



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 23 June 2021

Session 6



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE

1st Meeting 2021, Session 6

CONVENER

*Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)

*Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)

*James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

*Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)

*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

*Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab)

*Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

*Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD)

*attended

LOCATION

Virtual Meeting

Scottish Parliament

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 23 June 2021

[James Dornan opened the meeting at 09:15]

Interests

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): Welcome to first meeting in session 6 of the Education, Children and Young People Committee. I am the member for Glasgow Cathcart, and, as the oldest member of the committee, I have the pleasure of convening the meeting for the first two items of business. I welcome all members and I look forward to working with them over the session.

I remind everyone to switch mobile phones to silent. No apologies have been received.

Under agenda item 1, each of us should declare any interests that are relevant to the committee's work. Background information is provided in paper 1, which is in members' packs. I have no relevant interests to declare. I ask each member in turn to declare any interests.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I am a councillor for the ward of Hamilton North and East in South Lanarkshire.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): There is nothing that I am required to declare, but it makes sense to note that I was a teacher for 10 years. I was registered with the General Teaching Council for Scotland and was a member of the Educational Institute of Scotland.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): I have no relevant interests to declare, but I place it on the record that, although I no longer practise, I remain on the roll of solicitors that is held by the Law Society of Scotland.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Although it is not a registrable interest, I have membership of the Disclosure Scotland protection of vulnerable groups scheme for the purposes of youth work with the Church of Scotland.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): I have no relevant interests to declare other than that members of my family are teachers.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I am a councillor for the Lochee ward of Dundee City Council.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): I have no relevant interests to declare.

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Although I am not required to declare it, I am still a registered member of the General Teaching Council for Scotland. I was a teacher, and I was previously a member of the NASUWT. I, too, am a member of the PVG scheme.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I have no relevant interests to declare.

Convener

09:18

James Dornan: The committee's next task is to choose a convener. The procedure is explained in paper 2. The Parliament has agreed that only members of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party are eligible for nomination as convener. I ask for a nominee from that party.

Oliver Mundell: I nominate Stephen Kerr.

James Dornan: Thank you, Oliver. I was just about to move on—you took your time in responding.

Stephen Kerr was chosen as convener.

James Dornan: I take silence as acquiescence and I congratulate Stephen Kerr on his appointment. I hand over to him to convene the rest of the meeting. Thank you, Stephen, and good luck.

The Convener (Stephen Kerr): Thank you for leading us to this point in the meeting, James.

It is a tremendous privilege to be the committee's convener. We have important work to do. It is perhaps the most important work of the Parliament, because it pertains to our country's future.

I look forward to getting to know you all and to working with you as colleagues. I very much hope that we will be able to work across parties for most of our time in committee and that our work will be firmly evidence led. I will strive at all times to be inclusive. I want everyone to have a positive experience of serving on the committee.

I also want you all to know that I am open to feedback. I relish positive and constructive feedback. Please do not hesitate to let me know how you feel about how I am performing as convener.

Deputy Convener

09:20

The Convener: Our next task is to choose a deputy convener. Parliament has agreed that only members of the Scottish National Party are eligible for nomination as deputy convener. I ask for a nominee from that party.

Bob Doris: I am happy to nominate Kaukab Stewart.

The Convener: Thank you for that nomination.

Kaukab Stewart was chosen as deputy convener.

The Convener: I congratulate Kaukab Stewart on her appointment and I look forward to working with her. We had a brief introduction yesterday and I think that we will get along famously.

Congratulations, Kaukab. Would you like to say anything?

Kaukab Stewart: Thank you to the convener and the rest of the committee. This is a dream come true for a teacher of 30 years' experience who has worked across two local authorities and across all demographics. I hope that I can bring that experience to bear in some way. My ears will listen widely. Like the convener, I look forward to getting to know my colleagues so that we can take on together the serious work that is ahead of us.

The Convener: As I said, we had a brief conversation yesterday and I look forward to being the beneficiary of Kaukab Stewart's experience from her 30-year career as a teacher. We will all benefit from that.

Fergus Ewing: Let me be the first to congratulate you, convener and Kaukab Stewart, on your roles. I am sure that we all look forward to working on the committee, which is important, as you said. I was extremely pleased to hear your undertaking to work in a non-partisan and inclusive fashion.

I seek clarification on one point. It has been 14 years since I had the honour of serving on a parliamentary committee. When I was deputy convener to the late Alex Fergusson on the then Rural Development Committee, his practice was that we, as convener and deputy convener, worked closely together—for example, I attended all the pre-meeting sessions with the clerks, along with Alex Fergusson, and I participated in administrative and other decisions about the committee's work, including decisions about the terminology of correspondence and the setting of agendas. We never had a cross word. His chairmanship was exemplary and that committee worked in a collegiate fashion, with Elaine Murray

from Labour and Mike Rumbles from the Liberals. That committee operated exactly in the way that you described, convener.

We all have our political views, but we want to lay those aside as far as we can for our work on the committee. Convener, will you confirm that your approach will be to work in partnership with Kaukab Stewart in the way that Alex Fergusson worked with me years ago?

The Convener: You make an excellent point and I appreciate your bringing that to the fore in our opening meeting. I absolutely intend to work in partnership with Kaukab Stewart, so that we have a sound basis for the aspiration that I described of our being collegiate, as far as we can be.

As Fergus Ewing said, we are politicians and we will have political views on things, but, if we work together and have a commitment to being evidence led in our proceedings, we can reach across the parties and do something that the Parliament should perhaps do more of—set aside our tribal instincts and work together for the good of the people of Scotland. That is my aspiration, and I know that it is yours, too.

Fergus Ewing: Many thanks for those assurances.

Decision on Taking Business in Private

09:25

The Convener: Under item 4, does the committee agree to take in private item 6, which is the committee's work programme?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I see lots of nodding heads.

Legacy Paper

09:25

The Convener: Under item 5, we will briefly consider the legacy paper from session 5, which members have all received copies of. The committee is asked to thank the session 5 Education and Skills Committee for its legacy paper—as is appropriate—and to note the paper for now and agree to consider it as part of our forthcoming work programme discussion under the next agenda item. Does anyone wish to speak or do we all agree to do that?

Oliver Mundell: Since the legacy report was produced, there has been a major and highly critical intervention from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Its report details 10 years of botched reform and bureaucracy that has put teachers under pressure and failed young people. I do not know about other committee members, but I certainly found it embarrassing to read the 150-page document, especially given that many of the OECD's suggestions were recommended by the Education and Skills Committee in the previous session. Those suggestions were resisted and ridiculed by the SNP Government for years.

Opposition members on the committee in the previous session were accused of politicking, of making baseless criticisms and of talking Scotland down, but we now know that those concerns were, in fact, true and that the then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney, was putting his political future ahead of our young people. It is no wonder that the SNP was so keen to keep the report secret ahead of the election.

The material change in circumstances, to borrow a phrase, reframes many of the discussions that we had in the previous session and demands a different approach from the Government. It is therefore vital that we explore in detail the concerns that the OECD has highlighted before we revisit the legacy paper in its totality. I am content to leave that discussion to the work programme agenda item, which will be in private, but I wanted to make those points in the public session.

The Convener: It is only fair that I invite other committee members to respond to that, if they wish to.

Bob Doris: I am a new member of the committee, so I will look at the legacy paper carefully. We have agreed to take in private our work programme agenda item, which is the convention not just in this committee but across all committees. I was really pleased with the tone that you set in your initial remarks, convener, and I

hope that Mr Mundell might reflect on his tone. That said, our committee will look at not only this OECD report but the further report on assessments and certification later in the year. That should go without saying, but Mr Mundell felt the need to raise the issue. I respect that but, moving forward, I hope that we can work collegiately and non-tribally, as the convener suggested. I hope that we can all live up to that.

The Convener: As no one else wishes to speak, I will ask the question again. I might have already got past this point. If I have, forgive me—I am a new convener, so Bob Doris and I have something in common: we are both new to this whole thing. Do we agree to note the legacy paper and to consider it as part of our work programme discussion under our next agenda item?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: That concludes the public part of the committee's first meeting. We now move into private to consider the work programme.

09:29

Meeting continued in private until 10:46.

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