



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Thursday 10 January 2013

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CONTENTS

	Col.
FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS INQUIRY	797
CONSULAR SUPPORT FOR SCOTTISH CITIZENS ABROAD	831
“BRUSSELS BULLETIN”	840
EUROPEAN UNION FUNDS	843
FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS INQUIRY	847

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

1st Meeting 2013, Session 4

CONVENER

*Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP)
*Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP)
*Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
*Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
*Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

John Bissett (Scottish Government)
Gillian Campbell-Thow (Scottish Government Languages Working Group)
Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP)
Jenny Goldsmith (Clerk)
Simon Macaulay (Scottish Government Languages Working Group)
Tim Simons (Scottish Government)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Ian Duncan

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

European and External Relations Committee

Thursday 10 January 2013

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 09:04*]

Foreign Language Learning in Primary Schools Inquiry

The Convener (Christina McKelvie): Good morning. Sorry for the slightly delayed start, but welcome to the committee's first meeting in 2013. On behalf of the committee, I wish you all a happy new year and good fortune for 2013.

I make the usual request that all mobile phones and electronic devices be switched off because they interfere with the broadcasting system.

Moving swiftly on to agenda item 1, which is on the committee's languages inquiry, we will hear oral evidence from members of the Scottish Government languages working group. I welcome Simon Macaulay, who is the chair of the working group, and Gillian Campbell-Thow, who is the cultural organisations and local authority advisers—COALA—representative on that group. If you wish, you may make a brief opening statement.

Simon Macaulay (Scottish Government Languages Working Group): Thank you for inviting us. We very much welcome the committee's initiative and the extensive nature of its inquiry. We hope that the discussions that are about to take place will give further impetus to what we see as a very important agenda indeed.

We are here as representatives of the working group on one-plus-two languages. From the outset, we recognised the importance of the remit that the Scottish Government set for us. We were unanimous in our recommendations and we have welcomed the positive response of the Minister for Learning, Sciences and Scotland's Languages to the 35 recommendations in the report. We are now very anxious to see the process of implementation get under way.

The origin of the group and of the recommendations in the report is the European Union's Barcelona agreement of 2002 and the Scottish National Party's 2011 election manifesto, which set out recommendations on one-plus-two languages. It is important to state that one-plus-two means mother tongue plus two additional languages rather than English plus two additional languages.

I was privileged to be invited to be chair of the group. From your notes, you will have seen my career background, but it is worth saying that I have a background in modern languages. I remain a qualified, General Teaching Council-registered teacher of French. Through the years, I have sought to learn other languages—I am currently learning Mandarin. The members of the working group are representatives of stakeholders in the language-learning agenda. They include Gillian Campbell-Thow, who represents the cultural organisations and local authority advisers and also Glasgow City Council.

We started our work in the autumn of 2011. We reported in the spring of 2012 and there was a subsequent debate in the Parliament. The minister then responded to the report in the autumn, and there was a major conference in November.

In the working group, our work has had three key drivers. The first is the decline in the number of pupils gaining certification in languages. That decline has been experienced in all languages with the exception of Spanish.

The second driver is an economic imperative. Evidence from the research that the working group commissioned indicates that something like £500 million will be lost to the Scottish economy if Scots are unable to engage with foreign business. That research has been complemented by work elsewhere on the future employability of Scots if they are unable to speak languages other than English.

The third driver is mentioned in the first sentence in the report:

"Language learning is life enhancing."

Our concern was that Scotland will be left behind, and we wanted to nail the myth that all the world speaks English so people do not need to speak an additional language. The reality is that 75 per cent of the world's population does not speak English.

We recognise that the focus of the committee's inquiry is on primary schools. It is important to say that the working group saw the one-plus-two policy within the context of a three to 18 curriculum—in other words, all the way from nursery school through to senior secondary, articulating with the curriculum for excellence and linking through to further and higher education. Also, we note that the title of the committee's inquiry refers to foreign languages, whereas our report "Language Learning in Scotland—A 1+2 Approach" also covers languages that are native to Scotland, such as Gaelic and Scots.

There are 35 recommendations in the report. If I may, I will refer briefly to six of them. Recommendation 1, which is perhaps the most important of all, is that access to a first additional

language should start from primary 1. That is quite a change from the practice in most primary schools at the moment.

Recommendation 4 is about the introduction of a second additional language, which should be done no later than primary 5. Recommendation 8 covers the transition from primary to secondary school, which in the past has been a big problem for most secondary schools and pupils going into secondary school. The group wanted to create the momentum that will mean that pupils are well equipped to continue language learning through secondary school to certificate level and beyond.

Recommendation 20 recommends that future primary school teachers should have a languages qualification at higher level. In other words, future primary school teachers should be equipped to support pupils' learning of languages all the way through primary school.

Finally, recommendations 30 and 31 talk about the important role of foreign language assistants and other native speakers of additional languages in supporting the work of teachers.

We were delighted with the Scottish Government's response to the report. No recommendations were rejected. Where there is partial acceptance, that is about recognising the role of other bodies, such as the General Teaching Council for Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority, universities, local authorities and schools.

As I said, there was unanimity in the working group and a real determination that the recommendations should be taken forward, but that was very much tempered with realism. There is a financial cost, although the period of implementation covers two parliamentary sessions, which takes us to 2020 or thereabouts.

Since the publication of the report, initial funding of £4 million has been committed to support a number of pilots. We see that as a sign of the Scottish Government's commitment to take forward the group's agenda. The group is well aware of past modern language initiatives that have been of value and have advanced the languages agenda, but many of them have fallen by the wayside for one reason or another. The group is determined that that should not happen this time.

We look forward to getting more details on the implementation process, and we expect to hear from the Scottish Government soon. Central to that implementation process is winning the hearts and minds of pupils, parents and teachers that the one-plus-two policy must be pursued.

Gillian Campbell-Thow played an invaluable role on the working group, and she can say something

about the perspective of two extremely important stakeholder groups in the implementation process—local authorities and cultural organisations.

Gillian Campbell-Thow (Scottish Government Languages Working Group): If the convener will permit me, I will take five minutes to give the committee a brief update.

Although COALA sounds cuddly, it meets three times a year to discuss the pattern of the challenges that languages present for Scottish teachers and learners. It consists of local authority advisers, quality improvement officers and curriculum leaders, as well as representatives from most of the cultural language-learning organisations that are based in Scotland.

I was privileged enough to represent COALA and Glasgow City Council education services in my role as manager and curriculum leader for modern languages three to 18. COALA played a fairly important role in taking on the views of all the teachers across Scotland, and those views had an influence on the policy. Members will see that the recommendations that have been made will have an impact on the way in which local policy is shaped. Local policies and committee papers will be shaped by local circumstances, and the approach will be supported by cultural institutions through the provision of training materials and further support for teaching and learning.

Consultation has also taken place with practitioners and local establishments, as well as with further education and universities. Each authority will take that into account when it looks at developing its committee papers. As Simon Macaulay said, the report is very much a three-to-18—and beyond—paper.

The committee will see that the recommendations that have been made start from directorate level and involve workforce planning. They look at increased engagement and work with parents, as well as other interested stakeholders, and at local circumstances. They also look at transition—not just the key transition point from primary to secondary, but the transitions from early years to primary and from secondary to beyond.

09:15

The Convener: Thank you for that comprehensive introduction.

I will open with a couple of questions about your presentations. Just before Christmas, Hanzala Malik and I had the great privilege of launching the inquiry at Dalmarnock primary school in Glasgow, which was a return for me as the school is in the social work area I used to work in. It was

interesting to go back and see how well the area has developed and how great the school is doing.

In the classroom that we were in, 14 different languages were spoken because there were so many kids from different parts of the world. A lot of peer education is used to teach other children—some young kids said that they went to the Russian club after school. We also had the privilege of meeting some of the parents who are involved. Parents now come to after-school clubs so that they can learn a language, because their five, six and seven-year-olds are coming home and speaking French or Spanish and they want to understand and learn the language. You will understand that, in the east end of Glasgow, that type of interaction between parents, kids and teachers is absolutely fantastic. I seek your comments on that.

We are focusing on primary education because one recommendation in your report was to get in early and teach kids early. We want to consider how early we should do that.

I also want to ask about leadership. The headteacher of that school seemed to be very dynamic. Hanzala Malik pressed her strongly on funding and asked how much money she needed, whether there was enough money and whether the approach is funded properly. She said that all she needed was a wee bit of money at the beginning, and then she used all the skills and experience in the school. I seek your comments on how we can develop that leadership role for headteachers. That school is dynamic because it has a dynamic headteacher. What support should be put in place for headteachers to ensure that they develop leadership skills and take forward the best part of the working group's recommendations?

Simon Macaulay: I will make a start on that, but I will ask Gillian Campbell-Thow to comment in greater detail because she works on the ground in Glasgow, which is the largest local authority.

I have seen the report of the meeting at the school in Dalmarnock, where there is clearly very good practice. There is a lot of tremendous practice in primary schools up and down the country. As convener of the working group, I visited a number of primary and secondary schools in which I found a real determination to instil a love of languages and to seek to create continuity and progression in languages. However, that is not universally the case. Not every school in Scotland has practice that is as well developed as in the school that you have seen. We want to address that. In a sense, we want an equality agenda, so that every child in Scotland has the opportunity to learn from language development in schools.

We also want to address some of the real issues that have arisen to do with progression. There might be good practice in one class, but that might not be sustained when pupils progress to the next class. There is the even bigger issue of transition to secondary school, which is a core issue.

On leadership in schools, you are absolutely correct about the role of the headteacher in supporting and driving forward the work of the school and ensuring that the resources are in place to support the school's work.

Gillian Campbell-Thow has seen much more practice and might want to say a little about that.

Gillian Campbell-Thow: Absolutely. The convener made a point about parents and how to engage them. Underpinning all the recommendations in the report is the point about winning hearts and minds. That involves demystifying what it is to learn a foreign language. The overarching statements in the principles of the curriculum for excellence talk about celebrating what is special and different about the child's own language and other languages and cultures. We have a huge task in selling languages and telling people that languages matter, although we can achieve that.

I can speak only about the position in Glasgow, but it is important that we engage with parents. As you know, the approach that we are talking about involves the mother tongue plus two foreign languages. Because it is a challenge to get GTC-registered teachers who can teach the languages, we must make use of the resources that we have, so we need to engage with parents.

You have seen examples in which parents come in and work with children—not just their own children—not only to enhance mother tongue provision but to engage with other children, teachers and learners so that they can learn about a different culture, as well as learning a language. One of the issues is definitely to bring in parents in that way. We have to demystify languages and the process of learning a language.

The issue of leadership from headteachers is a good point. You have seen the most wonderful example in Nancy Clunie in Dalmarnock, who is a competent linguist and has made languages very accessible, not only to her pupils but to her staff. We are in challenging times, in which teachers feel that there is a lot of pressure and that a lot of changes are happening, but we can show that this can be done in a manageable way.

The way in which it is being done in Dalmarnock is manageable—as you pointed out, the school is using existing resources. That is certainly the way in which Glasgow would like to move forward, and it is the example that we would like to set. We

could work with other authorities and tell them that it can be kept manageable. The danger is that they will suddenly feel as if they have to provide 15 different languages and that everyone has to become fluent. There has to be exposure to L3—a third language—as well as L2.

Something that we would want to build on is peer education. Children learn really well from each other. If we use the principles of the assessment is for learning approach and of collaborative learning, children will progress if they have the chance and the conditions are created properly for them to learn.

On the issue of bringing through L2 and L3, we have CLIL—content and language integrated learning—which is contextualised learning in the language. The traditional way of learning a foreign language in primary is for an hour a week and the language is not picked up again. Instead, pupils could use a small bit of the language every day. If we can work with teachers to a manageable level of training and competency, they will feel as confident teaching languages as they do any other aspect of the curriculum. That would be really good base to work towards.

The paper recommends an audit of current provision in authorities—who has trained, what languages are there and how that can be enhanced further. We would have to work closely with headteachers and ask them what they have at the moment. We would have to look at workforce planning and at what is manageable at a local level.

The Convener: You have segued straight into the next issue that I was going to ask you about. Is the working group taking on the role of the audit and of mapping what provision and skills are available and what parents can do? In the primary 1 class that we visited, a parent who was Spanish had been teaching Spanish to the pupils for years. She was absolutely fantastic—she engaged the class and motivated these wee kids, who all wanted a chance to get involved. An audit is important because we need to map what we have and how we can utilise it. Is that something that the working group would undertake?

Simon Macaulay: There is a specific recommendation in the report about carrying out an audit in local authorities on what is available. For example, we believe that quite a large number of primary teachers are qualified in modern languages, through the modern languages in primary school—MLPS—programme, but are not teaching modern languages at the moment. That is the sort of thing that we hope will be identified in the kind of audit that you describe.

I think that I mentioned that we see bringing native speakers of languages into the classroom

as important in future. It is a practice that is developing, although not, I think, on a large scale. It is an important way of supporting the qualified teacher by bringing in expertise. Such expertise is available in many communities, not just in community languages. It is also about ensuring that those people are trained to work in a classroom environment and support the work of the teacher.

The Convener: We move to open questions and start with Clare Adamson.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Good morning. My question is about what skills and resources are available at the moment and where we need to get to in order to implement language learning in primary schools correctly. What additional support and training is required for existing teachers? How might that change?

As well as this committee, I am a member of the Education and Culture Committee, which has been taking evidence about changes in the area of literacy and numeracy. You mentioned recommendation 20. The evidence given to the Education and Culture Committee was that a higher or secondary level English or maths qualification did not necessarily indicate that someone was equipped to teach literacy or numeracy.

I am therefore interested in finding out why you have specifically recommended that students have a language qualification. Is there scope within that recommendation to consider other assessments of an individual's capacity to teach languages or routes other than that specific qualification?

Simon Macaulay: Recommendation 20 sets a very high benchmark in specifying a higher languages qualification and, as you will see, it has not been fully accepted by the Government, which recognises the locus of the GTC. The GTC is already looking at this area; next week, in fact, it will meet me and Sarah Breslin of SCILT—Scotland's national centre for languages—from whom you are going to take evidence as part of this inquiry.

Although the benchmark is high, it is only a start. You are correct to suggest that the fact that someone has a higher in a language does not mean that they will be good at teaching it. In its recommendations, the report also mentions the importance of the work of universities and teacher education and that initial teacher education for every primary school teacher should contain some element of language work. Beyond that, there is the issue of continuing professional development for teachers in post.

There is a mountain to climb with regard to teacher education but the issue will have to be addressed and carried forward if the report is to be

implemented fully. The notion of skills and the professionalism—indeed, the developing professionalism—of teachers is absolutely key to the success of this approach.

I do not know whether Gillian Campbell-Thow has anything to add.

Gillian Campbell-Thow: Although the recommendation is that students have a language qualification on entry into or exit from initial teacher education, further training in pedagogy and delivery is still needed. There are various MLPS training models across Scotland, but it is very much recognised that although people might have a language—or indeed have a higher or a degree in a language—they still have to go through how all of that is broken down and taught at primary level, which is very different from the approach taken in secondary school. That aspect would be built on top of recommendation 20.

As for the skills and resources that are available, there are teachers who have been trained for a great number of years—indeed, since the start of the initial modern languages project in primary schools. They had 28-day, day-release, centralised training, but now that the training has been devolved to local authorities the pattern of training varies. Some authorities might have 28-session twilight training, while others might have 10-day training, and that all has to be taken into account. I think that you will see a very different picture across authorities, and it would be good to get a national picture in that respect.

The available resources also vary from authority to authority. In fact, the issue comes up frequently at COALA meetings. Some authorities have their own frameworks; some buy their frameworks from other authorities; and others use materials that were previously generated by Learning and Teaching Scotland—or what is now Education Scotland—and such places. That kind of varying picture is certainly a challenge but not one that we cannot overcome.

Clare Adamson: Do you think that the articulation between primary and secondary schools should be driven by local government policy to ensure continuity rather than through a national strategy?

Simon Macaulay: The short answer is that there should be both. Our specific recommendation was that local authorities should bring forward their own strategies to make continuity possible, but the transition between primary and secondary school is extremely important and there is work to be done not only by local authorities but by two major organisations that will be supporting this approach—SCILT and Education Scotland in its curricular and

inspectorate roles. I know that the committee will be talking to representatives of both.

It is fair to say that the working group was very together on this issue, and I am confident that the will that it has generated will carry through to the work of those organisations and the implementation policy. The transition from primary to secondary is certainly one of the keys to this issue.

09:30

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): What evidence is there from any part of the world on the best method of ensuring that the youngest pupils are successful in becoming fluent speakers in foreign languages? Why does Scotland have such a bad reputation in this area?

Simon Macaulay: We looked at a considerable body of research evidence that shows that, if a child starts earlier, there is more chance that they will learn a language properly. In other words, the earlier a pupil starts, the better.

That practice has not been applied much in Scotland. There has been some good practice at the early primary stage and in nursery schools, but until now the recommendation has broadly been to start language learning at primary 6. The research evidence shows that that is too late. Most countries are moving towards starting at an earlier stage. The age of six, seven or eight years is increasingly the norm in European countries, and there is strong evidence to support that.

If language learning starts at the age of six in Scotland, that will approximately reflect the beginning of primary school, as children start primary school at the age of five. That will mean a change in Scotland, but we strongly believe—and the evidence supports us—that we must start early, have continuity and create momentum as pupils move through primary school and secondary school. In time, we will begin to stop the decline in the number of pupils who get qualifications in languages.

Gillian Campbell-Thow: One example is the Walker Road primary school project in Aberdeen many years ago, which used French. It is well recognised and documented that the best way in which to learn a foreign language is total immersion. At present, we are just not able to do that, but the Walker Road project showed how it could be done. The curriculum was taught in French and the children were able to cope with it.

We see a wonderful example if we look at Gaelic-medium education, in which the curriculum is delivered in Gaelic as well and the children are able to use both languages well and work in them.

Another example is the project at St Aloysius college in Glasgow, which has been supported by the Italian Government. Under the model that it uses, part of the day is completely in Italian. That has considerable funding implications, but the project has started, and it is another model that could be used.

However, we are not in a position where such an approach could be taken forward at present. It would involve a serious overhaul of initial teacher education as well as significant retraining of the teachers who are currently practising. Another model is CLIL, which I mentioned, under which certain elements of the curriculum are delivered in another language.

Your second question was about why Scotland has such a bad reputation for languages. Again—dare I say it?—the reason is perhaps the island syndrome and the idea that everyone else speaks English. I return to the core of the report, which is that we need to win hearts and minds. That involves saying to people that languages matter. We often use the example of Glasgow taxi drivers, who have a smattering of various languages, and point out the difference that it makes being able to converse with people at that initial stage.

We need to start with children at the earliest stage. They are now much more exposed to modern languages in the media, if we consider many of the television programmes that they see, and there are projects such as Scottish Opera's sing up Saturdays, in which it works with children in various languages to enhance their natural curiosity.

There are lots of different models. What we need to do is look at them and draw on the best parts of them.

Jamie McGrigor: Thank you. Can I carry on, convener?

The Convener: You certainly can.

Jamie McGrigor: What is the capacity within the curriculum to accommodate greater language study? Can language learning be embedded in existing teaching? On the choice of languages for teaching, which languages should children be learning and why?

Simon Macaulay: I begin with the last question, because which languages children should learn is an important aspect of the report. I will ask Gillian Campbell-Thow to comment on the issues of capacity.

The report sets no hierarchy of languages. Broadly, there are four categories of language, all of which are valid. The first one is the traditional languages of Europe—the ones that have been broadly taught in schools for many years. The first of those is French, although of course many other

languages are taught and should be taught in future. The second category is the languages of the world's growing economies, and first on that list is Chinese. A lot of work is going on to encourage the teaching of Mandarin Chinese in schools. There are other languages in that category. For example, we could add Portuguese because of the importance of Brazil, and Russian is coming back into play strongly.

The third important group is community languages, in which Gillian Campbell-Thow has particular expertise. In many cases, that could involve the mother tongue or the first additional language, although that is less common. Those languages include Polish, Punjabi, Urdu and Arabic, which are all important languages that have growing importance in our communities. The last category is Gaelic, the language of Scotland. That could be a first additional language for many pupils and, for some pupils, it will be their first language.

The group did not set a hierarchy and say that one language is more important than another. The suite of languages will be very much determined on the basis of the needs of communities and schools and in consultation with parents about what would be particularly valuable for pupils. Of course, we are talking about two additional languages, so there is the option of taking languages from two of the groups. For example, it is now quite common to have Chinese plus a modern European language in schools.

I think that Gillian Campbell-Thow would like to comment on capacity and the extent to which learning is embedded.

Gillian Campbell-Thow: The issue of capacity has two sides. The first is the capacity to teach within the curriculum, which was part of the question. Modern languages are a core component of the primary and secondary curriculums, so they should be delivered. L3 has to be provided in a manageable way, and there are various ways of doing that—to go back to the example of Dalmarnock primary school, it uses the masterclass option.

To provide personalisation and choice for children, a menu of activities is very often available in primary school, and second and third languages are often part of it. That approach can also be taken in secondary. We cannot forget that the one-plus-two approach is important there, too. Language teaching is often diluted in secondary, in part because of the capacity of teaching staff.

Simon Macaulay talked about the different languages that can be taught in schools. The challenge is that, if we do not have GTC-registered teachers, we cannot deliver that language to a certificated level. We also hit a

stumbling block if the SQA does not include that language in its suite of qualifications, as we have to look to alternative qualifications, such as those provided by AQA. That is a particular issue with Punjabi, for example, as it is not certificated by the SQA.

Therefore, language learning can be done in primary, and it is being done. It needs to be enhanced, but there is a vicious circle relating to capacity in teaching staff. The decline in certain languages impacts on the availability of teachers for them. We could get into the thorny discussion on language departments in universities, which are also being reduced, but that is a discussion for another day, I am sure. The teaching of some languages is declining because people are not coming through school and then going to university, so we do not have sufficient teaching staff.

Jamie McGrigor: Gillian Campbell-Thow said that the whole process had to be manageable and that we could not have 15 languages or something like that. However, Mr Macaulay just gave a long list of languages, although I think that he said that the group made no recommendations on which are the most important. Somebody will have to grasp the nettle to comply with what you said originally. You say that a lot of languages are important, but you do not say which ones are the most important.

Simon Macaulay: No—we said that there should be no hierarchy. Grasping the nettle is for schools, communities and pupils in particular schools. They will have different approaches. We are seeking equality of access to languages, but there will not be 15 languages in one school, for example.

Gillian Campbell-Thow: The dominant language that is taught in primary schools is determined by the availability of teaching staff at secondary level. If a secondary school can support French and Spanish, one or both of those languages will be delivered in primary schools.

The teaching of L3 will depend on the training and availability of staff. Simon Macaulay is absolutely right that the discussion will have to happen at local authority level. The issue will be determined by learning communities and the staff who are there.

The Convener: Willie Coffey and Hanzala Malik still have questions, but we do not have a lot of time.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): If the enthusiasm of our two witnesses is anything to go by, we are well on the way to a successful outcome. I congratulate you on your presentations earlier.

I have a broader question, which is about immersion. Gillian Campbell-Thow said that there is no point in somebody having an hour of a foreign language one week if the next time that they see or hear it is the same time the following week. After this wonderful strategy has been implemented, will children in Scotland still be at a disadvantage? For example, children in primary schools throughout Europe have far greater exposure to the English language through the television and other media than Scottish schoolchildren have to European languages. How will we ever get close to bridging that gap? Is there a role for parents and perhaps the media in the new strategy to give our children an opportunity at least to match the experience of their European counterparts?

Simon Macaulay: I will respond to the second point, which was on exposure to other languages. I ask Gillian Campbell-Thow to answer the first question, as she has a great deal more experience on that issue than I have.

Scotland is changing. There is exposure to languages in a way that was not the case in the past. I mentioned the growth of community languages. In addition, European languages can be heard a great deal more often on the streets, in hotels and cafes and at tourist destinations throughout the country. We have a changing community and a changing country. I am particularly struck by the number of people on the streets in Edinburgh—although not just in Edinburgh—speaking Mandarin Chinese. Increasingly, Scots are hearing other languages. It is not as strange to hear another language as it would have been a generation before.

From the introduction of Chinese in schools, it is apparent how ready children—particularly young children—are to go a step beyond listening to languages that are strange to them to wanting to acquire and develop those languages. The agenda is important and we have a chance, perhaps uniquely in the United Kingdom, to take it forward.

We are working together closely on the issue. There is an opportunity for the stakeholder bodies to work in a unique way to take the agenda forward to ensure that our schools are more equipped for the modern world and to teach languages to children. More and more, children have a thirst to learn languages.

Gillian Campbell-Thow: To bring immersion and its implications right down to grass-roots level, one issue in secondary schools is timetabling. That is a huge issue for local authorities and schools. For example, they have to consider whether there should be two periods of a language a week for, say, an hour and a bit each, or four 40-

minute periods a week. That has huge implications for teaching and learning.

Willie Coffey mentioned the media and exposure to language. We have to look at how languages are taught, and we perhaps need to get away from older methodologies. There are fabulous and wonderful examples of fantastic methodologies and projects that involve engaging with social media and with how our young people learn. That is one thing to consider.

We need to say to headteachers, "This is part of the literacy component," because modern languages sit beside the language element of the core curriculum. That is about showing the importance of learning a modern language, not just in broadening the learner's horizons and enabling them to appreciate what is different and special about Scottish culture and heritage and about the culture of other countries, but in enhancing literacy.

09:45

I keep going back to the heart of our report, which is about changing the perception of languages and winning hearts and minds. If we work with headteachers and engage with parents to use the expertise of people on the ground who have other languages, we can increase children's exposure to other languages.

We have to keep things manageable. It would be wonderful to have immersion—we would love that—but other subject specialists would like that for their subjects, too. I am very much aware that we are fighting our corner for languages.

To sum up, there are implications for teaching and learning, people need to be more exposed to the media and we need to work carefully with headteachers—that is about impressing on them the importance of the approach, while keeping things manageable. I hope that that answers your question.

Willie Coffey: Thank you.

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): The committee has been provided with interesting figures. I am really proud of the diversity of the languages that are spoken in Scotland.

Do existing teachers have the skills to teach languages and are resources available for tuition for them? The witnesses touched on that issue. Should we be doing more to train our teachers so that they are better equipped to deal with languages, particularly if they are teaching more than one language? How much more support do teachers want? Are teaching staff willing to take on additional responsibilities?

Simon Macaulay: From talking to teachers in schools and from the work of the schools inspectorate, which observes what happens in schools throughout Scotland, we have discovered a tremendous amount of good practice. A tremendous number of teachers in primary and secondary schools are excellent language teachers and inspire great enthusiasm among their pupils. In secondary schools—I know that they are not part of the committee's remit—pupils are taken forward to certification at higher level and beyond.

However, that is not universally the case. The central point is that a great deal more has to be done in the context of teacher education. More also needs to be done to encourage young people who are in school and who are considering a career in teaching to move into teaching and to teach languages. The numbers will have to increase.

Our recommendation in that regard was not 100 per cent accepted by the minister, because of workforce planning issues. We have to bring into the profession teachers who have the qualifications, the skills and the pedagogy that Gillian Campbell-Thow talked about to be able to teach languages well. There is a role in relation to recruitment. The universities have an important role in teacher education.

I think that most teachers are anxious for languages to develop in their schools, so there is certainly the willingness about which Hanzala Malik asked. However, there are barriers to overcome. That is partly about winning hearts and minds among communities, parents and pupils. In some cases, we have to convince teachers that languages are integral to the school's work.

There are lots of examples of good practice, but there is not necessarily good practice in the majority of schools. We need to convince teachers that they can support language teaching, provided that they are supported. That is why the role of native speakers, foreign language assistants and so on is so important.

Gillian Campbell-Thow: Hanzala Malik asked about skills and resources. In relation to primary schools, a big issue is that the picture on training differs widely among local authorities. Much depends on whether someone in an authority is driving the approach. Some local authorities work together to train teachers, for example by sending primary teachers into other authority areas.

On the willingness of staff, I can speak only for Glasgow, but the number of primary teachers in Glasgow who want to train in languages has increased. Progress is happening quite slowly, but we have seen a pattern over the past few years.

The suite of languages that we can offer is obviously getting bigger as well.

In secondary education, single linguists—teachers who can teach only one language—should be given the opportunity to train again. That depends on the availability of courses in universities. I can speak only for Glasgow, where we have a framework in which teachers are partly funded to go back to university and do a certificate of continuing education, with which they can qualify in another modern foreign language. That is dictated by what universities can offer—there seems to be a bit of a circle.

There is willingness among teaching staff, particularly in primary schools and among child development officers in early years, because they value the importance of the approach, particularly at the early stages, for language acquisition rather than language learning. The tide is beginning to turn and I think that there is willingness among staff. Our biggest resource is the teacher.

Hanzala Malik: Thank you very much for bringing that to my attention. I have always had very high regard for the teaching staff in Glasgow. They face particularly serious challenges and it is pleasing to know that there are teachers who are willing to go the extra mile. I am grateful to them for doing that.

In response to questions that I asked him about languages—particularly Punjabi—the minister suggested that the SQA did not certificate Punjabi because there is not a high demand for it, yet the Scottish Government figures show the contrary. Fifteen authorities support Punjabi, which is incredible, and I am sure that the minister would be very keen and interested to know that figure and perhaps ask the SQA how it came to its conclusion.

On the issue of language choice, the phrase “grasping the nettle” was used. I appreciate that there will be political pressures. However, I note from the figures that Arabic is not being supported as well as it could be. I know a lot of schools, particularly in Glasgow, that have hundreds of pupils who are being taught Arabic outside school hours. I do not understand why authorities up and down Scotland are not supporting Arabic in schools. Clearly there is a demand; perhaps the community that teaches Arabic is not articulate in approaching schools to take on that responsibility. What could be done to reverse that trend?

Simon Macaulay: I will ask Gillian Campbell-Thow to respond to that, because that is her area of expertise.

I stress the importance of community languages in the report. The kind of message that the group wants to send out about our diverse and multicultural Scotland is that those languages are

of equal status and there will be many people for whom community languages such as Punjabi, Urdu, Arabic and Polish are the first languages.

Gillian will speak about work in Glasgow to support Arabic in particular.

Hanzala Malik: And Punjabi.

Gillian Campbell-Thow: We are well aware that, in many authority areas, children are attending Saturday school and classes after school to enhance and further their studies of their mother tongue. The point is valid and it desperately needs to be addressed.

The issue tends to come back to initial teacher education and GTC-registered teachers. Teachers who can support the provision of English as an additional language are often Arabic, Punjabi or Urdu speakers, but they may not be registered with the GTC to teach those languages. A discussion is happening next week with the GTC about that and about not only initial teacher education but how people can be registered to teach those languages.

We have seen the example of Mandarin Chinese, which is very much in the media and is one of the flagship modern languages. Teaching of Mandarin started off as a hub concept, whereby support was given, and, slowly and surely, that has grown. I wonder whether we should look at that model for Arabic, Punjabi and Urdu. Although Urdu is certificated by the SQA, it is still studied very much by native speakers only. Mandarin has been demystified and we now have far more non-native speakers. I have studied Mandarin and I have to say that, once it starts to be demystified, you understand it.

We need to do the same job for our community languages, and it would be worth while discussing that with interested stakeholders. I will perhaps speak to you about that at another point. Perhaps we can consider a similar model, as we can see growth and as children and other interested stakeholders take things forward. The discussion is for the SQA as well.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): Good morning. Is any special consideration being given to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds who might struggle with the programme?

Gillian Campbell-Thow: What do you mean by “disadvantaged backgrounds”?

Roderick Campbell: Those who are right at the bottom of the pecking order and who are deprived.

Simon Macaulay: The equality agenda very much underpins what we seek to achieve through the report. We are asking local authorities to recognise the diversity of pupils’ backgrounds, and we recognise that issues in urban areas are very

different from the challenges in many rural areas and sparse communities, where getting access to teachers of another language is very difficult.

Every child can benefit from learning an additional language, regardless of their background or where they live in Scotland. There is substantial evidence that children who find other parts of the curriculum challenging benefit from learning an additional language at an early stage. Gillian Campbell-Thow may have experience of that. There are specific issues in Glasgow that she may want to mention.

Gillian Campbell-Thow: The issues are not just in Glasgow. Let us be clear that we have the same high aspirations for all children—even for children in non-deprived areas—regardless of where they stay. Getting it right for every child means that we need to meet each of our learners on their own journey and provide a language experience that is proper and robust for them.

I work in a school in Glasgow that would perhaps be described as being in a deprived area in the north of the city. All our children are studying two languages, and we had to look at the learning needs of all those children. For example, it may be more appropriate for them to follow courses that involve talking and listening and which allow them more time to focus on their mother-tongue literacy in relation to reading and writing. We must look at the individual child rather than talk about deprived areas, as we have the same high aspirations for all our children.

Roderick Campbell: I have another issue. Recommendation 10 encourages the development of

“links between language learning and issues of employability and citizenship.”

How do you envisage the possible link between traditional teaching and private and other organisations on the employability side? How will that work in practice?

Simon Macaulay: I am pleased that those questions have been asked, particularly because, as I said at the outset, employability is one of the key drivers of what we seek to do. In simple terms, Scots will lose out in the employment markets of the future unless they can engage with people in languages other than their own. Primary as well as secondary schools are increasingly conveying that message. Given that there needs to be engagement with businesses as well in the big markets of the future in Asia and elsewhere, it will not be enough simply to speak English.

Related to that is the question of citizenship. Much of the work that is being done on language development in what is now becoming general education in schools springs from issues of global

citizenship. That involves understanding Scotland's place in the world and other cultures. The step beyond that is beginning to learn the languages that are associated with other countries and cultures. That also brings home the relevance of language by moving it out of the box of being something that students do in specified periods in schools.

Gillian Campbell-Thow mentioned intercurricular working in schools and the opportunities for using language as a medium to teach other parts of the curriculum. That is all about relevance and Scotland's place in the world and about the jobs to which young people in schools aspire and their future employability.

10:00

Gillian Campbell-Thow: One of the key steps on employability is to start looking at the models that schools can use for work experience, for example, so that there is a real application for the languages that children are learning. Often in the past, an awful lot of language learning has been going on, but the languages could not be used in a practical sense. That thinking has underpinned the SQA's new modern languages for life and work awards, so that young people are learning skills and languages that they can use in a work setting.

We must be able to show children that they do not have to go abroad to use a modern language. If we can show them how it can be used in a local context, we can build on that. We also need to broaden their horizons. There are cities in Scotland that are twinned with other cities in Europe and around the world. I can speak with great knowledge only about what is happening in Glasgow, but I am sure that the situation is the same for other cities. We have been able to set up links involving teacher exchanges and professional visits to see how teaching and learning are delivered, and we are starting to move into work experience.

That experience does not have to be abroad, as the skills can be used in international companies in Scotland. The example that is often used is IBM in Greenock: a lot of children go there to do work experience and to be shown how they can use their languages. The key point is that we must be able to show our children and young learners that they can use in a local context the language that they are learning.

Roderick Campbell: I have a final question. Recommendation 19 mentions

“further engagement with the FE and HE sectors”.

Should the approach of the FE sector and the colleges differ from that of the universities? Perhaps you can say a bit more about that.

Simon Macaulay: One issue that the working group learned about is the rapid decline of language teaching in further education. Further education was not part of the group's remit, but it was anxious that there should be engagement with the FE sector to take those issues forward.

Gillian Campbell-Thow mentioned the decline of language teaching in universities, and it is important that signals are sent out in higher education—not just in teacher education but in university language departments. The Donaldson report on teacher education discusses the links for teacher education between schools and the other parts of universities. Teacher education is not a block sitting apart, but it is seen as somehow different from what goes on in the rest of a university. The detail on further and higher education was beyond the group's remit, but we cannot make all this work unless further and higher education are part of what happens.

Gillian Campbell-Thow: There must be more dialogue between schools, further education institutes and colleges and higher education. That would also bring to the forefront the agenda on widening access, which is a bit of a hot topic and needs to be addressed. I do not think that there is necessarily enough dialogue or articulation, which must happen.

A lot of work is now being undertaken. For example, the University of Strathclyde has a language ambassadors project, which involves sending students out to schools to talk to pupils. The students tell the pupils what they can do and what campus life is like, but they also talk about what doing a language degree entails.

Such events and initiatives will help, and it would be ideal if schools and local authorities engaged with further education colleges and providers in their localities to articulate that. The point is valid and local authorities and schools should take it forward—that is certainly something that I have made a note to do.

The Convener: We have pushed the boundaries of our time, but I thank you for coming along. We could have spent much more time exploring many of the areas, and we may come back to you on a number of them.

Mr Macaulay mentioned a meeting with the General Teaching Council for Scotland next week about challenges in relation to registration. We will be interested in knowing how that meeting goes and in hearing about whether there are any outcomes or if progress is made.

Simon Macaulay: Absolutely. I think that the committee will speak to someone from the GTC as part of its process in any case.

The Convener: Yes—it is always good to get both sides of the story. I thank you very much. There will be a brief suspension to allow for a changeover of witnesses.

10:05

Meeting suspended.

10:06

On resuming—

The Convener: Moving on swiftly, we will now take further oral evidence as part of our languages inquiry. John Bissett is the senior policy officer on the Scottish Government's languages team, and Tim Simons is head of the curriculum unit in the Scottish Government. Gentlemen, I believe that you have a brief opening statement.

Tim Simons (Scottish Government): Yes, I will make a brief opening statement. Good morning, everyone. I am head of the curriculum unit in the directorate for learning under the Scottish Government's director general for learning and justice. I am responsible for policy development for curriculum issues across seven of the eight curricular areas in the curriculum for excellence: languages, science, maths, technologies, social studies, expressive arts and religious and moral education—that is, everything except health and wellbeing. I am also responsible for literacy and numeracy and—perhaps very relevant in this context—for the curriculum for excellence's five cross-cutting themes: enterprise education, creativity, international education, citizenship and sustainable development. The latter three are often grouped together under the terms "global citizenship" or "responsible global citizenship".

The manifesto commitment that the Government adopted at the last election was to

"create the conditions in which every child will learn two languages in addition to their own mother tongue. This will be rolled out over two Parliaments, and will create a new model for language acquisition in Scotland."

To take that forward, ministers set up a languages working group in September 2011. The working group published its report "Language Learning in Scotland—A 1+2 Approach", which was launched by the minister at Sacred Heart primary school on 17 May 2012. The Government published its response to the report on 20 November. As Simon Macaulay said, shortly afterwards—a week afterwards—a major conference was held in Stirling management centre to promote the Government's response and to take the actions forward.

The languages commitment aims to develop the teaching of languages within curriculum for

excellence. It aims to improve learners' engagement with, and achievement in, language learning. It also aims to achieve better public understanding and awareness of languages both in terms of the big issues that we face in the world, including our economic competitiveness, and as a career option for young people. The commitment is as much about changing attitudes to languages in schools and society—including with parents, with employers and in the media—as it is about ensuring that better and more language learning takes place. Bearing in mind the committee's previous questions, I should point out that the languages working group contained representatives from employers and the national parent forum of Scotland, so those voices were heard in the group.

All of this is about preparing young people for a radically different world from the one that we know today, which will certainly be different from when I went to school. In that world, young people with an interest in, and a positive disposition towards, learning languages will be at a distinct advantage compared to their peers.

Ministers have welcomed the report and its 35 recommendations. They have accepted 31 of the recommendations in full and four in part. They have recognised that taking the recommendations forward will require discussion, collaboration and partnership with local authorities, schools, parents, employers and other key stakeholders.

To summarise the key issues, the Government's commitment is to create the conditions for children to learn languages; it is not about imposing the policy on local authorities. It is about not only primary schools—I know that the committee's inquiry is to do with primary schools—but secondary schools and early years establishments. It is a three-to-18 agenda. As Simon Macaulay mentioned, the timeframe is two sessions of Parliament—in other words, by 2020—so it is a long-term change.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this is about cultural change. It is about changing attitudes to languages in schools and in society as a whole.

My colleague, John Bissett, is the languages team leader in the curriculum unit. He attended all the meetings of the languages working group and provided a secretariat and other assistance to Simon Macaulay. We look forward to members' questions.

The Convener: You mentioned four key issues, two of which were creating the right conditions and cultural change. We witnessed those clearly when we visited Dalmarnock primary school. In a few weeks' time, Clare Adamson and I will visit a school in Hamilton that I think has a Spanish hub.

We are also well aware of the Confucius hubs that have developed throughout Lanarkshire.

Perhaps you could give us some insight into how you see the cultural change developing. I asked earlier about the skills capacity and abilities within the existing structures, and how you tease out and use the best.

One of the challenges that we heard about from teachers at Dalmarnock primary school related to the use of glow, the online community for Scottish schools. Glow should be the medium for sharing materials, ideas and information, but teachers are unable to search outside the parameters of the United Kingdom. That might just involve a small technical fix. I do not know whether that was one of the challenges that came up in the information that you received from teachers. Do you know about the challenges with glow? If you are already dealing with those challenges, could you give us an insight into how that is going?

Tim Simons: There are some challenges with glow, although it is not our area in the learning directorate. Steps are being taken towards a major reform of glow. I would have to come back to you if you would like more detail about that.

Some local authorities use glow extensively and find it extremely useful for accessing and sharing information, including foreign media and articles. There is much more exposure to language among young people as a result of glow.

Young people are much more aware about the world around them than they were in the past. They see news reports on television in which people speak other languages. As was mentioned in the previous evidence session, there is more exposure to other languages as a result of young people who are foreign nationals coming to live here. We gathered evidence from local authorities about the main three languages after English that are spoken in schools. In 22 out of 32 authorities, the top language after English is Polish. There is a lot of exposure of young people to Polish in schools.

10:15

John Bissett (Scottish Government): As has been said, there are issues with glow. We hope that the next generation of glow—whatever it looks like—will be much more accessible. We are doing some work with SCILT, Scotland's national centre for languages, which is based at the University of Strathclyde.

The promotion of languages is very much part of SCILT's work. It has been overhauling its website and there is now an entire section on the one-plus-two approach. It is also developing messages for teachers, policy leaders in local authorities and

parents. To effect a culture change, we must draw on the increasing weight of evidence that languages are of benefit to our young people, not just as individuals, giving them the confidence to engage with the world in which they are growing up, but in relation to their future economic prospects. Regular surveys suggest that, because of the nature of the globalised economy that we live in, companies are increasingly looking for youngsters who can offer more than just one language.

It is about giving our young people the opportunity to make their way in the world when they are increasingly in competition with young people from Europe, for example, who can offer two or three languages. There are a number of strong drivers for suggesting that Scotland needs to improve its performance in languages and we must draw that evidence to the attention of teachers, parents and so on if we are to begin to make that cultural shift. It is an agenda that other countries take seriously, and Scotland should do so as well.

The Convener: You are absolutely right that teachers are a key element, as we discussed in the previous session.

The parents whom we met at Dalmarnock primary school were very keen to come along to extracurricular events. They pick up words at home and told us that, when they went on holiday, they relied on the young person in the family to order in restaurants and so on. In that context, young people are enabled to learn much more effectively. The buy-in of parents will be key for that to work. It cannot be about just one hour a week; it must be about much more than that.

We heard about the working group's recommendations and the plans around those, which we see in action in Dalmarnock primary school, but that might be just that school. What work is being done to identify what is happening throughout Scotland and whether that good practice can be easily applied? It might not be applied in different settings.

John Bissett: From what you have heard already this morning, it is clear that this is a broad agenda. We need to take forward a number of different work strands, and it is a process that we are embarking on.

In the past year or so, we have had the report of the languages working group, which ministers have welcomed. Building on the national conference that we had in November, we are now looking at setting a number of things in train. Clearly, we must have some oversight or implementation group to ensure that a policy that is designed to last not just for this session of Parliament but until 2020 is maintained and kept

on course. That will require a lot of sustained effort on the part of Government, local authorities, schools and so on, and we will pull together an implementation group to oversee that work fairly soon.

Recommendation 2 in the languages working group report is critical. It calls on local authorities to develop their own strategies and plans. Unless the plans are owned by local authorities and schools, the policy will not be delivered, so the work that we do over the coming period with local authorities will be important. Ministers have announced funding for a number of pilot projects to run in the current school year. There are 10 projects running; some are already under way and some are starting up just now. Six in the primary sector are looking at the implications of introducing language learning from primary 1 and the issues of introducing a second, additional language from later in primary education into the broad general education phase in secondary school. Other projects are looking at the transition between primary and secondary schools, and one pilot is looking at languages in the senior phase.

We will draw a lot of lessons from the pilot projects, which will help to inform local authority strategies and their delivery. Our key partners, such as Education Scotland, which draws together the lessons to be learned from school inspections, and SCILT, which I have mentioned and which provides a lot of training and CPD for teachers, have many examples of what already works well. The modern languages excellence group report that was published 18 months or two years ago highlighted a range of good things going on in schools across Scotland, so we know that good things are not taking place only in Dalmarnock primary school. We are trying to pull together the best of what is happening.

A key message that came out of the national conference, particularly from the practitioners who were present, was that practitioners appreciate and need the time and space to learn from one another. We will look closely at how we get school and local authorities to learn from one another. That will be a key element of the work that we develop over the coming years.

Jamie McGrigor: I hope that it is all right to ask the panel whether there is enough funding, including the use of EU money, for the Scottish Government's proposal.

Tim Simons: John Bissett has already mentioned the importance of recommendation 2, which the Government has accepted, about local authorities planning for the implementation of the one-plus-two strategy. They will work closely with and engage schools and parents to ascertain what they can provide. Gillian Campbell-Thow—who

spoke earlier—provided an insight into what Glasgow City Council is doing.

The work of local authorities is crucial in making the ambition of the strategy work. They have a lot of staff who have been trained under the modern languages in primary schools programme who are not being used effectively, for example, and they need to ascertain where those staff are, what they are doing and how they can resurrect their language skills, perhaps with additional training.

As John Bissett said, one of the conference's outcomes was a recognition that local authorities need time to think the strategy through and to plan. Some authorities are well on the way and have a good idea about who and where their skilled teachers are. We know that quite a few in the teaching profession have a higher or equivalent language qualification that they have not used. There is a need to identify who and where they are and whether they would like to use their language skills to enhance their teaching professionalism. Every authority and school will be different, so that will take time.

On funding, the Government has set aside £120,000 this year for the pilot projects. In addition, during the debate on 23 May last year, the minister announced that £4 million—pending agreement by Parliament of the budget—would be available for local authorities for the next financial year to progress the work. The languages working group has estimated that, overall, two to three times that amount would be needed. However, I think that the work can be done if it is well planned and well thought through. We are at the early stages of ascertaining with local authorities what their needs are, and where and when their needs will need to be met.

John Bissett: Ministers are well aware that the strategy is an ambitious objective to deliver over a period of time. They recognise that additional resource will be required and in that regard, as Tim Simons mentioned, the minister has earmarked £4 million for next year. He has also committed to further discussions with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland on the longer-term resource implications. Once we begin to see local authority strategies develop and their audit of provision, that will help to inform future discussions around resources.

Jamie McGrigor: As you have described, we need to produce the best formula for Scottish children to be able to compete in the new world, and I totally agree with you on that. Mr Bissett has described what is a very broad front at the moment, but there will obviously come a point when the focus has to be narrowed down and details given as to what languages will be taught in schools and for what reason. Obviously, that will

need to come after great consultation and everything else. When do you envisage that process taking place and who will be in charge of it?

Tim Simons: I envisage that all of that will come out in the audit that local authorities will undertake over the next six to 12 months. By this time next year, I hope that every local authority will know who its trained teachers are, where they are, what languages they can offer from primary 1 and what languages they can offer from primary 5 as a third language.

Crucially, that will be very much dictated by what can be provided in the secondary school. That is the crucial point about transitions between primary and secondary. From a survey that was undertaken by the national languages centre, SCILT, we know that a third of primary schools do not have any transition plan on languages with their secondary school, so that must be addressed. The primary schools need to liaise closely with their secondary schools. If a primary school starts off with young people in primary 1 learning a particular language that they can continue with only up until primary 7 and which then falls by the wayside because there is no provision for it in the secondary school, that is just not a good use of resources whatsoever. Schools need to provide learning in a language that will progress through so that, when young people move into secondary, they are enthusiastic about the language.

We hope that we will then see much greater take-up of languages at certification level. In due course, the universities—to pick up on what was said in the previous evidence session—will notice that and provide more language courses, so there will be more throughput of students in higher education.

Hanzala Malik: I am interested in two comments that have been made. First, on the possible need for additional resource beyond what has already been allocated, only time will dictate what sort of resource that would mean. Secondly, I absolutely agree that there is a need for a joined-up system in which primary schools, secondary schools, colleges and universities are all aligned so that we maximise the skill that is handed down to our youth.

Perhaps I should have taken up this point with Gillian Campbell-Thow, but I wonder about engagement with the communities that have language skills. Given that we have people from the Polish and French communities and so many organisations in Scotland from those language bases that our teachers could engage with, perhaps we need a structure whereby our teachers could be invited by those organisations

so that there could be two-way traffic in engaging with those organisations.

More importantly, once those contacts have been established, perhaps the teachers could work with those organisations to share some of the cultural events in our schools, which would once again reinforce the language skill. That would promote not simply the language but the culture of that language, as language and culture go hand in glove. Being aware of one's culture is almost as important as having the language skill itself. Luckily, we have more than 150 communities in Scotland so those opportunities are available to us. All that we really need to do is to organise ourselves to tap into that resource. Are you in a position to do that and to support the staff in making those connections?

10:30

Tim Simons: We certainly support local authorities that are innovative in their approaches. You are right that there is a wealth of opportunities. Much of that comes down to the teacher's attitude to bringing in parents.

We are working with the national parent forum of Scotland to try to change the attitude to parental involvement, because parents are a huge resource. The convener mentioned the Spanish parent who went into Dalmarnock primary school. We want that approach to be used more often, because it breaks down the myths about language learning for young people to have a native speaker in a classroom speaking the language, playing games or singing songs and making learning great fun to be part of.

The point that was made about cultural events is also important. I have spoken to teachers who have encouraged their pupils to bring in artefacts and articles from their home countries. They come in with coins and notes and talk about them. That generates excitement in the class and can lead to cultural events and celebrations being followed through.

The Scottish Government would welcome any innovative approaches such as those. It comes down to the teacher's attitude.

The University of Edinburgh offered some of its foreign students the opportunity to chum up with a school and talk to pupils about their country. A wide variety of languages was used among that group, from Malay to Polish and Chinese. That project was evaluated and proved to be highly successful. Young people in the primary schools to which those students went were excited to learn about Malaysia and the language that was spoken there, even though that was not one of the languages that would be taken through to

secondary school—it could be but, in the grand scheme of things, probably would not be.

Hanzala Malik: What support could you lend local authorities in establishing engagement with local organisations? I know that we can encourage local authorities to engage directly with the organisations in their areas, but I would like to know what, if any, support you could lend them. They should know that they can approach you to tap into that support.

Tim Simons: The funding that the Government will make available for that is yet to be confirmed but, if the Parliament approves the £4 million, we will discuss with COSLA how best local authorities can use it. When it is provided to local authorities, we will respect their approach to using it and, if that involved an innovative approach such as we have just discussed, we would support that.

John Bissett: When we talk about asking local authorities to have an audit of provision, we are thinking not only of teaching provision in schools but of wider parameters—what resources are available to schools in their communities or what partnerships can be developed with business in their areas—so that, when authorities develop their languages strategies, those strategies will be all-encompassing rather than based on what happens in particular schools.

That is about engagement with the community and drawing in resources that are on the doorstep or, through information technology, resources that are further afield. It is also about links with universities or cultural organisations. We are trying to get schools and authorities to think about the resources that exist more widely rather than just those that are near at hand.

That touches on a previous question about which languages should be taught. A few years ago, Spain thought about extending its language provision, but that is easier in a country where, almost naturally, English is seen as the first additional language that young people should learn. The situation is different in the UK and Scotland. Historically, schools have delivered a variety of languages. In a sense, we have to start from where schools are. For example, it is interesting that some schools in the east of Scotland offer German and French, whereas in parts of the west of Scotland, schools tend to offer French and Spanish. A variety of languages are already on offer.

Tim Simons talked about the image that schools project and whether they value all the languages that children bring to the school with them and offer parents opportunities to engage with the school in relation to the mother tongue. Schools that do that have the kind of ethos that makes young people more likely to have an interest in

languages and a disposition to learn them. In a sense, it does not matter what first additional language young people learn, because it is generally recognised that the more proficient someone is in one language, the easier it is to learn another. If we encourage young people to pick up a first additional language, the chances are that they will go on to learn other languages as and when that is appropriate for them or when they come to make choices about life and work.

The issue is all about trying to encourage schools and authorities to think about their languages strategy in the round and to consider how they can draw on the range of supports that already exist.

Willie Coffey: I seek your thoughts on how we design the curriculum to support the process, if that is necessary. If the strategy works, it will push through from primary to secondary level the demand to learn modern foreign languages. I am thinking about science and engineering students. Even at the moment, does that group of youngsters expect to pick up modern foreign languages, and can the current curriculum accommodate that? I know of one or two examples in my local authority area in which it has been particularly difficult for youngsters to match their choice of foreign languages with, for example, science subjects. I expect that that will happen more often. Has any thinking or planning been done to ensure that the process is smooth and that children are offered the subjects that they want?

Tim Simons: You make a valid point. Our scientists and engineers of the future will need to speak another language. Scientists and engineers from all over the world work here, and they bring with them opportunities—they know their mother tongue plus another language and they are perhaps working in English.

The employers representative on the languages working group talked about a German drilling company that was looking for someone to work in the middle east. The person who was going to get the job was a Libyan who could speak English and German, so he was a shoo-in for it. We want our engineers and scientists of the future to know another language and to have the disposition and preparedness in life to learn another language.

Mr Coffey asked how we fit that into the curriculum. That is where innovation is crucial. Some schools provide exposure to other languages in innovative ways, and we would like those approaches to be much more mainstreamed. For example, John Ogilvie high school provides physical education lessons in Spanish, so the young people's language skills in Spanish will concern numbers and exercises and things such as that. That is providing language in

a new and innovative curricular area. It reinforces the point that there is more to learning than speaking your own mother tongue—English.

If young people start to learn a second language from primary 1, they will be at a much higher level when they start secondary school than if they started to learn a second language in primary 6. They will probably not need as much language learning in secondary school. I know that it is a lot more complicated than that, but I hope that, through good planning, the engineers, scientists and social studies students of the future will be more open to learning another language. We are not necessarily talking about absolute fluency; it is about a broad capability to communicate and to take that further and learn another language to fluency for employment purposes. I hope that a lot of increased fluency will be achieved.

John Bissett: Four of the pilot projects this year are looking at languages in secondary school—in broad general education and at the senior phase. When young people come to make choices, they might go down the sciences route. We would be keen to encourage young people to pick up languages later in the senior phase. That would not have to be at the level of a higher; there are lots of SQA awards for work purposes, or for life and work, that young people can pick up in sixth year to sit alongside qualifications in sciences.

As Tim Simons suggested, we hope that the policy's long-term impact will be that, when young people go to secondary school, they already have a bank of learning in languages that will make it easier for them to pick up additional qualifications further up the school.

Clare Adamson: Tim Simons has partly answered my questions already. I return to your comments about the students from the University of Edinburgh. Are we using the Erasmus programme to best advantage? The Scottish Government has just changed the funding rules for studying abroad. They used to be based on the provision in the country in which someone was studying, but such study is now being funded on the same basis as that for someone who was studying in Scotland. Is there enough knowledge out there about the Erasmus programme? What can be done to encourage more Scottish students to spend time studying abroad?

Tim Simons: I should say that the learning directorate is not responsible for Erasmus; it is a higher education responsibility. Better awareness of Erasmus would be beneficial. Part of the reason for the poor uptake of Erasmus by Scottish students is the lack of confidence in language skills.

When the policy is adopted and implemented to the level that we hope it will be, it will result in a

whole new cohort of young people who are much more confident about using languages and who are keen to do so. The scientists and engineers who are studying here will be keen to go to Germany, France or indeed China to spend a year continuing their studies and to bring back all the advantages that they will acquire as a result. That will be a wonderful addition to their CVs.

This is a chicken-and-egg situation. How do we get the demand for such places without the language skills? The Government is trying to break that cycle by getting children to start learning another language in primary 1, which will change attitudes to languages and mean that a whole new cohort of young people is much more aware of and skilled in languages.

Clare Adamson: I appreciate the answer. Are enough of the teachers who are training involved in Erasmus? Are there opportunities for study abroad for primary and secondary teachers when they are training?

10:45

Tim Simons: Again, that is about changing attitudes. Teachers would perhaps see the opportunities that are available.

The Scottish Government funds the British Council to arrange opportunities for English language assistants. All undergraduates who are studying a language here spend their third year in a foreign country. The converse is that students who are studying English in another country can come here as assistants.

That was picked up in the languages working group report. The balance between incoming foreign language assistants and outgoing English language assistants is completely out of kilter. Many more English language assistants go abroad than the number of foreign language assistants who come here. We hope that that can be addressed if local authorities see the opportunities to employ foreign language assistants. That is a cheap way of getting a native speaker to come here.

I repeat the point that Dr Allan made in the debate last May, which is that, if local authorities were to use the £4 million that has been earmarked for next year simply for foreign language assistants, it would provide enough funding for 500 foreign language assistants to work in Scottish schools. If we compare that with the 71 assistants that we have at the moment, we can see the impact of such an initiative.

The Convener: Rod Campbell wants to ask a question, but we are really pushed for time.

Roderick Campbell: Do not worry—I am happy to leave it if we are short of time.

The Convener: I thank the witnesses for coming along. I have no doubt that we could have spent much more time exploring some of the avenues. We may come back to you on some of the issues that came up during the meeting.

10:47

Meeting suspended.

10:50

On resuming—

Consular Support for Scottish Citizens Abroad

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is consideration of a paper on the United Kingdom Government and EU consular procedures for providing support to families affected by bereavement of citizens abroad. The information has been compiled following a request from our colleague Bob Doris MSP that the committee seek an update on the UK Government's current processes for dealing with this issue.

I welcome Bob Doris to the meeting—we are delighted to have him here. Mr Doris, I believe that you wish to make some comments on the back of your request.

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): Thank you very much, convener. I am delighted to be here today, too, and I thank you for the preparatory work on this issue that has been carried out on the committee's behalf.

I will very briefly provide some context as to why I have a constituency interest in the issue. A few years ago, the son of a constituent, Julie Love, died in Venezuela, and it was felt that the support that she and her family received after Colin passed away was unsatisfactory. No matter whether the support came from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, local authorities or, indeed, support services in Scotland, it was clear that there was a need for improvement.

I have done a lot of work on finding out how such support might be improved, and indeed the situation is improving. However, it was felt that the first step in seeking to provide more consistent support to families when people pass away in other countries should be at a European level with the institution of the EU itself.

Since writing to you, convener, I have met Victim Support Scotland, Strathclyde Police, the Lord Advocate and a number of other bodies to discuss the issue, and one thing that has come on to my radar is that a European victims directive is to be in place by 2015 to ensure more consistency in the support provided. I am certainly keen for that to happen.

This, then, is not just a case of my representing one constituent; a number of people across Scotland have been drawn to my attention via the formation of Death Abroad—You're Not Alone, a new support group that has been set up in Scotland for families whose relatives have died overseas.

The intention is to have a consistent quality of support, not just for Scots who die in Germany but, say, Germans who die in Scotland, Spain or France, via the European victim support network and other authorities. I would be very keen for the European and External Relations Committee to give some cognisance to this issue and to get some information on the European victims directive that will be in place by 2015. I will certainly be following the issue and am keen to make representations, perhaps via this committee, on how to improve the situation.

The Convener: Thank you very much for that. It is always helpful to have some background to put things in context.

As members will see, the Scottish Parliament information centre has produced a paper that sets out our investigations into the matter. I invite members to make comments or ask Bob Doris questions.

Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I thank Bob Doris for the paper and the information that we have received, and I congratulate him on this work. I, too, have been affected by the issue, having helped a constituent whose son died in an accident in Thailand. It was a major trauma for everyone concerned, and Mr Doris is right to highlight the real problems with, for example, getting the body repatriated. In the end, the family had to have a cremation to bring the costs down from £17,000 to £8,000 but even then, as you can imagine, getting £8,000 together was a huge issue for two pensioners. We managed to raise the funds locally, but having helped the family I am aware of the pertinence of the points that Mr Doris has made.

There is certainly a need to be met. For example, the SPICe paper that we received this morning highlights the very good approach that seems to have been taken in Denmark, which will provide support to repatriate the body. However, it is the only country that seems to have such a facility at the moment. The fact is that not everyone has insurance, and the other message that we need to get across and promote to members of the travelling public is that they must work through the small print of their insurance policies.

I welcome the establishment of the organisation that Bob Doris spoke about. We as a Parliament should do what we can to support such an initiative, which is important. It is all very well for us to say that the matter is reserved to Westminster and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office but, if we all care, the bottom line is that we must ensure that the best support is in place for the affected individuals.

We should not leave families or the MSPs and others who support them to paddle their own boats. That is not the way forward—the best thing to do is to provide the maximum help and support. I would support further work by the committee on what we can do to give assistance.

Bob Doris: Helen Eadie mentioned reserved matters, but significant devolved matters are at play, too. For example, how the police deliver a death message is not consistent across Scotland—perhaps that will improve with the national police force. There is also no consistency in the police referring families to Victim Support Scotland for support. The police are looking at improving that, which I have discussed with them. I have given just two examples from the devolved setting; the committee might decide that devolved matters are at play, too.

Jamie McGrigor: Helen Eadie mentioned insurance. As far as I know, most people take out insurance when they go on holiday abroad. Do you know what the insurance position is? Does insurance not cover the situation? Are people being conned into thinking that they are safe and that all such things are taken care of, when they are not?

Bob Doris: I need more information on that, to be honest. There are two different situations. Sometimes people have been travelling overseas, but sometimes Scots who made their lives overseas are involved, so they do not have travel insurance. I will not give the details, but I have a friend who eventually decided on a cremation in France because of the expense of storing the body in France and returning the body to Scotland. No one should face such a choice in the European Union.

I have made the suggestion, which I am taking forward, that the travel industry has a role to play. When booking flights online, we have all seen boxes to click on to donate £2 to this or £1 to that. Perhaps the travel industry has a role in helping to provide funds for families who are in such terrible situations.

Travel insurance is a key responsibility, but families of people who do not take out travel insurance should not be punished and should not suffer because of an individual traveller's choice.

Jamie McGrigor: Do not get me wrong—I think that you make an important point. I agree with Helen Eadie that we should look into the issue. I just wanted to get the facts about insurance straight.

Hanzala Malik: Jamie McGrigor is right that it is people's responsibility to have insurance, but we need to appreciate that many insurance companies do not insure people in many countries. We have people of 150-odd nationalities

living in Scotland. When those people travel overseas to visit family and friends, or even for business, insurance companies simply will not insure them while they are out there.

Insurance policies play safe. Companies ask people what issues they have, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart conditions, kidney conditions or whatever, and then say that they will not cover people for those conditions. I do not know what the companies cover people for; they take money from us but they do not cover us for the issues that may be a problem.

Insurance companies are quite selfish in reducing people's cover—they find ways of not paying out. Unfortunately, a lot of people are caught out by that. They do not see the small print and they get the insurance. They go abroad and have an issue, but the insurance company says, "Ah—you didn't tell us about this, so we're not covering you." Families are then left to pick up the tab.

The most important element is the human dimension. When our people go overseas, their families need to know that, if an issue arises, our Government will step in and support them. That is an important aspect.

I am particularly keen to support the directive because it will take away that fear and burden from families and give a proper structure for dealing with issues. I know that there will be complications. For example, if a body is being sent back home from overseas, people will ask who is going to examine it, whether it is carrying any diseases and so on. There will therefore be issues to be dealt with, but I think that we can deal with them. It is just a matter of sitting down and going through them.

I therefore recommend strongly, convener, that this committee continues to support the directive and tries to find ways of accommodating it.

11:00

The Convener: Okay. Thanks for that. Helen, did you want to come back in on a specific point?

Helen Eadie: Yes, on the insurance issue. Perhaps one of the things that we could do is write to the Association of British Insurers.

Gloria Hunniford highlighted on BBC television in the past week the issue of how the Association of British Travel Agents travel insurance is invalidated if people book online, as many of us do nowadays, their flights separately from their accommodation when going abroad. If people do not book a holiday package in that sense, they are not covered by ABTA insurance. That is the type of detail that the man or woman in the street might not necessarily pick up on. It is only when they are

confronted by the dilemmas that Bob Doris's constituent and my constituent have been affected by that people understand the detail. As I said, I suggest that we approach the ABI to ask whether it can comment on the issue or come and speak to us about it.

Jamie McGrigor: Good idea.

Willie Coffey: I thank Bob Doris for bringing the matter to the committee's attention. It is not a subject that I had particular knowledge about. To add to the discussion, there is also the situation of a person dying during a journey from one country to another. I have had some experience of constituents who have fallen into that category. The issue is where the responsibility lies in such cases. I hope that such situations might be considered as part of the EU victims directive that Bob Doris mentioned so that the position is clear and consistent and that people do not have the kind of worries that Bob Doris's constituent and other members' constituents have had to face.

Roderick Campbell: Good morning, Mr Doris. I have a couple of points. First, the proposed victims and witnesses bill will shortly be going through the Justice Committee. I would have thought that we would try to ensure as far as possible that the bill will reflect the EU directive. I do not know whether it is possible for you to engage with the Justice Committee on that kind of issue.

Secondly, for circumstances in which there is a fatal accident, I think that the Scottish Government is committed to introducing legislation in this session of Parliament to allow fatal accident inquiries to take place in Scotland for deaths that occur abroad, which is not the current position.

Those are just a couple of tweaks for the discussion. I think that you have raised an important issue, and I am glad that you have brought it to our attention.

Bob Doris: To respond briefly to Mr Campbell, I am delighted that the Scottish Government is going to legislate to lift the bar on fatal accident inquiries into deaths overseas. That proposal was based on a representation by my constituent Julie Love and me to Lord Cullen for his inquiry into the issue, and I am delighted that the Scottish Government has listened to it.

I thank committee members for their general support for what I have said, which is very much appreciated. I have a general point to make, though. Our initial discussion was about the repatriation of a loved one's body, but I should stress that there are other dimensions to the issue, such as when the police appoint a family liaison officer when a family contests that the death of a loved was sudden or unexplained but the authorities in the country in which the person died

do not agree. A light has to be shone on the back channels that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the police can use in such situations, so the issue is wider in that regard. That was one of the reasons why I thought that the European directive that is on the horizon might be of interest to this committee.

Finally, I want to draw the committee's attention to a particular event for which I hope I have got the dates right—I checked them in my notes of a meeting that I had with Victim Support Scotland just before Christmas. Victim Support Europe is holding a conference in Edinburgh between 29 and 31 May this year to explore further the kind of issues that we have discussed. I will attend the conference if I can, and the committee may be interested in it for its future work plan.

On a personal level, I will continue to pursue the matter. We should remember the human nature of the problem and the obvious fact that the European Union provides an excellent platform. We wrongly hear many negative things about the European Union, but surely, in this example, it has an exceptional role to play in supporting citizens across Europe at a time of incredible need. The committee may wish to follow that story.

The Convener: Ian Duncan is going to tell us a wee bit about the directive that Bob Doris mentioned.

Ian Duncan (Clerk and European Officer): Yes. The new victims directive might not be quite as useful as you think, as it will be a victims of crime directive—that will be its full title. Therefore, it will not cover those whose deaths abroad resulted from natural causes; rather, it will cover only those who have been affected by crime.

It might therefore be worth while if I look further into the matter when I go back to Brussels to see exactly what the scope of the directive is with regard to the criminal aspect and to see whether there are any proposals on the wider picture of death by natural causes. It might also be worth while if I bring back more information on what the EU sees as a good practice model. Consular support services work is currently being done in Brussels, and it might be worth while seeing whether the issue is being actively discussed at an EU level and whether more information will come back.

It might also be useful if I prepare a short paper that draws together the strands of today's discussion and includes the various letters that we will write and information that we draw back. I can bring that to the committee as soon as it is available, and we can then have a further discussion.

The Convener: There will need to be baby steps rather than giant steps, as there seem to be

different avenues. I do not know what members think about Ian Duncan's taking forward that piece of work and bringing information back at a later date for further discussion. I know that Bob Doris is taking his own actions, and it would be great if he kept us informed about how they are going. Does that next step forward seem reasonable?

Bob Doris: It certainly does. It is, of course, for the committee to decide its own work plan and way forward. I thank the committee for its extensive engagement with me on my involvement in plotting things out. The idea is excellent.

I am disappointed to hear that the directive might not be what I hoped that it would be, but perhaps an outcome of today's discussion will be that we could expand the directive's remit. Would not it be something if the committee and I helped to instigate a direction of travel at the European Union level that improves the lives of families throughout the European Union?

The Convener: I do not know about the early stage of the directives process and whether two years from a directive's being brought in is at an early stage. It might not be in European Union terms: it might be a very late stage, with the early stage having been five years ago. Perhaps Ian Duncan can shed light on that.

Ian Duncan: Yes, I can. The directive is at quite a late stage. The expectation is that the directive will be finalised in the coming months, because the current Commission will demit office in May 2014, so it is quite far on. However, the next Commission, which will come in in 2014, will have to set out its own work programme at that point, and it may well adopt the issue as it begins to look at its five-year term of office. It is therefore not impossible to amend the particular directive, but that might not be in parallel with its scope. That said, the matter can be explored more thoroughly in the European Parliament. After 2014, the next Commission may well be able to take the issue forward.

The Convener: There are a few opportunities to take steps forward. Perhaps we can bring in the information that Ian Duncan will gather.

Hanzala Malik: I am considering the speed of the process. I am sorry, but it sounds rather slow to me. The direction needs to be multifunctional; we need to do several things simultaneously rather than take one step at a time.

The Parliament has a wonderful opportunity to put something in place for our community. Bob Doris has had the vision to bring the issue forward. He has the experience that his constituents have faced, which he has made us aware of. It is now up to us to support him to ensure that we deliver sooner rather than later.

Therefore, I think that we need to be proactive—we should contact the European Union sooner rather than later. Let us not wait until the new Commission comes in; let us get on with it. If the present Commission decides to pass the matter on to the next Commission, that is its prerogative, but we should not hold back. I think that we should push to make the process move a little faster so that members of other communities do not face the same difficulties that some constituents already face.

The Convener: We have various bits of information. There is an opportunity for the committee to hold an inquiry on issues such as police consistency, the travel industry, insurance and so on. The other aspect is the European directive. When are you next in Brussels, Ian?

Ian Duncan: I am next in Brussels at the end of the month. I can certainly have early discussions at that point. We can move very quickly. The European Union moves very slowly, but that is not a reason for us not to move quickly.

Roderick Campbell: What about interaction with the UK Government, bearing in mind that this is a reserved matter?

Ian Duncan: The early engagement that I would have would establish what avenues exist for taking forward such work. The first step would be to find out how we do that, where we should go and what would need to happen. I will come back with that information. You are quite right that the UK Government, as the member state, would have to be active in support of such a proposal.

Helen Eadie: I think that I read somewhere in the sea of papers that we have had that inquiries are being made with the consulates in Scotland; I do not remember whether Bob Doris is doing that or whether our committee clerks are doing it. If it is identified that there is a problem in other nations in the EU, perhaps we could ask the consulates what voluntary organisations there are in those other member states that provide support, with which we could link up. A networking approach might be a useful way forward.

If the issue is not on anyone's radar just now but other countries share the same concerns, the question is how we can get it into a directive or get the Commission to think about bringing forward a directive on it. I feel sure that a directive in this area would command support across the EU.

The Convener: Bob Doris will no doubt correct me if I am wrong, but I think that Victim Support Europe is pushing for the victims directive. Is that right?

Bob Doris: Victim Support Scotland informed me about it. I do not know for sure, but I suspect that that is the case.

The Convener: Does the plan of action that has been suggested meet with what we need? We need detailed information on the directive and on the European dimension of engagement with the UK Government before we can take matters forward. At that stage, we can have a discussion about how we want to deal with police consistency, the travel industry, insurance and so on.

Do you have any final comments, Bob?

Bob Doris: I have some brief ones, because I know that time is pressing. I will not go into the detail of what the convener has suggested, because it is for the committee to decide on its own course of action.

As far as the reserved nature of the issue is concerned, I point out that when the Local Government and Communities Committee, of which I was a member, visited Brussels—we met Mr McIver when we were out there—we found out that Europe was very surprised that committees of the Scottish Parliament do not make direct representations as often as other nations and regions do. We were encouraged to do that far more. That is an important point to put on the record.

I also have a serious point to make about networking. I very much appreciate the committee's clerks contacting various European consulates in Edinburgh. I was minded to have a networking event in the Parliament that would allow us to put a human face to the experiences that the various consulates have had. I would be happy to do that in conjunction with the committee, if it so chose.

No country likes it when other nations say that what it is doing is not good enough. It is a question of working in partnership and getting a degree of consensus. If we want to get a degree of consensus across Europe, I think that the network of consulates in Edinburgh would be an excellent place to start. I am keen to have such an event, and I would be happy if the committee wished to do something in partnership with me.

The Convener: Given the committee's work programme over the next few months, we would be very keen to have you do some of the work to inform the process. That would be extremely helpful.

Bob Doris: Okay.

Helen Eadie: But we will support you.

The Convener: Yes, we will. Thanks very much.

“Brussels Bulletin”

11:15

The Convener: We move on to agenda item 3, which is the “Brussels Bulletin”. We are really pushed for time, so Ian Duncan has said that he will be quick. If members have any questions about the bulletin, please get them in quickly.

Ian Duncan: I will just go through a couple of the things that are in the bulletin. The big thing that is worth noting is that the EU budget for the coming year has been passed. As members may remember, there were some discussions about how the failure to agree the budget would affect various funding programmes. I draw your attention to the comments from the EU budget commissioner, who has said:

“There is a serious risk that we will run out of funds early in the course of next year. I am concerned that by systematically cutting the Commission's estimates, the Council transforms the EU annual budget in a budget for 9 to 10 months; last year we ran out of cash to pay all the claims in November, this year was in October and next year I expect this to happen even earlier.”

That is something to bear in mind.

The common fisheries policy negotiations are on-going, but the fishing quota negotiations in December have taken place. I know that the deputy convener has been interested in the mackerel issue, which has not yet been resolved. The quotas for mackerel, which are set bilaterally between the EU and Norway, have not yet been set. All the quotas for the North Sea stocks have yet to be set because the mackerel issue has not been resolved. The quotas for the mackerel and herring stocks have not been set. That discussion should take place in January, but you will see that progress has been very slow on that.

On cigarette packaging, it is worth while noting that the original plan that there should be no fancy packaging but just brown packaging has been set aside. There will be large health warnings, but there will not be complete brown-paper packaging. There is a proposal to ban flavoured cigarettes, such as menthol cigarettes, outright.

On funding for renewables projects, Scotland has been successful, with two projects having received money. One of those is in the Sound of Islay and the other is in the Kyle Rhea area.

One final point is that it is worth while noting that the gender ruling on insurance finally came into place on 21 December. You might well find in your postbags correspondence from both men and women complaining—in different directions, no doubt—about the increase in the cost of their insurance policies.

Jamie McGrigor: Does the fact that we now have an EU budget mean that we now have a budget figure for the common agricultural policy?

Ian Duncan: No, it does not. A budget has been agreed only for this year of 2013. The big discussions on the multi-annual financial framework, which covers 2014 to 2020, have not yet been resolved. The multi-annual financial framework will give us the figure for the CAP and other things. However, the agreement means that the Parliament and the Council seem willing to compromise on this year's budget, which might or might not be a good sign for the negotiations over the bigger financial framework.

Roderick Campbell: The bulletin includes a useful marker about this being the European year of citizens. Will you follow that up with a bit more detail on what will actually happen for the year?

Ian Duncan: Yes, I can do so. The European year of citizens is an EU-wide idea, but basically the member state has to say what it intends to do. It might be useful to provide a small note on what the UK and Scottish Governments intend to do to mark the year of citizens.

Roderick Campbell: That would be helpful.

Hanzala Malik: On the mackerel issue, given Iceland's involvement in fishing for the mackerel reserves that we helped to build, what action if any are we taking? Is there the possibility of a ban on imports of fish from Iceland because of that?

Ian Duncan: You are quite right to raise the issue again. You will recall that, when we spoke about this the last time, the discussion of a ban on various aspects was imminent. The ban has run into the ground, primarily because the imports affect employment inside the EU for the processing of the mackerel. The issue has therefore become a little bit more complicated than one might have liked. At the moment, that is still on-going. It is hoped—I think that this is a slightly forlorn hope—that the January negotiations will resolve the issues. I will provide more information when I come back from Brussels, but I am not overly optimistic that the issues can be resolved, and they may lead to questions about the quotas for the North Sea. The Icelandic issue is the one that has to be lanced.

Hanzala Malik: How can we engage to try to ensure that there is some sort of recompense by the Icelandic Government on that issue?

Ian Duncan: It might be worth while my having informal discussions with the Scottish Government to see where it stands on the issue. I know that the UK Government has expressed concerns about the employment issues, but I would like to find out a bit more about where Scotland stands. If I can find that out, I can bring it back and say exactly

what the Scottish and UK Governments intend to do to try to bring the issue to resolution.

Willie Coffey: On the announcement about new funding for carbon capture and storage, how is that funding opportunity made known to Scottish companies?

Ian Duncan: You might remember that the Longannet plant in Scotland was up for funding but, for various reasons, did not secure it. The money was intended to go to a large French operation, but in the end the funding fell through because the operation was unable to meet the criteria that would have been the justification for securing the money. Therefore, no money was spent on carbon capture and storage, which was surprising.

I assume that the Scottish Government will be pushing hard in the new funding cycle to get money for Longannet and that Longannet will be further on in the process. I believe that the Scottish Government is currently discussing the opportunity with the energy companies—the stakeholders who have the potential facilities—and encouraging them to be ready for that particular funding stream. It is a lot of money.

Willie Coffey: So the companies will be fully aware that the funding announcement has been made?

Ian Duncan: Yes, I am absolutely certain of that.

The Convener: Is the committee content to send the "Brussels Bulletin" to other committees for their perusal?

Members indicated agreement.

European Union Funds

11:21

The Convener: Agenda item 4 is our exploration of the range of EU funds that are available. Paper 4 goes into some detail on that. Ian Duncan will give us a brief overview. I have picked up on one area of concern in the paper—Ian may mention it.

Ian Duncan: The excellent paper was produced by Iain McIver in SPICe. It was a mammoth task. What seemed initially to be an easy question to ask has proven to be a hard one to answer. There is a useful table at the end of the paper that allows members to scan the various funds. Iain has helpfully laid out each fund, what each fund is meant to do, how the funds are allocated, the overall EU budget that is available to the whole of the EU and how much Scotland has drawn down.

There are two types of funding streams. One is what I will term pre-allocated, which basically means that the negotiations on the multi-annual financial framework take place, the budget heads are set and that is the amount of money that the UK, including Scotland, gets. That covers things such as structural funds and the common agricultural policy.

The other, more interesting funding stream—the one that the committee is touching on—involves large pots of money that Scottish organisations and Scottish bodies can draw down if they are successful. However, they are competitive funds, so they have to be secured in open competition across the whole of the EU. It is important to note that match funding plays a key part in that process. If organisations do not have sufficient funds to get into the round, we will not have great success in drawing down the moneys.

It is worth while drawing attention to a point that the convener alluded to. A scan of the list of Scottish draw-downs shows that, on a number of occasions, the figures are simply unknown. Reasons given for that include the fact that many draw-downs involve not the Scottish Government, but other organisations, so the Government is less aware of the details. However, I am sure that somebody somewhere must have a book that sets out exactly what Scotland has drawn down, so that they know whether Scotland is a net recipient of funds. Somebody has to know. The EU will know, but one would hope that somebody closer to home would know, too. One recommendation in the paper is that the committee should ask that question, because somebody somewhere must have that information.

The paper covers the period up to 2014, which is the end of the current funding cycle. The next

funding cycle is important as well. I suggest that the committee asks the Scottish Government where things stand with regard to that. How successful is the Government being in securing the big budget heads such as those for the CAP, which Jamie McGrigor raised earlier and structural funds? That negotiation is on-going and an update on it would be useful.

Other committees would be interested in the paper, so I suggest that we circulate it. This committee should think about what it wants to do once it has more information from the Government on those other funds.

Helen Eadie: I, too, congratulate Iain McIver. It is an exceptionally good paper that was a huge undertaking for him, as it was for us to read our way through it. The paper is fantastic and it is important to share it with colleagues across the Parliament. All MSPs should have sight of the paper.

I agree with the recommendations. It concerns me that we do not have the information on the figures. As Ian Duncan said, there may be good explanations for that, but it is important that we get the information. We either get it from the Scottish Government or go to Brussels—not physically, but by asking Brussels for it. It is vital that we get the information, because some of the figures that we are talking about are higher than the whole of the Scottish Government's budget. We could draw down that funding and grow the budget.

We talk about shovel-ready projects and so on, but there are possibilities of getting more money if people work much harder and the Scottish Government puts the highest priority on getting all the money that can be drawn down. I realise that there is a fixed pot of money, but there is also the draw-down money for research, which is separate. That is what the committee has to focus on.

The Convener: You are absolutely right. If we send the paper to all the committees, at least all MSPs will get a sight of it.

I am concerned about the unknowns. Some of the unknown money will be at the local authority level. In a match-funded project that I ran, the money came through the local authority and not through any Government—it came direct from Brussels to the local authority. There are avenues to gather some of that information.

The other thing that crossed my mind is that, as members will remember, when we took evidence on the multi-annual financial framework, some people in the sector said that there should be a central Government strategy, and that an agency in one of the Government directorates should communicate appropriately, actively seek out additional funding and then distribute it. Perhaps we could follow that up at a later date.

Jamie McGrigor: Ian Duncan states in the “Brussels Bulletin” that somebody has complained that the budget is not big enough. That person stated that, two years ago, the EU ran out of money in November; last year, it ran out in October; and this year, he suggested, it will run out even earlier. I presume that that affects all the grants that we are discussing.

Ian Duncan: It affects some more than others. You might remember that one of the big impacts of a failure to secure the budget would have been that the Erasmus moneys would immediately be at risk.

Jamie McGrigor: I note from the bulletin that an extra €6 billion has been dedicated—I do not know whether it is for that particular project, but it is for research and development. I imagine that it is for the Erasmus project.

Ian Duncan: Yes. Other sources of money had to be sought. The problem is always that all these commitments are made, but they are almost unfunded commitments. The member states then come along and say, “We don’t want to put that money in,” so we end up with high-level commitments and low-level funding. That is a frustration that almost everyone in Brussels has. There is always a discrepancy between the two, and that causes the very problems that we are witnessing now.

There is no doubt that the EU does not like running out of money before the end of the year, for the obvious reason that, if that happens, projects cannot be completed.

Willie Coffey: I support everything that has been said so far. How is it made known to organisations in Scotland that they are eligible to apply for the funds? For example, the European partnership on sports has €3.5 million available to tackle things such as the fight against match fixing. That might not be applicable in Scotland, although we do not know. [*Laughter.*] How are organisations made aware that the funds are there and that they can apply for them? Is that part of the remit of either the UK Government or the Scottish Government?

Ian Duncan: That is a good question. The convener touched on the issue. There are lots of funds, but if people do not know that they exist, how can they prepare to draw down the money? On the sport example, it is fascinating to read what we could get funding for. I am not quite sure who would be the person to draw down the money in that instance. We might want to put the question to the Scottish Government and ask it what strategies it has to make potential recipients aware of the sources of funding at the EU level and what support could be offered to help them engage with that.

The Convener: Are we happy with the recommendations? We will contact the Scottish Government and get updates on the multi-annual financial framework and some of the other issues, and we will circulate the paper to the subject committees. Once we have the updates, we can agree our approach. Are members happy with that?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Helen Eadie: Convener, I have a parliamentary question to ask in the chamber and it is fairly high up on the agenda. Will we be finished in time for me to get away?

The Convener: We will be. We have to be. We are not allowed to sit at the same time as the Parliament, so I am conscious of the time.

Foreign Language Learning in Primary Schools Inquiry

11:29

The Convener: Item 5 on the agenda is our foreign language learning in primary schools inquiry. Jenny Goldsmith has put together a brief report on the formal launch of the inquiry, which took place at Dalmarnock primary school. Do you want to say anything about it, Jenny?

Jenny Goldsmith (Clerk): I will be brief, as I am aware of the time and the fact that Helen Eadie needs to get away.

I will highlight the main points quickly—I will not go through them all. In the evidence-taking session, we dealt with issues such as funding and parents' and teachers' engagement. The report also touches on the qualification issues, towards the end of page 1. Hanzala Malik and Christina McKelvie attended the meeting, so they can answer any questions that members might have.

The Convener: It was an excellent morning. "Impressed" is probably too weak a word to use with regard to our impression of the skills, motivation and understanding of the kids, parents and teachers. The key factor in that was the leadership of the headteacher. If we could capture what she has and put it in a bottle so that we could administer it to every headteacher in the country, we would be in a good place.

Hanzala Malik: Most headteachers would duplicate that feeling. I genuinely feel that our school staff have faced great challenges, historically, and they seem to do better and better, year after year. I was absolutely impressed with the level of commitment of the staff, pupils and parents. I hope and pray that we can replicate that across Scotland, because I think that our kids deserve it.

The Convener: The inquiry will continue. We can simply note the report and incorporate its findings into the final report.

Our next meeting will be on 24 January. We will speak to some academics and take forward issues around the human trafficking directive.

The meeting with the Canadian delegation has been shifted from 2.15 to 3.15, because their timetable has changed. An email was sent out yesterday to say that that was the case. Members should let the clerks know whether you wish to attend.

Helen Eadie: I believe that a meeting is scheduled with the Bulgarian ambassador, too. Is it possible for me to be included in that meeting?

The Convener: Absolutely. I did not think that you would miss that opportunity.

Helen Eadie: I had not seen anything about it in the emails.

I apologise to Jenny Goldsmith. I will read her report.

The Convener: The information about the Bulgarian ambassador was sent out by the UK and international relations office. That went to all members.

Helen Eadie: Did it? Sorry. I must have missed it.

Jamie McGrigor: When is the Canadian meeting?

The Convener: It is on 24 January.

Jamie McGrigor: And it has been moved to what time?

The Convener: It has been moved from 2.15 to 3.15.

Okay, Helen, you had better be off.

Meeting closed at 11:33.

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