



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee

**Thursday 4 March 2021**

**Session 5**



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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**PUBLIC AUDIT AND POST-LEGISLATIVE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**8<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2021, Session 5**

**CONVENER**

\*Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab)

**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)

\*Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)

\*Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Paul Johnston (Scottish Government)

Graeme Logan (Scottish Government)

Catriona Maclean (Scottish Government)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Lucy Scharbert

**LOCATION**

Virtual Meeting



## Scottish Parliament

### Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee

Thursday 4 March 2021

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]*

### Decision on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Jenny Marra):** Good morning, and welcome to the eighth meeting of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee in 2021. Agenda item 1 is a decision on taking business in private. I will assume that everyone agrees unless a member indicates otherwise. Does any member object to taking items 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 in private this morning?

As no one has objected, that is agreed.

## Section 22 Report

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

09:01

**The Convener:** Agenda item 2 is the section 22 report on “The 2018-19 audit of Bòrd na Gàidhlig: Governance and transparency”. I welcome our witnesses from the Scottish Government: Paul Johnston, director general, education, communities and justice; and Graeme Logan, director of learning. I understand that Paul Johnston would like to make a brief opening statement.

**Paul Johnston (Scottish Government):** Thank you for this opportunity to update the committee on the progress that has been made since the evidence session on 24 September 2020 on the 2018-19 audit of Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig has faced challenges in its governance and operations over a number of years, and the 2018-19 audit focused on the need for significant improvement within the organisation. Clear evidence of that improvement was set out in the 2019-20 audit, and I have seen the determination shown by the chair and chief executive of Bòrd na Gàidhlig to pursue a wide-ranging improvement programme. They are the first to recognise that a continued focus on sustaining that improvement is vital. I understand that you will hear directly today from Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s auditors and I hope that they will confirm that they recognise that improving situation.

The 2018-19 audit recommended that work be done to clarify roles and responsibilities between the sponsor team and Bòrd na Gàidhlig. An internal review of the sponsorship function was completed in September 2020. That recommended greater clarity in the purpose and frequency of engagement between the Scottish Government team and Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and clarity on matters such as attendance at board meetings and scrutiny of performance. Those issues have now been addressed in the updated framework agreement that I sent to the committee on 26 February and that is included in the papers for today’s meeting.

I am joined today by Graeme Logan, who assumed the role of director of learning in the Scottish Government in summer 2019. As the portfolio accountable officer for the education portfolio, I formally delegate the responsibility for the oversight of the sponsorship relationship to Graeme Logan. He and the deputy director work closely with the sponsor team. The responsibilities

of all parties, together with arrangements for regular engagement, are set out clearly in the framework agreement.

It is vital to have an effective system of escalation alongside any system of delegation. The issues identified in the 2018-19 audit of Bòrd na Gàidhlig were escalated to me. They have been considered as part of the director general audit and assurance arrangements alongside other sponsorship issues that the committee will consider later this morning. They have also been highlighted as part of the annual certificate of assurance process and there will be continued focus on improvement, with input from the Scottish Government's internal auditors and non-executive directors.

In addition to addressing immediate issues, we must share learning from every audit. An event was held in December 2020 for sponsor leads across the Scottish Government, at which we shared key learning points from the 2018-19 audit. I held a meeting last week with the chair and chief executive of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the director, deputy director and sponsor team in the Scottish Government to take stock of progress and ensure clarity around purpose and direction. I saw evidence of a shared commitment to work closely together with a view to supporting the promotion of Gaelic language and culture in Scotland.

Graeme Logan and I are happy to discuss the ways in which we will work to ensure continued improvement in relationships and performance in the days ahead.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much. Colin Beattie will open the questioning for the committee.

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** I thank Paul Johnston for his letter to the committee, which clearly outlined the sponsor unit responsibilities and so forth. That was helpful. I will ask some basic questions. Was the person who was responsible for discharging the sponsorship responsibilities a Gaelic speaker?

**Paul Johnston:** Yes, the head of the sponsor team is a Gaelic speaker and members of the team are also speakers of the Gaelic language.

**Colin Beattie:** There was no barrier to understanding what was happening in the bòrd.

**Paul Johnston:** There were no issues there.

**Colin Beattie:** Since the section 22 report, there has been a review of responsibilities in terms of the relationship between the sponsor unit and Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Surely a standard process or a standard level of engagement was in place previously? Why was it necessary to revisit that and review what was happening? Were there deficiencies?

**Paul Johnston:** Good practice tells us that all framework agreements between the Scottish Government's sponsor teams and public bodies should be kept under regular review. The 2018-19 audit that this committee has considered carefully also emphasised the need for further consideration to be given to the sponsor relationship. As such, it was important that we reviewed that. We sought the support of some experienced colleagues within the Scottish Government who were sponsoring other teams to come along to look at what our procedures and policies and relationships were like. They gave us some recommendations in late September 2020, among which were some suggested improvements for the framework document. I shared an updated version of that with the committee in February. There has been a framework document in existence, but some key clarifications and improvements are set out in the most recent document.

**Colin Beattie:** Are we saying that the arrangements for each unit that is being sponsored, or each organisation that has a sponsor attached to it, are different? There is not one common document?

**Paul Johnston:** Yes. There is a model framework document that the public bodies unit in the Scottish Government has and keeps up to date. In the later session, we will be joined by Catriona Maclean, who is responsible for that unit. We share the model document with all sponsor teams, but sponsor teams then need to look at the specific statutory arrangements for the body—you will appreciate they differ from body to body—and ensure that the particular framework document is quite specific about the roles and responsibilities, which may vary depending on the powers, duties and statutory set-up of the body in question.

**Colin Beattie:** Turning again to specifics with the bòrd, you stated that the Scottish Government became aware of issues with the organisation in early 2018. How did that physically happen? How was it raised? How was the problem uncovered?

**Paul Johnston:** As I sought to acknowledge in my opening statement, it is a matter of public record that there have been challenges with Bòrd na Gàidhlig for a number of years, and indeed there have been a number of chairs and chief executives, as was mentioned at the committee's September evidence session.

The particular issues that gave rise to the 2018-19 audit by Deloitte were the ones that I focused on in my letter to the committee in November 2020. As you can see from the documentation that I have submitted, the first formal notification was the letter to the deputy director at the time, dated 20 June 2018. My understanding from speaking to the sponsor team is that it was known through

discussions that there were some issues with engagement between Bòrd na Gàidhlig and other organisations, but the formal concerns were raised with us in June 2018.

**Colin Beattie:** You said that you were aware of a history of problems with the bòrd, involving things such as the turnover of the directors, the chief executive and so on. Would you not have had the bòrd under some special scrutiny?

**Paul Johnston:** There was engagement between the Scottish Government and the bòrd throughout its history and the Scottish Government has had responsibility for the appointment of the chairs and for the scrutiny of the performance of the chairs. Of course, one of my reflections is whether there needed to be earlier intervention, and I can see why the committee would conclude that there should have been. I think that is one of the key areas of learning from the work that has been done over recent times.

**Colin Beattie:** Frankly, somebody who is carrying out the sponsorship responsibilities should surely have been close enough to the bòrd to be aware of the difficulties that it was having and the concerns that there were internally, but nothing happened. Apparently nothing was reported back to indicate anything serious.

**Paul Johnston:** I would not say that nothing happened. That would not be an accurate description. As you can see from the correspondence, when concerns were raised in 2018—that is well before the audit was received—the deputy director was active in working with the chair to support Bòrd na Gàidhlig in resolving the issues.

It is important to emphasise that, when bodies such as Bòrd na Gàidhlig and other non-departmental public bodies are established, it is primarily their responsibility, with the governing legislation and the accountable officer framework, to ensure that they are operating effectively, and they are audited annually. Nonetheless, there is a responsibility for the Scottish Government, and what you can see happened is the work with the chair and, ultimately, the appointment of an external person to engage with staff with a view to resolving the issues that had been raised.

**Colin Beattie:** Did the person discharging the duty of sponsorship give advice, support or any help to the board members at any point?

**Paul Johnston:** Yes. The sponsor team and the deputy director have been active in seeking to provide advice and support to them and to the chief executive.

**Colin Beattie:** Was that prior to June 2018?

**Paul Johnston:** Yes. There has been engagement throughout the life of the body with the Scottish Government sponsor team and Bòrd na Gàidhlig. I think that it is important to recognise that, over the years, although there have been issues, we can also point to some real successes in the work of Bòrd na Gàidhlig in supporting the roll-out of Gaelic language plans and the promotion of Gaelic language and culture in Scotland. That has been a result of the work of the Bòrd na Gàidhlig and its staff, and there has been engagement between it and the Scottish Government through the years. However, I am here today recognising that there have also been issues and there is important learning from the audit and from the scrutiny of this committee. We must ensure real clarity of roles and responsibilities and we must ensure early escalation and resolution of any issues that arise.

09:15

**Colin Beattie:** You will understand that there is some concern—certainly on my part, and probably on the part of other members of the committee—about the point at which the Scottish Government or the sponsor unit became aware of the seriousness of the problems at Bòrd na Gàidhlig and intervened in such a way as to, we hope, put it back on track. Clearly, that did not happen prior to 2018. There is no evidence that it happened prior to 2018. It was after it became generally known that there were serious problems that support and help were provided. Do you agree?

**Paul Johnston:** We are referring to a body that was formally established following the passage of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. Of course, with any body, issues will at times arise. I think that you will see that audit reports over the years did not raise anything like the issues that were surfaced in the 2018-19 audit. As with most sponsor teams, there is an on-going relationship between the sponsor body and the sponsor team, and most issues are resolved satisfactorily. What we saw in 2018 was an escalation of those issues, which led to the course of correspondence that I shared with the committee following my evidence session in September.

**Colin Beattie:** What advice was given to ministers at the time?

**Paul Johnston:** I have sought to set out the advice that we provided to ministers in the documentation that I shared with the committee on 6 November 2020. In the first instance, we ensured that ministers were kept up to date with the way in which we were seeking to support the board in handling the complaints; we also ensured that ministers were aware of the findings that emerged from the 2018-19 audit. You will see from the correspondence that ministers then wrote to

the board to emphasise the need for it to focus on a clear plan of improvement. I was also asked by ministers, as the portfolio accountable officer, to visit Bòrd na Gàidhlig and ensure that I was satisfied that that plan of improvement was being pursued. I have shared the Deputy First Minister's correspondence with Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the correspondence that I sent to Bòrd na Gàidhlig at the time.

**Colin Beattie:** Again, that seems to be post-2018—or, at least, post the problems becoming evident in 2018. Was any briefing or advice given to ministers prior to that?

**Paul Johnston:** Undoubtedly. The committee asked me for the correspondence with Bòrd na Gàidhlig relating to the issues that we discussed at the September session, but the sponsor team will have given advice given to ministers over the years of the body's life.

**Colin Beattie:** Thank you.

**The Convener:** What advice was given between early 2018 and June 2018?

**Paul Johnston:** From early 2018, primarily we advised ministers of the fact of the complaints and concerns that had been raised with us, and of the approach that we proposed to take on receipt of those concerns. Again, I have disclosed in my letter and the attachments a number of pieces of advice that we sent to ministers.

First and foremost, we assured them that we were seeking advice on handling from other areas in the Scottish Government, including human resources. We told them that our approach was to ask the chair to lead in handling the issues, since they related to the internal management of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, but that we had also asked the chair to ensure there was independent involvement in the resolution of the issues—hence the appointment of an independent person to work with the chair. They then spoke to a number of staff in Bòrd na Gàidhlig and came up with recommendations for improvement. We advised ministers of all those steps.

**The Convener:** Were ministers satisfied with that?

**Paul Johnston:** Yes. Ministers indicated that they were content with the steps that we were taking.

**The Convener:** There was never a direct intervention by a minister to find out what was going on or whether enough was being done to sort out the situation.

**Paul Johnston:** There were certainly discussions with ministers. I think that you can see from the correspondence that action was taken at a significant pace once the concerns were brought

to our attention, with the full knowledge of ministers.

Those matters were being resolved at around the time that the wider audit that was done by Deloitte began, so the concerns were quite swiftly wrapped up in the wider issues that were captured in the audit that the committee has considered. As I have said, you can see that ministers were proactive in making clear the need for swift resolution of the issues that had been raised through the audit.

**The Convener:** But if the sponsorship arrangement was working correctly, how was the situation allowed to get to such a point?

**Paul Johnston:** Unfortunately—I wish that this were not the case—issues arise around the relationships between particular bodies and stakeholders, as the committee will be well aware. Such issues were brought to our attention formally in June 2018 in the correspondence and we sought to address them. Should they have been addressed more speedily? I absolutely accept, as we look back on the situation, that we would much prefer the issues to have been nipped in the bud and addressed more rapidly. I acknowledge that there is learning for us to do there on the rapid escalation and resolution of issues, wherever that is possible. That is part of the learning from the audit that we are seeking to emphasise in the wider training that we are providing to other bodies and other sponsor teams.

**The Convener:** As you know, we will come on to a session on the general issue of sponsorship, but it strikes me that if I were a civil servant who had responsibility for a body such as Bòrd na Gàidhlig, I would want to check in with it every fortnight or so to check that everything was okay and to maintain at least a level of light-handed oversight. For things to get to the stage that they did, it is clear that that did not happen.

**Paul Johnston:** As I have said, there was such engagement, but I am clear about the fact that I recognise the need for real clarity and close engagement with Bòrd na Gàidhlig going forward. It may be that Graeme Logan could describe his role and what that will look like in terms of the close engagement between him and his team going forward, if that would be acceptable, convener.

**The Convener:** Let us come on to the “going forward” in a minute because a lot of the time, as you know, our role is to look backwards and to scrutinise that first before we get the good news from you. I will pass over to Graham Simpson, who has a couple of questions.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** I have more than a couple, in fact, convener.



Mr Johnston, do you ever contact stakeholders—in other words, the bodies that receive funding from Bòrd na Gàidhlig—to find out what their relationship is with the board and how that is working?

**Paul Johnston:** I know that one thing that the sponsor team does is maintain relationships with a number of bodies that are in receipt of funding from Bòrd na Gàidhlig and from the Scottish Government.

**Graham Simpson:** So that is a yes—you do contact them.

**Paul Johnston:** That is a yes as regards the work of the sponsor team. It is not something that I personally do or have done.

**Graham Simpson:** Right. I have heard anecdotally that the relationship between some of the bodies that receive funding and the board is—how shall I phrase this?—not what it should be. I will not put it any stronger than that.

**Paul Johnston:** As I recall, the 2018-19 audit by Deloitte, which the committee has considered, made clear the need for improvements in the relationship between Bòrd na Gàidhlig and its stakeholders. That has been taken very seriously by the body. I have sought and have received assurance that it is reaching out and seeking and receiving feedback on its performance and how that can be improved. In my letter to Bòrd na Gàidhlig around the time of the audit, I emphasised the need for it to be really proactive in engaging with its stakeholders and listening carefully to their perspectives and concerns. I think that the most recent audit has confirmed that it has better systems in place for engagement with key partners.

**Graham Simpson:** Clearly, there were a number of targets when the board was set up; we would not expect it to just receive Government money and do nothing with it. It has to deliver something. Originally, we had a set of targets that said that, by this year, there should be 4,000 entrants in first year Gaelic-medium primary education, 65,000 Gaelic speakers recorded in Scotland, and 40,000 Gaelic speakers who can read and write the language. Those were the original targets for this year. How are we doing against those targets?

**Paul Johnston:** I do not have the numbers in front of me on exactly where we are with those targets. I am very happy to take that away and write to the committee, if that would be acceptable. I know that Bòrd na Gàidhlig has been reporting on the progress that it has been making against its strategic priorities and against its key performance indicators and that progress is being made, but it may be that you have the numbers in front of you; I am sorry, but I do not.

**Graham Simpson:** I do not have the numbers. That is why I was asking you. Given that you put in several million pounds a year and you expect certain results, I would have thought that you might have known how the body is doing against those targets, but you do not.

**Paul Johnston:** In the discussions that I have had with Bòrd na Gàidhlig and with the sponsor team, I have heard about significant progress in the use of Gaelic and the increase, for example, in children who are being educated in Gaelic-medium education, so the situation is improving.

I will take that away and get back to the committee on specifically where we are against each of the targets that were originally set.

**Graham Simpson:** I have just found the answer on one of those targets, which was a target of 4,000 pupils entering primary 1 in Gaelic by this year. Last year, the figure was just 653, against a target of 4,000. That does not strike me as doing very well. Would you agree?

**Paul Johnston:** That indicates that we still have a lot of further progress to make.

**Graham Simpson:** Yes, so what are you doing about it?

**Paul Johnston:** That comes back to the importance of the work of Bòrd na Gàidhlig in seeking to ensure the promotion of the Gaelic language but, of course, there is also an important role for our partners in local government who provide Gaelic-medium education. That is absolutely something that requires continued focus.

**Graham Simpson:** Do we know how many Gaelic speakers there are in Scotland?

**Paul Johnston:** I do not have the figure in front of me for the precise number of Gaelic speakers at this time.

**Graham Simpson:** The ultimate target for 2041—we have another 20 years to go—was 100,000 Gaelic speakers. I imagine that we are nowhere near that, are we? You do not know.

**Paul Johnston:** Again, I think that we have some way to go, but I am sorry—I do not have those numbers in front of me.

**The Convener:** Do you have any further questions, Mr Simpson?

**Graham Simpson:** No. I think that Mr Johnston is unable to answer the questions that I have, so I will leave it there. Thank you.

09:30

**Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** I will pick up on the point about stakeholders. Although I

recognise that the Scottish Government is making more effort to scrutinise Bòrd na Gàidhlig, including improvements in its internal workings, what worries me is that in the feedback that I have had from the Gaelic community there is a very strong feeling that Bòrd na Gàidhlig is not speaking for them. As the sole shareholder in Bòrd na Gàidhlig, what is the Scottish Government doing or going to do to find out what the end users of its services think of the performance? I heard you say that you have asked Bòrd na Gàidhlig to make sure that it has more robust engagement with its stakeholders and all the rest of it, but the shareholder does not always take what the board of directors says as gospel. What is the Scottish Government going to do to reach out to the Gaelic community to ensure that Bòrd na Gàidhlig is working at a satisfactory pace and satisfactory quality for its customers, if I can put it that way?

**Paul Johnston:** I understand the point. There is engagement between Bòrd na Gàidhlig's sponsor team and stakeholders, given that there is sometimes shared responsibility for funding. I know that the Deputy First Minister has held a number of meetings with Gaelic stakeholders. You are raising an important point and I can see that there is scope for the Government to perhaps engage more formally with key stakeholders to gauge their views on the relationship now, given the steps that we have taken to seek to build improvement. I am happy to take away that there should be an exercise in which we formally contact stakeholders to obtain their views on the relationship, then work together with Bòrd na Gàidhlig to pick up any issues that arise from that.

**Alex Neil:** I think that there are two levels of stakeholders. There are formal organisations, such as local authorities and others, and it is absolutely right that you talk to them. However, as a result of the work that the committee did on this last year, I had a lot of feedback—I think that other members did as well—from ordinary members of the Gaelic-speaking community, from all over Scotland, who were extremely dissatisfied with the role of Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Many of them thought that it was almost a self-appointed little club whose members were looking after each other rather than serving the wider interests of the Gaelic-speaking community. I cannot comment on whether that is true, because I am not a member of that community. The Government could perhaps use modern techniques to test opinion among the Gaelic-speaking community, as opposed to the formal stakeholders who all have their own agendas.

I am interested in whether the money that the Government is putting into Gaelic speaking and Gaelic-medium education—which is welcome money—is providing a satisfactory service to the end user. I do not know why the Government does

not use modern methods of public opinion surveying—focus groups and the like—to get to those people and understand their concerns about Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and, indeed, the wider issues around promoting the Gaelic language.

**Paul Johnston:** That is an entirely reasonable step that we could take. I take some assurance from the fact that Bòrd na Gàidhlig is reaching out more actively to its stakeholders and can provide us with data on the feedback that it is getting about the impact that it is having. The committee will recall that it has also made real strides in openness and transparency. It is, therefore, now much easier for stakeholders and members of the public to engage with Bòrd na Gàidhlig, hear all that is going on in its board meetings and raise any issues or concerns directly with it. However, none of that negates the fact that I can see the merit in further engagement between the Scottish Government and formal stakeholders and Gaelic speakers to see what we can do to improve matters further.

**Alex Neil:** Although you could not give the up-to-date figure, we know that there are roughly 65,000 Gaelic speakers in Scotland, and they are not entirely concentrated in the Highlands. Many of them are in Glasgow; in my area we have an excellent Gaelic-medium education facility in Cumbernauld.

Two things have to happen if the language is going to live. First, there are wider issues in Gaelic communities, such as housing issues, that need to be addressed in order to retain people, the language and local skills. Also, we need to get that number up from 65,000 to nearer the original target of 100,000 Gaelic speakers. I do not see any plan to do that. I do not see anything in what the Scottish Government or the board are saying or doing to get us from 65,000 to anywhere near 100,000. I do not see how that target is fitting into a wider strategy for regenerating the Gaelic communities in a way that not only is economically and socially sustainable, but ensures that the Gaelic language lives on. I do not see any strategy big enough to do that.

**Paul Johnston:** Sorry, shall I reply to that?

**Alex Neil:** Yes, please. That is my last question, so make it a good answer. [*Laughter.*]

**Paul Johnston:** I hope that the best answer is to say that I recognise that we need to be doing that work. Thank you for making that point. Forgive me, but I am here specifically to focus on the issues around governance between Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the Scottish Government. However, I accept that there are really important wider issues about the strategy for the promotion of Gaelic in Scotland and for meeting the targets that have originally been set. I will take those matters away

and update the committee about where we have got to.

Crucially, we need to consider very carefully the points that the committee has made on how we can accelerate progress. I know that the Deputy First Minister has been leading on work that is seeking to accelerate the progress, and I will certainly provide an update on that work.

**Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** To follow on from Alex Neil's questions, I have had conversations with people, constituents and schools—one school in particular—on the north coast that are having difficulties recruiting Gaelic teachers. I am talking not about Gaelic-medium education teachers, but about teachers of Gaelic. We are going for the joined-up approach, and as Alex Neil said, if you get a teacher, it is very difficult to get a house for them. I wanted to put that on record.

I also want to ask what the strategy is for rural communities in particular. Teachers go to rural communities to teach Gaelic to the pupils, and they become proficient. They might stay for their probationary year or for a couple of years, and then, once they have got some teaching experience, they tend to move on to bigger schools in bigger communities. What can we do to attract teachers to rural areas and keep them there?

**Paul Johnston:** That is an excellent point, and I will turn to Graeme Logan as director of learning to say a bit more on it in a moment.

I know that there have been challenges in attracting and retaining teachers, as you said. We have seen Gaelic educators lead in some phenomenal ways recently. The e-Sgoil programme, which has been piloted in Western Isles and seeks to ensure top-quality remote teaching of Gaelic, has served as a model for remote learning across Scotland through Covid-19. I want to highlight that real positive. When I visited the Western Isles a couple of years ago and saw the work of e-Sgoil, I did not imagine for a moment that it was something that we would seek to use for learners across Scotland. It is a model that can continue to be developed to ensure that high-quality Gaelic education can reach every young person in Scotland, regardless of where they are located. Maybe Graeme Logan could say a little bit more about the issues that you raised around the teaching profession.

**Graeme Logan (Scottish Government):** Good morning, colleagues. We are certainly acutely aware of the need to pursue a number of routes for teaching for rural communities. We have been working with, for example, the University of the Highlands and Islands to develop a flexible route into teaching that enables people to remain in their

communities. We know that a big barrier for a lot of citizens has been having to relocate to Aberdeen, Edinburgh, or Glasgow to do, for example, the professional graduate diploma in education. There are alternative routes that enable people to remain in their communities and we want to continue to promote those opportunities. We are also looking for other innovative ways of doing things. Paul Johnston mentioned the work of the faster rate of progress initiative, which is a really important forum in which we bring together public bodies and local authorities to try to improve the rate of progress on the Gaelic language.

As a result of that work, the General Teaching Council for Scotland has been surveying teachers who are working in Gaelic-medium education or would like to move into the sector or learn more Gaelic language. I believe that, to date, about 600 people who are registered to teach in Scotland have responded to say that they would like to do that. The General Teaching Council for Scotland is following up with opportunities to learn the language and potentially move into the sector. The numbers for the UHI's flexible route are quite low—about 30 teachers each year—and we are obviously looking to expand that further. We are acutely aware of the issues that Ms Ross has raised.

**Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con):** Good morning. Paul Johnston, can I ask you about leadership at the board? The chief executive officer told us in correspondence that the board was about to recruit three new members and was seeking skills in change management, corporate governance, financial scrutiny, strategic planning, as well as corporate communications, and that the closing date was 18 December, with the appointments to take effect from 1 April this year. Was the planned recruitment successful and do the new appointments take effect from 1 April? What role has the Scottish Government had in the appointment of these new members?

**Paul Johnston:** I can confirm that there has been recruitment, which has been partly successful but not wholly successful. You will appreciate that we will set and maintain a high standard for all board-level appointments. My understanding is that we are expecting one new board member to come on to the board very soon but that some gaps remain. There are two things that need to happen. One is that there will be a further appointment round, which the Scottish Government will work with Bòrd na Gàidhlig to support. We are also working with Bòrd na Gàidhlig on ways in which we can strengthen it and fill some of the gaps that it has in the organisation. We are in receipt of a formal request from Bòrd na Gàidhlig for gaps to be filled, and we are giving attention to that because, obviously, that requires additional funding.

09:45

**Bill Bowman:** Do you know why only one of the three has been appointed? Did you have the applications but they were not suitable, or you did not get applications?

**Paul Johnston:** We got applications. The recruitment was taken forward by the chair of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, with involvement from the sponsor team. The briefing that I have had since then confirmed that there were a number of applications. You will appreciate that there is a detailed interview and recruitment process in which all applicants are tested to ensure that they have the required competences and skills. One person has been appointed from that recruitment round.

**Bill Bowman:** Who makes the decision? Is it the board or is it the Government?

**Paul Johnston:** Ultimately, it is for ministers to appoint the members of the board. A sponsor team member and the chair are on the recruitment panel. That panel comes up with recommendations, and it is ultimately for ministers to make the appointments.

**Bill Bowman:** Accepting that you may have some gaps still to fill, is the Government now satisfied with the quality of the leadership in both senior management and the board?

**Paul Johnston:** We are determined to maintain high expectations of the board. As I set out in the framework document, there is on-going close engagement between the director and the deputy director. That includes an annual appraisal process of the chair and an annual scrutiny of performance. Ultimately, as I hope you will hear clearly from the Deloitte auditors, we have seen determined work to ensure improvement. That has been led by the chair and the chief executive, and I welcome the efforts that they have made. They have shown determination in responding to the challenges and in securing improvements and, of course, they recognise that that must continue. The job is not done. There are still some elements of the improvement plan outstanding and there is a need to secure continued progress.

**Bill Bowman:** I am looking for something slightly more specific. Are you satisfied or are you not satisfied?

**Paul Johnston:** I am satisfied that good progress has been made.

**Bill Bowman:** With the quality of the leadership?

**Paul Johnston:** I am satisfied that the chair is leading the body with energy and determination.

**Bill Bowman:** As Alex Neil said, you are the sole shareholder here, so if you are not satisfied,

who would be? How will you monitor this so that we do not get into the situation that we were in in the past and so that the changes that are being made are successful?

**Paul Johnston:** The framework document sets out the range of ways in which we will be monitoring progress. That includes regular meetings between the sponsor team and the executive team in Bòrd na Gàidhlig. It includes quarterly meetings between the deputy director and the chair. We are also inserting some extra engagement and, in particular, Graeme Logan will now be meeting the chair regularly to ensure that there is progress against the key strategic priorities. My expectation, of course, is that all these actions will be undertaken and that, should there be issues, they will be escalated to the portfolio accountable officer.

**Bill Bowman:** That is a sort of internal process but, to pick up on what Gail Ross and Alex Neil were saying, if your customers—your stakeholders—are not happy, the whole thing is not really working. How will you make sure that you have a direct knowledge of what is happening out in the field—I will not call it the marketplace—and on the front line?

**Paul Johnston:** I take that as an important point that has been raised this morning. The sponsor team and the Deputy First Minister have regular engagement with a range of stakeholders. As you can see from the correspondence that I have shared, stakeholders can come to us with particular concerns, and we have acted to address those. I hear the point about the proactivity of that engagement and the reach beyond particular organisations. That is a good point and we should ensure that that happens regularly in future.

**Bill Bowman:** I think that “proactivity” and “reach” are the key words there. Thank you.

**The Convener:** If members have no further points for the panel on the Bòrd na Gàidhlig report, I thank both Graeme Logan and Paul Johnston for their evidence on the report this morning.

09:51

*Meeting suspended.*

09:54

*On resuming—*

## Scottish Government Support and Sponsorship Arrangements (Key Audit Themes)

**The Convener:** Item 3 is on key audit themes—Scottish Government support for public bodies. I welcome our witnesses from the Scottish Government: Paul Johnston, director general for education, communities and justice; Sharon Fairweather, director, internal audit and assurance; and Catriona Maclean, deputy director, public sector reform, public sector and third sector. I understand that Paul Johnston would like to make a brief opening statement.

**Paul Johnston:** Thank you. I am grateful to the committee for the opportunity to discuss the action that has been taken by the Scottish Government to improve the engagement between sponsor teams and public bodies. Over the lifetime of this Parliament, a number of audit reports have highlighted the need for strong relationships between public bodies and their sponsor teams to ensure good governance and accountability. The public must have confidence that public bodies are operating effectively, focused on their purpose and objectives, spending money wisely and taking time to learn and improve. I welcome the recognition from the Auditor General for Scotland earlier this year, speaking to this committee, that

“For the most part, the vast majority of the arrangements work effectively, with public bodies delivering what is expected of them and having an appropriate level of support and challenge from their sponsorship team.”—*[Official Report, Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee, 14 January 2021; c 22.]*

The Auditor General also stated that the Government is taking steps to improve the consistency in sponsorship arrangements. Most bodies are functioning well, including through the enormous challenges that Covid-19 has brought, and I pay tribute to the staff, the board members and the sponsor teams for the work that they have done to secure this. However, each report that the committee has considered over this session provides scope for learning and improvement. I have seen the ways in which improvements have been made in each case following the section 22 report and the highlighting of issues by the committee.

I am joined today by Catriona Maclean, who leads the team that is providing support to sponsor teams and public bodies across Scotland. We now hold regular events for all sponsor teams to come together and share learning. The most recent event was in December 2020, when I shared learning from the recent issues that have arisen

with Bòrd na Gàidhlig and we collectively looked at the lessons that had been learned from a previous audit scrutiny. I have spoken directly to every sponsor team at these events and I have summarised to around 100 sponsor team leads what I see as vital issues, summarised as five Cs.

The first is compliance: a sponsor team must ensure that the legal and operational frameworks are being adhered to. The second is capacity: it is essential to ensure that sponsor teams have the resources that they need and, in turn, that we support the body in having the resources that it needs. The third is clarity: governance and accountability arrangements must be set out clearly in a framework agreement that is monitored, reviewed and updated where needed. The fourth is communication: there must be clear lines of communication between the Scottish Government and the sponsored body, including attendance at board meetings and frequency and purpose of engagement. The fifth is culture: it is very important that there is a culture of strong, open and trusting relationships between public bodies and sponsor teams, which enables issues to be identified and resolved at an early stage.

Thanks in part to the scrutiny and challenge from this committee, we now have an enhanced package of support in place for sponsor teams and further work is in hand to build on that. A short review is under way to take stock of the context that we now find ourselves in: learning from Covid-19, seeking to capture good practice and ensuring that we are doing all that we can to learn the lessons that have been highlighted through this Parliament. I am keen to look at ways in which we can develop further our early warning systems to ensure the rapid escalation of issues that might arise. I am also keen to support leadership development in our public bodies.

Scrutiny and assurance activities will always have an important role to play alongside the support that we offer. To that end, I am joined by Sharon Fairweather, the Government’s director of internal audit and assurance. She will be able to describe the audit activity that has taken place and is planned alongside the assurance activity that is taking place on information technology projects. I am happy to follow up on any of those matters.

10:00

**The Convener:** Thank you. I ask Graham Simpson to open the questioning for the committee.

**Graham Simpson:** Thank you, Mr Johnston. That was a really useful opening statement. I found it quite encouraging to hear about some of the work that you have been doing.

I will run through some of the reports that you mentioned—we have seen a number of them. There were reports on colleges in 2017, in relation to which the then Auditor General told the committee that

“the ability to spot problems early and tackle them seems to be very variable.”—[*Official Report, Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee*, 18 May 2017; c 14.]

A report in 2018-19 on Community Justice Scotland raised a number of questions about the support that the Scottish Government had provided to the board.

There was a 2017-18 report on the Scottish Social Services Council, which concluded that the council

“had not followed good governance or project management in undertaking its digital transformation project.”

We heard earlier about Bòrd na Gàidhlig—we know all about that.

A report on the Scottish Public Pensions Agency raised a series of concerns about the management of the pensions project.

The 2018-19 audit of Disclosure Scotland raised concerns relating to governance—again—financial reporting and management of a new IT system.

Of course, we have also had a number of section 22 reports on national health service boards, including NHS Tayside in particular, on which we looked at a report last week.

You mentioned a number of reports in your opening statement, but you also said that you are taking measures to tackle what seem to me to be systemic problems. Can you or one of your team tell us in a bit more detail what exactly has been done to address those issues?

**Paul Johnston:** In a moment, I will turn to Catriona Maclean, who heads the team that is seeking to ensure that support is given to all sponsor teams. Before I do that, I will say a little about the specific issues that you mention, because I think that it is important that I do so.

All those reports raise significant issues that have been taken very seriously indeed. In every case, work has been done within the body itself to ensure that improvements take place. In the regular course of my role as portfolio accountable officer, I have sought assurance on the progress that is being made with each of those bodies.

When I have looked at subsequent audit reports on those bodies in the area for which I have responsibility, I have been struck by the way in which significant progress has been noted. I will not go through them all in the interests of time. However, I know, for example, that the committee has looked carefully at the Scottish Police Authority over the years, and I was pleased to see

that the most recent audit described improvements in financial management, stability and leadership, and progress in organisational governance. The subsequent audit of Community Justice Scotland, which the committee has also considered, referred to good progress on the agreed actions.

I think that it is very clear that, where specific issues are raised, swift and determined action is being taken by the bodies and there is clear oversight of that by the Scottish Government.

Nonetheless, we would all much prefer that the issues did not arise in the first place and that, where issues arise, lessons are learned so that they do not arise with other bodies. I fully accept that. That is why we are strengthening the programme of support to sponsor teams. Catriona Maclean can say a little more about that, with your permission, convener.

**Catriona Maclean (Scottish Government):**

Good morning. As Paul Johnston said, it is quite heartening to know that, in most cases, our public bodies are working well. However, we know that there is more to be done, and we have a continuous programme of improvement. That is not a one-off—it is something that we do regularly. In the last number of years, we have carried out about 40 training events for sponsor teams and for board members. We try, where possible, to pool the learning from what is working well in the sponsor ecosystem; we also look to see where we can learn from areas where it is not working well and build that into our work programme.

For example, in the coming year, we will carry out a number of actions. I think that Mr Johnston provided the committee with an outline of our workplan for this year, which includes sponsorship training. That training will be delivered by David Nicholl, who is a well-respected individual and has great knowledge of good sponsorship. The training will cover a wide range of things and will be in two parts. One part will be for someone who is new to sponsorship and will introduce the roles and responsibilities, what to look out for and how to sponsor well. We will also have an advanced programme for those who have more experience of sponsorship, which will focus on scenarios of what might happen when things go wrong, how to escalate them and so on. We want to cover the wide range of learning that is available to our sponsor teams. The modules and the training have been developed in conjunction with Audit Scotland and the Standards Commission for Scotland.

**Graham Simpson:** That is really useful. Other members will have more specific questions but I will put another question to Paul Johnston. Is there anyone—it might be you, Mr Johnston—who has overall responsibility for sponsorship arrangements across the Scottish Government?

**Paul Johnston:** That is set out in the “Scottish Public Finance Manual”. The provisions of the manual make it clear that, ultimately, it is for each portfolio accountable officer to be assured that sponsorship arrangements are working effectively in their area. That is why I have a particular interest in all the bodies in the education, communities and justice portfolio. It is my responsibility to delegate to individual directors and deputy directors the duties that they must exercise as sponsor directors. I also happen to have within my area the team that provides support across the Scottish Government. That is the team that Catriona Maclean leads. It is the responsibility of individual directors general to assure themselves that appropriate sponsor relationships are in place in their area.

As part of our governance, we have an annual process whereby each director general provides assurance, or, indeed, identifies any issues, to the principal accountable officer, who is the permanent secretary. Any issues are then highlighted as part of our overall governance framework. As the Auditor General has mentioned, sponsorship issues have been identified as an overall corporate issue for the Scottish Government; that is referred to in the Scottish Government’s consolidated accounts this year.

**Graham Simpson:** Therefore, it is fair to say that there is no one figure—there are a number of you, but you all talk to one another.

**Paul Johnston:** Yes, we are all members of the Scottish Government’s corporate board and the Scottish Government’s executive team, and we all report to the principal accountable officer, who is the permanent secretary. We are all given our responsibilities by the permanent secretary and in turn are required to give an account to the permanent secretary of how those responsibilities are being discharged.

**Graham Simpson:** Thanks very much.

**Alex Neil:** I realise that you cannot provide this detail today, but it would be useful for us to get a list of all the sponsoring departments in the Scottish Government and what the budget is for running each. It seems to me that, if you add it all together, it is quite a substantial overhead.

I remember that the late Professor John P Mackintosh wrote a book many years ago arguing that, even then, too many functions of government were carried out by agencies that are much more difficult to hold to account from a parliamentary point of view. His argument was that some functions are far better done in-house. You would not need a sponsoring department; those functions would just be done by, in this case, the Scottish Government. Getting an overview and a list of sponsoring departments across the Scottish

Government and how much each costs would indicate the important issue the public resources that are being used by that function. A future public audit committee might want to look at that in more detail.

**Paul Johnston:** Yes—I can see that that is an important point. I shared with the committee some pretty basic information. My apologies if you are already well sighted on that material, but I thought that it might be helpful to provide that overview of what the public body landscape looks like. We are, of course, working within the framework of the legislation passed by Parliament for many of those bodies—legislation that sets out their status and their relationship with the Scottish Government.

I can take that request away. I have looked at the position fairly recently and I know that sponsor teams vary in size and seniority. In some cases, there will be one person; in others, there will be a small team. If we are to provide you with overall numbers, I should add the important qualification that sometimes the sponsor team will have quite a range of responsibilities in addition to sponsoring a particular body. However, I am happy to take the request away. I agree that sponsorship is an important function of government. More than 100 bodies are set out in the overall public body landscape, so significant resource goes into the sponsorship function.

**Alex Neil:** That would be very helpful. Thank you very much.

**Colin Beattie:** I want to explore some of the detail of how the sponsor system works on the ground. A very obvious question is how sponsor figures gather intelligence. I looked at what you produced for Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Do sponsors physically attend all the board meetings? Do they have a risk register for the organisations, with checklists of the type of things that they should be looking for? Do such things exist?

**Paul Johnston:** The starting point is to look at the framework document. As we described in the earlier session, there is a model framework document, which is not prescriptive around issues such as attendance at board meetings. That needs to be agreed between the Scottish Government and the sponsored body and in many cases depends on the issues that the body is dealing with.

For example, on Bòrd na Gàidhlig, as we are mindful of the issues that were raised in the audit report, the up-to-date framework agreement makes it clear that the Scottish Government will attend all board meetings as an observer. It also sets out the range of engagements that will take place regularly between the sponsor team, the deputy director, the director and Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

There are other bodies where, as a matter of course, the Scottish Government attends the board meetings, and others where it does not. However, in every case, I look to the framework document to set out the terms of engagement between the Scottish Government and the body in question. For example, in my area, I have attended the board meetings of some bodies annually rather than attending every meeting. That is all set out in the terms of engagement between the Scottish Government and the body.

10:15

**The Convener:** Sorry, Colin, but Catriona Maclean would like to come in on this point, if you would like to hear her.

**Colin Beattie:** Sure, of course.

**Catriona Maclean:** I would like to build on what Mr Johnston said about attendance at board meetings. You asked about risk registers. In our guidance, we have a risk profile, which is provided to the sponsor team. That profile is completed by the sponsor team and covers all sorts of different elements of a body, from finance to engagement, relationships and so on. Sometimes the team completes the profile itself, but we encourage that to be done along with the body so that there is a joint understanding of the risk profile.

**Colin Beattie:** Would an alarm bell sound for the sponsor figure if there was a lack of challenge by board members? The committee has seen that issue on a number of occasions.

**Catriona Maclean:** We would certainly want to identify that in the risk profile as an area of concern or as something that needed to be discussed.

**Colin Beattie:** Sponsor figures are the eyes and ears of the Scottish Government. How do you make sure that they are doing their job and all the things that they should be doing?

**Paul Johnston:** I can pick that up. Ultimately, that takes us into the good management and leadership of people in the organisation. Every member of staff, whether they are part of a sponsor team or discharging some other responsibility, should have very clear objectives set. They should be having a monthly conversation, at least, with their line manager and a regular process of performance reviews. If a member of staff has sponsor responsibilities in their role, the effective discharge of those responsibilities will be discussed regularly with their line manager. Good line management is the principal way in which these matters are dealt with. The specific responsibilities of sponsor teams are set out in the framework document that

governs the relationship between each sponsor team and the sponsored body.

**Colin Beattie:** Clearly, it is important that an appropriate distance is kept between the public body and the sponsor team. We do not want one official to be too long on the job of supporting one body, because that can lead to issues. How do you make sure that the sponsor figures do not become too close to the sponsored public body? Is there a system of rotation, for example? How does that work?

**Paul Johnston:** There is not any formal system of rotation, although most civil servants move role from time to time; indeed, sometimes there has been criticism that there is too much movement. There is a balance to be struck. There is a benefit in civil servants building up a real knowledge of a body and a real understanding of its purpose, the issues that it is dealing with and the stakeholders that it works with.

There is a tension at times. You will recall, I am sure, that we have faced the charge of being too distant from a body; at other times, we are accused of being too close to a body. I say that not to trivialise the issue; I am saying that it is really important that we work to get the balance right in terms of distance from the body.

In all cases, we must respect the statutory frameworks within which the body operates. That will generally include being very clear that the chief executive of the body is the accountable officer and that the chair of the body has statutory responsibility for its oversight. As has been clear from the committee's scrutiny, the chief executive will be directly held to account for the body's performance.

**Colin Beattie:** What would you consider a reasonable time period for a sponsor figure to be attached to a body—two years, three years, four years?

**Paul Johnston:** It is not possible to be prescriptive about how long an individual should be working as a sponsor lead. It depends in some cases on the particular skills that the individual brings, but it is commonplace for staff to move to different roles or to take on new responsibilities every few years in the Scottish Government.

**Colin Beattie:** You have said already that sponsor figures get all sorts of training and so on in the lead-up. Do they do scenario training? So many scenarios have come forward to the committee that we would not want to see happen again. Do you use those in the training?

**Paul Johnston:** Yes, we absolutely do. Sometimes those real-life scenarios are the most useful thing, as they help to bring the training alive. In the recent events that we have held for all



sponsor leads—as I mentioned, at times we have had more than 100 sponsor leads in attendance—we have used the live scenarios that have been raised through audit reports and considered by this committee. We have invited the sponsor teams, and at times members of the bodies, to come and describe the learning that they have taken from the issues. The feedback that I have had is that that sometimes has been the most effective and most compelling way for other sponsor teams to recognise the importance of grasping the issues that have been raised in audit reports and by the committee and ensuring that that learning is taken into the sponsor relationship that the particular team has with its body. It is vital that that learning is based on real scenarios. We have invited Audit Scotland to participate in a number of those sessions, so we have the benefit of its perspective and the perspective from internal audit.

**Colin Beattie:** I have a final question about how sponsor figures operate. Are they briefed to maintain regular contact with staff at all levels? We have seen in previous scenarios that a great deal of the intelligence that they are gathering could come from staff, who frequently know a great deal about what is happening that maybe the board does not.

**Paul Johnston:** Typically, engagement will take place with the board and with staff in the body. It will depend on the size of the body and on the range of connections. The Scottish Police Authority is a body that I have worked quite closely with and there are a number of colleagues in the sponsor team who are working with quite a number of staff in that body. There will be a lead on finance in regular contact and there might be a lead on strategy in regular contact. There will be a number of links into the body, particularly in the case of the larger bodies.

If your point is about gauging the views of staff more generally at all levels in the organisation, that is not something that a sponsor team would typically do. We would expect to see the results of the annual staff surveys that all bodies should be carrying out, which should serve as an important indicator of the overall wellbeing of staff in the organisation and highlight any particular issues or concerns.

**Bill Bowman:** You may have covered this a little bit in the broad-ranging discussion before, but what would be the typical grade of the individual undertaking a sponsorship role? Is there a minimum grade for that person and what key skills do you look for in the individual? Are there enough people willing to do the role? Is it something that someone is appointed to, or are they asked to do it? Are they volunteers, or is it just that they are told to do it?

**Paul Johnston:** There should always be senior civil service oversight of the sponsorship arrangement. We expect that as part of the guidance that we provide to sponsor teams, so there would be a deputy director or a director ensuring strategic oversight. Typically, the deputy director would be responsible for forming the team that works to them and provides the day-to-day engagement with the body. The grades of the team members vary depending on the size of the body but, typically, there are a range of grades below the senior civil service.

I am not aware of any issues in attracting and recruiting members of staff who wish to serve as sponsor team members. I think that it is a very rewarding, satisfying role, in which people get a perspective of what our public bodies are doing and how they are delivering and contributing to the delivery of important outcomes. Certainly, there are no issues there. You may be aware that we have huge demand when we advertise roles externally for policy functions in the Scottish Government, so there are no particular issues there.

As I think I mentioned earlier, it comes down to the line manager clearly specifying the duties of the postholder and their objectives, ensuring that the postholder has access to support, advice and training, which is co-ordinated by Catriona Maclean's team, and ensuring that their performance is monitored through our performance management systems.

**Bill Bowman:** Is the deputy director what we would call the sponsor figure, who then has a team?

**Paul Johnston:** Yes. We call them the overall sponsor lead—I think that that is the correct term.

**Bill Bowman:** When we were talking about how many years someone spends in the role, were we talking about that individual?

**Paul Johnston:** Yes, and certainly deputy directors will typically move role every few years. They are the overall strategic lead for sponsorship and they will have a small team working with them.

**Bill Bowman:** I think that you said earlier that each portfolio accountable officer has responsibility for the sponsorship role in that area. Is there a commonality of skills and roles for sponsoring figures? The portfolio accountable officer does not set their own determination of what a sponsoring figure should be, but it would be the same throughout all the portfolios.

**The Convener:** Catriona Maclean would like to come in.

**Catriona Maclean:** I was going to build on what Mr Johnston said and it might go some way to answering the question that has just been asked.

The sponsor role should be similar across the whole of the organisation. One of the ways to strengthen that position that we are considering is by creating sponsorship as a specialism course that people can undertake and then get recognition for the skill set that they have developed. That should help to create a consistent approach to sponsorship across the organisation. We are at early days in thinking about that, and that idea has to be tested in the organisation, but it is something that we think would be of advantage to try in order to improve and build on the good practice that there is and give recognition to that good practice.

**Bill Bowman:** It seems to make sense to have consistency. I think that you mentioned earlier somebody called Mr Nicholl to do with the training—is that right?

**Catriona Maclean:** That is correct, yes.

**Bill Bowman:** Who is that person and what is he going to do?

**Catriona Maclean:** The person's name is David Nicholl. He is a director of On Board training, which is a recognised organisation that provides high-quality training for board members and the type of sponsor arrangements that we have. With him and others, we are developing a training course that will be delivered not just once but over a number of ways through all the sponsor teams in the Scottish Government. We hope that we will have those courses in place within the next month to two months and we will then invite our sponsor teams to participate.

**Bill Bowman:** Is that an external person?

10:30

**Catriona Maclean:** Yes, he is external, but he has detailed experience of providing support to boards and dealing with some of the issues that arise when bodies have difficulties.

**Bill Bowman:** How do you monitor the performance of a sponsor figure doing their role effectively? Is there some form of appraisal that assesses their performance specifically as a sponsor figure?

**Catriona Maclean:** That should form part of an individual's general approach, but it is something that we recognise we could strengthen. We want to check in with internal audit to see whether there is a way of codifying that more and having a process in place whereby we can monitor it more effectively over the piece. Each individual sponsor team will be monitored during their performance and that will be reported to the portfolio accountable officer as part of that process.

**Bill Bowman:** I have a final point for Paul Johnston. It sounds as if the sponsor figure is perhaps not being assessed or appraised on their sponsoring activities against whatever the role definition is. I agree that it is good that you might do it, but is it not being done at the moment?

**Paul Johnston:** The system that Catriona Maclean has described works effectively, in my view, and is taken incredibly seriously. That is the regular monitoring of performance. If one of your duties is sponsor team leader or sponsor team member, it is absolutely to be expected that your performance of that duty will be monitored as part of your performance management. I accept that there is always scope for us to learn and improve, and I welcome the work that Catriona Maclean's team is taking forward, which is exploring whether we should strengthen this area further with training modules, undoubtedly, but potentially also with quite a robust annual accreditation exercise. That will ensure that we are recognising the importance of all sponsor teams keeping their knowledge and skills up to date and learning the lessons that come out of the scrutiny of this committee and the important work of internal and external audit.

**Bill Bowman:** I think that appraisal is always good for the employee and the employer, so thank you.

**The Convener:** As there are no further questions from members, I thank you all—Paul Johnston, Catriona Maclean and Sharon Fairweather—for your evidence this morning.

10:33

*Meeting continued in private until 11:17.*

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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