



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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'MSP Building to be Clad in Granite' Claim - Holyrood Team Responds

Lewis Macdonald MSP, Convener of the Holyrood Progress Group, has issued the following statement in response to recent claims that the contract for granite cladding at the new Parliament building had been awarded.

Speaking today, Mr Macdonald said:

"Contrary to press reports, no contract has yet been awarded for the supply of granite required to clad the MSP block in the new Parliament building complex

"Negotiations are currently in progress to establish whether interested quarries are able to supply the quality and quantity of granite required within the necessary timescale. We anticipate that a public announcement will be made following a decision within the next few weeks.

"We are certainly hopeful that a Scottish quarry will be able to rise to what are challenging timetable and cost targets."

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Audit Committee Criticises Holyrood Parliament Project Cost Reporting

The decision by Scottish Office civil servants not to disclose the full estimated cost of the new Holyrood Parliament building was "unnecessary and wrong" says a hard-hitting report published today by the Parliament's powerful Audit Committee.

Deputy convener Nick Johnston said:

"The fact that the Auditor General undertook an examination of the Holyrood Project when the building shall not be completed for well over two years is a sign of the seriousness of concerns expressed over the project's stewardship and the amount of public expenditure it will incur.

"The findings of today's report draw heavily on our own detailed cross-examination of Muir Russell and Paul Grice, the two respective Accountable Officers responsible for monitoring costs during the project's split ownership."

The conclusions and recommendations from the committee's report are as follows:

Conclusions

- It was not helpful that, from the outset of the project, a misunderstanding in the public mind should have been created (by the Scottish Office) about the full costs of this project (ie the construction costs plus dependent costs). It was unnecessary and wrong not to disclose the estimated full costs once they were available.
- There should have been much greater transparency in the cost reporting arrangements for this project. Reporting systems were unsystematic and did not adequately reflect the political dimension of this project.
- Bearing in mind the exceptional and high profile nature of the project, we consider that the Accountable Officer at the Scottish Office should have been given information on cost estimates from the earliest stages. If that information was not forthcoming, then he - as the Accountable Officer - could have done more to seek it out. The evidence led the Committee to believe that Mr Russell was semi-detached from the process.
- The risk assessment policies which were in operation prior to the agreement of a cost plan were clearly insufficient and at odds with HM Treasury guidance. It is alarming that such fundamental variances in positions should exist on this matter.
- The forecast construction costs of the Holyrood project increased from £62 million to £108 million after the transfer of client responsibility from the First Minister to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body in June 1999. As a result of the quality of the evidence given, we are not in a position to say conclusively when the underlying causes of the increased costs projected in the late summer of 1999 first arose. However we are persuaded that the redesign of the chamber that the SPCB instructed in June 1999 did not alter the forecast construction costs greatly although it did have a significant impact on the overall progress of the scheme. To our knowledge, no other fundamental changes were instructed by the SPCB in the

period from handover to August 1999, when the risk of greatly increased costs was first identified.

- We do not have confidence in the former Accountable Officer's view that the project, when transferred in June 1999, was clearly sustainable within the budget set.
- There should have been an independent review of the state of the project in June 1999. This would have provided more positive assurance about the prospects for completion on time and on budget and would have usefully highlighted the remaining risks and uncertainties to be faced.
- We disagree with the judgement taken by the Clerk and Chief Executive of the Scottish Parliament, once he became the Accountable Officer, not to inform the SPCB of the cost consultants' estimate in August 1999 that construction costs could reach £115 million. The SPCB was entitled to receive all relevant information and it is unacceptable that this information was withheld from that body.
- The Spencely report appears to have been a turning point for the project and there are several indicators of improved management now in place. The Holyrood Progress Group has added an element of independent scrutiny and political control that was not previously evident. It is noted that there is now a settled design and cost plan in place.
- We still have concerns about the impact of construction inflation and we have accepted the offer of the Clerk to the Parliament to report to us the details of the global figure showing the results of the major tenders and the extent to which it varies from the target in the cost plan. The trend will be much clearer following the release of that information.

Recommendations

- For future high profile projects we recommend that accountable officers within the Scottish Administration and other public bodies consider carefully their responsibilities to answer to Ministers and to the Parliament for the exercise of their functions. In the interests of good stewardship and public accountability they should, for any major project for which they are accountable, ensure that they are informed and can consider the consequences of the risk of increased costs becoming real as well as the likelihood of this occurring. Where the consequences may be so great as to undermine confidence in the viability or value for money of the project the accountable officer should consider informing Ministers, who may then inform the Parliament.
- The Scottish Executive should conduct a review of its policy on fee incentivisation with a view not only to maximising value for money but also achieving best value.
- The Scottish Executive should act to clarify the application of Treasury guidance on risk assessment and tackle the problematic yet critical issue of how risk assessment can be achieved in a robust manner but in a way which does not encourage cost inflation. As part of this review, we suggest that Ministers may wish to consider guidelines under which accountable officers present monitoring reports to them. We recommend that the Scottish Executive considers the issues pertaining to public reporting and overall public expenditure planning. We consider that the type of questions which need to be addressed include defining the circumstances where risk assessment figures should - as a matter of course - be reported to the Parliament, and hence made public.
- For future major capital projects we recommend that the Executive, and other public bodies in Scotland, consider the appointment of independent scrutineers to reinforce project monitoring at critical stages.

Background notes

The committee's full report is available on the Parliament's website or can be purchased from outlets of the Stationery Office.

[Report by Audit Committee](#)

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Public to Benefit From New Parliament Building Visitor Centre

"The Scottish people... I can envisage the moment where they will be absolutely in love with this building."

- Benedetta Tagliabue on the Holyrood design

Many visitors wander round the hoardings at Holyrood to view construction work on the new Parliament building. But from today (Monday) they now have a modern, hi-tech Visitor Centre to provide information and images on the historic project.

Situated across Holyrood Road from the busy construction site – and ideally placed between Our Dynamic Earth and Holyrood Palace, two of Edinburgh's top visitor attractions – the new facility tells the story of the most important building to be constructed in Scotland for 300 years.

Commenting on the innovative, free admission facility, Holyrood Progress Group convenor Lewis Macdonald MSP said:

"This tremendous new Visitor Centre explains the ideas behind the design of the Parliament and tells the history of its development. Importantly, it offers everyone the chance to become familiar with a building which belongs to the people of Scotland as much as it does to today's MSPs.

"As well as having a range of interactive exhibits, touch screen displays and architectural models, the Visitor Centre includes a video presentation with up-to-date computer graphics of how the building will look. There are also contributions from many of the key players who have been involved in the Parliament project. And fittingly, the video pays tribute to the late Enric Miralles, who died in July."

Enric's wife, Benedetta Tagliabue, one of the three remaining partners in the EMBT/RMJM Design Team, speaks passionately about the project. In the video she says:

"I do think it [the project] is one of the most extraordinary things that Enric ever designed, and I still think it's a fantastic project. I really have a great passion and a great wish to see it completed.

"The origin of this project is a kind of desire to see this part of the city becoming something special, transforming and becoming fantastic – even better than it was before.

"I'd love to say to the Scottish people that they maybe don't know now, but I can envisage the moment where they will be absolutely in love with this building."

The Visitor Centre charts the history of the Holyrood Project from the selection of the site through the design competition, and the development of the design from concept stage through to final scheme design. A 'Time Line' summarises the project using key dates and events, with some of the small finds from the on-site archaeological investigations also on display.

The specially-commissioned video about the Project will feature prominently in the Visitor Centre. When Parliament is in session, visitors will also be able to watch proceedings from the Chamber live on screen.

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Media Preview: Holyrood Visitor Centre Opens on Monday

Video preview shows late architect's wife talk passionately about 'fantastic project'

The wife of the late Holyrood Building architect Enric Miralles has described the construction of the new Parliament as "one of the most extraordinary things that Enric ever designed ... a fantastic project."

Benedetta Tagliabue, one of the three remaining partners in the EMBT/RMJM Design Team, makes her exclusive comments in a video presentation, part of an innovative new Visitor Centre which will open to the public on Monday.

The official opening of the Centre takes place on Monday evening but media are invited to a special preview on Monday morning (1030 hours). The convener of the Holyrood Progress Group, Lewis Macdonald MSP, will be on hand to introduce the new facility.

Media will be given an exclusive screening of the 10 minute video which contains further comments from Ms Tagliabue along with contributions from many others involved in the Project. It also contains a number of new, computer generated images of how various aspects of the new building will look.

Beta copies of the video will be available for broadcasters and a selection of stills from the video will be available for print media in hard-copy form and electronically from our website.

The New Parliament Visitor Centre - located in a popular tourist spot between Our Dynamic Earth and Holyrood Palace - will be open, free of charge, to the public from 10am until 4pm Monday to Saturday.

It charts the history of the Holyrood Project from the selection of the site through the design competition, and the development of the design from concept stage through to final scheme design. A 'Time Line' summarises the project using key dates and events, with some of the small finds from the on-site archaeological investigations also on display.

Using a variety of media, including architectural models, plans and touch-screen information kiosks, visitors will be able to view and interact with the latest computer generated images produced by the Design Team. The specially-commissioned video about the Project will be shown, and when Parliament is in session, visitors will be able to watch proceedings from the Chamber live on screen.

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Corporate Body Welcome Auditor's Report on Holyrood Project

Chairman of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Sir David Steel today welcomed publication of the Auditor General for Scotland's report on the Holyrood Project. Sir David said:

"The Auditor General's report is a forward looking report which makes a useful and instructive contribution towards ensuring that this historic project is managed to a successful conclusion.

"The report recognises the complexity of the task that lay before us and gives credit for the 'great deal of work' already done. Importantly, the Auditor General's report affirms that the Scottish Parliament will have a distinctive, high quality building of historic significance, at a cost which he confirms is comparable with other major public buildings. I welcome this endorsement of the project.

"In no sense can it be said that the project was spiralling or haemorrhaging money. While it became apparent that construction costs would rise significantly, the fact of the matter is that only relatively small amounts of money were spent prior to Parliament's approval of the revised design and budget.

"Only after this endorsement do you start to see major items of expenditure and tender contracts being let. The cost increases can be fully accounted for – as indeed the Auditor General's report does.

"The Corporate Body inherited a building which required a fundamental redesign. This included a change to the shape of the chamber and significantly more space. This detailed process meant that the final approved design of the Parliament was a significant improvement.

"As soon as our design team had produced a satisfactory revision of the design by March 2000, we asked John Spencely to audit the project. Spencely's independent assessment endorsed our proposals for a £195 million building, and on that basis we sought Parliament's approval to proceed.

"Robert Black's report offers sound, constructive advice on the future management of the Holyrood Project. In particular, we have already accepted his recommendation for independent assessment in the composition of the Holyrood Progress Group. This has been in place since June 2000."

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Holyrood Progress Group Welcomes New Leadership of Holyrood Project

Alan Ezzi has been appointed by the Scottish Parliament as the new Project Director of the Holyrood building project.

Welcoming the announcement, Lewis Macdonald Convener of the Holyrood Progress Group said:

"The Spencely report recommended a strengthening of the management and oversight of the Holyrood Project. The Parliament's first response to this was the establishment of the Progress Group. Its second was an internal reorganisation of the Project Team and the appointment of a new Project Director. I am delighted to welcome Alan Ezzi to that role.

"Alan is no stranger to high-profile projects and we are impressed by his enthusiasm and understanding of the task ahead. He joins a committed project team and we look forward to working with him.

"We also wish to take this opportunity to confirm that, at a Design Team level, Benedetta Tagliabue Miralles, Brian Stewart and Mick Duncan are jointly in charge of the project following the untimely death of Enric Miralles.

"It is abundantly clear that the vision of the Parliament was deeply held and understood by all the members of the partnership. I am confident that they will continue to work together – as they have done in the past – to deliver an outstanding Parliament building."

Background notes

Alan Ezzi, aged 52, is currently Capital Projects Director at Lothian University Hospitals NHS Trust where his responsibilities include oversight of the New Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh. He has previously held a number of positions in project management both in this country and abroad.

Mr Ezzi will take up appointment in early November 2000.

The post of Project Director was advertised following the end of the former Project Director's secondment from the Scottish Executive.

The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body has a contract with EMBT-RMJM Ltd. as architect of the new Parliament building at Holyrood. The continuing obligation to carry out the commission rests with the company. That obligation on the Architect, being a company, has not altered with the demise of Enric Miralles.

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Parliament Welcomes Statement of Commitment to Building Project

Today's statement of commitment to the Scottish Parliament Project (see below) was welcomed by the Presiding Officer Sir David Steel and the Convener of the Progress Group, Lewis Macdonald MSP.

Commenting on the statement by Brian Stewart and Mick Duncan of EMBT-RMJM, Mr Macdonald said,

"I unreservedly welcome this statement from the design team. No-one can be left in any doubt about the strength of the resolve both in Barcelona and in Edinburgh to press on with the Parliament project.

"It is abundantly clear that the vision of the Parliament was deeply held and understood by all the members of the Team. I have the utmost confidence that they have the talent and commitment to work together now to deliver that vision."

Sir David Steel echoed these sentiments and added:

"Having watched the design team collaborate over the past year I am confident that they will continue to work together to deliver an outstanding Parliament building. The death of Enric Miralles is a blow but it is one which the team is strong enough to absorb. They have our full support for the work which lies ahead."

The statement by Brian Stewart and Mick Duncan read as follows:

"The Scottish partners in EMBT-RMJM have been deeply saddened by the death of Enric Miralles. He was not only a collaborator but had also become a good friend and his loss is felt keenly on both counts.

In common with Enric, his wife Benedetta and their close family and friends in Barcelona, we believed that he was on the road to recovery following what had been judged to be successful surgery in America earlier this year. His sudden death was a complete shock to us all.

While the personal tragedy is clearly at the forefront of our minds, we recognise that there is understandable concern to know what effect Enric's death will have on the Scottish Parliament Project. We have spent the past two days in Barcelona in discussions with Benedetta Tagliabue, Enric's widow and the fourth member of the partnership and with her EMBT colleagues.

All three of us and our teams in Barcelona and Edinburgh are unwavering in our commitment to completing the Parliament building. As has been explained, Enric was working with us on the project right up to the end of last week and there is ample testimony to his close involvement in the Stage D scheme design which was recently agreed by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.

All four of us were passionately proud of our design as it had evolved over the past two years. That evolution was a process in which we have all participated and the current design is the expression of a strong joint venture. Enric expressed this philosophy most eloquently in an interview in October 1999 when he said:

"However personal a building is, it is always built by ten, maybe twenty, maybe thirty people. It is impossible for a building to be the result of direct personal action. The process embeds itself in everyone's work. When you see one of my old buildings like the archery range or Alicante, I don't think of them as things I have built. They are familiar to me but I did not do them myself."

Such was the closeness of our collaboration that the remaining partners are totally confident that we can and will translate the current designs into reality.

Those of us who worked closely with Enric can testify to his commitment and enthusiasm for the Parliament. He greatly enjoyed working firstly with Donald Dewar and then with Sir David Steel both of whom he numbered among his good friends. Together they explored the ideas and symbols associated with a Parliament, concepts which were fundamental to the development of the design. Enric was committed to delivering a truly memorable Parliament for Scotland. To drive forward its completion and delivery following his death is exactly what he would have expected of us."

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Professional Edge to Holyrood Progress Group

The final make-up of the Holyrood Progress Group (HPG) was revealed today with the announcement that two professional members will be adding their expertise to the new body.

The HPG Convener Lewis Macdonald MSP introduced quantity surveyor David Manson and architect Andrew Wright as the new members of the group. They will join Linda Fabiani MSP, Tavish Scott MSP; Robert Gordon from the Scottish Executive, and John Gibbons, the Executive's Chief Architect.

Commenting on the new appointments, Mr Macdonald said:

"This is the most exciting building project to take place in Scotland for many years. I am delighted that these experts are joining us in making it happen. We have a good team and we are looking forward to working together."

David Manson is a quantity surveyor and former member of the Scottish Construction Industry Group. He is also a former chairman of the Quantity Surveyors Division of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors in Scotland and a partner in the Glasgow Surveying and Project Management firm of Doig and Smith.

Andrew Wright is a current member of the Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland and the Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland. He is a Past President of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland. He is a partner in the architectural practice of Law Dunbar Nasmith and is based in Forres.

Robert Gordon is the Head of the Executive Secretariat at the Scottish Executive and was the Executive's nominee to the Group.

John Gibbons is Chief Architect at the Scottish Executive and architectural adviser to the SPCB. He is currently acting as interim Project Director.

The Holyrood Progress Group will hold its first full business meeting on Tuesday 4 July. It is anticipated that a media facility will be arranged to co-incide with this meeting. Further details will follow.

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Holyrood Progress Group Welcomes Parliament Scheme Design Agreement

Members of the Holyrood Progress Group have welcomed the finalising of the scheme design for the new Parliament.

Following yesterday's meeting of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB) at which the proposals were unanimously approved, convener of the new group, Lewis Macdonald MSP said:

"The Progress Group has spent the past fortnight examining the scheme design proposals closely with our professional advisers. We are now confident that these proposals meet the needs of the Parliament and we have also been reassured that they meet the cost and time limits laid down by Parliament. This is a very significant step forward.

"Now the Progress Group can get down to business and ensure the building is delivered and the cost and time limits are observed. We will also be looking carefully at the next stage in the development of the detailed design and consulting our colleagues and others on end-user issues.

"We want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of the Design Team in fulfilling the requirements of this crucial stage and we look forward to working with them closely as we move forward to the next phase."

Background

The development of the scheme design from the outline proposals is a major stage in the project, referred to as 'Stage D' in the RIBA Plan of Work. It forms both the key response to the brief and the foundation for the detailed design and technical solutions that will follow.

During this stage the client ensures that the design team has completed any studies that were needed to confirm the viability of the project and has clarified the client's requirements. At the end of the stage the design team present a design report to the client and obtain approval before proceeding to develop the detailed design, with its associated working details and specifications.

The 'Stage D' report should:

- demonstrate how the brief is being met;
- if necessary, show where any changes should be made;
- identify any time constraints; and
- include a full report on budget costs.

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Holyrood Progress Group 'Eager to Get on With the Job'

Members of the Holyrood Progress Group (HPG) met with the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB) today to discuss detailed arrangements for the handover of day-to-day management of the Holyrood Project.

Following the meeting the convener of the new group - which includes Linda Fabiani MSP and Tavish Scott MSP - Lewis Macdonald MSP said:

"The coming fortnight is a transitional period during which we will be working with the SPCB to sign off the amended plans and to identify the professional members of the Progress Group. From that point on we will be off and running.

"The Progress Group will be a top priority for all of us as individuals. We are each making the time available to get to grips with the project with a view to delivering on time and to cost. I speak for all the members when I say that we are eager to get down to work as soon as possible.

"We have had a constructive meeting with the SPCB who share our desire to press on with the new arrangements. It is clear that the HPG will work as the principal advisory body in fulfilling the terms of the resolution of the Parliament, namely the finalising of the design; completion of the project by the end of 2002 within the agreed budget and keeping everyone informed about progress.

"We will be working closely with our professional advisers to identify our immediate priorities, but I certainly anticipate that early discussions will centre on how best to keep colleagues and the public informed about progress from now on."

Remit of the Progress Group

The HPG is the principal advisory body to both the SPCB and the Clerk in the management of the Holyrood Building Project. It will be a source of political liaison with the Parliament and provide high-level authoritative advice on technical, professional and administrative issues relating to the project. Within the legal framework described above it will work with the Corporate Body to fulfil the terms of the resolution of the Parliament, namely to finalise the design; to complete the project by the end of 2002 within a budget of £195m; and to report on progress. In particular, its remit will include:

- To advise the Clerk on all issues relating to the progress of the project;
- To monitor and report periodically to SPCB on progress towards achieving the targets prescribed by the Parliament;
- To be available for consultation by the Clerk and the SPCB on any aspect of the project;

- To promote good communications with MSPs and the public and to optimise presentation of the project;
- To make recommendations on matters within its remit;
- To take formal minutes of its meetings and to inform SPCB of key decisions/recommendations.

The SPCB recognises that although the HPG can function only in an advisory and consultative capacity its advice will strongly influence the management of the project, and, apart from in exceptional circumstances, should be followed by the Clerk. Any fundamental disagreements between the SPCB and HPG will be reported to the Parliament.

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Holyrood Building Project Update Published Today

Progressing Group MSPs nominated - 50 per-cent increase in Public Gallery seating

The fifth report of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB) into the Holyrood Building Project was published today. It updates MSPs and the public on recent developments relating to the £195 million project.

This includes naming the MSPs nominated to serve on the Holyrood Progressing Committee and revealing that – in response to representations about seating provision in the public gallery – the original plan for 170 seats had been increased to at least 250.

The text of the report is reproduced below:

(Please Note - A book of drawings etc based on the recent planning application have been produced by the Design Team. This document, which also provides a description of the changes is available to the media by contacting the Media Relations Office on the number at the foot of this release)

FIFTH REPORT TO MEMBERS ON THE HOLYROOD BUILDING PROJECT

Progress on Building

The Corporate Body last reported to Members in relation to the Holyrood Building Project in March. That report (the 4th such document) accompanied the report by John Spencely.

Since then, Members will wish to be aware that work has continued apace on the project, in line with the requirements of the Parliament's resolution of April 5 to be completed by the end of 2002 within a total budget of £195 million.

Visitors to the site will be aware that significant progress has been achieved 'above ground' at the west end of the site, where the MSP block is being constructed. Less obvious is the work 'below ground' where the substructure has been largely completed, providing storage, plant and car parking space.

As highlighted in the SPCB's 4th Report, we accepted John Spencely's recommendation that the brief for the project should be finalised quickly.

The amended plans – known as Stage D proposals - are scheduled to be finalised and signed off later this month. This will allow the Project to continue without any unnecessary delay.

In terms of planning, an amendment to the Notice of Proposed Development was lodged with the City of Edinburgh Council at the end of April relating changes in the design since planning consent was originally granted in September 1999.

A number of detailed drawings based on this application have been produced by the Design Team and a document featuring these drawings and providing a description of the changes is available to the media by contacting the Media Relations Office on the number at the foot of this release.

A new scale model of the building is currently with the City Council as part of the planning process and when it is returned in the summer will be displayed to Members and the general public in the Parliament's Visitor Centre.

Seating in the Public Gallery

We are pleased to report that seating provision in the Public Gallery at Holyrood has been increased from 170 spaces to more than 250.

The Corporate Body had received representations about the limited seating in the public gallery, which under the original brief provided seating for 170 people – less than that currently in the Assembly Hall but in line with provision in other modern Parliament buildings.

In the light of comments from Members and the significant level of visitor demand which we have experienced in the Assembly Hall the seating capacity will now be increased to over 250 seats plus 6 wheelchair spaces on a flat platform with suitable access and 30 seats for the media.

We are also still actively engaged in increasing the public seating further by the limited use of bench style seating for school parties and other groups of visitors which would have the added benefit of allowing them to move in and out more freely and without disrupting anyone else seated in the gallery.

There has also been an improvement to sightlines in the gallery compared to our existing Chamber. Additionally, public seating in the Committee Rooms will, at 200 spaces, be far superior to the limited facilities we have on George IV Bridge.

Any additional costs associated with the increase in the seating in the public gallery will be contained within the current budget.

Progressing Group

Lewis Macdonald, Tavish Scott and Linda Fabiani have been nominated to serve as members of the Holyrood Progressing Group. The names of professional experts will be announced as soon as possible. They will take over the day to day oversight of the whole project. We will meet together next week to discuss the arrangements.

The Corporate Body will retain legal responsibility for the Project which is laid on us by Section 21 of the Scotland Act 1998 and the Transfer of Property Etc. (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body) Order 1999.

Structure of the Holyrood Building Project Team

The responsibilities of the previous Project Sponsor have been split between a Project Director and a Financial Controller, and a new post of secretary to the Holyrood Progress Group has been established.

The post of a new Project Director has been advertised. He/she will be responsible, as the client's representative, for the day to day management of the project and securing the delivery of the building within budget and timescale.

Interim arrangements are in place to ensure the effective management of the project until the new director is appointed.

Members will wish to know that Barbara Doig has completed her secondment to the Parliament and has returned to a post at the Scottish Executive. We wish to place on record our appreciation of all her hard work during her term as project sponsor.

Enric Miralles

In view of many misleading reports about Mr Miralles, the SPCB wishes to inform Members that he recently underwent a serious operation at a specialist unit in Texas for the removal of a brain tumour.

During Mr Miralles' convalescence some of his work colleagues have visited him and he has been in regular touch with his colleagues in Edinburgh. The Presiding Officer has spoken to him on the telephone.

His unfortunate illness, however, does not affect the building programme as the burden of work has switched from Barcelona to Edinburgh as foreshadowed in Mr Spencely's report. The entire project is currently on target for both budget and timing in accordance with the resolution of the Parliament on April 5.

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Parliament Bosses Thank Holyrood Project Director

Barbara Doig, Director of the Holyrood Building Project is today completing her secondment to the Scottish Parliament and returning to a post in the Scottish Executive.

Commenting on Mrs Doig's return, Sir David Steel, Chairman of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, said:

"The members of the Parliamentary Corporation wish to place on record our appreciation of all Barbara Doig's hard work during her term as Project Director.

"Having brought the project this far and noting the endorsement of Parliament for the project to continue, Barbara Doig felt it appropriate to seek a return to the Executive. This was done entirely at her own request.

"Contrary to some recent press articles, the Spencely Report into the Holyrood Building Project did not criticise Mrs Doig. We wish to make clear our support for her and we wish her well on her return to the Scottish Executive."

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Audit Committee Ask Audit Scotland to Investigate Holyrood Project

The Parliament's powerful Audit Committee this afternoon asked Audit Scotland to consider carrying out a special investigation into the management of the Holyrood construction project.

Committee Convener Andrew Welsh MSP has initiated proceedings by writing to Robert Black, the Auditor General for Scotland, asking if he will carry out the investigation and report before the summer recess.

The text of the letter to Mr Black is as follows:

"As you will be aware from recent press reports, the Corporate Body of the Scottish Parliament has appointed an independent expert to carry out an assessment of the current position of the Holyrood project. I understand that in broad terms, the review will consider the current cost estimate and likely completion date of the project.

Nonetheless, the Audit Committee is of the view that this is a matter which might merit investigation by Audit Scotland. I am therefore writing to ask if you would consider a special investigation into the management of the construction project covering, inter alia, original cost estimates, projected escalation of these costs to completion of the project and the implications of such increases for the value for money of the project. In view of current public and political interest, I would very much appreciate it if a report could be produced before the summer recess.

I should be grateful if you would let me know whether you would be willing to conduct an investigation into these issues and the timescale on which you might be able to report back to the Parliament.

I look forward to hearing from you."

Should Audit Scotland decide to report on this matter, Mr Welsh, who is also a member of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, would not participate in any ensuing inquiry by the Audit Committee.

Background note

The office of Auditor General for Scotland was established by the Scotland Act. He is statutorily independent and the decision whether or not to carry out any Inquiry rests with him alone.

However, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000, in determining whether or not to carry out any value for money examination the Auditor General is required to take into account any proposals made by the Parliament.

Andrew Welsh can be contacted on 0131 348 5690.

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Independent Expert Appointed to Carry Out Holyrood Project Assessment

Past President of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS), John Spencely, has been appointed to carry out the review the Holyrood project which was announced yesterday to Parliament.

He has been appointed by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB) to carry out the assessment of the current position of the project and advise the SPCB ahead of their report to MSPs next month. He was nominated by RIAS.

Edinburgh-based Mr Spencely (60) who retired as Chairman of Reiach and Hall Architects last year, is Chairman of the Buildings Investigation Centre and Visiting Professor at Napier University. He will shortly be appointing two independent advisers to assist him.

In broad terms, the review will consider the current cost estimate and likely completion date of the project. The detailed terms of reference are:

- To review the current estimates of cost and time to delivery and occupation;
- To review the value for money of the project;
- To review and compare the advantages of alternative contractual methods;
- To review the effect on cost and delivery of a reduced specification;
- To review the effectiveness of communications between the Corporate Body and the Project Team and to make recommendations.

The Parliament's Presiding Officer Sir David Steel, who chairs the SPCB, welcomed Mr Spencely's appointment. He said:

"John Spencely brings a wealth of relevant independent experience to this appointment. It is important that he and his team are now able to complete their task unhindered. Their independent assessment will enable the SPCB to give Members as robust information as is possible on cost and programme.

"I must make it clear there are no blank cheques for the new Parliament. What we require is robust information about costs and timescales and establishing these are the key tasks for the team."

Sir David also took the opportunity to set the record straight on a number of inaccurate claims which have been made recently.

"Work at Holyrood has not been halted. Indeed construction work continues apace as anyone visiting the site would see. The substructure of the MSP block at the west end of the site is nearly complete – including concrete pouring – and the superstructure contract was awarded recently on schedule. Fabrication of the MSP structure is being carried out off site as planned and on-programme.

"There is also a lot of activity in relation to Queensberry House. As we have said time and again, the condition of this building is a lot poorer than initially thought and stabilisation measures are being carried out.

"It has been alleged that the Holyrood site is too small. That is nonsense. The site is comfortably big enough to cater for all the accommodation needs now demanded by the Parliament.

"The SPCB took full control of the project in June last year. Substantial progress has been made since then, and we have acted in accordance with the wishes of MSPs, for example in relation to the shape of the debating chamber. We have also been asked to respond to requirements for extra office space for staff.

"We have done all this whilst taking great care to consider how best to meet the Parliament's property requirements and manage the many and varied pressures on the new building, its cost and programme. We have also made improvements to the design enabling more effective use of space.

"When we receive this report we will place before MSPs – and make available to the public – a complete and detailed report which will enable Members to have a full debate on the Parliament project as soon as possible."

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Corporate Body 'Concerned About Inaccurate Claims' About Holyrood

The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB) held a routine meeting today (Tuesday) and noted with concern recent and on-going inaccurate assertions about the Holyrood Project.

The SPCB rejected the following claims:

That costs of the project have been revised to £200 million;

That the Presiding Officer held 'crisis talks' with Party Managers recently over alleged delays to the Project;

That the project has been delayed 'until possibly 2003'; and

That facilities like stairs and lifts have only been added at the last minute.

All of these, and other claims about the site being too small and plans not being sent to the planning authorities are false.

Sir David Steel, Presiding Officer of the Parliament and Chairman of the SPCB, said:

"The Corporate Body has agreed not to get involved in this wild speculation on a day-by-day basis and will instead proceed with overseeing the major project, with one of the next actions being the completion of a promised report to MSPs, for issue by the end of February. This report will be made publicly available in the same way as the previous three."

This report, the fourth such update for Members, will highlight progress on the Holyrood building and look at some specific issues relating to the building's contents.

The SPCB take the view that the third report to Members, published late last year, promised that a feasibility study on design work would be featured in their next report and that at this stage no useful purpose would be served by commenting on each and every misleading rumour.

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Holyrood 'Delay' – No Foundation to Story Says Steel

Presiding Officer Sir David Steel was this morning "baffled" by media reports suggesting that the completion date for the Holyrood project had slipped to 2002 or even 2003.

The stories even quoted Sir David as saying at a 'crisis meeting': "I don't think I'll see the new building."

Commenting on the stories, Sir David said:

"I can state categorically that no such meeting has been held to discuss delays in the Holyrood project, not have I made any such remarks.

"We are still on schedule to complete the Holyrood project towards the end of 2001. I am totally baffled by this story which is entirely without foundation.

"We will be producing a further interim report for MSPs on progress at Holyrood which will be issued by the end of the month."

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