OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 3 February 2022

Session 6

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
4th Meeting 2022, Session 6

CONVENER

*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
*Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab)
*Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con)
*Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
*Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

James Hampson (British Council)
Professor Andrea Nolan (Universities Scotland)
John Primrose (Scottish Government)
Angus Robertson (Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

James Johnston

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 3 February 2022

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning. I wish everyone a very warm welcome to the fourth meeting in 2022 of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee. Our first agenda item is a decision on whether to take business in private. Do members agree to take item 4 in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Scottish Government's International Work

09:00

The Convener: Our next item is our inquiry into the Scottish Government's international work. For the committee's fifth panel on the topic, we will hear from James Hampson, who is the director for the United Kingdom region and external affairs at the British Council; and Professor Andrea Nolan, who is the convener of Universities Scotland's international committee. I welcome you both and thank you for the comprehensive written briefings that you have provided to the committee.

We will move to questions. I remind everyone that we have to hear from two panels this morning, so I ask our witnesses to try to keep their contributions concise. That also applies to committee members in asking their questions.

I will open with a question for Mr Hampson about education. As I was the convener of the Education and Skills Committee in the previous session of Parliament, I have a strong interest in the area. I want to ask about the work on schools engagement, which you described in your written submission. With schools, initiatives tend to be driven forward by leadership at local authority level or by head teachers. Are all local authorities engaging with the British Council in that work, or is there a geographic element to engagement with the British Council on the schools exchange programmes and projects that are on offer?

James Hampson (British Council): It is a great pleasure to be with the committee this morning. Thank you for receiving our evidence and giving me an opportunity to speak.

Schools are an important part of what we do as an organisation. Obviously, we try to build a bridge between Scotland and the rest of the world. This is not a great start, because I do not have the data that you are asking for on all local authorities, so perhaps I could follow up in writing to answer that. I have a huge number of examples of our education work in front of me, but I cannot give you a precise answer to the question on how many local authorities are involved. If you bear with me, I can get back to you with the accurate data.

The Convener: That is absolutely fine—thank you.

I have a question for Professor Nolan. Again, from my previous experience, I know that we very much valued the Erasmus programme in Scotland, and many witnesses have lamented its loss. Will you expand a little on what your aims are for an ideal new mobility scheme? Will you give a little

insight into what funding and back-up the scheme might require?

Professor Andrea Nolan (Universities Scotland): Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee.

Obviously, we were disappointed not to be part of Erasmus+, which is the follow-on programme, particularly as it is about twice the size of the previous one. At the moment, 17 of the 19 higher education institutions in Scotland have received funding from the Turing scheme. We are trying to make a success of that. One positive aspect is that the scheme was initially for one year with funding of around £100 million—I am not quite sure that I have got that right, but it is around that figure—and it has now been extended to three years. One of the challenges for us is that a student going into first year might not go abroad until their third year, and three years is a very short time in a higher education planning context. Another positive, though, is the focus on shorter-term exchanges, which I think is a good thing, particularly for people with caring responsibilities or those who cannot afford to go away for a semester and have jobs that they really need the income from.

There are positives that we can take from the Turing scheme, but a real challenge is the lack of inward mobility. For us, an ideal programme would have some of the features of Turing such as short-term mobility, but it would also enable students to come into our universities. It is an interesting issue, and I know that the Scottish Government is thinking about a student mobility scheme; however, I highlight some recent information about an international learning exchange programme that the Welsh Government is setting up to replicate Erasmus. We think that it has committed around £9 million to £10 million for that, although I should point out that the student headcount in Wales is perhaps half that—or maybe a bit less—of the sector in Scotland. It is not an enormous amount of money in the context of the higher education sector, but it is nevertheless a significant investment, and we have seen no such funding in the Scottish Government's draft budget for next year.

In short, the ideal scheme would have those reciprocal relationships. We are all frantically trying to build them; indeed, my institution, Edinburgh Napier University, has reached out to 65 of our Erasmus partners to ask for bilateral joint exchanges, and we have had agreement from, I think, 40 per cent of them so far. You can just imagine it, though: we once had this wonderfully organised multifaceted scheme, and now we are all suddenly making bilateral arrangements. The ideal would be a broad-based scheme with no bilaterals and funding for inward students.

The Convener: Thank you very much for those responses. We move to questions from committee members, and I invite Mr Golden to begin the questioning.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): I want to ask the same question of both panellists, starting, perhaps, with Professor Nolan. You have touched on some of these issues in response to the convener's questions, but I note that the Universities Scotland and British Council Scotland submissions both highlight the importance of the Scottish Government's as yet unpublished international education strategy. What are your main asks for inclusion in the strategy, and what support and commitments from the Scottish Government would you like to see?

Professor Nolan: I am glad that you have raised that issue so early, because we are very excited about the international education strategy. We have spoken to Scottish Government officials about it on many occasions, and we have offered our vast evidence base from across the universities sector showing what our priority markets are, how student recruitment works and where our big research partnerships are.

A key ask is that we get a strategy—and get it quickly—and that it commits us all to a set of targets that will deliver real impact for Scotland. We would also like to have a set of key priority markets and territories. I have some priority markets for student recruitment—there will be others for international research—but we would like that sort of thing to be set in the context of the Scottish Government's international ambitions, with regard to not just targets for international student recruitment but how we attract and retain talent. That is not necessarily a huge challenge, given how well regarded the Scottish higher education sector is internationally, but the market for talent is very competitive, and we would like to have a scheme for attracting and retaining it.

We would like there to be connections between Scottish Government departments. We would like the trade directorate to connect with the learning directorate so that there is cohesion. Foreign direct investment and how we trade do not fall under the education directorate, but it is clear that synergy and cohesion are extremely important.

There needs to be a commitment to supporting the growth in the number of online students and transnational students, which is an area that often tends to be forgotten when we think of international student recruitment and research. For example, my institution, together with partners, teaches 4,000 students overseas, which leads to the awarding of Edinburgh Napier degrees. Those are fantastic partnerships, and we have been doing that for 25 or 30 years. We have wonderful

alumni who are all passionate about Scotland and Edinburgh Napier University.

Those are some of the elements that I would like in a strategy. It does not have to be complicated. What is important is that it unites us behind what we want Scotland to be when it comes to international education. We are a contributor to the Scotland is now campaign. An issue that has come up is how we market Scottish education and how we could do that in a shared manner with an appropriate digital platform. I think that that would make an enormous difference to Scotland as a distinct brand in the education sphere.

I am sorry—I have gone on a little.

Maurice Golden: Not at all—that was very interesting.

I have a quick supplementary question. You mentioned key target territories for recruitment. Do you have a broad idea of where those might be?

Professor Nolan: I can tell you where we get most of our international students. Big recruitment markets for Scotland are China and the USA. If we include European Union countries in which we want to keep our links, Germany would be a big one. For my institution, Nigeria and Malaysia are important markets; Hong Kong used to be.

There are different areas, and some of the Scottish Government's focus might be different from that of my institution. However, we all benefit from having a set of priority markets that is underpinned by good digital branding, marketing and awareness.

Maurice Golden: Thank you—that was interesting.

I turn to James Hampson. What would you like the Scottish Government's international education strategy to provide?

James Hampson: Professor Nolan has covered some of that. We have just published a report on Scotland's higher education assets. Our research points to the fact that the education system is the jewel in the crown, so we must make the most of that.

From talking to our colleagues in the EU and beyond, we know that there is an appetite for engagement with and mobility between markets that are important to Scotland and markets that are important to us. Those markets include the EU, but we look at the whole world. There are two aspects: understanding that Scotland has an incredible asset that shapes the way that people perceive Scotland and which has enormous soft power that helps with trade; and having a really strong plan around mobility. Given that, as an organisation, we look at the whole of the UK, we can help in relation to how the marketing works on the ground. I saw that when I worked in Egypt and in Pakistan, where the Scottish Government is investing in the Scottish scholarships programme, which we deliver for it.

If we can bring those things together, in addition to what Professor Nolan spoke about, Scotland will be heading in a good direction.

The Convener: Mr Hampson, I think that you wanted to respond to my first question about how many local authorities are involved in the schools exchange programme.

James Hampson: I did. The answer is 32.

The Convener: So all the local authorities engage in that work.

James Hampson: Yes. A third of all schools and 32 local authorities take part. My team have come to my rescue.

The Convener: Thank you—that is helpful. We move to questions from Sarah Boyack.

09:15

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): It was good to read both the submissions that we received. My first question is for Professor Nolan and follows up on a point that she made about a replacement for Erasmus, given its academic importance in Scotland.

I was looking at the new Welsh scheme, which Professor Nolan said will cost about £9 million. However, at the launch this week, I think that it was said that they have launched a £65 million international exchange scheme, with 15,000 participants from Wales going overseas and 10,000 participants coming to study or work in Wales. Presumably a Scottish equivalent would mean significantly more students than that. They have targeted people from non-traditional backgrounds in order to improve learning opportunities for people with additional learning needs, which looks progressive.

Will you say a bit about what you would be looking for in a future Erasmus approach, whether that is something like the Taith approach or otherwise? What would suit us in Scotland, given that academic and cultural exchange is good for our overall soft power and how our colleges and universities operate is significant for the economy?

Professor Nolan: In relation to international mobility, it used to be said—I do not know whether it is any more—that if employers saw that someone had done a semester or a year abroad, it was a real brownie point or persuader for bringing them into the firm. It is about the motivation for and the challenges that people have to overcome when going to another country. They might have

to study in another language or develop the language before they go. Like all my colleagues across Scotland, I am a passionate believer in the benefits of that.

The aspect of Turing that is wonderful is people's ability to do short-term exchanges. At Napier, we even have students who have been on study trips for two or three weeks; we have people who have gone to parts of Africa and various parts of Europe. As to the benefits, they come back and talk about life-changing experiences. Short-term exchanges, which we did not have with Erasmus, are hugely beneficial. For example, 40 to 45 per cent of my students at Napier are mature students who cannot necessarily just up and go for a year or a semester.

Sarah Boyack spoke about the Welsh scheme. My apologies about the finance point—I was perhaps talking about it on a yearly basis. In relation to the benefits from a focus on people from MD20 areas—the 20 per cent most deprived areas—or more socially-deprived backgrounds, those places should be well funded. When we fund those places, we need to fund them properly.

I would love us to combine short-term exchanges and a progressive approach as a feature that we carry through, and to have less of a focus on people having to do a year abroad. Those would be the main elements for me: the improvements that I saw in the Turing scheme and continuing support for inward students.

I sometimes notice at Edinburgh Napier—and noticed previously at the University of Glasgow—that the European or Erasmus students, or the students here on study abroad, are often the ones who lead societies for a year. They really enrich the culture and experience of our Scotland-domiciled and home students. That is a strong push from me for the progressive and targeted approach. Even when students from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds have their degrees, they do not have the social capital that others might have as they progress to further study or graduate-level jobs.

Sarah Boyack: Those points are well made.

On the academic side, I presume that, from the point of view of research and strengthening international relationships, lecturer exchanges are also beneficial for our further and higher education systems.

Professor Nolan: That is a very good point. I did not mention the fact that Erasmus was of course also open to staff, so that they could move around and be mobile. Although we have research schemes that we hope—if the association to horizon Europe goes through—will support the mobility of researchers, the Erasmus scheme funded staff exchanges that were often the prelude to the building of deep partnerships for further student exchange, as well as research partnerships.

Sarah Boyack: I would like to ask James Hampson about the same area.

The British Council's report "Gauging International Perceptions: Scotland and Soft Power" talks about Scotland's soft power and points to research comparing nine significant global geographies that shows Scotland to be first in the categories of education, enterprise and digital and second in the category of culture. What more do we need to do to capture those benefits? What opportunities need to be developed for exchange opportunities not only at a higher and further education level, but at a school level?

James Hampson: I will start with a short response. We believe in more inward and outward mobility, not less. The advent of any scheme—a potential Scottish programme, the Welsh programme or the Turing programme—is a great thing.

You are right to point to the research. Cultural relations and soft power can build attractiveness and influence, and they also build trust. We know that people abroad are twice as likely to trade with or invest in the UK if they have had a strong cultural relations experience. I am using "cultural relations" as a bit of a catch-all term to describe the work that the British Council does in arts and education and, of course, in relation to the English language. That approach generates economic benefits and benefits in terms of perception, reputation and influence.

To go back to the point that I made earlier, Scotland's higher education sector is a jewel in the crown, and the same goes for its arts and creative sector, which has a world-class reputation as an exporter of brilliance but also as a destination, particularly around the summer months—we are looking forward to getting back on the streets of Edinburgh this year.

Making the most of your hub network is important. Our experience of having a global network is that being there on the ground enables us to develop relationships and gain insight and influence over the choices that young people and their parents make about the future. Our organisation wants young people to come and study in the UK. We want young people to seek UK qualifications, and we very much want young people to see the UK—including Scotland—as a place that they can connect their values to and think about investing in. It is really about making the most of the Government hubs. We have made an offer to the Scottish Government about how we can work more closely together. My new chief executive met Angus Robertson in September to

discuss that—it is something that we really want to do.

There is a huge demand among our colleagues in offices in Europe for continued engagement with Scotland, which involves mobility around arts education institutions, working with policy makers and connecting Scotland to the markets that we know are important to you, too.

You need to make the most of what you already have and think about what value for money looks like, what key performance indicators you will use and what a good outcome for Scotland looks like. It is important to think about what can be done with the Government hubs, how you can connect with organisations such as mine and how you can work with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to ensure that we are all working for the whole of the UK. I should add that we take that commitment incredibly seriously.

Sarah Boyack: What would be the top change or top additional initiative that would help to deliver that?

James Hampson: Having a unifying international strategy that brings everything—not just education and the arts—together is important, and I know that work is under way on that. That will be the arrowhead behind which everything else is delivered.

Sarah Boyack: I presume that that should be done as an urgent priority.

James Hampson: I think so. It is certainly the case that Scotland has a huge amount of presence in the world and a positive reputation. You are in a great place to start from. As you said, our 2019 research shows that Scotland is up there, so you need to build on that and make the most of what you already have.

Sarah Boyack: Thank you.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Can you give me some practical examples of how the British Council works with the existing hub network, and also what your thoughts are on its expansion? A couple of weeks ago, the cabinet secretary indicated to us that the Copenhagen hub is already being developed—I believe that its director is being appointed at the moment. What do you see the opportunities being with that hub and with a future hub in Warsaw?

James Hampson: We have worked closely with the hubs in Europe and elsewhere. I work with Creative Scotland, and we will be launching our arts assets report, which is the companion piece to the work that we have done on education. It will be an analysis of the distinct aspects of the Scottish arts and culture sector that are different from those of the rest of the UK and will tell the story of what helps Scotland to stand out from the crowd. That is a live example of how we can work with you.

The question about Copenhagen and Warsaw goes back to what I said about mobility, connecting policy makers and how Scotland is able to be attractive and influential in that space, as well as the broader question of how you connect with Pakistan, China and India, because the world outside the EU is important—that goes without saying; it is certainly an important part of how we see things.

There is a question about Scottish Government investment beyond the EU and into those much bigger markets. The Indo-Pacific region is a big priority for the British Council and was a stand-out feature of the integrated review that was published by the UK Government last year. I think that you should be thinking beyond Europe and about how to maximise impact in places where you already have a presence and reputation, such as Pakistan.

Mark Ruskell: Practically, what will the British Council be doing in relation to the Copenhagen hub? Where do you see the opportunities lying? Do they involve the creative sector and the screen sector, for example?

James Hampson: We have a Nordics cluster—we no longer have an office in Copenhagen. In that part of Europe, the work would involve connecting education and arts institutions and conducting exchanges of policy makers. Scotland has a great track record of exporting its success in assessment and access to the university sector—Professor Nolan will know more about that.

The hub in Copenhagen presents us with a challenge, as we are no longer present on the ground there but are operating digitally and remotely. It is a great opportunity to work together and think about what we can do in that territory.

We have had an opportunity to think differently about how we work and, in some parts of Europe, we are working on a hub and spoke model. In Warsaw, we have a big fixed presence—that operation in Poland is one of our oldest. Again, our commitment to work for the whole of the UK means that, when the Scottish Government Warsaw hub is up and running, its director can work with our director to look at what can be done together.

Of course, our focus is on arts, education and the English language, so we are involved in thinking about what our work with Scotland on the ground will look like in that regard, and how we can create benefits and measure them.

Mark Ruskell: Your submission focuses on soft power, which has been described slightly differently by some commentators—Pat Kane, for example, talks about the notion of “fizzy power”. It

seems to be quite a fluid concept. Obviously, there are tangible benefits in that area, but how do we pin those down? Should Government set out some clear metrics and objectives in relation to how we measure and account for soft power? If we are talking about building relationships and trust, should it be more of a wellbeing indicator, which is valuable but is not the same thing as, for example, a country's gross domestic product? How do we measure soft power and incorporate it into Government objectives?

09:30

James Hampson: We have been able to demonstrate that the return on investment in soft power can generate economic benefits as well as reputational benefits and influence. The short answer is that we should measure that, not least because we are spending taxpayers' money in our case. We think that that can be done in a number of ways.

Every year, we run a perceptions survey that involves 20,000 people across the G20. The survey looks at their engagement with, their understanding of and how attracted they are to the UK as a whole—we do not yet have the Scotland cut, but we will have that soon, and I would be happy to share it with the committee. We have seen that, as I said, people are more likely to trade with the UK if they have had cultural soft power relations with the UK, so it is great to have those relations.

We have a number of partnerships across the world, and we measure business outcomes. For example, we showed that, for each £1 that was invested in our UK and Japan season, a further £8 was generated for arts organisations across the UK. Partnerships are also built as a result of such investment. Through the UK and Korea season in 2017-18, and our work with Indonesia, we were able to build sustainable partnerships.

We can do a number of things. How do you build trust? As a result of soft power interventions, what does trust mean in terms of trade, partnerships, perceptions and—crucially—influence? It is worth bearing in mind why the British Council was founded. It was founded as part of the effort to face down fascism in the 1930s, and influence remains an important part of who we are and what we do. I hope that that is helpful.

Mark Ruskell: Yes, that is helpful.

Professor Nolan mentioned horizon Europe and some of the potential delays in getting associate membership of that programme. What are the delays? How have they manifested themselves? What are your hopes for a resolution?

Professor Nolan: There is a current blockage. The UK Government said that we would associate with horizon Europe. The whole UK sector, including the Scottish sector, was delighted by that, as it is a €95.5 billion research programme over the period to 2027. The blockage sits at the European Commission level and appears to be linked to the Northern Ireland protocol, so that issue needs to be resolved.

Horizon Europe bids opened in early 2021. In the first tranche, Scotland won four of the very prestigious European Research Council bids—two at the University of Edinburgh and two at the University of Glasgow. However, the funding cannot be accessed, because we are not officially associated with the programme, so grant agreements cannot be signed.

At some point towards the end of last year, the UK Government agreed to underwrite and provide the funding for the successful horizon Europe applicants that were unable to sign grant agreements. Most of us thought that there was just a slow process, but the issue being linked with the Northern Ireland protocol is potentially very damaging. The next big round of applications and awards takes place between March and June this year, so we are pushing the UK Government to say whether it will underwrite funding for those awards. It will know much more about the progression of the politics around the Northern Ireland protocol.

Meanwhile, as you can imagine, the issue is high up academic researchers' worry list. Will people invest so much time in developing a grant application and keep going with it if they are not sure whether the funding will be underwritten? The impasse is damaging not only to UK and Scottish research but to EU research, because we are highly valued partners in the EU research ecosystem. We are very anxious about lost opportunities and the potential damage to partnerships. We are desperate to get the issue resolved, but we are at an impasse.

The Convener: I invite Dr Allan to ask his questions.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Professor Nolan, you have talked about some of the stresses that the academic sector has faced in coping with events, let us say, post-Brexit. You mentioned the Northern Ireland protocol. Will you give us a picture of how much academic time or university time is being devoted to trying to resolve some of those problems? How are universities coping with that and working together to overcome the problems by trying to recreate things that used to exist or to find new opportunities?

Professor Nolan: I do not want to underestimate the time that is being spent on that. Going back to the Erasmus situation, I note that my university, which is a mid-size university in Scotland, has written to 65 partners to work out how we will do international student mobility credit transfer, and we are just one university out of 19. That will be replicated across the universities, and people will be spending significant time on that activity.

On research, we do not have the ability, individually, to influence the resolution of the Northern Ireland protocol. What we do in that context is work with the umbrella organisation Universities UK, which is a membership organisation. It has an international unit that liaises closely with the UK Government and the big UK research funding body, UK Research and Innovation, to highlight the difficulties and put pressure on them to try to get a guarantee that the next round of EU applications, if successful, will be funded. Universities UK works closely with the relevant UK Government departments. We channel most of our work and effort through it because, as an individual institution, we would have very little sway.

Huge amounts of energy are being used around mobility. We are all doing our own thing and hiring staff from the EU. However, on the big horizon Europe issue and the impasse, we are channelling our efforts mostly through the UK and, where we can, through MSPs and MPs.

Dr Allan: You raised the subject of online learning and the opportunities that undoubtedly exist around that, but you also mentioned the aim of attracting people to Scotland. Are there any tensions between those things? Are there any potential threats, or are you confident that you can manage the new landscape? Many of us do not know quite what the new landscape of online learning looks like. Perhaps you could say a bit about that.

Professor Nolan: I do not see any tensions in relation to online learning somehow being in competition with students wanting to come to Scotland. Higher education is growing massively around the world, as is the demand for it in knowledge-based economies. Covid has helped us all to understand the potential of online learning and the demand for it.

At Edinburgh Napier, we started to do some online learning about six or seven years ago, and every year we recruit more and more students, because there are students who cannot come here. They might be carers, or they might be mature students. However, there is also a massive demand from students who want to come and study and live here, and the post-study work visa has made that very attractive.

Despite the Covid pandemic, in my institution and across virtually all of Scotland, we have seen on-going increases in students who want to live, study and work in Scotland for a couple of years and then take those experiences back. Therefore, I just see opportunity abounding, despite the difficulties. For example, some of the students who wished to join us last month in January could not get here because of visa offices being shut—due to Covid—in their country, but we were able to facilitate their early learning by engaging them in online activities. Those difficulties have not stopped them wanting to come; they are still booking their flights and coming, because they want to have that experience of being in another country.

I see oodles of opportunity for Scotland—hence my excitement. I hope that, this year, we get an international education strategy that says, “This is where we are going and these are our priorities,” so that we get real Government support behind us all.

Dr Allan: Mr Hampson, in relation to Professor Nolan’s last point, but also in relation to a point that you made about how you unify international strategy and policy, one of the traditional ways of doing that is through diplomacy. You touched on Scotland’s offices abroad. How do cultural organisations get the most out of those offices? Should we have more of them?

James Hampson: On the question about offices—of course: the more, the better, within the realms of what is affordable. Our view is that, by working with the Scottish Government and Creative Scotland on the arts assets report, we are able to help Scotland to tell the world its story. Therefore, we would obviously want to encourage and work with as many parts of the Scottish machine as possible, whether that is Government or the arts sector.

We have an incredible relationship. We have been in Scotland since the 1940s, when we opened our office in Edinburgh, and we helped to found the Edinburgh International Festival, so we have deep roots, as we do across the UK. The idea that we can help Scotland to grow its international profile and presence is completely aligned with who we are. I would have the same conversation with the Welsh Government in Cardiff, the Executive in Belfast and, of course, our colleagues in London.

Diplomacy manifests itself in different ways, and it is a case of playing to your strengths. Scotland is really clear on what it is good at and where its strengths lie, and I think that looking at how culture and education connect with trade is a great place to start. Having more presence, more profile and more people out there in the world and building partnerships with organisations such as mine is

the way to go. We could have put a long list of things that we do in our submission. Our organisation is entirely committed to making that approach work.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I thank the witnesses. This has been a very informative session and I am reflecting on what you are saying from an education, culture and design perspective. The work that you do reflects not only Scotland and Scots to the world but the world to Scotland.

Mr Hampson, I was having a look at some of the international collaborations that you have done, such as the collaboration between Dundee Rep and Scottish Dance Theatre and cities in India and the US, and the collaboration between Eigg and Newfoundland. I am interested to hear how those projects turned out and how they developed or are developing. How do one-off projects expand and lengthen their lives with your support?

James Hampson: Thank you. It is great to hear that you are pleased to see those collaborations.

Part of the success is having a brilliant team in Scotland, which I have the pleasure of line managing. The director of Scotland and her team are plugged in in two ways, the first of which is through our entire global network. We operate all over the world and we connect with 745 million people a year, so we are a big organisation that has presence in a lot of places. Corporately, I am the guardian of the promise to ensure that my organisation understands what it means to truly work for the whole of the UK.

Secondly, we are plugged into what is happening in Scotland through Creative Scotland and our various partnerships that manifest themselves in Venice and in the Edinburgh international culture summit, and we are ensuring that we bring those things together in a way that has meaning. We believe that what we do is a process, not an event. It is a bit like democracy. It takes time to nurture and for things to pay off.

09:45

On the specifics of the projects that you asked about, I would love to be able to write to you to tell you how they have turned out. We operate within a big, global programme framework. The British Council does work on English, arts and education throughout the world, and everything sits in that. I would be happy to write to say how we got on with those projects. It is really about intelligence and insight on the ground in all the parts of the world that we work in; how that fits with the aspirations of our Scottish partners, Creative Scotland and the Scottish Government; and bringing those together in a way that has meaning and helps to change people's lives.

We are in the optimism business. It is really important for all of us to hold on to that. We are at that end of the spectrum, and it is really important that we help people to realise their ambitions and aspirations.

Jenni Minto: In a previous life, I worked with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, which did a tour to China that involved working with the British Council to provide education to children there. That was brilliant. Such projects add to Scotland's opportunity to approach different organisations in the world.

When you have a project, what is the plan at the end of it? How is it expanded? How do you keep the connections? Do you have a continuing relationship with the client?

James Hampson: Scaling and measuring are incredibly important, and the third part is giving the project sustainability. We do not have all the money that we would like to have. That means that we try to help the partnerships to stand on their feet. We do long-term tracking of outcomes and how the relationships are working, but the sure sign of success is that the partnerships stand on their own two feet. We are then able to measure what the project has meant for the people involved, for the systems that sit around them and, depending on the scale of the project, for the reputation of the organisations and the UK, and we can measure the project's influence and the longevity of its impact. We ask whether the benefits can be measured economically—for example, whether there was a trade benefit.

Not everything is measured purely through the trade lens, because that cannot be done with some things. However, there are clear benefits to UK organisations from our seasons and partnerships in China, for example. The 1:8 ratio for Japan is an important part of saying that that investment is good value for money and that it has a much bigger impact in respect of society and reputation and, ultimately, a soft power impact, which many of us think is an incredibly important part of how nations conduct themselves in the world.

Jenni Minto: I would reflect positively on that. Last week, I attended Indian independence celebrations, a large element of which was the cultural side and the relationships between Scotland and India.

James Hampson: The diaspora is an incredibly important part of that. In respect of India and Pakistan, there are large and very vibrant diasporas and individuals who are hugely influential in British public life. When I was in Pakistan, I met the governor of Punjab, who is, of course, a former Scottish MP. Those links matter a great deal. They matter because of how the UK

shows itself to the world and how the UK is with itself. We all believe that that is really important.

Jenni Minto: Professor Nolan, I want to follow on from my colleague Dr Allan's questions about the use of distance learning during the pandemic and how we approach the practical side of education. I would just note that the Scottish Association for Marine Science in my constituency, which does an awful lot of work on biodiversity, climate change and suchlike, has explained to me what impact the drop in EU students has had. I suppose, then, that my question is twofold: first, how do we continue with the practical side of studies and, secondly, how do we enrich the experience of not just students from Europe but those home grown here in Scotland in our institutions, in the light of our recent leaving of the EU.

Professor Nolan: With regard to the practical side of things—and particularly during the period of the pandemic—I would point out that my university has a lot of practical-based subjects. When the pandemic hit, it was March, and almost all of the universities were coming to the end of the second trimester or term and were going into examinations. That helped, because it meant that students had their practicals done.

The really tough time was the second lockdown, from January to March 2021. The Scottish Government allowed students to do some practical work or to go into the university if it was essential and if they could not progress in their year or graduate if they did not do so. As you will have seen, we did that very safely and securely and our students were able to graduate. It was a very challenging time, but the staff, particularly in our design, television, radio and journalism departments, were enormously creative in how they developed the students' skills. That would normally have happened in the lecture theatres, but I had groups of students walking up the hills behind Craiglockhart, because we were able to do things outdoors. It was not ideal, but I think that it is truly remarkable and a testament to the staff that virtually all our students were able to graduate. That is, of course, not to say that it was not very difficult for many of our students and our staff.

The pandemic aside, the fact is that, with online learning, students know what they are coming to do. For example, we have a lot of online programmes for business studies, public health and so on that do not require a practical basis. In other words, if I join an online course electively, I know what I am getting. Moreover, with the development of virtual and augmented reality, online learning is actually becoming pretty amazing.

As for enriching the student experience, we have seen, I think, a 60 per cent drop in numbers of EU students this year. In my institution, I think that across the board there were drops of 50, 60 or 70 per cent in EU students. What can I say about that? It makes me really sad, and I suspect that those drops will continue. As I said earlier, there is still tremendous demand—and growth in demand—among students around the world to come here. The Scottish Government has given some funding—I think that it was about £2.5 million this year—for scholarships for EU students so that we can keep encouraging them to come, but one of the key issues with scholarship funding is that we need to give very good notice. For example, someone who wants to join in September will be thinking about it in January, which means that the scholarships really need to be in place. I hope that that will happen in the future and that the Scottish Government will commit to it.

I go back to my earlier comments about the international education strategy. If the strategy makes clear what areas we want to target and why and we join all of that up across departments, there will be more coherence, and we will be able to align ourselves as appropriate to it.

What can I say about that? I am sad about the decline in the number of EU students. They now pay international student fees, whereas, previously, tuition was free to them and the Scottish public funded them.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Good morning, witnesses. I find this evidence session fascinating. I have one question for each of you and then, if there is time, I have a round-up question.

Professor Nolan, I want to ask you about the balance between Europe and the rest of the world. You spoke about one of the benefits of the Turing scheme being its short-term placements. Is it a benefit that the scheme is global? Do you have any observations on the balance between the EU, where we have long-standing academic relationships, and what could be done more widely around the world?

Professor Nolan: That is a very interesting question. Do I have an answer for what the balance should be? No, I do not. With the EU, we were so well integrated and we had developed partnerships over so many years—academics knew one another through research and it was easy to move around—that the loss of that feels enormous.

We have always had about 50 per cent of our exchange students coming from other countries. We have a lot of study-abroad students from the USA. Some universities have massive numbers

coming to Scotland because of the links between Scotland and the USA and Canada, and that will continue. It is done through bilateral exchange agreements, which really increase the required work and effort. If I want to start a new exchange relationship with a university in, say, Indonesia, that would take a lot of time and effort. I do not have in place a structure such as the one that I used to have through Erasmus and, although I might have my own agreement, it might not work in an Indonesian context. There is opportunity to expand, but, with my staffing base, I cannot go into every country around the world and develop bilaterals. That is why, if the Scottish Government could set up targets for where we will put our effort, that would be enormously helpful to me.

It is a good point—what is the right balance? The European framework certainly made mobility easy for Scottish students because we were all signed up to that, and it certainly made it easier for us to administer.

Donald Cameron: I turn to the British Council and James Hampson. One of the issues for this committee is how the Scottish Government international effort interacts with what the UK Government does, given constitutional responsibilities, which you will be well aware of. The British Council represents the UK as a region as well as Scotland within that. Do you have any views on how your work is seen through that prism? For example, several—not all—of the Scottish Government hubs are co-located in UK embassies. I would be interested to hear about how that works in practice.

James Hampson: Do you mean how it works for the council and the foreign office?

Donald Cameron: Yes.

James Hampson: We are a non-departmental public body—an arm's-length body—of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. We are an operationally independent organisation that is aligned with what all four Governments of the UK are trying to achieve in the world. Our closest relationship is with FCDO ministers, because that is where the lion's share of our money comes from.

On the ground, it works brilliantly. My experience of working in big missions in Pakistan and Egypt—I spent four years in Cairo—is that the council and the embassy are aligned on ensuring that there is one big UK story.

Of course, we represent the whole of the UK and we do not have ministers, so we are able to align ourselves in very practical and relatively straightforward terms with what the UK is trying to achieve through the country planning process. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has its planning processes, and aligning with and connecting to those takes some doing—that is just about the two systems talking to each other—but we have been working closely with the foreign office overseas for 85 years.

10:00

Where the UK presents itself and sets out the whole waterfront—for example, where there is a brilliant development operation and trade mission as well as culture and education activities—is where we become most attractive and influential. That is what our competitors are doing. Soft power is a very competitive space. There is competition for influence over the choices of young people, their parents and policy makers. We do not quite know how much China spends on that, but we think that it is in the region of $10 billion a year through its growth and expansion. Our EU friends and the Americans are all in that space, too, so it is competitive.

It is about all of us thinking about what we can do best with soft power and in culture and education—particularly given that culture and education are devolved and are a brilliant manifestation of everything that Scotland has to offer—and then considering how we work together to deliver a good outcome that maintains reputation and delivers influence. A lot of other actors are active in this space.

Donald Cameron: I have one general question, convener, but I see that it is already 1 minute past 10, so I am happy to hold it—

The Convener: We have a few more minutes, so it is fine if you want to ask it.

Donald Cameron: Thank you.

There has been a lot of discussion about what your organisations could do in the best case scenario. Obviously, we all accept that resources—both Government resources and your resources—are limited. Will you set out as quickly as possible what would be your shopping list or top three ambitions for the next few years? I realise that you have provided detailed written submissions and that it is a bit glib of me to ask you to attempt this. I will start with Mr Hampson.

James Hampson: Networks, collaboration and mobility.

Donald Cameron: Very good. Professor Nolan?

Professor Nolan: I first want to say one thing that I have not said in my evidence, which is that we value the British Council offices enormously when we work internationally. I wanted to make it clear that we work together all the time.

First and foremost, we need direction from the Scottish Government through the education strategy—we need targets and clarity. Secondly,

behind that, we need investment. We are not talking about masses of money; we are talking about small amounts for scholarships and mobility schemes. Thirdly, we need a real push on the branding of Scotland and the marketing of who we are as a study destination, what we offer and what is distinctive about it.

Donald Cameron: That is helpful. I am sorry to put you on the spot like that at the end, but that was a really useful way to finish.

The Convener: I actually have a couple of final questions, the first of which is for Professor Nolan. You touched on the idea that what the Turing scheme is missing is inward mobility and an exchange programme with students, which I think of as the other side of the same coin. Will you comment on what you would like to see in the future and explain why it is so important that there is a two-way street and an opportunity to exchange in both directions, for students, lecturers and other researchers?

Professor Nolan: For good partnerships to be sustained and grow and become more multifaceted, they have to be mutually beneficial. A university might think, "We're taking all these students from Edinburgh Napier and it's wonderful to have them, but why can't our students have the opportunity to go to Edinburgh and experience the university and the city?" A feature of partnership development is that it is mutual and is about what both partners get out of it.

With Erasmus, it will be interesting to see how inward flows of students change over the next two or three years. The pandemic has muddied the waters, but will French students go to America—perhaps they will not go there—or to some of the Scandinavian countries? How will that impact our classrooms? We had healthy numbers of inbound EU students, who really make a difference to the classroom and to the students with whom they mix.

Mutuality or reciprocality—whatever the word is—is really important for developing the partnership and adding on other things, such as developing research relationships. It is the same with staff. We benefit greatly when staff come and spend some time with us. We learn about their ways of teaching and their approaches to research or assessment, for instance. It cannot be a one-way street.

The aspects of Turing that I thought were progressive were the target on more disadvantaged students and the shorter-term mobility. Early on in my career, I would have thought that four weeks would not make a difference, but it does. Two weeks can make a difference. I have had nursing students who have gone away for two weeks to another country and it has, they say, literally transformed their lives.

Reciprocity and a short-term, targeted scheme would be enormously beneficial for Scottish students and staff.

The Convener: I have a final question for Mr Hampson, which touches on my first question. As the relationships have been changing so much, it is perhaps interesting to probe some of the weaknesses that we had previously. I do not want in any way to diminish the absolute success of the summer festivals in Edinburgh, but we also have other festivals in Scotland. One example is the Wigtown book festival at one end of the country, but I am thinking more specifically of the St Magnus festival in Orkney. How might we take advantage of the Nordic relationships and the Copenhagen office to build the status of the other festivals across Scotland more widely so that we do not always think of the summer festivals being Edinburgh?

James Hampson: That is a great challenge. First, I absolutely support what Professor Nolan said about mutually beneficial relationships. If we establish such relationships and do it well, we build the trust about which I have been talking and all the benefits that come from it.

I have talked a lot about the whole of the UK. Your point is about the whole of Scotland. That is a really good challenge for us. I would like to think that our brilliant arts team represents the whole of Scotland in its work. Celtic Connections, which is in Glasgow, is an example.

Your question is really good, but I do not have in front of me a brilliant, or even good, answer to it. We know that work has gone on between Shetland Arts and a programme in Texas, but that does not really address the point that you made about the Nordic relationships. I undertake to write to you, convener, to tell you in a bit more detail what has happened and some of the things that are in the pipeline. I see from my notes that some work is going on between the Work Room in Glasgow and the Nordic countries, so the Nordic countries are on the radar, but perhaps not quite in terms of the geographical areas in Scotland that you pinpointed.

We will write to you on the matter and set out in detail a proper response to your question. It is a great challenge. We need to represent the whole of the UK, but we also have to represent the whole of Scotland.

The Convener: That is great.

I thank both the witnesses for attending the committee. It has been immensely helpful. I also thank them for their submissions, which were helpful.

I suspend the meeting until 10.15 am, when we will resume for our session with the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture.

10:09

Meeting suspended.

10:15

On resuming—

The Convener: Welcome back. Agenda item 3 is the final session of our inquiry into the Scottish Government's international work. We are joined by the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, Angus Robertson MSP; John Primrose, deputy director of international relations, Scottish Government; and, in a change to the witnesses for technical reasons, Neil Watt, head of European engagement, Scottish Government. I welcome you all to the meeting.

I thank the cabinet secretary for being with us and invite him to make an opening statement.

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Thank you very much, convener. I am losing track of how many times I have been with the committee recently—I think that this is my fifth or sixth evidence session. I am delighted to be back, and I am happy to answer the committee's questions.

First, I want to make a few remarks about events this week, not least because of what they might mean for the committee's powers and role.

On Monday, the UK Government published what it called "The Benefits of Brexit: How the UK is taking advantage of leaving the EU" to mark the second anniversary of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. As a political distraction from events at number 10, it clearly failed. It is no surprise that it failed. The simple truth is that there is a profound absence of Brexit benefits, whereas the disbenefits are all too evident. New polling this week showed that 75 per cent of people in Scotland have a negative opinion about whether the UK has benefited from Brexit and only 2 per cent of people in Scotland believe that Boris Johnson delivered a good Brexit deal. It is clear that, for people in Scotland, the proclaimed benefits of iconic blue passports and crown markings on pint glasses are small beer that does nothing to redress the significant step backwards that Brexit has meant for our trading position within the European Union and the wider benefits of EU membership.

The document celebrates an "ambitious Export Strategy", but the truth is that Scotland's total trade with the EU fell by 24 per cent in the year to September 2021 compared with 2019. For example, Scotland can no longer export the 20,000 to 30,000 tonnes of seed potatoes that we used to sell to the EU and Northern Ireland.

The document boasts of securing trading deals, but even the UK Government's own research shows that there is little or no economic benefit from the new agreements that have been signed. The document also boasts of

"A highly-resilient food supply chain",

with no acknowledgement of the significant labour shortages that are being experienced across the sector, especially in rural Scotland.

The document celebrates taking back control of our waters, but neglects to mention that total UK fish exports in the first four months of 2021 were 27 per cent lower than they were in same period in 2018 and that, because of new UK immigration rules, an average of 20 to 25 per cent of vacancies in the seafood industry are unfilled.

The document trumpets new initiatives to "tackle criminal activity", but the reality is that, post-Brexit, we are now outside key policing tools, such as the Schengen information system and the European arrest warrant system, which makes it much harder for Police Scotland to combat criminality and for prosecutors to bring people to justice in Scotland.

The document claims that £1 billion of red tape will be cut, but it ignores the fact that UK Government officials have estimated that British companies that trade with Europe will have to fill in an extra 215 million customs declarations at a cost of a whopping £7 billion a year. It also ignores the fact that cutting red tape usually simply means undermining environmental standards, workers' rights or quality standards, which is bad in itself and a sure way to trigger significant further disputes with the European Union under the trade and co-operation agreement.

The UK Government promised that the UK shared prosperity fund would, at a minimum, match the size of the EU structural funds in each nation each year, but the current spending plans fall far short of replacing the EU funds. The reality is that the "levelling up" that was announced yesterday for Scotland actually means "losing out".

That is not all—do not worry, convener; I am not going to talk for much longer. There is very little good news, but we need to point out the bad news.

The Convener: I am sorry to interrupt you, cabinet secretary, but I want to make it clear that we are not taking evidence on the proposed Brexit

freedoms bill today. We are focusing on our inquiry into the Scottish Government's international work and the operation of its international offices. Although I appreciate that there is an overlap between those areas, because of time constraints, I would appreciate it if you could concentrate on the subject of our inquiry.

Angus Robertson: That is absolutely understood, convener. I was just ending my peroration.

The UK Government's proposed bill will impact on the work of the Scottish Government and its offices, and on the work of the committee. It is unacceptable that the UK Government seems ready to unveil sweeping measures that will have such profound consequences for Scotland, its Government, the Parliament and the committee with such little discussion with, or respect for, the Parliament and the Government. The manner in which we were informed about the document to which I have referred makes a mockery of the UK Government's recent commitment to reset relationships with the devolved Governments.

The Convener: Thank you, cabinet secretary. We will move straight to questions, starting with Dr Allan.

Dr Allan: I thank the cabinet secretary for his opening remarks.

I do not know whether you heard the evidence from the previous panel about the benefit that our international offices provide. There is quite an interest in having more of those offices. What ambitions are there for further countries to benefit from a Scottish presence around the world?

Angus Robertson: It is fantastic that there appears to be general agreement on, and general enthusiasm for, the excellent job that Scotland's international offices do. They attract investment, broaden our horizons, and create domestic opportunities and benefits for people in Scotland, and they do so at a very marginal cost in the context of the Scottish Government's budget. Between 0.01 and 0.02 per cent of the Scottish Government's overall portfolio spending plans goes towards our existing eight international offices.

The future funding that is allocated in the Scottish budget includes the funds for the opening of our office in Copenhagen, which will take place this year. That offers us huge opportunities for developing our links with the entire Nordic and Baltic region. Those countries are our near northern European neighbours.

Within the current session of Parliament, we are committed to opening an office in Warsaw, which will serve central Europe. That is a region that matters enormously to us, not just from the point of view of trade and educational and cultural exchange, but because so many people who were originally from that part of the world live in Scotland. Therefore, the opening of that office makes perfect sense.

There is an interesting discussion to be had about where the network should develop at the next stage. Given that there seems to be so much encouragement for the network to be as successful as it can be, I can definitely identify parts of the world where we are not currently represented by a Scottish Government office. There is, of course, Scottish representation through Scottish Development International, whose reach extends right around the world. The question is where might we look next. Should we consider having offices in capitals in which there are strong bilateral and cultural connections with Scotland? In some cities, there is a very strong multilateral diplomatic and third sector presence. All those factors will go into the thinking about where we might expand after Copenhagen and Warsaw.

Dr Allan: We heard from the previous panel of witnesses that there is an opportunity now to draw together policies and activities in different strands of the Government's work. That might be cultural activity, economic development and education. In thinking about where future offices might be, do you factor in how those offices could draw together different strands of Government activity and what the universities are saying about where they would like further activity?

Angus Robertson: Members of the committee who have had the good fortune to visit Scotland House in Brussels will be aware that there has been a long history of co-operation between different Scottish organisations that have a locus in a European context. In the past in Brussels, there was representation from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament and so on.

More can be done on co-ordination. That already takes place between Scotland House and other Scottish agencies that are currently represented on the ground. There is a high level of co-operation among people who answer to Scottish Enterprise internationally.

Alasdair Allan made a point about other strands of work that could be undertaken in an enlarged network. That is absolutely true, and we will look at that. However, that could be the case in places in which we already have a presence. There is very successful Scottish Government representation in Paris, for example. Paris is not just the capital city of France; it is home to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which is in charge of education and culture, both of which are devolved areas. It

seems to me that we could broaden and deepen the work that we do in places in which we are already represented, and we can look at places in which we are not yet represented, but perhaps should be.

I am really interested in hearing members' views on where we should be looking next. Our network is comparable with those of other devolved parts of the world. We are of a comparable size to Québec, Flanders and German Länder, and many such places are increasing their networks.

The committee has taken evidence from colleagues who are in charge of Scotland House operations in a number of capital cities. They are extremely talented people, and I put on record my appreciation of all the work that they and their staff do. We need to grab every opportunity with both hands to ensure that Scotland is represented as widely as possible so that we can enjoy the benefits that such representation brings.

Dr Allan: I turn to international development, which is another area that is your responsibility, although you have a new Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development in Neil Gray. There is a lot of reciprocity in the relationships that exist between Scotland and the countries in which we work—most famously Malawi, but also others, including Zambia. There has been a review of our international development policy and a keenness on the part of Government to challenge our assumptions about how international development is done. For example, there has been talk about removing the white gaze from the way in which we do international development. Will you say a bit about what is changing so that the committee can understand that?

Angus Robertson: Travel restrictions have meant that colleagues and I have not been able to travel to speak to people on the ground in our partner countries. However, during my most recent visit to London, I had the benefit of meeting diplomats from those countries at Scotland House, which is our excellent representative office. From speaking to the diplomats from our African partner countries, I know the tremendous appreciation that there is of the international development work that Scotland does. However, you are right to point out that there has been a review to ensure that what we deliver on the ground is, frankly, what people in those countries are looking for rather than perhaps priorities that are made in northern Europe and what we might think is important for our friends and colleagues elsewhere in the world.

10:30

On the reorientation of our principles of international development in the review, I can highlight four changes. One is to build back fairer and stronger. That is about an evolution of our funding and restructuring our current funding schemes.

Secondly, there is the global south programme panel. In our programme for government, we announced that we would establish a panel of experts by experience who principally work and reside in the global south. That goes back to the point that I tried to make about making sure that we have key input from people in the countries that we work with, led at ministerial level, to help us to ensure that global south voices are properly heard.

The third area is updating our funding criteria to ensure that we actually deliver that which we want to deliver and have the impact that we want to have in our partner countries.

The fourth area is ensuring that our international development offer is focused on the best matches and the asks from the partner countries that we work in.

Maurice Golden: We received a written submission from Oxfam, which states:

> "Scotland's credibility on climate justice is now in significant jeopardy due to it missing three successive annual emissions targets."

I realise that delivery of climate targets is not in your portfolio directly, but is that situation having an impact on Scotland's international effort?

Angus Robertson: It is nice to see you, Mr Golden, and to see that your amazing clock is still in its place to tell me where I am with the timing of this evidence session.

At the recent climate change talks in Glasgow, I spent a lot of time speaking to colleagues from around the world. Scotland is held in extremely high regard because of what we are achieving, which I hope is not being done in a way that is preachy to the rest of the world. We are very fortunate that we have won on the natural resources lottery twice. We won once with oil, but we are now pivoting away from hydrocarbons, as we know we must. We are extremely fortunate to have a disproportionate amount of renewables potential, and we are trying to make the most of it. I do not think that that is a party-political issue, because we all know that we have to grab the opportunity with both hands.

In that area, we have a lot that we can share with countries that are trying to do their best, as we all are, to deal with the climate emergency. For example, I spoke to Malawians, including the Malawian President, who was here in Edinburgh at an event that I was speaking at. They are exceptionally keen to work with the Scottish Government so that we can share best practice

and any learnings that we have. Just as importantly, it is about what we can learn from our partner countries. We do not know everything and we do not have the answers to everything, and there will be things that we can learn, too.

It is right that we need to do everything to ensure that we reach the targets that we have set ourselves, but we have set targets that are among the highest in the world, and most other countries in the world are significantly behind where we are. Therefore, we still hold a leadership role, and we have a responsibility to continue to do everything that we can on the renewables front. Working with our partner countries is one of the great prizes that we should focus on in our international development priorities.

Maurice Golden: We have heard lots of evidence about the positive nature of the Scottish Government's international work. I listened to your answer to my earlier question. Have you considered taking a thematic approach to complement the geographic approach that we are currently pursuing, in order to get more bang for our buck? That might involve looking at renewables or water. That is just a thought.

Angus Robertson: It is more than a thought; it is absolutely right. That is what we are doing. One of the areas in which we are focusing our efforts relates to women and girls. That will be a very important factor with regard to taking a thematic approach, and there can and should be others. I will invite John Primrose, who has a great deal of experience in the area, to come in at the end of my comments and underline my points.

We are taking a thematic approach, but we should not be hidebound by that, because we can, I hope, do a number of things at the same time. Although the women and girls strand is very important, there are others that will also be key priorities. We are among the world's leading countries when it comes to renewables and our climate ambitions, so that could and should be a key approach to our work.

Would John Primrose like to add to what I have said?

John Primrose (Scottish Government): I thank Maurice Golden for the question on a thematic approach versus one with partnership countries. Geographically speaking—I think that that is, in part, where the question comes from—I think that it is right that we focus our international development on the three sub-Saharan countries in which we are currently investing, given the size of the portfolio's budget. To give the committee an idea of scale, I note that it looks likely that, by the end of the current parliamentary session, we will be spending about £25 million or £26 million primarily in those three partnership countries. That is a really meaningful amount of money for engagement in that area, but it would not be if we diversified across multiple countries.

That said, it is right and proper that, through that work, we professionalise thematically and lean into the extensive skill sets that already exist in Scotland to ensure that we maximise the benefits for our partnership countries. The cabinet secretary referred to renewables as a key area of partnership, and that links to climate justice. Health is another area. We have an excellent national health service global citizenship programme, which has involved extensive partnerships with Malawi and, now, with Zambia. There are a range of areas in which Scotland is excellent and can have extensive partnership with developing countries. We are thinking about the policy themes in the global review that was outlined to the Parliament last March.

To answer the question, I think that we should remain focused on that geographic area, but we should also accelerate and increase the level of global leadership that we can provide, at a policy level, on individual themes.

Mark Ruskell: I have a couple of quick questions for the cabinet secretary and his officials. The first is about the international relations concordat, which was drawn up in, I think, 2013, when we were in a very different world. Have there been discussions about revising that?

Angus Robertson: Are you talking about the Scottish Government's international framework?

Mark Ruskell: I am talking about the UK international relations concordat, which, I presume, governs how the UK Government and the different UK nations work together—imagine that—on international relations.

Angus Robertson: On a general point, as you know, a refresh of intergovernmental relations between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations was announced only a few weeks ago. You rightly point out that there was an agreement at the onset of devolution that underscores the opportunities that devolved Administrations, including the Scottish Government, can pursue on the international stage.

That is exactly what we do—we focus largely on the areas of devolved responsibility to maximise our opportunities internationally. Do we need to specifically revisit that agreement? I am not currently involved in that subject. To be frank, in the medium term, it would be much better for us not to have any form of restriction whatever on Scotland's ability when it comes to European and international policy, and I look forward to that being secured during this session of Parliament.

However, in the meantime, we will do everything that we can to make the most of the opportunities that we have. You might be aware that most Scotland House operations are currently co-located within UK embassies, and there is a high degree of co-operation and collegiality. I welcome that, and I know that our colleagues in the Scotland House networks value it. I hope that colleagues in the foreign office value it.

To answer your question, we should always keep our formal relationships under review. My last thought on the issue is that I do not lay the greatest store on such formal arrangements, given that we have had them until now in the devolved settlement and, frankly, they have not worked tremendously well because there has not been a willingness to let them work very well. One first needs to be minded to work positively with others, and the good news is that, on the ground internationally, that happens already. If there are any specific observations or suggestions about the arrangements that were entered into after devolution, I am happy to take a look at them.

Mark Ruskell: So there is no real desire to look formally at the concordat or memorandum of understanding, and you are saying that we are very much led by practice on the ground, which appears to be working. Is that a fair summary? Is there any move to revisit formally those responsibilities and relationships?

Angus Robertson: I am currently not looking at any update or changes to the arrangements. As things stand, we have a network of international offices. We have excellent people working on the ground around the world in the Scottish Government network and in our economic partners answering to Scottish Enterprise. We are doing what we set out to do.

Should Scotland's constitutional status change—or when that happens—we most certainly will have to look at the network and the ending of the restrictions on what we can do. I very much look forward to that, because normal countries can develop their international relations in an unrestricted way. However, that is not within the scope of this morning's evidence session. No doubt, we will come back to it during this session of Parliament as the Scottish Government's prospectus towards the independence referendum is published.

Mark Ruskell: We certainly will.

When will the Scottish Government's international framework be reviewed and updated?

Angus Robertson: My earlier query with you related to the updated international framework. That is extremely current and has been worked on. You will be aware that the update was a manifesto and programme for government commitment. We will publish the new global affairs framework in this financial year, so within the next month. It sets out the Scottish Government's engagement internationally and the values that underpin that engagement, and it demonstrates our wish to be a good global citizen. We have an important role to play in demonstrating high international standards, and we will continue to support our internationalisation agenda to influence the world around us on the issues that matter the most. That is probably the furthest extent that I can go to in giving a sneak peak on the framework, which will be published shortly.

10:45

Mark Ruskell: That is good to hear. We took evidence a couple of weeks ago from the Scotland Malawi Partnership, and there was considerable concern about the pulling of the Malawi small grants scheme. There are concerns that the scheme was evaluated against objectives that were incorrectly written and that the full benefit of the scheme as it operated was not properly evaluated or reviewed. I recognise that that is quite a granular issue to hit you with this morning, but are you aware of those concerns? What commitment might you be able to give to ensure that they are properly addressed?

Angus Robertson: I am fully aware of the issue that you raise. Again, I signal to John Primrose that he might want to comment at the end of my answer.

I think that everybody appreciates that all schemes that involve us dispensing taxpayers' money are subject to review. That is a common practice. We need to ensure that we are actually delivering against the aims that are set for particular projects or funding streams. The evaluation came to the view that the scheme had not delivered against all the criteria for what the Scottish Government wished to deliver on the ground or the impact that we wanted to see. That is why we review the projects that we support.

My previous ministerial colleague Jenny Gilruth updated the Scottish Parliament on the thematic approach that we are now taking with the focus on women and girls. We are going to continue to dispense small grant funds, but it is not going to work in the same way as it has until now, because there has been an evaluation, and the recommendation is that we should do things differently.

The feedback that we have had from partner countries has been positive. I will share one example with you. The Government in Malawi has requested that Scotland finances a smaller number of larger programmes, which will help it to track progress and manage alignment with its

aims. We are trying our best to work with our partners on the ground and ensure that the projects that we support work better for them, but also that they work in line with the strictures that we place on the projects.

In essence, we want to make sure that what we are committed to is working. If it is not working in the way that we intended, we have to pivot and ensure that we deliver in the way that we want with our partners in our partner countries. John, is that a fair assessment?

John Primrose: Absolutely, cabinet secretary. If the committee allows me, I will give a bit more of the detail that lies underneath that.

As the cabinet secretary said, one of the objectives of the programme at the outset, as advocated by the SMP and Scotland's International Development Alliance, was to provide some very small organisations in Scotland with capability support so that they could start to access much larger grants. That was one of the critical raisons d'être of the programme. When we evaluated that, we found that, out of 80 grants, only one organisation was able to graduate to that larger area, so it is absolutely right to say that the programme did not fulfil a core objective that we set out at the outset.

There were also a few other issues. For example, we anticipated much larger demand for the grants than there was. We anticipated that 150 grants would go out, but in the end there were only 80. There is also evidence out there, which the review took into account, on the additionality of having much smaller projects versus larger ones. The evidence globally from an aid impact perspective is that it does not create more innovation or impact when we have a range of much smaller projects rather than some larger ones. There is no positive evidence for that. There is also a transaction cost issue.

We took the decision on the basis of value for money and the external review that was done in collaboration with the SMP and other organisations. As the former minister, Jenny Gilruth, said, we remain incredibly committed to supporting civil society in the global south. We will continue to support our partner countries in the three areas of concentration for the small grants programme, which were in health, education and economic development. In fact, we will increase the finance associated with that.

Scotland's civil society and global citizenship overall within Scotland remain a critical focus for our programme and we will continue to support Scotland's civil society through a range of means, including our support for the alliance and the SMP. I think that we have a difference of opinion there, based on the evidence that we have seen with the SMP, but I would be keen for that not to be seen as us disinvesting in any way from the key priorities that our partner countries have or indeed our engagement in global citizenship in Scotland.

Mark Ruskell: There is a key role for small initiatives to be established, which have the potential to grow into bigger initiatives that could attract more funding. I am interested to know—maybe you could write to the committee about this—how you are going to continue to support the growth of grass-roots initiatives, which seem to attract such a huge amount of voluntary support and engagement across Scotland and in Malawi and have the potential to grow into bigger programmes over time. I will stop there.

Sarah Boyack: It has been an interesting discussion. I am definitely interested in the issues to do with the sharing of knowledge and expertise. It was interesting to hear the cabinet secretary talk about how we can share our knowledge and expertise on renewables, but we can learn from other countries as well. I am thinking about Denmark in particular. About two thirds of homes in Denmark are heated through heat networks, and I think that three fifths of that is done through biomass and not fossil fuels. Such learning has to be a two-way process.

Cabinet secretary, you kicked off your comments by talking about the shift that has occurred two years on from Brexit. Quite a few of our witnesses have raised that issue, and two of them in particular—Dr Kirsty Hughes and Anthony Salamone—said that we need a better post-Brexit engagement approach and a better set of priorities. What are your comments on that? Is there a new international development strategy to come, particularly in light of the comments that you made at the start of the meeting about reduced trade relations with our neighbours in Europe?

Angus Robertson: On interrelationships post-Brexit, I have spent a considerable amount of my time, as did Jenny Gilruth—and Neil Gray has hit the ground running as her successor—on our continuing relationship with our European partners, whether at the European institution level or at a bilateral level. We have a high-tempo level of engagement to try to make sure that we are still plugged in to the thinking of our European partners. That matters to us very directly and it is a very current issue.

If we take what is going on with the Northern Ireland protocol as an example, we need to be fully sighted on what is happening with all of that, not least because we are set to have a border post constructed in Scotland as a result of the UK Government's agreement with the European Union. We know that the UK Government is resiling from its own agreement. The news from

Northern Ireland in the past 24 hours has been extremely fast moving. We probably do not have time to go into working out what it means, but we have had a Northern Ireland minister refusing to see border control posts operating. That is in direct contravention to the international agreement that was signed by the UK Government.

Since then, we have had the announcement that the First Minister of Northern Ireland is resigning. Today is a day when what is happening is extremely dramatic, and what is happening matters to us: it relates directly to issues in and around Brexit and how we are supposed to be emerging beyond Brexit. It illustrates why it is important for us to have continuing deep and trusting relationships with our interlocutors, and we are doing that.

Are we going to do more of that? Yes. We have to have the best possible relationships. I know that you have a particular interest in the workings of the Scottish representative offices, so I should say that that is one of the things that they are able to do: they can nurture and further the relationships that we have in Brussels and other European capitals.

Having made that point, I will segue to your point about what we can learn from other places. The point about Copenhagen and Denmark is extremely well made. There are different things that we are probably best able to learn from different countries. You highlighted Denmark's environmental policy, and I whole-heartedly agree with your point. We can learn a lot from our Nordic neighbours in that respect. As I have mentioned to the committee before, we can also learn a lot from Denmark and its neighbouring countries in the cultural sphere, particularly with regard to what they have been able to do in screen production and broadcasting. Like me, many members of the committee are acknowledged fans of Scandi noir and have watched amazing television series that have been produced by DR, the Danish public broadcaster. I am keen to learn from what those countries have been able to do so successfully.

I think that I have covered the two parts of your question—first, on ensuring that we have the best possible direct connections with people, and secondly on what we can learn from others—but if I have missed anything, you can come back to me.

Sarah Boyack: I wanted to flag up the Danish issue because the Copenhagen office gives us an opportunity that we must seize with both hands.

In my opening question, I spoke about articulating a post-Brexit strategy, which previous witnesses have talked about. I get your point that the situation changes day by day, but there is also something about those relationships and the points that Mark Ruskell made about international relations in terms of a concordat across the UK with our partner countries in the EU. Will you talk about the need for a clear post-Brexit strategy and say how that links to the hubs that we have abroad and ways of increasing transparency about how they work?

I am not looking to be told absolutely everything, because there has to be a degree of give and take, but I would like to hear something about key priorities and the thematic approach. You talked about that in relation to international development, but I would like to hear more about it in relation to Europe as well. What are our priorities in that regard? Some witnesses said that our priorities should be tight but, of course, everyone suggests that the focus should be on the issues that they are interested in. We have heard today about the importance of education and cultural links. You mentioned economic development and trade, and the issue of climate change is also important. What is the strategy? What are the objectives under those headings, and how can they be linked to the hubs?

Angus Robertson: I know that time is short this morning, but I will be happy to share with you information about any specific questions that you have. The work on the priorities of the hubs is not un-transparent. The priorities that they have set are subject to assessment.

We have five key outcomes against which the external network reports. They are improving Scotland's international reputation; improving Scottish businesses' ability to trade internationally and more effectively; promoting Scottish research and innovation capability and securing further partnership and funding for it; increasing investment in Scotland; and protecting and enhancing Scotland's interests in the EU and beyond. Those are the key headline objectives that the network works to.

There will be nuance in different capitals because of the different priorities that we have in different places. For example, it is very easy to see that, in Germany, we are pursuing closer and enhanced relations on renewable energy and hydrogen with the Länder especially, because that makes sense. We have gone through the advantages of the Denmark-based office, and we can go through the others. One advantage is working to those higher goals; there will then be specific areas of focus.

11:00

It is great that you have heard directly from colleagues who run hubs such as Scotland House internationally, and I am delighted that you were able to ask them about what they do. That is transparency in action, and I am sure that you will

wish to invite them back. I speak to those colleagues extremely regularly. They are very keen to be able to say what they do and how they do it, and I encourage you to learn more about what they do. By and large, the operations are quite small ones by diplomatic standards, but we have extremely talented people out there batting for Scotland, and they are doing a great job. The more we can hear about what they do and the advantages that they bring, the more everybody should be enthused and encouraged.

Sarah Boyack: Okay. We will pick that up.

Do you have any comments on the post-Brexit strategy? That is a moving agenda, but has the Scottish Government articulated that, or is there a briefing that we can circulate to address the issues that witnesses have raised?

Angus Robertson: We are talking about a fast-evolving situation, and we are moving with the situation as quickly as it moves. We do not have an end state at the moment. We were supposed to have international agreements and the basis of a new relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union, but we are not there yet. The United Kingdom Government is still threatening to invoke article 16 of the Northern Ireland protocol, with all the problems that that would bring for us all in a worsening relationship with the European Union.

I will highlight two levels on which we interact with European colleagues. First, we talk to people about Brexit and its on-going and unresolved issues. Secondly, we interact on areas in which we have emerged beyond the immediate wreckage of the Brexit process. For example, on education, we know what has been transpiring with the Erasmus scheme and that, measured against it, its UK replacement is inadequate. Nevertheless, we still want to ensure that we have the best possible relations with other European countries in respect of education. I spoke with the German federal minister who has responsibility for that, because we want to ensure that we have the best possible relations. A few weeks ago, I spoke with the French culture minister about how we can move beyond the problems that Brexit has caused for Scottish and French artists and how it has made it much more difficult for them to tour and perform.

We are working on two levels. We are considering how we deal with the immediate issues and how we can move beyond them. Some things are moving very quickly, and we have to deal with the fast-moving circumstances. We are also doing exactly what you mentioned: we are working out where the different areas are in which we can move beyond the immediate Brexit transition issues to try to firm things up and, in some respects, ameliorate the damage that Brexit has caused.

Sarah Boyack: It is worth checking out the discussion that we had with the first panel about educational connectivity and the new Welsh scheme that was announced this week. There are interesting lessons for us to look at.

The Convener: The cabinet secretary spoke about the time, and members should also be mindful of that. Two other members have questions.

Jenni Minto: Your answer to Ms Boyack pre-empted one of my questions, which was about the evolving situation in Northern Ireland and the impact on Scotland.

We took evidence from David McAllister MEP about the fact that Scotland can pursue a different and more informal engagement with the EU. I think that it was the first time that you came to the committee when I asked you about the connections that you are making on the softer side of things, such as through culture, education, design and Scandi noir. I am interested to hear a wee bit more about that, if possible.

You also commented on the wider diaspora and learning from how, for example, Flanders and Quebec engage on the world stage. Will you talk about that, too? Sorry—I have rolled a few questions into one.

Angus Robertson: I might get myself into all kinds of trouble with the convener, because I could happily talk about those issues for a long time.

I have a locus on the point about the diaspora because I also have responsibility in relation to the population challenge that we are facing. I do not know how widely people are aware that we are heading back into the territory of relative population decline, which is very concerning for us. That is the background to the perennial challenge—or opportunity—that we have.

We are one of the nations in the world that have a significant diaspora. The question is how we can best discover, maintain and develop our relationship with that diaspora. In the past, that has largely been thought of in terms of people who have left Scotland and gone to the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and so on. However, there are other forms of diaspora. For example, tens of thousands of people have studied in Scotland and then gone back to the countries from which they originally came. They are a form of Scottish diaspora as well—they are aspirational Scots. We need to find imaginative ways of striking a continuing relationship with those people and making the most out of that.

We have lessons to learn from other countries, some of which you mentioned. I would add Ireland

to the list. The Irish have a great experience of fostering relationships with their diaspora. There is more to come on that issue, and I will be happy to return to the committee when I can say more. It is definitely something that we are thinking about—we are working out how we can move all of that forward.

On the softer areas such as culture, it is relatively simple for me to take that forward as I have responsibility for external affairs and culture, so I can do both at the same time. In doing so, we always need to keep an eye on other areas of Scottish Government policy that also have such interactions. For example, education was mentioned. Shirley-Anne Somerville is extremely focused on that, and we talk about that area.

An area that we have not gone into today is justice. Through Brexit, we are in the unfortunate position of having lost our place in a great many judicial co-operation functions. That is the bad news. The good news—if we can call it that—is that the Scottish Government is working well across directorates and its areas of expertise in the area. Recently, we had a deep dive, as it is called in the jargon, that was hosted by colleagues at Scotland House Brussels. That is another example of the value that that network and the colleagues who work in that field in Brussels can bring. We are able to brief my Cabinet colleague Keith Brown, justice officials, my directorate and others on those issues.

That is a concrete illustration of how we are moving beyond Brexit, if we can call it that, and understanding the downsides. As I pointed out in my opening statement, there are very few upsides to Brexit. What will we do about that? We can find workarounds for some things, but the honest truth is that there are many things for which we cannot find workarounds. We need to be honest with people that Brexit has been extremely damaging not only to trade, but to education, culture, justice and other areas.

We will have an opportunity during the current session of Parliament to put that right and to chart our course for rejoining the European Union as an independent member state. That will go a long way towards repairing the damage that Brexit has wrought for us.

Donald Cameron: I have questions on two broad areas. The first is about the Scottish Government's current international presence. Plainly, the hubs are predominantly in the EU. Notwithstanding differences of opinion on Brexit and Scotland's constitutional future, resources are limited, so are we in the right place? We are not in parts of the world such as Asia, South America or Africa. If there is to be a refocus or an expansion, what are the precise criteria to decide where Scotland goes? You mentioned the diaspora and cultural links. I would like to pin it down, if possible.

Angus Robertson: I concur with the underlying sentiment of your question, which is about the attractiveness of expanding the network. I have not heard anybody suggest that the places where we are currently located are the wrong places to be. Far from it—the cities and countries that we are in are absolutely the places where we need to be. The next question is: where next? Preceding my time in office, decisions were made that we should look to Copenhagen and then to Warsaw, and those decisions make significant sense.

You are right to ask where we should go after that. You could suggest, given their importance, the Asian subcontinent countries to which we have close cultural and historical connections. You might point to Pakistan and India. You might highlight the importance of Japan as a trading partner. You might pass comment on Australasia as a part of the world to which we have strong historical connections and current trade and tourism connections. You would be right to ask where our presence in Africa is and, when it happens, as I am sure it will, where would be best suited to our having a presence. Of course, we have partner countries there, so should we have a physical presence in one of those, or are there regional capitals where there is a multilateral presence? There are a number of factors that come into play in making any assessment of where next.

I take a different view to you on the scope of the best network that Scotland could have. I have no difficulty in saying that I look forward to Scotland being represented on all the continents of the world. However, even the biggest states in the world have limits to their international networks. There is a process to be worked through for the question of where next. As I signalled to Alasdair Allan, I would be happy to hear members' views on where they think we should be looking next. There is no monopoly on common sense on that.

I am content with where we are, where we are going next makes perfect sense and I look forward to the network being expanded even further. I am delighted that there seems to be cross-party agreement on that in the committee.

Donald Cameron: I would like to pin that down a bit further. It is easy to build up a wish list of places for different reasons, but what are the criteria—are they related to the economy, culture or diaspora? I am not entirely sure that we know exactly what factors are to be taken into account if there is a refocus of some sort. However, I am content to leave it there and move on to my second set of questions.

One of the issues that the committee is looking at in its inquiry is how the Scottish Government's international effort works with the UK diplomatic effort. You mentioned co-location of hubs within embassies in some parts of the world. Are there any other practical examples of such interaction? Your officials might be able to give some.

11:15

I was struck by the High Commission of Canada in the UK promoting, on social media, an event that was being held by the Quebec office in London. Does that sort of thing happen in UK embassies abroad in relation to Scottish Government efforts? Are there any practical examples of the Scottish Government's international hubs working with the other devolved nations on work that they are doing in Wales or Northern Ireland? Is such co-operation or co-ordination taking place?

Angus Robertson: I could talk at great length about all the activity that is going on in that area. I do not think that I will be able to do the issue justice, especially given the convener's request for pithy answers.

In speaking to colleagues in our current network, I am always struck by what they say about being involved in this initiative or that event. The Covid restrictions have limited the ability to do much of the conventional outreach work—the soft diplomatic work—that normally takes place. However, last week, I spoke to the new Welsh representative in Brussels about what they hope to achieve for the Welsh Government. I said that they should feel free to work as closely as possible with our colleagues on the ground. I very much hope that there is a professional relationship with the UK mission to the EU. In the past week, Neil Gray spoke to the British ambassador to the EU in Brussels.

I could go on and on about where things work well. I could also point to other areas where there is room to grow. For example, I noticed—I do not want to embarrass the embassy in question, so I will not even mention the continent—a British embassy in a significantly sized country talking with pride about hosting its first ever Burns supper, which made me wonder why it had not been able to host one in the previous 200 years. That shows that there are ways in which we can help to influence the UK diplomatic network to make more of the opportunities to promote Scottish culture and Scotland in a general sense.

There is an opportunity to work well together. I hear lots of examples of that being the case and, in all constitutional eventualities, I look forward to that continuing to be the case.

There are some really good examples of co-location working well. The Nordic nations share an embassy in Berlin, and I think that I am right in saying that the UK and Germany share an embassy in Reykjavik. When it comes to international networks, we can work with one another in all kinds of ways. It would be a thoroughly good thing for us to be imaginative and supportive of one another.

Donald Cameron: My final question is about measuring success. In our inquiry, the committee has tried to grapple with the issue of what metrics should be used to measure success in this area, given that public money is being expended. Do you have any concrete thoughts about how we should measure success with regard to getting value for money in what we do?

Angus Robertson: I am going to read something out, because I think that it is quite important:

> "Offices use a range of both qualitative and quantitative indicators to measure their performance. Evaluation reports for the international offices in 2019-20 have been published under FOI, as has the evaluation report for Scotland House Brussels in 2018-19."

There is a continuous evaluation process to make sure that the work that is undertaken by the Scottish offices is measurable, and that process is transparent and is available to the public. It is good that people are aware of that. One is aware of the five key outcomes that we ask of the network, the fact that there is an evaluation process and the fact that it is publicly available.

In addition, it has been really helpful—this is where the committee has performed an important function—to see the people who are actually out there, doing the job. I know that you have had evidence from colleagues from Scotland House in London, Scotland House Brussels and our office in Berlin, and no doubt you will speak to others in the future. It has been helpful just to hear from them about what they do and how they do it.

The thing that I find tremendously encouraging is meeting not just the people who run the representative offices that we have, but the other members of the team. Last week, I spent an afternoon meeting, via a Teams call, the staff of Scotland House Brussels, who are an amazing and enthusiastic international polyglot staff complement, and they are there, working every day to promote Scotland across the piece. We should be very grateful for what they do.

It is now 20 minutes past 11, and I know that I am getting to the end of my time, so I will abuse my position by again saying a big thank you to everybody who does their best to promote all of our interests—our economy, our culture, education

and all of that. They are doing a great job, and long may that continue.

The Convener: That concludes consideration of this agenda item. I thank the cabinet secretary and remind him that we are not expecting him at the committee next week, which I am sure he will be relieved about. I thank him and his officials for their evidence.

The committee will now consider its work programme in private.

11:22

Meeting continued in private until 11:30.

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