

## Scots Language

**George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has provided any (a) agencies, (b) organisations and (c) public bodies or services with (i) books and (ii) literature on old Scots dialect and, if so, what the cost was. (S3W-40098)

**Fiona Hyslop:** We have not provided books or literature on Old Scots dialect to any agencies, organisations, public bodies or services.

**Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive when it will make representations to the UK Government regarding the Council of Europe's Charter for Regional and Minority Languages and agreement of part III undertakings for the Scots language and what the reasons are for its position on the matter. (S3W-40251)

**Fiona Hyslop:** At this time we have no plans to extend Part III coverage to the Scots language.

There is still some work to do to fully meet the Part II provisions and it is fitting that we complete this work before considering the requirements of the Part III provisions in respect of Scots.

## British Sign Language

**Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive how many people have (a) sat and (b) passed exams for qualifications in British Sign Language in each year since 2007. (S3W-40080)

**Alex Neil:** The Scottish Government does not hold this information centrally.

There are many providers who offer various levels of British Sign Language (BSL) training in a variety of settings in Scotland, and these organisations and individuals have different accreditation bodies, such as the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Signature and the British Deaf Association. The examination statistics are not collected by the Scottish Government, however, this information would be held by these accrediting bodies.

The Scottish Government has funded a training initiative through Heriot-Watt University for Deaf BSL tutors to teach BSL. Since 2007, 18 deaf tutors have undertaken these courses: 10 graduated from the first Training of Trainers (ToTs) course in 2007, and a further eight are currently completing and due to graduate from the second ToTs intake in 2011.

The Scottish Government has also funded the "Building Bridges" project, a work-based route to BSL interpreter training in Scotland through the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI). It is anticipated that their 10 apprentices on this programme will graduate at the end of March 2011.

## Audiology

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made by NHS boards in the delivery of the 18-week referral-to-treatment target for audiology services. (S3W-39924)

**Nicola Sturgeon:** All NHS boards are actively working to deliver the 18 weeks referral to treatment time target by the end of this year. Some boards have made better progress than others. That is why the Health Delivery Directorate is providing additional support to boards to ensure that the target is delivered.

**Scottish Sensory Centre**

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/apps2/business/orsearch/ReportView.aspx?r=6150&mode=html>

**Cathie Craigie** (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab):

5. To ask the First Minister what recent discussions the Scottish Government has had with the Scottish sensory centre at the University of Edinburgh. (S3F-2941)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** Scottish Government officials have regular contact with staff at the Scottish sensory centre and their employers. They last met representatives of the university on 14 December and they are also members of the centre's advisory committee.

**Cathie Craigie:** Is the First Minister aware that the Requirements for Teachers (Scotland) Regulations 2005 require teachers of children with a sensory impairment to hold a specialist qualification, the achievement of which is supported by the sensory centre, which is the only centre of its kind in Scotland? By working with those who are involved in the education of young people with a sensory impairment, the centre is promoting innovation, good practice and expert support throughout Scotland. By now, the First Minister should be aware of the widespread concern about the Government's decision to withdraw funding for the SSC. Is he aware of the impact of his decision to cut funding on the on-going training of specialist teachers who work to ensure the best educational outcomes for a very vulnerable group of children? Does he regret the fact that there has been no consultation, and will he take immediate action to reverse the decision? The centre costs taxpayers £200,000 per annum. I think that funding the centre is the sort of thing that a Government should be doing.

**The First Minister:** Cathie Craigie will want to put the issue in the context of front-line funding. We will fund Donaldson's school and the Royal blind school, as grant-aided special schools, with £4.5 million to support children and young people with sensory impairments. We have protected £305,000 of funding for CALL Scotland, which is also based at the University of Edinburgh and provides children with technological solutions to help them to overcome their barriers to learning. This year, we have provided CALL Scotland with an additional £27,000 to enhance its Scottish text-to-speech software. We have also provided £66,000 to update the state-of-the-art national equipment bank, which lends devices to young people to test before local authorities invest in their own equipment. I mention those things because I know that Cathie Craigie will want to put the issue in the context of the support that we are providing.

I would be very happy to convene a meeting between the University of Edinburgh, the Scottish sensory centre and our officials and ministers to discuss the way forward. But let us do that on the basis that, regardless of the £1,300 million cutback in funding, the Scottish Government is anxious—as the figures demonstrate—to support people who are engaged in the activity that we are discussing. On that basis, I will, with good will, convene such a meeting.