



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 6 October 2022

Session 6



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STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
19th Meeting 2022, Session 6

CONVENER

*Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP)

*Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Katy Orr

LOCATION

The Adam Smith Room (CR5)

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 6 October 2022

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Martin Whitfield): Good morning. I welcome everyone to the 19th meeting of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee in 2022. Our first agenda item is a decision on whether to take items 4 and 5 in private. Do committee members agree to that?

Members indicated agreement.

Cross-Party Group

The Convener: For our second agenda item, I welcome representatives of a proposed cross-party group on the Scots language. Good morning to Jackie Dunbar and to Emma Harper, who join us at the far end of the table. I will hand over to them to give us a short introduction on the proposed CPG.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Good morning to the convener and to everybody. I have a short wee introduction, which I will read out to keep myself accurate and on time.

It is braw tae be here tae propose the restert o the cross-pairty group on the Scots language, or the Scots leid, along wi ma colleague Jackie Dunbar MSP, whae hersel is a fantastic native spikker o Scots Doric. This is in oor ain national Pairlament.

Scots is a language. It was ratified under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by the United Kingdom Government in 2001 and it is recognised as an indigenous language by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

I pey tribute tae former MSP Rob Gibson, whae convened a Scots CPG in session fower o this place. He made great efforts tae advance Scots aa ower Scotland, and the statement of principles that were produced by his CPG—which I have here—are still relevant and valuable as a resource to build on.

We want tae restert the CPG acause Scots is an important pairt o Scotland's culture and heritage, appearin in sangs, poyums and leeteratur as weel as in modern-day yaise fae Shetland tae Stranraer. Quite simply, the Scots language is o a wheren importance tae Scottish identity. Scots wis the state language here afore 1603. Its importance, and the need tae continue tae protect and promote Scots, is clear and cannae be denied.

In the 2011 Scottish census, 1.5 million people reported that they could speak Scots. I look forrit tae the census results next year, tae see whether the nummers are mair.

Scots is baith a historical language and a vibrant, modern language. Literary giants sic as Robert Burns, Hugh MacDiarmid and Walter Scott wrote in Scots, and there are monie modern screivers whae mak me prood, tae, when I see whit they write and their confidence in takkin Scots forrit.

However, Scots needs mair national attention, focus and political support. The cross-pairty group will, therefore, bring thegither folk fae the Scots community tae focus national attention—here and

across the country—fur tae advance and promote speirin and scribing in Scots. We want tae raise questions o, and provide clarity and guidance tae, the Scottish Government as it taks forrit the promised Scots language legislation in this session.

Mair important, the CPG will work tae ensure that Scots is here fur generations ahead. We will work tae ensure that young folk hae the opportunity tae yaise Scots at schule, which has awready been shown tae lead tae mair than a scantie increase in attainment.

We want tae inspire confidence in weans and bairns across wir country so that they can be chuffed when they yaise Scots, whether they are native speakers or no.

As the main custodians o Scots, here where oor mither tongue and indigenous language stertit monie years ago, we hae a really important duty tae promote, protect and celebrate its contribution tae Scotland's identity and future, even as Scots continues tae evolve.

I therefore ask the staunnarts committee tae approve the CPG. We are happy tae tak onie questions fae memmers.

The Convener: Thank you very much indeed. I open it up to questions from the committee.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank Emma Harper for her presentation. She outlined that the purpose of the group is to promote and encourage Scots. However, the written application refers to ensuring that the Scottish Government takes forward legislation. Will you expand on how you intend to do that and what the purpose of the group is?

Emma Harper: My understanding is that the Scottish Government is proposing legislation relating to the Scots language. There is currently a consultation on Gaelic and Scots and how to—I suppose—revive Gaelic. Part of the conversation is about how we have a Bòrd na Gàidhlig and whether we need an equivalent for Scots or whether we should take a different path that helps to promote Scots in another way.

Over the past couple of years, I have met loads of experts who have ideas about how we should take Scots forward, whether that is in schools, in public or at cultural events. The CPG would allow us to have discussions about the best way to suggest how the Government can support Scots.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Having shared many discussions with Peter Chapman, I am always very conscious that there are different dialects. I will leave it there because, if I said anything out of turn, Peter would probably jump on me.

I ask the same question of everyone. There is a huge number of cross-party groups in the Parliament, and I know that each of you has commitments to those cross-party groups. In fact, I think that there are almost more cross-party groups than there are MSPs. I want to be sure in my mind that you both feel that you have enough time to give the group the attention that it so clearly deserves.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I can spik only for masel, but I would say that I absolutely do. I am very careful in the cross-party groups that I pick. I mak sure that they have got tae dae wi ma constituency. For me, the Scots leid een is a no-brainer.

I will take a wee second to explain the reason that it is so important to me. Ma bairn had been affshore recently—she is a wee bittie auller, but she is still ma bairn—and she said to me that somebody had asked her far she came fae and that, when she said Aiberdeen, they said, “Ye spik affa posh.” She said, “That is acause ma mam taught me bilingual—she taught me the Doric and she also taught me the English.”

That is funny, but it is also nae funny in a wey. I remember gan tae schule—walkin intae schule in primary 1 and suddenly gettin telt that the wey I spoke wisna right. “Steens” wis “stones”. “Muckle” wis “a lot”. “Puckle” wis “a few”. They didna even ken fit a “bosie” wis. A “bosie” is the nicest wurd in this wairld—it is a cuddle. Fa disna want a bosie?

It is important that we use oor language and promote it as much as we possibly can. I am sorry; I am gan on a wee bit o a rant there.

Edward Mountain: You are convinced that you have enough time, with all your parliamentary commitments, to do it.

Jackie Dunbar: Absolutely.

Edward Mountain: I put the same question to Emma Harper. We share the chairing of another cross-party group.

Emma Harper: I am aware that there are already 118 cross-party groups. I tried to merge a few of them, so that we would have better capacity. If we plan carefully, we will make the diaries work. We have already identified that Jackie and I can be co-conveners. Ariane Burgess and Sarah Boyack will be deputy conveners. We therefore have capacity for others to step in if there are problems with our diaries. We plan to meet four times a year, which seems realistic to me.

Of course, there are also cultural events throughout the calendar that will help to promote the work of the cross-party group. I am confident that it will be a fun cross-party group for any

member to join, whether they are a native speaker or not—or a learner.

Edward Mountain: I am sure that it will be fun and worthwhile; it is simply about making sure that the commitment is right. I am sure that you are also aware of the reports that have to be submitted to the Parliament. I will leave it there.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I have a few questions. One of the purposes of the cross-party group is

“to preserve, promote and encourage the use of the Scots Language amongst MSPs, the wider Scottish Parliament and Scottish Society.”

When this kind of matter is raised, we all start thinking about wir own background and upbringing, and about wir own language, dialect, slang, Scots—whatever. I am thinking about that now, and I wonder whether we are using Scots in everyday conversational exchanges in this place and beyond and do not even know that we are doing it. It is sometimes about raising awareness.

It would be very contrived to give examples, so I will not do that. Is there a need for awareness raising among people who stay in Scotland who use everyday Scots? Would this help to identify that? It is not about educating people in how to use Scots, because many people use it anyway but simply are not aware that they do.

Emma Harper: Thanks for that question. We have worked with the Scots Language Centre to see the work that it does and how it promotes and supports raising awareness of Scots. We also have a Scots language policy in the Parliament. We have members of the official report staff who are really supportive of ensuring that the words that we use in the chamber, in debate or in questions—or even in committee—are transcribed properly, so that, when we look back at the *Official Report*, we can see that Scots is used here.

I met the chief executive of the Parliament before the recess, because I was keen to talk about how we could promote the use of Scots in the Parliament. We now have a wee poster with a QR code that takes you directly to the Scots Language Centre website, so that folk who are in and about the campus can learn about the resources out there to help to raise awareness. There are loads of folk working together, such as Wee Windaes, Oor Vyce, the Scots Language Centre and many others. If we help to share their information on social media, the people who are using everyday Scots might realise that that is what they are doing, even though they were not aware of it.

Bob Doris: That is helpful.

I was quite staggered by the number of individual members of the cross-party group.

Sometimes, we are asking the opposite question: “You’ve not got very many individual members. How are you engaging with wider society?” I am staggered by the number of individual members and the number of associate organisations that want to be key partners of the group. How you engage with that wider membership presents a challenge—a welcome one, but a challenge nonetheless. There is no requirement for them all to be active, but how many of them do you think will be active and dynamic in the cross-party group? It is quite something to see—I think that you have 120 or 130 individual members. That is to be commended, but it will also be a challenge to keep them engaged.

Emma Harper: We have had a couple of meetings online. Because Scots is spoke fae Shetland tae Stranraer, we find that meeting online, rather than bringing everybody here, means that people can participate and engage. We have had great attendance so far, and we disseminate information through email engagement and support.

Our secretariat, which is the Scots Language Centre, helps to supply us with all the connections and the people. It already has contact with the 128 potential individual members and groups. I am confident that we will be able to continue to support online and electronic engagement, to make sure that we keep folk up to date with what is going on.

Bob Doris: The sheer extent of the potential membership is very encouraging. I have no more questions.

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): I have one question, which I always ask, and it is to do with the membership. It is an observation more than anything else. It is very welcome that it is an all-female membership, but, going forward, are you doing anything to try to attract male MSPs to the CPG?

Jackie Dunbar: Already done it, quine. We have Joe FitzPatrick. On Tuesday night, when he heard that we were comin along, he said, “Why am I nae in it?” I said, “Well, ye never joined up but ye’re mair than welcome. It’s an open invitation.” So we have the mannies comin already.

Emma Harper: That is right. As well as men, we have people from diverse backgrounds. We have people whose first language mibbe wisnae Scots or who moved to this country from South Asia or wherever. We hear them every day when we are out and about. There is an opportunity to make it not just for the lassies, but for a wider audience as well.

Jackie Dunbar: She meant the quines. [Laughter.]

Collette Stevenson: It is very heartening to hear that. Thank you very much.

The Convener: As convener, I always get to ask one exciting question. From the evidence that we have heard today, you are using Scots as a collective description for several minority—perhaps unfairly so—languages in Scotland. Am I right in thinking that you are looking at the scope of minority languages covered by the term “Scots”? I love the fact that groups such as the Doric Society have signed up. I am just looking for clarification that it is about not just what we, in the south of Scotland, would call our lowland Scots, but is about Scots in the proper, collective definition.

Jackie Dunbar: Aye, it is all Scots, whether ye spik the Buchan Doric that Peter Chapman used to spik in the chamber. I used to love it when he stood up and spoke, because it was like listenin tae ma grunny and granda again. I mean that wi full respect—I absolutely loved it. There is also the Aiberdeen Doric and there is the Sooth o Scotland Scots. Everybody’s dialect is welcome—aabodie welcome, as they say in Aiberdeen.

The Convener: Welcome and important.

Jackie Dunbar: Absolutely.

09:45

Emma Harper: That is one of the things that we were speaking about. I am learning about the language and the grammar—particularly the grammar that makes Scots different fae English. I will give an example. Where I come fae, there is a place called Portpatrick and Lochans, but everybody calls it “the Port” and “the Lochans”, or they say, “Ah’m goin tae the toon.” When I was speaking to Joe FitzPatrick about it the other night, he said that that is replicated in Dundee, where folk use “the” in front of whatever place they are talking about.

That shows that Scots is broad and is spread across Scotland, including Orkney and Shetland. It is not that we have got all these different minority languages; it is because that is the way that Scots evolved out of Old English and Danish, with Norse influence, even. We have a language that is vibrant and needs to be promoted. When we start speaking to each other about the history and grammar that makes Scots different fae English, it reinforces to me the need to promote it.

The Convener: That is very helpful. Thank you, both, for attending the committee this morning. We will consider the application for the proposed CPG as our next agenda item. The clerks will be in touch with you in due course.

Item 3 is a decision on whether to approve the new cross-party group.

Edward Mountain: I have never disagreed with any of the cross-party groups—it would be a brave MSP who did so. However, I always like to put on record that the number of cross-party groups in the Parliament is huge, and I question in my mind whether all MSPs have enough time to meet all their cross-party group commitments. I will not vote against it—I will vote for it. However, I have that real concern, which might be borne out when you see the reports from the cross-party groups, when they come in—on time, possibly, although they do not always. I will leave that question hanging.

Bob Doris: I share Mr Mountain’s sentiments, which would be put on record irrespective of which cross-party group was seeking approval this morning.

We normally ask questions about duplication and overlap. We did not really do that this morning, which tells us that there is a clear gap in the Scottish cross-parliamentary group landscape for this particular CPG. On other occasions, we have said, “Yes, we will approve this CPG, but it should work closely with this CPG and that CPG.” We did not do that this morning. I wish Jackie Dunbar, Emma Harper and other members of the cross-party group the very best in filling that identifiable gap dynamically and positively—I am sure that they will do that, should we approve the CPG this morning.

Alexander Stewart: You cannot be anything other than impressed, convener, with the number of individuals who are seeking to be involved in the cross-party group and the organisations that it is aligning itself to. That gives us confidence that the group will be very active and will carry out its role collectively and responsibly. I am encouraged by that, and I look forward to seeing how the group progresses—I am sure that it will progress.

Collette Stevenson: I echo what everyone else has said. I know how passionate Emma Harper is about our Scots language. It is very welcome that we keep that going in Parliament, from a cultural and a Scots point of view. When the paper came to us, I welcomed it. As Bob Doris said, there appears to be a gap in the Parliament, and the group has a big welcome. I wish them guid luck.

The Convener: Absolutely. Do members agree to accord recognition to the proposed CPG?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Excellent. The clerks will pass that information on in due course.

09:50

Meeting continued in private until 10:43.

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