

EDUCATION IN THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

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PREAMBLE

This paper follows on from the previous bulletin (Redford 2011), which covered the education and lifelong learning remit of the Parliament's Education Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee from September 2010 to March 2011, completing the third session of the Parliament (2007 – 2011). The fourth session of Parliament (2011 – 2016) opened on the 1 June 2011. This paper presents the new members of the Education and Culture Committee and the work they undertook in the first meetings of the new session between June and August 2011.

JUNE 2011 - AUGUST 2011

The Education and Culture Committee had the following members during this period: Stewart Maxwell (Convener), Claire Baker (Deputy Convener), Clare Adamson, Marco Biagi, Jenny Marra, Joan McAlpine, Liam McArthur, Liz Smith and Jean Urquhart. Full records of the Committee meetings, including minutes, official papers and transcripts of proceedings can be found on the Scottish Parliament website at: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s4/committees/ellc/meetings.htm>

The Committee members have held three meetings since their election to Parliament in May 2011. At their first meetings in June they elected a Convener and Deputy Convener of the Committee and heard presentations from the Scottish Government about their priorities for education and culture. The third meeting was a business planning meeting held by the Committee in private during the summer recess.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS AND CHOICE OF CONVENER

The Committee held their first meeting of the new session on the 14 June 2011. The papers provided new members with information about the declaration of their interests within the remit of the Committee (EC/S4/11/1), choosing a Convener and Deputy Convener (EC/S4/11/2) and the development of the Committee work programme (EC/S4/11/3). The meeting opened with Jean Urquhart, as the oldest member of the Committee, in the chair. She welcomed members to the meeting and asked for declarations of interest. The following members then made declarations of interest: Clare Adamson as a member of North Lanarkshire Council, Joan McAlpine as the author of a weekly column for The Scotsman newspaper and Jean Urquhart as a member of the Highland Council and member of that Council's Education, Culture and Sport Committee. The Committee then moved on to

choose the Convener. The chair reminded Committee members that Parliament had agreed that only members of the Scottish National Party were eligible for nomination as Convener of the Education and Culture Committee. Clare Adamson nominated Stewart Maxwell who was chosen as Convener and took the chair of the meeting. The newly chosen Convener then asked for nominations for Deputy Convener, reminding the Committee that Parliament had agreed that only members of the Scottish Labour Party were eligible to be chosen as Deputy Convener of the Committee. Jenny Marra nominated Claire Baker who was chosen as Deputy Convener. The Committee ended their first meeting with a discussion of their work programme for 2011 – 2012. They agreed to hold a business planning meeting during the summer recess and to request a briefing from the Scottish Government on their priorities relating to the work of the Committee at their next meeting on the 28 June 2012.

WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee took evidence from Michael Russell, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning on the 28 June 2011. They then considered their work programme in private and agreed to seek approval for the appointment of an adviser in connection with its budget scrutiny and to consider a list of candidates for that post at their next meeting.

Date of Committee	Witnesses
28 June 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michael Russell, <i>Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Scottish Government</i>

The Convener welcomed the Cabinet Secretary to the meeting and congratulated him on his continuing post. The Cabinet Secretary opened his remarks by reminding the Committee of his vision statement, ‘about improving the life chances of Scotland’s children and young people by improving attainment for all, and by raising and realising ambition for all’ (Russell, 28.06.11, Col 17). He then listed the priority areas for the government, beginning with early years and early intervention, the use of the change fund and the development of a national parenting strategy. He indicated the government’s intention to introduce legislation to ensure that ‘investment in early years is not an optional extra and that the Getting it Right for Every Child approach works throughout Scotland (Russell, 28.06.11, Col 17). He went on to identify literacy, and language learning, as areas for development in schools. He noted the McCormac review of teacher’s terms and conditions, which would report at the end of August or the start of September 2011. He then indicated that he would be setting out in Parliament reforms for post-16 education, which included a previously announced review of higher education led by Professor von Prondzynski. Liz Smith asked the first question of the Cabinet Secretary, enquiring about the timescales for any proposed legislation. Michael Russell replied he intended to work towards legislation on higher and further education within the next

18 months, with legislation approved in 2012 – 2013 and the new measures in place by 2012 – 2014. Jean Urquhart followed this with a question about the moratorium on rural school closures announced in May 2011. In reply the Cabinet Secretary listed the closures he had recently called in, or been asked to rule on:

I have called in the two closures in Shetland, and I refused to allow Aberdeenshire Council to close two schools last week. I have called in the decision on Robslee primary school, and I think that one or two others are pending call-in (Russell 28.06.11, Col 19).

Claire Baker moved the questions back to higher education and asked for more information about the European Union service charge. Michael Russell declined to provide the information as he would be presenting the information to Parliament. The discussion then turned back to rural schools, with Liam McArthur asking about closures happening when there was community support for the closure. In reply Michael Russell gave the example of Pinwherry primary school in South Ayrshire, where the children were moving to a new school and the community was in agreement with the closure of the old primary school. Joan McAlpine asked the Cabinet Secretary about arrangements to monitor the attainment outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence (CFE). In reply Michael Russell outlined the assessment work supported by Education Scotland and the statistics, which are published twice-yearly. He concluded his statement with an offer to the Committee to visit schools, 'to see CFE in action and talk to the profession' (Russell 28.06.11, Col 23). Marco Biagi followed this with a question about the relationship between the government and the teaching unions over the implementation of CFE. In reply the secretary said that there was a strong commitment in the classroom to CFE, but that, 'It is always difficult to introduce a major reform if, at the same time, there is downward pressure on resources,' (Russell 28.06.11, Col 23). The discussion then moved to the college sector and the issue of compulsory redundancies, with Jenny Marra asking Michael Russell about his policy of no compulsory redundancies. In reply he said he had suggested to the colleges in March 2011 that they apply a policy of no compulsory redundancies, but that not all colleges had achieved that. He went on to say how surprised he had been that there were over 40 different agreements on terms and conditions in the sector, and that he had urged colleges to move towards one set of national terms and conditions. He said that he would be providing further information in his statement to Parliament about the need for, 'a more rational map of provision' (Russell 28.06.11, Col 25). Clare Adamson turned the questions back to CFE and asked the Cabinet Secretary what the government intended to do to inform the business community about CFE. Michael Russell replied that the business community was fully supportive of CFE and the timetable for new qualifications. The questions then moved to focus on the McCormac report on teacher's pay and conditions, with Liz Smith asking about the government timescale for assessing the report. Michael Russell replied:

It is my intention to respond to that as promptly as I can, but the report will then be fed in to the SNCT process, so any recommendations in the report on changing terms and conditions would require to be negotiated through that process. That is the means by which teachers' terms and conditions are set (Russell 28.06.11, Col 27).

The meeting ended with a question from Liam McArthur about the government priority to improve language teaching in schools. In reply Michael Russell talked about the introduction of the Barcelona scheme, where over the next 13 years:

. . . . as children go from primary 1 to sixth form, they will acquire a knowledge of their own language plus a working knowledge of two others. The degree of knowledge will vary. Some young people will take another language to fluency or almost to fluency; some will simply be able to order a coffee in Spain, Latvia or wherever they choose to go (Russell 28.06.11 Col 28).

WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee discussed the role of the Committee's European Union Reporter at their second meeting on the 28 June 2011. This was supported by a SPICE paper which outlined the European Union issues for the Education and Culture Committee (EC/S4/11/2/3), and a note from the clerk explaining that the role was introduced towards the end of the third session of Parliament (EC/S4/11/2/2). The Convener reminded the Committee that the European Union had no legislative remit in education or culture and proposed that the Deputy Convener took the role. The Committee agreed and appointed Claire Baker MSP to serve as its European Union Reporter.

SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION

The Committee took evidence, debated and approved the following subordinate legislation related to education and lifelong learning during this period:

- Education Maintenance Allowances (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2011 (SSI2011/261).

REFERENCES

Redford, M. (2011) Education in the Scottish Parliament, *Scottish Educational Review*, 43(1), 86-105
Scottish Government (2006) *Getting it Right for Every Child, Implementation Plan*. Online at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/06/22092413/0> (accessed 18/03/11)