



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Equal Opportunities Committee

Thursday 8 September 2016

Session 5



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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

3rd Meeting 2016, Session 5

CONVENER

*Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- *Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con)
- *Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
- *Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab)
- *David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
- *Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

- Mary Alexander (Unite the union)
- Morven Brooks (Scottish Disability Equality Forum)
- Superintendent Davie Duncan (Police Scotland)
- Jatin Haria (Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights Scotland)
- Juliet Harris (Together—Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)
- Parveen Khan (Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Sector Organisations Scotland)
- Colin Macfarlane (Stonewall Scotland)
- Gordon MacRae (Humanist Society Scotland)
- Helen Martin (Scottish Trades Union Congress)
- Alastair Pringle (Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland)
- Rania Qusassi (Saheliya)
- Bill Scott (Inclusion Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Claire Menzies

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Thursday 8 September 2016

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:03]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Christina McKelvie): Good morning, everyone. I hope that you are all comfortable. Welcome to the committee's third meeting in session 5. If you wish to use tablets or other electronic devices, could you make sure that they are switched to silent so that they do not interfere with our deliberations this morning?

Item 1 is for the committee to consider taking item 4 in private. Does the committee agree to do that?

Members indicated agreement.

Work Programme

10:04

The Convener: Item 2 is the committee's proposed work programme. As members can see, we have a big round-table evidence session this morning; welcome to you all. We really appreciate you coming along. We are looking for areas that we can take up as part of our work programme and I thank you all for taking part in this morning's informal meeting. We got some good and interesting information and direction from that meeting.

We are looking to identify our priorities. The first goal of the parliamentary committee is to look at how we do things. The Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee is to consider an expanded remit for our committee. The remit gives us a focus but it will not be a different focus. Human rights and equalities sit together and if we can take them together it will make a huge difference in how we take forward some of the issues. Over the coming weeks, those are the sort of the things that we will be looking forward to.

I will go round the table and let you introduce yourselves and your organisation. We have limited time so we will try to make the discussion free-flowing and share as much information as possible. There will be an opening question and you can all come in on the back of that. If you just catch my eye and channel your contribution through me, we can organise things a bit better and will not give our official reporters a serious headache when they are trying to record everything. We want everybody's thoughts and aspirations on the record.

I am Christina McKelvie, the member of the Scottish Parliament for Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse, and I am the convener of the committee.

Colin Macfarlane (Stonewall Scotland): I am the director of Stonewall Scotland. We are one of the five lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex equality organisations and we campaign for equality for LGBTI people in education, across our workplaces, in our communities and in our public services.

Juliet Harris (Together—Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights): I am director of Together—Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights. We are an alliance of more than 320 members, including non-governmental organisations, academics and professionals who are interested in children's rights issues. We work to promote the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Most recently, we have been involved in influencing the concluding

observations that were issued to the United Kingdom in June this year.

Parveen Khan (Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Sector Organisations Scotland): I am Parveen Khan, not Fiaz Khan, as it says on my nameplate—no relation either—and I am here from the Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Sector Organisations. We are a national intermediary organisation and a strategic partner of the Scottish Government. We have a network of more than 600 ethnic minority voluntary sector organisations and community groups throughout the country.

Superintendent Davie Duncan (Police Scotland): I am Davie Duncan from Police Scotland. My role is superintendent in safer communities. Part of my function involves the service delivery element of equality and diversity to our communities across Scotland.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I am an MSP for the Lothians.

Morven Brooks (Scottish Disability Equality Forum): I am from the Scottish Disability Equality Forum. We are a member-led organisation and we support 45 access panels across Scotland. The panels are groups of volunteer disabled people who primarily look at physical accessibility and, more importantly now, look at social accessibility for disabled people.

Rania Qusassi (Saheliya): I am a lead youth worker with Saheliya, which is a black and minority ethnic women's organisation for mental health and wellbeing.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I am an MSP for the Glasgow region.

Mary Alexander (Unite the union): I am the deputy Scottish secretary for Unite. We represent 1.4 million members across the UK in all different sectors of the economy. Like Juliet Harris I have been involved in the UN, in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, making representations on workers' rights.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): I am the MSP for Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley.

Jatin Haria (Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights Scotland): I am the director of the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights Scotland. We undertake a range of Scotland-wide strategic anti-racist activity.

Gordon MacRae (Humanist Society Scotland): I am the chief executive of the Humanist Society Scotland. We are a membership organisation and national charity for people in Scotland who wish to live an ethical, rational and secular life. We have about 16,000 members

across the whole country and we campaign for equality, human rights and a more even playing field for people of all faiths and none.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): I am an MSP for West Scotland.

Helen Martin (Scottish Trades Union Congress): I am an assistant secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, which represents more than 570,000 workers in Scotland. I should just note that I am representing all the equality communities of the STUC and not just the women's committee as it says in the committee papers.

Alastair Pringle (Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland): I am the national director for the Equality and Human Rights Commission. We are the national equality body for England, Scotland and Wales and we are one of Scotland's two A status national human rights institutions.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): Good morning, everybody. I am the MSP for the Kirkcaldy constituency.

Bill Scott (Inclusion Scotland): I am director of policy for Inclusion Scotland. We are a national disabled people's organisation and, like the Scottish Disability Equality Forum, we are membership based. We have 70 member organisations throughout Scotland. Our largest member is the Glasgow Disability Alliance, which has around 3,000 disabled people as members. We do a lot of human rights-based work, including compiling the shadow report on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The Convener: Thank you very much. Last but not least is Alex Cole-Hamilton, who has just arrived.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I sincerely apologise, convener.

I am deputy convener of the committee.

The Convener: As you can see, there are a lot of interests around the table. It is interesting that, from all our discussions with you this morning, one of the key issues that strongly came through was discrimination and how we tackle it across all the different sectors. Each sectoral group had its own issues, but discrimination and how we report and challenge it seemed to be the common thread.

My opening question is to the police. Can the police give us some understanding of how they are tackling some of those issues? We can then perhaps go on to the experiences of discrimination of some of the groups and the areas that they think should be tackled.

Superintendent Duncan: From our perspective, the key to tackling discrimination lies

in the pre-crime space. We deal with the ramifications of discrimination when it becomes criminal or is reported to us.

There is an understanding that hate crime is woefully underreported due to a lot of factors that may arise throughout the discussion, but a key element for the committee, people around the table—including me—and my colleagues, is the promotion of tolerance.

All the communities across Scotland are in a good place to start off with. We have a very tolerant society compared with other societies across the world, including in Europe and closer neighbours.

The key to tackling intolerance is in demonstrative leadership, and part of that comes from the Government function and leaders across society. If we can create, maintain and enhance community cohesion, that will break down attitudes in society, which will lead to a whole range of positive benefits, not least a more stable and secure society. More community cohesion has a tangible impact on the threat from terrorism. The strengths in those communities engineer out elements of terrorism that would otherwise exist.

There are also the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and the change in societal attitudes towards people who may look or are perceived to be different. Challenging attitudes and behaviours leads to the chance to minimise the number of people who act in a discriminatory fashion and marginalise them in focusing on positive benefits. That is where the committee needs to strategically aim at.

From a police perspective, we have a zero-tolerance approach to hate crime in all its forms. We record hate incidents. We take incident reports from the public where there may not be criminal elements and our focus is on supporting the victims of those incidents or crimes and very much on tackling the offender. That is done in partnership with a whole host of voluntary, public sector, private sector and third sector agencies. It is done very much nowadays right across those elements. Those offenders are brought to justice wherever possible.

A whole host of options are open in the pre-crime space. Not everybody gets dropped into the criminal justice process; people can be dealt with through other means. Before people eventually get to the criminal justice space where we become involved, there is often a lead-in period in which there has been misery and frustration for individuals who have been subjected to discriminatory acts. Trying to hivy people out of that process before the crime aspect is reached is a focus for us with partners in our preventative work in Police Scotland.

To round that up, fundamentally we need to demonstrate that intolerance and discrimination will not be tolerated in Scottish society, and use the collective understanding of the issues and the powers and policies that we can all bring together round the table to tackle them.

10:15

The Convener: Thank you. We all know that this is a big jigsaw: although we have most of the pieces, we do not have them all in the right order. You have given us a clear indication on zero tolerance, and on the pre-crime element and other issues that we need to consider in order to educate people before such cases come through the criminal justice system.

We will hear about some of the experiences from those at the table. I will pick on Rania Qusassi first, because she has given us a clear direction on some of the experiences that people have had in the criminal justice system. I also know that Juliet Harris has a particular interest in how young people report crime, but Rania can go first.

Rania Qusassi: Unfortunately, there is a language barrier that prevents people from reporting hate crimes and there is a fear that there is no follow-up to reporting hate crime. We would like to work more closely with the police to look at how we can tackle the issues, both with young people and with the adults with whom we work.

Superintendent Duncan: Absolutely—we would welcome that. We are doing a lot of work to try to break down the barriers to the reporting of hate crimes and incidents. As I mentioned in my first response, we recognise that hate crime is underreported across a range of diversity protected characteristics such as race, faith and disability.

We are doing a lot of work to refresh our approach to third-party reporting centres and our online reporting mechanism. We are trying to find new ways to engage proactively with young people and minority communities so that we have an understanding of what the issues are. I would welcome the opportunity to work with Rania Qusassi's organisation more closely.

Juliet Harris: It is important to note that discrimination against children and young people goes beyond the work of Police Scotland on hate crime, as it is embedded in Scottish society. Even the Equality Act 2010—which I know is not in the Scottish Parliament's remit—actively discriminates against children.

There is a culture of discrimination against children and young people across Scotland. We see that, for example, with signs that say that only

one or two children are allowed in a shop at any one time, and in the fact that mosquito devices are still legal—it is still possible to have a device outside a shop that makes a noise that adults cannot hear to keep children away. If we had such a device that discriminated against people with a disability or BME communities people would be outraged, but it discriminates against children and people just say, “Okay—that’s fine”.

When it comes to voting, the fact that the voices of children and young people were not heard in the run-up to the vote on membership of the European Union can be considered as discrimination against them. We actively need to look at a culture change so that we listen to and really respect the views of children and young people in line with article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

On hate crime, it is important to take a step back and look at bullying in schools. Bullying is not reported as hate crime and does not contribute to the Police Scotland statistics. We know from anecdotal evidence from our members that, post the Brexit vote, there has been an increase in bullying in schools against children from ethnic minorities, but that is not recorded and is not researched.

When we look at discrimination, it is important to see that we need a culture change, and we need to look at children and young people across all the different equalities groups to tackle the discrimination against them.

Colin Macfarlane: I want to pick up on Juliet Harris’s point about bullying and to go back to the point about the pre-crime element, before people get to the stage of reporting hate crime. From our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender perspective, we know that bullying is rife in our schools—indeed endemic, given that 99 per cent of young people hear some form of homophobic language every day in the classroom—and that the big issue is that our teachers feel that they do not have the confidence to tackle the problem in the classroom. Only 16 per cent of our teachers in Scotland have had any training whatsoever on tackling such bullying or talking about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex issues in the classroom.

If we are not fostering a sense of inclusion in our schools, that leads to the ramping up of issues, which can lead to hate crime incidents. We know that a majority of such incidents against LGBTI people happen in the 16 to 25 age bracket and that the perpetrators of those incidents are young. If we do not foster a sense of inclusion in our schools, we will not be able to tackle hate crime. At present, our teachers do not feel confident talking about those issues in the classroom and we need to tackle that quickly.

The Convener: Some committee members have been doing some work on that with the time for inclusive education campaign, which has some good research evidence that it will publish soon. We can build on that.

Jeremy Balfour: I have one question for Juliet Harris and one question for Superintendent Duncan.

Juliet, you talk about the non-reporting of bullying in school. Do you think that is the same across all the equality categories? If so, why do you think that is happening? I, too, hear about the issue from disabled people. Last night at a reception, I spoke to a number of children with hearing loss, and all of them said that they had been bullied at school but that the school had not reported it. Is that about fear among headteachers?

Superintendent Duncan, which of the equalities do you think is furthest behind in the reporting of bullying? Do you have a view on why people do not come forward?

Superintendent Duncan: There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that disability hate crime is very much underreported. People tell us that it is due to endemic societal attitudes towards disability and the nature of it. We are doing a lot of work to understand that and provide a better service to disabled people, and we encourage reporting whenever there is a crime or incident that they want to discuss with us. We do that through enhancement of third-party reporting, direct reporting to the police and use of the online facility as well as through direct engagement with representative community organisations.

The Convener: Is Alastair Pringle able to answer Jeremy Balfour’s other question? You have an overview of all those areas.

Alastair Pringle: Sorry—what was the other question?

Jeremy Balfour: It was on bullying in schools, for whatever reason that happens, and the lack of reporting of it. People say that they are bullied, but the statistics that are coming out of local authorities suggest that there is little bullying with regard to sexuality, disability, race or whatever.

Alastair Pringle: Indeed. I will capture that together with another point that also responds to your question. A year and a half ago, we undertook a fairly large piece of work with LGBT Youth Scotland and others on the extent of prejudice-based bullying in schools. One of my concerns is the extent and normalisation of sexualised bullying—the lack of data on that is one of the most concerning things of all. Where we have data, we do very little with it; where we do

not have data—particularly in relation to sexualised bullying—that needs urgent attention.

We have also called for mandatory reporting of bullying—particularly prejudice-based bullying—in schools. We recently went to the UN to call for mandatory reporting of racial discrimination, but we are now calling for all forms of prejudice-based discrimination to be reported. To date, the response has been non-mandatory guidelines—a refresh of the existing framework for schools—but we do not think that that is acceptable. The majority of hate crime is perpetrated by younger people, and we know that it does not start outside the school yard. We have been pushing hard for that reporting to be made mandatory. I think that the Scottish Government's approach is not to make various levels of reporting mandatory, for various reasons, but we will continue to push it on that.

I also want to add to Juliet Harris's point. Direct and indirect discrimination takes many forms, and it is the role not just of Police Scotland but of all our institutions to deal with it. As a regulatory body, the Equality and Human Rights Commission has a few roles that it is worth putting on the table, because we have a part to play. We have a range of legal powers at our disposal that, given the size and skill of our resources—we are a small team of 18 staff in Scotland—must be used strategically. Nevertheless, we undertake inquiries and investigations into issues such as the treatment of cleaning workers and vulnerable workers, human trafficking and so on. We can undertake judicial review and we can support discrimination cases if they are strategic in nature. We do that regularly, so please bear us in mind when you are thinking about tackling discrimination.

We also undertake large programmes of research. We recently published a widescale survey into the extent of pregnancy and maternity discrimination in the workplace, 10 years on from the Equal Opportunities Commission's own research. We looked at 3,000 employers and 3,000 employees, and it was very concerning to note that there has been absolutely no progress in 10 years. We have that at our disposal, too.

We have the Equality Act 2010 and, most important for this committee, there is a duty on all listed public authorities to assess the equality impact of legislation and policy; I suggest that they should also consider the human rights impact. I will give modern apprenticeships as an example. What we see time and again is the unintended consequences of not thinking through equality and human rights systematically in legislation and policy, in the form of direct and indirect discrimination and outcomes. We have concerns about a range of current Government programmes of work, including educational attainment, which

focus only on postcode. That will not benefit young disabled people, young Gypsy Travellers and others who face unequal educational outcomes. I could raise a host of other issues but I will stop there and not hog the microphone.

The Convener: We are still interested to hear them—let us know.

Mary Fee: I want to come back to something that Colin Macfarlane said in relation to LGBTI and bullying in schools, and it is an issue that Alastair Pringle kind of touched on in relation to data collection. Colin, when you said that teachers are not confident in dealing with LGBTI and bullying in schools, is that because they do not have the right kind of training? Is it that they can tackle bullying under a kind of bullying umbrella but not specifically in relation to LGBTI, and is the situation the same in all schools? Where do faith schools sit?

Colin Macfarlane: We are very careful not to differentiate between faith schools and non-denominational schools, because the situation applies across the board in all schools. In the schools that are doing really good work, this sort of thing is teeny—it is really small and really patchy.

As far as confidence levels are concerned, a lot of this is a hangover from section 28. According to our research, 75 per cent of primary school teachers and 44 per cent of secondary school teachers have clearly stated that they have been told by their management that they cannot talk about LGBTI issues—or they think that they cannot talk about them—in the classroom. It is not that all of those teachers are homophobic and do not want to talk about this; they just still believe that section 28 exists.

A lot of this is about leadership and the heads and management teams who set out the ethos in schools. In those schools that are doing really well, part of their individual ethos is that every child should be safe and treated with dignity and respect. In too many schools, though, that is not happening.

Schools have individual bullying plans, and we have found that although gender, race and disability are included in most of those plans, there is no mention of LGBTI. There is a block-up, if you like—it is a kind of wall that teachers cannot seem to get their head around or get over, because they do not feel confident talking about LGBTI. They are worried about losing their jobs and the reaction from parents. What we found in our discussions with the schools that have those conversations and do them well is that parents are joyful that such conversations are happening in the school, because it means either that they do not have to have those conversations with their kids

themselves or that they have a lead into having those discussions with their children. There is a myth that parents will react badly.

Mary Alexander: As you can imagine, we as a union come across all forms of discrimination, day in, day out. I will not go into great detail about that. There have been contributions about what is required to tackle discrimination, and we have heard suggestions with regard to culture change, fostering a sense of inclusion and demonstrative leadership.

I recently went to the UN and made representations on a number of breaches of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. We also talked about zero-hours contracts in relation to the Trade Union Act 2016 and addressed blacklisting, employment tribunal fees and a host of other work-related practices in relation to which we felt that there had been breaches by the UK Government and the Scottish Government. In talking about remedies or what we can do, I hope that the Equal Opportunities Committee, which now has a human rights aspect, will introduce a review process to ensure that, when the concluding observations that we brought back from the United Nations—we went there twice to give evidence and saw that it had a robust process in place—are released, they are brought back here and acted on.

10:30

I know that the Scottish Government is committed to human rights, but I suppose that when I came back, I was a bit silly and excited, because I thought that, given that we are signed up to the convention, the Scottish Government would do something with the various important recommendations. I am a bit disappointed that it has not. I hope that the committee will consider introducing a robust review process in order to ensure that the Scottish Government is compliant with what it has signed up to and what it says on the tin.

The same thing applies to the universal periodic review. Recently, we went to a meeting at which we were encouraged to make representations. The last one was in 2012 and something like 122 recommendations came out of it, but I do not think that many of those have been followed through.

That is what I would like to happen, alongside all of the other useful points that colleagues have made.

The Convener: As far as the concluding observations are concerned, we hear you.

Bill Scott: On the issue of bullying, we think that there is massive underreporting of bullying of disabled children in schools. Schools would prefer

bullying to be dressed up as something other than homophobic bullying, racist bullying, disablism bullying and so on, because they think that those sorts of bullying reflect badly on the school. That failure to recognise the problem hides it and leads to its not being addressed.

On the original question of discrimination, we believe that discrimination is based largely on prejudice and ignorance; it is about fear of the other. Disabled people make up one of the most excluded groups in our society. They are excluded from the workplace, as seen by the fact that less than half of the number of disabled people of working age are in work; they are excluded from public life, as seen by the fact there are very few disabled politicians; and they are to some extent excluded from our schools, as seen by the fact that one third of children with additional support needs are not taught in mainstream schools, even though that is supposedly the default position.

The fact of disabled people's exclusion leads to an increase in discrimination; they become other by virtue of the fact that they cannot be known, simply because people do not come across them in everyday life and so on. If you want to begin to shift that discrimination, you have to begin to include disabled people in schools, in the workplace and in public life. Only by addressing the issue in that way will the barriers of prejudice and ignorance begin to be broken down and will disabled people begin to be seen as just people rather than as the other or as people who should be pitied, feared or, unfortunately, hated—and I make that latter point because, as was said earlier, we believe that there is massive underreporting and underrecording of disability hate crime, because it is not often recognised for what it is.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Mary Alexander's points about the concluding observations are well made. At the committee's away day, it was suggested that the observations could present a road map for the committee and the wider Parliament to address the inequalities that still exist in Scottish society.

One particular concluding observation that keeps coming up is the issue of equal protection from assault for children. I wonder whether Juliet Harris can give us her reflections on that frontier of equalities, which we keep getting wrong. After all, we are one of about only four countries in the Council of Europe that still allow children to be hit in their homes, whereas all adults are protected from such assault.

I would also like Colin Macfarlane to bottom out and explore further the cultural situation that he described—the hangover from section 28 in our teaching community. Do we need to boil that down to modules in the postgraduate certificate of

education and diplomas in education, so that teachers are equipped with the necessary toolkit to address homophobic bullying in our schools?

Juliet Harris: Equal protection highlights the importance of using the concluding observations as a road map for the equalities and human rights committee. Equal protection has come up in the universal periodic review, the Committee against Torture, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The recommendation has been made repeatedly and it is to Scotland's shame that children still do not have the same protection from assault that adults have. That reinforces my point that discrimination against children is seen as acceptable. I therefore urge the equalities and human rights committee to press for action on equal protection, because it is a travesty that that has not been addressed.

The need for equal protection is one of a number of concluding observations that international treaty bodies have made repeatedly. Mary Alexander made her point well about the concluding observations, and I endorse it. She talked about the number of recommendations from the universal periodic review, but I urge the committee not to be overwhelmed by that, because a lot of the work is being done.

The committee's papers include a letter from Angela Constance that refers to the work that is being done on LGBTI inclusion and bullying, which has been raised by three international treaty bodies; such bodies have also raised the work on sexual health education. Focusing on the concluding observations will add weight to the work that the committee wants to be done anyway and will ensure that any gaps that are not being picked up, such as the need for equal protection from violence, are addressed in the Scottish Parliament.

Colin Macfarlane: Was Alex Cole-Hamilton talking about working directly in teacher training colleges?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Yes.

Colin Macfarlane: You are right that the issue is endemic not just among older teachers; we are finding that those who are entering the teaching profession are also being told that section 28 still applies and that they should therefore not talk about homophobic bullying. More of a focus is needed on ensuring that LGBTI inclusion and inclusive education are part of training modules. Our colleagues at LGBT Youth Scotland are doing welcome work on that.

We offer a train-the-trainer programme for teachers who are already in schools. That one-day training session gives them a road map—the tools that allow them to go back into schools and train

their peers—and independent evaluation of the programme has shown that it has been extremely successful.

We cannot keep up with the demand from teachers to go on that training, which is great. We and our colleagues at LGBT Youth Scotland have had conversations with the Deputy First Minister, as part of his portfolio as the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, about how we can work with the Scottish Government to accelerate the programme. Those conversations have made us hopeful.

The aim is absolutely to tackle the issue in teacher training colleges, but we must also make continuing professional development for teachers who are in schools part of the approach. Our teacher training programme should be central to that.

Morven Brooks: I echo Bill Scott's comment that disabled people should not be seen differently from anybody else, and I will touch on a couple of the issues that have come up in relation to discrimination.

Inclusive communication has been raised, and hate crime has been mentioned. In an earlier discussion, I referred to the terminology that we use every day. We should go back to using plain English not just for disabled people's sake but for everybody's sake, so that we all understand what we mean and what we want to do. What is more important for our stakeholders—disabled people—is that inclusive communication is taken forward.

Accessibility is still a huge issue with regard to transport, employability and education. Accessibility is the ground of everything, particularly for wheelchair users; for example, a wheelchair-user student might not be able to access their school. In addition, a lot of employers do not recognise that, with regard to accessibility, they need to invest in reasonable adjustments to increase their uptake of disabled employees.

As far as discrimination is concerned, I would mention inclusive communication and employability, but accessibility is the most important issue. Housing, too, is still a big issue for a lot of disabled people.

The Convener: I am conscious that we have not heard the voices of a couple of people round the table, but we would like to hear your thoughts as well, so that we get something on the record from everybody this morning, which will help the committee going forward.

Parveen, do you want to come in first? We are sorry that your nameplate and the agenda say that you are "Fiaz Khan".

Parveen Khan: No worries at all. I did not want people to think that I had just snuck in ahead of Fiaz.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. It has been interesting to hear people's contributions. In the past three years, CEMVO Scotland has been delivering a race and equality mainstreaming support programme that focuses on supporting the public sector, statutory bodies and third sector agencies to progress race equality. There are nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, but we have learned that policies that are being developed or being put in place often do not look at the specific strands. We know that we cannot take a one-size-fits-all approach—Alastair Pringle and I know that from a national health service background—and that we have exhausted that approach. There is often an attempt to make policies comply with all the protected characteristics and meet their needs, but that will miss out huge chunks of the population.

We have heard about bullying. My experience with anti-bullying policies is that they cannot possibly address all the different strands in terms of hate and prejudice against various groups. They cannot possibly pick up on disability because, more often than not, they are blanket policies. We need to get better at that. We must not only look at the business of the organisation and what we are promoting so that we fit the policy to that, but take into account the need to equality impact assess everything from the word go—from the inception of the policy to making it happen. We are working on that with organisations.

The Convener: Equality impact assessments are a hobby-horse of mine. How well do you think they are done?

Parveen Khan: There is a real commitment to them, but how well they are done depends on what an organisation's core business is, because that is where the focus will be. That is where the resources are targeted and where the incentive and the actual work will be. At the end of the day, we need to think beyond that and look at equality impact assessing in relation to all the protected characteristics. We also need to look at intelligence gathering and data gathering and apply that when equality impact assessing. It should not be a quick and dirty exercise; it should be full on. We are working with the public sector, statutory bodies and third sector agencies to emphasise to them that equality impact assessing should be a process from start to end.

Jatin Haria: On that last point, we would go a bit further and say that there is not really a proper commitment to equality impact assessment. I do not think that people even understand what is required, so they tick boxes without knowing what they are doing. If we had proper equality impact

assessments, we would not be where we are now, more than five years on from the 2010 act and more years on from when the process began.

One thing that we are calling on the Equal Opportunities Committee to do after the next round of public sector equality duty reporting next April is to undertake a full-scale inquiry on what has and has not worked, and what needs further input.

Just to widen the other discussion, I do not think that we should give up on the mandatory reporting of bullying. The Government might not want that, but at the end of the day it is up to Parliament to make the decision. That mandatory reporting might be a step towards achieving some of what people round the table have been asking for today.

On a much wider scale—Superintendent Duncan mentioned this briefly—it is about community cohesion and promoting good relations. Again, that is part of the public sector equality duty, but it is probably the least understood and least implemented part. It is probably the more difficult aspect of delivering on PSED, but if we do not get that right, we will be having conversations about these things for ever.

Finally, for now—I do not know whether this is the right place, but I will say this for the record—CRER and others are still not convinced that expanding the remit of this committee to include human rights is the right thing to do, given that there are so many equality issues to be discussed and examined. We have written to the committee and to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee about that. We believe that there is a discussion to be held before that change is agreed.

10:45

The Convener: I hope that we can reassure you that we will not have two separate silos and that equalities will not be pushed aside to enable us to deal with human rights. I do not want to pre-empt anything, but the committee's view is that it makes sense for the two things to fit together. We are endeavouring—I was going to say "hoping", but I will not, because it would mean that there was some doubt, and there is none—to ensure that sectoral issues are not pushed aside to the advantage of human rights. We are absolutely committed to that because we do not see the two things as separate. If there is a sectoral issue, it will fall within a human rights format anyway. Please be reassured on that. We will not push some things aside.

Jatin Haria: That is reassuring. Will you agree to a review in one or two years' time to ensure that what you have just said has happened?

The Convener: We have on-going discussions about the format and the process that we will go through to ensure that the committee does what it says on the tin. Some of that is in process right now. I hope that we can reassure you and continue to do that.

Helen Martin: The STUC welcomes the inclusion of human rights in the committee's remit. Perhaps what I am going to say shows how human rights and equalities fit together really well.

One issue that we have been picking up—it fits well with what Mary Alexander said about ICESCR and economic, social and cultural rights—is the link between precarious work and discrimination. We at the STUC have been running a campaign called better than zero, which looks specifically at supporting young workers on precarious contracts. Through that campaign, but also through the work that unions do more widely and the work that the EHRC did on pregnancy and maternity and lots of other pieces of evidence, we are starting to see a really worrying picture developing in Scotland.

Workers who are on precarious contracts—zero-hours contracts, agency work and umbrella contracts—are much more likely to face discrimination than other workers in the labour market, and that discrimination is of a style that we have perhaps not seen in the labour market in quite some time. We are much more likely to see straight-up sex discrimination cases where people are being asked to wear short skirts, to behave in a certain way, to hide their sexuality or to do different things to present an image to the customer. If they refuse to do those things, they are in effect dismissed, because they are not given any more shifts.

Workers on such precarious contracts feel vulnerable, because they feel that they are unable to challenge things. Sometimes, they do not even know that they can challenge things, because there is a lack of understanding that equality law applies even if people are in precarious work. We feel that employers are becoming more likely to use practices whereby they ask for pictures and they make sure that people at the front of house are very beautiful or that ethnic minority people are put at the back of house. Things that we have not seen in the labour market for quite some time are now routine practices again.

It would be useful for the committee to consider the link between discrimination and precarious work. That fits well with the work of the Government, with human rights issues and with the fair work agenda. It would be something useful that could shine a light on an extremely worrying practice. To be frank, it is growing, but we do not have a good understanding of it at present.

Gordon MacRae: Given the assurances that the convener mentioned, we welcome the expansion of the committee's remit. We have had concerns for some time that a lot of the human rights oriented commitments that the Scottish ministers have made in recent years have not always had scrutiny to ensure that the aspirations are delivered on.

A current example of that is the clear commitment in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 for the Scottish ministers to consider what further steps they can take to secure rights. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child review made a number of recommendations. One that was of interest to our sector was the clear recommendation that it was time to extend the right to opt out of religious observance in schools from parents to young people. Young people in England and Wales have that right, but young people in Scotland are denied it. The Scottish Government has informed us that it has no intention of doing that. When commitments on such matters are made in legislation, we have a responsibility to scrutinise how things are taken forward.

For us as humanists, the last year has been something of a tipping point. Scotland is now a country in which a majority of people say that they have no religious affiliation. Demand for humanist weddings now outstrips demand for denominational weddings. From our perspective, that demands a bit of new thinking about how we should approach a secular society that protects every faith and people of no faith. In the papers, ministers talk about faith schools and non-denominational schools, but every state school in Scotland is a faith school; there are no non-faith schools. We have denominational and non-denominational schools, but they are all faith schools.

We think that there is still systemic discrimination against non-religious, humanist and atheist young people, who are denied the same rights as other people. I mentioned the right to opt out of religious observance that young people elsewhere in the UK have; there is also a specific issue in some, although not all, denominational schools around access to sex and relationship education. I know that Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board has expressed real concerns about the access that its workers have to schools.

Therefore, there is scope for the committee to look at the consequences of some of the commitments that ministers make and what future steps will be required. The committee could also start thinking about what Scotland will look like in 2016 and beyond, now that we are a nation of many beliefs in which a single world view no longer dominates.

Alastair Pringle: I want to go back to a hobby-horse that I share with the convener, which concerns equality impact assessment. We have been monitoring the publication of public bodies' reports on their specific duties since the introduction of those duties in May 2012, and we will be doing a piece of work to look at the effectiveness of the specific duties after the four-year cycle in April 2017.

Our role is to monitor the effect and impact of those duties, and I have concerns about that. I have had concerns in that area since I worked in the NHS 15 years ago and since I worked in central Government 10 years ago and, as a regulator, I now have concerns that parts of those duties are simply not working. The sooner we acknowledge that, the sooner we can start to think about the outcome that we want to achieve and how we might achieve it. As the regulator, I turn up at many meetings only for a great big file to be pushed over that is full of equality impact assessments. Some poor soul in the corner will be sweating buckets, because that is their year's work—100 equality impact assessments. I push the file aside and say, "Tell me one thing that has changed as a result of doing that work."

We need to think about equality impact assessment differently. That is partly about the language that is used. As the committee moves to an integrated equality and human rights mandate, there is a real opportunity for us to think about how we can do some of that work differently. For me, equality impact assessment and human rights analysis involve going out to speak to people and asking them what their experience is of the NHS or the education system, what the equality law and the human rights framework say about what they can expect, and how we can deliver that. We need to ask people what the solutions are. Too often, decisions are made by junior officials or people in ivory towers who do not have a world view, and I very much welcome the approach that the committee is taking, of which this morning's meeting is a great example. We need to ask people about their lived experience in using our education systems. We should think not just about bullying in schools but about attainment and the gendered norms that lead to the fact that we have to set targets for 50:50 by 2020 because nothing else in the system is working.

So let us focus on equality impact assessment, but not the form—let us think about how we do that more creatively, with a clear eye on the outcome that it is meant to achieve and on whether it is achieving that.

Bill Scott: Our experience is that, unfortunately, equality impact assessments are an afterthought rather than a forethought. Rather than being used to build equalities into the planning of service

delivery, they are done as an afterthought, to consider how something has complied with the law.

A concrete example that the EHRC knows about very well comes from the modern apprenticeship programme. It was brilliant that the Government decided to invest in young people and in 26,000 or 27,000 modern apprenticeships a year, but it was a total disaster that that actually intensified existing inequalities among its achievements, because occupational segregation occurred between young men and young women, BME people were underrepresented and, although there should have been around 3,500 to 4,000 young disabled people taking part in the scheme each year, we had only 70 or thereabouts. That was because of a failure to build in from the outset what the objectives were and what the outcomes should have been for the scheme. That is where equality planning can come in.

We are very pleased that the committee is going to take on human rights as well as equalities, because human rights and equalities should be about the elimination of existing inequalities over time, and about the realisation of human rights through the elimination of those inequalities. We think that economic, social and cultural rights are fundamental. A Joseph Rowntree Foundation report that was released in the last month shows that half of all people living in poverty in our society are either disabled or live with disabled people—that is, people who take care of disabled children or who have a disabled partner. That is a tragedy and an enormous waste of human resources in our society that we should begin to address.

The independent adviser on poverty and inequality has said that we should think about where we can make the most difference; that is perhaps where the committee should direct its attention. I think that you can make the most difference with young people. The transition from school to work is a crucial stage. The committee could look at that and begin to make a difference to young people's life chances and break the cycle of inequality and poverty by making recommendations for strategic intervention at that key stage in the development of young people's lives. That is where you could make the most crucial difference for young people leaving care, for black and minority ethnic young people, for young women and for young disabled people. In no way do I want you to write off working-age or older disabled people, but you could make the biggest difference if you began to look at younger people.

One of the independent adviser's recommendations was to carry out a comprehensive review of how policies impact. If

the committee did that, you could make a huge difference to how policy is viewed and you could begin to get equalities addressed in key policy areas, which could make a difference.

Willie Coffey: I was going to tease out some of the information that Bill Scott has just shared with the committee, because I had an interesting conversation with him earlier this morning, which was quite an eye-opener. I am therefore glad that you have done that, Bill.

Another issue that you have raised this morning is the one that you touched on towards the end of your comments—about the difficulties that young people, particularly those with disabilities, face in making transitions from where they are to where they would like to be, whether it is the modern apprenticeship programme, college or the world of work. You told me that the statistics are actually getting worse as the years roll by, which must be a worry for the committee.

I want to explore with you—and Morven Brooks, too—what we could do better to assist young people, particularly those with disabilities, to ensure that they get access to help, advice and support, and that they feel that they are a part of the system. I think it was Ryan McMullan who mentioned to us this morning that making things fair does not necessarily make them equal. Sometimes, we might overlook that; there is a lesson in that. People have to feel that they are part of the system, but young folk in particular do not feel that they are welcome. We need to help them through that transition in the system. I would be very much obliged, particularly to Bill Scott and Morven Brooks, if they could flesh that out we bit more and give us some examples.

11:00

Morven Brooks: The biggest issue is attitudes to and awareness of disability, especially when it comes to employability. I think that 40 applications went through last year's equality internship—I am not quite sure what the final figure was, so I will find out how many succeeded in gaining full-time employment from those internships. The biggest barrier was around accessibility—not just physical access, but access to the equipment or what they need to do the job. Obviously, they had access to work, but for those on internship programmes, by the time the appliances that were needed were available, the internship was nearly up, so it was a bit pointless.

In addition, peoples' benefits from the Department for Work and Pensions are affected. Again, that is an example from the internship programme. However, in real life, the benefits of a disabled person who gets full-time employment and has requirements in order to do that job would

stop at a certain point. There is a gap, and that is no good. If a disabled person has needs, such as rent, then that gap is a worry and adds stress. There is a big impact there, especially around disability.

I have talked about what people need to do the job, but there is the physical accessibility side, too. We hear that a lot of employers require a lot of training and awareness raising around attitudes and what reasonable adjustments are required. It can be costly for an employer, but they must also take into account how many disabled people they are looking to employ in the longer term. From our research, we know that a lot of employers class disabled people as high-risk. They have to do an impact assessment, and there are also costs associated with implementing reasonable adjustments.

We are working with access panels. They get across the message to their local employers on the physical accessibility issues that employers need to take into account to help disabled people get into employment in their areas. We are also working on an employability hub to collate resources for employers in order to help them to employ disabled people. There is an inclusive communication hub, because delivery of inclusive communication is also an issue. An employer that is looking to employ a British Sign Language user will have to meet requirements that have cost implications. How does the employer work with the employee to address that need?

There are a lot of matters for employers to take into account, including training requirements. The inclusive communication hubs that we are working on are a resource bank where employers can go to get that information. We are taking steps to make improvements, but we would obviously encourage support in getting across the message.

Bill Scott: I will give you the figures. A young disabled person as a school leaver at age 16 is twice as likely to be not in education, employment or training as a non-disabled peer; by the age of 19, they are three times as likely to be in that position. Things do not improve after leaving school; they get worse. That is partly because a lot of the support that is provided to disabled children at school simply stops the moment that they leave. That has very practical consequences.

For example, earlier this year, we were up in Inverness speaking to groups that work with young disabled people. They pointed out the ludicrous situation in which young disabled schoolchildren with additional support needs who wanted to go to Inverness College got taxis there and back, because they were still at school. Because the college offered courses, they could get taxis there and back.

However, young people of the same age who had left school had to get there by bus and the bus service was not accessible. Therefore, they could not get to the college because social work no longer supplied them with taxis to do so because they had left school. That is why I am saying that we need to think about this strategically. Investment at that age for that particular group of young people could make an enormous difference to the rest of their lives, because if they could acquire skills, work experience and so on and begin to get on the employment ladder, that could be them set for the next 40 or 50 years. If they do not get those skills and so on, it could be the opposite for the next 40 or 50 years; they could remain unemployed, which is what over half of all disabled people are—they are workless.

If we can begin to think about the policies that we implement at that key stage of the development of all young people, taking into account the particular needs of the most excluded groups, and if we invest in employability schemes, work experience schemes, training schemes and so on at that age in order to equip young people with the skills that they need for the modern labour market, we could begin to make a real difference. I keep on coming back to that point.

One of the best-kept secrets in the world—certainly in the UK—is the access to work scheme, which funds adaptations to employers' premises and provides software if someone has communication impairments and so on. For small employers, there is a 100 per cent Government grant for those costs, but it is simply not well known enough. The Scottish Government and the committee could look at that scheme and begin to promote it to small businesses because if small businesses knew about it, some of the barriers in their heads about the costs of employing a disabled person—which are based on prejudice or ignorance—could be overcome and we might see more welcoming workplaces.

Once you have established that a disabled person can work in a workplace and an adaptation is made to that workplace, the adaptation is there forever, which means that the workplace is accessible not only for that worker but for workers who follow them and, possibly, for new customers who were not previously able to access the premises. There are all sorts of things that we should be thinking about around opening up access to the most excluded groups.

The Convener: We are coming up against a time barrier. Juliet Harris and Helen Martin want to come in on this point and then a couple of members want to come in as well, so could Juliet and Helen make their remarks succinct?

Juliet Harris: I just want to reinforce what Bill Scott said on the importance of children and

young people and of considering their human rights. For the record, in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, there is a duty on the Scottish Government to consider steps to further the UNCRC. As a result of that duty, the Scottish Government has to carry out a child rights and wellbeing impact assessment on all new policies and legislation.

I recognise the frustrations and the limitations of impact assessments, but the duty provides a real opportunity for the committee to look at what consideration the Scottish Government has given to children and young people's rights. A number of the impact assessments have been published so far. Interestingly, given what Bill Scott has just mentioned, one of the impact assessments is on the national transport strategy refresh. It was decided not to do a full impact assessment on the refresh because it was not considered necessary. That really highlights the important point that children and young people's rights should not just be considered in relation to children's services; it is not just about education.

Certainly, concerns have been raised by our members that although we have a cabinet secretary for education, which we really welcome and are really pleased about, and a Minister for Childcare and Early Years, we do not have a minister for children and young people. We need to make sure that children and young people's issues are listened to across the board. It is not just about children's services; it is about mental health, transport, the environment and so on. It is about the whole spectrum. It comes back to the fact that if the committee looks at the concluding observations of the UNCRC, they will provide a road map that makes sure that children and young people's rights are respected across all areas of policy and legislation and are not just pigeonholed into children's services.

Helen Martin: In considering how disabled young people get access to work, it is important to consider the nature of the work and what work looks like. That goes back to the point that I made previously about precarious work—many young people start their working lives in precarious contracts in the service industries or in places where they are on zero-hours contracts and are seen by their employers very much as commodities. The reality is that young disabled people do not get the opportunity to work in such roles because employers will not employ them, which increases the extent to which disabled people are locked out of the labour market. It is important to consider how that impacts on those young people getting the opportunities that they deserve.

It is also important to think about young people who have hidden disabilities. We know of cases of

young people who work in the care sector working long shifts in poor conditions, which has exacerbated underlying conditions such as heart conditions. They have asked their employer for reasonable adjustments to be made and have found themselves being made redundant because the employer has not been willing to make a reasonable adjustment. That is not necessarily legal, but it happens because of the nature of the work and the how the employee is seen by the employer—as someone who is there to do a really difficult job for a really long time, and if they are not able to do it they are out.

The points that Bill Scott and Morven Brooks make are really important, but the issue links back to the nature of the labour market and how people are treated generally.

Mary Fee: I will be brief—I promise. In our group this morning, we had a similar discussion to the one that we have just had about exclusion from the workplace, but it was in relation to the barriers that the BME community faces to getting into the workplace and the lack of progression for BME people. That is similar to the lack of opportunity for people with disabilities. I posed a question this morning that I will now pose to the whole room. Everyone around the table will know of the glass ceiling that exists for women in the workplace and the work that is being done to eradicate that glass ceiling, but it almost seems as though there is now a glass ceiling for the BME community and for people with disabilities. Should there be more focus on working to remove the lack of progression for the BME community and people with disabilities?

Mary Alexander: I reaffirm what Helen Martin said about the challenges that people face in the workplace. We have heard a lot about how different groups are treated, which takes us back to the question of how we remedy that in a meaningful way with the powers of the committee. We have seen quite a lot in the news about the impact of Brexit. Although there is a lot of uncertainty about that, I hope that the committee will want to work with the European and External Relations Committee to protect existing workers' rights. The First Minister has talked about having a floor of protection, and we hope that you will consider that. The Scottish Government has also commissioned a national baseline assessment on business and human rights as a precursor to developing a national action plan, and the committee should look at that, too. That is based on the UN's guiding principles: respect, protect and remedy.

I will not go into it, but you will know about the baseline assessment planning and the fact that there is a process whereby the Government is considering priorities for that action plan. That has

been a long time in coming. The UK Government has had a national action plan since 2013, which it refreshed it in 2016. The Scottish Government needs to focus on that, and I hope that the equalities and human rights committee will move the process along. As I said, I also hope that it will work with the European and External Relations Committee on protecting workers' rights.

The Convener: Absolutely. That is a good direction to point us in. Before Jeremy Balfour adds a final remark—we are up against the clock—I invite everyone in the room to confirm that we all agree with Mary Fee's point about the need to smash some of those glass ceilings.

I see that the answer is yes. We can follow that up. Jeremy Balfour has the last few seconds in which to make his points.

11:15

Jeremy Balfour: This is probably coming at the wrong time, because I might be opening a whole new tin of worms, but would anyone care to comment briefly on how good our public bodies are at what we have been talking about? Helen Martin has talked a lot about companies—rightly so—but what is the experience of the NHS and local authorities with regard to how open we are to those who have disabilities or other issues? Does that area need to be looked at? I appreciate that we have only about 30 seconds, but perhaps I can throw that question out there for, say, one person to answer.

The Convener: Perhaps Helen Martin and Alastair Pringle can give a very quick response.

Helen Martin: Ah—[*Laughter.*]

The Convener: I know that the STUC and Alastair have a particular interest in this area.

Helen Martin: It is fair to say that public bodies do not have the same degree of exploitation associated with them, but that does not mean that there are no problems in the system. For example, a lot of Government employs people through apprenticeships. Although it is a very good-quality training scheme that brings young people into an organisation, it probably models quite a lot of the problems that we have seen in the apprenticeship system itself. If only 75 disabled young people are getting apprenticeships in Scotland and practically all the Scottish Government's recruitment from school level is coming through apprenticeships, that suggests that there could be a problem.

The NHS has done some really good work, with specific schemes to put autistic young people and those with other mental disabilities into certain roles. Those have worked very well, and retention has been found to be better in some roles that previously had been hard to fill. There are

therefore examples of really good practice and of how different outreach schemes and recruitment techniques can be used to fill positions that had been difficult to fill in the past, and there is some very good practice that can be looked at as a model of how things should be done. It is fair to say that if you were to delve into different parts of the public sector, you would be likely to find problems, but they would look different from the systematic and deliberate things done by employers that I am talking about.

The Convener: Can you share some of those examples of good practice with the committee?

Helen Martin: Yes.

The Convener: Alastair, you can have the final word.

Alastair Pringle: That is somewhat daunting, convener, but thank you.

We have gathered quite a lot of good practice on equality over the years, and we have made available online a lot of that as well as loads of guidance and toolkits for the public sector. In response to your question, though, that does not always lead to improved practice.

Public services, by their very nature, can tackle some of the significant barriers and challenges in Scottish society. I hope that you have had an opportunity to look at “Is Scotland Fairer?”, which sets out progress over the past five years. It is one of the biggest studies of its kind, and many of the issues that are raised in it relate to education and access to further and higher education opportunities. Indeed, as one of Scotland’s biggest employers, education has a significant role to play.

In our monitoring, we also find pockets of good practice. Many look to us to try to drive forward improvements; however, as a small agency, we cannot do that on our own, and we look to all our partners to collaborate and help us achieve that. As a short answer to your question, I think that yes, we should be looking very much at public services.

The Convener: We have a job of work on our hands, haven’t we? [*Laughter.*] We are having a few more round tables with other groups, and I am sure that they will come up with some great ideas, challenges and opportunities to fix some of this.

I thank everyone for coming along. Obviously you could take much more time to say much more about all this, but we are hoping—I keep saying “hoping”, but I mean “endeavouring”—to be one of the most open committees in the Parliament with regard to sharing information. If you can share as much information with us as possible, we will be able to do policy better, and we need your support in that respect. We would therefore be grateful if you could continue that relationship.

I ask everyone to stay in their seats, because the committee has another wee bit of business to discuss. We will then have a quick break. It just means that, having given Alastair Pringle the last word, I can move things on a bit more quickly.

European Union Reporter

11:19

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is nomination of our European Union reporter. Mary Alexander will be delighted to hear that the committee will have an EU reporter who will work very closely with the European and External Relations Committee on some of the work that it is doing. We certainly think that this committee has a role in working with many of the committees in the Parliament to equalities proof some of the work that they are doing.

I therefore invite nominations for the committee's EU reporter.

Jeremy Balfour: I nominate Annie Wells.

The Convener: Annie, are you happy to accept the nomination?

Annie Wells: Yes.

The Convener: Is the committee delighted to endorse that decision?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Thank you very much, and thank you to Annie Wells for taking this forward. We will be happy to give her any support that she needs, and I wish her well in her new role.

We will have a quick break for a few minutes to allow people to get out of this hot room and perhaps get a cuppa.

11:20

Meeting continued in private until 11:37.

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