

EDUCATION IN THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

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PREAMBLE

This paper follows on from the previous bulletin (Priestley, 2005), which covered the business of the Parliament's Education Committee between January and June 2005. This bulletin covers committee proceedings during the first half of the 2005–6 parliamentary year (Session 2, September 2005 until January 2006).

The Education Committee has the following members this session: Iain Smith (Convenor), Wendy Alexander, Rosemary Byrne, Lord James Douglas Hamilton, Fiona Hyslop, Adam Ingram, Kenneth Macintosh, Frank MacAveety and Elaine Murray. Full records of the committee meetings, including transcripts of proceedings and all committee papers can be found on the Scottish Parliament website at: www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/education/index.htm

The work programme agreed by the committee for 2005-6 covered one major piece of legislation, The Scottish Schools (Parental) Involvement Bill, the conclusion of the Pupil Motivation Inquiry, taking evidence for the Early Years Inquiry and agreeing an Inquiry into Looked After Children. They scrutinised the budget process and continued their debate with the Minister on the issues of school transport and school closures. (ED/S2/05/15/7) There was also a substantive amount of subordinate legislation relating to the Additional Support for Learning Act 2004. The work of the committee in the first half of the Parliamentary year included considerable time on the Joint Inspection of Children's Services and Inspection of Social Work Services Bill, which the Executive was taking forward with an accelerated Parliamentary timetable.

The main areas of the committee business which are addressed in this bulletin relate to the following areas:

- Completing the Pupil Motivation Inquiry
- Taking evidence for the Early Years Inquiry
- Stage 1 of the Scottish Schools (Parental) Involvement Bill
- An accelerated timetable for Joint Inspection of Children's Services and Inspection of Social Work Services Bill

The bulletin identifies key issues that have arisen during the committee discussions, supported by relevant committee papers. The substantive and interesting debates are highlighted, including the questioning of expert witnesses. References indicate the relevant committee and business papers which provide full details of the work of the committee.

PUPIL MOTIVATION INQUIRY

The evidence gathered for this inquiry was discussed in the previous bulletin (Priestley, 2005). A draft report was considered by the committee at their meeting on the 7th September 2005, but the committee felt that the subject did not sit easily within the standard report format and agreed instead to publish a shorter issues based paper to highlight the key themes captured during the course of the inquiry; this would then be used as the basis for an event which would enable committee members to engage directly with stakeholders. (ED/S2/05/14/5) The draft issues paper discussed at the next meeting had the following sub-headings: the scale of the problem, the purpose of education, leadership, motivated teachers, pupil centred

learning, the transition from primary to secondary school, vocational options, home-school and community links and sharing of best practice. The conclusion quoted the recognition from witnesses to the inquiry, “that there is no magic bullet.” (ED/S2/05/15/6:4) In presenting this paper the committee asked the Executive to consider prioritising addressing issues which often arise for pupils in the transition between primary and the early years of secondary education. The initial plans for a stakeholder event, with representatives of all who gave evidence, in October 2005 were changed to an event in January 2006. (ED/S2/05/16/4:36)

EARLY YEARS INQUIRY

The focus of the Early Years Inquiry is the effectiveness of early years education and childcare, and implications for future policy decisions. The Inquiry followed a petition to the Parliament from Unison (P523) which called for a national enquiry into early years education and childcare. The committee considered written submissions and supporting oral evidence at their meetings from the 28th September 2005 to the 5th October 2005. They resumed on the 18th January 2006 and will conclude taking evidence in February 2006. This break in evidence was caused by the Joint Inspection of Children’s Services and Inspection of Social Work Services Bill.

Members of the committee visited early years projects in West Lothian and Glasgow in September 2005 and had study visits to Finland and Sweden in October 2005. (ED/S2/05/15/2:24) The Committee commissioned four focus groups and a re-analysis of survey data from DTZ Pidea on the views of parents. An evening discussion meeting with private sector providers took place on 31 January 2006. The committee papers for the meeting on the 18th January highlight the publication of a number of reports, including the report *Children Starting School in Scotland* (Tymms et al., 2005), commissioned by the Education Department. The summary of research written by the Committee Clerk stated that, “The study found little connection between the amount of pre-school experience and children’s starting points at school. The study found similarities between countries in the range of ability in early mathematics but differences for literacy.” (ED/S2/06/2/1) The paper commented on the evaluation of Scottish Surestart published in December 2005, which recognized that all projects support integrated working towards the core objective of supporting vulnerable families in flexible and non-stigmatising ways.

The Committee discussions demonstrate a breadth of interest and expertise in different areas of early years education and childcare as they engaged in debate with the following witnesses:

Date of Committee	Witnesses
28 September 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Christine, Stephen: <i>SERA</i> • Peter Lee: <i>SERA</i> • Tam Bailie: <i>Barnardo’s Scotland</i> • Dr Bronwen Cohen, Catriona Thomson: <i>Children in Scotland</i>
5 October 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carol Ball and Eileen Dinning: <i>UNISON</i> • Margaret Lauder: <i>Argyll and Bute Council</i> • Carolyn Martin: <i>The City of Edinburgh Council</i> • Sandra Gray: <i>Shetland Islands Council</i> • Linda Kinney: <i>Stirling Council</i>

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Date of Committee	Witnesses
18 January 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eileen Carmichael, Margaret Clark: <i>Learning and Teaching Scotland</i> • Kenneth Muir, Kate Cherry: <i>HMIe</i> • Norma Watson, Sheena Wardhaugh: <i>EIS</i> • Carole Wilkinson: <i>Scottish Social Services Council</i>
25 January 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alan McLaughlan, Mandy Mayo: <i>Scottish Preschool Play Association</i> • Maggie Simpson: <i>Scottish Childminding Association</i> • Gavin Fergie: <i>Community Practitioners and Health Visitors' Association</i> • Heather Gunn: <i>Association of Directors of Social Work</i>

The debate began with a submission from SERA supported orally by Christine Stephens and Peter Lee. This addressed pedagogy, judgments about quality of provision, child-led learning and the role of practitioners, and transition to school. The written submission recommended an articulation of “a pedagogy that works in our context and meets the demands of revised curriculum guidance in Scotland.” (ED/S2/05/16/1a) Peter Lee asked the committee to recognise recent Scottish achievement in early childhood, “We have moved towards an amazingly wonderful service in early childhood education and care in Scotland. People are already coming to Scotland to have a look at it.” (Col 2616) The initial evidence raised key issues which dominated the evidence to the Inquiry: the challenges of integrated services, barriers between professions and reaching the most vulnerable children and families. In addressing the challenges of reaching the most vulnerable a number of papers to the Inquiry strongly advocated the need for universal and targeted services. Unison at the meeting on the 5th of October proposed “a comprehensive and integrated package of universal, affordable, early education and parental leave could have significant economic and social benefits for children and parents in Scotland.” (ED/02/05/17/1a:7) Elaine Murray asked, “Is there a danger that, in moving towards a universal model, some of that support might be lost to some of the most disadvantaged parents?” (Murray, 5.10.05, Col 2662) Unison put forward the view that universal provision would remove the stigma that currently exists for disadvantaged families, but Barnardo’s stated clearly in their written submission that “tailored services must exist for the most vulnerable in society.” (ED/S2/05/16/1b: 13) A number of submissions asked the committee to consider the connections between childcare, employment and parental leave, despite the fact that the latter are reserved matters. Bronwen Cohen of Children in Scotland:

I think that it is a problem when one puts services for pre-school education in one pot, support for young children in another pot and child care tax credits to support parents in paid employment in yet another pot. That contributes to the fragmented state of the provision that we have in this country, which is among the most fragmented in Europe. (Cohen, 05.10.06, Col 2635)

Tam Baillie for Barnardo’s clearly expressed the challenges Scottish parents face in arranging childcare.

I heard an example the other day of a parent who used six different ways of caring for their child from the cocktail of funding and the cocktail of different employment provision. (Baillie, 05.10.05, Col 2640)

The evidence and debate with witnesses from the representative local authorities addressed funding issues. Argyll and Bute Council, The City of Edinburgh Council

and Stirling Council all identified a need, for the “mainstreaming of funds at a national and local level to address the needs of children and families.” (Ed/02/05/17/1d:19) Rosemary Bryne pursued the issues of funding and integration:

A few weeks ago, some of us had an interesting visit to the Jeely Piece Club in Castlemilk, which offers an integrated service for children between the ages of nought and five, plus pre-school provision. It is a highly impressive facility that chases seven funding streams, some of which come from the local authority while others come from the voluntary sector. The Jeely Piece Club highlighted to us the difficulty of keeping provision going under such circumstances, and the efforts involved in constantly having to apply for funding, which distracts from management and development of the set-up. How can we sort out funding and approach the situation in an integrated manner? (Bryne, 05.10.05, Col 2665)

Carolyn Martin for The City of Edinburgh Council replied:

It has to be a universal service because stigma is a problem. That is particularly the case for services that are provided for nought to three-year-olds, which are not universal; they are targeted, and the net impact of that is the possibility that children who very much need the service are not getting it because it is not universally available. (Martin, 05.10.05, Col 2666)

Wendy Alexander drew all aspects of the discussion together and asked about the consequences of different funding streams, while recognizing that because of the different types of need it was likely that there would continue to be a variety of funding streams in the future. She stated that the corollary of establishing national funding was that there should be a national approach to quality assurance and drew a parallel with the school inspection system, asking if there was a role for the Care Commission here.

We want to avoid a situation in which there is a different monitoring regime for every piece of money that goes to organisations, on top of the funding uncertainty. Is there any way to streamline the system as an interim step towards more integrated funding? How do we match that with more integrated evaluation? Can anybody say what progress they have made in using the care commission or say why the commission is not deemed adequate to meet those monitoring requirements? (Alexander, 05.10.05, Col 2670)

As identified above the committee will complete the evidence in this inquiry in February 2006. The key issues raised in the evidence taken in the inquiry to January 2006 are:

- the complexity of funding and monitoring requirements
- the value of an integrated approach
- the balance between targeted and universal provision
- the mix of staff skills and qualifications required in early years provision
- links with reserved issues such as parental leave and working tax credit
- whether there should be an overarching approach equivalent to the UK 10 year childcare strategy
- whether childcare can be self sustaining in very rural areas and deprived areas
- that Sweden and Finland provide useful examples but the specific Scottish context needs to be considered (Ed/S2/06/2/1)

SCOTTISH SCHOOLS (PARENTAL) INVOLVEMENT BILL, STAGE 1

The Scottish Schools (Parental) Involvement Bill was introduced by the Executive in response to issues raised in the National Debate on Education (Scottish Executive, 2003). The focus of the bill is to review and reform the legislation governing school boards (The School Boards (Scotland) Act, 1988 and associated Regulations), which established statutory parental representation in schools under the management of Local Education Authorities. The proposed Bill extends to parents' involvement in their own child's education. This should be seen against the background of The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 which places a duty on Scottish Ministers to promote parents' involvement in their child's school education. It builds on the existing duties placed on education authorities by the 2000 Act with regard to parents' involvement in their own child's school education and makes provision for new arrangements for parental representation in schools. It places a duty on education authorities to give advice and information to parents on the education of their own child; and requires education authorities to have a complaints procedure covering how they carry out their functions under the Bill. (ED/S2/06/1/3 – Annexe 1)

Peter Peacock introduced the Bill to Parliament on 28 September 2005. The committee agreed its approach to stage 1 of this Bill in Private at the meeting on the 5th of October. In November and December 2005 they considered submitted papers and heard evidence from number of witnesses:

Date	Witnesses
30 November 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jennifer Wallace: <i>Scottish Consumer Council</i>
7 December 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alan Blackie: <i>Association of Directors of Education</i> • Ewan Aitken, Anna Fowlie: <i>COSLA</i> • Caroline Vass, George Hammersley: <i>Scottish School Boards Association</i> • Judith Gillespie: <i>Scottish Parent Teacher Council</i>
14 December 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gordon Smith: <i>Association of Head Teachers in Scotland</i> • Lindsay Roy, Bill McGregor: <i>Headteachers' Association of Scotland</i> • Jack Barnett, Ken Wimbor: <i>Educational Institute of Scotland</i>
11 January 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter Peacock: <i>Minister for Education and Young People</i> • Colin Reeves, Deirdre Watt, Stephanie Walsh: <i>SEED</i>

Much of the debate with witnesses focused on the proposed responsibilities in the Bill, the responsibilities of the Local Authorities in implementing the legislation, the role and responsibility of Headteachers and the responsibility of parents to become involved. COSLA proposed a number of amendments to the Bill (ED/S2/05/23/3) and there was considerable concern expressed about the varied needs of individual schools and communities, for example in this comment from Alan Blackie of ADES.

We are a little anxious about the possibility that the bill will become excessively prescriptive as it goes through the committee stages on its way to becoming an act, and we are concerned that it might try to do the work of education authorities for them. For example, the constitutions and membership of parent councils need flexibility to reflect local circumstances and to recognise the fact that schools vary in pupil numbers, ranging from 10, or even slightly below 10 in some very rural areas, to well over 1,000 or 1,500 in other parts of the country. (Blackie, 07.12.05, Col 2862)

The EIS welcomed the Bill and the repeal of the 1988 Schools Board Legislation but were direct in what the Bill must address to enable it to work:

- The relationship between the Parent Council and the Forum.
- The level and quality of consultation with parents by the local authority.
- The standard of advice and guidance provided by the local authority.
- The involvement of parents in communities which, in the past, have not been so engaged. (ED/S2/05/24/4)

The most active debate on the Bill were the exchanges between Committee members and Judith Gillespie of the Scottish Parent Teacher Council:

I have no doubt that the bill is the right way to go. Parents have been waiting for it for a long time. I point out, because I am so old, that when the school board consultation was undertaken in 1987, there were 8,000 responses to it—from a system in which there were no boards. A lot of the responses came from ordinary parents and PTAs. There was a live interest in education prior to school boards. I make no criticism whatever of the people who have been engaged in school boards—I have been so engaged—but we have tended to have a compartmentalisation of parental involvement. We have had boards doing the development planning stuff and many PTAs have been disfranchised and told that they can do only such things as fundraising. At the time of the education debate, when we opened up discussion, it was interesting how many parents told us how nice it was to be talking about things to do with education, rather than talking just about fundraising. The bill offers parents a permanent opportunity to do that and I think that it is really good. (Gillespie, 07.12.05, Col 2885)

A number of practical implementation issues were discussed as the committee took evidence and members referred to these when they discussed the financial memorandum on costs involved in implementing the Bill at their meeting on the 11th January 2006. (ED/S2/06/1/2) The committee considered a draft report on Stage 1 of the Bill in private at their meeting on the 25th of January 2006.

JOINT INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND INSPECTION OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICES BILL

The context of the Bill was succinctly explained in the paper presented to the committee by Graham Donaldson, HMCI. In March 2004 HMIe was asked by Ministers to establish a multi-disciplinary team to undertake joint inspections of all children's services beginning with child protection. This followed major reports and enquiries into child deaths which highlighted the need for change in the delivery of children's services. Common features of concern were poor communication between universal and targeted services, too much assessment and too little provision of service with intervention taking place only after a crisis and system failure. The purpose of the new approach was to promote joint working between inspectorates and to improve outcomes for children and young people by adopting a new methodology focussing on inter-agency working and the outcomes achieved for children and their families. The proposed Bill is to overcome some of the difficulty of access to health records experienced in the pilot inspections (ED/S2/05/20/1)

The following witnesses were called to give evidence for the Bill:

Date	Witness
9 November 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter Peacock: <i>Minister for Education and Young People</i> • Graham Donaldson, <i>HMIe</i> • Maureen Verrall, Jackie Brock, <i>SEED</i>
16 November 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graham Donaldson, Neil McKechnie, <i>HMIe</i> • Gill Ottley, <i>Social Work Inspection Agency</i>
23 November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morgan Jamieson: <i>National Clinical Lead for Children and Young People's Health in Scotland</i> • Dr David Love: <i>British Medical Association (Scotland)</i> • Ms Jane O'Brien: <i>General Medical Council</i> • Dr Jenny Bennison: <i>Royal College of General Practitioners (Scotland)</i> • Dr Helen Hammond: <i>Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health</i> • Jacquie Roberts, Ronnie Hill: <i>Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care</i> • Peter Peacock MSP, <i>Minister for Education and Young People</i> • Robert Brown MSP, <i>Deputy Minister for Education and Young People</i> • Maureen Verrall, Jackie Brock, <i>SEED</i>

The Minister for Education and Young People attended the committee meeting on the 9th November and was asked by the Convenor to explain why the Executive was seeking an accelerated timetable for the bill. In reply Peter Peacock outlined the commitment of the Executive to joint inspections and the timetable for their implementation by 2008. HMIe had carried out a series of pilot joint inspections, these raised major issues for the Executive, “to do with inspectors’ current powers to access and share information and to work jointly.” (Peacock, 09.11.05, Col 2741) The pilots highlighted the fact that the different inspectorates do not have powers to operate jointly or to access or share information in a way that is required in a joint inspection. In response to this and to enable the timetable for joint inspections to continue the Executive introduced the above Bill to ensure that the Inspectorates have the relevant powers to work together. Graham Donaldson, HMCI went on to describe the pilot inspections of child protection for the committee and the difficulties they encountered in accessing health records:

All the other services that were engaged took the view that the public interest was served by allowing the inspection team access to information, as that enabled us to establish how well the system had operated for individual children. I have to say that the chief executives of the health boards and many of the health professionals on the ground reluctantly said that they could not participate in the process; they indicated that they would like to participate but believed that it would not be appropriate for them to do so under the current legislation. (Donaldson, 09.11.05, Col 2744)

Wendy Alexander asked the officials to comment on the delays in implementing the joint inspection system:

As I said, although in Scotland we made the commitment to joint inspections in 2002, before England did, the timetable that we have before us gets us to the position where we will be embarking on a full range of inspections

only by the end of 2008. By that time, a full range of inspections will have been completed in England. I am looking for an explanation. A year ago in committee, I asked on a number of occasions whether legislation comparable to the Children Act 2004 would be necessary and I was assured that legislation was not necessary. I am happy to see movement, but I have some concerns. (Alexander, 09.11.05, Col 2745)

In reply Graham Donaldson reassured Ms. Alexander that:

Child protection inspections will be done in 2008, assuming that we get the powers. Children's services will be inspected in parallel. A programme of pilot inspections will start in 2007 and joint inspections involving all the relevant inspectorates will be under way in 2008. (Donaldson, 09.11.05, Col 2742)

The main topic of debate throughout the evidence was the focus of the Bill in ensuring access to health records. The British Medical Association expressed concerns about confidentiality:

The BMA expressed considerable concerns both in previous written submissions to the Executive and in our submission to the committee. Our main concern is about the possible threat to the doctor-patient relationship that is posed by the bill. (Love, 23.11.05, Col 2793)

Much of the debate between the committee and witnesses concerned the haste with which the Bill was being taken through Parliament, balanced with the need to address child protection issues and not alienate health service professionals.

The committee considered a draft of the Stage 1 Report in private on the 30 November 2005. The table below details Stage 2 of the Bill which was discussed at the meeting on the 21 December.

Amendments	Action taken by the Committee
• 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.	Agreed to (without division).
• 12, 1B, 13, 17 and 19 were moved	Withdrawn with the agreement of the Committee.
• 1A, 14, 15, 16, 20, 18	Not moved.
• Sections 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8	Agreed to as amended.
• Sections 2, 4 and 9 and the long title	Agreed to without amendment.
• Amendment 12	Debated and withdrawn by agreement. (The views of children to be taken into account in evaluating the service is dealt with in children's service planning guidelines.)

THE BUDGET PROCESS 2006–2007

The committee scrutinised the central budget of the Education and Young People portfolio for 2006–07 (draft) at their meeting on the 26th of October 2005. The guidance to the committee noted the “tightening of the fiscal climate,” (Ed/S2/05/16/5) and asked the committee to explore the prioritisation of the targets. In discussing the budget the committee raised concerns about the funding of additional support. Kenneth Macintosh pointed out that money seemed to have gone into the National Priorities Action Fund and, “is therefore subsumed into the bigger picture.”

(Macintosh, 26.10.05, Col 2716) In reply Peter Peacock assured the committee that the budget for additional support needs is increasing:

I think that some £14 million has gone into supporting the development work around that, which underlies the figures that you see in the budget report. There have also been some internal transfers between the Education Department and the Health Department so that the health service can provide some of the services that we require of it for additional support. Underlying the budget there is an extra feeding of money into the system, and there are also adjustments in that to the health service. (Peacock, 26.10.05, Col 2716)

Elaine Murray questioned efficiency saving, particularly in relation to the SQA and was assured by Philip Rycroft of SEED that the SQA was, “making great strides towards achieving the efficiency savings targets.” (Rycroft, 26.10.05, Col 2721) Fiona Hyslop asked for more detailed information about the budget:

You pointed out that about £4 billion goes directly to local government on education spend. We get to scrutinise the remaining £400 million, which is a mere tenth of that. Of that, 40 per cent is in what I would call the slush fund of the national priorities action fund. That means that, in our budget scrutiny, we look at 6 per cent of the overall budget spend on education. It might be helpful if in future we could get a breakdown of the national priorities action fund, because the lack of information on it looks a bit suspicious. That would give us some idea about the direction in which the Executive wants to go with its initiatives. (Hyslop, 25.10.05, Col 2721)

In reply Peter Peacock made reference to his time as Finance Convenor in Highland Region when he had an official slush fund to clear roads in winter; but agreed to give the committee a breakdown of the way money is spent to support Executive policy initiatives. (Peacock, 25.10.05, 2721) The committee concluded its deliberations on the budget by making general remarks in response to six specific questions raised by the Finance Committee (Col 2724–2726) These covered the following topics in the draft budget:

- Ministerial response to the 2005–06 budget
- New resources
- Specific changes to programme budgets
- Statement of priorities
- Cross-cutting issues
- Efficiency proposals.

MINISTERIAL QUESTIONS

Committee questions for the Minister concerned School Transport and School Closures. School Transport is a longstanding interest of the committee and at their meeting on the 7th September 2005 they sought further information from COSLA and the minister in relation to the integration of transport policies regarding health and safety, and environmental concerns. At the meeting on 26th of October they noted the response from COSLA to the committee, in which COSLA stated that it was content with existing guidance and emphasised the need for each authority to take into account local circumstances. They supported the policy of encouraging children to walk to school wherever possible but expressed concern over funding, particularly for children with special needs with the move towards mainstreaming. (ED/02/05/183b)

The committee considered a letter from the Minister on School Closures at their meeting on the 14th September 2005 and agreed to write again to the minister, asking for an update on how additional guidance on local authority proposals on the school estate, including school closures, was being interpreted and applied. In a written reply Peter Peacock thought that the guidance had been beneficial but recognised that it was only a year since the guidance was issued and there is a need to take steps to bring “the practices of all councils up to the standards of the best, in relation to consultation and the information they make available to parents.” (Ed/S2/05/15/3) At the meeting on the 14th of December the committee were asked to comment on a Petition: Rural Schools (Closure) (PE872). The committee agreed with the proposal of Iain Smith, Convenor that the committee consider the petition in the context of the revised guidance on school closures when that became available. (Smith, 14.12.05, Col 2905)

INQUIRY INTO LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

A SPICe Briefing on Looked After Children by Camilla Kidner was published on the 8th September 2005. (05/49) It summarises statistics and Executive policy on Looked After Children. 11,700 or just over 1% of Scottish children are ‘looked after’ by Scottish Authorities. As a group of children they are more likely to be excluded from school and 60% of them leave care without any qualifications. The issues faced by young people in care cross the boundaries of social work, education, health and housing. The briefing gives an outline of current policy initiatives designed to support looked after children, focusing particularly at issues in education and mental health.

SCHOOLS, YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE PARLIAMENT

The MSPs in Schools project sits outwith the remit of the Education Committee, but illustrates the work of the Parliament in building close links with schools. It follows a pilot project which found that work in schools helped to develop confidence and increased skills in research and public speaking. The project was launched on 12 September 2005 in the Royal High Primary School in Edinburgh when Susan Deacon MSP met with pupils, later that week George Reid, the Presiding Officer and MSPs Andrew Arbuckle and Mark Ruskell met with a modern studies class in Alloa Academy. The aim of the project is to inform school pupils of the work of the Parliament, through education for citizenship. It has been established by the Hansard Society working with the Parliament’s Outreach Services, Learning and Teaching Scotland, the Executive and Electoral Commission. In December 2005, a group of Lothian MSPs; Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, Robin Harper, Kenny MacAskill and Margo MacDonald, joined the Edinburgh South MSP, Mike Pringle, on a visit to the Royal Blind school in Edinburgh. The pupils had prepared a presentation on sport, covering such issues as sports facilities, cycle lanes and coverage of sport on television of athletes with disabilities and as a result have been invited to address the Cross party group on sports.

WORLD YOUTH CONGRESS

The Parliament hosted the closing ceremony of the World Youth Congress on the 7 August 2005. This was the third time the congress has met, the first in Hawaii in 1999 and in Morocco in 2003. 600 delegates from 150 countries concluded a week of discussions at the University of Stirling. The focus of the week was ways to achieve the United Nations goals on sustainability, poverty, education, equality, community and wealth. The First Minister Jack McConnell MSP was presented with the Congress’s outcome documents and action plans.

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