareness and agreed with the approach. There is a lot of talk among journalists and educators about balance and bias, which are very subjective. We cannot really achieve balance; what we can do is have a good intention to be self-aware all the time and to be fair to the evidence, rather than go in with preconceptions.

I am sorry; that was a long answer.

Clare Adamson: In what period was your research conducted?

Professor Robertson: The first block covered September to September in the first year since the announcement of the referendum date. I am currently working on the second year.

I publish mostly in peer-reviewed journals, which largely encourage us to stay well away from politics. It is a sad fact that intellectuals have become detached from politics. There is a place for engagement, as long as it is intelligent engagement.

I was urged by *Scottish Affairs* to sit on the whole thing until it was finished, but that struck me as pointless. I was hoping to improve coverage. I did not think that I would necessarily shout out one way or the other, but rather naively I thought that the BBC's department of self-improvement—if there is one—might be interested in the research and invite me along for a chat about it. However, the BBC just reported me to the principal.

I am sorry; did I answer your question?

Clare Adamson: Yes, you did.

You talked about the reaction of your academic colleagues and the BBC to your research. Are you

aware of the BBC getting so involved in criticising any other research in Scotland?

Professor Robertson: No, I am not.

On an online blog, I have been compared with Professor Curtice, from the University of Strathclyde—I will not say anything that is offensive to Professor Curtice, of course. A commentator said, "I'll explain it: Professor Curtice is premier league; this Robertson guy is playing in the reserves at Elgin City." That kind of thing is happening in the background.

There are huge bodies of research that are not being questioned. Professor Curtice's research—I can say this without insulting him—is based on sampling. He and his team sample perhaps 1,000 people to represent the electorate of Scotland, but how many millions have been reduced to 1,000? Such an approach introduces massive potential for distortion, as you will see from how ineffective polling has been for a long period of time.

One of the reasons why I am quite angry about this is that I did no selection; instead, I looked at all the broadcasting from 6 pm to 7 pm over the year in question. Once you start to select, people can say, "You missed something. You just happened—unluckily—to choose the bad news."

10:15

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I want to ask a quick supplementary on your methodology. What research have you done in the past? Is this the first time you have looked at Scottish politics?

Professor Robertson: My interest is in—dare I say it—thought control in democracies. Thought control is totally ineffective in totalitarian states because the entire population pretty much knows that they cannot trust the media or the stuff from the party and that they are being lied to. However, there is undeniably thought control in democracies.

Media and political elites often work in each other's interest. They do not get round some big cauldron and say, "Let's do down the working classes and send our boys off to die"—they just mix. They went to the same schools, their children go to the same schools, they share the same cultural interests, and so on. As a result, we end up with a degree of thought control not as a result of conspiracy but through self-censorship, with members of elites acting in their own interests and therefore in the interests of their elite.

For many years now, I have researched the media coverage of war and the economy, but this is my first piece of research to attract any interest. All my research is published in academic journals, and when I get the occasional postgraduate student writing to me I think, "At least I've influenced one person." Most of my work has, I think, been more controversial than this piece of work; I guess that what has happened is just a matter of timing.

I have been a bit naive. I had just finished a piece of research on the television coverage of the British Airways cabin crew strike, which I thought would be interesting because of the gender dimension and the idea that cabin crew are quite different from real crew. Under my contract, I am expected to produce research and submit it for review and, when I had finished the research on the cabin crew strike, I was looking around at subjects that might be interesting right now.

I have to say that, when I published the research that we are discussing, I was surprised by the email from Mr Small of the BBC. It caught me off-guard. That might be naivety on my part; I do a lot of quantitative stuff, so I might have a slightly autistic streak. I do not always pick up the political.

I am sorry—that was a long answer.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Good morning, Professor Robertson. I read with interest the report that you provided to the committee. In your opening remarks, you drew attention to what you saw as the conflation of the First Minister and his views and perspectives on independence with a line of attack that was unique to those seeking to retain the union. Would you say that there is a similar tendency by the First Minister and, more broadly, the yes campaign to characterise the union as something to do with David Cameron, George Osborne, posh southern Tories or whatever you will? Might both sides be echoing a personalisation of politics that goes on in all elections and all political contexts?

Professor Robertson: I can talk about only the period that I surveyed. I admit that that period did not stretch to a full year of the campaign, but I noticed that an intensity of the demonisation of the First Minister happened during the first six months. It reminded me very strongly of how Michael Foot—many of you are probably a bit too young to remember him—and Neil Kinnock were treated and made fools of by the media. In other words, the idea was to associate a fool with a political stance.

I do not know because I have not yet looked at the data, but I think that George Osborne has recently been picked out in a similar way and, to be fair, I think that the Scottish media has been quite keen to jump on him. For example, we have seen Bernard Ponsonby shouting at him—and no doubt everyone has been cheering at that.

There might be some truth in what you say, but in the period that I covered there was a very heavy

imbalance. Hardly ever was it suggested that Johann Lamont wanted anything, even though it would have been as easy to demonise her as it was to demonise Alex Salmond.

Liam McArthur: Does that not throw up a possible problem with your approach to the research? The association, particularly of David Cameron, with welfare reform and other difficult decisions that were being taken at United Kingdom level was being conflated with the independence debate in very much the same way that Alex Salmond was being conflated.

Professor Robertson: Not in the year that I surveyed. You must remember that my commitment is to record what is there, and the tendency that you have mentioned with regard to David Cameron was much weaker than the tendency to commonly associate Alex Salmond with everything and to open broadcasts with "Alex Salmond this" and "Alex Salmond that".

Liam McArthur: I would be very surprised if between September 2012 and September 2013 there was not extensive coverage at UK and Scottish level about welfare reform and attacks by Alex Salmond—

Professor Robertson: Are you looking at "Reporting Scotland"?

Liam McArthur: —and Scottish National Party ministers on what was happening with welfare reform and the budget cuts to deal with the economic crisis.

Professor Robertson: The way that a welfare reform story is presented might not be directly concerned with the referendum. I appreciate, though, that you could take it that way.

Liam McArthur: Your report also refers to health-related matters, which are entirely devolved to the Scottish Parliament, but I am not entirely sure what point you are making about reports on health-related issues with regard to the referendum.

Professor Robertson: I agree that subjective decisions had to be made when I looked at this material and thought about where to put it. I am open to the suggestion that another team might move things about a bit, but I do not think that they would make a big difference. I suspect that, if you were to bring in fairly naive undergraduates—the kind I know the BBC has recently recruited in some number and directed with a view to destroying my research—and if they were to look at the raw data, they would probably come out showing more bias on the part of the BBC.

Liam McArthur: Frankly, since the 2010 election, the point that has been made about welfare reform—sometimes implicitly and often explicitly—is that everything will be done very differently in an independent Scotland. Surely, then, the reporting of that is material to where there might be balance or bias in the reporting of political issues.

Professor Robertson: All I am talking about is what I have found, and that is what I found in that period. I do not want to comment on gut feelings and whatever I am thinking at the moment—I want to hold back until it is time to look at the material—but I suspect that you might be correct that there has been an increased tendency to associate Cameron and Osborne as people with particular initiatives and to demonise welfare reform as a consequence. However, in the year that I surveyed, there was no such tendency.

Liam McArthur: But—

Professor Robertson: If you can dig up some examples, please send them to me. If I have missed anything, I will admit as much.

The Convener: I am happy to bring you back in later, Liam, but other members are waiting to ask questions.

Liam McArthur: Okay. I am happy to come back in later.

Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Good morning, Professor Robertson. My view is that, in life, we often see things as we not as others are. Do you accept that, as far as research studies are concerned, the coding of language is subjective, that a person's world-view and understanding of life will have an impact on their decisions about language and that you are as susceptible to that as anyone else? How impartial do you think you have been able to be in the process?

Professor Robertson: I agreed entirely with you until you said that I was as susceptible to this as anyone else. I have spent 30 years trying to be less susceptible by immersing myself in constraining procedures. I know that it sounds tremendously elitist, but I do not think that my performance is the same as the average person's. After all, this has been my job for 30 years.

I agree and will admit that all research into politics into political, social and economic factors can be presented in certain ways. I have looked at some of the other papers that have been presented to the committee for discussion later on this morning, and I could jump all over them if you wanted me to.

What puzzles me is: given the potential to have a critique and a debate, why did the BBC, *The Guardian* or *The Herald* not report the study? Why did they not find a professor who disagrees with me, call me in and have me debate it with him? Why did they just suppress it? I think it is because, in the end, there was a feeling that it could not be.

They cannot pin me down to membership of anything or to having an alignment. You have suggested that I am human—thanks for that. I am a bit autistic, which I think makes me a bit more suited to this kind of thing than normal humans.

I have wandered a bit there—I am sorry.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Good morning, Professor Robertson. I know your principal, Craig Mahoney, quite well, because he is based in Paisley. I met him not so long ago and I know exactly what he is like in his attitude towards things.

In your report, you mentioned the personalisation of the campaign in relation to Alex Salmond during the first year. You mentioned Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock, who are perfect examples of how the media went out of their way to play the man and not the ball.

You said that, on 23 October 2012, "Reporting Scotland" used the phrase, "Alex Salmond under pressure!" and that, in the same show, it was said that Willie Rennie "challenged Alex Salmond's policy". You also stated:

"On 25/10/12, in *Reporting Scotland*, Salmond is described by Johann Lamont (Labour) as 'straight as a corkscrew' and then compared by Ruth Davidson (Con) to bent salesman 'Delboy'."

Those things hardly seem fair and open.

In your chart, your figure for the personalisation of ideas as Alex Salmond's is 35, whereas the figure for the personalisation of ideas as those of better together individuals—you broaden it out to take in everyone else—is absolutely zero. I would say that that is quite an important part of your findings. If we want to make the debate better and have engagement with the public, we have to move away from the personalisation of the process.

Professor Robertson: I am not a political scientist—I am a media researcher—so I could agree with you, but I do not feel tremendously expert on what should be done. I think that, in a democracy, the media should be open and self-critical. What angers me most is that I do not think that it is self-critical; I think that it is rather closed and cosy.

George Adam: Taken on their own, the figures of 35 and zero seem incredible.

Professor Robertson: Mind you, that is out of hundreds of messages, so you could argue—if you were to take the other perspective—that it is quite a small percentage.

I am not suggesting anything about impact here, although I hinted a little. There is hard research evidence that bad news sticks and may affect voters—bad news about the economy, in particular, does that. It is less clear what the impact of the representation of Alex Salmond is. My mum dislikes Alex Salmond very strongly. I do not know why. I think that she just dislikes the way he is, which I think has a lot to do with what she has seen and the way he is presented, so it may be that that has had an impact—I do not know what she thought before the campaign.

Were this the Crimea, we would say, "Okay, pass, not bad, reasonably balanced." The coverage is not really extreme, it must be said. This is by far the most civilised process in the world when it comes to an attempt to separate one country from another—it is incredibly polite.

The 3:2 ratio is of almost no significance. We are talking about the respect for certain allegedly independent agencies. It is the presentation of individuals that really counts.

George Adam: You mention some of the stuff that has been part of the debate that has no academic substance or value. Statements have been made that have no backing. An example that you give in your evidence is:

"On 5/10/12, in *Reporting Scotland*, the Scottish Government's commitment to universal benefits was immediately followed by a reference to 'spending watchdog chief Robert Black who has questioned whether such benefits are affordable' and reinforced by reference to Black's cv".

I see that as an example of how certain things are said and are just left to hang there during the debate.

Professor Robertson: You could have a debate about whether Mr Black's CV is important. I have played a similar card when I have said that I am not subject to subjectivity because of my training. I suppose that it could be argued that his CV gives him a certain entitlement to speak. However, if there are too many of those examples, it leads to an imbalance. I have not been treated with particular respect—far less respect than Professor Curtice has been treated with—and I do not think that I should be treated with enormous respect.

10:30

George Adam: You have been dragged into the matter because of your research. One of the examples that you give is that you have been told that you are the equivalent not of a premier league player, but of an Elgin City reserve. I take offence at that, because my wife's family is from Elgin.

Professor Robertson: I am actually a Falkirk fan, as well.

George Adam: Another perfect example that you give is:

"On 26/4/13, in *Reporting Scotland*, a generally negative assessment of the future of insurance companies after independence finished with the"

line from a Labour spokesperson talking about

"'billions in costs' and 'potential closures'."

There is no substance behind all that. It seems to be very one-sided. The yes campaign has asked for answers and definites, but those seem to be just fluffy lines.

Professor Robertson: Journalists will often say that they are working under the pressure of deadlines—and they are. What they do is not a conspiracy, as such. If, over a period of time, they produce an imbalance, that is partly random and partly to do with their subconscious preferences. They do it without really planning to do it. It is not malevolent.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I will also defend Elgin City. I remind you that Inverness Caledonian Thistle and Ross County were in the Highland league, and look where they are now. I have to do that because I am a Highland MSP.

Professor Robertson: Of course. Due respect.

Mary Scanlon: Professor Robertson, do you favour independence for Scotland?

Professor Robertson: Yes.

Mary Scanlon: You favour independence for Scotland—I have a quotation that says that you do—and I favour Scotland remaining part of the United Kingdom. Would I be right in saying that, if we watched the same television broadcast, I would be more sensitive to comments about David Cameron, George Osborne or any Conservative, including my leader, Ruth Davidson, whereas, because you favour independence, you would probably be more sensitive to comments that are anti-independence?

Professor Robertson: I have made reference to being slightly autistic, but I cannot deny that I have some kind of humanity and, therefore, weakness. I have made it very clear that there is always subjectivity and the way to deal with subjectivity in a democracy is to report it and argue about it, not to hide it because it is bad news. Therefore, I agree with you. However, although I favour independence, I do so for many reasons that would not allow me to join the Scottish National Party.

Researchers should surface themselves. There was a belief in the past that researchers should hide themselves. Teachers were also encouraged to hide who they were because it was thought that, otherwise, they would contaminate everything. My belief is that, if we surface who we are, we can tell more.

I am primarily a socialist—I would put that first. I am not a nationalist in that sense. I would probably put pacifist in second position, so NATO is anathema to me. In third position, I would say that I am a feminist. The abuse of women in Scottish society is an enormous scandal. We might even argue that it should be the first thing to be dealt with. The treatment of women in this country—and in other countries, obviously—is horrific. I would put those three before any interest in independence.

I have a feeling that small countries tend to be more democratic. They tend to be less likely to be imperialist states. I am also an anti-imperialist. I condemn the history of the British empire. It cannot be rewritten: the British empire was a massive protection racket that brutalised enormous parts of the world. In 100 years' time, once everything is out in the open, historians will probably be hard pushed to say whether the Soviet Union or the British empire was worse.

As you can tell, nationalism is way down the line. I am a nationalist because I think that the Danish seem to do it quite well, so I would quite like to be like them.

Mary Scanlon: You have completed the quotation that you previously gave:

"I'm a socialist, pacifist, feminist and anti-imperialist. The latter position inevitably means I do favour independence for Scotland".

Professor Robertson: For small countries.

Mary Scanlon: As an academic for 20 years before becoming an MSP—I lectured economics as opposed to your subject—

Professor Robertson: The miserable science.

Mary Scanlon: Would it be fair to say that another researcher in your shoes, with my thoughts, my views and my values, which favour Scotland remaining in a United Kingdom, would be able to interpret the same information in a different way? As you have confirmed, you favour independence for Scotland, which is fine. I welcome your views; I feel strongly that, in a democracy, the views of academics are as important as any views expressed in the Parliament. Do you think that another researcher looking at the same information could have presented a different conclusion if they favoured Scotland remaining in the United Kingdom?

Professor Robertson: To a point. Again, I make this arrogant claim for exceptionalism. If a researcher has been at it for 30 years, if they use grounded theory and if they are committed to allowing evidence to emerge, as modern researchers are, I do not think that they could have come out of the evidence with a hugely different picture.

I have referred to multiple phases of coding. It is not possible just to collect all this stuff and code it once. As we code changes, we see how we might have coded what came earlier. I coded the data twice. That is a big task—it takes absolutely ages. The first time through, I came out with a stronger imbalance against the yes campaign. I went back through the evidence and I looked at sentences. I thought, for instance, that some statements were still pro no, although it was not as obvious, and somebody else might disagree with me. I dropped those ones. The category for where everything else goes therefore grew bigger the second time.

In the end, I have to agree that I come with baggage. I cannot entirely escape it, but I have done my level best.

Mary Scanlon: We all come with baggage.

The BBC has said that your report

"singularly fails to define – 'fairness', 'insulting language'."

What may seem unfair to you may seem fair to me. Insulting language could be subjective. Is that reasonable?

Professor Robertson: There were very few examples of that in terms of the number of messages.

Mary Scanlon: The BBC was looking for your definition. It said that you failed to give one.

Professor Robertson: You are right. I did not give a definition; I used examples. The examples, such as those that George Adam gave earlier, were almost entirely from Johann Lamont and were aimed at Alex Salmond. Sometimes, they came from your leader. One example is "straight as a corkscrew". I do not think that there is any ambiguity in that as an insult.

Mary Scanlon: I refer to the examples that you have mentioned. The first example on page 5 of our papers is:

"Scots savers and financial institutions might be at risk".

We have discovered this week that European Union legislation means that financial organisations such as the Royal Bank of Scotland have to be based in the area where the majority of their customers are. There is uncertainty. George Adam rightly mentioned that things are hanging in the air, and I agree with that. Do you appreciate that many people are concerned and that there are some big questions to ask?

You also mention the subsidy for renewables. At the moment, the subsidy falls on a United Kingdom-wide population. In the event of independence, the renewables subsidy would fall on 2 million households. Do you understand that those are talking points and that, at the moment, because there is no pre-negotiation, there are no answers?

Professor Robertson: I do understand that. You will be far more knowledgeable than I am about what is happening.

Mary Scanlon: I do not think so.

Professor Robertson: I mean with regard to the politics. I am interested only in the representation of the politics.

Mary Scanlon: You have used those examples.

Professor Robertson: I agree that that is selection, which is subjective. However, those are real examples. I am not saying that they are either true or false; I am saying that they are bad-news examples, and I am saying that there were lots of bad-news examples. I am not suggesting for a minute that anybody was wrong in what they said; I am just saying that they were presenting bad news.

Mary Scanlon: Is it not fair for the BBC and others to be part of the debate and to highlight risks and uncertainty where they feel that they exist? Is that not an obligation, on behalf of the freedom of the press, that the BBC has to have in a democracy?

Professor Robertson: Sure, but one of the reasons why the BBC head of policy was so angry with me was that the BBC has a charter, under which it is committed to fairness. Fairness is not the word that it uses, of course, but its journalists are committed to impartiality. If they are reporting negative stories more than positive stories, that opens up questions about their impartiality.

The Convener: A number of members want to ask questions. I will begin by bringing in those who have not yet spoken.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): We have heard, Professor Robertson, that you are in favour of Scottish independence. Is it your belief, stated publicly, that the Labour Party is fatally corrupt?

Professor Robertson: Have I said—

The Convener: Hold on a second, Professor Robertson.

Mr Bibby, we are asking Professor Robertson about his views with regard to his research. I allowed Mary Scanlon's question because I could see its relevance, but we are not going to get into a personalisation situation. If you want to ask questions about the research, that is fine, but we are not going to get into the area of Professor Robertson's personal views.

Neil Bibby: In an interview that you gave to openDemocracy, you said:

"There are good people in the BBC. Mindless loyalty to a now fatally corrupted Labour Party is not uniform".

Professor Robertson: I do not think that I should have said that last bit. I should have said the first bit, because I am not having a go at the BBC—I am not having a go at anybody, except defensively now, because the BBC had a go at me, and I do not see why I should take it lying down. The "fatally corrupted Labour Party" thing was inappropriate and I regret saying it.

Neil Bibby: If you regret using the phrase "fatally corrupted", do you still believe that BBC employees are loyal to the Labour Party?

Professor Robertson: I do not know. I think that Kirsty Wark is.

Neil Bibby: Where is your evidence for that?

Professor Robertson: It lies in her jumping all over Alex Salmond on television at every opportunity that she could get. Anyway, we are wandering off the subject of my research and into my personal views—or do you think that my views undermine my research?

Neil Bibby: Your view appears to be that you have retracted what you said about the Labour Party being corrupt, but—

Professor Robertson: No, I have not retracted it. I have said that I regret saying it.

Neil Bibby: Okay, so you—

Professor Robertson: I do not retract it.

The Convener: I have given you a little bit of time. We have only a limited amount of time and Professor Robertson is here to talk about his published research. If we can stick to that, I will be more than happy to take questions from you, Mr Bibby.

Professor Robertson: Would it help to reiterate what I said at the beginning—that I am a socialist and a pacifist? That means that there is virtually no mainstream political party in this country that I can hold in high respect. None of them.

Neil Bibby: My last question on this line sums up the point. When it comes to accusations of political bias, you are not a neutral observer, are you?

Professor Robertson: Political bias? Who have I accused of political bias?

Neil Bibby: When it comes to your—

Professor Robertson: I have not accused anybody of political bias. I have condemned the reaction to my research as undemocratic, unfair and unethical; those are probably the appropriate words. I have not condemned anyone in the research at all. I have observed something that I thought might be of interest.

Neil Bibby: I thought that the line,

"Mindless loyalty to a now fatally corrupted Labour Party"

was—

Professor Robertson: That is not in my research, is it?

Neil Bibby: That was part of an interview that you did with openDemocracy, but I just—

Professor Robertson: I agree. You will have said things in interviews—

Neil Bibby: I think that that was an interview that you did following your research.

The Convener: I am going to stop this now, because today's evidence session is about the research that Professor Robertson has published. I am not going to let us get into a personality spat between members of the committee and witnesses. If any member wants to ask questions about the research, please do so, but we will not get involved in attacks on individuals about their personal views, which have nothing to do with the research that they have published.

I call Colin Beattie.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): I have a couple of questions, the first of which is brief. I notice that you refer to phase 1 of your survey, which I presume refers to the period from September 2012 to September 2013. Is phase 2 the following year?

Professor Robertson: Yes.

Colin Beattie: Is that going ahead?

Professor Robertson: It is currently under way, but I am not looking at it. Members have mentioned things that are happening in politics, but I am trying to stay back a bit from engagement, because I value the researcher's role. I acknowledge that I will let slip gut feelings and emotional viewpoints—as I have admitted, I am only human—but I am doing my best to hold back. The whole two-year survey, plus a review of the literature and the references—I was once given a row for not having enough references and got only a C for my essay—will appear as a chapter in a book with other media academics, including those I have condemned today for not supporting me.

10:45

Colin Beattie: I was also very interested in your discussion of evidence from sources other than the political parties that purport to be independent or whatever, and I think that you referred to academic or scientific evidence. On the OBR and the IFS, which you mentioned and which, to my

mind, are very frequently used to support evidence that is put forward, you have stated:

"Notably, there was very little use of such evidence in the reporting overall".

Professor Robertson: You should remember that that is a slightly teacherly reaction to the reporting. I do online debates with postgraduates and other students, who are slammed if they do not make heavy use of evidence and references. In what is a very important political debate, it seemed quite rare for any kind of academic, apart from one or two regular pet ones, to appear. Obviously I am not a pet academic. I do not know how I come across—as a bull terrier academic, perhaps—but it seemed to me that not very much evidence of that type was being used compared with the many statements of opinion that we were hearing from political editors. We have Brian Taylor over and over again saying what he thinks and yet there is hardly a professor or another academic saying what they think about the issues.

Colin Beattie: I find that interesting because, as I have said, to my mind such references seem to be made very frequently. However, you have actually done the count and are saying that there is very little use of such evidence.

Professor Robertson: There has recently been a run of chief executives saying things. Is that what you mean?

Colin Beattie: No. I am thinking of your examples of the IFS and the OBR. For a long time now, they seem to have been very frequently mentioned in the press in support—

Professor Robertson: You must bear it in mind that I looked at only the television coverage. Press coverage is another matter. I suppose that the press has more time and more space. I can say only what I found; I did my best to let it be found.

Colin Beattie: It is an interesting anomaly. Thank you.

Liam McArthur: Professor Robertson, you started by framing the research around your interest in censorship of the media. Earlier, George Adam referred to the comment about the "Reporting Scotland" report from October 2012, in which the watchdog chief Robert Black was mentioned as questioning the affordability of the Scottish Government's commitment to universal benefits. I think that you said that the view was that his CV gave him an entitlement to speak. He was the Auditor General and, generally speaking, auditors tend to raise concerns and questions rather than give endorsements. Do you think that it would have been of greater concern if he had been raising concerns but he had not been quoted and the story had not been reported by "Reporting Scotland"?

Professor Robertson: I agree that if someone has a CV in a certain area, we should be interested in what they have to say—

Liam McArthur: We are not talking about a CV. He has a statutory role to look at—

Professor Robertson: I am sorry, but the CV is the evidence for this. Are you talking about his current role?

Liam McArthur: He has now demitted office but he had a statutory oversight role—

Professor Robertson: So you are saying that he does not have that role now.

Liam McArthur: He is no longer the Auditor General.

Professor Robertson: So it is accurate to refer to his CV. If I refer to his CV, that is what I am talking about. It is not his current role.

Liam McArthur: Right, but he would have been interviewed on the basis of the concerns that he had expressed as Auditor General—

Professor Robertson: But that was his previous role. I refer you back to your colleague Mary Scanlon's point. Robert Black, too, will be subject to bias, will have baggage and so on.

Mary Scanlon: Oh!

Professor Robertson: But that is all right—we are all human.

Mary Scanlon: Oh!

The Convener: To say that we are all human is a fairly reasonable statement.

Mary Scanlon: I am sorry, but he is talking about the Auditor General.

Liam McArthur: It is a fairly reasonable statement to say that we are all human but we are getting into fairly dangerous realms if we are impugning the reputation of the Auditor General.

Professor Robertson: I have not impugned anyone. I am simply saying that he is human and he may bring certain perspectives to bear. The point is that—

Liam McArthur: With respect, his role as Auditor General is to question and highlight areas where further answers or greater clarity is needed or where figures have been presented that do not necessarily add up in the way that—

Professor Robertson: I do not know the Auditor General at all but, like all the other people involved in this, he is a political animal. He, too, will be political. I do not know that—I do not know anything about him—but he was mentioned on "Reporting Scotland". I do not think that the other

channels mentioned him; for example, I do not think that STV mentioned him that night.

You seem to be implying that we should pay attention to this particular statement, but the fact is that journalists choose. Sometimes they choose the chief executive of BP or Shell or whatever, and the other channel does not. Sometimes they choose differently. I am arguing not with the veracity of anything that is being said but about the overall picture.

Liam McArthur: So because the Auditor General has sought to raise questions about the Government's approach to one area, it reflects the Auditor General's inherent political bias.

Professor Robertson: I have not said that at all.

Liam McArthur: Well—

Professor Robertson: I have not said anything like that. If you read what I have written, you will see that I have said that it is an example of bad news that has been left uncontradicted and has been treated with deference. That is just an objective statement. I am not saying that it should not have been treated that way.

Liam McArthur: But there seems to be an implication that, because we are going through a process leading up to the referendum in September this year, if a negative perspective is taken on any issue, however it is perceived, it is somehow part of an anti-independence approach. I encourage you to watch much of BBC's reporting on the UK Government. One could equally say that it takes a pro-independence approach in that it plays into the argument that Alex Salmond and others within the yes campaign are trying to prosecute.

Professor Robertson: You are setting me up as some kind of political scientist, which I am not. I am a media researcher. I have just described something that happened and which I thought was fair to code as an anti-independence statement that would worry people who are voting yes. It was presented without being countered, as if it were of unquestionable high status. I am not saying that it was not. How would I know? I know nothing of the Auditor General's area of expertise. Without really having any emotions about it, I just looked at it and thought, "That was an uncontradicted negative and deference was shown to the whole thing." What is wrong with that?

Liam McArthur: Only the fact that Auditors General raise questions about Governments of all political hues. That is their role.

The Convener: Before we move on, perhaps Professor Robertson can help us with a point of clarification. When that statement was made, was Bob Black the Auditor General or the former Auditor General?

Professor Robertson: I do not remember. I think that he was the former Auditor General but I would have to check my records.

The Convener: I, too, think that he was the former Auditor General. Liam McArthur keeps saying that he was the Auditor General but I do not think that he was at the time. A different impression would have been created if he had been the Auditor General.

Professor Robertson: To be fair to Liam McArthur, I think that he said that he was not sure.

Liam McArthur: In your written submission, you seem to link the OBR and the IFS with the UK Government and other Government departments. Can you explain the IFS's link to the UK Government?

Professor Robertson: I know of the IFS from previous research, and I know that it is aligned with a particular neoliberal view of economics. It is inaccurate for that organisation to describe itself as impartial because, although it might not see itself as such, it is also a political movement.

I am coming at this not as someone who has a view on independence but as someone with a particular view of the intellectual world and its impartiality. Far too many agencies in this world—the World Bank, for instance—try to present themselves as being somehow outside ideology, and I think that that is wrong. The OBR and the IFS are clearly aligned with certain political ways of thinking.

I am not saying that we should not be listening to them. However, there are examples of bad news that are coming from organisations that present themselves as impartial, and I am simply casting a little doubt on whether any of them is impartial.

Liam McArthur: So when the First Minister quotes favourably from the IFS when it is critical of the UK Government, he is misguided, as was John Swinney when he talked about the establishment of an equivalent of the OBR in Scotland.

Professor Robertson: Again, you are turning me into a professor of politics. I just observed what was there, and I leave you to draw your conclusions as to whether anything should be done about it. I tried to describe what was there as coldly and impartially as I could. Should I have just kept quiet and said nothing at all about the fact that I have become in favour of independence for Scotland? I do not know. I have to say that I have become more so because of the no campaign. The research has made me slightly more in favour of independence. However, it is not a big deal for

me; it absolutely does not drive me, and it comes way down the line after pacifism and other issues.

Clare Adamson: I should probably have put on record earlier that I have worked with a number of students from the University of the West of Scotland—obviously, the university has a campus in Hamilton in my region—and that I recently had a journalism student doing work experience in my office.

Ms Scanlon gave the example of George Osborne's concerns about where financial institutions have to be based, but I want to put on record my belief that the European Union is reviewing those rules and that, according to current reports, it seems that they are unlikely to continue.

We have had a wide-ranging discussion, but I have a fundamental concern about the issues that Professor Robertson set out in his opening statement and what has happened. Are you willing to give an opinion on the impact that your academic peer-reviewed research has had on the students at the university and the university's reputation? Of course, we are very proud of the university in Scotland.

Professor Robertson: As Mao Zedong said when he was asked in the 1950s about the lessons to be drawn from the French revolution, it is probably too early to say. According to the head of policy at the BBC, I have damaged the corporate reputation of the UWS, which is why he reported me to the principal. He thought that I might have damaged the university's corporate reputation. Of course, there are other kinds of reputation apart from corporate reputation.

I have not used the material with students, because the study has just been done this year. I use my research with students to demonstrate how to do research, but this research is too recent, so I cannot comment on that. I think that the impact will be mixed. There has been a huge amount of the kind of online activity that younger people are more engaged in. Someone suggested to me that there are about a quarter of a million online messages on Twitter and other things that I do not use referring to my research. As a result, the fact that the issue did not make *The Daily Telegraph* or whatever is perhaps not a big deal. Again, however, I am being drawn off the subject and on to things that I should not talk about.

The Convener: Before we finish, I have a direct question about the research results. You mentioned that the 3:2 ratio is—if I can put it this way—not a headliner for you. I note that in some lines in the column in your data on "Reporting Scotland" and BBC 1 combined figures, there is a comparison between the two sides. For example, there were 211 pro-independence statements and 317 anti-independence statements; four pro-independence academic statements and 23 anti-independence academic statements; and there were 79 cases of an anti-pro order and 43 cases of a pro-anti order. We have mentioned some of the others, and I will not list them all, but in every single case in which the data can be compared the numbers are greater on the no side than on the yes side. Is it possible that, over a 12-month period, that could have happened by random accident?

Professor Robertson: I do not think that it could have happened in a random way. It suggests something structural. As I think I explained earlier, there was a tendency to allow everyone in the major parties to speak. There are three major no campaigning parties and one major yes campaigning party—obviously, that leaves out the Greens, the socialists and so on, who are presumably considered to be too small to be allowed to comment very often. If everyone in that group of no campaigning parties had been allowed to speak, we might actually have had a 3:1 ratio.

Often, the comments were very short. For example, the Lib Dems would be given barely a sentence. That can lead to an imbalance. That might, I think, not really matter a huge amount, but I do not know because the study is not a study of the effects. I have not interviewed potential voters, so I do not know. I leave it to Professor Curtice to interview voters.

The Convener: Thank you for giving us your evidence and discussing your report—we appreciate it. I am sure that we all look forward to your future publication when it is finally completed.

Professor Robertson: That will happen when it is all over.

The Convener: I suspend the meeting briefly for a change of witnesses.

11:00

Meeting suspended.

11:03

On resuming—

The Convener: I welcome our second panel of witnesses, who are all from BBC Scotland and will give evidence on broadcasting. We have with us Ken MacQuarrie, John Boothman, Bruce Malcolm and John Mullin.

I thank the witnesses for their further written evidence on BBC Scotland's preparations for the referendum and the Commonwealth games. I will start with a question. I presume that you all heard the evidence this morning from Professor

Robertson, who has just left, and you have, as an organisation, responded to his research. Mr MacQuarrie, can you tell us why you took the view that it was necessary to respond in the way that you did to Professor Robertson's research?

Ken MacQuarrie (BBC Scotland): Yes, I can. First, it would be worth putting a couple of points about Professor Robertson's report on the record. We read the report with some interest, but we have serious concerns with it that pertain in particular to elements of its methodology and factual accuracy, its findings and its conclusions. We believe that the report displays fundamental errors in all those areas and for that reason we question its validity. We have detailed our concerns in our report, which we understand has been distributed to committee members.

When Professor Robertson's report was first published on a website, it was not sent to us for comment. We were alerted to it by concerned members of the public, but even from a cursory examination we could see that there were errors in it. We contacted the author, and copied in the university given that the report had been published with the university's logo appended. It was to my mind entirely proper that we did so, and the content and tone of our communication was also entirely proper.

We asked whether we might see the raw data, as we did not recognise the evidence that was presented in the report as an accurate reflection of our broadcast output, but the request was rejected by the report's author. The report makes it clear that its evidence base was a series of transcripts of broadcast output. We are not, unfortunately, in a position to say how accurate those transcripts were, but, given the number of factual errors in the report, it is at least fair to ask the question.

We are aware that the version of the report that has been presented to the committee differs from the version that the author originally published in January, and that one or two of the errors that we pointed out have been corrected. However, the vast majority of the errors remain.

The original version claims that the weekly bulletins are the focus, but we pointed out that the report's figures were therefore out by more than 200 hours. I see that the latest version of the report now claims that all the weekend bulletins were considered, and the figures have been revised down by around 100 hours, from 730 hours to approximately 640 hours. It seems that the author is unclear about what or how much news the report covers, which is the basis on which the entire report is predicated.

The report makes a number of allegations about our news coverage, as it does about the coverage by STV. We completely reject those allegations, as we reject the questioning of our journalists' professionalism and of what they have brought to air.

The evidence that the report presents does not support its contentions, and the conclusions are based largely on flawed analysis and occasionally on intuitive guesswork. The report is not, as it claims to be, a piece of analysis that is based on empirical research, but rather a highly subjective and selective assessment of our news coverage.

It is important for the committee to note that the BBC is governed by the requirements of our editorial guidelines and by the Office of Communications' broadcasting code. It is against those criteria that our impartiality is judged and we are entirely confident that not one of the examples in the report would have fallen foul of them.

We take full cognisance of sound analytical broadcasting research, such as the report, "From Seesaw to Wagon Wheel: safeguarding impartiality in the 21st century", which was published in 2007, and Professor King's report, which was published the following year.

Our issues are not with Professor Robertson, but simply with the report as it is published on the University of the West of Scotland's website. We welcome all contributions to the debate, but we feel that it is important that we make it clear where there are errors of fact.

The Convener: Thank you for that comprehensive response, Mr MacQuarrie.

How many pieces of academic research—I am sure that you will have to guess this, if you can—would BBC Scotland cover in a normal 12-month period?

Ken MacQuarrie: I cannot give you an exact figure for how many we cover, but we feature a number of different pieces of academic research in our news broadcasts.

The Convener: It is a lot, is it not? That is a regular occurrence, almost on a daily basis.

Ken MacQuarrie: Yes, although I could not give you an exact figure.

The Convener: Can you tell me on how many occasions you expended BBC resources on—to be polite about it—tearing apart any such pieces of academic research and reporting that research to the principal of the institution from which the research came?

Ken MacQuarrie: The piece of academic research that we are discussing was about our output, and our desire was not to tear it apart but simply to put on the record where there are factual errors. The report was on the University of the West of Scotland's website, so it seemed to be perfectly reasonable to copy in the principal. I do

not see it in any sense as a piece of academic research, which is always welcome in the debate that we are involved in by reporting on it.

The Convener: We know what you did with Professor Robertson's research. I am asking whether you can give the number of occasions on which you have done something similar in relation to any of the many hundreds of other bits of academic research that you report every year.

Ken MacQuarrie: In general terms, I cannot give a specific instance in which we would have copied the principal into a comment on a piece of academic research. What we do in our journalism is test, debate and discuss academic research on a regular basis. On the aforementioned research, Professor Robertson was given the opportunity to put his views on "Good Morning Scotland".

The Convener: Let me be clear about what you are saying. The answer is none at all.

Ken MacQuarrie: Not to my knowledge.

The Convener: This is the only piece of research in relation to which that happened.

Ken MacQuarrie: To my knowledge, as we currently stand.

The Convener: Would an ordinary person who was looking at this not find it rather peculiar that although the BBC accepts academic research day in, day out and responds by publishing stories and having debates about it, on this one occasion, when the research was about the BBC's own output, you responded entirely differently?

Ken MacQuarrie: I do not think that it is peculiar in the slightest. We wanted to correct the errors of fact that were in the report. It is perfectly reasonable, given that the report was about our output and was on the question of our impartiality, that we would get the facts on the table. We wrote only to Professor Robertson, and copied to the principal.

The Convener: I am surprised by your answer. It seems astonishing that on no other occasion have you expended such effort in analysing academic research—you said that you did not think that you had ever done that before—but on this occasion you seem to have expended substantial effort in an attempt to discredit Professor Robertson's research.

Ken MacQuarrie: We simply wish to ensure that we have registered that the factual base of the research is incorrect. We wanted to supply example by example for Professor Robertson, with the true facts.

George Adam: Do you get a lot of complaints about your coverage?

Ken MacQuarrie: We get a number of complaints across the BBC about our coverage on any given subject. We also get a lot of plaudits, neutral comment and inquiries. There is a high volume of engagement with the public.

George Adam: Do you have figures on the number of complaints you receive per annum?

Ken MacQuarrie: The number of individual contacts with the BBC is in the order of 1 million per annum. I cannot give you a breakdown at this point—

George Adam: Into news, current affairs, BBC Scotland and so on?

Ken MacQuarrie: —if you want, I can supply that to you.

George Adam: That would be interesting.

John Boothman (BBC Scotland): Mr Adam, if it is helpful, I can say that in the past couple of years, in the context of the onset of the referendum debate and stories that we have done on Scottish football, there has been a rise in the number of complaints that BBC Scotland has dealt with. We try to answer each complainant as promptly as possible.

George Adam: Okay. Thank you for that.

The Convener: Mr MacQuarrie, did you say that you are willing to supply the committee with the total number of complaints, broken down by whether they are to do with football, the referendum and so on?

Ken MacQuarrie: No. We would not be able to do that. I was talking about the generality of the number of contacts that we have with the audience in any particular year—

The Convener: The question was about complaints. Can you give the number of complaints that you have received?

11:15

Ken MacQuarrie: We would not normally do so as a matter of course in the BBC, but that—

The Convener: I asked because when I put a freedom of information request to you on how many complaints BBC Scotland receives, you refused to answer. I thought that you just said that you would supply the committee—

Ken MacQuarrie: No. I said that I could supply the number of contacts.

The Convener: You will not supply this committee with the number of complaints that the BBC has received about its referendum coverage.

Ken MacQuarrie: In terms of the referendum coverage specifically, no.

The Convener: No. Why not?

Ken MacQuarrie: In general terms, we use that contact and we reply to each complaint—and first of all, the body that would release that information is the BBC trust rather than the executive, and we would not break it down.

The Convener: I am trying to understand why not. You are a body that is paid for by the public. Surely the public have a right to know about the level of interest in or complaints about your output.

Ken MacQuarrie: The trust publishes the data about the number of contacts on an annual basis.

The Convener: I am not asking you about the number of contacts. I am asking about the number of complaints that you have received from the public about the referendum coverage.

Ken MacQuarrie: We would not break down the complaints into specific subject areas.

The Convener: Okay.

George Adam: Has there been a cut in the number of people who deliver news and current affairs in BBC Scotland?

John Boothman: In the run-up to the referendum, because of the £5 million of additional investment for Scotland, I think that more people are working in news and current affairs than has ever been the case. I think that we have added nearly 50 staff in the past year, to deal with all the additional output that we are providing in the run-up to the referendum.

George Adam: Are you saying that flagship shows such as GMS and "Reporting Scotland", the main news show, have more people working on them than they had previously?

John Boothman: Yes—I can give you some examples. You will have read in the press recently that Sarah Smith is coming to present a new programme called "Scotland 2014", which will start at the end of May. The chief reporter from *The Herald* recently joined us, and an economics correspondent from Northern Ireland, Colletta Smith, has joined us. Laura Bicker has been seconded to the position of political correspondent. We have 14 new news trainees. We have more producers coming to join us, to fulfil our obligations in relation to the extra coverage that we want to do.

The last time that we were here, we told the committee that for the fixed period of the referendum we would employ up to 50 additional staff to deal with all the new output that we propose for the referendum, some of which I am sure that members have already seen. We have had a number of debates and documentaries, and we have beefed up staffing around some of the programmes.

George Adam: I am slightly confused—it might be entirely my fault; perhaps I live in a permanent state of confusion. The National Union of Journalists has told us on numerous occasions that its members are under more pressure. We have heard in various media outlets that shift patterns have changed to such an extent that producers are working through the night and then doing some of the early morning stuff. If we have so many people working for BBC Scotland, how come we are still hearing those reports from people who are employed in the industry?

John Boothman: As I said, we have had £5 million of additional investment for the referendum and we are employing up to 50 additional staff. Until the end of the last financial year, we were in a period of making savings, which resulted in a number of redundancies, but since then, and for the period of the referendum, as well as our permanent staff we have had the additional £5 million and an additional 50 staff—

George Adam: What is the breakdown of the 50 additional staff? Are they new staff? Are they newly qualified?

John Mullin (BBC Scotland): May I step in here? Fifty staff have joined the referendum unit. All of them are contract staff and their contracts run out at the end of the referendum period. Many positions are for documentaries, so they are three-month contracts. We have beefed up online, with four new employees. We probably have a dozen or so people working on documentaries at any one time, but that is a rolling figure.

We have a gold standard form of training scheme for the trainees. They do three months of extensive training, and we put them around different programmes. Some of them are attached to online, some of them are attached to radio and some of them are attached to TV.

George Adam: You are saying that we have more staff than we have ever had but that it is in effect all temporary contracts—it is all until the referendum is over.

John Mullin: All 50 are temporary posts, yes.

George Adam: You would say that, in the middle, between the two stories, there has probably been a change to your way of working, but the NUJ would say that there has been a cut in the number of journalists with full-time contracts in the BBC in Scotland.

Ken MacQuarrie: We regularly meet the joint unions and we discuss the level of staffing. At a previous committee hearing, we indicated the level of savings that we had to make, due to the extra responsibilities that we have to undertake as part of the current licence fee settlement, which has been frozen for a period of pretty much seven

years. We had to make savings in excess of £700 million across the organisation, on which we gave full evidence to the committee during a previous discussion.

We are working with the unions, and we have had constructive and positive meetings with them. There is an absolutely open channel with them. I absolutely believe that that is a matter for industrial relations between us, as the BBC management, and the unions and the staff.

George Adam: We are talking about 35 full-time journalists, possibly, being let go from BBC Scotland. I recently saw a public advertisement for a public policy officer job, at between £39,000 and £62,000 a year. That brings me back to my original question about the level of complaints, which you have said is quite a lot higher. I have been led to believe that that post would assist with dealing with the level of complaints from the general public. Do you think that, following the changes to the management structure, as you would say—the union would probably describe it as the cut in journalist staff at the BBC—it presents the right image to advertise a job for £39,000 to £62,000 a year, which is in effect for someone who will just be dealing with complaints?

Ken MacQuarrie: First, the post that you mention is for a nine-month period. It is a temporary post in what is a huge year for Scotland. There is the Commonwealth games, which involves a whole number of broadcasters. A Commonwealth games broadcasting conference is taking place at Pacific Quay in Glasgow in May. There is the referendum. There are a number of other huge events in which we are heavily involved, not least the centenary of world war 1.

I deemed it absolutely appropriate that, with one post in that area, we supplement that post this year in terms of workload to ensure that the level of engagement in general between BBC Scotland and all the various bodies that we will be engaging with is absolutely appropriate, and to ensure that we can sustain that seven days a week over a 52-week period.

We adjudged that we would put in place a nine-month contract. I took the responsibility for that, having examined all the investments that we were making, with increased programme output and over a highly successful year for BBC Scotland.

As regards our output, it is important to note that we recorded our highest ever network television spend in Scotland last year, with 11 per cent of BBC network television being made in Scotland. That was a rise in our network TV hours of more than 11 per cent.

I took the decision on that—I take responsibility for that post. I am absolutely confident that that is the right thing to do.

Liam McArthur: I take you back to the report by Professor Robertson. How many academic reports come to the attention of your journalists but are ignored and do not get reported?

Ken MacQuarrie: I cannot put a figure on that.

Liam McArthur: Is the number likely to be significant? That is what I am asking.

John Boothman: Are you talking about reports about the BBC, Mr McArthur?

Liam McArthur: I am talking generally about reports that are produced by academics.

John Boothman: Academic reports come to the attention of the BBC, and of every broadcasting and journalistic organisation, all the time. Reporting of them is a matter of editorial judgment and news values.

Liam McArthur: So, it is fair to say that a large proportion of such reports are simply ignored because they do not meet your criteria.

John Boothman: Sure.

Liam McArthur: As part of those criteria—this is probably what you were alluding to—is there a tendency among BBC journalists not to report academic studies in which they believe the methodology is flawed or there are inaccuracies, whether the study is to do with the BBC or with any other area of policy? Is that part of the editorial judgment?

John Boothman: Any good journalist would assess the methodology, whether a report is accurate, what techniques were used to compile the report, whether there are errors and the conclusions in the report. People would make such assessments before determining whether to cover a report. That happens daily.

Liam McArthur: There is always room for improvement, but is it your impression that the BBC has a reasonable reputation for self-criticism and self-analysis?

John Boothman: Yes—I think so.

Liam McArthur: Can you provide evidence to substantiate that?

John Boothman: As I have explained, in our normal editorial processes for each and every story on each and every day, there are editorial guidelines to be taken into account. Discussions take place daily throughout the day, as in any other—

Liam McArthur: When stories are about the BBC, is the BBC—in your opinion—fairly robustly self-critical, and can you evidence that?

John Boothman: Over the past few months, there have been many stories about the BBC, and

I think that the BBC has proved recently that it is up to reporting of those stories fairly and impartially. On Professor Robertson's report, I was interested in some of the things that he had to say earlier. The report was discussed on phone-in programmes—I certainly heard it—and Professor Robertson was interviewed on "Good Morning Scotland".

Liam McArthur: On complaints, I have listened with interest to the exchanges with George Adam and with the convener, although there appears to be an inconsistency in approach. It is inevitable that, in the run-up to the referendum, you would anticipate closer scrutiny and there is probably a greater interest in complaining. Do you have any way of analysing whether complaints come from people with a particular agenda to prosecute or whether they just come from members of the public who are regular listeners or viewers and who just happen to be affronted or to have misgivings about BBC programming?

Ken MacQuarrie: Our desire, and our practice, is to respond to each and every complaint on an equivalent basis, no matter what that complaint may be. That is our intention and that is what we are set up to do. We then make it clear to the complainants what next steps are available to them in the complaints process, which can, if necessary, go through to the BBC trust.

Liam McArthur: I presume that you separate complaints from the press offices of political parties and from people who are associated with the campaigns on the referendum, from those that come from people who do not have an obvious tie in either respect. Is that the case?

Ken MacQuarrie: If a formal complaint comes from a political office, it is treated in absolutely the same way as any other, and with the care that you would expect. If it is an informal complaint, which sometimes happens, there is usually a dialogue that will engage the complainant with the senior editorial staff who are responsible for that output. Complaints come in a variety of forms, but formal written complaints have to go into our complaints process.

Liam McArthur: Do you have any sense that there are campaigns in which complaints appear to be orchestrated? We are all subjected to letter-writing and email campaigns in which it is obvious that the wording that is used reflects a concerted campaign, which is entirely legitimate. Do you see that? Is there a way of distinguishing between a campaign and a spontaneous outburst of anxiety about certain programming?

Furthermore, even if you cannot give us the numbers of complaints, do you have a sense about whether they fall equally on both sides of the debate in the referendum?

11:30

Ken MacQuarrie: Whatever view we take of the genesis of a complaint, we ensure that we treat each and every one equally and respond equally, irrespective of whether it might be part of a campaign.

Liam McArthur: What about whether complaints fall on both sides of the referendum debate?

John Boothman: That is immaterial to us. At the end of the day, if a member of the audience complains, we deal appropriately with the complaint. It is fair to say—

Liam McArthur: I am sorry. The question is more in the context of Professor Robertson's evidence, which would lead us to believe that it is more likely that there would be complaints from people on the yes side.

John Boothman: I do not necessarily support that point of view. Over a period, depending on what happens in the campaign, we will get complaints from one side or the other. We do not distinguish between them; we deal with each and every individual complaint.

What I can say, as I have said already, is that there has been an increase in the number of complaints—I indicated the two areas where those had come from—and to be honest I am anticipating that, over the next six and a half months, there will be an even bigger number of complaints. However, at the end of the day, it partly depends on the issue.

Liam McArthur: I apologise. I should have declared an interest as I have a family member who works for the BBC.

Clare Adamson: I have a quick supplementary on George Adam's line of questioning. I am still a bit confused. My understanding is that in last year's cost-cutting exercise—the efficiency savings—35 journalist posts were cut. Is that correct?

John Boothman: No. In the two-year period until April 2013, the department of news and current affairs and BBC Scotland lost up to 30 members of staff. Those staff were not all journalists. Three were content assistants, which is a grade below researcher. Two of them were resources staff—staff who work around cameras and video editing. To be fair, most of them were journalistic staff; they were not all in Glasgow, but came from a variety of places around the country. By far the vast majority were voluntary redundancies.

Clare Adamson: Mr Boothman, I was glad to hear you mention that two high-profile women journalists have been appointed. Of the 50 staff in

the referendum unit, how many are in journalism posts?

John Boothman: Most of them are, I think.

John Mullin: Do you mean staff who are seconded from other places?

Clare Adamson: No—you said that there are 50 staff members in the referendum unit.

John Mullin: Do you mean staff who are journalists?

Clare Adamson: Yes.

John Mullin: Yes. There are 14 trainees and the others are all working as journalists.

Clare Adamson: So, all those staff are journalists.

John Mullin: There is a production manager, an assistant production manager and one researcher.

Clare Adamson: Would it be possible for you to provide the committee with a breakdown of the structure of that unit?

Ken MacQuarrie: The staff are all directly related to output, if you like, in terms of getting programming and production on the air.

Clare Adamson: Thank you. It would be very helpful if that breakdown could be provided.

I will move on to my own question. I do not know whether you were able to view the earlier evidence session, but I asked Professor Robertson a specific question about the methodology in his research. He assured us that the methodology was grounded theory, which has been used in other academic studies. I think that Mr MacQuarrie questioned that methodology in his opening statement. Is that correct? Do you have concerns about the methodology?

Ken MacQuarrie: We had concerns about how stories were categorised, if you like, and felt that there were—as we have set out in the document that we have produced—essentially errors of fact. The key thing for us is to get the factual base correct. It is up to Professor Robertson to apply whatever methodology he wishes, but if it does not have a sound factual base it is incumbent on us to help Professor Robertson by pointing out what we believe to be errors of fact.

John Boothman: Having listened at great length to the report's author, I have to say that I am not really sure what report we are talking about. Are we talking about the original report that he published in January and which, this morning, is still to be found on the University of the West of Scotland website, or are we talking about the amended report that he submitted to the committee and which we saw for the first time last week?

Mr MacQuarrie has already touched on one of the fundamental issues that concerned us, which was the comment in the initial report that it had examined four hour-long programmes that had been broadcast on two channels every weekday evening. As I am sure the committee is aware, watching, transcribing and coding that much television is no mean feat; however, according to the amended report, the author studied 640 hours of programming, which is 110 hours less than the initial estimate in January.

Moreover, it was suggested for the first time that the report had not just looked at four programmes on two channels on weekday evenings, but had also included all the weekend bulletins. What we find curious is that not a single figure in each of the 17 categories that are identified in the report has been changed. Even though a number of bulletins on two channels had been analysed for two more days a week over a whole year, there was no difference in the report's numerical analysis.

We have provided an analysis of the report and, to be fair, the professor has corrected a number of things in it. For example, there were some quite glaring errors. Ruth Davidson and Willie Rennie were confused with each other; one such example has been changed but the other has not. For each "Reporting Scotland" example that the report identified, we noted factual errors: the date; people who were named as having taken part in the report had not taken part; and that what the report identified as the end summaries or what we call the pay-offs were not actually the pay-offs that were made by the reporter or which were included in the reports. As I have said, there are a number of factual errors in the report.

The other difficulty that we had with the report—again, I should say that we sent all these observations privately to the report's author in January—was its classifications. For example, Mr McArthur asked about a health story that is mentioned. Given that health comes under the devolution settlement and has nothing to do with the referendum coverage, I do not know why it should be in a report about referendum coverage.

Mr McArthur also asked a question about the former Auditor General Robert Black's views on the affordability of free care for the elderly and prescription charges under the current devolution settlement. There might be a rational explanation for those things—that is fair enough—but they constitute not minor but fairly significant and major concerns that we have about the report.

I should also say that we welcome any report of this nature. It is important that we talk about these things, and we are happy to do so.

Clare Adamson: When discussing the report during your opening statement, Mr MacQuarrie, you said that you were concerned about the allegations in it. Having read it myself, I am not aware of any allegations. I am aware only of observations in it. Could you clarify what you mean by that?

Ken MacQuarrie: The report suggests, for example, that there is what you might call a lazy approach to our journalism. We refute that.

Mary Scanlon: I will say first of all that it is a pleasure to interview the BBC.

Throughout Scotland, there are pro-independence views, and there are views that are pro Scotland's remaining in the United Kingdom. A huge amount of people are still undecided. The examples in Professor Robertson's report concern some of the risks and uncertainties. Professor Robertson appears to suggest that the fact that you are highlighting those risks and uncertainties can somehow be taken as a criticism of the yes campaign. From where I am coming from, you are reflecting reality, as people across Scotland want to know what will happen in the event of a yes vote. How did you feel about your looking at the examples of risks and uncertainties being defined as a criticism? I hope that part of the job that you will do for the next six months will be to highlight and debate the risks.

Ken MacQuarrie: In this important debate, our desire is to provide the most impartial coverage that we can possibly provide. Ultimately, that is a matter of editorial judgment for our highly experienced journalists, who make such judgments daily. That does not simply mean that they judge between one side and another; it involves trying to get the whole spectrum or range of views that are alive within the debate.

Our job is to report the news as it happens and to make judgments on it. Professor Robertson deals with issues to do with which story comes first and which comes last. That has some currency in some academic theories, although it is not something that we recognise as a measure of impartiality within our output. Our desire is simply to bring the most comprehensive coverage to the audience in Scotland every day, to be absolutely impartial in bringing that coverage to air and, as far as the quality of journalism and broadcasting is concerned, to aspire to the highest possible standard. Every day, we consider that and we question ourselves on how well we did the previous day. We also do it on a monthly basis.

I chair a formal group from across the whole BBC. On an issue such as the referendum, we discuss and debate all the stories and how we have treated them. We are absolutely conscious that there are times, given the volume of journalism that we do, when we may occasionally get it wrong. When we do so, it is important that we put our hands up and admit that to be the case. On other occasions, the BBC trust may take a view of what we broadcast.

It is deep in the DNA of every journalist in BBC Scotland that we bring the very best of our journalism to this story. That is our aspiration. I believe that, in giving some examples of the programming that we have done, we can substantiate that. We can answer the question that the convener posed to us about studying our level of preparedness for two major events: the referendum and the Commonwealth games.

The committee properly deemed it important to spend time on Professor Robertson's report, but it was only last week that we knew that Professor Robertson was coming to the committee. However, our main focus—

The Convener: I am sorry, Mr MacQuarrie. This is very interesting but, given the time, could we keep the answers a little bit shorter? A lot of members still want to come in.

11:45

Ken MacQuarrie: Our main focus is on delivering the best coverage of those two events and on trying to answer and assure the committee of our level of preparedness for them.

Mary Scanlon: I certainly hope so. People are looking to you and other media sources for answers on pensions, banks, currency and Europe.

I turn to my second question. You say that Professor Robertson

"singularly fails to define – 'fairness'".

You have helpfully given us the definition of "fairness" as defined by Ofcom. Could you explain how Professor Robertson's definition of fairness differs from yours, as set out by Ofcom?

Ken MacQuarrie: We were trying to understand from Professor Robertson how he defined fairness. We wanted to engage in a dialogue with Professor Robertson on that. However, he was unwilling to define the term with regard to the data.

Mary Scanlon: As the deputy convener of the Public Audit Committee, I noted the comments about the Auditor General. Every report is critical in some way, because it has to be critical. The Auditor General considers public sector spending and value for money. I hope—

The Convener: I am sorry, but I have to interrupt for accuracy—this is the point that I was trying to make earlier. My understanding is that Robert Black was not the Auditor General at the

time, but was commenting as a private individual. He was at that point the former Auditor General. To suggest that there was a report by the Auditor General is inaccurate, Mary.

Mary Scanlon: Robert Black was Auditor General for 13 years, and was highly respected in Parliament.

The Convener: Absolutely.

Mary Scanlon: I certainly hope that that office does not come in for criticism.

Given that an SNP minister has already written to an academic institution to complain about a researcher—Chris Whatley—there, how can we move forward with a fair, highly informed, just and reasonable debate, given what is at stake in the next six months?

I put it on record that I am aware that some of complaints have come to you from Tory members who think that you are too biased in favour of independence. Whatever complaints you receive, they are not all coming from one side.

Ken MacQuarrie: We will be publishing our referendum guidelines, which are awaiting final approval by the BBC trust. They have been out for consultation, and will be absolutely clear.

This is a debate in which impartiality is much more than a simple balance of appearances by members of the campaigns. The objective is to achieve what the guidelines will call "a broad balance" between the arguments in the debate. That will include a range of voices.

Our editorial guidelines are very clear. We must ensure that news judgments continue to drive editorial decision making in news-based programmes. In other words, we will cover what is happening, while ensuring that the bar for impartiality is set high.

Mary Scanlon: You will continue to inform and be part of the debate.

The Convener: Lots of members want to come in. I really want to get through them.

Joan McAlpine: I go back to Professor Robertson's results. Notwithstanding the issues that you have raised about the types of programme covered, because you are in dispute about the hours and so on, I will stick to his figures on "Reporting Scotland" in the interests of clarity.

Overall, Professor Robertson recorded 171 statements of a pro-independence nature and 262 statements of an anti-independence nature. If you listened to his evidence this morning, you will have heard him say that he was not too concerned about that because he felt that it could be explained by the fact that you have to interview the three better together parties, which would introduce an imbalance. I know that that imbalance has been addressed in your referendum debate coverage, but is there a difficulty in addressing it when you report the news?

John Mullin: We are moving into a new phase of the campaign. During the designated period, we will always have a proper balance of arguments between the yes and no campaigns, but we have been operating in that way for a long time now—certainly since last September. In a debate on any issue, there should be a proper balance between yes and no. That is the approach that we will take.

Joan McAlpine: In the case of a news story—something coming out of the Parliament, for example—do you find that there is a conflict between balancing the different parties and balancing yes and no?

John Mullin: There is not so much of a conflict around Holyrood stories, but I can see that there is a conflict when a story is about Westminster. For example, when we covered Ian Lang's debate in the House of Lords, it was obviously hard to find SNP peers to appear on the programme. Therefore, we had an SNP spokesperson—or perhaps it was a Scottish Government spokesperson; I cannot quite remember—on the next day as a way of balancing up the argument.

Joan McAlpine: You have a commitment to impartiality. Do you see the commitment to impartiality raising a conflict between achieving a balance in relation to the yes and no campaigns and achieving a balance in relation to the three better together parties and the SNP?

John Mullin: I think that there is a conflict there, but the way in which we are resolving it is always to go for the balance.

Joan McAlpine: Will the referendum guidelines that you say you are about to publish address that specifically?

John Mullin: Yes.

Joan McAlpine: Okay. Thanks very much.

John Boothman: Ms McAlpine, let me give you an interesting example. A simple mathematical formula and a stopwatch do not always address the issue. In the past month, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer made an intervention on the currency issue, Henry McLeish, who is a no campaign supporter, made a statement that, it could be argued, supported the views of the other side of the debate. If you were looking at that in a purely 50:50 way, rather than introducing a range of views to the debate, where would you put him in relation to categorisations such as those used by Professor Robertson?

The same might apply on the other side of the debate on an issue such as the monarchy. If you were to interview Dennis Canavan or the Greens, you would find that they would take a different view from that taken by the SNP, so into which category would you put them? It is a complex issue, but the BBC attempts to reflect a range of views across the debate, and that is how we will inform our audiences.

Joan McAlpine: I picked up from what you said a few minutes ago that, going forward, your referendum guidelines would be much more focused on the 50:50 balance between yes and no, notwithstanding the fact that there is a range of opinion within the two sides.

John Boothman: As the referendum gets closer, of course we will pay much more attention to that. There are different periods in the year and different circumstances in which a different broad balance will apply. For example, during the year of the professor's study, there was a by-election in Aberdeen Donside. If we had reported a referendum issue during that by-election, we would have reported what all the parties said, and that might have included the Greens and other parties as well as the four main parties that were standing candidates. Once we get closer to the referendum, those things will be focused. That is not to say that we will not face particular challenges during the forthcoming European elections, for example.

Joan McAlpine: I will move on to another aspect of Professor Robertson's findings. He looked at the personalisation of independence as Alex Salmond's idea and found 28 examples of that on "Reporting Scotland", compared with no examples of personalisation of ideas as being those of better together individuals. Notwithstanding what you have said about having some issues with Professor Robertson's figures, there seems to me to be no margin of error at all with 28 versus zero. Does that give you cause for concern.

John Boothman: I had a pet theory of my own about that. Can I tell you what I did? At the weekend, I looked at the period that Professor Robertson studied—17 September 2012 to 18 September 2013. I looked at Thursdays, because the fulcrum of democratic debate in this institution is, of course, First Minister's question time on Thursdays, which by and large is reported fairly frequently on BBC and STV. It is very difficult not to report verbatim what party leaders say during First Minister's question time. That is partly my simple explanation for what Professor Robertson refers to as "personalisation" and possibly demonisation, for which I think there might be a much simpler reason.

Joan McAlpine: Of course, you were just looking at one day in the week. Professor Robertson made it clear that he did not take samples but looked at every programme over the period.

John Boothman: I spoke to colleagues in our office in the Parliament this morning, and they told me that there are, I think, 36 or 37 First Minister's question times in a year. The number to which Professor Robertson referred is around that, but he examined two programmes that are based in Scotland, and we do not cover FMQs on "Reporting Scotland" every week. Look, I am not saying that that is the complete answer, Ms McAlpine. However, it is a reasonable theory to suggest.

Joan McAlpine: What about the complete lack of personalisation of pro-UK ideas in relation to any personality on the unionist side?

John Boothman: I am not sure that I accept the analysis, to be honest. What I can do is explain, as I have done, what I think has happened in terms of the reporting of that particular part of the campaign. We report FMQs and we report what the First Minister and other party leaders say, which would explain why there was a big number of instances where those individuals were referred to directly in programmes.

Joan McAlpine: A number of newspapers have nailed their colours firmly to the mast and are virulently anti-independence. For example, the *Daily Mail* front page regularly equates independence with the personal views of Mr Salmond, as do other papers. Are your BBC journalists influenced by the media landscape outwith the BBC?

John Mullin: Not particularly. I do not really know where to take that question, to be honest.

Joan McAlpine: But the newspapers have no obligation to be impartial, whereas the BBC does—

John Mullin: Of course, but we are talking about the 28 instances that you cited, and there are 36 FMQs. It does not take too much to work out that 28 is less than 36, so it seems to me to be quite a reasonable—

The Convener: I am sorry to interrupt again, but I am pretty sure that Joan McAlpine did not say that she was citing 28 instances out of 36 FMQs.

John Mullin: No; we cited the 36 FMQs.

Joan McAlpine: But you do not cover every FMQs, as Mr Boothman explained—

John Mullin: No, but 28 is less than 36, so we can regard it as a fair proportion.

Joan McAlpine: Yes, but there are absolutely no examples of personalisation of ideas in relation to better together individuals—Professor Robertson broadened that out to include more than one individual.

Ken MacQuarrie: You asked whether our journalists are influenced by other media that take a particular line in the debate. My view and strong belief is that, because of the level of their training, integrity, probity and professionalism, that is absolutely not the case.

Joan McAlpine: One final question—

The Convener: Sorry, but we must move on. A number of members want to come in and I want to ask a couple of quick questions first. Are the witnesses suggesting that personalisation takes place only in relation to FMQs?

John Boothman: No, I am not suggesting that at all. I am saying that part of the explanation for programmes focusing on what the leaders say in the chamber could be the fact that the fulcrum of democratic debate in the Scottish Parliament is the weekly First Minister's question time.

As I said, having looked at Thursdays over the past year in particular, I found 14 "Reporting Scotland" reports alone—leaving aside what would have been on STV—in which the First Minister featured heavily, although not necessarily as the lead person. At the end of the day, that gave me some explanation of something for which the professor has an alternative theory.

12:00

The Convener: I have looked at the professor's report, and it does not seem to me that that explains it at all. It is about the personalisation of ideas as Alex Salmond's or as those of individuals from the better together campaign; it is not about reports that the First Minister said this at FMQs today, the leader of the Labour Party said that and the leader of the Conservative Party said something else. That is not what the report is about. It is about reports that say that subjects such as the currency union are Alex Salmond's ideas as opposed to being those of the yes Scotland campaign, while views on the other side are expressed as being those of the better together campaign as opposed to being Alistair Darling's views.

John Boothman: Over the period to which the report refers, many of the exchanges at FMQs were about the referendum debate, to be honest. I was not party to the data set that the professor used in his analysis. That is something that we were looking for when we originally corresponded with him.

The Convener: I meant to mention this earlier, because I find it very interesting: it is your output and you have the original data.

John Boothman: That is why I had a look at it.

The Convener: You just said that you do not have access to it.

John Boothman: I am saying that I do not have access to what the professor has or has not included in his report. In terms of the categories and classifications that he used, I have already pointed out that I do not understand at all why health stories, for example, or, as I have said, the report by the former Auditor General that we have been talking about, would be included.

At the end of the day, until we have an opportunity to take a look at what was and was not included in the report in terms of FMQs and the professor's suggestion—or his theory or hypothesis—about what he regards as personalisation and the demonisation of the First Minister, I am saying that the issue can be explained simply by the number of reports on FMQs that dealt with issues around the referendum debate. That is my reading of it, given the simple level of knowledge that I have of what the professor studied.

The Convener: I do not think that it is about the demonisation of the First Minister; it is about personalisation, which is entirely different.

John Boothman: I think that you will find that the report refers to demonisation.

The Convener: Mr Boothman, the category is "Personalisation of ideas".

John Boothman: As I said, the professor refers to demonisation in the body of the report and talks about the same thing happening to the First Minister as happened to Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock.

The Convener: Okay. Let us look very briefly at something that I asked Professor Robertson about. Across all the categories in his research where there is a direct comparison between the two sides, such as the one that we have just been discussing, in all cases there is a huge majority on one side.

Joan McAlpine mentioned some examples earlier. For "Reporting Scotland" and the BBC, the figures were 211 for the "Pro-independence" category and 317 for the "Anti-independence" category; 10 for "Finishing with Pro evidence unchallenged" and 40 for the "Finishing with Anti evidence unchallenged" category; and 19 for the "Abusive of Pro independence figures" category and three for the "Abusive of Anti independence figures" category. The report has similar figures for many other categories, as Joan McAlpine said.

How is it possible that, over a 12-month period, an organisation that states that its primary purpose is to provide balance in the debate ended up with such figures?

Ken MacQuarrie: The professor places a lot of weight on the order in which things happen in a report. He uses the description "unchallenged" if a report ends with one side or the other. We do not recognise that as being important; we recognise the narrative of the story, the clarity of the narrative and impartiality within in a report. Those are the clear issues.

The professor believes, from an academic perspective, that that order is important, but it does not form part of the criteria to which we subscribe. Until we have access to the raw data and to how the professor is codifying and categorising it, it is difficult to respond to that question, which is why we politely asked the professor to make the raw data available.

The Convener: But it is almost impossible to believe that if there was such randomness in the ordering—if you did not take any particular view or stance in the ordering of the stories—the results would come out as they have done in the research.

Ken MacQuarrie: I disagree, because it depends on how the stories are categorised and codified. Without the evidence of the raw data and without being able to examine how the numbers are made up, it is difficult to respond to the question. Also, in the examples that were given, we found a number of errors. We listed those errors in our paper.

The Convener: I heard that you listed a typographical error in the report as a substantial error.

John Boothman: Sorry, what was the typographical error?

The Convener: The misnaming of the person who made a particular comment as Johann Lamont rather than Ruth Davidson.

John Boothman: Sorry, convener, such misnaming happened twice in the original report—Willie Rennie was confused in the space of three lines with Ruth Davidson. Also, in the draft second report—

The Convener: But does that change what was said?

John Boothman: If you will forgive me, in the draft second report, one of those errors has been corrected and one of them has not been, despite the fact that we pointed out both errors to the author in January.

The Convener: It is hardly a substantial error, is it?

John Boothman: I would have thought that most people would know the difference between Ruth Davidson and Willie Rennie, to be honest. We pointed out the error and it is very easy simply to go and check it.

There was also a—

The Convener: In what way does that affect the figures?

John Boothman: If, as I have said, each and every example reported from "Reporting Scotland" has an error of fact, an error of inclusion, an error of omission, an error in how the author describes who was in it or an error with regard to a report's pay-offs—if there are such errors in each and every example—it makes things difficult. It is of some concern to us that the numbers that are in the report might not be entirely correct.

The professor says that he did not survey just samples of programmes but the whole domain. However, in the space of a month, that domain changed from two hours every night to two hours every night plus a load of bulletins in four programmes on two channels over the weekend. It is fair to say that it is strange that the number of hours that he surveyed seems to drop rather than increase as a result of that domain change. That makes looking at the report quite difficult, and is quite a concern for us.

The Convener: Is there anything at all that you accept in Professor Robertson's report?

John Boothman: As I said, for people to watch, transcribe and code those television programmes for an entire year is a remarkable feat—it is a large amount of work.

There is nothing that the BBC can do in relation to the report except respond to it appropriately, and that is what we feel we did. At the end of the day, when reports such as this one come out, it would be remiss of us not to respond to them so that our audience, for a start, has some perspective on them. There is no malice and no attack on the author in that approach—we would not do that, irrespective of what may have been said. At the end of the day, we wanted to deal substantially with the issues in the report, and I think that we have done that in as fair, as reasonable and as prompt a way as possible.

The Convener: Professor Robertson does not feel that at all. He feels that he has been under personal attack from BBC staff members and that he has been abused by the BBC. He was quite clear about how he viewed the situation this morning. You have said that there has been no other instance that you are aware of in which you have analysed a report and written to a person's employer about their work. That seems, on the face of it, slightly odd.

Ken MacQuarrie: We have not written to the employer. We copied in the principal regarding a report that was on the University of the West of Scotland website. I am sure that he will be absolutely aware of it. We are not providing the principal with any new news in that regard.

It is with some puzzlement that we hear about Professor Robertson's feelings about the way in which he was treated. I have examined the language of the emails, and there is nothing in them other than a polite and normal request for the data.

Neil Bibby: You mentioned the debates that the BBC is holding. We heard some concerns recently about the adversarial nature and format of the last STV debate. Have you received any positive or negative feedback about the style of the BBC debates? Do you have any plans to alter the format of the BBC debates?

John Boothman: Before handing over to my colleague Mr Mullin, I should point out that, from the BBC's point of view, one of our aims in engaging our audience over such a long campaign is to try as much as possible to use different formats, so that we can keep the audience engaged, we can keep up interest in the story, we can pick up new people who are coming along and we can target different segments of the electorate that will vote in the referendum. That has been one of our objectives from the very beginning. We have had audiences from different ethnic minority backgrounds; we have had audiences of women; we are going to various parts of the country; and we have had audiences of 16 and 17-year-olds.

We are trying some new and interesting formats. For example, many of you may have seen a couple of debates that we ran with three journalists questioning two politicians, which has been interesting for us, as that changes the dynamic of the politicians' responses. I think that that gives a politician a better opportunity to explain where they are.

Mr Mullin might be able to enlighten you further about some of the other things that we are planning.

John Mullin: You have completely stolen my thunder there, John—thank you very much.

We have started our series of nine debates. You will have seen that we were in Greenock first and in Kelso last month. One of the crucial things is to get out of the central belt. It will be Kirkcaldy next week and then we are off to your backyard in Kirkwall, Mr McArthur.

We will vary the debates. They are being produced by Mentorn Media, the indy outfit that makes "Question Time", but we will change them as we go along. We have not finalised our approach to all the debates, nor the venues; we want to bring a bit of spontaneity to them as we go.

We are having an online debate next week with the generation 2014 group that has been brought together with my colleague David Stenhouse. The generation 2014 group are 15, 16 and 17-year-olds from all over Scotland. They will be brought together in Pacific Quay for that project next week. They make up a resource right across the BBC network and many programmes are making use of them.

"Brian Taylor's Big Debate" continues its way around the country and is on every Friday on Radio Scotland. We will also initiate a series of specific local radio debates, presented by our own correspondents, including David Gray in Orkney and Cameron Buttle down in the Borders. Each month, we earmark one day for a special edition of "Newsnight". That allows for the tailored debates that John Boothman mentioned. The programming and the debates will be mirrored on BBC Alba and Radio nan Gàidheal. You might be interested to know that BBC Scotland's knowledge and learning department is also planning a range of operations.

Debate, getting people talking, and coming up with new ideas for programmes are very much part and parcel of what we want to do over the next six months. We want to get out of the central belt and round the country. We want to give viewers and listeners the chance to put the questions that they think are important, both nationally and locally, to the politicians, campaigners and key personalities in the campaign.

That is a very ambitious programme, and I do not think that any other broadcaster is doing that. We look forward to generating more light than heat in the debate over the next few months.

12:15

Neil Bibby: We have talked a great deal this morning about balance in news coverage, but I want to ask about balance in debates. After the most recent STV debate, I was struck by a commentator's view that, if the debate was a football match, one of the speakers would have had 60 per cent possession and the other only 40 per cent. Where there are two speakers—one on each side—in a television debate, how do you monitor the debate to ensure that those people have an equal say? Do you monitor it?

John Mullin: It comes down to good chairing, and we have a good chair in James Cook, our Scotland correspondent, who has proved to be exceptional in that regard. We have gone back and looked at programmes afterwards and we feel that there has absolutely been a broad balance

between the yes and no arguments in both programmes. That is exactly what we will do for every debate that we have.

Liam McArthur: I will take you back to the issue of personalisation. Professor Robertson's report provides statistics on the personalisation of individuals associated with the better together campaign in which there is no ambiguity, as the figure stands at zero.

In the course of a year of watching "Reporting Scotland" on a Thursday evening, did you establish how many references there were to David Cameron, George Osborne or Nick Clegg? I ask you to bear it in mind that the attack, if you like, of the yes campaign has not been largely about Alistair Darling but about portraying the better together campaign as something to do with Eton-educated Tories in the south of England. Can you reflect on whether that came across in the period from 2012 to 2013?

John Boothman: To be honest, it was not something that I looked at. The report made a specific point about personalisation with regard to the First Minister and that is what I was looking for.

Liam McArthur: Right. Would it surprise you if there were zero references to either the Prime Minister or the chancellor in the year September 2012-13?

John Boothman: I do not know the answer to that question.

Liam McArthur: That is interesting.

Colin Beattie: Reference was made to funding of £5 million, which I assume is 100 per cent dedicated to the referendum. Do you have a published plan for how that money will be spent?

Ken MacQuarrie: We have an internal plan for how the money will be spent, which will be subject to both our internal audit and a review of how we are spending the money. Each month we review our spend against our various criteria and targets for delivering the referendum programming. We do not publish individual programme budgets, as when we have been asked to do so—whether for "Good Morning Scotland" or for the "Today" programme—in previous committee evidence sessions, we have consistently refused to go into individual programme budgets.

The answer to the thrust of Mr Beattie's question, which I think is whether we monitor and whether we have a system for rigorous scrutiny of how the money is spent, is that we absolutely do.

John Boothman: We have up to this point had to spend an awful long time—although, to be fair, this has been a much bigger job for my colleague Bruce Malcolm in relation to the Commonwealth games—on capacity building, which involves programme planning, identifying which programmes we will do and working out how many staff and technical resources we will need in order to make that happen. We have done a lot of that work.

It may interest the committee to know that we have, in the past couple of months, spent a very long time—given that the referendum is the biggest political story that has ever happened in the country—on preparing for the results service and programming. We will be in up to 40 live locations around Scotland and we will take reaction from other parts of the UK and all around the globe. It will be the biggest news and current affairs set-up that we have ever had on a single day in the country and that takes a lot of planning.

It would be remiss of me not to mention that, in the past few months, we have been liaising a great deal with not just our network colleagues but our colleagues in the World Service. In fact, part of that work is broadcasting now: right at this moment, the John Beattie programme is broadcasting to Scotland and the rest of the world in English on the BBC World Service. It is the first of many such programmes and a television programme on the subject is being recorded for the World Service.

This afternoon, the World Service Arabic service is making a live programme for radio and television so that the debate about Scotland's future will be broadcast around the whole of the middle east. The producers tell me that the programme has a particular focus on how the debate in Scotland is being carried out in the civilised manner that it is.

Colin Beattie: I must say that £5 million does not seem a lot of money to achieve all that.

John Boothman: That is only in Scotland, to be fair; additional resources have been made available to our colleagues in London. Aside from that, you must remember that we already have a lot of news and current affairs capacity in the BBC in Scotland, and a considerable amount of our existing programming will be turned over to coverage of not only the Commonwealth games but the referendum.

Colin Beattie: Are there specific budgets allocated outside Scotland? Do we know how much those are?

John Boothman: Those are not from the £5 million.

Colin Beattie: I am not referring to the £5 million. Are there separate budgets outside Scotland?

Ken MacQuarrie: In general terms, departments across the BBC—for example, BBC news—have budgets for major events and

broadcasts, and they have to a large extent made provision for the referendum coverage in their plans and budgets. That is also true for television, where various supported documentaries are being produced for the network.

On the question that I think the committee wishes us to answer, which concerns not only our level of preparedness for the events of the referendum and the Commonwealth games but our ability to maintain business as usual while those two events are going on, I can report that we have had a hugely successful year and that I am very proud of the achievements of all our staff in delivering the quality of programming that they have during the year.

It is worth noting on the record that we have received seven British Academy of Film and Television Arts awards and particular recognition for our investigations team, which has a Scottish BAFTA. We have twice won the Royal Television Society award for investigative journalism; it is very rare to get that award two years in a row.

All that has been happening while we have been planning and putting in place the capacity for the Commonwealth games and the referendum. I am intensely proud of the achievements of our staff and of our journalism. That includes the quality of the journalism that we brought, for example, to the Clutha Vaults tragedy. Journalists responded tremendously to that, not only on radio and television but online, and we have seen record figures in the past year for the use of our online services.

Whatever disagreements there are between me and the NUJ about how I have implemented the DQF—delivering quality first—savings, which we would sit down and discuss in internal meetings, it is important to put on the record my regard for and pride in the quality of the journalism that we have brought to not only Scotland, but the world.

Colin Beattie: Within the budget of £5 million, you said that you have already recruited 50 staff.

Ken MacQuarrie: Yes.

Colin Beattie: Am I right in saying that 14 of those staff are trainees?

Ken MacQuarrie: That is correct, yes.

Colin Beattie: Are those trainees all working full-time on the referendum?

Ken MacQuarrie: Yes.

Colin Beattie: My understanding was that some of the referendum trainees were diverted to do research on Professor Robertson's report. Is that correct? I heard that five of them were working on that.

John Mullin: I think that that is correct. I think that five trainees were used to investigate some of the examples that Professor Robertson had looked at.

Colin Beattie: So they are being used for other things as well.

John Mullin: You could argue that that is referendum-related coverage, since Professor Robertson's report seems to be about referendum coverage.

They are working on the referendum. As I say, they have an intensive training period of three months, and then they are working on other programmes and other output.

Colin Beattie: When does the three months' training finish?

John Mullin: The three months' training is on-going over the first three or four months that they are there, so they still have a week or so to go.

John Boothman: Allow me to explain, Mr Beattie. We created 14 trainee positions in BBC Scotland for a year. We spoke to the college of journalism, which is part of the BBC training academy, and it has organised for us a gold-standard training scheme across all our platforms. Almost as part of a block release programme, at the same time as the trainees are working on referendum programming, they have been undergoing periods of training. For example, they finished a week-long period of television training the week before last. Before that, in November, they had online training, and before that, radio training, so we reckon that they can now be deployed to work on any of the output across the whole department, whether for online coverage or for any radio programmes in the forthcoming months.

I have not had a chance to mention the new radio formats that are coming up, although I have mentioned Scotland 2014, and there is a rich variety of work on online content that I am sure John Mullin could tell us more about. As far as I am concerned, all those trainees are now in a pretty good place to be able to carry out across the department the tasks that we would require them to do over the referendum.

I did not have the opportunity to say this earlier, but one of the interesting things about the length of the campaign and when the referendum will actually take place is that, for the first time, BBC Scotland will keep all its political output on over the summer. That is partly in response to the fact that the Parliament has changed its timetable, but you will be aware that political programming usually goes off when the Parliament goes into the long summer recess and does not come back until the beginning of the party conference season in

late September. We will not be doing that this year, so as well as all the additional output that we have spoken about, we will keep going with all our political programmes.

That is why what I said earlier about engagement with our audience is so important when we have the opportunity to do new things, to create new formats and, frankly, to surprise people. That is one of our objectives for our coverage. We hope that if we try not to use the same old formats and programmes, we will not turn off audiences.

Ken MacQuarrie: We are also investing in a number of craft apprentices, who are hugely necessary in delivering the output. They will also be working on another event, the Commonwealth games, on which you also asked for an assurance about our level of preparedness. Bruce Malcolm, our head of the Commonwealth games, is here should you wish to ask any questions about that.

The Convener: I have one final question. Some people have criticised what you have reported, and there has also been criticism of what you do not report, which we all accept is always a difficult editorial decision. BBC Scotland gave extensive coverage to the question of Scotland's status with its credit rating and to the accusation that it would not get a AAA rating, and a number of comments were made at various times when you were covering that story.

Recently, Standard & Poor's, a well-known credit rating agency, produced a report, which the BBC covered, and I thought that Douglas Fraser did a good job in covering it. However, in that report, Standard & Poor's said:

"Even excluding North Sea output and calculating per capita GDP only by looking at onshore income, Scotland would qualify for our highest economic assessment."

That was probably—certainly from my point of view—one of the most interesting and important statements in that report. Why was that not covered by the BBC?

12:30

Ken MacQuarrie: I do not have the detail of that in front of me, but you said that Douglas Fraser made an excellent report. As I said before, our staff make on-going news judgments each day. I cannot confirm that we did not cover it across any of our outlets, whether online or in the broadcast that you heard. I would need to go back and research that.

John Mullin: My recollection is that we did cover it, but that it was on the same day as the Standard Life story and that it did not lead.

The Convener: You covered the Standard & Poor's report, but I am asking about the specific and important point about the report's economic assessment.

John Mullin: I cannot answer that without going back and looking again.

The Convener: Okay. Well, I could not find it, so I think that it is curious. Even if it is somewhere online—and I am not saying that it is not—it seems odd that such a prominent credit rating agency would make such a statement and that it would not get the coverage that it deserved, given the previous coverage of the opposite view.

John Mullin: We certainly did report the AAA status.

The Convener: I could quote what was actually said, but I do not want to get into a—

John Mullin: My recollection is that we did, but I would be happy to go back and look again. As I said, it was a big, busy news day, and my recollection is that the story broke quite late in the day. However, I am happy to go back and look at it again.

The Convener: Thank you. On behalf of the committee, I thank all the witnesses for coming along this morning to answer our questions. We are grateful for your time and I am sure that all committee members are grateful for your responses.

12:32

Meeting suspended.

12:34

On resuming—

Cyberbullying

The Convener: Our second item is a discussion on cyberbullying. This evidence session will consider how schools should respond to cyberbullying, and we have identified in advance some of the areas that we want to discuss with today's witnesses. I welcome Laura Tomson from Zero Tolerance, Brian Donnelly from respectme and Tony Rafferty from the National Parent Forum of Scotland. Unfortunately, Caroline Harris from Anti-Bullying East Lothian has been unable to attend this morning.

Before I move to questions, I apologise for keeping you waiting. I know that you have been waiting patiently, so I apologise for the delay.

We begin with a question from Neil Bibby.

Neil Bibby: Good morning, everybody. We have a good panel and I hope that the witnesses will be able to offer different perspectives, because cyberbullying is a complex issue. I start with a general question. How can children be kept safe from cyberbullying in these days of increased connectivity, use of social media and the internet?

Laura Tomson (Zero Tolerance): Our focus is gender-based bullying, so any answer that I give will be focused on that. We do not see cyberbullying as being particularly different from any other kind of bullying, although it presents some slightly different challenges.

There is a massive focus on the idea that children are less safe online than they are in other areas. I am a bit worried that, in focusing on the idea that technical problems may be a challenge but they can be solved by teaching children how to use the internet safely and by putting apps online to help children to do that, we are avoiding tackling the bigger issue, which is sexism. That is the problem that young people face at school, and it not just online. Bullies can target people online, but bullying is happening all the time in lots of different ways.

The evidence seems to suggest that young people are tech savvy—they know how to block people on Facebook and how to stop people contacting them, but that does not mean that they do it. They face a lot of pressure not to do that. For example, a girl who gets harassed by a boy for pictures of herself in her bra might not delete those messages and might not stop those messages because her friends tell her that it is cool. They say that the boy must love her, so it would be mean to delete them. That is the kind of culture that we have to tackle, and telling young people specifically how to be safe online is not going to tackle that.

Brian Donnelly (respectme): I agree that educating parents, in particular, and teachers about how young people get online, the technology that they use, where they go online and how to make that safer is only part of what we could do to respond to such behaviour. Bullying is about relationships—it is done by people to other people—and what underpins bullying that takes place online is the same as what underpins other forms of bullying behaviour, it is just how bullying looks in 2014. If you and I were friends but we had a falling out and you ignored me one day at school, I might go and post something on Facebook or Twitter about that, and that might carry on the next day in school or on the bus. There is no clearly delineated place where it happens. It happens to people, and their online life and online profile are as much part of their social identity as other parts of their lives such as school and friends.

For a number of years, we have encouraged people not to make distinctions because if we focus on one type of bullying, we ignore other types of bullying. The focus on what is happening online has led to a dilution and an ignoring of what is happening to children more regularly, which is stuff that happens face to face or behind their back.

Tony Rafferty (National Parent Forum of Scotland): Sadly, we have found some recent evidence from where I live that parents themselves are participating in cyberbullying of the teachers. It transpires that the children are copying what the parents are doing. Although there is a lot of evidence that parents are not aware of what is happening until it is too late, there is no mention of what part the parents might have played in the children doing the bullying. As well as looking at the problem for schools, we must look at how parents are involved. I have evidence of that from two things that I have been involved in. I was asked to get people to take some horrific remarks about a headteacher off Facebook. The remarks were made in an open Facebook account, which meant that children were able to look at what the parents had been writing about the teachers. If the parents are doing that, how can we expect the children not to follow?

Neil Bibby: That is an interesting point about the parents. I will focus on schools—what can schools do to help and support children while they are at school? A lot of cyberbullying surrounds school pupils outwith school and in school. Should there be some sort of national programme or should the issue become incorporated into daily discussions about internet use? For example, I was at an event recently where the advice that

was given to children there was to tell somebody they could trust about the cyberbullying abuse that they were getting, as they would be encouraged to do if they were being bullied in another context. What would you like schools to do to tackle the issue?

Tony Rafferty: Schools need to have a fundamental policy in place whereby it is part and parcel of the curriculum for excellence—it should be looked at as just another subject, almost—and schools should ensure that they involve all the outside agencies and not just keep things within the school. Up in Aberdeen, where I live, we involve the outside agencies an awful lot in coming into the schools and holding regular events, especially from primary 4 to 7. Sessions for parents are also held to make sure that everybody is included and those sessions are really well attended. If we take an inclusive approach within the school so that children and their parents can sometimes attend the same meetings, that can be very rewarding and everybody gets an awful lot out of the meetings.

Brian Donnelly: Understanding of the issue has certainly grown in many schools in recent years, with schools seeing it very much as a behaviour issue, not a technology issue. The bullying that happens online needs to be treated like other types of bullying. We do not see any need to have a separate policy on what happens online. The school anti-bullying policy should encapsulate all types of bullying. Also, different types of bullying happen online, such as gender-based, racist and sectarian bullying—a whole host of types of bullying. Homophobic bullying takes place online and offline as well. We need to be very careful not to carve out cyberbullying from other bullying.

The evidence suggests that when schools approach anti-bullying in a broad sense, with an equalities focus and a children's rights focus, they talk about relationships that happen face to face and about relationships that play out online. Most children online connect with people whom they know—people who, by and large, go to the same school or live in the same area as they do.

It is about parents role modelling appropriate relationships and recognising that parents can and do have an impact on how children relate to each other. We need to involve parents and young people in the promotion of positive relationships. When we discuss how children should conduct themselves online and what the impact is of commenting on or passing on something online or hearing something in the corridor, we need to put it in the realm of respectful relationships. That lets us talk about how relationships play out everywhere, because children and young people do not differentiate in the way that adults do. Children know the difference between online and offline but they do not differentiate in the way that adults do—they do not see cyberbullying as being this phenomenon over here and other bullying as being that phenomenon over there. It is all about relationships and behaviour.

Laura Tomson: I agree with that. I would add that discussion about gender needs to be part of relationships, sexual health and parenthood education; it needs to be fundamental to teaching RSHPE. RSHPE should not just be about how to avoid getting pregnant. Young people really want to learn about healthy relationships. They need to talk about the issues that surround them—about the sexualised images or perhaps the pornography that they are seeing. They are desperate to talk about those things and how they might affect how they treat each other. That discussion needs to be part of tackling the issue. It is about creating a whole-school philosophy. It is about creating a culture in the school of respecting other people.

It is not that the technology stuff is not useful, but it should not be the main thing. It should not be seen as the answer—we should not think that if we can just control the technology somehow, young people will not be bullied any more.

Legally, there are a few grey areas when it comes to online bullying and abuse. Teachers could perhaps have clearer guidance on that. For example, there is no specific law against sharing an intimate image of someone without their knowledge, but there are laws that can apply to that. It is quite a complicated area, and the law is only just catching up in the guidance that is provided on what people can be prosecuted for. It would be useful for teachers to have a tool that told them when behaviour crosses from bullying behaviour that can be dealt with in school to abuse and harassment, which are against the law and need to be taken a bit more seriously.

12:45

Neil Bibby: What are your views on internet access in schools? Earlier, you mentioned access to sexualised images. Do you think that we have the right balance between providing access to websites that will have an educational benefit and prohibiting access to sites through which children can be subjected to cyberbullying or harassment?

Brian Donnelly: I think that we are getting better but, by and large, schools still err on the side of caution. I will give an example. YouTube is a fantastic resource for parents and children and young people. It has a lot of "how to" material on it, such as information on how young people can keep themselves safe and how to set up useful learning tools, as well as great videos by young people from all over the world. Despite that,

YouTube is one of the hardest sites to access in schools. There are versions of YouTube that are safer—smaller intranet sites—but we need to be a bit bolder in going on that journey with schools and families and, collectively, getting over the fear.

Recently, I was contacted by a journalist because a school had blocked Snapchat on its wi-fi network. The journalist wanted to know what the latest scandal involving Snapchat was—he wondered whether a young person might have hurt themselves—but there was no scandal. It was just that the school did not want to provide access to any social networking sites, for fear that it would distract the children and young people.

We are still in our infancy in dealing with the issue, but we need to replicate the positive steps that schools have taken and embrace the use of access to the online world as a tool. If the online world is part of pupils' everyday lives and is something that they access at school, that will make it possible to talk about how to use it respectfully, but if access to the online world is blocked, banned and demonised, it will not be possible to engage on how it should be used.

Colin Beattie: "A National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People" contains the statement:

"We have ... aimed to avoid labelling children and young people as bullies or victims because these labels can constrain thinking of the problem as solely a characteristic of the individual, rather than as a problem that emerges from complex social dynamics."

Is that gobbledegook?

Brian Donnelly: Absolutely not, and I am not saying that because I wrote it. [*Laughter*.] Labelling children is risky. The character of adolescents is not fully formed. No one is ever just one thing. Children can bully and be bullied, so how can we label them?

The statement that you read out is not an example of finding a nice way to talk about a difficult issue. We do not change someone's behaviour by labelling them; we change it by telling them that what they did was wrong, why it was unacceptable and what is expected instead. That is a fundamental tenet of behaviour management. Labelling goes against that and causes stereotypes. If someone's child is labelled in a particular way and they do not think that their child fits that stereotype, it can be hard for them to view their child's extremely damaging behaviour as bullying.

The approach that we take in Scotland has been commented on and has impacted on policy and practice around the world. We are seen as being at the forefront of an approach to bullying that seeks not to demonise and label, but to deal with behaviour. It is a solution-focused approach.

I ask you to forgive my passionate defence of that, but it is fundamental to the success that we have had.

Colin Beattie: One thing that surprised me was the fact that there are differing opinions on whether cyberbullying of girls is more prevalent than cyberbullying of boys. I am not sure whether the evidence that is given in the Scottish Parliament information centre briefing points one way or the other, but table 1 on page 2 of that document suggests that there are significant differences between the level of bullying in primary school and the level of bullying in secondary school. I presume that that is to do with the development of the child and how that affects what they are interested in bullying people about, for want of a better expression.

Brian Donnelly: As children get older, their online profile matures. In primary 7 and secondary 1 and 2, it is all about using the internet to socialise, connect with people and expand their social networks, rather than using it as a tool, as they did when they were younger. Their use of the internet reflects how their relationships develop and change as they get a bit older.

Colin Beattie: Do we have evidence that children who have been bullies in primary school continue to be bullies in secondary school?

Brian Donnelly: It depends how successfully any intervention has worked. Children who were labelled in that way in primary school might still be labelled in that way in secondary school, which is part of the problem. However, if we do not intervene to address their behaviour and give them a way of repairing relationships and developing more respect for relationships with their peers, then their bullying behaviour is likely to continue. If it has not been challenged appropriately, it will continue. Similarly, if it has been rewarded in terms of status, it will continue.

Colin Beattie: Do we have any evidence on the success of intervention at primary school level in preventing reoffending in secondary school?

Tony Rafferty: Not that I am aware of.

Brian Donnelly: No scientific evidence has been gathered in Scotland in relation to that. However, we know from evaluations that we have done and work that we have done with other agencies that, where the environment and ethos in primary school is about repairing relationships and not labelling but helping to find solutions, that can make children more pro-social and less likely to engage in bullying behaviour. However, sometimes children experience a dramatic change of school ethos and culture between primary school and secondary school. Most of them cope with that, but it can present challenges.

From what we know about child development, particularly around boys and girls maturing at different ages, S1, S2 and S3 are significant years for children figuring out who they are, where they fit in and how they respond to the world around them. I hope that that helps the committee.

Laura Tomson: It is also well known that that is the age when children come into contact with stereotypes about being straight and gay, and what boys and girls should be like. The adults around them will influence whether they latch on to those and use them to isolate other young people.

Liam McArthur: I was interested in what Mr Donnelly said—although I think that all of you said it—about treating bullying as a whole and having strategies for dealing with it as a whole. All that makes a good deal of sense. However, with online bullying, there is presumably the capacity for bullying to expand and be done by those who would not have been involved were the online option not there. I think that we are all aware of the perils of putting stuff online that we would never dream of saying face to face. That must mean that bullying, whether that is done directly or simply by being part of the mob that isolates, is expanding and becoming more widespread. Does that present particular challenges for schools tackling bullying? Without separating out the kinds of bullying, how do you begin to tackle it?

Brian Donnelly: I suggest that the problem is that we are not talking about it enough as a relationship issue.

Tony Rafferty: Absolutely.

Brian Donnelly: It is about how they conduct themselves online and seeing that as an extension of developing respectful relationships. As we pointed out earlier, children can be quite savvy and are aware of stranger danger, despite the fact that some might feel that they could never be exploited. Children feel that they know what to do and how to block online contact, and they know about some of the practical elements of it. It is about engaging with them on the impact of, for example, letting a comment slide on Twitter and not making an input to say that they dislike or disagree with it. Alternatively, it can be pointed out that if they like it and share it, they feed it.

Young people have always commented about other young people. They have always gossiped about what people wear, what they said, what their mum is like or who they fancy. Such comments tended to just circle around the people who made them, whereas now they can be made online and can become permanent and grow arms and legs very quickly. It is not about focusing on what the technology can do; it is about focusing on helping young people to understand how to conduct themselves in the online social space. The internet is a place, not a thing.

Liam McArthur: There needs to be better understanding of that, because one cannot see the impact that an online comment—whether one initiates it, likes it or shares it—has on the individual or individuals concerned.

Brian Donnelly: That is right.

Liam McArthur: It must make the challenge of talking about relationships a bit more difficult.

Brian Donnelly: As adults, we need to acknowledge first that cyberspace is a social space that children occupy. That is what is new, so we need to integrate what we know about how we have always helped children to manage and negotiate risks and relationships with the impact that their actions can have in that new place.

People have always talked about anonymity as being the driving force behind cyberbullying, but there is no research that supports that. The research suggests that those behaviours continue because of a belief that you will not get caught because the internet is so vast, and because of the failure of a lot of children and young people to understand the permanence of comments that they make online. We know that, so we know that we need to focus on educating them about the permanence of online activity, rather than focusing on making technology less anonymous. Anonymity is not the massive problem online that some people would have you believe.

Tony Rafferty: There are certainly things that happen online that would not happen face to face, and we need to learn the new language that children are using online. If somebody posts a photograph of themselves online, thousands of people can suddenly see that photo and they may start posting all the little words that are used now to tell the person in the photograph that they are ugly, or whatever. That can have profound effects because such activity can be taken to a whole new level. However, it is still part of the whole package and, as Brian Donnelly said, we need to make people aware of what they are doing. It is all about the social aspect.

Brian Donnelly: It is a massive children's rights issue, as well. We all have a reasonable expectation of privacy, and children have a right to privacy enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child but—it is a big "but"—that does not apply to the world wide web. If you do not make something private, you cannot reasonably expect privacy, because anyone can read it, copy it or screen-grab it. We need to focus on helping children to understand their rights in relation to that, but also the risks that go with it: if they want something to be private, they need to be aware that the default settings for

any sites that we use online are not designed with privacy in mind. We need to educate parents, teachers and young people about rights and expectations.

Mary Scanlon: I have two short questions. We have a SPICe briefing paper on cyberbullying and I have been looking for some sort of evidence base. The submission from respectme reports the finding that 16 per cent of eight to 19-year-olds have been cyberbullied. Livingstone's research on internet use by 25,000 young people across Europe found that 6 per cent had been cyberbullied. Ditch the Label's 2013 survey found the figure to be 17 per cent. When my colleague Liz Smith wrote to all the councils in Scotland to ask about the number of cyberbullying incidents in the past 4 years, 16 councils responded and 16 did not, and the answers ranged from one incident in the Highland Council area to 95 in West Lothian.

Respectme's research base is the most authoritative, but which figure is accurate? That is what I am struggling to understand. I know that cyberbullying exists and I acknowledge the problem, but I am trying to ascertain the extent of it and whether it can be measured.

Brian Donnelly: It is difficult. Not all young people differentiate between what happens online and what happens offline, because bullying may have both online and offline elements. When we did our research, the 16 per cent figure entirely mirrored research that had been done in Northern Ireland, Wales and England. There are some organisations that have a vested interest in getting money to develop resources and build websites, but we found that 16 per cent of children had been bullied and that 25 per cent were worried about it. Other organisations would, in order to get more traction, have added those figures together and said that a larger percentage was affected by cyberbullying.

I think that the number may have gone up, but that is because behaviour has migrated to where children spend time, and children are spending more time online than ever. At the time of the survey, I think that that figure of 16 to 20 per cent was reflected across the UK.

Mary Scanlon: I am pleased to see that you work with the Scottish Association for Mental Health; I have huge respect for that organisation. I note that the Scottish Government is doing a training day for teachers, and that is to be welcomed. You have also developed a two-and-a-half-hour training session for parents, which you are piloting in the central belt. Can you explain that initiative to us? I know that parents need help on these issues, so what are your plans for rolling it out?

13:00

Brian Donnelly: The training sessions were set up to address a specific need that came out of our research and the extensive amount of training that we have done on bullying and online bullying. We have found that when parents understand the notion that the internet is a place and not a thing, and when they acknowledge that they have to learn how Twitter and Facebook work, they are more confident in dealing with problems that arise.

We have done a lot of work with schools, but we found that parents were sometimes being left to one side. Some parents are very engaged while others are not engaged at all, so we tried to figure out a way of doing the work at local level rather than through strategic partnerships or by putting on training in particular places.

We ask schools and organisations to get 15 or 20 parents to come along for two-and-a-half hours of an evening, for which we provide a trainer to introduce the parents to the reasons why we talk about bullying in the way that we do, and what we have learned about the links between bullying and online bullying, and online safety. The second hour of the workshop is entirely hands-on. Parents can either bring their own devices or use computers to which we have access through schools and partners, and we walk them through the process. We show them how to make a safe profile for a 14-year-old on Tumblr, Instagram and Facebook. Young people who are under 16 need to go through about 16 clicks on Facebook to ensure that it is as safe as it can be, and a lot of people do not know how that is done.

We give people practical time to engage with the technology and understand the places where their children are going. We encourage them not to see the issue as a technology issue, but to understand that, if they have children or play a role in children's lives, they have—just as adults have always had to do—to understand the world in which their children spend time.

We are rolling out the programme in the central belt purely because of value for money and the use of time, but we have already engaged with Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow, City of Edinburgh and North Lanarkshire councils, which have new state-of-the-art classrooms or learning centres with computers that will be perfect for training 20 to 30 parents in an evening in order to give them the core messages about respectful relationships and bullying. At the end of the six-month or seven-month pilot, we will make recommendations on how we can roll out the scheme across the country, and on the resource implications and the partnerships that we will need to make it succeed.

Tony Rafferty: The national parent forum would absolutely welcome that. At present, most councils generally tend—as the council in my area does—to hold an evening session that deals only with internet safety. That is where it stops, which is why we need to open the training out and make it about the whole package.

Clare Adamson: The internet is 25 years old this month, but it is certainly not 25 years mature. Over time, our attitudes to privacy will change and some of the services will have to adapt to the concerns that have been highlighted.

I am glad that we are discussing the issues today, and I am aware that there have been some excellent cross-party contributions to a couple of debates in Parliament recently. One was a member's debate on revenge porn, and the other was a debate on the Equal Opportunities Committee's report on child sexual exploitation. Both those debates touched on safety issues and dangers, and on the dangers to women in particular—although the issues are not all gender specific and can affect both genders.

Are we getting out to young people out a proper message about the dangers, early enough? Obviously, they move on in terms of sexual maturity as they get older, but should we be putting out a much stronger message about personal safety and privacy to younger people?

Laura Tomson: Yes—but I would be wary of focusing too much on what potential victims can do to protect themselves at the expense of focusing on what young people should not be doing to other young people, which is what really needs to change. There is only so much that a young person can do to protect themselves. Young girls talk about being harassed by getting 50 texts a day from boys asking them for images of themselves, so it is not enough just to tell them to ignore it or to block messages from particular boys when boy after boy is involved in such behaviour, because it is part of the culture. The culture is what needs to change. I cannot emphasise enough that schools must tackle that. They need to be brave enough and skilled enough to talk about those issues with young people. More resources need to be provided to ensure that parents are skilled up to talk about those issues. It is only possible to do so much telling girls and women to carry their keys in their fists when they walk home.

Clare Adamson: I am aware that we have focused quite a bit on what schools can do, but much of the bullying that we are talking about will be unknown to the school, because those who do it do not use the internet in school to do it. Young people turn up at school with tablets and internet-enabled phones, and a lot of cyberbullying takes place outwith school.

Are we engaging enough with third sector organisations that deal with young people? Are we going into communities to places where poor young people socialise, to get our messages across?

Laura Tomson: We work with youth groups on general issues to do with relationship abuse rather than on cyberbullying specifically. The organisations that we have spoken to have been fantastic and seem much more ready for such engagement than some schools are, perhaps because young people feel more comfortable in that environment and more able to talk about such issues than they would be with teachers. The organisations that we have had contact with are ripe for more support and input on that, but it is hard for me to give a more general view.

Brian Donnelly: We have done a considerable amount of work. Our largest group of stakeholders are in education. Our work is underpinned by the message that the issue is not about where bullying happens, but what happens.

I know of cases in which young people have told the headteacher that they are scared because a threat has been issued online, only to be told, "That didn't happen here, so I can't do anything about it." I have heard that view being generally acknowledged by a roomful of professionals. If a child has confided in a teacher that they are scared and worried, it does not matter where the thing that has made them fearful happened. If a child was not being fed or clothed at home, or was being neglected, it would be perfectly legitimate for them to raise that with the school and to expect the school's duty of care to come into play.

Tony Rafferty: Absolutely.

Brian Donnelly: When we gave evidence at the summit in December, there were schoolchildren who talked about the school being involved. I was not surprised by that because, by and large, practice is good.

We have also done training with foster carers, social care staff and residential workers. We have done quite a lot on child protection in sport with coaches and a fairly broad range of third sector partners. The training that we offer is free and available to everyone. There is no doubt that it is patchy, but we do not focus solely on what schools can do, although that takes up most of our time. We have other examples of people who have embraced the message and who are well placed because they are in the community.

Practice is at its best in schools that are genuinely community schools. I am talking about schools whose doors do not close when school finishes and which are part of the community.

Tony Rafferty: As Brian Donnelly said, teachers still have a duty of care, which means that they must follow up when something is happening. When bullying happens online, there is a good chance that it will follow on into the classroom, with the result that the unfortunate children concerned will end up being bullied physically at school. The bullying does not stop online.

In a perverse way, that is how the situation with the Hamilton school in Aberdeen—which has now been closed—developed. That started off on Facebook, with parents slagging off a headteacher, which was followed by someone putting in genuine comments about what was happening. A policeman who was a friend of one of the parents thought that he ought to take action, so he submitted a report. The Care Inspectorate went into the school the next day. It was followed by Education Scotland, after which the school got closed. It is extremely difficult to box such behaviour into one area.

Laura Tomson: I add that schools need to go further rather than just saying, "Okay, we have had a report and now we will act on it." They need to be open to receiving that information. It is about having a specific school culture and talking about the issues. It is incredibly difficult for a young person to share information when it comes to sexual bullying, images being shared and so on. I suggest that the statistics do not show the true picture, because young people would not necessarily class some things as bullying and certainly would not tell a parent that someone had shared around the school a picture of them having sex. It is necessary to create such a culture and for teachers to say, "Come and tell us if any of these things are happening to you." Youth workers and social workers all need to show that they understand the issues and that young people can go and talk to them about the matter.

Jayne Baxter: That leads on to my question. What is the scope to link the work into the getting it right for every child agenda or the child protection work? There must be times when people are put in a position whereby they feel that they need to feed such information into the system. I am not sure how that process works or whether it could work better. What are your views?

Brian Donnelly: We have seen significantly increased consistency in terms of local authorities having a policy position on what they mean by bullying and the types of behaviours that they would expect to be recorded and reported. If they follow our approach and work in partnership with us, we ensure that their policy and training are in step with health and wellbeing outcomes and curriculum for excellence, and that their policy reflects the GIRFEC outcomes.

We will work with colleagues to produce guidance on the named person in relation to sharing welfare concerns, because I think that bullying will probably be a daily concern when it comes to welfare. We are trying to ensure that the policy is joined up. Sometimes it is about helping schools or agencies to understand what they have to do with the GIRFEC agenda.

A good anti-bullying approach that recognises different types of bullying, children's rights and equalities will take them a considerable way down the road towards being able to demonstrate and produce evidence that children's welfare is paramount, that they promote respectful relationships and that children are safe, healthy and so on.

Jayne Baxter: Has any work been done on—or is there any awareness of—whether bullying is a bigger issue for children with learning disabilities? Does any research show that that is the case?

Brian Donnelly: Yes—very much so. Enable conducted research across the UK. Everyone and anyone can be bullied for a variety of reasons—from hair colour to size, gender or ethnicity—but research suggests that if someone is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender or is disabled, or is perceived to be LGBT or disabled, they are likely to be bullied more frequently.

The Convener: Mr Donnelly mentioned the level of success that we have achieved so far and you said that others around the world are looking at work that is being done here. How do you define success?

Brian Donnelly: We had a 27-month external evaluation of the service—the longest evaluation that I have ever been involved in. It looked at the impact that our service had on our stakeholders and asked whether we built the capacity and confidence of stakeholders. The second part of the evaluation looked at what impact that had on children and young people and asked whether they saw a difference and felt more confident in themselves and in the adults around them, such that they felt that if they had a problem with bullying, people would know what to do.

Over that 27-month period, the evaluation found that we do make a difference—that is where the title of the report comes from. It found that respectme is a catalyst for change and that we contribute to schools and local authorities establishing ownership, and having the confidence to recognise and respond to bullying more effectively.

The elements that the evaluation said had contributed to success in making a difference in children's lives were a flexible approach to training, policy support and strategic policy influence around child protection and getting it

right for every child to make those link up; working in partnership with local authorities; and having resources and campaigns that complement all those efforts, which all combined to be the catalyst for change. Rather than there being a campaign, or training, or resources, or a Government policy, it is cohesion and consistency in language throughout all the elements that has given a more consistent picture.

The Convener: Given that big picture of what you have defined as success, is bullying going up or going down?

13:15

Brian Donnelly: ChildLine's statistics show that bullying is no longer the top reason why young people call ChildLine, so in that sense it has gone down. We have commented on that, but ChildLine was first to comment that it feels that that is the result of a clearer, cohesive policy picture in Scotland and of the work that we do.

Awareness of bullying is increasing and I am happy to say that reporting of bullying is increasing, but that does not mean that there is an epidemic or an increasing problem with that behaviour or phenomenon. Behaviour that has always existed continues to exist, but it has migrated to new social spaces. From that point of view, I do not think that we are seeing an increase of bullying. In Scotland, the behaviour in schools survey suggests that it is not the gigantic problem that perhaps the *Daily Mail* would have people believe. However, that in no way detracts from the real challenges of the impact that such behaviour has on people.

The Convener: Perhaps there is a difference between the reality and the perception. I suspect that many people have a perception that bullying is, at the very least, not going down, and that it may in fact be getting worse because of the cyber aspects of it. We probably all agree that that is just one aspect of bullying, and that bullying is bullying whether it takes place in the playground or online, but has the massive expansion of young people's access to internet-capable devices at all times not led to an expansion in bullying? Before, it was constrained by the need to be in physical contact with a person in order to bully them or to be bullied, but online spaces and social media make it much easier to bully an individual. Has that not led to an expansion in bullying?

Brian Donnelly: There is no evidence to support that. It is as simple as that. As I said, it is about not thinking that you will get caught and not understanding the permanence of it. That is what has led to it, but we have seen that the profile of such behaviour has increased because of media interest in what children and young people are doing and in the dangers of social media; there has been a massive conflation of all online risks and how behaviour can escalate to become abusive and predatory, but that is not bullying and a distinction should be drawn.

The internet presents new challenges. It presents adults with a challenge to learn about the new social space and how it works, and about how to promote positive relationships on it, but there is no evidence to suggest that simply having access to a laptop, tablet or other online device makes people more likely to bully than they would have been if they did not have such things.

The Convener: I was not suggesting that it makes an individual more likely to bully. I was suggesting that the ability to do has expanded.

Brian Donnelly: I suppose that it has, and that is in step with what I have been saying. People who are likely to bully are likely to do so using whatever means are at their disposal, whether the internet is 25 years old or not. If I were inclined to bully and had access to the internet, I would be likely to use it to bully. If I am not inclined to bully, having access to the internet will not necessarily make me do it. The expansion might mean that some people's behaviour has become more prolific, but it does not mean that a whole new group of people is involved. There is a small group, but not a new group of people.

The Convener: I was not suggesting that there were extra people; I was suggesting that there were extra incidents because individuals who wish to bully others now have the ability to do it 24/7.

Tony Rafferty: It is perhaps a matter of what we would class as incidents. Some children might not necessarily realise exactly what an incident is. Going online and thinking that, when somebody says something horrible about somebody, it is okay and fun just to click "Like" on several comments is a lot different from going into the playground and hitting somebody. There might have been an increase in such online behaviour, but that does not mean that the children themselves are bullies.

The way in which children contribute to Facebook, Instagram and other such sites can easily make it look as if the number of incidents has been going sky high, but I have not seen any rockets in schools and there is no great evidence that there have suddenly been more expulsions or suspensions from school. If there was a lot more bullying online, we would expect it to be mirrored in the school as well.

Joan McAlpine: You will be aware that the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, which was recently passed by the Parliament, incorporated GIRFEC into legislation and, as part of that, created the named person service. Will the

support of a named person for young people and their families help to tackle the problems that you have described?

Tony Rafferty: It is early days. I cannot comment on that until the service is embedded and working. I hope that it will.

Brian Donnelly: It probably would.

Laura Tomson: I imagine that the matter would not get to the named person until the young person had been extremely bullied. The service might help with that, but—I return to gender—it will not help with the day-to-day sexism and harassment that girls face but might not talk about.

Brian Donnelly: We have an opportunity to provide good and robust guidance on sharing information based on concerns about welfare to go alongside that element of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill. That is a change from sharing concerns on safety and harm. Bullying, online or offline, will obviously have an impact on welfare.

We want to be able to use illustrative examples of the challenges that might be faced. The young person might not want a named person to know about the bullying that they are experiencing, because it could out them in a way that they do not want if they are emerging from that experience and are not ready for anyone to know whether they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

We are working around guidance that says that sometimes it is okay for someone to make the professional judgment that, although they are aware of a child's situation, they will not share it. However, now they have to record why they did not share it. With the guidance, we have an opportunity to improve practice on focusing on sharing concerns with the best interests and wishes of children at the heart. If the legislation was applied very literally, some days the named person would not be able to move for concerns about behaviour.

The bill will impact on every policy throughout the country because the expectations on sharing concerns about welfare will have an impact on local authorities in which, currently, recording is not good.

Tony Rafferty: Earlier, the convener highlighted a point on the access that schools have to the internet. The information and communication technology in education excellence group submitted a report to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, which was accepted in full. One of its recommendations was that the blocking in school systems should be moved down to teacher level so that, when teachers wanted to access something on the net on which there was a blanket ban, they would be able to remove it for the time of their lesson and then put it back on.

The national parent forum thinks that that would be a great way to allow teachers to access sites that they cannot access, which Brian Donnelly mentioned. In schools in some authorities, if someone wants to know something about Middlesex and types the word "Middlesex" into the internet, they cannot get in, because it has the letters S, E and X in it. Today, with my day job, I was over in Fife and—I do not know why this is—NHS Fife has banned access to Marie Curie Cancer Care. I was reminded of that when I saw the convener's daffodil. We need to get such issues sorted.

The Convener: Indeed. I cannot understand why that would be the case. We know many examples of perfectly innocent words that could be interpreted as something else when we type them into Google or whatever search engine we use.

Tony Rafferty: Absolutely. It is imperative that teachers have access to all the tools so that, once they have been taught, they can go on to the internet and explain the dangers to children as part of a lesson. At the moment, they cannot do that, because they cannot access Instagram, Facebook or Twitter and tell children, "If you do this, this is what happens. Everybody sees it. If you send something to a friend, your friend might be open and pass it on to all their friends." We would be all for teachers being able to use such sites for the purposes of teaching and then to shut them down again.

The Convener: Thank you very much. I apologise once again to the witnesses for the delay in getting to them. It has been an interesting evidence-taking session. We appreciate you coming along and giving of your time to the committee.

With that, I close the meeting.

Meeting closed at 13:26.

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