



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

**Thursday 2 September 2021**

**Session 6**



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - [www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot) or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

---

**Thursday 2 September 2021**

**CONTENTS**

	<b>Col.</b>
<b>DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT UPDATE .....</b>	<b>2</b>

---

**CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting 2021, 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)

\*Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

\*Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Donald Cameron (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 2 September 2021*

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

### Decision on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Clare Adamson):** Good morning, and a very warm welcome to the second meeting in session 6 of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee. I remind all members to switch their mobile phones off or to silent, so as not to disturb the meeting.

Our first item is to decide whether to take item 3, on consideration of our work programme, in private. Are members agreed to take the item in private?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## Scottish Government Update

09:00

**The Convener:** Item 2 is a Scottish Government update. We will take evidence from Angus Robertson, the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, on the Scottish Government's priorities relating to the remit of the committee. The cabinet secretary is joined by Donald Cameron, who is the deputy director of the constitution and United Kingdom relations division, and Euan Page, who is the head of UK frameworks. Welcome to the committee. I invite Mr Robertson to make an opening statement.

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** Thank you, convener, for the opportunity to come before the committee so early in Parliament's deliberations and my tenure as cabinet secretary. As you might imagine, I have a bit of experience of committees—particularly in another place, having served for 10 years on the European Scrutiny Committee, among others, in the House of Commons. I therefore understand the importance of committees and look forward to working with you collegially throughout this parliamentary term, directly in committee, and in the chamber, where you will no doubt be raising issues of interest.

We are at the start of the sixth session of the Scottish Parliament. In 1998, people in Scotland voted overwhelmingly to set up the Parliament after years of Westminster Governments that ignored their wishes and imposed unwelcome and damaging policies.

Devolution has improved people's lives in Scotland and delivered Governments that they have chosen—at least for devolved policy areas such as health and education. Our Parliament has introduced free personal care, abolished university tuition fees and no one is now charged for prescriptions. The list could go on.

The UK Government is putting all that at risk by taking back control, once again, of key devolved powers, without consent from Scotland—without consent from you and without the consent of the people of Scotland. It is doing so most notably through the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020, which was imposed on Scotland despite an overwhelming rejection by stakeholders and this Parliament's explicit refusal of consent. It is also doing so by using Brexit—a Brexit that the people of Scotland overwhelmingly rejected as an ill-disguised attempt to diminish the powers and responsibilities of the Scottish Government and this Parliament.

The committee takes up its responsibilities at a pivotal moment. Devolution is under systematic attack from a UK Government that is increasingly hostile to devolution in word and deed. It is doing that directly through legislation such as the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020, which takes powers from Scottish ministers and the Scottish Parliament and places them in the hands of UK ministers. It is doing that through direct UK Government spending on devolved matters in Scotland in a way that bypasses the Scottish Parliament, bypasses you and bypasses the democratically accountable ministers, which is likely to have a profound and damaging effect on the devolved budget. It is also doing that through legislation that has a deliberately wide interpretation of what is reserved under the devolution settlements, or by ignoring the legislative consent decisions of this Parliament. It has done that four times since the European Union referendum alone—a convention that past UK Governments of various stripes had scrupulously observed since 1999.

This is not just happening in Scotland. The Welsh First Minister, Mark Drakeford, said that the UK Government is continuing to

“steal powers and money away from Wales.”

The Scottish Government will do all that we can to keep Scotland safe and protect the gains of devolution and our democratic rights.

We remain committed to working with the UK Government and other devolved Governments in an equal partnership on common frameworks, and on voluntary arrangements based on progress by agreement between equals, offering a model for future co-operation. However, such arrangements can work only if all parties are prepared to respect devolution and proceed on the basis of equality and mutual respect.

Sadly, there is little evidence that Westminster wants an equal partnership. Instead, it has resorted to unilateral control. Make no mistake—the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 is clear evidence of a UK Government that is committed to actively constraining and overriding decisions made by the Scottish Parliament without its consent. Delegated powers in the 2020 act mean that devolved policy choices can be brought within or excluded from the scope of the legislation’s market access principles by UK ministers alone, with or without the agreement of this Parliament, and with or without your agreement. All members of this committee and Parliament, irrespective of party, should be deeply concerned about that and should oppose the damage that is being inflicted on devolution.

I am sorry to say that, faced with a UK Government that is determined to centralise power

at Westminster, there is a limit to what can be done in mitigation. The outdated fixation on Westminster sovereignty allows any UK Government with a majority in the House of Commons to strip or override devolved powers without consent, should it wish to do so. Let us not forget that the current UK Prime Minister is on the record as describing devolution as “a disaster”.

That is a far cry from the devolution settlements that were agreed in 1999, and it cannot offer a stable basis for equitable and productive relations between the Governments of these islands. It demonstrates why, as we recover from the pandemic and try to mitigate the wholly avoidable consequences of a hard Brexit that we did not vote for, the people in Scotland have the right to decide their own future. At the recent election, the Scottish Government was given a clear mandate to offer the people of Scotland a choice over their future once the Covid crisis has passed. It will then be up to the people of Scotland, not a Westminster Government that they did not vote for, to decide how Scotland is governed.

In conclusion, it is increasingly clear to me that the choice that the people of Scotland face is between a greatly diminished devolution settlement that is under constant threat from the unilateral actions of a hostile UK Government and our being an independent country, which is part of the European Union, with the full range of powers that is needed to keep Scotland safe, to recover from the social and economic damage of the pandemic, and to flourish in a genuine partnership of equals with our friends across the rest of the United Kingdom.

**The Convener:** I hope that we can ask questions in a logical order this morning. Obviously, the committee has a wide remit, so we will start with the constitution, move on to Europe and external relations and then finish with culture. I hope that that is helpful to know. Members should bear that in mind when they are requesting supplementary questions.

I open by thanking the cabinet secretary for your letter last week to the committee that explained the Scottish Government’s position on a lot of the issues. In it, you state:

“Work is ongoing to fully map out and understand the Act’s impact: it will take time to fully grasp its implications”.

Will you say a little bit more about that work and whether it will be published and made available to the committee for scrutiny?

**Angus Robertson:** Given your observation about the wide range of the committee’s remit, convener, I should say that it is probably unrealistic for us to be able to cover all the issues that you might have questions about in one hour. I therefore reiterate that I look forward to coming

back to the committee, and, in the meantime, I hope that we can inform the committee about any queries that you might have through letters.

By way of an update on the status of the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020, the legislation has been in force since 1 January 2021, and Scottish Government officials are engaging across a number of related fronts on a factual basis and without prejudice to ministers' fundamental opposition to it. The Scottish Government is seeing a wide range of impacts on policy and on public investment, and the frameworks team can supply further detail on request, if the committee wants a bit more information on that, relating to examples of known and emerging risks to devolved decision making, and on technical aspects of the 2020 act's operation.

The Scottish Government's concerns have been shared with the UK Government, and we have been working in conjunction with colleagues in Wales and Northern Ireland. The views that I am expressing today, and which the Scottish Government is expressing, are shared by the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. This will be a really big issue throughout this parliamentary session, and we will no doubt come back to it again and again.

**The Convener:** Thank you. I move to questions from members.

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** Welcome to the committee, cabinet secretary. You have mentioned some of the new constraints that are being put on this Parliament by UK legislation such as the 2020 act. What are the Scottish Government's options for engagement and for putting its views across? At the moment, we have a number of inadequate mechanisms such as joint ministerial committees. How do you intend to use them to make your point?

**Angus Robertson:** I could probably speak for the next hour on that subject alone. First, I will set out my starting principle. You might be interested in hearing more detail on this, but since I have taken up office, I have been working closely with colleagues in the UK Government and the devolved Administrations in Wales and Northern Ireland. In my engagement with UK Government colleagues, I have made it absolutely clear that, in finding workable solutions to issues of governance, administration, democratic oversight and the reform of arrangements, I am extremely keen to do so on a collegial basis, to find agreement where it can be found and to overcome any administrative blockages, if I can put it that way. I am acting in good faith to try to deliver on the wish that surely everyone in Government should have to operate as best we can.

A concrete example of how it might be possible to improve things is the issue of frameworks. The subject itself might seem slightly dry, but the framework agreements are the method by which a United Kingdom that has left the European Union can best operate with the devolved Administrations. It goes back to principles that were agreed in October 2017. I must point out that the timeline is important to understanding what is going on below the surface. Commitments were made about the way in which Governments could and should work together, but, subsequently, the UK Government decided to pursue the 2020 act, which in effect drives a coach and horses through the devolution settlement. As a result, progress on the detail of framework agreements has neither been as quick nor gone as far as I—and, no doubt, the committee in wishing to scrutinise the frameworks—would have wished. Frankly, it has not been good enough.

I have discussed the issue in person with Chloe Smith, a UK Government minister in the Cabinet Office, whom I know. Having spent 16 years at Westminster, I know a lot of the UK Government ministers and interlocutors, as you might imagine. That is a good thing, because we agreed to work and act in good faith to try to make progress on the framework agreements, on which such progress has been too slow or, indeed, not been made. In answer to your question on how we can make things work better, I think that that is a concrete way in which that could happen.

A more general observation that goes across the piece with regard to internal Government relations—and something that I have asked that we log from now on—relates to how meetings and discussions that involve the UK Government on specific matters that Governments have supposed to progress operate in practice. It is hard to reach any other conclusion but that the UK Government's determined and deliberate approach towards the Scottish Government—and, by extension, the Scottish Parliament—is not to inform the Scottish Government, or to inform it late, and not to involve it in all relevant meetings.

When one takes part in meetings, the thing that one hears most often is "noted". Apparently, one will hear later that the things that were discussed have been fully consulted on. I suspect that, if being consulted means taking part in Teams or Zoom meetings at which UK Government ministers simply say, "noted", that will fall far short of the expectations of the Scottish Government and, I expect, this committee.

09:15

We have a profound challenge in how we deal with the UK Government because, frankly, not only is the relationship between the UK

Government and the devolved Administrations suboptimal, but the UK Government is pursuing policies that are aimed at undermining and denuding the devolved settlement that was agreed by the people of Scotland—and, incidentally, the devolved settlements that were agreed by the people of Wales and Northern Ireland.

No doubt, those are questions that you would want to ask any UK Government minister if they deign to turn up. I look forward to watching such an evidence session with interest.

**Dr Allan:** Clearly, you will enjoy joint ministerial committees when you get an invitation to one. It sounds like you have worked out the format.

In your introductory remarks, you raised a point about some of the history behind what we are talking about. One of the reasons—it is not the only reason—that this Parliament is in existence is to ensure that decisions about spending and what we now understand to be devolved areas are made by this place and not by anyone else. What do you make of comments from Scotland Office ministers that, because they do not like policies in certain devolved areas, they might want to bypass that? There is a suggestion that spending decisions in areas that might be considered to be devolved might be better made by them or other UK ministers rather than by ministers here. How can the Scottish Government engage with UK ministers in a way that makes it quite clear that that should not happen?

**Angus Robertson:** It is important to understand that challenge on a political and practical level. On a practical level, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament have the formal responsibility for areas that are devolved. We have in place the oversight mechanisms and the formal structures to appropriately manage spending projects and plan across the full range of the devolved areas; the UK Government does not. Local authorities in Scotland and the Scottish Government make all kinds of plans and strategies on the basis of the needs, interests, concerns and expectations of the communities that we all serve; the UK Administration and UK Government departments do not.

Therefore, on what basis will decisions about the allocation of resources by the UK Government in devolved spending areas be taken? At the present, all indications seem to suggest that that basis will be arbitrary, political and politically motivated, and that the UK Government will seek to bypass the devolved settlement, and, incidentally, the priorities that have been set by the Scottish people when they elected you, in the relative strength of the political parties in the Scottish Parliament.

On a political level, there is, clearly, a political motivation in doing all of that. There is an attempt to show that the UK Government cares about Scotland by getting itself involved in policy areas where it thinks it will curry favour with voters—there is a hope that people will say, “Look at the munificence of the UK Government,” as it spends on a range of things that are actually the responsibility of this Parliament and the elected Scottish Government.

Those are the two levels that I see as being most important. People need to be held to account, but the UK Government is not being held to account in this regard, because the place where accountability lies in those areas is in this place, as opposed to with Government ministers representing a Government that has not been elected in this country and most of whose ministers have not been elected in this country, either.

**Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** In your opening remarks, you talked about a partnership of friends. I think that that was specifically with regard to the United Kingdom, but could you say what you have been doing across the wider partnership of friends that we could have, whether that be in Europe for the rest of the world?

**Angus Robertson:** One of the advantages, if I can call it that, of having had an election shortly before a recess is that, as a Government minister—I am learning this as we go along—I could use that recess time to bed into the job. There is a sort of golden hour for reaching out and speaking with people. I have been doing that on a number of different levels. In the first instance, I have been speaking to the consular corps—the diplomatic corps—in Scotland. You will be aware that a wide range of countries have consulates in Scotland, largely in Edinburgh, and I and Scottish Government colleagues have been meeting consuls general—and, on occasion, diplomats from London embassies—about developments in Scotland and also specifically in relation to consular questions. We may come on to this, but that has included the impact that Brexit is having on other countries’ citizens and on people from here in their countries.

There has been very good engagement with the consular corps in general. Specifically, I have met face to face and in person with the consuls general of the United States of America, Germany, France, Japan, Ireland and Austria, and with the rest on Teams calls. I have also been engaging with the diplomatic community in London. Visits are beginning to take place. Looking back in my diary, in recent weeks I have met in person with the ambassador of Slovenia. His country, which I think is comparable in size to Wales, is a very important country, because it currently has the



presidency of the European Union, so I was very pleased to meet him in person. I have met the ambassadors of Finland and Austria. I have met the Indian high commissioner, and I have spoken via Teams with a number of others.

On Europe, I have met or been in communication with, among others, the German permanent representative to the European Union; the Irish permanent representative to the European Union; David McAllister, who is the chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs; and MEPs from across all the mainstream political families in the European Parliament. You will be aware that there is a friends of Scotland group in the European Parliament. That is just—I say “just”—the outreach that I have been engaged in during recess with the diplomatic community here, in London and in Europe.

Further afield, you will know that the Scottish Government has representatives in a good number of countries around the world, and we are hoping to increase that. We have been working closely with them, too.

**Jenni Minto:** Great. What a fantastic few weeks you have had—very busy.

You touched on relationships with our own citizens going to Europe and vice versa. Yesterday at the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee, we heard evidence from representatives of the food and drink sector, and they have requested short-term Covid recovery visas. I am interested to know what work you have been doing to support the sector on that.

Separately from that but connected, I met some musicians, and they, too, are looking for improved access to Europe and for European musicians to be able to come here as well.

**Angus Robertson:** Thank you very much for the question. Again, that is a subject on which the committee could take up the whole of its time talking simply about the scale of the challenge that we are facing in the areas that you mention.

Someone who does no shopping might be living under the impression that things are normal, but those who do their own shopping and who see what is going on in our smaller and larger shops are aware that there is a problem, and it is an increasing problem, sadly. For those who work in any coastal communities where there is an offshore fisheries sector or an onshore processing sector, the impact of Brexit is disastrous. We are now at a stage where even those who were the primary campaigners for the “sea of opportunity” are now regretting, in terms, what has happened since.

There are people working in the agricultural sector who have not been able to conduct their harvest because they do not have the necessary staff. Imagine: you have worked all year, but what you have worked so hard to nurture and grow literally rots because you cannot pick the fruit that you have grown or harvest the crops that you have planted. Those are the realities of Scotland in Brexit Britain. Across the Scottish Government, colleagues are working on these issues, whether that is directly in the agriculture and fish sector or in my area of responsibility.

The impact on the culture sector has been mentioned. On one hand, we should put on record our appreciation of everybody in the cultural community who has worked so hard to try to make sure that, as we emerge from Covid, we can see the bounce back in the culture and arts sector, which is so important to all of us. We should be glad that that has happened. Festivals have begun to run. However, anybody who works in the cultural community would be able to explain to the committee in Technicolor the impact that Brexit has had on people's being able to come here, and on people from here who are trying to go somewhere else in order to perform. I know about that because I have held a number of sector round tables, so I have directly spoken to the people who are involved.

For example, Spain is a hugely important country for the Scottish cultural community. Scottish music is exceptionally popular there. Many festivals wish to host Scottish performers. Under normal circumstances, there is an established timetable for Scottish performers to be able to perform there. Now, because the UK is outside the European Union—and because, I stress, the UK Government refused an agreement with the rest of the European Union that would have allowed visa-free travel for cultural performance—performers from Scotland are being hit with prohibitive costs. For example, costs are in excess of £557 for Spain. That is deterring performers in general, but it is also deterring performers in specific ways, the impacts of which will take us a while to fully understand.

For younger and emerging performers, who might not earn so much or who might not have such a big following, but for whom performing internationally is an important way of getting experience, growing their profile and—it is to be hoped—becoming a success story, things are so bad that they are literally not going on tour. If they are not going on tour, they are not developing their skills, earning money or developing their following. That will have an impact on the Scottish arts and cultural community in ways that we will learn about only in the fullness of time.

There are alternatives, on which we have been pressing the UK Government. Legal advice that we have seen from the Incorporated Society of Musicians makes it abundantly clear that a visa waiver agreement with the European Union would not require a reopening of the trade and co-operation agreement—which, we have heard, is why the UK Government is not pursuing it. That would allow the UK to continue to control at its borders and would be legally binding. The UK Government had the choice of agreeing to such an arrangement, but it did not do so. The impact of that on the cultural scene is really appalling. I am working very closely with that sector. Those are the best people to explain to you the impact of all of this.

The situation provides an example of how the co-location in my brief of the constitution, external affairs and culture is extremely apposite in the current circumstances. The interactions that the Scottish Government is able to have with other countries on a consular level allow us to highlight those challenges.

Unfortunately what is happening to Scottish performers is also happening to performers on the continent who are not coming here, which is a loss to audiences here who would love to see them. We are a European country, but that is not the only reason why we would like to see performers from the rest of Europe. It is a great loss to the country that fewer people are coming here to perform.

09:30

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I want to pick up on the comments that you made in your opening remarks about the purpose of devolution, which is to increase decision making and accountability in Scotland as part of the UK. You gave a pretty full critique of how things are working at the moment. Today is the committee's first chance to talk to you and we are thinking about the next five years. It feels to me as though there are three levels: the ministerial level with joint ministerial relationships; parliamentary accountability and the relationships between different parts of the civil service across the UK; and the local authority level. Your description of the current structures and relationships is not overly positive. What are your short-term suggestions for how we begin to reset those relationships, given that we are at a critical moment?

When we look at common frameworks and think about how we deliver parliamentary accountability on that raft of different frameworks, what changes need to be made? I suspect that there is agreement around the committee table that "noted" is not a full way of engaging with us and

letting us know what is being discussed at the most senior levels. Knowing that might help us to think about our questions and what UK ministers we want to have a fuller discussion with as we set out our work for the next five years.

**Angus Robertson:** Having a positive approach and looking at how we can try to make things better is the correct starting point, and it is my starting point. As you might imagine, when someone arrives as a new cabinet secretary, they are presented with a mountain of papers and there is a long track record on the issues. My colleagues who are sitting next to me have long experience of what is going on and I might ask them to come in at the end of my contribution to give some insight into the formal workings of the structures and the scale of the challenge that we face.

Can changes be made? I have taken part in meetings where the people who were taking part were prepared to listen and to co-operate, and that is as it should be, is it not? In fairness, I want to share the fact that it is possible to discuss areas of common concern.

I was asked a question about engagement earlier, and I have had this level of engagement in at least two significant areas. I have taken part in meetings of the co-ordinating committees of the UK Government that are dealing with EU exit. More recently, there have been meetings of co-ordinating committees involving the UK Government on Afghanistan. In both of those cases, I was joined by colleagues from Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as colleagues from a number of UK Government departments. I would describe some of those meetings as constructive, business-like, and engaged. For example, I shared what I thought should be a priority on the issue of the arriving Afghan refugees, which is that we work in a joined-up way to make sure that they are able to go to parts of the UK where they have a connection with places or organisations, because they were translators, they worked with military units or they had an educational link. That seems eminently sensible to me, and a number of people were saying that it is something that we need to look at. You will appreciate that the Scottish Government would partially deal with some of that, but the clearing would be dealt with by the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence. I got a positive impression from colleagues in those departments and in the Cabinet Office, so I take that at face value and I hope that the work can be proceeded with similarly.

On issues related to our exit from the European Union, UK Government ministers said on record that they agreed with me on a number of subjects. I do not want to embarrass them, but it was nice to hear that UK Government ministers could

welcome contributions that are made in good faith. Therefore, I will start there on that basis.

However, beyond that, in the conversations when we are dealing with the machinery of Government, how do we formally work together on intergovernmental relations? At that point, it is clear that there is a structural problem. Therefore, it is not simply about the individual goodwill or sense of colleagues who can hear a sensible suggestion and go, "That is a sensible suggestion—why don't we do it?" Rather, it is about when one is involved in discussions about structure or policy and things that need to be signed off and agreed.

I have little doubt that, in relation to matters that are not viewed as partisan, there is good opportunity for informal working, and I will continue in all circumstances to try and work like that. However, on the formal level, we need to know that we are dealing with a UK Government that has a policy about its interaction with devolved Administrations. I stress again that it is not an issue that is of relevance only to the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government, because our views are shared by the Welsh Government, which is of a different political hue, and, when one speaks with colleagues in Northern Ireland, one hears much the same thing.

Internally, we are trying as best we can to understand where the blockages are on frameworks. The issue of frameworks crystallises our challenge. We have the pre-Brexit commitment to a way of working that respects the devolution settlement in principle and allows us to work out frameworks on the basis of that principle. Incidentally, those commitments were given by Government ministers on the floor of the House of Lords, among other places. We also have the impact of the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020.

As committee members are aware, there has been internal debate within the UK Government about its form of interaction with devolved Administrations. The term "muscular unionism" has been used by, among others, the Welsh First Minister. In the internal thinking of the UK Government, we have those contradictory positions. The truth is that the UK Government has not yet worked out how to square the circle and whether it will pursue a purely muscular unionist position or deliver on its commitment on frameworks.

That is a very live issue, because I had a positive meeting—in terms of the tone of the conversation—with Chloe Smith about where we were with frameworks, and there has been some back and forward since then. Where we get to will be extremely instructive with regard to where the UK Government is with things. Now that I have

reached that stage, I turn to colleagues who have been working on that area to give you a bit of colour and insight into the more technical aspects.

**Donald Cameron (Scottish Government):** I do not have a great deal to add to what the cabinet secretary has said. Sarah Boyack asked about relationships with officials; clearly, officials who work in the civil service in different parts of the UK have a shared interest in good governance, so officials communicate and talk to each other, but there is no doubt that we have differing sets of ministerial mandates. That is the reality of the situation and we are long used to that being the case but, in the post-EU referendum period, it is reasonable to conclude that those relationships have been more difficult, given the differing ministerial mandates, particularly around the UK Internal Market Act 2020. It is clear that the positions of the UK and Scottish Governments are very different, and that informs the approach to engagement between officials. In both Administrations, we do our best to manage our way through the differing ministerial mandates, but there comes a point when the reality of that hits and there is no scope for further negotiation or development at an official level and matters must be sorted out at a political level. I think that that is the reality of the situation at the moment.

I agree with the cabinet secretary's remarks about the common frameworks programme. I think that we have seen a lot of good progress during the three years over which the programme has been under way. I will make two points in relation to that. The work was predicated on an agreed set of principles about what frameworks would do. Baked into the project was respect for devolution and a recognition that there was a set of legitimate interests on the part of the UK Government in devolved areas and on the part of the devolved Governments in reserved areas, where reserved and devolved responsibilities intersect.

The work got off to a good start because of that recognition at the outset. We have now reached the crunch point in three separate areas where we need to see progress and which really sit at the heart of the effect of the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 in terms of an exclusions process for frameworks. Our sense in the Scottish Government is that there needs to be a degree of automaticity to that process if we are to see the frameworks do the job that they were originally conceived to do, otherwise we will be in a situation in which, irrespective of what is agreed in a framework's area, the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 provisions can cut across that agreement, and the only thing that can be done to address that is a decision made by the UK Government secretary of state. That cuts across the principles that were agreed that govern the frameworks at the outset. That is an area where

progress is needed, if we are going to get on to the second part of your question, which is about the committee's role in scrutinising frameworks.

Our sense is that progress is needed on those three cross-cutting issues before scrutiny can be done on a meaningful basis. However, we recognise the pressure in terms of the timings, workloads and scheduling of business for committees.

I think that, as the cabinet secretary has said, we are hopeful that progress can be made during the next few weeks on those outstanding issues. That will very much depend on the UK Government reaching a collective decision. It remains to be seen whether that will be possible.

**Sarah Boyack:** Those two answers were very useful and help us to think about accountability and what further scrutiny we should do.

I return to my first question to the cabinet secretary about the priorities that you will change in the short term. You are clearly of the view that the system is not working as intended, and there have been big changes as a result of Brexit. I know that you want a different constitutional settlement in the long run, but, to make things work now, so that you—and the other devolved Governments—can get the job done, what is your top priority? I note that the Welsh Government has republished its suggestions on how things need to change. What short-term changes do you want that you think would be of assistance? I think that it would be helpful for the committee to put those to UK ministers itself.

**Angus Robertson:** To be concrete about it, I wish that the framework process, which has been going on and on, could be completed and agreed, and that the frameworks were operating in such a way that then precludes the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 from impacting on devolved areas. That would be a pretty good short-term solution, which would free you up to actually scrutinise the workings of said frameworks. That would be a good thing.

I am not entirely sure—we may have different perceptions of how short the short-term short term is, but it is the Government's intention that, within the current parliamentary session, the people of Scotland should be able to determine the future governance of this country. Whatever we consider to be short term, medium term and long term, we intend to take that forward in this parliamentary session. That will allow us to think completely differently about the interrelationship of Governments and governance on these islands.

09:45

I stress that, for me, an important dimension in the next stage in Scotland's democratic journey is our interrelationship with the rest of the United Kingdom, which will still remain the primary relationship that we have. Obviously, during the Covid restrictions, my ability to take part in face-to-face meetings has been restricted—as it has been for all members and for the rest of society—but I am pleased that, this weekend, I will take part in my first face-to-face intergovernmental event at which I will meet members of the UK Government, the Welsh Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Government of the Irish Republic at the British-Irish Association.

Given the suboptimal way in which things currently operate in the devolved settlement, it behoves us all to work out how things can work better on the basis of Scotland being a sovereign state like the Irish Republic. That is not all plain sailing, as we have observed during Brexit, but I am very cognisant of the issue and I want good formal and informal relations between the nations of these islands. I am of the view that we will be in the best possible position to pursue our interests, and our shared interests, by being a sovereign equal and, in our case, a member state of the European Union, which we would then be, together with the Irish Republic. There would also be new machinery, and we would need to think about how we can make that work optimally.

Obviously, we want the people of Scotland to decide on that once we emerge from the Covid phase that we are in now, but it is very high up on my working list. After all, the manifesto that I was elected on, and the manifestoes that the majority of members in the Parliament were elected on, said that we would deliver that referendum within the current parliamentary session.

**The Convener:** Cabinet secretary, can you just confirm that you referred to a meeting of the British-Irish Council?

**Angus Robertson:** No—it was the British-Irish Association, which is perhaps less known. The British-Irish Council is of course important. We should not lose sight of the fact that its secretariat is headquartered in Scotland, in this very city. It is an example of machinery that was agreed as part of the Good Friday agreement. Obviously, we hope that the situation in Northern Ireland does not deteriorate. I very much hope that the interrelationship between Governments on these islands can be improved. The British-Irish Association is another format that brings together Government representatives from across these islands.

**The Convener:** Thank you for clarifying that.

I invite Donald Cameron to come in.

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** The other Donald Cameron, as it were.

**The Convener:** Yes, indeed.

**Donald Cameron:** I welcome the cabinet secretary and his officials to the committee. I want to start with an observation about common frameworks. In the cabinet secretary's answers, there was a sense that we cannot really get on with scrutinising common frameworks until certain issues have been resolved. It is worth saying that the Health and Sport Committee in the previous session of Parliament, of which I was a member, scrutinised two common frameworks and heard from the Scottish Government, stakeholders and officials. Therefore, it is not a novel process, albeit that we are all feeling our way a bit on it. I just wanted to put that on the record.

I want to pursue the issue of intergovernmental relations. As the cabinet secretary has made clear, it feels like relations are at a pretty low ebb, although it has emerged today that there are constructive contacts at ministerial level and at official level. To go back to something that Mr Cameron said, there comes a point when the policies of the UK Government and the Scottish Government are diametrically opposed, so engagement ends. It is the Scottish Government's policy to take Scotland out of the United Kingdom and to oppose Brexit. When that happens, how do we break the impasse?

**Angus Robertson:** Thank you for your first observation, which is helpful. It is possible to scrutinise things that are not fully resolved, and it is not unhelpful for the Government to try to make significant progress with such measures before bringing them to Parliament. I am sure that you appreciate that.

On the issue of intergovernmental relationships, I will again start off with the best of intentions and say that there are areas in which it is possible to deliver further progress. I raised the issue of frameworks, which would be a good thing on which to make progress, notwithstanding that there are genuine and legitimate differences between the Government that has been elected in Scotland and the Government that has been elected elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

I will share a few other matters that I think would be worthy of consideration by the committee. First, the fairer dispute resolution process, which could, for the first time, involve the principle that no Government can be both party to and arbiter of a dispute, would be a good thing. There is the question whether there should be an independent secretariat drawn from the four Governments, which would oversee machinery and dispute resolution processes. I think that that would also be a good thing.

There are emerging proposals from the Treasury that would make four-nation discussions more equitable, but there is the outstanding issue about whether the Treasury, which, in normal circumstances, would be unlikely to relinquish control of the oversight of financial disputes, would need to do so because, as part of the UK Government, it is party to many of them.

The fourth area in which there are revised proposals—which you might want to understand more about, and which would improve current processes—involves having more transparent arrangements for formal intergovernmental meetings. The arrangements would involve shared responsibility for agenda setting and chairing meetings, rather than our receiving a fax that sets out what we are talking about, when the meeting is happening and who is taking part, which has all been decided by the UK Government. That is not a normal way of doing business.

In answering the question, I stress that there are areas in which we can make progress and areas in which things could be agreed if there was goodwill on all sides. I acknowledge that there comes a point when the seriously differing views of the UK Government and the Scottish Government are irresolvable. However, surely all of us on the committee, in the Government and in the Parliament serve on the basis of a devolved settlement that was voted for by the people of this country. Therefore, it behoves us to protect, maintain and support the governance of this country on the basis that that is what the people agreed to.

No doubt we will have differences about what happens next. In 2014, we were invited to say “no thanks” and remain in the United Kingdom, which was part of the European Union, but the material circumstances of that choice have subsequently changed, and the issue will be debated in full. I stress that there are areas in which we can make progress, and I genuinely hope that we can do so, but it will take a shift in either mindset or policy.

**Donald Cameron:** I have a question about external affairs, which you touched on in relation to the outreach that you were doing. Under the devolution settlement, external affairs are reserved to the UK Government but, over the past 20 years, we have all accepted that Scotland has an international presence and a need to promote itself. How does the Scottish Government work alongside the UK Government on external affairs? In the recent co-operation agreement with the Scottish Green Party, one of the proposals is to open new international offices in Copenhagen and Warsaw. In that example, how would the Scottish Government work with an existing UK diplomatic operation in those countries to enable that to happen?

**Angus Robertson:** First, I should say that I am very mindful of the time, and I am sure that there are committee members who are keen to ask some questions about culture, as well.

To give a very quick answer, both of the proposed Scottish Government hubs would be established on an on-platform basis in the UK embassies, simply because proximity can result in very direct co-ordination with UK embassy colleagues. There are other advantages in following a different model, but that is a concrete response to the specific case that you have asked about. I could talk at greater length about how we co-ordinate, and I want to do so.

Incidentally, though, it is a two-way street. It would be great to hear what the UK Government is doing in a whole series of circumstances that impact on us and this committee's work. Unfortunately, we do not hear about any of that. It would be good if that were to happen.

**The Convener:** We will now move on to the culture part of the committee's remit, which the cabinet secretary mentioned. I invite Ms Webber to open the questioning.

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** Welcome to the meeting, cabinet secretary. This is the first time that we have met in person. Before this, we have had only virtual meetings.

Both of us represent this fine capital city, which is important not just internationally but at the more local level with regard to our country's economic growth. Our world heritage status, which is something that Liverpool lost just recently, is under direct threat through a number of decisions taken by the city's Scottish National Party administration. Those decisions were taken without consultation with Historic Environment Scotland or Edinburgh World Heritage or any proper local engagement, and you have written on the subject in the local *Edinburgh Evening News*. Given the cultural importance of our maintaining our world heritage status, what can you do as cabinet secretary and as the Edinburgh Central MSP to help to preserve it?

**Angus Robertson:** In the precisely two and a half minutes that I have to answer that question—

**The Convener:** Mr Robertson, I am not sure where that time limit has come from. We are happy to continue. If you were under the impression that you had only an hour and now need to go, that is fine, but the committee thought that the session would be 90 minutes.

**Angus Robertson:** That is great. I can therefore answer Ms Webber's question at greater length, which will no doubt be a relief.

I will come back to the point about economic growth in a second. On Edinburgh's United

Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization status, as the member of the Scottish Parliament for Edinburgh Central, I have the good fortune to represent both the old town and the new town—in other words, the UNESCO site—and that is therefore as extremely important to me as it is to Edinburgh. As you will imagine, I have lots of meetings to discuss a wide range of specifics in Edinburgh Central. Last week, for example, I met, among others, the Cockburn Association, which has a long track record of promoting and supporting Edinburgh's historic nature. Those are principles that I support and which lie very close to my heart.

This is not part of my curriculum vitae, but I used to be a tour guide on the Royal Mile, so I know both it and the new town rather well. Again, they lie very close to my heart.

I have had much to say about the issue of refuse collection, and I very much thank the member for the plug for my column in the *Edinburgh Evening News* this week. Instead of regurgitating that, I simply draw members' attention to it.

An interesting thought for me is that Scotland is not represented at UNESCO, which, for those who are unaware of it, is the cultural organisation of the United Nations. Given that it has representation from the Government of Québec, the Government of Flanders and the Government of Wallonia, perhaps it is worth thinking about our own relationship with the UN's cultural organisation. After all, it has an influence not just on Edinburgh; there are other world heritage sites in Scotland that are relevant to the discussion, and UNESCO is the key interlocutor in that respect.

10:00

I agree that, in relation to the UNESCO world heritage site, we want to do everything that we can to support, promote and protect the extremely important and special nature of the old and new towns, and I encourage everyone who is involved in making decisions about that to work out what the options are. For example, I know that the new town and Broughton community council has been making some suggestions in the past week. I am almost 100 per cent sure that the convener did not expect the new town and Broughton community council to be discussed in this evidence session.

I will segue to the issue of economic growth. You may want me to answer the question on the basis of a further question that people may have. One of the things that excites me most in respect of economic growth—this relates to the culture area of my portfolio rather than to my responsibility as the member for Edinburgh Central—is film and television production. Members will have noticed a

big change to broadcasting in Scotland. Five or six years ago, we were lamenting the fact that we did not have a single significantly sized studio in Scotland. We had market failure in screen production terms. That has all changed.

I will widen my observations to cover the rest of the country, but Edinburgh has, for the first time, a significantly sized studio, which is based in Leith. One can add to that the work at the Kelvin hall in Glasgow and Pacific Quay, where we enjoyed success during the recess in ensuring that the BBC did not farm work out. I am delighted that we have an additional studio that will continue to be managed from Scotland. We know from productions such as “Outlander” that we have facilities in Cumbernauld, and season 2 of “Good Omens” will be filmed in West Lothian.

Screen production is now worth hundreds of millions of pounds to the Scottish economy, including Edinburgh, and we are now at a point that we could not have imagined a few short years ago. As the cabinet secretary for culture, I am extremely focused on making that the success that it can be. I hope that the committee shares my enthusiasm and encouragement for supporting that emerging and growing part of the Scottish economy. The potential is groundbreaking.

I have been asked about external affairs. I spoke to many people during the recess, including the director general of the BBC, Tim Davie, and the chief executive of Channel 4, Alex Mahon. I have spoken to the heads of Screen Scotland and Creative Scotland and to others who are involved in the sector about where we are. It is genuinely exciting.

It was genuinely exciting to go to the film studios and see the shooting of “The Rig” with Martin Compston, Iain Glen, Emily Hampshire and others. I do not know how many of you are watching this on television, but I will give an unashamed plug for the BBC, which, on Sunday night, broadcast episode 1 of “Vigil”; episode 2 was on Monday. That also stars Martin Compston—I do not think that everything that is produced in Scotland has him in it, although he is very good. Series 2 of “Good Omens”, starring Michael Sheen and David Tennant, starts filming soon.

With the beginning of streaming services such as Amazon and Netflix, we now have the prospect of permanent screen production in Scotland, which we did not have before. When I was at Bath Road in Leith, I spoke to the young trainees, and their number 1 question for me was, “Can I continue to do this?” They want to continue making films and TV series. I was able to tell them that I am the first cabinet secretary in Scotland with responsibility for that area who can almost guarantee that people going into screen production will be able to have a

lifetime career in that sector in Scotland. That was not possible before, but it is possible now.

There is a huge prize to gain in jobs, career development, skills and investment. We must ensure that young people who would like to work in TV and film production get all the skills that they can.

There was an extremely popular initiative during the recess—I do not know whether members saw it. The director of season 2 of “Good Omens”, who is based in Scotland, put a list out on Twitter of all the traineeship posts that were being offered on that production. That was massively oversubscribed, as you might imagine.

Understanding what that means is encouraging. We can learn about that from programmes such as “Outlander”. I am not an aficionado, but I think that it is in its sixth series. People who went into that production during series 1 and 2 have gained experience and become more senior.

We are closing a market failure in the Scottish economy. We have people who are trained and have the skills and, instead of their being exported to work at Pinewood or in Prague, New York or Los Angeles, they can work here. I will not hide that light under a bushel; it is one of the most exciting things in the Scottish cultural sector. We should be doing absolutely everything that we can to help that to be the success that it can be.

That may have been an unexpectedly long answer to your question about Edinburgh’s UNESCO status. However, the question was predicated on economic growth, and I look forward to the screen production sector going from strength to strength.

**Sue Webber:** I should probably have declared an interest, given that I was a board member of Marketing Edinburgh when we were seeking to get a studio in the city.

At our introductory meeting, we spoke about the role of the gaming community—I do not mean pheasants—[*Laughter.*] I mean “Grand Theft Auto” and the role of Dundee. You have spoken at length about screen industries, but where does the gaming sector fit in?

**Angus Robertson:** I suspect that the gaming sector is the area that I will have to write back to the convener about after the evidence session. I can speak generally. This is not gaming in the sense of betting, although there is a lottery in the locus because the headquarters of the People’s Postcode Lottery is in Edinburgh Central. That impacts significantly on the culture and charity sector. I may have come to this by a circuitous route, but it is relevant to the committee and to me as a minister and as an MSP. I was previously unaware of it because I am not a gambler and do

not buy lottery tickets; you may be experts, but I am not. The lottery is a charitable organisation and the numbers are extremely significant. The lottery is very forward leaning in its work with charities, especially in the cultural sector. It works on a grass-roots level and is also supportive of larger cultural organisations.

Some aspects of lottery governance come under devolved legislation and some relate to reserved legislation. The committee might look more closely at that to see whether it is relevant. There are unresolved governance issues that affect that Edinburgh-based lottery and its ability to grow and to continue to support charities and cultural organisations. The committee might want to have a look at that.

**The Convener:** Thank you. I will add a bit of context around the games industry. A lot of the skills involved in games development are similar to those in the screen industry.

**Angus Robertson:** I am so sorry—

**The Convener:** Your answer was relevant, because you talked about funding that comes from the lottery.

**Angus Robertson:** Forgive me, convener. As my wife would confirm, my hearing is not always on point. I might be accused of having selective hearing. I heard the word “gaming” in the sense of betting or buying a lottery ticket.

**Sue Webber:** It is a verb: to game. It is for a young man or a young woman—

**Angus Robertson:** I am not a great gamer in the sense of “Grand Theft Auto”. Forgive me, I was answering the question on the basis of gaming financially, as opposed to the online version.

I mentioned “Grand Theft Auto”, but I think that most people in Scotland are unaware of how groundbreaking game development in Scotland has been. It is not only about “Grand Theft Auto”, but if people do not know just how big and groundbreaking that game is, they should go and have a look. It might not be all our thing, so to speak, but it is a thing for a lot of people around the world. We have a great tradition in that area, particularly in Dundee but elsewhere too.

In parallel, we also have some very interesting developments in the tech sector in Scotland. The tech and games sectors are related, because we have a huge opportunity—as well as a challenge—with regard to helping to give enough people, particularly younger people, the skills, training and expertise to walk into those emerging sectors, and ensuring that the maximum number of people here are able to take up such jobs. That is still an open question. There are some countries for which computer science is absolutely up there

as a priority—the good news is that it is for the Scottish Government, too—and we need to ensure that we match those organisations that have a big tech locus.

There is an aspiration for Edinburgh to become the data hub of the whole of Europe, and there is a huge artificial intelligence sector developing in Edinburgh, too. That should be hugely encouraging for a young generation of people for whom computing, gaming, tech and AI are interesting. Although some of those sectors fall into the education or economic development spheres of the Government’s work, they also fall in part into culture. We need to understand that many of them are extremely relevant; as such, they are also on my long list of things that are relevant for me and my colleagues.

**The Convener:** It is an issue that the committee has discussed in private, because the games industry has fallen between certain areas—it is not fully tech and it is not fully culture. For your information, we have been talking about it in the context of the wellbeing society, and how people consume and spend their time. We have discussed how the big Comicon events and gaming competitions fit into the culture portfolio. That issue is not for today, but it brings me to more localised questions, not about Edinburgh but from Dr Allan.

**Dr Allan:** I am not sure that they will be very localised, but they are on a subject that you will no doubt have heard me go on about before.

Cabinet secretary, you have talked with great enthusiasm, quite rightly, about the production of culture. I was interested to hear your views on the consumption of culture, in the sense of people’s access to and enjoyment of it. I am particularly interested in a subject that I have raised before. There is a body of Scottish literature that exists out there but, as academics and others point out, people in Scotland, compared with people in most other European countries, seem to have an abnormally small opportunity—although things are getting better—to get immersed in books, both old and new, that are produced in Scotland. I appreciate that you are not the education minister, but it would be interesting to hear your views about the promotion of Scottish literature.

10:15

**Angus Robertson:** Access to culture is another subject that could have an evidence session all of its own, and a number of obvious areas around culture and access to culture should be high on our priority list.

For the sake of argument—because we are sitting here—let us take the example of festivals in Edinburgh. The Edinburgh festival fringe and



certain venues have tried to make sure that, in particular, younger people from deprived backgrounds in more socially challenged parts of the city feel that cultural life, such as festivals, includes them and their part of Edinburgh and is not just something that happens “over there”. There is a long track record of that work, which goes back to the Craigmillar festival, for example. That subject is hugely important to me; I have discussed it with people who have been running festivals in Edinburgh and, in fairness to them, it is also a big priority for them. We must do everything that we can to foster better cultural access on that level and make sure that it is a year-round experience and not just a matter of saying, “Oh, the festivals are in August—let’s arrange for buses for kids from this primary school to go to the performance of that particular event.” Good though that might be, we have to ensure that cultural opportunity is an all-year-round experience and that it is mainstream to learning.

I do not know where to start with the observation about Scottish literature. Imagine living in a country where it is abnormal to learn about the literature of your own country. It seems preposterous that that would be the case anywhere but, more specifically, it seems absurd for that to be the case in this country, although things are changing. I think that I am right in saying that a previous schools minister had particularly strong views on that and made efforts to ensure that at least one piece of Scottish literature was taught as part of the higher programme. Sorry—I am being elliptical. For those who are reading the *Official Report* and not seeing our proceedings, I am looking directly at Dr Allan, who was that schools minister. We have to do better and, incidentally, we also have to do better in teaching our history, which should go without saying.

There are a number of points to make about access to culture. I am committed to it, as is the Scottish Government, and I have given examples of how we make sure that everybody has access to culture, but the gamut goes much further than that. We need to help introduce everybody to the amazing culture that we have on our doorstep. One person’s idea of culture is not shared by everybody and we have to realise that, for some people, it includes online games, as was mentioned in an earlier question. There is a cultural dimension to gaming and I will not be snooty about it. Similarly, we are lucky that the cultural offering in this country runs the full gamut from the high arts to the alternative and traditional Scottish sectors. Everybody should have an introduction to that offering, so that they can have an appreciation of it and, on the basis of having been exposed to it, choose what they have a personal interest in. The idea that we are a

country that does not teach our literature or has a lack of awareness of our history should be consigned to the history books.

I will add a supplementary thought to all that, given what is going on at present and the debate in Parliament this afternoon on Afghanistan. It is important that people who come to this country have the opportunity to learn about the culture, history and society that they will now share. That is a priority for me and for the organisations that work in that field, such as the Scottish Refugee Council and a variety of non-governmental and Afghan Scots community organisations. We need to be imaginative about how we help the people who come to these shores in our schools and through our cultural organisations. As we know, they can become hyphenated Scots if they want to be, as soon as they want to be. Everybody should have access to culture.

**Jenni Minto:** That was a very interesting discussion, but I would like to shift us away from talking about culture in the big urban areas. I would like to know your thoughts on culture in more rural areas, with their smaller museums, and how people access culture there. Given the growth in staycations, the percentage of people who come out to rural Scotland is much higher. I would also like you to say a wee bit about your thoughts on Gaelic and its importance to Scottish culture.

**Angus Robertson:** Again, that is a subject that we could spend a whole session talking about.

Let us deal with the tangible. For those who are unaware, I represented a rural constituency for 16 years, so the issues that you raise are not foreign to me. The successes in that part of the world—I am talking about Moray—are at the forefront of my thoughts. We are not talking only about there being a cultural offering in cities, with nothing in rural areas—far from it. There is a strong tradition of a touring element among our artistic community and our cultural organisations. Those whose memories are long enough will remember “The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil”, which was a cultural production that travelled round all the villages and towns of Scotland.

**Jenni Minto:** Including those in my constituency.

**Angus Robertson:** Indeed—including those in Argyll and Bute. In its way, that production was groundbreaking in showing that there was a hunger throughout the country for a cultural offering. The great news is that there is such an offering across the spectrum, from organisations such as Scottish Opera and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, and I could go on, but from more alternative organisations such as Neu! Reekie!, which normally performs in Edinburgh but which

performs in other parts of the country, too—I have seen it perform in Elgin.

That work needs to be supported, and the good news is that, as part of its first 100 days in office, the Scottish Government is delivering on the touring fund, which is not to be confused with the Turing fund—the UK Government’s anaemic replacement fund for the Erasmus+ programme. The Scottish Government’s fund relates to touring in the sense of travelling around the country, as opposed to the esteemed scientist Turing. As well as making sure that cultural organisations and individual performers can access funds to tour around Scotland, which is a good thing, we are ensuring that museums and galleries are lending their collections—whether of works of art or historical items—to different parts of the country, because that needs to be supported.

Staycations are great not just for bouncing back from Covid but in enabling people to get out of cities and to go to different parts of Scotland. It has been so nice to see people who, in other circumstances, would almost certainly not have gone to where they have gone on a staycation. Through that, they have learned about other parts of the country and what they have to offer. I know that communities right around the country are doing their best to make sure that people who visit have a good cultural offering and a good cultural experience, rather than just going somewhere to do, say, paddle boarding.

Turning to Gaelic, I declare an interest: I am not a Gaelic speaker, but I have the good fortune to have a second language, and I know that having a second language—whichever language that is—is transformational for people. It opens up another world. Therefore, I am a huge supporter of people being able to learn other languages.

We do not have enough time today to discuss the historic role of Gaelic as a language of this country. Our past relationship with that language leaves much to be desired. We are dealing with the results of that. The number of people speaking Gaelic as a first language has reduced to an all-time low. The good news, as we know, is that the number of pupils in Gaelic-medium schools is rising. They are among the most popular schools in the country. I can attest to that in Edinburgh, where parents from non-Gaelic speaking—and even non-English speaking—families are very keen for their kids to go there. That is because of the educational benefits of being able to speak another language and also because of the cultural inheritance.

I am a massive supporter of the language. The Scottish Government has a role to play in the cultural offering. That may be in education. That is not my responsibility, but I know that my colleagues who are responsible for education are

supportive of that. Broadcasting is part of my area. Gaelic is also important there and much more can be done. It is encouraging that a number of regular viewers of BBC Alba are non-Gaelic speakers. You could call it a gateway broadcaster for people whose first interest might be in watching football but who watch and enjoy the commentary in Gaelic, which might help to foster an interest in the language.

I hope that answers your question. There is much that we can do. We can connect that to my responsibility for external affairs. I do not know whether it has struck members of the committee, but the number of people who are learning Gaelic and are not even from Scotland is remarkable. The committee may not be aware of this, but one of Scotland’s leading Gaelic language newsreaders is not from Scotland—he is German.

**Jenni Minto:** He lives in Oban.

**Angus Robertson:** That is another Argyll and Bute connection. We must understand that Gaelic is not only a historic language of Scotland and something that we should learn and enjoy; it is also of huge interest to people elsewhere. That is a thoroughly good thing.

**The Convener:** We may have exhausted the questions. It has been quite an eclectic session.

**Sarah Boyack:** I have a quick question. It was good to discuss screen production, but I want to talk about live performance. We have lost a lot of incredible talent because of the pandemic. Can we talk about forward planning? The 75th Edinburgh international festival is next year. That is a huge economic issue, not only for Edinburgh but for the wider economy. Can we think about resilience and recovery in the live performance sector? What more can the Scottish Government do to ensure that people and venues in that sector are supported? It must be incredibly difficult for them to plan ahead after the difficulties and uncertainty of the past year.

**Angus Robertson:** I cannot do that question justice in the time that we have. I am absolutely seized of that, not only because of Covid. We have a great opportunity to showcase our cultural offering, especially with the 75th anniversary of the Edinburgh international festival next year. It was founded by an exiled Austrian Jew, Rudolf Bing. I was discussing that with the Austrian ambassador yesterday to try to ensure that we can maintain the festival’s connection to the country of his birth.

How do we help, support and work with our cultural organisations and our venues to ensure that they are in the best possible position to take part in the recovery? Ms Boyack will be aware that there have been announcements about certain venues. For example, during recess, a significant funding announcement was made by the Scottish

Government about the King's theatre in Edinburgh. We are committed to supporting the cultural sector and venues as they bounce back.

We frequently have discussions with people in the cultural sector. We are very well informed about the needs, interests, concerns and expectations of people in the sector. We want to be able to match their ambitions as part of the recovery of the arts and culture sector. If it is not obvious to members, a look at the statistics will confirm that the impact that the lockdown had on the arts and culture sector was among the worst in the Scottish economy. It behoves us to do everything that we can. There are constraints, but we should do as much as we can to work with our colleagues in the sector. We are doing that.

10:30

The sad reality is that we are dealing with a global pandemic. We are doing our level best to ensure that we do not have to go back into restrictions. I am happy to tell the committee that I took part in a meeting yesterday with the Deputy First Minister and representatives from different sectors. Some of the first people who spoke in that meeting were leading members of the cultural community and people who manage venues. They very much buy into the approach that we are trying to take, which is to do all that we can to ensure that we do not have to go backwards into restrictions. By working in partnership, we can increase the chances of being able to recover from Covid and of seeing the cultural sector not only recovering but thriving.

I will leave you with a final thought. I am personally interested in Scotland's cultural offering internationally. Most countries pursue that through a cultural diplomacy framework. I will be developing my thoughts about that during this session of Parliament and will be happy to return to the committee to speak about that. We have a tremendous offering, not only domestically but internationally. We want to do all that we can to support that in the years ahead.

**The Convener:** Thank you, cabinet secretary. We have covered a broad range of topics. We have had two touring funds, two gaming industries and two Donald Camerons and we have still managed to get here. We thank you and your officials for your attendance.

**Angus Robertson:** I look forward to coming back.

10:32

*Meeting continued in private until 10:52.*



This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

---

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

---

All documents are available on  
the Scottish Parliament website at:

[www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot)

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers  
is available here:

[www.parliament.scot/documents](http://www.parliament.scot/documents)

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact  
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: [sp.info@parliament.scot](mailto:sp.info@parliament.scot)

---



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba