



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee

Thursday 24 September 2020

Session 5



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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PUBLIC AUDIT AND POST-LEGISLATIVE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20th Meeting 2020, Session 5

CONVENER

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab)
*Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab) (Acting Convener)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
*Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)
Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con)
*Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
*Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Douglas Ansdell (Scottish Government)
Paul Johnston (Scottish Government)
Mary MacInnes (Bòrd na Gàidhlig)
Shona MacLennan (Bòrd na Gàidhlig)
Dr Stewart Macleod (Bòrd na Gàidhlig)
Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con) (Committee Substitute)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Lucy Scharbert

LOCATION

The Mary Fairfax Somerville Room (CR2)

Scottish Parliament

Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee

Thursday 24 September 2020

[The Acting Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Interests

The Acting Convener (Anas Sarwar): Madainn mhath. Fàilte gu Pàrlamaid na h-Alba. Good morning, and welcome to the Scottish Parliament. This is the 20th meeting in 2020 of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee. We have received apologies from Bill Bowman MSP; Adam Tomkins MSP will be attending the meeting in his place.

Before we begin, I remind members, witnesses and staff that social distancing measures are in place in committee rooms and across the Holyrood campus. I ask everyone to take care to observe the measures during the course of this morning's business, including when exiting and entering the committee room. I also remind members not to touch the microphones or consoles during the meeting.

Agenda item 1 is a declaration of interests. As this is his first meeting as a substitute member of the committee, I ask Adam Tomkins to declare any relevant interests.

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): Thank you, convener. I have no relevant interests to declare beyond those that are listed in my entry in the register of member's interests.

Decision on Taking Business in Private

09:31

The Acting Convener: Agenda Item 2 is a decision on taking business in private. Do any members object to taking item 4 in private? If Neil Bibby or Adam Tomkins—who are joining us remotely—object, they should please raise their hand.

That is agreed.

Section 22 Report

“The 2018/19 audit of Bòrd na Gàidhlig: Governance and transparency”

09:31

The Acting Convener: Agenda item 3 is a section 22 report on the 2018-19 audit of Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

I welcome our witnesses from Bòrd na Gàidhlig: Shona MacLennan, chief executive; Mary MacInnes, chair; and Dr Stewart MacLeod, chair of the audit and assurance committee; and our witnesses from the Scottish Government: Paul Johnston, director general, education, communities and justice; and Douglas Ansdell, head of Gaelic and Scots team.

I understand that Shona MacLennan, Mary MacInnes and Paul Johnston wish to make opening statements. Before I invite them to do so, I want to make a few comments.

The Scottish Parliament is committed to facilitating the use of the Gaelic language in its proceedings wherever possible. Shona MacLennan and Mary MacInnes wanted to speak in Gaelic in this evidence session, and we were making arrangements for that to happen in April, when the session was originally due to place. As you know, the session was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and we are now working in very different circumstances. I am grateful to Bòrd na Gàidhlig for working with the Parliament's staff to explore different options to enable the use of Gaelic during this session. I understand that both Shona MacLennan and Mary MacInnes will be making their opening statements in Gaelic, which is welcome. The Parliament is arranging for the *Official Report* of this meeting to be translated into Gaelic so that it will be accessible to all those in the Gaelic community.

I invite Mary MacInnes to make her statement in Gaelic, and then in English.

Mary MacInnes (Bòrd na Gàidhlig): Tapadh leibh. Madainn mhath, a neach-gairm, a bhuill na comataidh agus a chuideachd air fad a tha an làthair an seo an-diugh. 'S e urram agus dùbhlán a th' ann a bhith an-diugh a' bruidhinn às leth Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Is mise Màiri NicAonghais. Is mi cathraiche a' bhùird. Is mi an seachdamh cathraiche a tha air a bhith air Bòrd na Gàidhlig bhon a chaidh a stèidheachadh còrr is 14 bliadhna deug air ais.

Còmhla rium tha ceannard a' bhuidhinn Shona NicIllInnein. Is ise an t-ochdamh ceannard a tha air a bhith anns an dreuchd aig a' bhòrd bhon a chaidh a stèidheachadh aig an àm sin. Cuideachd

an làthair air-loidhne tha Stewart Macleòid a tha na chathraiche air comataidh aig Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

'S e buidheann poblach le dleastanasan mòra ach sgioba beag a th' anns a' bhòrd. Tha 400 bliadhna de dh'eachdraidh air cùlaibh leasachadh na Gàidhlig. Fad iomadach bliadhna cha robh riaghailtean idir coibhneil agus chaidh iomadach cron a dhèanamh air a' chànan. Ach tha sinn fortanach an-diugh gu bheil Achd na Gàidhlig (Alba) 2005 ann agus gu bheil am bòrd a' cur air adhart leasachadh. 'S mar sin tha uallaichean mòra mòra air Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Tha an sgioba beag agus mar as motha a tha an obair a' dol air adhart, 's ann as motha agus as treasa a tha an obair a' fàs.

Thairis air na beagan bhliadhnaichean a chaidh seachad, a' tòiseachadh ann an 2018, thuig am bòrd gun robh atharrachadh a dhìth taobh a-staigh a' bhùird fhèin agus tarsaing na h-obrach aige air fad. A-mach às an tuigse agus na còmhraidhean a bha sin, thàinig rannsachadh domhainn aig toiseach na bliadhna 2019.

A-mach às an rannsachadh sin, thàinig plana gnìomh agus 's e sin am plana gnìomh air a bheil sinne aig a' bhòrd air a bhith ag obrachadh airson leasachadh cudromach agus tomadach is mòr a thoirt air a' bhuidheann.

Tha mise toilichte a bhith an seo an-diugh a' toirt fianais air an obair mhath is an obair chruaidh a tha air a bhith a' tachairt san ochd mìos deug a chaidh seachad.

Mary MacInnes continued in English.

I am the chair of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and I am the seventh chair or interim chair of the board since it was established more than 14 years ago. With me is Shona MacLennan, the ceannard or chief executive officer, and joining us online is Dr Stewart Macleod, who is the chair of our audit committee.

It is both an honour and a challenge to be here today, but I am delighted to have this opportunity to be present and give evidence in real time. Bòrd na Gàidhlig is a public body with significant responsibilities and a very small team. The Gaelic language suffered 400 years of poor legislation and poor support, and we are still addressing that history as we try to develop the language through the work that we do.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig is the first statutory body with that responsibility, so it is no small task that we have set ourselves. The aims and expectations are significant and ever increasing. With more development, more opportunities and more successes, expectations are raised within our organisation and among the wider Scottish and worldwide Gaelic community.

It became apparent to us at Bòrd na Gàidhlig that the organisation needed to change, and the board itself recognised that. Our CEO, Shona MacLennan, played a particularly important role in taking those steps. Late in 2018, we set about examining how we wanted to create a culture of change and evaluation. We had a wider-scope audit undertaken in January 2019, out of which came a comprehensive improvement plan to develop the organisation. We worked with the improvement plan over and above the operational plan to which we work anyway. I am pleased to say that that culture of change has been well developed. At our recent audit visit, significant improvement was noted, and I am grateful for that.

I now ask my CEO to furnish you with more information and details on that.

The Acting Convener: I hand over to Shona MacLennan, who will make an opening statement in Gaelic, and then in English.

Shona MacLennan (Bòrd na Gàidhlig): Madainn mhath. Is mise Shona NicIlinnein agus is mi ceannard Bòrd na Gàidhlig. 'S e aithisg dhùbhlach a bha againne ach tha i air feum mòr a dhèanamh dhuinn.

Nuair a thòisich mise sa bhuidhinn, bha obair mhòr romhainn a thaobh a' "Phlana Cànan Nàiseanta Ghàidhlig 2018-2023"—an treas plana—agus às dèidh sin a chur an gnìomh, thòisich sinn ag obair air atharrachaidhean. A' tighinn a-mach às na h-atharrachaidhean sin bha e soilleir gun robh barrachd dhraghan ann na bha sinn an dùil agus, air sgàth sin, bha sinn a' bruidhinn ris an luchd-sgrùdadh againne. A-mach às a sin thàinig an sgrùdadh as doimhne a bha riamh aig Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

Thug na luchd-sgrùdadh dhuinn plana leasachaidh mionaideach domhainn farsaing. A-mach às a' phlana sin, thàinig structairean a tha a' ciallachadh gu bheil a' bhuidheann a-nis ag obair air leasachadh leantainneach agus gum bi na pròiseasan sin againn gu bràth.

Thairis air a' bhliadhna a chaidh seachad, tha sinn air tòrr a dhèanamh airson na molaidhean aig an luchd-sgrùdadh a chur an gnìomh, nam measg: a' cumail choinneamhan gu poblach; ag ullachadh plana feachd-obrach; a' neartachadh conaltradh taobh a-staigh agus taobh a-muigh na buidhne; atharrachaidhean ri structaran; agus prògram trèanaidh is leasachaidh mu choinneamh sin. Tha sinn air leth riarachaidh gun robh an sgrùdadh bliadhnail seo a' sealltainn gun robh toraidhean air leth math air a bhith ann.

Shona MacLennan continued in English

Good morning. I am Shona MacLennan, the ceannard of Bòrd na Gàidhlig. The report that we received was challenging but it was also useful.

When I started in the organisation, there was significant work to be done on progressing the development of the third national Gaelic language plan, and that work took about a year to complete. As a result of that, I recognised that significant change was required in the organisation and started actions to implement change.

As a result of some of the outputs of those actions, we discussed our auditors' concerns and, following that discussion, it was agreed that a wider scope audit would be carried out on the organisation. It has been the most in-depth review that has been done of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and it resulted in a comprehensive and detailed improvement plan and structure, which means that the organisation now has in place continuous improvement processes.

Much work has been undertaken in the past year to implement the auditors' recommendations, including holding board and committee meetings in public, creating a workforce plan, increasing internal and external communication, changes to structures, and a programme of training and development to supplement those changes. So much work was done that this year's annual audit report recognised significant improvement.

It might be helpful for the committee to know a little bit about some of the work that Bòrd na Gàidhlig delivers. We work with more than 60 public authorities in developing Gaelic language plans, including the Scottish Government as it renews its Gaelic language plan. Our education team provides advice throughout the country and to the United Kingdom Parliament. Our director of education recently gave information to a UK all-party parliamentary group on oracy in Gaelic-medium education and matters such as cultural diversity in Gaelic-medium education for the Northern Alliance regional improvement collaborative.

We regularly input into draft bills and give evidence to committees. We are working with teams on the proposed human rights bill and we will give evidence on the Children (Scotland) Bill, because they both recognise linguistic rights, so Gaelic needs to be central to them. We are also working with the Scottish Government's islands team on developing the islands impact assessment so that Gaelic is a part of it.

In response to Covid, we quickly established a resilience fund that was open to all Gaelic organisations, and we awarded more than £200,000 to help approximately 60 organisations to develop resilience. We work with many of our main funded partners to develop more online resources and create better access and branding for those to support Gaelic-medium pupils and their families during lockdown, so that immersion

education can continue throughout these difficult times.

We have also been involved with our main funded organisations in adjusting what we expect them to deliver because of Covid. Much of what we fund is cultural and language events, so we have worked with them to make those events available online. That has led to thousands of people across the world participating in Gaelic language events. We have been developing networks to give leadership to the Gaelic community at this challenging time.

I hope that that gives the committee a flavour of how seriously we took the report and how much work we have done to implement it, and shows that we are continuing with our day job. I would like to reiterate a Gaelic saying that I included in my letter to the committee in June, because it describes exactly the process of continuous improvement:

"S e obair latha tòiseachadh, 's e obair beatha crìochnachadh. It's a day's work to start, it's a life's work to complete."

Taing mhòr.

09:45

Paul Johnston (Scottish Government): As the accountable officer for the education portfolio, I was concerned by the content of the 2018-19 Deloitte audit report and the subsequent section 22 report from Audit Scotland. It was clear that a significant programme of improvement required to be undertaken with pace and urgency in order to address the issues that had been raised.

I met the chair, the chief executive and members of the senior team in November 2019, and we agreed that focused work was needed in three key areas: first, building a cohesive, effective and highly performing senior team; secondly, ensuring good practice in managing performance; and thirdly, working openly and communicating effectively with partners and the public to provide emphatic, outgoing leadership to support the development of the Gaelic language.

The 2019-20 audit report that has been shared with the committee demonstrates significant progress in those areas. The auditors recognise greater openness and transparency and improvements in financial planning, workforce planning and training for board members. It comments on improvements in the senior management team and the establishment of an improvement plan steering group to monitor progress. Over one year, they assessed 74 per cent of the actions in the improvement plan as complete, with actual improvement seen in 86 per cent of the areas covered by the plan. That improvement work must continue. A number of

areas have been identified for further progress and there is a need to maintain momentum in the delivery of those improvements.

I welcome the open and determined way that the chair and chief executive have gone about leading that improvement work. When the former Auditor General provided evidence to the committee, she said that she was pleased by the extent to which there had been

“a real recognition of the problems and a commitment to the improvements that are needed to resolve them.”—*[Official Report, Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee, 16 January 2020; c 16.]*

The Scottish Government will continue to support Bòrd na Gàidhlig as it delivers its important work of promoting Gaelic language and culture in Scotland.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): I will start with a couple of questions on the section 22 report, then I will move on to the document that was sent to the committee under cover of your 22 September letter.

The section 22 report outlined a number of challenges faced by the board in relation to governance failures. To what extent did those governance failures impact on the delivery of support for the Gaelic language and what engagement work has been done with the community to address that?

Shona MacLennan: We have referred to the volume of work that we have continued to deliver for the development of Gaelic. Our 2018-19 annual report and our 2019-20 annual report, which the board approved yesterday, demonstrate that we delivered almost all the actions in our operational plans for those years. Four out of the 80 actions in the 2019-20 report were not delivered, and three of those were completed after the year end, so we have clear evidence that we have continued to deliver on the day job.

We took a number of actions to increase engagement with our stakeholders. One of those, which I referenced earlier, was to hold committee and board meetings in public; they are webcast and that has been in place since May this year.

In our guidance for those meetings, which is available online, we ask people to submit, via email, any comments on the issues that are discussed by the board or the committee. At the time of publication of the report, in November 2019, I wrote to the chief executives of the main Gaelic organisations to invite them to a meeting with me to discuss the report's findings, to hear their views on our work and on the report, and to input into how we might work better together for Gaelic. I am pleased to say that all those organisations took up that offer.

Continuing on that theme, since the start of lockdown, the chair and I have instituted a series of meetings with the chairs and chief executives of the Gaelic organisations. I meet the chief executives monthly to discuss current issues and to prepare responses to, for example, Scotland's route map. We submitted to the Scottish Government a response to the route map from the Gaelic community. All those organisations participated in preparing the information for that response.

In many ways, we have continued to build stakeholder engagement. We have used the report as a mechanism for doing that. We have been transparent with our community about what was in the report, and we have sought people's views on what we need to do. Yesterday, we had a board meeting at which the programme for engagement for the development of the fourth national plan, which starts in October, was agreed. The first phase of that consultation will run for the next six months. There is continuing and increasing engagement with the community.

Colin Beattie: The board's annual audit report and your covering letter, dated 22 September, indicate that there has been improvement. There is an awful lot of stuff in the report. I could go through it bit by bit, but I will highlight eight points that I find concerning. There are references to “inaccurate information”; “concerns about ... financial sustainability”; “further improvements” being needed; “non-compliance”; poor levels of “scrutiny”; the board not understanding “roles and responsibilities”; recommendations not being actioned; and the issue of “transparency” with staff. We have not had the opportunity to go through the report in depth, but those points sprang out at me. Although there has been improvement, there is clearly a long way to go. The report highlights some fairly worrying gaps. How will you address them?

Shona MacLennan: I will address the point about financial sustainability first, because that is a slightly separate issue. In common with many public bodies, we receive a budget from the Scottish Government, which is set each year, and we must operate within that budget. The bulk of our running costs are staffing costs. As those costs rise, we have to manage that in order to keep those costs within our budget.

There is always an issue around ensuring that we manage to be financially viable, which we have achieved, as all our audits have demonstrated. However, in our forward planning, there is always a concern about how to manage increasing costs. We have developed, and are further developing, a medium-term financial plan and a business case to address that issue. That is one part of the picture.

On receiving the report, our view is very much that further work needs to be done. We did immediate work and made a solid start, but we need to continue to develop. Consideration of the areas that the auditors have highlighted in this year's annual audit report, the outstanding actions from the previous improvement plan and the actions that arise from our annual staff survey will all form our new improvement plan, so there is—

Colin Beattie: Some of those items are fairly basic. One would expect them to be automatically in place without the need for a special project or a particular focus on them. For example, dealing with inaccurate reporting—that is so basic.

Shona MacLennan: I am not sure whether you have reviewed our improvement plan. The last version ran to 18 pages, and was very detailed. What the auditors referred to are some inaccuracies in that reporting. Yes, absolutely, we need to get better—

Colin Beattie: Are you saying that the auditors were incorrect?

Shona MacLennan: No. I am saying that the auditors said that there were some inaccuracies in our reporting of the improvement plan. I accept what the auditors have said.

Colin Beattie: But that is not the type of inaccuracy that is coming out in the report; it is about inaccuracies in information that has been sent to the board.

Shona MacLennan: The improvement plan is reported to the board.

Colin Beattie: I do not think that it was just about the improvement plan, but let that be. All eight items which I highlighted are so basic; how can they not be getting done?

Shona MacLennan: I assure the committee that the vast majority of it is being done, and that we have—

Colin Beattie: The report says not.

Shona MacLennan: The report highlights some instances in which it did not happen, but in the vast majority of instances, it happens. The improvement plan, and the training which we continue to deliver in our organisation, will build those systems.

Colin Beattie: What is your time plan for addressing all the remaining issues?

Shona MacLennan: Some of the issues which were highlighted in this year's audit report have already been addressed. For instance, one of the actions that the auditors recommended was to acquire additional external expertise for change management. Yesterday, our board approved a paper to implement that action. It has continued to

focus on that area. That will give us additional expertise and capacity to deliver the remaining requirements for improvement. We are taking immediate action on that.

Colin Beattie: Quite a lot is still to be done, and a lot of it is dependent on support from the Scottish Government, as far as I can see, when it comes to board members and their roles and responsibilities. Is a programme in place to provide that support? I invite Paul Johnston to comment.

Paul Johnston: I am happy to answer that question. In doing so, I want to make it clear that I was keen that the committee was sighted on that most recent audit report, even though it comes early and is pretty fresh, the reason being not that it is perfect—as you have identified, there are significant areas where progress is still needed—but because it demonstrates quite substantial progress.

The pie charts throughout the report tell their own story about the level of progress. Progress has been made in supporting board members. Training has been provided to them on their roles and responsibilities. The chair or chief executive may want to say more about that.

The Scottish Government sponsor team will continue to provide support to the board. Most immediately, that will be through working with the board and the chair on the recruitment of additional board members. That process has been delayed while we paused public appointment recruitment during Covid-19, but I am pleased to say that it is getting up and running again.

Board member recruitment is really important, as is support on what it means to be a board member. We will continue to work with the board on fleshing out the “On Board” guidance.

Colin Beattie: The report mentions concerns about the direction of the support that is being given, in so far as it seems to be limited to board members. There seems to be a feeling in the report—I am speaking from memory here—that it should cover operational staff as well.

10:00

Paul Johnston: The first report, which led to the Audit Scotland section 22 report, contained some comments about the sponsorship relationship and the Scottish Government's role in that regard. We took that seriously, and conducted an external review by inviting other teams in the Scottish Government to look at how the sponsorship function was operating. Douglas Ansdell leads that function, so he may wish to say more about it.

We are looking—in fact, we have just looked—at the framework agreement between the Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig in order to ensure that there is clarity around roles and responsibilities. It is primarily a matter for the chief executive of the Bòrd and her team to support and develop her staff; I do not think that the committee would expect the Scottish Government's sponsor team to take an operational role in that respect. Nonetheless, I am keen that we provide from within the Scottish Government all the support that Bòrd na Gàidhlig reasonably requires.

The Acting Convener: Why are there inaccuracies in the improvement plan?

Shona MacLennan: It goes back to the level and volume of detail and the resources that are available, in combination with the fact that since March this year, all Bòrd na Gàidhlig staff have—in common with many others—been working from home, which makes things such as checking papers and collaboration more difficult.

The Acting Convener: Why were the auditors able to check and find inaccuracies, when the people who put the report together could not? You have not really answered the question of why.

Shona MacLennan: Why? It is because of the volume of work. We have referred to the fact that work is on-going on the improvement plan at the same time as work on the day job. We have a very small team to do that. I and three others are in the senior management team, and we have three people in our administration team. Our improvement plan currently runs to something like 18 pages.

The Acting Convener: In your view, what are the inaccuracies? [*Inaudible.*]

Shona MacLennan: One that I know of involved a reference to an internal audit report. We had a full programme of internal audit last year—10 audits were carried out. Our internal auditors use a ranking system to describe the quality of the audit report they are given. There are four grades. The two good grades, as it were, are “strong” and “substantial”. The best grade is “strong”, and the second-best grade is “substantial”. One of the auditors' reports said that one of the audit reports had been given a “strong” rating—that is, the highest rating—when it had in fact received a “substantial” rating. That is an example of one of the errors in the improvement plan.

The Acting Convener: How many errors were there?

Shona MacLennan: From memory, I do not think that the auditors quantified how many—

The Acting Convener: Surely, once the auditors told you that there were inaccuracies in

the improvement plan, you went and checked what those were.

Shona MacLennan: Yes—we then amended them.

The Acting Convener: How many inaccuracies were there?

Shona MacLennan: There were perhaps five. I am sorry; I cannot give you an accurate number, but that was the scale—

The Acting Convener: Of the inaccuracies that you recall, were they all as minor as the wrong word, such as “strong” rather than “substantial”, or were there ones that were much more detailed?

Shona MacLennan: They were of that nature, but the auditors might consider it to be no small matter for us to say that we had received the highest grading when in fact we got the second highest grading.

The Acting Convener: Right. So—

Shona MacLennan: Could I say something else?

The Acting Convener: Yes—on you go.

Shona MacLennan: We agreed with our auditors—and we discussed this with them in June and subsequently at the audit committee in August—that the new improvement plan will be a much simpler and more strategic document, with clearer key performance indicators. That will make reporting on, challenging or monitoring that reporting much more straightforward. Recognising improvement is needed, and one way in which we will do that is by making a more meaningful plan.

The matter that Colin Beattie picked up—staff not being fully aware of the impact of and improvements in the improvement plan—happened because of the detailed nature of the plan. All such documents are open and are shared with staff, but there is a huge volume of detail in them. Therefore, we want to move to a simpler—

The Acting Convener: Were the inaccuracies caused by human error?

Shona MacLennan: Yes.

The Acting Convener: Do you understand why—given the controversy around the performance of the board and the challenges that it faces—having inaccuracies in an improvement plan does not really help to build confidence?

Shona MacLennan: I absolutely understand that.

The Acting Convener: Do you accept it?

Shona MacLennan: Yes.

The Acting Convener: Dr Stewart Macleod wants to come in, so with Colin Beattie's permission, I will go to him.

Dr Stewart Macleod (Bòrd na Gàidhlig): Mòran taing. Perhaps the point that I am about to make has been covered by the ceannard. However, to continue on the question of inaccuracies, I should say that in my view the point that was made by the auditors was a criticism, or an issue, that was raised to bring to the attention of board members the need for them to take on responsibility for scrutinising management and the reports that were sent by management, and for identifying errors in the information that is given to them.

The auditors gave one or two examples of errors that they had noted. Shona MacLennan gave one example; another was the citing of a date on which something had been completed, in relation to which they questioned not whether the task had been completed, but whether the date that was cited was accurate. I am not saying that that is not important, but that it was a point of detail rather than a suggestion that the fundamental information was incorrect or was leading board members in the wrong direction.

The Acting Convener: Do you know what the five inaccuracies are?

Dr Macleod: I do not know that it has been enumerated that there were five. I am aware that the auditors gave examples, but I am not sure that they gave a complete list.

The Acting Convener: Do you know the complete list?

Dr Macleod: I am not aware that there is a complete list.

The point that was made in the audit report was that board members need to take more care to scrutinise effectively, because inaccuracies had not been picked up by board members, and that should happen. One or two examples of errors were given. I am not sure whether the auditors or anybody else listed a complete set of inaccuracies.

The Acting Convener: Dr Macleod, as chair of the audit and assurance committee, surely when you were told that there were inaccuracies in the improvement plan you double checked them and listed what they were in order to correct them. Therefore, assuming that you did that—as the chair of the audit and assurance committee—I ask what they were and how many there were?

Dr Macleod: As Shona MacLennan said, we do not have a list of inaccuracies.

As has been mentioned, we set up a steering group to oversee implementation of the

improvement plan. That group is going through the detail of the 72 recommendations and the progress that is being made on them. The steering group is examining the detail and is best placed to focus on the correctness of the detail. As chair of the committee, I receive a report on that, along with many other reports. One of the issues that has been pointed out by the auditors is that the volume of paperwork at committees is excessive, and the range of duties that are carried out by the board is wider, in some respects, than what a small team can deal with. Therefore, it is appropriate that our committee focus on scrutiny and strategic decision making, rather than on operational matters and detail.

The Acting Convener: You have said that a group is dealing with that, and will know the detail. Who chairs that group?

Dr Macleod: The group is chaired by a member of the audit and assurance committee—it is made up that chair and two members of staff. They are seeking to extend staff's input to the group. I do not sit on that group, but I receive its quarterly reports and am in direct contact with its chair, between meetings.

The Acting Convener: I am not 100 per cent convinced that your responses help to build confidence. I hand over to Adam Tomkins.

Adam Tomkins: This is pretty extraordinary stuff.

I have a quick supplementary for Mr Johnston, on the back of Colin Beattie's excellent questions to him. I accept that progress can be seen in the most recent report, but it is progress from a very low bar. Mr Beattie is absolutely right to say that the errors that we are talking about are so basic in nature that they beggar belief. What is the Scottish Government's view on why the bar for progress was allowed to fall so low in the first place? Is it mere incompetence, or is there something more sinister than that?

Paul Johnston: The Scottish Government is aware that there has been a range of issues around governance within Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Many of them are known. Undoubtedly, however, the very detailed 2018-19 audit clearly set out a wide range of issues that required to be addressed. I have sought to make it clear, through my engagement and through that of the sponsor team—and with engagement from ministers—that we needed swift and material improvement across the range of issues that were covered in the audit report. I accept that the committee is focusing on some of the more critical aspects of the recent report, but if we look at that report in the round, we must acknowledge that there has been very significant progress.

I quoted the particular figures that were set out in the audit in relation to improvement, which broadly show that at least two thirds of the actions that were set out last year have been completed. That relates to an extraordinary range of actions—we have talked about 72 actions in the improvement plan.

One of my concerns is that that number is far too high, and that some more strategic actions are needed. I therefore welcome the work that has been done to ensure that the board does not get drowned in the detail of pages and pages of improvement plan commentary, but is clear about the key activities that must be pursued by Bòrd na Gàidhlig—hence, the proposal to revise and streamline the improvement plan and to ensure that the board is furnished with highly accurate reports from the plan.

In relation to the past few minutes of the discussion, I accept, of course, that we want all reporting to be 100 per cent accurate, and that the board and the executive team must strive for that accuracy. However, it is necessary to recognise that the examples that have been given—such as a date that was not accurate—have been examples of human error, and there is a risk that they have come about, in part, because of the great volume of material. Let us streamline the material, focus on what is most important and, of course, demonstrate a real commitment to accuracy in reporting and to the board playing a robust role in its scrutiny of the executive.

10:15

The Acting Convener: Eighteen pages cannot be drowning the board. You must have 18-page documents presented to you every day, given the wide scope of your portfolio. Are 18 pages really drowning Bòrd na Gàidhlig?

Paul Johnston: What we are talking about here is spreadsheets that comment in detail on the status of 72 different actions. Of course we can cope with 18 pages of material; the issue that I am raising is whether it represents best use of the board's time to focus in detail on those 72 actions, and whether it should be playing a strategic role and ensuring that Bòrd na Gàidhlig is delivering on its important purpose in relation to promotion of Gaelic language and culture in Scotland.

From the position of the Scottish Government sponsor team, I would, of course, like to see the very highest standards of governance, oversight and transparency, but I expect the board to be setting direction, looking out and providing the ambitious leadership that we need in relation to promotion of Gaelic language and culture in Scotland.

The Acting Convener: I agree, but the board also needs to lead its organisation, does it not?

Paul Johnston: It does, indeed.

The Acting Convener: I do not think that a worry about the board drowning in paperwork is an adequate reason for there being inaccuracies and our not having confidence in how the board is operating. I do not buy that argument, at all. You will be drowning in information every day, especially in the current climate, with Covid, given that you have such a large brief. I am not willing to accept that Bòrd na Gàidhlig is drowning in an improvement plan when, in fact, it looks as if it is drowning in the detail of a failing organisation. That should be a much bigger concern to the Scottish Government.

The correspondence from the ceannard makes it clear that the Scottish Government sponsor team receives board and committee papers, but no longer attends board meetings. Why does the Scottish Government no longer attend board meetings, given that the organisation is still in a process of transition to efficacy?

Paul Johnston: I will ask Douglas Ansdell to say a little about what the sponsor team does. We seek to provide active support to Bòrd na Gàidhlig, but there is an important balance to be struck in the sponsor team's role. It is important that we are not seen as micromanaging, or interfering with, what the board does. For that reason, our role is largely around receipt of papers and the on-going dialogue with the chief executive and the chair. Colleagues in my team speak regularly to the chair and the chief executive and apprise the chair in relation to the specific measures that it is agreed she will focus on.

A lot of detailed work is going on, but that does not, at present, extend to our sitting through committee meetings. I ask Douglas Ansdell to say a little more about what our role entails.

Douglas Ansdell (Scottish Government): We have a dual role. We sit beside Bòrd na Gàidhlig in the sponsorship role and we work closely with it on a number of policy areas and programmes. I think that there were comments in the 2018-19 audit to the effect that boundaries were blurred; for that reason, we stopped attending committee meetings and board meetings. However, the relationship is still close. We receive papers and we have quarterly meetings in the diary. We are in touch with Bòrd na Gàidhlig on all things very regularly, and we have access to papers from meetings.

The policy and programme areas are significant. We are involved in education, Gaelic arts, Gaelic publishing and community issues, so the relationship is strong and close. Even though we do not attend board meetings, there is still a high level of involvement and partnership.

The Acting Convener: When did you stop attending board meetings?

Douglas Ansdell: We stopped attending board meetings when the first draft of the 2018-19 Deloitte report was issued. The advice to us was that comments were made in that report about blurring of boundaries, so we stopped attending. We did not attend every board meeting or every committee meeting, but we attended as observers.

The Acting Convener: Was that prior to that report?

Douglas Ansdell: Yes.

The Acting Convener: That report shook things up.

Douglas Ansdell: The report offered all of us things to consider very closely.

The Acting Convener: Since that report shook things up, we have had an improvement plan, so I would guess that there has been more, not less, Scottish Government intervention. Is that correct?

Douglas Ansdell: There has been a different level of intervention and partnership working.

The Acting Convener: “Different” is such fantastic civil service speak. Given what was in the report in 2018-19, has there been more intervention or less intervention?

Douglas Ansdell: I still think that—

The Acting Convener: Should we say that there has been more intense engagement with the board since 2018-19, if we do not want to say that there has been more intervention?

Douglas Ansdell: There has been more intense engagement, and there has been engagement at different levels.

The Acting Convener: Since the more intense engagement, the Scottish Government has not attended board meetings.

Douglas Ansdell: That is correct.

The Acting Convener: Okay.

Mary MacInnes, as the chair of the board, do you feel “drowned” in detail?

Mary MacInnes: No, I do not feel drowned, but I feel that there is a lot of work. I was interim chair when the audit was carried out in the early part of 2019. I remained as interim chair until March this year, when I was appointed as permanent chair.

As soon as we got the draft report, I set up a working group of board members. In a previous life, I was a headteacher, so I understand the severity and gravity of audit reports and what they can do to teams and communities.

I was aware that the CEO had very much been moving forward the agenda for improvement. Shona MacLennan had been in post for a year and a half at that time. She had realised, and had instructed and informed us, that change was needed. The improvement plan was produced. That message was not easy to take, but very quickly we got our board together and looked at how we would move forward, as a community.

The work of Bòrd na Gàidhlig covers a wide range of things. Language planning and language development are very complex issues. People on the board come from the variety of communities where Gaelic is nurtured and developed, and they bring many strengths. However, at that time, governance was not a key strength in the board.

Over the months in which the improvement plan was implemented, I directed training and development for board members. We now have a streamlined board and senior management team. We have a focused board and have revisited the committee structure, and we are acting as a more strategic organisation. We have a clear understanding of how we work with the Scottish Government. We also have good and committed support from Mr Swinney, who is the minister with responsibility for the board. In the work that we have done in Gaelic communities in building community and leading other organisations, particularly through lockdown, we have been very fortunate that Bòrd na Gàidhlig is as strong as it is at the moment.

It has not been an easy journey; continuous improvement is hard work, but I have a lot of experience of that. I also understand that errors happen and cause complications, but that is life. We accept the report and all that is in it, and we accept that improvement is a journey. As Shona MacLennan said, it is a day’s work to start, but improvement is an on-going and lifetime process. I fully accept all that has been said to us today, but I am confident that the board is in a much stronger place now than it was 18 months ago.

The Acting Convener: As the chair of the board, you must have been extremely frustrated that there were inaccuracies in the improvement plan.

Mary MacInnes: Yes, I was. However, as Dr Macleod said, I have quite a firm handle on the work itself. Therefore, although there were inaccuracies and human errors, I am confident that the chair of the improvement group has a robust approach to the improvements.

The Acting Convener: I am pleased to hear that you are not drowning.

Colin Beattie: I have to say that the assertions that I am hearing are not really borne out in the report, particularly in connection with the human

errors and inaccuracies. We are talking about inaccuracies, insufficient documentation and missing documentation. I find it worrying that the auditors said:

“We have been particularly concerned by updates provided by management to the Board which suggest that the 2018/19 audit findings and recommendations were flawed and were subsequently contradicted by other independent advice. As set out throughout this report, this has not been the case.”

To me, that indicates that the inaccuracies and the missing information go considerably further. Where did that come from? Who is saying that the section 22 report was flawed? That seems like an attempted whitewash in order to make things look better. That report brought out those very facts. In my view, that is quite serious.

Shona MacLennan: The reference there is not to the section 22 report, and it is not to the whole of the governance and transparency report; it is, I believe, a reference to the requirement to refer the organisation to the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland.

At no time has there been any question of our not accepting in full the section 22 report and its findings, or those of any of the audit reports.

Colin Beattie: That is not what the auditors said. They said that confidence in audit quality had been undermined.

Shona MacLennan: My understanding is that that refers to a specific issue whereby the auditors required us to refer ourselves as an organisation to the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland. The auditors were sighted on the original email that I sent to the commissioner, because I wanted to ensure transparency and that I was satisfying their recommendation.

The response that we had from the commissioner’s office basically said that it could not comment on hypothetical cases. We then discussed the matter with the auditors. I proposed that we sent additional information to the commissioner’s office and that the auditors were copied in on that, to ensure that our understanding was all the same. They said that that was not necessary. I proceeded as advised. They advised having conversations, and we had conversations. The commissioner’s office continued to say that no action was required.

My understanding is that what you mentioned refers to that specific issue. We have said at all times that that report is extremely difficult and challenging, but that we accept it in full and are committed to implementing its recommendations. Our position is the same with the section 22 report. We take it very seriously. We do not say that there is fault with the audit report—absolutely

not. We have continued to work with the auditors on a collaborative basis that is geared to change and improvement, and they have been supportive of us in that.

Colin Beattie: I have to say that, from reading the report, it sounds different—it sounds as though the auditors have real concern about confidence in audit quality, which they have been trying to address.

I will leave it at that for the moment.

10:30

The Acting Convener: Shona MacLennan, do you accept that referrals to the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life are not normal?

Shona MacLennan: Absolutely.

Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I want to go back to Paul Johnston and Douglas Ansdell. Am I right in saying that part of the role of a sponsoring department is to monitor the performance of the organisations that are being sponsored?

Paul Johnston: Yes, that is part of the role.

Alex Neil: Why, then, did the Scottish Government not intervene much earlier? Why did you wait until Bòrd na Gàidhlig got into such a mess before doing anything about it? In fact, it appears that the Scottish Government did not originally do anything about it—it seems that the chief executive took the initiative. Where was the Scottish Government? Why were you not monitoring performance and seeing what was happening?

Paul Johnston: We had been working closely with the organisation well before the audits came to light. We had sought to support it in a wide variety of ways; Douglas Ansdell can say more about that. However, I fully accept that the range of issues that was highlighted in the audit certainly demonstrated the need for improvement at pace, and for the increased engagement of the Scottish Government on those matters.

Douglas Ansdell can say what we were doing prior to the audit coming about.

Douglas Ansdell: Before the 2018-19 audit, improvement actions were in place. A people committee at Bòrd na Gàidhlig was looking at issues of concern. We were very involved with the chair and the chief executive at that time. Actions were in place and progress was being made before the Deloitte committee. The chair at the time had put in place a range of measures to move forward and bring about improvement at Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

Alex Neil: In a sense, does that not make it worse? It is clear that the organisation was allowed to get to crisis point before corrective action was taken. Surely the Scottish Government should have been more decisive, intervened much earlier and commissioned the independent report long before it was commissioned.

In her introductory remarks, the chair pointed out that she is the seventh chair in 14 years. It would not take a man or woman from Mars to see that as a proxy for an organisation that is not functioning properly. Having an average tenure of two years for the chair would immediately suggest to me that there is a problem. Did it never strike anybody in St Andrew's house that the problem was much bigger?

We are not talking about sponsoring an organisation that is the size of Google or Amazon. Bòrd na Gàidhlig turns over £5 million a year. Why did nobody bell the cat and get some action long before anything happened? If you were involved, that is even worse—it means that you were involved with the organisation and did not realise how big a crisis it was in. Why did you not go to the minister and say that you had an organisation that was in crisis—or was about to go into crisis—and was not functioning properly, and that you needed to do something about it?

Paul Johnston: In going back through the history of the organisation, you are correct to identify the changes in chair; it has also had quite a number of chief executives. At various points in its history—throughout its history, really—work has been done by the Scottish Government to try to support and stabilise the team, with varying levels of success. There have been points at which I think there was stability and the organisation was functioning smoothly, and other points at which there was considerable instability.

One of my reflections from looking carefully at the audit and the action that has been taken in the past year—we see this in other bodies—is just how vital it is to invest in leadership development, and in paying real attention to the people and relational issues around us.

In the past year, Bòrd na Gàidhlig has invested significantly in forming a cohesive leadership team; that has required real attention. It has invested in ensuring that the board is clear about its roles and responsibilities and that it works effectively with the leadership team. Those are some of the matters that have required attention, which at points have been subject to intervention. The intervention over the past year to 18 months has been sustained and intensive, and it has been effective, although I recognise that there is more to do.

Alex Neil: Paul, not one word of that answers my question. Why did you not bell the cat? Why did you not do something sooner, before the organisation got into total crisis? You said that you were very closely involved and that you were talking to the various chairs and the numerous chief executives. If you were doing all that, surely you were aware that the organisation needed much more than mild intervention or blurring of lines. There should have been no blurring of lines; you should have been right in there saying, "We've got to get this organisation sorted out." Whatever the reason—whether it is the result of poor management or poor internal controls—surely to goodness, if you are doing your job properly as the sponsoring department, it is your job to have an early warning system so that you can take action before a crisis develops.

It is clear from the section 22 report that the organisation was in crisis for some time, but there was nothing from the Scottish Government. Is there a minute to a minister before the section 22 report warning the minister about how bad things were in the board?

Paul Johnston: I sought to—

Alex Neil: Yes or no—is there a minute to that effect?

Paul Johnston: The answer, I think, is yes, but let me ask Douglas Ansdell to confirm that.

Alex Neil: Could we get a copy of that minute, please?

Paul Johnston: I can certainly take away that request.

Alex Neil: We want a copy of it. That is not a request—we demand a copy. We want to see the evidence.

Douglas Ansdell: At every stage, we kept ministers fully informed of events. If—

Alex Neil: I am sorry to intervene, but what action did you recommend to the minister?

Douglas Ansdell: I will just come on to that. We looked at the comments that were coming to us in Government, which were very similar to the comments that you are making at the moment. The advice to us was that those comments were all very fine but a specific grievance was not mentioned or listed.

Alex Neil: When you say, "those comments", whose comments were they?

Douglas Ansdell: We received comments that came to the Government.

Alex Neil: From whom?

Douglas Ansdell: They were from independent parties; they were sometimes anonymous.

Alex Neil: And you still did not do anything.

Douglas Ansdell: No. If I can go on, the advice to us was that the body had its own processes for dealing with grievances and issues. [*Interruption.*] I am sorry, is there a problem?

The Acting Convener: No. I was just clarifying to Mr Neil that he is facing away from the microphone and that he should face towards it.

Douglas Ansdell: The other issue that we were dealing with at the time was that there were not any specific issues that we could look at in terms of intervention or consideration; there were measures for the body to deal with. That puts the section 22 report in a wider context of improvement and progress, and although there were issues from 2018 and 2019, I would not want the committee to lose sight of the wider context of progress and improvement.

In answer to Alex Neil's initial question, we kept ministers fully informed and we actively discussed those matters with the chair and the chief executive.

Alex Neil: I would sum that up by saying that you were warned by other people about the crisis in Bòrd na Gàidhlig, you looked at it and decided that there was nothing that you could do and that it was an internal matter for the board, which was already in crisis, and you told ministers that there was nothing that they could do about it. It would appear that that is what happened.

I have two questions on that. First, having read the section 22 report, do you think that that was the right course of action? Secondly, can we have a copy of the anonymised comments that you received and a copy of the minutes to ministers recommending no action?

Paul Johnston: I will do all that I can to share with the committee all that we are able to share, so the answer is yes, I will share all that we can.

Alex Neil: Under section 23 of the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000, the committee is entitled to see all the advice. We need to establish an audit trail to see when the situation developed into a crisis, who did what, how much information was available to the Government about the crisis that was developing and what the advice for ministers was.

The Acting Convener: Paul Johnston, can you tell us more about the anonymous complaints?

Paul Johnston: I am not sure that there is much more to say than what Douglas Ansdell has said, which is that a small number of people, as I understand it, raised concerns. One, potentially, was anonymous, and a couple were raised by name. Those concerns were about various

elements of the performance of Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Around the time, or just before—

The Acting Convener: Were they from board members?

Paul Johnston: No, I do not think that they were from board members. Douglas Ansdell can correct me if I am wrong.

Douglas Ansdell: The people concerned were not board members.

The Acting Convener: Were they employees?

Douglas Ansdell: No.

The Acting Convener: Were they people who had interaction with Bòrd na Gàidhlig?

Douglas Ansdell: Yes.

The Acting Convener: So they were whistleblowers.

Paul Johnston: I think that the advice that we had was that none of that amounted to whistleblowing; rather, it was an expression of some concerns about governance, management and leadership in the organisation.

The Acting Convener: It turns out that those who raised those concerns were right.

Paul Johnston: We will certainly ensure that the committee has sight of the detail of the concerns, but the improvement action that we are discussing—

The Acting Convener: I am sorry, but I want to clarify something. The comments in question—which were from two people whose names you know; one of them was anonymous—were made before the Deloitte report. We know from Alex Neil's exchange that advice went to ministers that "did not amount to anything"—I think that those were Mr Ansdell's exact words—meaning that it was not thought that there was any substance to them or that any action could be taken.

The Deloitte report then came out, and it substantiated what those complaints were. The complainers—two named and one anonymous—were correct, were they not?

Paul Johnston: I do not have the detail of the complaints in front of me, so I cannot say that—

The Acting Convener: You said that they were about governance and leadership issues, so they were correct: there were governance and leadership issues.

Paul Johnston: I fully accept the range of issues that was highlighted by Deloitte, and those are what the organisation has gone on to address. From memory, some of the concerns that were raised in the letters in question were not

necessarily reflected in what Deloitte said required to be addressed.

The Acting Convener: Well, we look forward to receiving the letters, the advice to ministers, the response that you got back and the communications that then went to Bòrd na Gàidhlig. We look forward to your full transparency, Mr Johnston.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I want to follow up on that. What we have heard so far this morning is extraordinary.

Two of the complaints were not anonymous; I presume that you can tell us who they were from.

Paul Johnston: It may be that Douglas Ansdell has that information. It is possible that some of the complaints were submitted in confidence, so, if the committee will bear with me, I would rather take that question away and seek advice on what I can disclose. I do not want to breach confidence by being put on the spot today.

The Acting Convener: I agree with that approach, Mr Johnston.

Paul Johnston: Thank you.

Graham Simpson: That is fair enough.

Mr Ansdell, you are described as the head of the Gaelic and Scots team in the Scottish Government. How big is that team?

Douglas Ansdell: It is a team of five people.

Graham Simpson: You have obviously lost your way a bit when it comes to Bòrd na Gàidhlig; you did not keep a grip on what was clearly a shambles.

Alex Neil mentioned a figure of £5 million as the cost of Bòrd na Gàidhlig. I have struggled to find that actual figure, to be honest, and the latest figure that I could see was a bit higher. Could anyone confirm what the annual running costs are?

Douglas Ansdell: The annual grant in aid to Bòrd na Gàidhlig is £5.179 million. The running-cost figure, which is listed in the grant-in-aid letter, is slightly over £1.6 million.

Graham Simpson: Is that £1.6 million plus £5.179 million?

Douglas Ansdell: No. The £1.6 million is an element of the £5 million.

10:45

Graham Simpson: Right. What results are you expecting from that £5 million a year?

Douglas Ansdell: Bòrd na Gàidhlig has a wide range of tasks and duties, including statutory functions under the Gaelic Language (Scotland)

Act 2005, which are not insignificant. It leads and funds a network of Gaelic organisations that operate in different areas: everything from publishing and Gaelic arts to Gaelic education and resources for teachers and young people.

The board is also involved in many projects and initiatives, not only small community projects but initiatives that involve working with large public bodies in Scottish public life. It has a number of partnerships whereby it works effectively to promote Gaelic. It also has a role with regard to the status of the Gaelic language, and it offers a voice for Gaelic interests and the Gaelic community. It has an advocacy role in representing Gaelic in public life—

Graham Simpson: Sorry—what I am trying to get at is how we measure the performance of Bòrd na Gàidhlig. In any organisation—especially an organisation that spends £5 million of public money—there have to be targets. What targets have been set, and how can we assess performance against those targets? Maybe the Government is not doing that, but I would hope that it is.

Douglas Ansdell: I expect that colleagues at Bòrd na Gàidhlig would be happy to comment on that. There is a national plan for Gaelic, and the board has a corporate plan as well as an implementation plan on progress with the priorities in the national plan.

Graham Simpson: Does anyone want to expand on that?

The Acting Convener: I will bring in Shona MacLennan. I think that what Mr Simpson is getting at is the question of what the key performance indicators from the sponsor team are.

Graham Simpson: That is exactly what I am getting at.

The Acting Convener: I would imagine that the sponsor team in the Scottish Government would know what the KPIs are for Bòrd na Gàidhlig. I will be happy to bring in Shona MacLennan to tell us what she, as the chief executive of the board, thinks the KPIs are for the board itself, but first I would like to know what KPIs the Scottish Government has for Bòrd na Gàidhlig. That is what Mr Simpson is asking.

Douglas Ansdell: We are happy to work with Bòrd na Gàidhlig on the performance indicators and the priorities that it has—

The Acting Convener: Do you currently have any performance indicators?

Graham Simpson: And what are they?

Douglas Ansdell: We abide by what the board has in its corporate plan, its implementation plan—

The Acting Convener: So name them. As the team leader, can you tell us what they are?

Douglas Ansdell: I am sorry—I do not have them with me. This is—

The Acting Convener: You are the leader of the sponsorship team for Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and you do not know what the Scottish Government's KPIs are in that regard.

Douglas Ansdell: I would not be able to list or name them right now.

The Acting Convener: Okay. What else does the Gaelic and Scots team cover?

Douglas Ansdell: The Gaelic and Scots team has funding responsibilities for Bòrd na Gàidhlig and funding responsibilities and relationships with Gaelic broadcasting, including MG Alba, which, in partnership with the BBC, operates the Gaelic channel BBC Alba. We also have funding responsibilities and relationships with Stòrlann, which is the body that provides resources for young people in Gaelic education and for teachers and parents. Similarly, we have a funding relationship with the Gaelic college in Skye, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, and we work closely with the local authorities that deliver Gaelic education; we have a grant scheme to provide support in that respect.

The Acting Convener: How involved with all of those things is Bòrd na Gàidhlig?

Douglas Ansdell: It is very involved.

The Acting Convener: Okay, but the point that I am making is that all of your work relates to a relationship with Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

Douglas Ansdell: Not all of our work relates to that.

The Acting Convener: The vast majority of it does.

Douglas Ansdell: The vast majority does, certainly. On many programme and policy areas—be they in education, arts or community issues—we work very closely with Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

Graham Simpson: That still has not answered my original question, which was what on earth Bòrd na Gàidhlig is expected to deliver every year through those KPIs? I am astonished that the Scottish Government can come here and not tell us what it expects from Bòrd na Gàidhlig. What do the witnesses from Bòrd na Gàidhlig think? Do you know what is expected?

The Acting Convener: Paul Johnston would like to come in on behalf of the Scottish Government—I will let Shona MacLennan in after that.

Paul Johnston: I am sure that the board members are keen to describe what they are achieving. From my point of view, the starting point is the statutory responsibilities of the board. This body has specific statutory responsibilities and we expect those KPIs—which are set by the board—to set out how it will deliver on those responsibilities.

At the forefront, the body exists to promote the use of Gaelic language and culture. Therefore, I expect the KPIs to include the extent to which there is increasing use of Gaelic language; that is one very specific KPI, and I think that we are seeing good progress toward the delivery of it.

Shona MacLennan: Earlier, we referred to the national Gaelic language plan. It is Bòrd na Gàidhlig's duty to produce a national Gaelic language plan for ministers every five years, and we produced the current plan—which runs from 2018 to 2023—in 2018. That was approved by ministers. It has three key aims: increasing the use of Gaelic, increasing the learning of Gaelic and increasing the promotion of Gaelic.

Our corporate plan flows from that. Bòrd na Gàidhlig's corporate plan also runs for five years, and it focuses on four key aims. Three of those flow from the national plan: increasing the use of Gaelic, increasing the learning of Gaelic and increasing the promotion of Gaelic. The fourth aim is a corporate one, which is developing how Bòrd na Gàidhlig works. Those are our four corporate aims.

Every year, the corporate plan is approved by ministers. The board also approves an operational plan every year. Obviously, that links back to the corporate plan, and the KPIs in the operational plan relate to those four priorities.

The 2019-20 operational plan and annual report and accounts were approved yesterday at the board meeting. There are nine KPIs within them. Two relate to increasing the use of Gaelic, three relate to increasing the learning of it, two to the promotion of it and two to developing how Bòrd na Gàidhlig works. All of those are what we work toward.

The Acting Convener: I presume that Mr Ansdell knows that.

Douglas Ansdell: Indeed.

Graham Simpson: In the 14 years that Bòrd na Gàidhlig has been in existence, has there been any success in delivering on any of that?

Mary MacInnes: Yes, certainly, there has. There has been a lot of success, and that success is leading to increased pressure on Bòrd na Gàidhlig. The success has come in education, in cultural activity, in the recognition that Gaelic is an economic asset, in help with the difficulties of

traditional communities and in relation to the need for Gaelic to be recognised across Government at large. That was all pre-Covid, which is certainly bringing its own challenges.

The board is increasingly under pressure to do more, because more always requires to be done. We have found—and you will find it in the Deloitte report—that we should look at increasing our resources. We have had standstill resources all the time. However, as I speak, there is discussion among the leadership team and the board about how we will put together a business case to take the work of developing Gaelic forward.

Since I have become chair, the board has developed a more strategic role, and I am building connections and relationships the length and breadth of Scotland. One of the good things about being here today is that I am able to speak on behalf of Gaelic and speak the Gaelic language in the Parliament; I thank you for that opportunity.

Graham Simpson: That is a good thing. I assure you that I have nothing against Gaelic; one of my daughters, who also speaks other languages, has started to learn Gaelic, which is good. I am trying to get to what the board has achieved; for example, have you managed to get more people to speak Gaelic? If so, can you demonstrate that?

Mary MacInnes: We can. Our annual report, which our board approved yesterday, gives many examples of the successes that we have had in relation to our KPIs and plans. We are monitoring that closely.

The Acting Convener: That progress report would be helpful to the committee, so if you can share that with us, that would be fantastic.

Mary MacInnes: An example of progress is—

The Acting Convener: I am sorry; I did not mean now. I meant the report that you referred to.

Graham Simpson: Could you send it to us?

Mary MacInnes: Yes, we can send the report to you.

The Acting Convener: I do not want anyone to think that we are not supportive of the Gaelic language; please share the report with us, so that we can see the progress that is being made.

Mary MacInnes: I will make sure that the office sends that to you immediately.

Graham Simpson: I have one more question. I was looking at your website; there have been criticisms of it not being updated. It made reference to the board meeting that you had yesterday but, although there was an agenda, I could not see any papers for it. Maybe I did not look hard enough but, in the Deloitte report, there

was reference to the minutes of a previous board meeting not being available until six months later. I hope that, within a few weeks, you will have published the minutes of the meeting that you have just had .

Mary MacInnes: Would you like me to say a little about that?

Graham Simpson: Yes, please.

Mary MacInnes: It was a big criticism in the first Deloitte report that there was not enough openness or transparency. I agree that the website was not up to date and that papers could have been done better. I also assure you that, since then, the committee format and meeting arrangements have been changed. The papers are now much better prepared and aligned to the operational plan, which links into the corporate plan, which, in turn, links into the national plan.

I am surprised that you could not find yesterday's papers, because eight people were watching that meeting; 30 people attended the previous meeting online in May. As far as I know, the latest report from Deloitte is also on our website, although I have not had time to check that. I am sorry if the guidance on the website has not taken you there, but I assure you that it is there.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): Thank you, convener. Madainn mhath, a-huile duine.

Over the years, I have had a great experience with Bòrd na Gàidhlig at East Ayrshire Council—in particular, on the Gaelic unit that was at Onthank primary school and is now at the William McIlvanney campus. It has existed for 20 years and is going from strength to strength. The level of support and encouragement for parents and children has been first class for many years.

The Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee hears about issues from a number of organisations and it is right for members to ask about them. It is important that there are the skills and expertise on the board to carry forward all the action plans. I am first keen to hear from members of the board whether the negative reports are having an impact on development of the language.

Mary MacInnes: It is right that you ask; difficult reports can have an impact. Nowadays, social media can also have a negative impact, but Bòrd na Gàidhlig has done a few things. We are working closely with our colleagues in the Scottish Government to recruit new board members. At the moment, we have only six, and we are looking to recruit at least three new members, who will have a wide range of skills.

11:00

We have produced a skills matrix that will inform the appointments. We have also developed our communications, and are working as hard as we can with stakeholders, families and everyone who is interested in Gaelic. Unfortunately, media reports can be negative and coverage can be difficult. That is difficult to bear, particularly for staff who are working hard. I appreciate Willie Coffey's having raised that.

We have a strong system in place to support staff—especially at this time, when the health and wellbeing of everyone is critical. We have a robust system to ensure that people are mindful of each other, that they are clear about communication channels and that there are clear complaints processes. It has been a big shift, but we are on the right path.

Willie Coffey: An issue that was raised at committee previously was whether there is a requirement for a person to speak Gaelic in order for them to be able to work with the board. Is that the case? With regard to getting the right skills and expertise that the board needs, was an issue identified related to the fact that applicants must also have the language? Is there a need to have a commitment to learning the language? Could Shona MacLennan explain the current position?

Shona MacLennan: Certainly. Following the audit report, we took the opportunity to clarify our policy, and we developed a Gaelic plan for Bòrd na Gàidhlig because, although we require other bodies to develop Gaelic plans, we did not have one. We developed a Gaelic language plan for the organisation, in which we set out clearly our expectations. One of the biggest reactions from the Gaelic community to the committee's meeting last January was about the question whether it is legal to require that such people speak Gaelic. In our plan, we say that it is desirable and essential that people who work with Bòrd na Gàidhlig speak Gaelic, because we are the body that promotes Gaelic. If somebody were to phone up, or if they wanted a meeting, expecting to speak Gaelic and we could not do so, that would undermine our work.

However, we also recognise that it is, at times, difficult to recruit people who have both the professional skills and the language skills. Previously, we had capacity issues; that was part of what caused the tensions. We have said clearly that we will advertise twice for roles in which Gaelic is essential, and that if we are unsuccessful in recruiting to those roles, we will relax that requirement, so that the role can go to somebody who is learning or is willing to commit to learning Gaelic, and we would provide that. Because we accept that that can happen, people who were not Gaelic speakers have worked in the organisation.

It is important for our credibility and work—for example, in giving advice to public authorities that have Gaelic language plans—that we have Gaelic speakers. We sought legal advice about it being a requirement for the role. That is important; it being a requirement for the role is permissible and is not discriminatory. I learned Gaelic as an adult, so we recognise that people acquire Gaelic in many different ways, in life. The requirement is not part of a discriminatory process; it is important for the organisation that we have those language skills.

Willie Coffey: That is a helpful answer, but for skills such as audit or accounts, a person does not really need to speak the language to be able to participate and work for the organisation, do they? How does the Scottish Government see that, and was that one of the issues that was at the heart of the question about having the right skills and expertise, and marrying that with the language to help the board to deliver its plan?

Paul Johnston: We are content with the position that Bòrd na Gàidhlig has arrived at on that issue. We have worked with Bòrd na Gàidhlig on it. It is important for the reasons that Willie Coffey identified that there is some flexibility. In other words, it is Gaelic first, in terms of advertising. If the right skills and experience cannot be found through two advertisement processes, it is correct that the pool be widened so that the appropriate range of skills can be represented on the board and among staff.

Willie Coffey: Good.

The current report identifies a £4 million cumulative funding gap for Bòrd na Gàidhlig. How will the Scottish Government address that? We have heard from Mary MacInnes that the budget basically flatlined over a number of years. The funding gap will grow if nothing is done about it. How do you see that, going forward?

Paul Johnston: I would not want to commit on the specifics of a funding gap. Shona MacLennan might be able to confirm whether that is her understanding, then I can come in with details of what we are going to do.

Shona MacLennan: One of the recommendations of the 2018-19 report was that we should develop a medium-term financial plan and a workforce plan. We did both. The gap that has been identified is based on the funding that would be required were we to implement the staffing structure that we believe would be the optimum, in terms of numbers of staff and roles to carry out our work. We have referred frequently to the tension that is caused by our responsibilities in relation to the resource that is available for delivering them. That amount is the medium-term financial plan saying what would be required were

Bòrd na Gàidhlig to be the size at which we believe it would be effective in delivering all its responsibilities.

Willie Coffey: Page 32 of the Deloitte report mentions that, so I had to ask the question.

Looking ahead, after all those audits, the experience that you are having today, and having produced the implementation plan and so on, can you give the committee the assurance that it needs that development of the language is in safe hands and is progressing positively? The question is for the Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Is the language progressing positively and can we look forward to a brighter better future for it?

Shona MacLennan: Our chair referred to our annual report, from yesterday. In that, we show that the education data for children in Gaelic-medium education is the highest it has ever been. There are now in excess of 450,000 registered learners of Scots Gaelic on Duolingo, so interest exists. Around 68 public authorities either have Gaelic language plans or are working towards implementing Gaelic language plans. I am sure that members will all be aware, from what you see as you walk around, that visibility of Gaelic has increased dramatically since Bòrd na Gàidhlig was established. We are delivering work that supports the growth of Gaelic in many ways, and we will continue to do so.

Willie Coffey: Paul—could you also comment, please?

Paul Johnston: I endorse all that Shona has said. In many ways, the specific statistics and evidence speak for themselves. There has been a welcome increase in education in Gaelic, in learning of Gaelic and in support for Gaelic culture. Bòrd na Gàidhlig plays a central role in all that.

It is critical in the context of today's evidence session that the areas that have been identified for improvement are grasped and pursued with determination and rigour. That is what I am determined to see, and I am clear that it is already happening.

I expect the committee to continue to take an interest. The Scottish Government will continue to remain close to the matter, because we want to support Bòrd na Gàidhlig in delivery of its ambitious mission for Gaelic language and culture in Scotland.

The Acting Convener: The next questions are from Neil Bibby, who joins us remotely.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Good morning. I place on record my support for Gaelic language and culture. The most important thing is that we have a functioning body that meets the

needs and wishes of the Gaelic population. I want to focus on that.

My father-in-law lives in Stornoway and is a fluent Gaelic speaker. I have to say that he had not heard of the board until earlier this year, when it was in the Gaelic news in relation to the previous reports. I accept that that is not the case for everyone; I have been in contact with a number of other Gaelic speakers whom I know and who are aware of the board. They believe that it is not just a case of board members not being aware of their roles and responsibilities; they believe that there is confusion in the Gaelic population as a whole about whether the board is an oversight and direction body or a support and advice body. The suggestion is that that confusion also applies on the board.

I will follow on from Graham Simpson's earlier questions. Is the board confident in its purpose? How does it reflect the wishes of the Gaelic population in its purpose and remit?

Shona MacLennan: We have referred on a number of occasions to the national Gaelic language plan, which is developed on the basis of extensive community consultation. We are about to start work on the fourth plan. There is a six-month consultation process with communities, followed by a three-month statutory consultation process. That is a prime statutory duty so, at our heart, we have a responsibility to communicate with the Gaelic community and to listen to its desires and ambitions.

In relation to what the organisation does, we have referred on a number of occasions to the tensions between the expectations of what Bòrd na Gàidhlig will deliver, what it is statutorily required to deliver and what it has taken on to deliver because of gaps in provision elsewhere. We have been a strategic policy-setting organisation, through producing national Gaelic language plans and providing advice and education on strategy and policy. However, at the other end of the spectrum, we fund community organisations and events and provide advice and support in that regard. Trying to deliver all that with such a small team has resulted in many of the tensions that arose that were evidenced in the original Deloitte report.

The chair might want to talk about this, but one of the actions that the board and its senior officers have taken is to focus much more on what we must deliver through our clear statutory duty, what we want to deliver to supplement that statutory duty and what we can support others to deliver. We need to be much clearer about what the organisation does and what we do in partnership with others. We have focused on that work since last August. The work on recognising that change

was needed predated the wider-scope audit that was carried out by Deloitte in January 2019.

I hope that that gives some assurance about our recognition of where we are going and how we support Gaelic.

Mary MacInnes: Three of our board members are from Lewis, and Stornoway is in Lewis, so it is surprising that someone in Stornoway has not heard much about Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

The first audit report asked us to improve our communication. We all know that we do not tell our own story well enough—that is, to an extent, a Gaelic thing. We are often overcritical of each other and of ourselves, and we sometimes do not find the good stories that we could be telling.

11:15

We at the board recognise that our communications team is very small, but we have an active social media profile, and we are increasing the team. We also have a programme of engagement with communities. Face-to-face engagement is no longer possible, but at our board meeting yesterday, we started to prepare for a new strategy for online meetings. Online meetings work really well in remote communities because—thanks to the Scottish Government—broadband is very good in remote parts of Scotland.

We are working on that. I accept that there is more to be done and that it is a big job, but we are aware of that and are working away at it.

Neil Bibby: We have talked a lot about providing leadership. Leadership is also about listening—in this case, listening to the Gaelic community. We have talked about the difference between oversight, and support and advice. I want to ask about a practical example.

You mentioned the advice and support that you give to parents in respect of education. Perhaps that involves advice to parents on how to negotiate with local authorities over Gaelic-medium education. However, there are parents who believe that there should be a much firmer role for Bòrd na Gàidhlig and that it should be involved in telling local authorities what they should be doing in providing Gaelic, not just providing support. Have you consulted the Gaelic population on that point?

Shona MacLennan: A piece of work that was on-going when I came into my role was the development of statutory guidance on Gaelic education consequent to the Education (Scotland) Act 2016. I understand that there was extensive consultation on the development of that statutory guidance. It sets out what is expected of the local authorities in the delivery of Gaelic-medium

education and gives advice to parents on what they can expect.

In addition, we fund Comann nam Pàrant, which is the parents association. It delivers a wide range of support for parents on Gaelic-medium education through its network of local forums. We are heavily involved with that in a number of ways.

Neil Bibby: Finally, we have talked a lot about the relationship between the Scottish Government and the board. I am aware that the board provides advice to ministers. What would the board's role be if the Scottish Government enacted something that the board or the Gaelic population disagreed with? What would its role be if the Scottish Government did something against the wishes of the board or the Gaelic population? Could the board speak truth to power on that? The Gaelic speakers I am aware of want a strong organisation that will stand up for Gaelic interests to the Scottish Government. Is the board fit for purpose in its current form?

Mary MacInnes: That is a difficult question. I think that the board is fit for purpose, but revisiting the act might be needed. Discussing that might not be for today. We have had an understanding of what we have committed to in the act as we have taken forward Gaelic development. We have not finished all the actions that were implied in that, but there is a feeling across the Gaelic communities in Scotland that it may be time to strengthen the act and that, through doing that, Gaelic development and Gaelic language across the country will be strengthened.

Gaelic belongs to all of Scotland. As I said at the beginning, there is a very complex minefield or landscape. There are the traditional communities, and there is the huge growth in the cities. For example, in Govan, there are 91 children on the waiting list for the Gaelic nursery. That is one example from a city. In the rural communities, the opposite applies. There are hardly 91 people in any such community.

There is a range of communities, and there is also a huge online community—lockdown has certainly emphasised and progressed that. Therefore, 15 years on, it is perhaps time to look again and, in many ways, now might be a good time to do that. As I have accepted throughout the session, there is more to be done. We have more to learn and we are up for moving forward with all that.

The Acting Convener: I believe that Paul Johnston wants to come in.

Paul Johnston: I simply want to add that the Scottish Government is absolutely ready to receive advice and challenge from Bòrd na Gàidhlig. As has been covered, the board has an advisory role and will contribute to much of the

work of Government. The committee will know that there are many other bodies like Bòrd na Gàidhlig that, at times, will be clear in their challenge to Government if they think that there is a need for a change of course. Therefore, I would not wish it to be suggested that that is not possible; indeed, it would be encouraged if the board is of the view that there are areas where challenge is needed.

Adam Tomkins: I have two supplementary questions, both of which are for Mary MacInnes, the chair of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, in light of her answers to recent questions from Neil Bibby and other members.

First, can you give me an example from your time as chair of the organisation in which you spoke truth to power and said to the Scottish ministers that they needed to do something that they were not doing or that they needed to stop doing something? Can you give me an example of your board representing the interests of the Gaelic community in a way that pushes the Scottish ministers around, which is your function?

Mary MacInnes: When the education recovery guidance was being drawn up, Gaelic was not included in it. We were keeping an eye on that and we pointed out the issue. We spoke to the sponsorship team and, as a result, an extra piece of work was done to ensure that Gaelic-medium education and its needs were included in the Covid recovery plan.

I ask Shona MacLennan to speak about children's rights.

Shona MacLennan: As members will be aware, two bills on rights are being prepared. One is about human rights and another is about enacting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We have been involved in contributing to the bill on human rights to try to ensure that there is recognition of a linguistic right in relation to the Gaelic language—not a cultural or heritage right but a right to use the language. We will do a similar thing with the children's rights bill, because the UN convention makes a number of references to linguistic rights. It is equally important for children in Scotland that Gaelic is recognised as a right in that bill. For all the children who grow up in Gaelic families or who are in Gaelic-medium education, it is important that Gaelic is part of that bill.

There are a number of issues on which, at times, Gaelic has not been considered or has maybe been considered but not acted on and we have said, "What about Gaelic? It needs to be at the heart of this and to be a normal part of Scottish public life. Taking these actions will meet the need."

Adam Tomkins: Those are useful examples, so I thank you for them.

My second question also arises out of something that Mary MacInnes said earlier. She described Gaelic as an economic asset that benefits us all. I am sure that she is right about that. We have heard a lot about how much the board costs and the money—taxpayers' money, it has to be said—that the Scottish Government gives to Bòrd na Gàidhlig every year. We have not heard very much about what economic value you think the work of the board over the past 14 years has added, so can you give me an example of the economic value that you and your colleagues on the board have added to Scotland to manifest your claim, with which I agree, that Gaelic is an economic asset to the people of Scotland?

Mary MacInnes: You may have heard that we are going to send you a copy of the annual report, which was signed off yesterday. That has many examples of good work. I will cite two things; one is our work with the tourism industry. Tourism is a massive industry in Scotland and we are fortunate that VisitScotland has developed a Gaelic tourism strategy. VisitScotland has worked with many others across the industry and a Gaelic offer is very much part of its core business. The work that VisitScotland has done, with the support of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, is a tremendous example of how Gaelic is seen as an economic asset. I do not think that anyone needs to explain the problems that we are having around that just now but, to address that, the Gaelic community, supported and led by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, is making a comprehensive and high-value online contribution. The ceilidhs, the events and the Gaelic language lessons that are being delivered through online provision at the moment are providing a lot of quality experiences that, in turn, we hope will result in people wanting to come back to Scotland to experience the language, the countryside and the whole tourism offer. That is one example.

The other example is the huge increase in traditional culture, particularly traditional music, with language at the heart of that. Traditional music and culture have seen a growth over the past 20 years, particularly through the growth of the Scottish Parliament, and Gaelic is very much at the heart of that. At times, when that happens in other countries, the language can be lost, but traditional culture and music mean nothing unless the language is at the heart of them. We at the board work with many others through the language plans to ensure that the Gaelic language is there and that people make a living through the language across a wide range of activities. For me, that is what an economic asset is.

Adam Tomkins: I have a question that I ask out of curiosity, really. How, in the end, do we measure the success of the organisation? Would it be a mark of success if, in the end, the organisation is no longer needed because Gaelic

has been so well promoted over the course of the past decade or two, as a language, as a culture, and as an economic asset, that we no longer need a board that costs £5 million of taxpayers' money every year to do that job, or do you think that we will need this organisation in perpetuity?

Mary MacInnes: It would be an ideal situation if that were to happen—if Gaelic were so much a part of Scottish life that there was no need for a campaigning board or a campaigning team, which is what we are. However, somehow, I do not see that happening—not in my lifetime, anyway.

I see a key role for the board, but it is also important that everyone recognises that the board needs to change, that the board is changing and that the board is now a strategic organisation. When Shona MacLennan talks to me about her team, I can hear that that is one of the hardest things to do. Everyone enjoys projects; everyone enjoys development. The board has been good and successful at those things. The more challenging thing is to move to being a strategic organisation that will influence policy in this Government and in any other Government that impacts on our lives.

I do not see the role for Bòrd na Gàidhlig changing at all: I see it improving, I see it extending and I see it going on for ever.

Paul Johnston: I would not wish to take away from anything that the chair has so eloquently articulated; I will just make a point for the record. To be clear, the Gaelic board does not cost £5 million a year to run; a significant amount of that £5 million goes towards a range of organisations that Bòrd na Gàidhlig funds directly. Something like two thirds of the £5 million—or perhaps above that—goes straight out the door in the form of the support that Bòrd na Gàidhlig seeks to provide.

The Acting Convener: I see that members have no further supplementary questions.

This has been a robust session, which has lasted longer than all of us expected it to, so I offer my genuine thanks to all our witnesses.

There has been a lot of investigation into and reporting on the role of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and I am sure that we will wish to follow up on a number of items. We are leaving this evidence session with many more questions about the role of the sponsorship team and the Scottish Government's oversight of Bòrd na Gàidhlig. We need some robust and fully transparent responses on the questions that Alex Neil and Graham Simpson raised with Paul Johnston in particular, and with Douglas Ansdell—I think that huge question marks remain at least over that aspect of our interaction this morning.

I thank Mary MacInnes, Shona MacLennan, Paul Johnston and Douglas Ansdell, as well as Dr Stewart Macleod, who was joining us remotely.

I remind all those who have been watching this evidence session that we will be translating the *Official Report* into Gaelic for those in the Gaelic community engaging with the work of the committee.

11:31

Meeting continued in private until 12:08.

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.

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