



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 15 June 2016

Session 5



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.parliament.scot or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Wednesday 15 June 2016

CONTENTS

	Col.
INTERESTS	1
CONVENER	3
DEPUTY CONVENER	4
EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE LEGACY REPORT	5
DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE	8

EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

1st Meeting 2016, Session 5

CONVENER

*James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)

*Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

*Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)

*Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)

*Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Roz Thomson

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education and Skills Committee

Wednesday 15 June 2016

[Colin Beattie opened the meeting at 10:00]

Interests

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the first meeting of the Education and Skills Committee. I remind everybody to ensure that their mobile phones are switched off, as they interfere with the sound system.

Apologies have been received from Tavish Scott, Ross Greer and Liz Smith.

The first item on the agenda is the declaration of interests. This is to allow committee members to declare any interests that they have that are relevant to their work on the committee. There is background information in the note from the clerk, which is paper 1. I will start by declaring my interests, and we will then go round the table from my left.

I have no interests to declare other than those that are already declared in my entry in the "Register of Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament".

Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con): I have no interests to declare other than what is noted in my entry in the register of interests.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I have no interests to declare other than what is noted in my entry in the register of interests.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I am a member of the Scottish Social Services Council and currently a councillor in North Lanarkshire Council.

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): I have no interest to declare other than what is already declared in my entry in the register of interests.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I have no interests to declare other than what is in my entry in the register of interests.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I have no interests to declare other than what is already contained in my entry in the register of interests.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): The one thing that I will note is my membership of the General Teaching Council for Scotland.

Colin Beattie: I am sure that the interests for the three members who are absent will be picked up at the committee's next meeting.

Convener

10:02

Colin Beattie: The second item on the agenda is the most important one: the choice of convener.

The procedure is explained in paper 2. The Parliament has agreed that only members of the Scottish National Party are eligible for nomination as convener of the committee. I understand that James Dornan is the party's nominee for the post. Do we agree to choose him as our convener?

Members indicated agreement.

James Dornan was chosen as convener.

Colin Beattie: In that case, James, congratulations. I will vacate the chair and hand over to you for the remainder of the meeting.

The Convener (James Dornan): Thank you, Colin. I thank all the members of the committee for agreeing my nomination as convener of the Education and Skills Committee. I look forward to working with them all in this role and to working well collectively on the important subjects that we will need to address over the next five years.

I pay tribute to my predecessor in the role, Stewart Maxwell. He was and is a close friend and colleague of mine and I had the pleasure of working for him for a number of years, so I know how committed he was to education. As a substitute member of the Education and Culture Committee, I saw the good job that he did as convener. I have big shoes to fill in that role. I also thank all the other members of the predecessor committee for their excellent service.

Deputy Convener

10:03

The Convener: The committee's next task is to choose a deputy convener. The Parliament has agreed that only members of the Scottish Labour Party are eligible for nomination as deputy convener of the committee. I understand that Johann Lamont is the party's nominee for the post. Do we agree to choose her as deputy convener?

Members indicated agreement.

Johann Lamont was chosen as deputy convener.

The Convener: I congratulate Johann on her appointment. I look forward to working with her in her role as deputy convener.

Education and Culture Committee Legacy Report

10:04

The Convener: Item 4 is consideration of the legacy paper from our predecessor committee, the Education and Culture Committee. Legacy papers are a good way for a new committee to find out what work its predecessors undertook and consider the ideas that they suggested for what work the new committee might like to undertake.

I will open the floor to members shortly, perhaps taking one from each party initially. I thank the predecessor committee and suggest that we note its ideas and take them into account in this meeting and over the coming weeks as we discuss our work programme.

I invite members to contribute, starting with Johann Lamont as our deputy convener.

Johann Lamont: There is a wide range of issues that we could look at, so it would be useful to know what skills and interests members have.

I am particularly interested in understanding properly what we mean by the attainment gap, because I do not think that it is just about young people who for some reason do not access university; it is also about young people who are failed much earlier in the education system. Some young people with good skills and qualifications do not achieve the place that they want, but there are also lots of young people who fall off the radar an awful lot earlier than that, and they are a particular interest of mine.

Ross Thomson: As an entirely new member, I found the legacy report helpful, as it allowed me to look at the work that the previous committee undertook.

My particular interest in relation to the North East Scotland region, which I represent, is the growing skills gap there, particularly in the energy sector. There are real challenges with that. I am interested in what the committee could do to help colleges and further education and to get young people experiences and into apprenticeships to try to deal with that gap. I look forward to looking at that issue as part of the committee.

The Convener: Thank you. Does anybody from the SNP want to comment?

Gillian Martin: My particular interest is in sharing good practice across colleges. Each college operates autonomously and some colleges are doing things very well, but some could perhaps do with knowledge being shared across the sector.

In my speech in the Parliament yesterday, I referred to North East Scotland College's partnership with Robert Gordon University, which is a great success story. I would like people to be brought in to share good practice. Perhaps we could have some visits to colleges that have been seen to be hitting their targets on attracting the people who Johann Lamont mentioned and who have not traditionally been encouraged into further and higher education. Some colleges have managed to bridge that gap.

The Convener: Does anyone else want to comment?

Daniel Johnson: I echo a lot of what has been said already. On the legacy paper, the attainment gap is clearly one of the absolute overarching priorities in the Parliament more generally, and that is a point of real consensus across the parties, so I would definitely like that to be taken up and taken forward. Within that, I have a specific interest in learning difficulties and disabilities. For example, I would be interested in looking at how we can better adapt and cater for children with learning difficulties such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and dyslexia. That is a specific interest of mine.

Beyond that, I would be interested in looking at some of the work that the previous committee did on colleges and on skilling and reskilling, which relates to some of the things that Gillian Martin and Ross Thomson said. It is about looking at how we equip the workforce for economic changes in the future. As I sort of comically noted yesterday in my speech in Parliament, some people have accused me of being paranoid about a Skynet takeover, but automation and increasing use of digital technologies in the economy will have a big impact on employment. Therefore, the way that we reskill our workforce, and not just skill young people, is critical.

Finally, I have an interest in childcare and the early years and in ensuring that we do our best at the earliest stage and right the way through education so that we help people to be as economically active as possible.

Colin Beattie: Clearly, the legacy document is a quality piece of work. [*Laughter.*]

The Convener: There speaks a member of the previous committee.

Colin Beattie: One area where the previous committee did good innovative work was on children in care. I would like to think that the current committee will find the time to continue with that element, because there is a lot of work still to be done on that.

I would also like to think that the committee might find opportunities to spend time out in the

community. A number of fact-finding visits and so on were done previously, but perhaps from time to time the committee should meet in different areas. I know that that involves expense and logistics, but it would be a good exercise in democracy for people in places such as Glasgow and Dundee to see the committee meet there at least once in this session. I just throw that out as a possibility.

Primarily, I would like us to build on the good work that was done on children in care.

Jenny Gilruth: I echo the points that Johann Lamont and Daniel Johnson made about the attainment gap. As a former secondary school teacher, that is a real priority for me.

Johann Lamont spoke about what we mean by attainment, which is an important issue. We often talk in educational jargon in Parliament, but when we speak to people on the street, they do not necessarily know what we mean by attainment. It is not necessarily just about qualifications; it is about achievement in school and how we measure that, and about other contributions that pupils make. I am certainly interested in that in the senior phase.

As I have worked for Education Scotland, I am also interested in how we use partners such as Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority to work with local authorities to close the attainment gap.

Fulton MacGregor: I am quite excited about the committee, which is very wide ranging, but my specialist interest is in child protection. I back up Colin Beattie's point about children in care. In the previous session, we made a lot of progress on that—that sounds as if I was there, but I mean that the Parliament made a lot of progress—and I would like that to continue. I would also like us to look at wider child protection issues.

The Convener: Thank you very much for that. A lot came out of that very short discussion, so I suspect that we will have lots of work to do over the next five years. I thank members for their contributions.

Decision on Taking Business in Private

10:10

The Convener: Agenda item 5 is to consider whether to take in private our work programme discussions that follow. It is commonplace for committees to have such discussions in private. Do members agree to do that?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: That concludes the public part of the meeting. Before we continue, I will wait until the public gallery is cleared, which could be some time. [*Laughter.*]

10:11

Meeting continued in private until 10:24.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@parliament.scot



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba