



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Education and Culture Committee

3rd Report, 2014 (Session 4)

Annual Report 2013-14

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Education and Culture Committee

Remit and membership

Remit:

The remit of the Committee is to consider and report on further and higher education, lifelong learning, schools, pre-school care, skills and other matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning and matters relating to culture and the arts falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs.

Membership:

George Adam
Clare Adamson
Jayne Baxter (from 3 September 2014)
Colin Beattie
Neil Bibby (Deputy Convener)
Neil Findlay (until 3 September 2014)
Gordon MacDonald (from 3 April 2014)
Stewart Maxwell (Convener)
Joan McAlpine (until 3 April 2014)
Liam McArthur
Mary Scanlon (from 27 February 2014)
Liz Smith (until 27 February 2014)

Committee Clerking Team:

Senior Assistant Clerk

Terry Shevlin

Assistant Clerk

Lewis McNaughton

Committee Assistant

Fiona Sinclair



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The Committee reports to the Parliament as follows—

1. This report covers the work of the Education and Culture Committee during the parliamentary year from 11 May 2013 to 10 May 2014. In this period, we have undertaken in-depth scrutiny of Scottish Government legislation and policies relevant to our remit.

2. In particular, we scrutinised the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill at Stages 1 and 2; undertook an inquiry into Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future; held a series of one-off evidence sessions on topics of particular interest at the time and scrutinised the Scottish Government's budget.

Inquiries and reports

Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future Inquiry

3. We held four evidence sessions to inform this inquiry. The evidence sessions covered three broad themes: further and higher education; early years, childcare and employability; and broadcasting and culture. The final evidence session included three Cabinet Secretaries. We did not publish a report on this inquiry, rather the written and oral evidence received forms the output of the Inquiry.

Inquiry into decision making on whether to take children into care

4. Following the publication of our interim report in the previous parliamentary year, we held an event on 17 June 2013 in the Scottish Parliament. This event was held to gather input from a wide variety of individuals and groups with an interest in the inquiry. The event informed our subsequent questioning of the Minister for Children and Young People and the conclusions in our final report. We published our final report on 23 September 2013.

One-off evidence sessions

5. In late 2013 and early 2014, we held several one-off evidence sessions on a range of education and culture related issues. These included sessions on Creative Scotland; Outdoor Learning; Curriculum for Excellence – National Qualifications; Broadcasting; Cyberbullying; and My World of Work.

Draft Budget 2014-2015

6. We agreed to focus our scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2014-15 on the extent to which relevant public sector providers of training and learning, including further education, are helping to deliver the Scottish Government's youth employability commitments. We also looked at whether the funding that is being provided for this purpose is sufficient; and how the policy focus on younger learners is impacting on lifelong learning. We took evidence from a range of stakeholders and academics and concluded by taking evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning.

Legislation

Children and Young people (Scotland) Bill

7. We scrutinised the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill. We received written evidence from a number of key stakeholders, organisations and individuals, and took oral evidence at our meetings between 25 June 2013 and 8 October 2013. We published our Stage 1 report on 14 November 2013. We supported the principles of the Bill though had some concerns about aspects of the proposed legislation and highlighted areas that could be improved or where further clarification was needed ahead of Stage 2.

8. Prior to our consideration of Stage 2 amendments, we took evidence on 3 December 2013 on the issue of rural school closures from key stakeholders followed by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning.

9. We considered Stage 2 amendments on 17 December 2013, 7 January 2014, 14 January and 21 January. A total of 438 amendments were lodged. Subsequently, the Bill was passed by the Parliament on 19 February 2014 and received Royal Assent on 27 March 2014.

Historic Environment Scotland Bill

10. During the reporting year, we began our consideration of the Historic Environment Scotland Bill at Stage 1. We received written submissions from 31 key stakeholders, and took oral evidence on 18 March and 6 May. We expect to publish our Stage 1 report around mid-June.

Subordinate legislation

11. During the parliamentary year, we considered 37 Scottish Statutory Instruments (SSIs): 10 under affirmative procedure and the remaining 27 under negative procedure.

Petitions

12. We considered petition PE1440 from Sharon McCluskie, on behalf of Play Scotland, calling for a statutory duty for play in the Children and Young People Bill. We agreed to close the petition, and to consider the issues that were raised in the context of our scrutiny of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill.

13. We considered petition PE1395 from Jan Culik on targeted funding for lesser taught languages and cultures at universities. We agreed to close the petition and

also agreed to write to the Scottish Government on the wider issue of the teaching of foreign languages.

14. We considered petition PE1487 from Mark Gordon and Scottish Secular Society calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to amend the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 by making Religious Observance in public schools an “opt-in” activity rather than an “opt-out” one. We agreed to close the petition and also agreed to write to the Scottish Government on the wider issue of local authorities ensuring parents are aware of their rights to withdraw their child from religious observance in school.

15. We also considered petition PE1498 from Mr Colin Emerson on behalf of Edinburgh Secular Society on religious representatives on local authority education committees. We agreed to close the petition on the basis that a draft proposal for a Member's Bill on local government accountability and transparency has been lodged.

Equalities

16. In recognition of the Parliament's commitment to mainstreaming equalities, we held an event in relation to our inquiry into decision making on whether to take children into care. We met a variety of stakeholders and individuals with an interest in the inquiry. During our scrutiny of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill we heard the views of many organisations representing the interests of minority groups. Beyond this, we have endeavoured to incorporate the views, written and oral, of stakeholders from a wide cross-section of the population throughout all our work.

Meetings

17. During the parliamentary year, we met 19 times. Of these meetings, 4 were held entirely in private, and 9 were held partly in private. Meetings were held wholly in private or partly in private in order to consider draft reports or work programme papers. All our formal meetings were held in Edinburgh.

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