



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

Thursday 26 September 2013



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**STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE**  
**12<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2013, Session 4**

**CONVENER**

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)

\*Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con)

\*Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP)

\*Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab)

\*Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Colin Keir (Edinburgh Western) (SNP) (Committee Substitute)

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Gillian Baxendine

Alison Walker

**LOCATION**

Committee Room 4



## Scottish Parliament

### Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

*Thursday 26 September 2013*

[The Deputy Convener *opened the meeting at 09:30*]

#### Interests

**The Deputy Convener (Helen Eadie):** I welcome members to the 12th meeting this year of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, and I remind everyone present to switch off their mobile phones or BlackBerrys if they have not already done so. We have received apologies from our convener and colleague, David Thompson, who, I am sorry to say, cannot be with us.

Agenda item 1 is a declaration of interests by our new committee member, Cameron Buchanan. Mr Buchanan is replacing John Lamont—whom I thank for his time as a committee member—and I invite him to declare any relevant interests.

**Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con):** I have no relevant interests to declare.

**The Deputy Convener:** Thank you very much and welcome to the committee. It is a pleasure to have you.

**Cameron Buchanan:** I hope that it will remain so.

## Decision on Taking Business in Private

09:31

**The Deputy Convener:** Moving to agenda item 2, I invite the committee to agree to take in private agenda item 5, which is consideration of a further paper on the elections of the Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officers in the next parliamentary session. Do members agree to take item 5 in private?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Cross-party Groups

09:31

**The Deputy Convener:** Agenda item 3 is consideration of applications for recognition from cross-party groups. The committee will take evidence from Jean Urquhart and Joan McAlpine on the proposed cross-party group on culture and from Richard Baker on the proposed cross-party group on France. I welcome the MSPs to the meeting.

First of all, I wonder whether Jean Urquhart will tell us a little more about the purpose of the cross-party group on culture.

**Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):** I will be delighted to do so, convener.

Our application shows the amount of interest in this cross-party group from arts organisations across Scotland. Indeed, that interest has endorsed our own thoughts about the lack of a meeting place for some kind of cross-art-form group discussion in Scotland and our view that such a discussion should take place in the Parliament.

There has been enormous support for the group, the purpose of which is to provide an opportunity for those involved in different art forms to talk to each other, to come to a better understanding of some of the problems, to have a genuine exchange of ideas and become involved in collaborative working, to put on performances in the Parliament and to raise MSPs' awareness of the importance of cultural programmes in Scotland.

**The Deputy Convener:** Thank you very much. Do committee members wish to ask any questions?

**Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** Good morning, Jean and Joan. Your application says:

"Creative Scotland will provide Secretariat support".

What will be the financial cost of that provision? I also note that the application suggests that Creative Scotland will provide travel expenses to those travelling to CPG meetings.

**Jean Urquhart:** I realise that that sounds very general. As I have said, we hope that a number of artists will perform in the Parliament but, as we and Creative Scotland are aware, artists quite often live on the breadline and some might therefore be restricted in coming along and taking an active part in meetings. As a result, Creative Scotland has proposed to make some money available—at least in the first year, just to see how

things work out—to allow artists to take part who otherwise would not be able to.

**Fiona McLeod:** That is very laudable and I find it very encouraging that Creative Scotland has made such an offer. However, we would need more detail on the projected costs of such provision, if that is possible.

**Jean Urquhart:** I think that I can share with you that Creative Scotland has put aside a budget of £5,000 for this year to cover the costs of four meetings. That might sound quite a lot but, given where we will bring people from, it is probably a reasonable figure.

**The Deputy Convener:** That was a very helpful question.

**Cameron Buchanan:** Good morning. I am rather surprised that there has not been a cross-party group on culture before. I would have thought that, with all the cultural activities going on in the Parliament, there would have been such a CPG. Your registration form states that you intend the group to provide

"a showcase for the arts in Parliament."

Do you intend to hold exhibitions and events, such as the Parliament's recent display of "The Great Tapestry of Scotland"?

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** We were also surprised that there was not a cross-party group on culture. That was why we had discussions about setting one up.

We felt that in talking about culture we could go down the road of talking about the strategy, politics and administration of culture but that that would isolate many artists. We decided that, if we were going to have a cross-party group on culture, we wanted culture to be at the heart of it.

The plan is that the CPG will discuss certain topics but that part of each meeting will provide an opportunity for artists to perform. In addition, we are keen to have artists, rather than just arts organisations and arts administrators, as part of the CPG. We want artists to feel that they are at the heart of their Parliament and can talk to parliamentarians, and that the channels of communication are open to them.

**Cameron Buchanan:** That is very laudable and—I would say—essential, because artists would feel slightly alienated if there was a them-and-us situation in the group.

**The Deputy Convener:** If there are no further questions from members, I will ask one: are you satisfied that the group's remit is sufficiently specific? I think that you referred to the group identifying problems, but an issue that this committee likes to look at is that of not only identifying problems but sharing knowledge and

experience with others in the Parliament. Can either of you comment on that?

**Jean Urquhart:** Joan McAlpine has explained, as has the sector, why there is a need for this new group. However, I am keen to see what unfolds in the group's first year, because the idea is that the group will respond to need. People will come along to the group because they will have something to say. I think that we can do no more at the moment than focus on the intention to bring people together so that they can share and discuss their experiences. There are undoubtedly issues around raising awareness of the arts in the Parliament and trying to showcase them. However, I think that we are as focused as we can be at the moment.

**Joan McAlpine:** Convener, I am not sure whether you referred to the issue of focus because you felt that the word "culture" had a very broad reference. We discussed in our pre-meetings with interested parties what they would like the group to be called. For people working in the arts, one of the attractions of referring broadly to "culture" was that the group would give them the opportunity to speak to people from across all the art forms so that, for example, poets and film makers could speak to one another.

It is therefore good that the group refers broadly to culture, because that will allow people from what are called the creative industries, who work on what is perhaps the more commercial side of the arts, to come and talk to people such as writers, who work entirely as sole traders, so to speak. We therefore felt that the group had to refer broadly to culture because that would allow cross-cultural pollination.

**The Deputy Convener:** I totally accept that. However, I was thinking more about what you would do when you convert that into parliamentary actions and activities. That was the context for my question about the remit. I would not worry about that too much, but I think that it is something for you to reflect on. We will perhaps hear what other colleagues have to say on that in the discussion that will follow.

Following on from Fiona McLeod's point, I would also ask that, in your annual report, you specifically state what all your costs have been. As those of us who have run cross-party groups will know, a variety of unexpected costs can arise but setting them out in the annual report will provide the transparency that Parliament is seeking.

Do members have any other points or questions?

**Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab):** I do not know whether Jean Urquhart or Joan McAlpine can answer this, but I note that a previous cross-party group on culture was

dissolved. Do we know why that happened? Was it just not formed again?

**Joan McAlpine:** I was not aware that there had been a previous group. Both of us were elected in 2011, so it was before our time.

**Margaret McDougall:** That is fine. I just saw it mentioned on the application form.

**The Deputy Convener:** As members have no other questions, I thank Jean Urquhart and Joan McAlpine for giving evidence. If you like, you can sit in the public gallery and listen to the discussion that follows.

I now invite Richard Baker to the table. Do colleagues have any questions on Mr Baker's application for a cross-party group on France?

**Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP):** The previous application that we discussed listed quite a number of organisations that will be involved. The application form for this cross-party group says that it will

"further develop the existing relationship through cultural and economic exchange and will function as a supporting body to Scottish-French diplomatic relations",

but you have not listed any organisations that will be involved. Are any other organisations going to be involved?

**Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Yes. First of all, though, I should perhaps defer to my colleagues Alex Johnstone and, particularly, Christian Allard, who have been very much involved in putting this cross-party group together—

**Richard Lyle:** That was going to be my next question.

**Richard Baker:** Unfortunately, neither of them could make it to this meeting.

I am aware that a number of different groups want to be involved in the group. There is, of course, the consulate general, which is based in Edinburgh, as well as the Institut Français d'Ecosse, which is also based in Edinburgh and is engaged in a huge number of activities to promote France and French culture and the historic and continuing relationships between Scotland and France. There are, in fact, far more of those relationships than I was aware of, and one of the cross-party group's aims is to promote some of that work not only on education in the French language but on cultural links. For example, the institute promotes a number of cultural exhibitions.

There are also economic links to be promoted. As North East Scotland members, Alex Johnstone and I are particularly interested in this issue because companies such as Total work in the energy sector and many French people live and

work in the north-east. As we have heard, some have expressed surprise at the lack of a continuing cross-party group on culture, but others have said to me that, given all our links with France, given the number of French people who live in Scotland—indeed, we now have a French MSP—and given the number of cross-party groups on other countries, they were surprised that there was no cross-party group on France.

A number of different organisations throughout Scotland will be interested in supporting the group's work—I note, for example, that there is an Alliance Française de Glasgow—and the Institut Français will be happy to provide organisational support.

**Richard Lyle:** I am sorry for interrupting you earlier but, as I said, my next question was going to be about why neither Christian Allard nor Alex Johnstone was here. I take it from your response that they are on other business.

**Richard Baker:** They are attending other committee meetings this morning.

**Richard Lyle:** Well done for stepping up to the mark, then.

**Richard Baker:** I do my best.

**Richard Lyle:** You are correct to say that Scotland has a very long history with France under the auld alliance, but I just wanted to find out whether other organisations would be involved in the group.

I do not know whether you will be able to answer this, but what will be the costs of running the group? How will the running costs, the costs of the secretariat and so on be funded?

09:45

**Richard Baker:** I was at the meeting to plan the work for the group if the application was successful. The Institut Français was there and made it clear that it would provide organisational support to the group. We do not expect any costs to be anything other than minimal. We expect people travelling within Scotland to make their own way to meetings, and the interest groups are already based in Scotland.

There is a proposal from the French consul general to arrange a visit of French parliamentarians to Holyrood. I imagine that that would incur significant costs, but my understanding is that the cross-party group would in no way be involved in meeting those costs. The principle that has been communicated to me is that the visit would be arranged by the French consulate and the appropriate French authorities.

**Richard Lyle:** If there were any costs, they should be paid by them. Would the cross-party group's costs could be around £1,000 a year?

**Richard Baker:** You are putting me on the spot a bit. From what was discussed at the meeting, I would expect that figure certainly to accommodate what the cross-party group wants to achieve. Having said that, if there is a proposal from the French consul general for a visit of French parliamentarians—Christian Allard has told me that there is such a proposal—there will be more costs involved, but they will not be borne by the cross-party group. The idea is that the cross-party group—if it exists at that point—will be involved and will help to facilitate some arrangements for the visit but not to the extent that it will incur significant costs.

**Fiona McLeod:** I would like to ask the financial question in a slightly different way. You say that the Institut Français d'Ecosse has said that it will help with the organisation of the cross-party group and you have an individually named person as the secretary. The committee would like to see, in the section headed "Financial benefits or other benefits", whether the Institut Français d'Ecosse is providing a member of staff to do the secretarial work and organisation of the group and an approximate cost for the time that that staff member will spend on that.

**Richard Baker:** That is a reasonable point but, unfortunately, I am not in a position to give a figure for that immediately. I do not know whether it is expected that the person will regard that work as part of their duties or in what capacity they will do it. It is not foreseen that that will be an onerous burden, but if a definite figure is required that will have to be supplied at a later date.

**The Deputy Convener:** If you could provide that in writing, that would satisfy the committee.

**Richard Baker:** Certainly. I am sure that that will be possible.

**The Deputy Convener:** I have one further question. Can you expand a little on the detail of what the relationship will be between the Institut Français d'Ecosse and the cross-party group?

**Richard Baker:** The relationship will certainly inform the work of the group and some of the meetings that we intend to have. As I said earlier, the group plans to promote a range of activities including cultural events and exhibitions, and I think that the Institut Français d'Ecosse will facilitate some of the speakers for our meetings and inform some of the issues that we will focus on. I think that the relationship will be of the order of suggesting topics and helping to facilitate speakers to enable us to have meetings on those issues.

**The Deputy Convener:** Do you expect more members to join the group? We wondered about the extent of the membership of the group.

**Richard Baker:** We certainly hope that more members will join. Given that there has not been a cross-party group on France before and that this is a new initiative, we hope to get more members interested once the group is established. At the moment, we have good cross-party interest in the group involving Labour, Conservative and Scottish National Party members.

There is already considerable cross-party interest in the group, and we hope that a greater number of MSPs will want to be involved in the group once it is established and is able to promote its work to members more fully.

**The Deputy Convener:** Do any members have further questions?

**Richard Lyle:** I compliment Richard Baker on his eloquence this morning and on stepping up to the mark when, unfortunately, Christian Allard and Alex Johnstone could not be here.

**Richard Baker:** That is very kind, Richard. I imagine that that is the first and last time that I will receive such compliments. Thank you very much—they are much appreciated.

**The Deputy Convener:** Thank you for your attendance, for which we are grateful. We will be in touch with you following the meeting to let you know the outcome of the application.

**Richard Baker:** Thanks.

**The Deputy Convener:** Agenda item 4 is discussion by the committee of the evidence that it has heard from Jean Urquhart and Richard Baker on the proposed cross-party groups. We will deal with the proposed cross-party group on culture first. I invite members' comments.

**Fiona McLeod:** I am happy to record that I think that the proposed group should be accorded recognition. It is interesting that the group wants to take a totally different approach, and it is laudable that Creative Scotland will support artists to come to Parliament. The proposal sounds extremely exciting.

**The Deputy Convener:** The group's proposed membership list is extensive. I was most impressed when I saw it.

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** I agree with Fiona McLeod. The point about the membership list is an important one: it is an extremely diverse list. I think that the vision for the group is fantastic.

**The Deputy Convener:** Good.

**Colin Keir (Edinburgh Western) (SNP):** I concur with my colleagues. The discussion has

changed my mind. The deputy convener mentioned the range of the proposed group and asked whether its remit was sufficiently specific, but it is clear from what was said that the breadth of the group's remit gives it latitude to do something different. It could be quite an exciting group.

**Cameron Buchanan:** I just wondered whether the list of organisations is one of those "anyone who knows me" lists, given how extensive it is. Have all those organisations agreed to sign up? The list is extremely wide ranging.

**The Deputy Convener:** That thought crossed my mind, too. I was not sure whether the list was aspirational or a reality.

**Cameron Buchanan:** Personally, I think that it must be aspirational. Solar Bear and the storytelling forum are listed among the proposed member organisations, although I do not want to give specific examples. Could we find that out?

**The Deputy Convener:** Perhaps we could seek clarification when we write to the group.

I think that members are saying that they agree with the principle that the group should be given recognition. We can follow up on the various points that we have raised this morning, particularly that last one. We can check on the membership and get an information note on that at some stage. That is excellent.

We will move on to the proposed cross-party group on France. I invite members' comments.

**Richard Lyle:** I was extremely impressed by the evidence that Richard Baker gave, given that he stepped up to the mark at the last minute. That is why I complimented him.

We should consider the proposal. Scotland has a long history with France under the auld alliance. I think that we should accept the application on cultural, diplomatic and other grounds.

**Colin Keir:** I fully support the application. It was quite a surprise to find that there was not a cross-party group on France. I spoke to the consul general on the matter some time ago. I might have been a wee bit more forward in looking at the idea. When I was a councillor here in Edinburgh, I knew a lot of the consuls general and the consular staff in the city. That is why anyone who looks at my entry in the register of members' interests will see that many of my interests relate to other countries.

Given how much activity the French are involved in, they need a tie-in. They have a link at local authority level, but they do not have anything at the Parliament, so I think that the proposed group would be fantastic.

**The Deputy Convener:** As no one else has any comments, I take it that members agree with the

principle that the proposed cross-party group on France should be accorded recognition.

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Deputy Convener:** I thank members for attending. That ends the public part of the meeting, so we will move into private session. We will allow the press and public to leave.

**Cameron Buchanan:** I would like to add something in relation to the proposed cross-party group on France. I know the French very well. They are prepared to pay for such activity. The Alliance Française is very keen on this sort of stuff, as is the French consulate general, so I do not think that there will be any problem with funds, if that is what you are worried about. They will sponsor lots of things.

**The Deputy Convener:** The issue is more the transparency of the funding. We would just like to be sure—

**Cameron Buchanan:** Someone mentioned the auld alliance. The French are particularly keen on Scotland. In many ways, the auld alliance seems to be much stronger in France than it is here. That was just an addendum.

**The Deputy Convener:** I thank all the members for their comments. We move on to agenda item 5, which we will take in private.

09:55

*Meeting continued in private until 10:52.*

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