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CONTENTS

	Col.
PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME	1
FINANCE AND THE CONSTITUTION	1
Independence Referendum (Assessment of Support)	1
Local Government Budgets (South Scotland)	3
Glasgow City Council (Budget Allocations Assessment)	5
Digital Strategy	8
Digital Scotland (Investment).....	8
ECONOMY, JOBS AND FAIR WORK	10
Coatbridge and Chryston (Jobs and Economy)	10
Music Industry (Economic Contribution).....	12
Economic Support (Dingwall)	13
Consumer Confidence	14
Scottish Investment Bank (Meetings)	18
EDUCATION	19
<i>Motion moved—[Tavish Scott].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[John Swinney].</i>	
Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD).....	19
The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney).....	22
Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	25
Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab)	27
Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD)	29
Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP).....	31
Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con)	32
Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab)	34
Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)	36
Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)	37
Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab).....	39
Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con).....	41
John Swinney	43
Tavish Scott	45
SINO FORTONE AND CHINA RAILWAY NO 3 ENGINEERING GROUP MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING	47
<i>Motion moved—[Willie Rennie].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Keith Brown].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Dean Lockhart].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Jackie Baillie].</i>	
Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)	47
The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown)	50
Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	53
Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)	55
Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD).....	57
Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	59
Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con)	61
Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab)	62
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)	64
John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP).....	65
Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab)	67
Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con).....	69
Keith Brown	70
Willie Rennie.....	72
BUSINESS MOTION	75
<i>Motion moved—[Joe FitzPatrick]—and agreed to.</i>	
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTIONS	77
<i>Motions moved—[Joe FitzPatrick].</i>	
DECISION TIME	78

ROTARY CLUBS (CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE AWARDS)	88
<i>Motion debated—[John Lamont].</i>	
John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)	88
Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)	91
Rachael Hamilton (South Scotland) (Con)	93
Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab)	94
Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)	96
Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con)	97
The Minister for International Development and Europe (Dr Alasdair Allan)	99

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 29 March 2017

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 14:00]

Portfolio Question Time

Finance and the Constitution

Independence Referendum (Assessment of Support)

1. **Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has carried out of public support for a second referendum on Scotland leaving the United Kingdom. (S5O-00828)

The Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe (Michael Russell): The current Scottish Government was elected last year with the largest ever constituency vote since the beginning of devolution on a clear manifesto pledge that

“the Scottish Parliament should have the right to hold another referendum ... if there is a significant and material change in the circumstances that prevailed in 2014, such as Scotland being taken out of the EU against our will.”

That specific “material change” is now taking place. We believe that the people of Scotland should have the final choice over their future once the terms of Brexit are clear.

Lewis Macdonald: I take it from that answer that the Government has carried out no assessment of public attitudes on this matter since the Brexit referendum on 23 June. Has the minister considered the opinion poll evidence, which Professor John Curtice summed up in a blog on 2 March? That evidence is that Scottish voters are overwhelmingly opposed to a second independence referendum before the final outcome of Brexit negotiations is clear. Does the minister agree that the priority for the Scottish Government for the next two years should be to protect Scotland's vital interests in those negotiations and to secure the repatriation of powers over devolved areas from Brussels to Holyrood rather than to promote a further referendum that the Scottish people do not want?

Michael Russell: Those two objectives are not mutually contradictory, of course. Indeed, this very day, I received a letter from David Davis that looks forward to working together on some of the issues that lie ahead. Lewis Macdonald is wrong about that matter and about the opinion poll evidence, which shows a split of about 50:50 in those circumstances. Very clear indications of public

support are often available in the opinion polls. I draw attention to the opinion polls that show that the Labour Party is in third place in Scotland. That is an indication of the public support for Lewis Macdonald, his point of view and the Labour Party.

Lewis Macdonald: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I assume that Mr Russell has inadvertently confused my question about support for holding a referendum with a different question about support for independence. Will he correct the record at this point?

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): That is not a point of order, Mr Macdonald, but I am sure that the point has been noted by the minister.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Does the minister think that it is a little bit hypocritical for both of the main Opposition parties to tell us to spend parliamentary time discussing health and education and then, at the very first opportunity, to use portfolio question time to talk about independence?

Michael Russell: That is an acute point, as ever, from Gillian Martin, and I have to make the point, of course, that the Scottish Government will—[Laughter.]

The Presiding Officer: It is all very amusing, but I call for order, please.

Michael Russell: It is quite clear that some people are easily amused.

The Government uses its parliamentary time to further the interests of Scotland in many different ways. That is shown by its record of achievement over the past 10 years, which is considerable and growing. I know that that makes Opposition parties uncomfortable, but the Scottish National Party has been efficient and effective in government, and it will continue to be so. The leader of the Opposition—whoever the Opposition is these days; there seems to be only a united Opposition—and, indeed, the Prime Minister should get back to their day jobs and start to concentrate on the real issues that face Scotland, such as being dragged out of Europe against our will.

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): If I may ask a supplementary question about the constitution in portfolio question time on the constitution, it has been said that

“To propose another referendum in the next parliament without strong evidence that a significant number of those who voted No have changed their minds would be wrong and we won't do it”;

and,

“If I, the SNP, those who believe in independence, can't shift opinion from September 2014, we won't earn the right to ask the question again”.

Both of those statements are direct quotations from the First Minister. Was she wrong? If she was not wrong, why have ministers changed their minds?

Michael Russell: The member knows very well that the manifesto on which the First Minister, I and everyone on this side of the chamber stood—I read it out in my original answer, to which the member was clearly not listening—says:

“the Scottish Parliament should have the right to hold another referendum ... if there is a significant and material change in the circumstances that prevailed in 2014 such as Scotland being taken out of the EU against our will.”

The member has clearly seen what has been taking place today. He has clearly seen the attitude of the Prime Minister. In all those circumstances, that manifesto commitment has been fulfilled and will be followed.

Secondly, I make the point that it is a dangerous position for any Opposition to believe that it can veto a majority in the Parliament that is based on a manifesto commitment. That is not democracy, and those who choose to depart from that cannot, by definition, be democrats.

Local Government Budgets (South Scotland)

2. Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to concerns that reductions to local government budgets will have a negative impact on local services in South Scotland. (S5O-00829)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): Scotland’s local authorities will have an extra £383 million to support local services in 2017-18, which represents an increase of 3.7 per cent compared to this year. That should have a positive impact on local services all over Scotland, including South Scotland.

Claudia Beamish: The sorts of cuts to our services that are coming from the Scottish Government are mind-boggling, frankly. The Scottish Government has cut hundreds of millions of pounds from local services since 2011. What assessment has been done of the impact on third sector organisations whose funding has been reduced as a result of budget cuts? In my region, the Lanarkshire carers centre has approached me about its funding position.

The Minister for Employability and Training (Jamie Hepburn): It has approached me too, and North Lanarkshire Council is freezing the council tax when it has been asking to increase it.

Claudia Beamish: The carers centre has great concerns, actually. Perhaps the minister would like to hear the question.

The Presiding Officer: Order. Minister, speak through the chair, please.

Claudia Beamish: NHS Lanarkshire, which is a contributor to the centre, has confirmed to me that it is unable to continue to top up the centre’s funding, as it has previously done. Funding for 2016-17 will be honoured, but the situation beyond that is uncertain. In addition, as Scottish Government money in relation to carers is announced on an annual basis, long-term planning is challenging. Similar issues have been raised by Borders Voluntary Care Voice. What assessment has been done of the impact of Scottish Government cuts on local services, and particularly on the third sector?

Derek Mackay: I tried to make the point to Claudia Beamish, and for the benefit of the chamber, too, that we have actually increased the resources for local services. I have checked all the local authorities in the South Scotland region in relation to the point that I have made about local services, which includes the issue of health and social care integration. Each one of the local authorities that I have examined will have an increase in its total funding—I say that separating out health and social care.

I see that Claudia Beamish is shaking her head, so I will give the figures for each council. Dumfries and Galloway Council will have an increase of 4.1 per cent; East Ayrshire Council will have an increase of 4.9 per cent; East Lothian Council will have an increase of 5.3 per cent; Midlothian Council will have an increase of 4.2 per cent; Scottish Borders Council will have an increase of 5 per cent; South Ayrshire Council will have an increase of 3.8 per cent; and South Lanarkshire Council will have an increase of 2.7 per cent.

How those resources are spent is a matter for local choice. However, the budget has approved specific sums to tackle, for example, attainment. In relation to the third sector, I have gone out of my way to try to protect third sector functions and budgets through the course of the budget.

Of course, there will be analysis of the impacts of our spending decisions. However, I ask members to reflect once again on the fact that we have increased—with the help of the support and co-operation of the Greens—the total resource that is available to local government in what was quite a challenging settlement.

I acknowledge the partnership arrangements that we have. No local authority rejected the financial settlement that I gave to it. I worked constructively with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which recognised the movement on the part of the Government. Alongside all that, local authorities had the ability to raise the council tax by up to 3 per cent. Some chose to do that and

others did not. Perhaps Claudia Beamish could ask some local authorities why they did not choose to increase the council tax in order to invest in exactly the kind of services that Claudia Beamish says she is concerned about.

Rachael Hamilton (South Scotland) (Con): The south of Scotland is crying out for funds to improve its roads. Recently, I wrote to Scottish Borders Council and was told:

“there is a long list of identified projects, many of which are classed as high priority ... Unfortunately, over recent years, the priorities from other sectors ... have meant a significant downturn in the number of road improvements being undertaken.”

The situation has been exacerbated by reducing revenue budgets and a deteriorating asset base that leads to an increasingly high percentage of investment going on maintaining the existing asset rather than on improvements. When will the Scottish Government adequately support our local authorities to improve our local roads?

Derek Mackay: I point out to the member that the Government increased the provision in the Scottish budget for roads maintenance while the Conservatives voted against the budget, so it is rich for the Conservatives to say that. It is at least with some credibility—maybe not in the case of every local authority—that the Labour Party can argue that it wanted extra investment in public services, because it proposed to put up all levels of tax, including basic-rate tax. That is not a choice that we made, but it is at least with some credibility that the Labour Party can say that it wanted to invest those increased taxes in more public services. However, the Conservatives proposed tax cuts for the rich—the richest individuals and businesses and the richest in terms of house values and the land and buildings transaction tax. Therefore the Tories cannot speak with any credibility when they call for extra resources to be put into local services, especially when they opposed the increased budgets that the Government proposed—particularly for maintenance and investment, which Rachael Hamilton asked me about.

Glasgow City Council (Budget Allocations Assessment)

3. **Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the local government budget allocation to Glasgow City Council since 2007. (S5O-00830)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): All of Scotland's 32 local authorities have received their fair formula share of the funds that are provided through the annual local government finance settlement, as agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Glasgow City Council will continue to

receive the highest level of local government funding per head of all wholly mainland Scottish councils in 2017-18.

Johann Lamont: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response. The cabinet secretary is, of course, aware that his Government has cut Glasgow's budget by £377 million since 2007. Does he recognise the important work of Glasgow's Labour council in doing its best to protect front-line services, leading the way in supporting childcare and apprenticeships, and making Glasgow a leading centre for business, tourism and sport? Does the cabinet secretary further acknowledge the critical role of Glasgow to the economy of Scotland? In that circumstance, does he therefore regret the opportunities that are being lost, the families who are unsupported and the economy benefit that is being lost directly through his Government's choice? That is the price that is to be paid by every Glaswegian for the cabinet secretary's choice to cut, rather than to fund, services.

Derek Mackay: I will begin by acknowledging some of those points. Some of the actions that have been identified I welcome, as Glasgow City Council addresses key issues in the city. I would welcome any administration's focus on such issues. There are areas in which there has been good partnership working between the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council. I was also signatory, on behalf of the Government, to the Glasgow city region deal proposition. There are many areas on which we have been able to work in partnership with the council. We have not found agreement in every area, but we have in many areas together undertaken partnership and shared endeavour—not least in respect of deprivation, inequality and the need for further economic development and partnership.

It would be wrong to suggest that the overall spending power of Glasgow City Council has decreased. Again, as a consequence of the budget, Glasgow City Council's overall increase in spending power to support local authority services in 2017-18 will amount to more than £45 million, which is a 3.3 per cent increase. [*Interruption.*] I hear Johann Lamont complaining about the settlement, but I say gently that it is a matter for local authorities if they want to suggest changes to the distribution formula. I am open to discussion on that via the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

However, today is a day of exits, so I remind the Labour Party that Glasgow City Council's Labour administration walked away from COSLA. Surely it is in the interests of all the people of the city for the council to participate in COSLA, which negotiates with Government on matters including finance, the budget, the settlement and distribution

thereof. I therefore encourage the Labour Party to think very deeply about its position, as we approach local government elections, and about local government being—to be frank—stronger if all 32 local authorities are willing to engage with us in partnership.

Once again, I say that Glasgow City Council's settlement has increased, that we have strong partnership working on areas of joint endeavour, and that the city region deal is all about economic development. I encourage the Labour Party to think about its engagement with COSLA going forward, so that we can have further discussions about distribution.

Finally, I say again that, just as the Tories opposed increased investment in roads maintenance and then called for more, the Labour Party asked for increased investment in attainment—which is really important for education and tackling the attainment gap in Glasgow—but voted against it when push came to shove at stage 3 of the Budget (Scotland) Bill.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): When I look at the per capita budget allocations, and take away the three island authorities, I see that the three—[*Interruption.*] I will carry on if Johann Lamont will allow me to.

I see that the three authorities with the greatest shares per head are Glasgow City Council, Inverclyde Council and West Dunbartonshire Council. That strikes me as being a good thing, because the authorities in the west of Scotland have great needs. Will the Government commit to continuing to fund such needy authorities well, as it has been doing?

Derek Mackay: It is important to recognise that there are different elements of local government funding, which is complex in nature. Fundamentally, the needs-based assessment is a feature that has been agreed with local government through COSLA. It distributes funding on the basis of need, which is why local authorities such as Glasgow are at the upper end in terms of resource. It is important to tackle need and ensure that level of redistribution.

The Labour Party is not consistent on the issue. In Aberdeen City Council, the Labour finance convener, Willie Young, says that Aberdeen has been ripped off and that its money has been sent to places like Glasgow. In Glasgow, the Labour Party says that its money has been sent elsewhere. In truth, the formula is, although it may not be perfect, the best that we have. I am willing to engage with local authorities, but I believe in using a needs-based assessment to ensure that resources are directed on the basis of need.

Digital Strategy

4. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how its national digital strategy will impact on the Motherwell and Wishaw constituency. (S5O-00831)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): The document "Realising Scotland's full potential in a digital world: A Digital Strategy for Scotland", which was published on 22 March, is a strategy for all of Scotland that aims to build a vibrant, inclusive and outward-looking nation with a successful digital economy, comprehensive access to connectivity and an education system that is focused on digital skills.

Clare Adamson: Motherwell and Wishaw faces unique post-industrial challenges. However, we have a wonderful college in New College Lanarkshire, and we have one of the biggest brownfield sites in Europe. What investment potential does the cabinet secretary envisage for Motherwell and Wishaw under the new strategy?

Derek Mackay: The digital strategy covers a number of areas including skills, connectivity and the potential for growth in employment. On a physical level, we have ambitious targets for meeting the connectivity challenge. In areas of deprivation and dereliction, the digital strategy should tie up with other strategies and initiatives, including the vacant and derelict land fund, to bring together the softer interventions that we are making through actual physical structure. There are resources available to North Lanarkshire Council to enable it to invest in those sites, and I commend the work that New College Lanarkshire is doing. Education, the potential that exists with regard to skills, and the new funding that was announced as part of the strategy should all come together to help areas such as Clare Adamson's constituency.

Digital Scotland (Investment)

5. Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what the impact will be of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution's recent announcement of £15.6 million being reinvested back into the digital Scotland programme. (S5O-00832)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): An additional 17,000 homes and businesses across 27 local authorities will benefit from fibre broadband as a result of the £15.6 million gainshare investment that is being made through the digital Scotland contract that covers the rest-of-Scotland region. That is in addition to the £2.2 million of gainshare funding that was announced last year by

Highlands and Islands Enterprise, which will deliver fibre broadband connectivity to an additional 1,800 premises across the Highlands and Islands.

Graeme Dey: When announcing the additional funding, the cabinet secretary said that it would focus in particular on maximising the number of premises that have access to speeds of greater than 24 megabits per second, with funding being targeted at areas—including Angus—that have the lowest-speed coverage. Are there any specific plans as yet for my Angus South constituency? Is the Scottish Government prepared to work in collaboration with Angus Council on that?

Derek Mackay: Yes—I believe that there is potential to do that. We have set ambitious targets that include 100 per cent coverage of homes and businesses by 2021, and we are very much on track to achieve the milestones within that target.

The particular initiative to which Graeme Dey referred should benefit an additional 500 premises in Angus, and it should ensure that we roll out superfast broadband to meet that particular challenge. It will increase superfast broadband coverage in Angus to 91.2 per cent by the end of the digital Scotland roll-out, after which we will move to the much more ambitious target of 100 per cent coverage.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Can the cabinet secretary clarify a point about the additional funding? Is not it the case that the money is actually the result of a clawback clause in the contract with BT, rather than its being new additional money that is being provided by the Scottish Government?

Derek Mackay: I did not say that it was Scottish Government money. I made it clear in my original announcement that it is part of the contract with BT, and that where BT has been involved in an area and hits certain targets, money is provided and then released, and that there is then dialogue about how it will be distributed.

I am highlighting how that is benefiting communities that otherwise would not have that connectivity. I welcome the approach and the intervention, and I have tried to raise awareness of it. I appreciate members asking questions about it, and I encourage members who are interested to look at the website www.scotlandsuperfast.com. To put the matter in context, I say that that is just one of our many interventions to meet our target of 100 per cent coverage by the end of this session of Parliament. I fully accept that new technologies and different ways of procuring services will be needed in order to reach that ambitious target—and it is just one target.

I have never pretended that the money was Scottish Government money, although there is

Scottish Government involvement in the contracts, as I am happy to confirm to Jamie Greene.

Economy, Jobs and Fair Work

Coatbridge and Chryston (Jobs and Economy)

1. **Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to boost the economy and create jobs in Coatbridge and Chryston. (S5O-00838)

The Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy (Paul Wheelhouse): Our enterprise and skills agencies are working to deliver sustainable and inclusive economic growth across Scotland, including in towns such as Coatbridge and Chryston, by promoting Scotland as an attractive place for business and innovation and through our substantial investment in infrastructure, regeneration, skills, internationalisation and business support. The Scottish Investment Bank has also directly supported eight investment projects in North Lanarkshire, while Scottish Enterprise currently account-manages 167 companies in the local authority area, and BioCity at Newhouse was designated as a life sciences enterprise area in April 2016.

The competitiveness of Coatbridge and Chryston as a business location will be enhanced by the £500 million upgrade to the M8, M73 and M74, which will reduce traffic congestion. The Scottish Government has also delivered a highly competitive business environment with a reduced poundage on business rates. Premises with a rateable value under £15,000 will now qualify for 100 per cent business rates relief through the small business bonus policy, and those with a rateable value between £15,000 and £18,000 will benefit from a 25 per cent discount on rates.

Fulton MacGregor: Coatbridge town centre has suffered multiple setbacks recently, including the closure of two banks, the proposed closure of the Department for Work and Pensions processing unit and major fires in some of the empty buildings. People are rightly concerned about the future of their main street. Having hosted a well-attended public meeting recently, I am in the process of establishing a steering group, involving residents and businesses, to create and implement a plan to improve the town centre. Would the minister be willing to meet the steering group to discuss how the Scottish Government can support the regeneration of Coatbridge town centre and create more jobs locally?

Paul Wheelhouse: On the latter point, I would certainly be happy to meet Mr MacGregor's constituents to discuss how we can support regeneration in the community. I commend the

efforts that I have seen elsewhere in Scotland where similar initiatives are taking a grass-roots approach to developing a vision for communities and have been very successful not only in developing a plan that the local authority can take forward but in helping to support subsequent funding applications for good causes to the lottery and other bodies to support local projects. I will provide Mr MacGregor with further detail about those initiatives.

The Government has also taken forward the town centre first principle with local government, trying to encourage public authorities, when making investment decisions or securing private sector investment in town centres, to identify whether the town centre is the best location first, and to look at peripheral areas only thereafter, to try to drive more footfall into our town centres and to support local businesses. I am happy to meet the member and his constituents and to provide further details.

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):

The minister will be aware of representations that I have made to save the jobs at the Tannoy factory in Coatbridge. The GMB union, the workforce and Scottish Enterprise have been actively working to secure those jobs for Lanarkshire, but too often they have been kept in the dark by the owner of the factory, based in the Philippines. Despite their valiant efforts, many of the workers are facing redundancy at the end of this week. Even at this stage, I ask the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work himself to make personal, direct contact with and representations to the owner of the company in Manila.

Paul Wheelhouse: I assure Mr Leonard that I, on behalf of the Government, have been actively involved in looking at the Tannoy case, as has the cabinet secretary. Obviously we are very concerned about the loss of any jobs. I can reassure the member that the company has been engaging with the Government and with Scottish Enterprise on proposals to develop new capacity in relation to a specific project, the details of which I am not at liberty to disclose, and that we are hopeful that some jobs will be retained in the area.

I can investigate the matter of communication with the trade union. Obviously, that is not entirely within our gift, but we will certainly encourage the company, if we can, to engage with the trade union. Clearly, we want to ensure that those who are affected are kept informed of what is happening.

I reassure the member that encouraging discussions are taking place on retaining some employment in the area.

Music Industry (Economic Contribution)

2. Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): I refer members to my entry in the register of interests and to my professional background in music.

To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the economic contribution of the music industry. (S5O-00839)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown):

The music industry in Scotland is a key part of our thriving creative industries sector. Scottish Government growth sector statistics show that, in 2014, the music industry in Scotland had a turnover of £27.9 million and a gross value added of £15.5 million. Moreover, UK Music's report "Wish You Were Here 2016" showed that music festivals and live concerts attracted 928,000 music tourists to Scotland in 2015. Those visitors generated £295 million for the local economy and helped to sustain 3,230 full-time jobs across the nation.

Tom Arthur: The overwhelming majority of musicians are self-employed, and the emerging phenomena of the precariat and the gig economy are conditions long known to people operating in music. In light of the cabinet secretary's answer, does he agree that it is vital that we continue to nurture musical talent in Scotland and to provide the support and mentoring that are needed to encourage young people to pursue a career in the growing and ever more exciting music industries?

Keith Brown: I agree with the member. It is true that we have to make more of the contribution that the creative arts make to the economy—we need to increase that contribution and recognise the current contribution. It is important that we support people to learn music and to pursue musical careers. We do that through the youth music initiative, which since 2007 has received funding of £109 million and is delivered by Creative Scotland. The youth music initiative provides a range of music-making opportunities for young people of all ages. It gives them a chance to try new music-making activities in their area to begin their musical journey or to build on their existing experiences. Earlier this month, the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs spoke at a Scottish music industry day at the University of Glasgow to promote career opportunities in the industry.

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): We should be rightly proud of new and emerging talent such as my constituents the Ayoub Sisters, who were recently nominated for the Young Scot award and who will perform in Parliament later this year. They have some great songs, and they are well worth a listen. What steps is the Scottish Government taking to support a broad range of

musical talent and genres in order to help to grow the economy?

Keith Brown: I look forward to the performance that the member refers to, which I am sure will be excellent. On other support that the Scottish Government can provide, we have the regularly funded music portfolio. Our thinking has been framed by a 10-year plan, the music sector review and the music companion piece. I agree with Maurice Golden that there is some huge talent that we should support. I have to say that, in my household, I actively support a budding musician—and he takes a lot of support; although, to be fair, he also works part time at Asda to help to sustain himself.

Ireland has a very vibrant live music scene and, in recent years, I have seen—I do not know whether Maurice Golden agrees—much more of that taking place in Scotland. It is to be encouraged, and perhaps the best way that we can encourage it is by each of us attending events and supporting the artists who are involved in them.

Economic Support (Dingwall)

3. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support Dingwall's economy. (S5O-00840)

The Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy (Paul Wheelhouse): Dingwall is in Highlands and Islands Enterprise's inner Moray Firth area and businesses and communities in Dingwall can access the full range of support from Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Since 2013, HIE has invested around £1 million in companies in the Dingwall area to support 219 full-time-equivalent jobs and to safeguard 106 full-time-equivalent jobs in a range of sectors. Over the same period, HIE has also provided a £2.46 million research and development grant and £90,000 of SMART: Scotland support for Inside Biometrics, which is a Dingwall-based company.

David Stewart: The minister will be familiar with the award-winning Inside Biometrics facility in Dingwall, which is developing its innovative KEYA Smart product, which will be life changing for people with diabetes. The company is looking to expand production capacity, which might create a substantial number of new jobs, and it is looking for further advice, guidance and assistance from the Scottish Government for that major and significant expansion. Will the minister agree to meet me to help to bring the project to fruition?

Paul Wheelhouse: I recognise that Dave Stewart takes a strong interest in this issue. Inside Biometrics is account-managed by HIE, which is closely engaged with it and has provided financial

and advisory assistance to support it to grow its business. I recognise that Inside Biometrics is an excellent, award-winning company. HIE has already provided it with a £2.5 million research and development grant, which I mentioned in my original answer.

I am aware that Inside Biometrics has plans to expand its operations in Scotland. Indeed, I was contacted by Selly Saini, the owner, following the life sciences awards to which Dave Stewart referred, at which the company was an award winner. Officials at HIE remain closely engaged with the company to explore every option and to help to support its growth.

I visited the company last year and was hugely impressed by its technology, and I have accepted an invitation to meet its representatives in the near future to discuss how the Scottish Government can continue to support the company with its development plans. I am, of course, happy to meet Mr Stewart to discuss anything that he suggests we can help the company with.

Consumer Confidence

4. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the latest *Fraser of Allander Institute Economic Commentary*, which warns that indicators of Scottish consumer confidence are more negative than for the United Kingdom as whole. (S5O-00841)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown): The latest *Fraser of Allander Institute Economic Commentary* provides a timely update on the Scottish economy. The report shows that, as Brian Whittle said, consumer sentiment has weakened in Scotland, but it has also weakened in the United Kingdom since the European Union referendum. The findings highlight the risks to Scotland's economic outlook following the EU referendum as heightened uncertainty and rising inflation are forecast to weigh on household incomes and consumption. By far the biggest threat to Scotland's economy is a hard Brexit, which, according to the Fraser of Allander institute, threatens to cost our economy around £11 billion a year by 2030 and to cost the country 80,000 jobs over a decade.

Brian Whittle: Perhaps the cabinet secretary can explain why the Scottish economy is lagging behind the UK economy on a range of economic indicators. We have lower employment, higher inactivity, lower consumer confidence, lower annual pay growth, lower productivity and lower growth in gross domestic product. Why is Scotland falling behind under the party that claimed to be "stronger for Scotland"? I wonder whether

something is distracting the Government from the day job.

Keith Brown: The member will of course be aware of the impact of the price of oil on the Scottish economy and the fact that it would have a disproportionate effect on the Scottish economy as opposed to the wider UK economy. The member asked what my response is. My response is to go out and try to attract more jobs, because that is very important for the Scottish economy. I saw that 300 new jobs in digital solutions and risk management were announced today by Genpact for its new European centre in Glasgow following a contribution by Scottish Enterprise. It is extremely important that we try to attract more such jobs; indeed, that is part of my job title.

The member mentioned different economic indicators. There are other indicators that tell a different story. We in Scotland have the second-lowest level of youth unemployment in Europe; only Germany has a better outcome. We also have very good numbers on female employment, and the same unemployment rate, despite the oil impact, as the rest of the UK. That shows real progress.

The member mentioned confidence. Today's edition of *The Times* mentions the Scottish technology industry survey, in which 78 per cent of respondents said that they were optimistic or very optimistic for this year. We should try, difficult though it might be, to accentuate the positive and see the things that we are doing well. Of course we should note the challenges, but we should try to do more of what we are doing well. That is the best response that we can have to the economic challenges that Brexit presents for us.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Being part of the UK has not done much for Scottish national self-confidence over generations. Can the cabinet secretary tell us what the impact of the alleged union dividend has been on Scotland, given that since 1900 we have had the lowest rate of population growth of any country on earth?

Keith Brown: I would tell Kenneth Gibson that if I was able to identify a union dividend, but I am afraid that I cannot see a union dividend. More than that, there is the price of the union, if we think about the huge recession that we went through, which was caused by failures of the banking and financial system under the UK. Of course there were global elements to that, but there is no question but that the regulation of the banking system was inept and it was crucial that the UK looked after that.

The consequences of that recession for Scotland, by which I mean individuals and companies in Scotland, were huge. The UK has to

accept its share of the responsibility, as I am accepting the Scottish Government's share of the responsibility for the condition of the Scottish economy. After all, it was a Conservative MSP who said that the UK still holds all the major levers of the Scottish economy, so the UK has to take responsibility for that.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Is it not the truth that the same Fraser of Allander report noted that

"a second independence referendum is likely to act as a further headwind for many businesses and potential investors"?

Is it not also the truth that the UK market is worth four times that of Europe to the Scottish economy, so the impact of independence has the potential to be much greater than that of leaving the European Union?

Keith Brown: It is true to say that the Fraser of Allander institute identifies and quantifies the effects of a hard Brexit as the loss of £11 billion a year by 2030 and of 80,000 jobs over a decade. It is interesting that Jackie Baillie decided not to mention that when the report that she cites, and the institute that she refers to, says that those will be the impacts. There has not been a word from Labour about those huge impacts on the Scottish economy.

On the recession that we have just come through, it was the Scottish Government's actions in investing in public infrastructure works that helped to mitigate the worst effects and helped us to recover more quickly. [*Interruption.*]

Jackie Baillie: He is choking on his words.

Keith Brown: Those actions are important to sustaining the economy and it would be useful if members could acknowledge that. It would also be useful if the Labour Party could acknowledge the serious effect of Brexit—£11 billion a year and 80,000 jobs—which it has failed to do on many occasions up to now.

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The cabinet secretary asked about the union dividend. I point him to the Scottish Government's own Government expenditure and revenue Scotland numbers that last year showed a £15 billion union dividend.

The Fraser of Allander institute highlights that, since the SNP came to power, Scotland's economy has grown by an average of 0.7 per cent per year during the past 10 years. That is less than a third of Scotland's long-term economic growth. That underperformance is nothing to do with oil and nothing to do with Brexit. Does the cabinet secretary think that such underperformance over 10 years of SNP Government is acceptable?

Keith Brown: I can imagine businesses outwith the chamber listening to someone who is talking about economics say that the rate of growth in Scotland has got nothing to do with oil. They must wonder how we even start to respond to a point like that.

It is quite obvious to me that there is not the basic understanding of the Scottish economy implicit in the question. It is also true that I did not raise the issue of the union dividend; somebody else raised it and I responded to that point in the way that I did.

It is important to make sure that we do the right things through the economy. Martin Gilbert of Aberdeen Asset Management said that we should look through the fog to see where the opportunities are.

I will just mention the 300 new jobs that are coming to Glasgow, which received not a word of joy or congratulations from any of the Opposition parties. They have also not said a word about the increased confidence in the Scottish technology industry survey. Those are important for Scotland. As I have said many times, we have to recognise the challenges of productivity, internationalisation and exports. I recognise those challenges and am trying to take action to address them. Surely some of the Opposition parties could acknowledge the strengths of the Scottish economy, even if it is just to encourage them, so that we can all get the benefit of increased economy activity in Scotland.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): The minister said that he could not identify any union dividend. Could he identify a union dividend—in his case in the Royal Marines and, in my case, the Army—for the protection of the whole of the United Kingdom together? Does he accept that there is a union dividend in our approach to defence?

The Presiding Officer: It is sort of related, cabinet secretary. Briefly, please.

Keith Brown: Once again, I just cannot understand the lack of information or experience. If we look at the defence footprint of Scotland in recent years—

Mike Rumbles: Oh for goodness' sake!

Keith Brown: Well, maybe Mr Rumbles does not think that it is relevant. We have seen regiments on front-line service being merged, people being handed their P45 when they are on active service, basing cuts, and reducing numbers in Scotland. The member would know that if he talked to the local authorities that are trying to wrestle with the latest round of basing cuts, such as those at Fort George, or Glencorse, a barracks that has had millions of pounds of investment but is going to be closed.

The lack of knowledge in Mike Rumbles's question shows that he has no understanding of defence activities in Scotland. Before he asks another question like that, perhaps he should do a bit of homework.

Scottish Investment Bank (Meetings)

5. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met representatives of the Scottish Investment Bank. (S5O-00842)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown): The Scottish Investment Bank is a division of Scottish Enterprise; officials from the Scottish Government met representatives of the Scottish Investment Bank on Monday 20 March.

Richard Leonard: What guidance has the Scottish Government issued to the Scottish Investment Bank on requirements that need to be satisfied for lending to companies or taking out equity stakes in companies regarding its stated goal of inclusive growth, and thus good trade union and industrial relations, the standard of employment contracts and the gender pay gap?

Keith Brown: The Scottish Investment Bank, as I have said, is an arm of Scottish Enterprise and it is fully apprised of the ambitions and standards that the Scottish Government would like to see encouraged. The Scottish Investment Bank has invested £52.4 million in 133 Scottish companies, helped companies to leverage £277 million of private investment and invested £12.2 million in 13 small and medium-sized enterprises through the Scottish loan fund, which is available to start-up, early stage and expanding businesses. The aims of the Scottish Government on the gender pay gap and inclusive growth, where everybody gets a chance to share in the opportunities for growth, are embedded in the work that Scottish Enterprise does and it is well aware of the Scottish Government's standards and conditions in those regards.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. I apologise to the members who waited patiently and whom we did not reach.

Education

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-04920, in the name of Tavish Scott, on education. I call Tavish Scott to speak to and move the motion.

14:41

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): On Monday, I witnessed Whiteness primary school's senior pupils performing "Henry VIII". The play has a lot to say about politics at the moment, but I particularly enjoyed the blood-curdling decapitations that took place in the classroom. I am not proposing decapitation today, but surgery is certainly needed, both on the role that central Government plays in our schools and on how exams are set and marked in Scotland.

This week, the Government's main education quango helped that analysis enormously. In "Quality and improvement in Scottish education 2012-2016", Education Scotland's chief executive published his interpretation of his own inspectors' reports into Scotland's schools. For the record, Dr Bill Maxwell is both Her Majesty's chief inspector of education in Scotland and the chief executive of Education Scotland. He retires in June, and I wish him well. The chief executive is responsible both for what happens in the classroom and for inspecting the quality of teaching in our schools. Those two roles have not previously been and cannot continue to be in the same organisation. If ever a report graphically illustrated that Education Scotland's policy and guidance functions and school inspections functions must be separated, it is the one that I have just mentioned.

Dr Maxwell's introduction to the report could have been written by Mr Swinney, because it is a restatement of Government policy, not a hard-nosed assessment of Scottish education with recommendations for all involved. By any objective assessment, four out of the six curriculum for excellence implementation years were not well managed—2012 to 2016, on which the report is based. However, the report makes no observations about the roles of Education Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority or the curriculum for excellence management board. Instead, there is a tendency to blame schools for any failings. I will cite just three examples.

The report states:

"Evidence gathered from inspection shows that schools now need to put in place better arrangements for assessing and tracking children's progress, including having a shared understanding of standards within Curriculum for Excellence levels."

Whose fault is it that schools'

"understanding of standards within Curriculum for Excellence levels"

has been problematic? The answer is given in the 2015 report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective", which specifically questions the

"complexity of the layers and dimensions"

of CFE. CFE has four capacities, 12 attributes, 24 capabilities and 1,820 experiences and outcomes statements, with 1,488 in the eight curriculum areas and 332 in the three interdisciplinary areas. I could go on, especially as Education Scotland admits to presiding over the accrual of more than 20,000 pages of advice to schools. Why did the inspectorate not question the effectiveness of that mountain of paper? Was it because those 20,000 pages were produced by the same office? Before the Deputy First Minister says that it is all fixed, a teacher pointed out to me at the weekend that, last week, Education Scotland published its six new curriculum benchmarks to add to the two drafts on literacy and numeracy that it issued last August. That brings the new, streamlined CFE advice that has been issued to schools just this session to 348 pages.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): I am grateful to Mr Scott for giving way. As he goes through the information about benchmarks, would he acknowledge that the number of pages that he has cited relates to the entire curriculum experience of a young person from the age of five to the age of 16 and that it covers various stages across various curricular areas, not all of which will be relevant to the needs and perspectives of every teacher in our schools?

Tavish Scott: Yes. There is much in that argument, although I suspect that it would be inordinately helpful to teachers the length and breadth of the country if the Deputy First Minister, rather than making the argument that he has just given, could give clarity on the numbers. I suspect that that would be welcomed by the Parliament's Education and Skills Committee as well. However, the broad point that he makes is, of course, correct.

Those 348 pages have been issued by Education Scotland to provide that clarity. The new benchmarks in one of the areas that are the responsibility of all teachers—health and wellbeing—are published in three categories, and there are 70 pages of new reading in that single curriculum area alone. Mr Swinney has often chided me, saying that information is not for all teachers, but in this case it is for all teachers. My question to the Government and Education Scotland is how that lives up to the claim that

“Benchmarks draw together and streamline a wide range of previous assessment guidance”.

Perhaps the Deputy First Minister could tell the Parliament how many of the 20,000 pages have now gone.

Secondly, the report says:

“Improving the consistency of learning and teaching needs to be a key priority for all secondary schools.”

Some teachers put it to me the other day that Education Scotland has something of a brass neck saying that, given its inability to ensure curricular consistency in the implementation of curriculum for excellence.

The final point that I want to pick up from the report is about this statement:

“Towards the end of the period covered by this report”—
that is, in 2016—

“we found that many schools were indeed re-visiting the design of their S1 to S3 curriculum in the light of the experience they had gained of designing new senior phase programmes.”

That so many schools are revisiting the design is in large part due to the vague and contradictory advice that they feel they have received from Education Scotland.

The chief inspector said on Monday that schools do not

“yet provide all children and young people with consistently high-quality learning”.

His report warns that, unless that is tackled,

“we will not achieve the national ambition of excellence and equity”.

However, which Government quango has been responsible for implementing curriculum for excellence since 2011? The answer is Education Scotland, which is led, of course, by the chief inspector. His final, main recommendation is on better implementation of curriculum for excellence. Which education body has been charged by four successive Scottish National Party education cabinet secretaries with implementing CFE? The answer is Education Scotland.

I suggest to the Government that the Deputy First Minister’s governance review needs to start right here, with his own quango. We must separate the implementation of curriculum for excellence from evaluation, put policy and guidance into the ministerial office and have intelligent educationists working constructively with schools, encouraging school clusters and the essential links to colleges and universities with vocational courses. We must make the inspection of education quite separate. The inspectorate must be an independent body of people who look objectively at the success of the education system

and the schools within it, rather than looking over their shoulders because their Education Scotland colleagues are responsible for the guidance that they are assessing.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority also needs reform. Its effectiveness was questioned by the Parliament’s Education and Skills Committee because of the inherent contradiction in the multivarious roles that it is asked to carry out. It is an arm of Government; a regulator; a monopoly provider of a service for which it charges money; and, indeed, an exporter.

As CFE has been introduced, the Scottish Qualifications Authority has been responsible for new exams. That work should have been done in conjunction with Education Scotland and other parts of Government. Why was the inevitable impact on teachers, pupils and schools not closely monitored? The reality is that there has been an unsustainable increase in teacher workload, a breakdown in trust between the SQA and teachers and a threat of industrial action.

The SQA’s chief executive, Janet Brown, told the committee that the SQA finds communication

“an extremely complicated and challenging area”.—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee, 23 November 2016; c 6.*]

Teachers cite SQA websites and online resources as being barely adequate, and difficult and time consuming to navigate. Communication is not difficult. Of course it needs concerted action and attention, but we suggest that, if the SQA cannot get that right, the Deputy First Minister must again step in. Sorting that out must be a priority.

The case for real reform is not just about schools and local councils, as the Government has so far described it. It is about the education secretary’s own quangos. He should reform the SQA and split up Education Scotland’s functions—functions that it should be fulfilling for the benefit of education, for schools and for pupils.

I move,

That the Parliament understands that the Scottish Government’s next steps document on educational governance is to be published in June 2017 and, in advance of this, calls for the inspection and policy functions of Education Scotland to be separated and for a reorganisation of the SQA in recognition of the concerns expressed by the teaching profession to the Education and Skills Committee.

14:50

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): The debate must be set in the context of our determination to improve performance in Scottish education. We have a good education system, with hard-working and committed

teachers and early years practitioners who are working day in, day out to support children to succeed. It serves neither the country nor our children and young people to ignore the many positive achievements that are being made.

More young people are achieving excellent exam results than ever before. The number of advanced higher passes last year reached an all-time high, and the number of higher passes surpassed 150,000 for only the second time. The choices that the Government has made mean that more children and young people from deprived communities now leave school with at least one higher or the equivalent. The proportion of young people who leave school for positive destinations reached a record high in 2015-16.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): Does the Deputy First Minister recognise the work of the Institute for Public Policy Research, which has discussed positive destinations and said that we should be cautious about using them as a signifier of excellence, as some destinations might be low-paid, zero-hours jobs with little prospect in terms of education? Will he undertake to consider what the positive destinations actually are for many young people in our communities?

John Swinney: The positive destinations analysis has been a reasonably long-term assessment of trends that has spanned many years. In the labour market strategy, we are concentrating on the issues that Johann Lamont appropriately raises to improve the quality of employment that is available in our society.

The progress in education that I have talked about is not an accident. At the heart of much of that progress are contributions from a range of organisations, including strong contributions from Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority. As the OECD said in its review of the implementation of curriculum for excellence,

“Education Scotland has been a linchpin in providing the guidance resources and quality assurance”

that have been necessary for that change. Education Scotland has also been instrumental in taking forward my recent priorities of decluttering the curriculum and reducing teacher workload to ensure that our teachers are free to focus on providing valuable experiences for young people.

The arguments for establishing Education Scotland’s dual functions—of inspection and of curriculum and pedagogical advice—were designed to ensure that the findings of inspection directly influence improvement in curriculum development and vice versa. That rationale is important to consider today.

Education Scotland also has a role in providing effective challenge to and scrutiny of the

Government. Its publication earlier this week, which Tavish Scott quoted extensively, is clear in highlighting strengths but also areas for improvement in Scottish education. As members will be aware, Dr Bill Maxwell, HM chief inspector of education in Scotland, has announced his forthcoming retirement, and I record my thanks for the significant contribution that he has made to the leadership and improvement of education in Scotland.

As a national education body, the SQA is properly within the scope of the governance review, as is Education Scotland. I put that point on the record to contradict what Tavish Scott said. Education Scotland and the SQA are both within the scope of the governance review that the Scottish Government is undertaking. Having said that, I have always made it clear that a national examinations body will be needed.

The SQA has played a key role in the implementation of curriculum for excellence. It focuses on ensuring that our young people can rely on the agency to give authoritative and accredited qualifications, which are essential for assessing the performance of young people.

I acknowledge that the performance of all agencies must be effective. I recognise that the SQA has made errors in the past, and I have made it clear to the SQA chief executive that there is no room for error. The SQA accepts that and is addressing that.

Although we must promote the whole record and the positives of organisations, as I reiterated in my comments a moment ago, the Government is undertaking a governance review that takes into its scope the SQA and Education Scotland. That is why the Government amendment proposes that we seriously consider the issues that the Lib Dems are raising in today’s debate. The governance review is looking at the role of all the constituent parts of our education system in delivering excellence and equity in education. It is focused on promoting and developing the crucial culture of collaboration across the education system that will help to drive innovation in Scottish education.

I do not want to pre-empt that consideration today. However, I assure Parliament that the governance review will focus on ensuring that the Scottish Government and other national bodies provide the right support to deliver the empowered and flexible education system that we want. It will support the empowerment of schools and assist in building their capacity to drive improvement and raise the attainment and achievement of children and young people.

Our reforms will be based on the best evidence of what will work and what will empower schools. There will not be a top-down, prescriptive

approach. Our reforms will put children and young people at the heart of Scottish education. We will bring forward changes that are focused on processes, not structures, and which are flexible and able to adapt to change. We will build capacity, encourage open dialogue and stakeholder involvement, take a whole-system approach and harness evidence and research to inform policy.

The Government is committed to taking forward a reform agenda that ensures that young people are well supported in their education in every locality of the country. That involves looking at the roles of our education bodies, which is why the Government amendment is set out in the way that it is. The approach must take into account the actions and involvement of all aspects of the education system, so that young people in Scotland have a guarantee that they are operating in a world-class education system.

I move amendment S5M-04920.1, to insert after “calls for”:

“serious consideration to be given to”.

14:56

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): John Swinney made it abundantly clear last week, in responding to a poor inspection report on Argyll and Bute Council, that when it comes to improving standards in Scottish schools,

“the status quo is not an option.”

We whole-heartedly agree with him not just on new measures to reform school governance and tackle the attainment gap, such as standardised testing, but on reforming the education agencies that are in charge of our schools, the justification for which has been an important focus for the Parliament’s Education and Skills Committee.

John Swinney made an interesting speech on 2 June 2016, not long after he became Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, when he described teachers as experiencing a “mystery tour” with regard to the curriculum for excellence. Again, he was right, but let us deal with exactly what that has meant for teachers, why it has happened and, most important, what should be done about it.

In doing so, I refer to the compelling evidence that is out there. There is the formal evidence that the Education and Skills Committee heard over several weeks. I know that John Swinney does not think that that evidence was particularly balanced, but it must be considered in the context of other evidence that we took in private, the evidence in the OECD report, the evidence from Education Scotland’s report this week and the surveys that the teaching unions and professional associations

have undertaken, which, taken together, speaks on behalf of many teachers and headteachers across Scotland.

What is alarming—I hope that it is the reason for John Swinney’s recent comments—is that the principal education agencies, which are the SQA and Education Scotland, have allowed the current situation to develop over the past decade, despite all the warnings from the profession. It was a bit rich of Education Scotland to tell us earlier this week that urgent improvement to raise standards is required in five areas, given that the problems in at least four of the areas—and perhaps all five of them—have been created by the education agencies themselves. The problems have been created not by teachers or headteachers but by the very people who are employed by the Scottish Government to oversee the curriculum and the qualifications system.

It is exactly that failure that so frustrates teachers—just as they were frustrated by the accrual of 20,000 sheets of curriculum for excellence guidance, which Tavish Scott mentioned. Let us be clear: the curriculum for excellence was the first major reform of Scottish education to be driven and implemented by civil servants and the education agencies and not by teachers on the ground.

The committee made sharp criticism of Education Scotland; I will pick out three of the most serious concerns. The committee asked why the lines of accountability for decision making are unclear; we asked why there is an absence of a good base of data to assess the progress that has been made with curriculum for excellence; and we were concerned about the conflict of interest in Education Scotland’s role as developer of the curriculum and independent evaluator of its inspection, which I think has no comparable model in other countries.

When those points were put to Education Scotland, what did the committee get in return? We got a 10-page document in which there is no real acknowledgement of the problems or, more important, recommendations for change. Instead, we got sentences such as

“This cycle of improvement is acknowledged widely as the Scottish approach to improvement”—

I do not know what that means—and commitments to have

“a mythbusters campaign via social media”.

That is something that we have to address. We got an outline of the theoretical structures in Education Scotland, but we did not get an outline of what happens in practice, and we got an extraordinary defence of Education Scotland’s role as both judge and jury when it said that

“This status safeguards the independence of its inspection and review function”.

No—it does not, and I am sure that Johann Lamont will outline her exchanges with Education Scotland, which prove exactly why not.

At the time of the merger of Learning and Teaching Scotland and Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education—which, incidentally, was not voted on in committee or Parliament—some believed that it was partly a cost-cutting exercise. It seems that, as there are fewer inspections and fewer inspectors—many of whom were seconded last year to help in local authorities—that is a large part of the truth. It cannot be right that the cycle of school inspections is getting ever longer, notwithstanding the changes to inspection.

When the SQA was represented at committee in November last year, it faced strong criticism from teachers and some of the teachers professional associations that the exam structure was weak and not sufficiently well articulated with coursework and, in some cases, prelims. Concerns were expressed about some exams not being sufficiently rigorous, about grade-related criteria, about grade boundaries—especially the disparity across different subjects at advanced higher level—and about marking and the transparency of requests for marking reviews. All of us as MSPs have heard parents of exam candidates raise those issues. We heard concerns about whether the national 4 and national 5 exams are properly structured to meet the needs of a diverse range of pupils and about whether that qualification network is, in some ways, undermining subject choice.

To sum up, with hindsight, it is very clear indeed that Education Scotland and the SQA, via the management board, have not delivered sufficiently well alongside each other. We therefore have a problem with the implementation of curriculum for excellence, which we all agree is the right theme. On that basis, I support the motion in Tavish Scott’s name.

15:02

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Like Liz Smith, I have carefully studied Mr Swinney’s speech last week, in which he declared that

“the status quo is not an option”

in our schools. I agree. The status quo in our schools is too few teachers, too few support staff and class sizes that are far too big, and that cannot go on. The status quo in our school system is also two Government bodies—Education Scotland and the SQA—that are, at best, failing to deliver and, at worst, dysfunctional.

The cabinet secretary said that his governance review included Education Scotland and the SQA in its scope. That is absolutely true, although Tavish Scott is right that it is quite hard to find them in there. Let us look at what some of the respondents to the governance review had to say about them. The Educational Institute of Scotland said this about Education Scotland:

“The EIS has concerns ... over the increasingly politicised role of Education Scotland ... With the role of the Inspectorate having been brought closer to Government, questions remain about the independence of the inspection process and its relationship to government policy, and concerns have emerged more recently regarding the capacity of Education Scotland to provide sound, evidence-based advice to inform government policy.”

That is pretty damning. It is reflected too in the submission from the Royal Society of Edinburgh, which says,

“There is concern that Education Scotland’s role has become increasingly politicised, with the implication that it prioritises the needs of Government over those of schools and teachers”,

and,

“where Education Scotland carries out the development work and has responsibility for evaluating those developments ... Its independence as an evaluator needs to be questioned”.

That too is fairly damning but, as Tavish Scott pointed out, we can look to what Education Scotland itself says in its role as the schools inspectorate. In Bill Maxwell’s valedictory report this week, he points out that school provision for pupils is very variable, that 23 per cent of secondaries and 26 per cent of primaries have “important weaknesses”, or strengths that only just outweigh weaknesses. That is hardly a glowing report. As Mr Scott pointed out, it is a report on Bill Maxwell himself, because, as chief inspector, he reports on Education Scotland, of which he is, of course, the chief executive. I fear that he rather damns himself by his own faint praise. We must ask ourselves on what he bases his assessment, because at the weekend we also discovered that, last year, only one in 18 schools was inspected. One element of Education Scotland’s responsibility seems to be disappearing.

As for the SQA, the Education and Skills Committee has received strong evidence from teachers that they no longer trust our exam body. In one submission, the committee was told:

“I am afraid that my current experience of the SQA is almost entirely negative ... Documentation is highly complex, repetitive and difficult to access”.

There have been failures by the SQA in maths, geography and computer studies exams, to name but a few. The cabinet secretary spoke of the decluttering of assessments but, at the moment, the SQA is making rather a hash of the change

that has come about because of his decision to remove the unit assessments from national 4 and national 5. Let us not forget, either, the SQA's decision to push the cost of appeals on to schools and local authorities, which has led to a massive drop in the number of pupils who can benefit from appeals or re-marks. That is affecting pupils in the state sector disproportionately and unfairly.

It seems clear that reform is needed. With Education Scotland, the reform that is needed is obvious: it is the splitting of functions. With the SQA, the required reform is perhaps less clear, but the organisation has certainly suffered a loss of experienced staff, and there are questions to be answered about the balance of its income-generating work and the work that it does for the Scottish exam system. We need a review of the SQA, and we need the certainty of knowing that reform will take place.

Although I acknowledge that the Government's amendment takes seriously the issues that the Liberal Democrats have raised, it is not enough to say that reform will be given "serious consideration". The Parliament must commit itself to actual reform—Education Scotland must be split and things must be changed at the SQA to make it work—and that is why we will support the Liberal Democrat motion this evening.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): We move to the open debate. We are extremely tight for time, so there is no leeway at all on the time limit of four minutes.

15:07

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Last night, when I discussed the topic of the motion with my wife, who is a primary school teacher of 15 years' experience, she gave me an insight into the mild disdain with which Education Scotland is viewed by educationists at every level in the primary and secondary education sectors. The amassing of 20,000 pages of guidance is a source of derision in itself. Each iteration of the guidance forms the basis of a game of spot the difference in classrooms and staffrooms around the country. Each one is examined and digested by senior management teams at every level in our education sector before heads are scratched as teaching staff grapple with what revelation in the new guidance is different from the previous version. The strength of feeling in that regard was evidenced in last week's evidence to the Education and Skills Committee.

The policy function of Education Scotland belies the Government's attempts to centralise, to control and to avoid external scrutiny of the conduct of education in this country. "Leave us alone," has been the clarion call of teachers and unions at

every education hustings that I have been to in my political career. They say, "Allow the curriculum to bed in and let us get on with on it," but like a hyperactive lab technician, the Government—in tandem with Education Scotland—has sought to tweak and prod at the curriculum in the desperate hope that the next intervention might be the one to stem the slump in our programme for international student assessment scores and our widening attainment gap.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I hear teachers say, "Leave us alone—let the curriculum bed in," all the time. Does the member not agree that changing the governance structures of the educational bodies would be an example of interference and changing the situation for teachers on the ground, rather than leaving them alone?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Not when that is exactly the intervention that our teachers are asking for.

The most recent example of the Government's tendency has been the advent of national testing, which has been rejected roundly by teachers across the board, who feel that they will once again be forced to teach to the test.

Across the board, educationists agree that the inspection of our schools should be entirely disaggregated from the guidance-generating machinery of Education Scotland. How else can the inspection regime offer that all-important role as the independent critical friend to the stewardship of education in this country? In effect, what is happening right now is that the Scottish Government and Education Scotland are marking their own homework, and that has to stop.

Furthermore, if we are truly to reverse the worrying decline in education standards in this country, we must reform not just Education Scotland but the Scottish Qualifications Authority. All of us will remember the anxiety and stress that we endured when we sat life-qualifying exams in our teens, so we can only imagine the terror of the young people who sat last year's higher geography exam, which teachers described as the worst ever and as nothing like the specimen. It came hot on the heels of the worst higher maths exam in living memory just a couple of years previously. The most important thing about this is the impact on schools in deprived communities, where young people's resilience when sitting these very traumatic life-qualifying exams can take a real knock if the first question on the paper is on something that they have never been taught.

The repetition of such a situation, which has a clear and demonstrable impact on the mental health and wellbeing of young people at what is a critical crossroads in their lives, should serve as proof, if any were needed, that the structures and

governance of our qualifications system are in dire need of reform. Indeed, we saw that most recently in the roll-out of the unpopular national testing that I mentioned earlier.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must come to a close, please.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I will, Presiding Officer. This is symptomatic of the Government's approach of measurement, meddling and micromanagement, and I am therefore quite happy to support the motion in the name of my friend and colleague Tavish Scott and to ask Parliament to follow suit.

15:11

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): In my contribution, I will concentrate on the first part of the Liberal Democrat motion, which refers to inspections.

As a member of the Education and Skills Committee, I was interested in asking Education Scotland about the inspectorate when it appeared before us at the end of last year. In my mind, the main questions about inspections were about the workload and stress that they have traditionally resulted in, but we were assured by the current chief inspector, Alastair Delaney, that the method of inspections was changing, with more emphasis on support and advice on classroom practice and less of the sort of walking around with a clipboard and making judgments based on documentation and copious written evidence that we had for many years.

I must admit that I was sceptical. I know many teachers—indeed, Mr Cole-Hamilton is not the only person who is married to a teacher—and their experience of inspections has not always been positive, as was reflected in some of the submissions that we received from teachers based on historical inspections. However, when a school in my constituency has an inspection, I take it upon myself to go and speak to the headteacher about their experience, so I have some up-to-date evidence from my constituency that the inspection method is improving. Recently, two of my local primary schools underwent inspections that both headteachers said were a vastly more positive experience for the schools than inspections in the past have been. It is important that we monitor that and ensure that that is the trajectory.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): From the evidence that the committee has gathered, there seems to be a disconnect between the value that headteachers place on inspections and the value that classroom teachers place on them, with classroom teachers feeling that there is less value to be had from them. Why might that be the case?

Gillian Martin: I have heard that kind of stuff, too, and I think that it is a cultural thing. The previous inspections regime was so onerous—and I will say more about this in a moment—that there is a disconnect with the inspectorate's message that it is there to help teachers develop, instead of taking a clipboard approach. That message has yet to percolate through, and it is incumbent on local authorities and headteachers to get it down to classroom level.

Another issue that has been raised by the Liberal Democrats is the conflict of interest in having the inspectorate as part of Education Scotland. I am not wholly convinced by the argument; I can see what they mean on the face of it, but I do not think that there is a pressing case for separation and going back to having two separate bodies. Education Scotland provides insight into the practical implementation of education policy through its school inspection programme and other quality assurance activities at school and local authority level. Scotland is not alone in taking that approach; Norway has a similar body that takes an integrated approach to curriculum development, learning and teaching, and inspection. It builds on a three-tier approach to quality assurance that puts practitioner self-evaluation at the heart of things, which is only right. As a former education practitioner, I know that self-evaluation and peer evaluation are among the most effective ways of carrying out continuing professional development.

As it stands, Education Scotland does not determine the design or the content of the curriculum that is being inspected—that is the SQA's job. Rather, Education Scotland takes that curriculum and develops it in partnership with local authorities, teachers and the inspectors. The inspections are part and parcel of that development. If inspections truly are moving away from the culture of judgment and are, as committee witnesses and teaching practitioners to whom I have spoken have suggested, becoming more of a professional development tool, separating the inspectors from Education Scotland might be a backwards step for Scottish education. To be honest, there are probably more pressing issues, such as getting the message across that the culture of inspections has changed wholly—Ross Greer mentioned that issue—rather than throwing the baby out with the bath water and going back to an HMIE-type situation.

15:15

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Education should serve two functions: it should enrich the minds of students and prepare them for the modern workforce. My colleague Liz Smith said that recent evidence to the Education and

Skills Committee had not made for happy reading. Having spent the past few days reading much of that evidence, I could not agree more. Not getting our agencies right has a knock-on effect on the output of our education system.

On Monday this week, I met DigitalEurope, which is the trade body that represents the technology sectors across Europe. I was told about the major problem of a shortage of suitably skilled graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, which will have a knock-on effect on our ability to grow the digital economy in Scotland.

In light of the fact that there is already a shortage of computer science teachers in Scotland, a number of other things in the evidence to the Education and Skills Committee worried me. For example, the national 5 computing exam had coding errors in it, and STEM subjects and exams have become increasingly technical and have faced increased scrutiny. For example, some 20,000 people signed a petition to complain about the higher maths and national 5 maths exams, and the Royal Society of Edinburgh has expressed concern that the structure of secondary 4 compromised subject choice. That surely must compromise opportunity as well.

Any lack of confidence in the quality, fairness or even the delivery of our exam systems undermines the opportunities for those who are coming out of those systems. Exams are not just statistics, letters, scores and percentages; they should deliver skills and knowledge as well as qualifications. For example, DigitalEurope said that although there are certainly a lot of people coming out of the education system with technical skills, very few of them have business acumen to go with those skills. Coding and programming skills are not good enough on their own; people also need management, financial and legal skills and knowledge.

How can we expect employers to have confidence in our exam process when our teachers are questioning it? There is clear evidence to suggest that the relationship between teachers and the SQA is not working as well as it should. A number of people have raised concerns about the additional workload that the curriculum for excellence has placed on teachers. Janet Brown mentioned that at one committee meeting. The Scottish Secondary Teachers Association showed that 65 per cent of respondents to a survey did not believe that the guidance and support around the curriculum for excellence provide the support that is needed to build a world-class curriculum in Scotland.

There are overarching structural problems, too. Education Scotland is structured in a way that means that it is in charge of policy delivery,

implementation and then assessing its own quality. As someone suggested earlier, it is not just the judge and jury, it is also the defendant. Is there a conflict of interest there? Lindsay Paterson, who is professor of education policy at the University of Edinburgh, seemed to suggest so, and the Royal Society of Edinburgh is concerned about that conflict. Keir Bloomer of Reform Scotland said that being responsible for both development and inspection has created

“a fundamental conflict of interest”.

Those people are the experts. Surely we must listen to them.

The Lib Dem motion calls for

“the inspection and policy functions of Education Scotland to be separated and for a reorganisation of the SQA”.

There is merit in that. If education is such a priority for the Government, I urge it to consider that proposal.

15:19

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate—albeit briefly—and I thank the Liberal Democrats for bringing the issue to the chamber.

I hope that the Scottish Government will commit to focusing more rigorously on education in the coming period, given the significant mandate that it has in relation to the issue. My greatest regret, following the two-day debate that we had about the referendum, is the opportunity costs that there will be over the next period as a result of the focus that the Government has chosen. There is a danger that all of Scotland’s talent in Government, local government and the civil service, as well as the talent in civic Scotland, will be focused on an imagined future, not the real and fundamental challenges that we face in creating an education system that matches our ambitions for the people of Scotland. Instead of making the tough choices that I believe need to be made, the Government will settle for what keeps everyone happy because of a putative vote in a couple of years’ time.

The Scottish Government needs to fully acknowledge the challenges presented to it by the Education and Skills Committee’s evidence on education bodies, much of which has already been rehearsed. Central to the issue is hearing what teachers and other education professionals—people working in schools—say, rather than seeking to explain away what they say. The Deputy First Minister quite rightly talks about the importance of valuing staff and recognising the job that they do every day. However, the first principle of that involves listening to what they say about the barriers that they face in trying to do their jobs. That would be real respect. Rather than trying to

explain away what staff are saying, it would be better for the Government to try to understand properly why so many people across education are so exercised.

There is an issue about the profound lack of clarity about the responsibility of individual education bodies and who is accountable. The evidence demonstrates that there is a lot of buck passing. In a world in which all are responsible, ultimately none is responsible. Indeed, Education Scotland says that, with regard to the extent to which it has authority over policy, there are a lot of action points for discussion by the management board of the curriculum for excellence. We need better than action points for discussion; we need someone to get a grip of some of these issues.

The dual role of Education Scotland has been highlighted already. I recommend that people read the *Official Report* of the exchange on that matter between me and the head of Education Scotland. There is a dilemma. Education Scotland gives the Government private advice that is not known to the rest of us; it has a responsibility to implement policy, regardless of whether it thinks that the policy is wise; and, ultimately, it has the responsibility to inspect the impact of the policy, a role that many education academics have said is a major weakness. That really needs to be addressed.

We are in a position in which the body that is implementing Government policy is not then looking at and testing the merits of the policy, but is looking at its implementation. It is impossible to conceive of a way in which that body could then say to Government that the Government is wrong. The evidence is that it says instead that the teachers do not understand and that there is a problem in communication. Maybe, sometimes, there is a problem with the policy, but it is not clear how that message would get back to the Government. Indeed, it is not clear how confident education professionals would be to say that the policy was the problem rather than the degree of guidance. The Government needs to address that fundamental issue.

There is institutional protection going on. The instinct is to say, "They have a problem. They did not agree with us. There is a conservative lack of desire for change."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Johann Lamont: That is not good enough. We know that people are trying to do their best. I believe that the proposed change in the role of Education Scotland would play a part in addressing the problem.

15:24

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Our education agencies play a vital role in ensuring that pupils get a strong education. Their performance has a real impact. As members are aware, the Education and Skills Committee has recently been scrutinising quite substantially the performance of the SQA and Education Scotland. We have listened to teachers, parents, other experts and the agencies themselves. Only this morning, we discussed the response of the agencies to our report and, quite rightly, it has been a pretty dismal experience. It is clear that improvement urgently needs to be made and that neither Education Scotland nor the SQA is willing fully to acknowledge the problems.

What we heard from teachers were significant concerns about the way in which those agencies function. It is clear that they do not feel that they can raise their concerns openly with either agency. Trust in the SQA, in particular, has completely broken down. Based on the evidence received by the committee, it is disappointing that the Government's education governance review has not focused more closely on the role that the education agencies play—although I heard the cabinet secretary's comments in that regard earlier.

From the evidence that we gathered, we felt that there was a serious cause for concern about the SQA: there has been a breakdown in trust with teachers, there have been errors in exam papers and the approach to feedback was akin to a defensive corporate public relations exercise. In fact, I believe that, from a freedom of information request made by Iain Gray, we found that defensive corporate PR was exactly what was going on.

We have heard of a geography exam being described by teachers as the "worst ever", a computer science exam that contained errors from back to front—which I had to pursue through this Parliament—and a maths exam said by students to be "impossible". Teachers have reported excessively high workloads created by huge amounts of complex and inconsistent documentation over which neither Education Scotland nor the SQA has kept sufficient control. One physics teacher cited 81 pages of guidance, spread across five different documents, available through different parts of the glow website. Guidance has been updated several times already, for courses that have been running for only a few years. We cannot say that that is an acceptable situation for our teachers.

The SQA's response to the committee's report has been far from adequate. I described it this morning as defensive, filled with platitudes and simply restating its structures and processes—as

other members have already mentioned—but not addressing the concerns that our committee raised. It has committed itself to further engagement with teachers and to reviewing some of its working practices, but has not yet substantively addressed the causes of many of the problems. Far more needs to be done to repair the trust between the SQA and teachers.

As Tavish Scott's motion highlights, concerns have also been raised repeatedly about the dual role of Education Scotland in both developing CFE and inspecting its implementation in schools. A majority of the teachers who responded to the committee told us that they felt that inspections added either little or nothing to their school's performance—that inspections do not grasp the realities of the school, as measures are taken simply to improve appearances for inspections. That is like the story about the Queen believing that everywhere smells of fresh paint.

That stands in pretty stark contrast to Education Scotland's own review, which stated that headteachers overwhelmingly value inspections—which was the point that I made in my intervention to Gillian Martin's speech. It appears that the further from the classroom you are, the more you value the inspections. That is not good enough.

It is concerning that Education Scotland's primary response to those concerns was to launch a media campaign, in its words

“to correct any misconceptions about inspections”.

We need to ensure that school inspections have the confidence of all teachers in the classroom—not just headteachers. I believe that there is a strong case to split the functions of Education Scotland and that that should be further explored, for the reasons that Tavish Scott outlined.

I have no interest in last-minute theatrics in this debate. The Greens will support the Government's amendment because we believe that Tavish Scott's proposal should be explored further, but that we should not yet make an absolute commitment to it. We will hold the Government to its commitment to consider the proposal seriously, because solving the real education issues in Scotland cannot be kicked into the long grass. We will not allow the Government to do that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The last contribution in the open debate is from Fulton MacGregor.

15:28

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): First, I would like to apologise for my hoarse voice. I have had the flu that has been going around—or, as I have been told by my partner several times this week, the man flu.

Apparently, she had it a couple of weeks ago and was neither up nor down, which says it all really.

As has been said many times, there are improvements to be made to the Scottish education system. The governance review is a key part of making those improvements. The OECD is right when it says that schools and communities should be at the heart of our education system and I welcome the Government's response in launching the review. I am pleased to hear the level of contribution to the review that has already taken place, with a number of responses having been received to date. I encourage everyone to get involved and to put forward their views. The review will consider the role of every part of the education system, including national agencies, and we are committed to ensuring that young people and parents have confidence in all parts of the system.

Decisions about a child's learning should absolutely be made as close as possible to the child and by the people who are closest to the child. The review is about getting it right for every child and, at its heart, is the presumption that as many decisions as possible should be taken at school level—a decentralisation, right to the heart of our communities. For that reason, the Government's pupil equity fund is a welcome step in the right direction, as it puts money into the hands of headteachers to invest in raising attainment based on the needs of their pupils.

My own local authority has garnered some media attention lately. It has received an investment of almost £9 million but the Labour council, rather than supporting headteachers and allowing them to invest as they see fit, has instructed all schools to hand over a large portion of the money to it to pay staffing costs. The situation has been well documented and is completely unacceptable. Once again, I call on the council to reverse that outrageous cash grab.

I am delighted to be a member of a party that is putting education first and working day in, day out to raise attainment for the most disadvantaged in our society—[*Interruption.*] I do not know why Labour and the Tories seem to find that funny. Better Together is obviously re-forming just now, so it is fair enough—[*Interruption.*]

I will tell members what is not funny. My constituency—

Johann Lamont: Will the member take an intervention?

Fulton MacGregor: No—there is not a lot of time.

My constituency contains some of the most deprived areas in Scotland, according to the Scottish index of multiple deprivation, and it voted

yes in the referendum—Johann Lamont mentioned the referendum. It is an area that wants change and wants to see everybody doing better, so the Government's investment to help young people has been very much welcomed by the schools, some of which are rated 50 per cent higher than the SIMD threshold.

Johann Lamont: Will the member take an intervention?

Fulton MacGregor: I do not have time.

Education Scotland already runs independently of Government, but I would support a review of the processes that are in place—as Ross Greer and other members mentioned—to ensure that things are being done as well as they can be.

The SQA has had its problems and those should be addressed, but we should support it as it attempts to make the necessary improvements to improve attainment. The SQA is already committed to working closely with teachers to develop new qualifications. It is reviewing its approach to engagement and communication with teachers, and it will work to ensure that its relationship with the profession reflects the mutual trust and support that it and teachers have enjoyed throughout the SQA's history.

I have made this point previously in debates, as other members have, but it is worth reinforcing: in aiming to improve education in Scotland, we must all support those who work in our schools and who strive to provide quality education for our young people. We have a lot to be proud of in Scotland. More of our population is educated beyond school level than is the case in any other European country, and young people from the most deprived areas are now more likely to participate in higher education than they were 10 years ago. A higher number of young people than ever before leave school for positive destinations—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member must close.

Fulton MacGregor: Those are just some of the positives, which we should all welcome. I put on record again my appreciation of the teachers and assistants involved.

15:32

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): As many members have mentioned, John Swinney, in a recent speech, said:

“the status quo is not an option.”

I not only think that he is right but will go further and say that the status quo is never an option. We need to review and modernise our public services constantly to respond to changing public demand and need, and that is especially true of education.

However, when we propose reform, we must have vision and evidence that leads to prescription—a vision of what the world should look like, and evidence of why change is needed and why the proposed reforms will improve the situation. Unfortunately, the emphasis to date has been on particular structural reforms without evidence or any particular explanation.

I appreciate the change in emphasis that we have heard today and the acknowledgement that we have to look at these bodies and institutions. More importantly, however, it must be acknowledged that the status quo in education has been created by the Scottish National Party Government. Its reforms have created the burden on teachers, who have had to make sense of curriculum for excellence and make it work. It is the Government's reforms to the qualifications that teachers have struggled to make work, and it is the Government's changes that have led teachers to feel unsupported and left them struggling with the guidance and help that have been provided.

SQA and Education Scotland have been central to those reforms, and they are also culpable for those faults, which need to be looked at. That is why this debate is so important and why I thank the Liberal Democrats for bringing it to the chamber.

I hope that the Government considers its amendment, because the issues that have been revealed through the work of the Education and Skills Committee and in the wider discussions are important and need to be addressed.

In the four minutes that I have, I do not pretend that I can cover everything that members have said in the debate, but the issues can be summarised under four key headings.

First, there are clear issues with responsiveness and transparency in both the SQA and Education Scotland. As Liz Smith put it, those bodies have, to be frank, just not been listening, which has led to—as Iain Gray put it—a lack of trust. Given that those bodies are responsible for devising and implementing the curriculum and for administering our qualifications, trust is critical, and the current lack of it is dire.

Secondly, there is a real issue around the guidance and support supplied by both of those agencies to teachers, which has led to an increased workload. Tavish Scott did an excellent job of illustrating the sheer complexity. It is ironic that the SQA, in its defence, has said that information technology has made things much more complicated. It must be the only organisation in the world to complain that IT makes communication more difficult, not less.

Thirdly, there are issues around design, coherence and implementation and with the

complexity of the transition from broad, general education into the senior phase. As Lindsay Paterson set out in his evidence to the committee, that has led to an inherent narrowing of the curriculum, reducing the number of subjects that pupils and students take through to secondary 4. In an education system that has prided itself on its breadth, that is of serious concern.

The fourth issue is the measurement and tracking of success. As the OECD pointed out, there simply is not the evidence base to establish how well curriculum for excellence has taken hold. If anyone needs to understand why Education Scotland must have its functions split apart, I would direct them to its response to the Education and Skills Committee, in which it pointed to its own inspection regime as being the measure of whether or not curriculum for excellence has been a success. That is quite simply not plausible—completely glossing over the lack of data and pointing to its own functions is simply not satisfactory. That is why we need the agencies to be reformed, and that is why we need the Government to make a frank acknowledgement of where we are with curriculum for excellence and to acknowledge its role and the evidence when it considers its reforms.

15:36

Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con):

I thank the Liberal Democrats for bringing forward this debate. When improving educational standards is supposed to be the defining mission of the Government, it is right that we have a frank debate about the real issues in education and thoroughly scrutinise the role of education agencies.

Since the start of this session of Parliament, the Education and Skills Committee, in undertaking a deep dive of the performance of the education agencies, has brought together some stark and compelling evidence. What is so deeply worrying is the huge distrust that exists between our teachers and the principal agencies, Education Scotland and the SQA. Plagued by bureaucracy and inconsistency, the current system is not fit for purpose and needs reform.

Beyond committee evidence, I know from speaking to teachers in my own region, as I am sure all members do, that there are very real concerns about the complications of guidance, the weight of workload and the lack of flexibility and clarity. I hope that the Government, in responding to the debate, will answer Tavish Scott's point about how many of the 20,000 pages of guidance have actually gone.

One local teacher in my region wrote to me to say:

“And more depressingly this simply adds to our workload. I have to say I am rapidly despairing of hearing any common sense on the whole issue of CfE and how it in any way meets its supposed aims. Sorry to keep saying it but we are facing a further downturn in attainment and it really saddens me to see the situation we are in and the failure to address the real issues.”

Indeed, the OECD examined the guidance and found that it contained, almost like a curriculum for excellence Christmas carol, 12 attributes, 10 aims, eight curriculum areas, seven principles, six entitlements, five levels and four capabilities—all we need next is two turtle doves and a partridge in a pear tree.

In just over six months, support for the Scottish Government's handling of education has fallen another five points, with 56 per cent of people believing that the SNP is not handling education well. It truly is a deeply troubling state of affairs.

In opening for the Conservatives, Liz Smith highlighted inspections. Inspections provide a necessary and informative way of ensuring that the system is watertight and runs effectively. Education Scotland stated in its letter of 16 December 2016 that it anticipates conducting between 115 and 120 inspections in the current financial year. Nonetheless, the number of school inspections will be lower than in 2012-13, and Government statistics show that there has been a 70 per cent drop in the number of inspections taking place since 2004-05.

Yesterday, I obtained figures on school inspections for my own region from the Scottish Parliament information centre. The figures show that, since 2009-10, numbers of inspections have fallen by 57 per cent in Aberdeenshire, from 26 to 11, with only five in the past three years; by 80 per cent in Aberdeen city, with just two completed this year; by 75 per cent in Dundee; and to zero in Angus, where no inspections took place.

As Tavish Scott said in opening the debate, Education Scotland is responsible for what happens in the classroom and the quality of teaching in our schools, and it is a body that assesses its own performance. I listened carefully to Gillian Martin, but I am sure that she would agree that that is equivalent to someone sitting an exam and then being handed it back to mark their own performance. There is an inherent conflict of interest.

Gillian Martin: Will the member take an intervention?

Ross Thomson: No—I am in my last minute.

Time and again, the Government comes to Parliament to tell us that its defining mission is education. Fulton MacGregor says that we discuss it day in, day out but, given that education has been discussed only in committee time and in the

Parliament only in Opposition time, and that we spent two days of Government time debating independence, I seriously challenge that assertion.

We most certainly know that ministers can talk the talk, but they need to seriously prove that they can walk the walk. It is time for reform and it is time for action, and that is why we will support the motion in the name of Tavish Scott.

15:40

John Swinney: I want to address a number of the issues that have been raised. The first is Alex Cole-Hamilton's point about external scrutiny of education. The Government invited the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which is renowned across the globe as the strongest interrogator of the performance of education systems in the world, to review curriculum for excellence and its implementation. The OECD did that and confirmed, essentially, that curriculum for excellence is a strong, effective and appropriate reform for Scotland to have undertaken. The OECD also identified a range of improvements that are required to ensure that curriculum for excellence can generate benefit and value as a consequence of the bold decision to implement it. That is the agenda that I am pursuing relentlessly. It underpinned the address that I gave at Queen Margaret University last week and I intend to stick to it, because I have sought external validation of and challenge to our approach. I accept the scale of that challenge and am now proceeding to address it.

One of the challenges that I face in progressing the agenda—I do not think that this will be a revelation to anyone in the chamber—is that not everybody in education agrees on the right thing to do. Therefore, in the debate that has been marshalled today, many of the opinions that members of Parliament have set out will be vigorously contested by commentators outside Parliament, including in the education system. I do not say that to criticise anyone; I simply have to reflect the fact that there are different and disparate views. I have to chart a course through them in order to try to address the issues.

Iain Gray: On the separation of inspection from other Education Scotland functions, who can Mr Swinney pray in aid as supporting the current position?

John Swinney: That is part of the exercise that I am going through to make a determination on the issues. I come back to the rationale that I set out in my opening speech: the thinking behind linking the inspectorate function and the policy function is that that ensures that what we learn in inspection informs policy and that what we learn in policy informs inspection. In the alternative scenario, in

which there are separate policy and inspection functions, the teaching profession would perhaps be uncertain about where guidance and certainty on the direction of education would come from. Would they come from the policy function or the inspection function? If those functions had different perspectives and there was no cross-fertilisation with other opinions, the teaching profession could have uncertainty. That is one of the issues that I am wrestling with as I consider these matters.

Johann Lamont and a number of other members asked whether we are listening to staff, and Liz Smith referred to my comments about the education system being a "mystery tour" for the profession. Those are the reasons why the curriculum guidance was issued in August last year, to what I think has been a pretty strong and positive reaction from the teaching profession. Further, the benchmarks have been published to make crystal clear to everybody at every level in the education system the levels that we are trying to get young people to achieve. That is crucial because it will, at the end of the broad general phase of education, be the foundation for the senior phase of education. The interaction between the work of Education Scotland and that of the Scottish Qualifications Authority is crucial in ensuring that learning in the broad general phase of education establishes strong foundations for the senior phase. That is the central argument that we are having today.

Liz Smith: Does the cabinet secretary accept that one of the reasons for the reaction to the recent changes that he made is that teachers feel that they have been involved in those changes and that, with other issues around curriculum for excellence in previous years, it was felt that changes were being driven by Government and the agencies, which were not listening to teachers?

John Swinney: I take entirely the opposite view. What struck me as I looked into the issues was that there was an endless amount of criticism of the formulation of guidance. If I am exposed to any criticism just now—and I accept that there is a danger that I might be—it is that I have not carried out as much consultation on the benchmarks that have been put out into the education system as was carried out on the previous guidance. That is a risk that I have taken because I want to provide early and swift clarity to the system to enable judgments to be made.

The Government amendment is designed to be helpful in ensuring that we can have a debate about the proper role and functions of Education Scotland and the SQA. I am happy to confirm to Parliament that they are part of the governance review. They always have been—they were part of

it from day 1. The Government will conclude that exercise and I will come back to Parliament in June with the next steps that we intend to take on our journey to reform.

15:46

Tavish Scott: John Swinney will well remember that, before the 1997 general election, Gordon Brown wholly opposed separating the Bank of England from Government, with the Chancellor of the Exchequer in effect setting interest rates. I remember that, before that election, loyal back benchers were sent out to the television studios to run down, or at least disagree with, the argument for the independence of the Bank of England. If I remember rightly, the day after the election, Gordon Brown declared, rightly, that the Bank of England would be absolutely independent of Government.

In fairness to the Deputy First Minister, I accept that he has listened to the argument. He has deployed a few back benchers today—Gillian Martin and Ross Greer among them—to make the opposite case, which is fair enough. He sensibly made the case that Education Scotland and the SQA are within his governance review and left the door open. I listened carefully to his point about dual functions and the arguments, which, frankly, I do not remember, from all those years ago about the rationale for merging the organisations. I ask him to reflect on the evidence in the coming months, before he gets to the June statement on governance, which I am sure that he will make to Parliament. The evidence that members from across the chamber have presented for the separation of Education Scotland's two functions and the SQA's reform is pretty strong and powerful.

Iain Gray: I struggle with recollections as well, but is it not the case that the bodies were really merged in order to meet a commitment to reduce the number of Government bodies, rather than for any sound educational reason?

Tavish Scott: I would be happy to go back and look at that. I suspect that we should probably ask the Deputy First Minister, because, as I recall, he was the minister who very much drove the reform of organisations at that time.

I have two other points to make about the Deputy First Minister's remarks. The first is that we can all find something in the OECD report. The OECD said in 2015 that there was a need to streamline the enormous amount of guidance in schools. I have said before that the Deputy First Minister has begun to address that, although today I set out some numbers that illustrate that there is still much to be done. However, it is important to recognise what the OECD said on both sides of

the argument—about both the development of curriculum for excellence and its implementation.

On the broader debate, a number of colleagues from across the chamber have looked at the concerns that have been expressed about the SQA. Some spoke about its evidence to the committee and others have been stark in their arguments on the need for change because of the multivarious roles that the SQA plays.

Johann Lamont's argument about the need for clarity around accountability is perhaps the most powerful argument of the lot. Such clarity is in the cabinet secretary's interests. The argument that John Swinney just rehearsed in dealing with Iain Gray's intervention about where policy and inspection sit is the central argument that we are having today. That is absolutely right.

The clarity around accountability that Johann Lamont raised is what so exercised the Education and Skills Committee. When it asked the curriculum management board to explain that, the answer was that they were all responsible for everything and yet no one was responsible for anything. That is the challenge that needs to be met.

John Swinney: For absolute completeness, will Mr Scott put on the record that, when I appeared at the committee, I accepted ministerial responsibility for everything?

Tavish Scott: Ministerial responsibility for everything, indeed. The debate is about helping the cabinet secretary to clarify the roles of his agencies. That clarity is what we seek.

The important evidence that we ask the cabinet secretary to bear in mind relates to the points that Iain Gray made about the responses from the EIS and the RSE on the need for the inspection process to be separate. That is the answer to Gillian Martin's reasonable arguments about the culture of inspection in our schools. If the EIS is arguing, on behalf of teachers, that that process is too close to the Government, I suggest that that is the very evidence that the cabinet secretary is looking for to make a fundamental change in that area. It is on that basis that we hope that he will take the advice that is being offered and the clear evidence that is in front of him, and make the changes when the time comes.

SinoFortone and China Railway No 3 Engineering Group Memorandum of Understanding

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-04919, in the name of Willie Rennie, on censure and apology on the anniversary of the Chinese agreement.

15:52

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): This debate is about a £10 billion deal with two Chinese companies—one that has connections to human rights abuses in Africa, and the other that promised billions but, so far, has only bought a pub in Buckinghamshire.

Without any checks, the deal was signed by our First Minister. The Scottish shambles was born and Keith Brown was the midwife. Today's debate is to discover why our First Minister's signature is so cheap and how the Government and its economy secretary Keith Brown were so easily duped by a couple of gents in shiny suits and a knighthood. We seek an apology and to censure the economy secretary for the handling of this shambles.

Members will recall that all this began last spring. A document was signed by Peter Zhang, Sir Richard Heygate and the First Minister. It was an agreement between the Scottish Government, SinoFortone and China Railway No 3 Engineering Group and, we were told, it was worth £10 billion. A photograph was taken but no one in the Scottish media was told. We discovered it all only through the Chinese media, which is unusually shy for the Scottish National Party Government, we might think.

The Government did not do the basic checks. We did, and they immediately flagged concerns about gross corruption in CR3; concerns about human rights followed soon after. These are the words of Amnesty International UK in a letter to the First Minister last year about the China Railway Group:

"After undertaking detailed due diligence, the Norwegian fund concluded that there is 'an unacceptable risk that the company is involved in gross corruption.'"

The letter went on to say:

"other members of the China Railway Group ... have been implicated in serious human rights violations in the DRC, including the violent removal of artisanal miners from sites and other forced evictions."

Those are two serious concerns about human rights. Those concerns had been in the public domain for years. If only the Scottish Government had bothered to check.

The SNP went into defence mode. For defence number 1, the economy secretary, Keith Brown, told the BBC that CR3 had already invested in Wales, so it must be okay—except that it had not. He was confused, because it was SinoFortone that had supposedly invested in Wales. However, as we will discover later, that was not true either. Defence number 2 was that no specific projects had been discussed, yet officials were instructed to prioritise funding building sites in Falkirk for the Chinese—so, that was not true either. Defence number 3 by the Scottish Government was that it was not an agreement, anyway. However, I have seen the document, the signature and the picture: it was an agreement. There was an agreement and there were specific projects, but there was no track record in Wales.

The Scottish shambles, as it is known in China, was growing by the day, but the response from the Scottish Government was to claim that the deal did not exist, then to boast about the deal that it said did not exist and then to accuse everyone else of jeopardising the deal that it said did not exist. It was a shambolic response to the Scottish shambles.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: Not just now.

The oddest thing then was that everything went quiet for months. However, we discover that the deal is off: cue more outrage at us from the Scottish Government. However, what was strange was that the Scottish Government had not even picked up the phone to the Chinese. If it mattered that much, why was no effort made? However, that did not stop the fury about the deal that was off, with Scottish Government members condemning us while sitting idly at their desks in the Government's tower.

I mentioned that SinoFortone had invested in Wales: £2 billion for two green power stations in Anglesey and Port Talbot, which would generate electricity from plant waste to power homes and grow prawns and vegetables. There was also a reported £700 million takeover bid for Liverpool Football Club and £100 million towards a £3.2 billion Hollywood-style Paramount theme park in Ghent planned by a Kuwaiti family. The group also claimed to be involved in London's Crossrail company, holiday parks in Cornwall and the Lake District, a proposed science park in Cambridge and regeneration schemes in Huddersfield and Stoke-on-Trent.

However, here is the sting in the tail: all of that has come to nothing—zilch. It was all media puff to create an impression of financial strength and credibility. It was reported by *The Independent* that the First Minister's signature had given confidence

in SinoFortone to the people at Liverpool FC who were looking for an investor. Mr Zhang generated a cloud of publicity in one part of the country to build credibility to sign a deal in another part, which would help with the next deal. All the way along, the group gathered up schemes that it had absolutely nothing to do with. The Scottish Government was part of that sham because it had not bothered to check. The only purchase that SinoFortone seems to have completed is that of a £2 million pub—The Plough, at Cadsden in Buckinghamshire—and even that was funded by a loan from the taxpayer-backed Royal Bank of Scotland.

Sir Richard Heygate—remember him?—signed the agreement alongside the First Minister. However, he now admits that SinoFortone turned out to be—these are not my words—“all bollocks”. He has walked away, but to this day the Scottish Government stands by the agreement with SinoFortone and the China Railway No 3 Engineering Group. Scottish ministers were naive to lend any credibility to that enterprise; it shows how careless the First Minister was to put pen to paper on a deal with Chinese companies that she knew absolutely nothing about.

Scotland’s reputation on human rights has been tarnished by this shambles; the prospect of investment from sound Chinese and other sources has been diminished; and the time of officials and businesses has been wasted by a company that had no financial track record and tried to use everyone else to build one. Our economy secretary presided over all that. He should apologise to everyone for this shambles and he should be censured by the Scottish Parliament for this shambles.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that 21 March 2017 marked one year since the First Minister signed a memorandum of understanding with the Chinese companies, SinoFortone and China Railway No.3 Engineering Group; notes that extensive parliamentary questioning has revealed that Scottish ministers did not undertake basic checks on the companies prior to signing; further notes that China Railway Group was blacklisted by the Norwegian state pension fund and condemned by Amnesty International, and SinoFortone has been exposed as having no serious investment record; censures the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work for failing to exercise basic diligence initially and then subsequently criticising opposition MSPs for raising basic questions; calls on the Scottish Government to apologise and take steps to alert public bodies in the UK that they may have gained false assurance about the financial credibility of SinoFortone from the First Minister’s signature on the memorandum of understanding one year ago, and further calls for the working practices of the department and the sign-off protocols of the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work to be revised to make sure that basic checks on the human rights record and financial underpinning of potential investors are made at an earlier stage.

15:59

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown): I would like to try, if I can, to do two things—first, to ensure that Parliament has clear facts on the status of the memorandum of understanding and what has happened since, and secondly to set out lessons that we have learned from the experience and how we are taking those forward.

Willie Rennie mentioned two different things. First, he said that it was a deal and then he said that it was an agreement. It is quite clearly a memorandum of understanding, which was based on the fact that we wanted to have further discussions. I would like to make it clear to Parliament that this Government takes full responsibility for the handling of the MOU and for the issues that have arisen from it. I regret that some of those issues have arisen, and I will seek to address that as I speak.

Given the concerns that have been raised, I want to assure Parliament that no financial commitment was made at any point on behalf of the Scottish Government and that none has been made since the signing of the MOU. Similarly, there have been no legal or contractual agreements with either of the companies that are named in the MOU. Finally, we have had no engagement with either company since September 2016. If earlier discussions had at any point resulted in specific investment proposals, of course we would have undertaken full due diligence at that point, as we do with all investment proposals.

Willie Rennie mentioned Amnesty International and the report. That has been fully investigated, and while it made no reference to and did not relate to China Railway No 3 Engineering Group but to its parent company, we agree that that information should have been known to us prior to our agreeing to sign the MOU. The lessons that we will learn from this situation are important ones.

In particular, I reinforce our commitment to human rights, which our amendment makes clear. I think and would hope that this is central to the points that Willie Rennie has raised consistently over the past year. While we—obviously—already consider human rights issues in all our engagements with other countries, we will ensure that we do the same in our engagements with overseas businesses.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): In another area where the Government has been seeking to do business, Qatar, there are well-established concerns about human rights, and particularly the slaughter—I use that word advisedly—of construction workers on the world cup projects. Throughout, however, the Government continued

to try to build links with Qatar. It does not seem to have learned any lessons there either.

Keith Brown: I reinforce the point that I have just made. We will maintain our commitment to human rights. While we already consider human rights in all our engagements with other countries—we regularly raise these issues with countries when we meet them—we will do the same in our engagements with overseas businesses, and we will sign investment agreements only where appropriate due diligence has been undertaken, including on the human rights records of the companies involved.

I know that Amnesty International has today contacted members stressing two key points in relation to this debate. The first is that countries and businesses should know that human rights abuses affect their business and their credibility, and we agree with that. The second is that the Scottish Government must ensure that thorough due diligence is done on all future business relations, including a robust human rights impact assessment. We are happy to discuss with Amnesty International, as part of our regular engagement with it and as part of the Scottish Government's overall approach to human rights, how such assessments could work and at what point in the process of investment they should take place. We are happy to have that discussion with Amnesty International. That builds on the work that we are already doing to give effect to the United Nations guiding principles on business and human rights.

We believe that those lessons are important, because attracting investment is, of course, an essential part of building a stronger economy in Scotland. We are an attractive location in terms of skills and infrastructure, and the Government and our agencies build strong working relationships with potential and existing investors. This morning, the First Minister joined professional services firm Genpact to announce that it is expanding its European operation in Glasgow, creating more than 300 new jobs over the next five years.

In recent months, we have seen welcome investment from China that has not been the subject of such intense discussion, including by Red Rock Power Ltd, which wishes to invest in renewable developments, and Skymoos Digital Entertainment, which employs 21 people in the games industry. It is also true to say that companies that are active in the North Sea are owned by parent companies from China, and have been for some years.

Earlier this month I was in Germany to build on our trading links, and next week the First Minister will undertake a series of engagements in the USA that are focused on creating jobs, opportunities and economic links for Scotland.

In discussing trade, we cannot really fail to note that this morning saw the triggering of article 50 by the United Kingdom Government.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for giving way. He is moving on from the substance of this debate to the wider arguments about trade and internationalisation. I think that the tone that he strikes in his speech is important for the Parliament to listen to. Can we expect to hear an acknowledgement and a sense of taking responsibility for what was not done, and an apology from the cabinet secretary?

Keith Brown: If Patrick Harvie reads back the *Official Report*, he will find that I have already done the first two of those things. I will come back to the others in my closing remarks.

I was making a point about article 50; Amnesty International makes the point in its report. Brexit means that there are about to be a number of new deals that otherwise would not be required, including a number of bilateral deals. It is important that international deals are made in the coming years, and we have to be part of that process. We want to remain an open and accessible country in which to invest. We should also ensure that that investment meets the very high standards that we all expect for Scotland.

I said previously, in response to Patrick Harvie's point, that we take responsibility for this situation—I have said that already—and that we regret some of the issues that have arisen. I will come back to the other points that Patrick Harvie has raised in my closing remarks.

I move amendment S5M-04919.2, to leave out from "notes that extensive" to end and insert:

"recognises that Scotland has a strong track record in attracting investment as evidenced by the fact that Scotland has ranked as the best place for inward investment outside London for five of the last six years; further recognises that the memorandum of understanding (MoU) was about developing a working relationship to explore potential investment and that no legal, contractual or funding obligations on behalf of the Scottish Government have been made and there has been no engagement with the company since September 2016; notes with concern the human rights record of China Railway No.3 Engineering Group's parent company, China Railway Group; regrets that the signing of the MoU gave rise to concerns, and commits to considering and taking account of these concerns in any future such situations; agrees that the Scottish Government must always consider the human rights implications of its engagement with countries and business; believes that investment agreements should only be signed where appropriate due diligence, including on the human rights record of companies involved, has been undertaken; welcomes Scottish Government engagement with Amnesty International and other organisations on human rights ahead of international engagements, and believes that, with appropriate care, it is possible for international trade to co-exist with support for human rights around the world."

16:05

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

This debate about the SNP's mismanagement of a potential £10 billion investment in the economy is one of many examples of how the Government's incompetence has damaged the economy over the past 10 years. Just last week, the Fraser of Allander institute highlighted that since the SNP came to power Scotland's economy has grown by an average of only 0.7 per cent a year. We heard just this morning that the SNP's flagship infrastructure project, the Queensferry crossing, has been delayed for a second time, which is shattering once and for all any pretence of competence that the SNP Government ever claimed to have.

John Mason: Will the member give way?

Dean Lockhart: Perhaps I will give way later.

Chinese companies have experience of investing across the world. In progressing this potential investment in Scotland they would, quite rightly, have expected a degree of competence from the SNP Government. Instead, after a few months of dealing with the SNP, and after the series of mishaps that were highlighted by Willie Rennie, the Chinese investors decided to walk away from the deal, calling it a shambles. That is deeply regrettable.

That shambles does not just reflect badly on the SNP and the cabinet secretary; it has the potential to damage Scotland's reputation as a place to do business. More broadly, the shambles reflects how the SNP has mismanaged Scotland over the past 10 years. First, we saw the SNP's blatant disregard for Parliament. We heard from the First Minister that Parliament is paramount, but then the SNP failed to announce to Parliament the request for section 30 powers to hold a second independence referendum. It failed to listen when Parliament voted down the Scottish Government on five separate occasions. In this instance, it failed to inform Parliament of the signing of a £10 billion investment agreement—the single largest potential investment in Scotland's history. Parliament found out about the Chinese agreement only from a photograph that appeared in the Chinese trade press. That is ridiculous.

The SNP tells us that Parliament is paramount, but that is the case only when that suits it politically. We have seen the SNP's total incompetence as a Government. Before the MOU was signed, there was a failure to do the most basic due diligence on the counterparties. At that stage, the First Minister had already given what was described as "confidence" to investors that the Government was

"ready for major scale investment",

and work had been undertaken to identify potential projects for development—all that without doing any basic checks on the counterparties whatsoever. A simple Google search would have highlighted concerns that were subsequently raised and that subsequently emerged in relation to human rights—a point that was made by Amnesty International.

After the MOU was signed, the deal was announced—in China—by way of social media and the Chinese trade press, but not in Scotland. There was no ministerial contact with the Chinese investors for three months. That left a potential £10 billion investment in the Scottish economy to drift without any follow-up. The SNP discovered that the MOU had been cancelled by the Chinese investors only when they read about it in the Sunday papers. You simply could not make it up.

This sorry saga highlights the classic response of the SNP when things go wrong: blame others. This time, however, even the SNP could not blame Brexit, Westminster or the oil price, so it found someone else to blame for the China investment shambles. It tried to blame the Opposition parties—for wrecking a deal that we did not know about, for daring to ask basic questions about a £10 billion investment when we discovered it on social media, and for demanding transparency, parliamentary accountability and competence from the SNP Government. Clearly, that is too much to ask for.

Our amendment highlights the fact that we welcome international investment into the Scottish economy, whether from investors in China, elsewhere in Asia or otherwise, provided that it is appropriate for Scotland, that it has been subjected to proper due diligence, including with respect to human rights, and that it is on terms that are in the best interests of Scotland.

Patrick Harvie: Will Dean Lockhart take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is moving into his final minute.

Dean Lockhart: I am just about to wrap up.

In other parts of the UK, we have seen how successful investment joint ventures between Chinese companies and investors and regional administrations have benefited the economy. The recent redevelopment of Manchester airport is a good example.

We encourage the Scottish Government to enhance its working practices, so that what happened does not happen again.

The SNP often accuses us of talking down Scotland. Let me make it clear that we are not talking down Scotland: rather, we are talking down the SNP, and the SNP is not Scotland. We are

talking down the SNP for the damage that it has inflicted on the Scottish economy. The most recent shambles is just one more example of its mismanagement of the Scottish economy over the past 10 years.

I move amendment S5M-04919.1, to leave out from “further notes” to end and insert:

“censures the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work for failing to exercise basic diligence initially and then subsequently criticising opposition MSPs for raising basic questions; calls on the Scottish Government to apologise; further calls for the working practices of the department and the sign-off protocols of the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work to be revised to make sure that basic checks on the human rights record and financial underpinning of potential investors are made at an earlier stage; considers that investment by Chinese companies in other parts of the UK has made a significant and positive contribution to the economies and infrastructure of the regions involved, and calls on the Scottish Government to take further action to promote Scotland as a top destination for investment by global investors, including from China, with counter-parties and on terms that are in the best interests of Scotland.”

16:10

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): This debate is a walk down memory lane. I am sure that it is not a pleasant walk for the cabinet secretary, because the story was clearly excruciating for the SNP Government at the time.

I can picture the First Minister signing a memorandum of understanding with SinoFortone and China Railway No 3 Engineering Group, on 21 March 2016. On the face of it, there was nothing unusual about that, but it was odd that the photo appeared only in the *China Daily*; there was nothing in the Scottish press. I confess that I would have missed it, because the *China Daily* is not my local paper. It was strange: a Government that issues press releases about the opening of envelopes was suddenly remarkably reticent about telling us what was going on.

The deal was reported as being worth more than £10 billion of investment in infrastructure projects in

“clean energy, transport and ... housing.”

It is always good to find out what is going on in Scotland and in the Scottish Government from our friends overseas, but that rather points to a breathtaking lack of accountability of the Scottish Government to this Parliament.

John Mason: Will Jackie Baillie take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: I will, in a second.

Let me be clear: I very much welcome inward investment, which is important for growing our economy and creating jobs. We know that trade

has been done with China for centuries and is nothing new. However, that does not mean that we should set aside the need to undertake due diligence of those with whom we are considering working.

There are real issues to do with the Scottish Government’s response. There were clear questions about the credibility of SinoFortone. Here is an organisation that had been set up with capital of £2. Yes—£2! The *South China Morning Post*, which I used to read when I lived in Hong Kong, gave me that nugget of information. The organisation does not sound like a billionaire Chinese group that would be able to invest £10 billion.

Then there was the question of all the projects that SinoFortone was undertaking in different parts of the UK. Willie Rennie mentioned some of them. There was the science park at Jesus College, Cambridge. It does not exist—it is simply not real. There was Crossrail, in London—again, that was not true—and who could forget the £700 million bid for Liverpool Football Club? That, too, was not true. Mr Zhang was a chancer who managed to fool the SNP and the First Minister. What a farce, and how embarrassing. There was no money, no backing and no credibility, but the SNP did not have a clue, because it never bothered to check. It was taken in by charm and a flashy suit. For the Scottish Government to be fooled in such a way raises pretty fundamental questions about its competence.

If that was not bad enough, we heard from the former chair of the ethics council of the Norwegian oil fund that the China Railway Group had been accused of gross corruption. Amnesty International wrote to the Scottish Government about alleged human rights violations. However, the SNP did not know about those, because it never bothered to check.

I welcome the partially apologetic tone of the SNP amendment. There is an acknowledgement, for the first time in a year, that the SNP got it wrong. To be frank, that is not enough. We need transparency and parliamentary oversight to stop such a mistake happening again. Bland assurances are simply insufficient.

The lack of transparency in the case that we are considering is truly damning. It took months before the information about the memorandum of understanding and associated emails were in the public domain. The SNP deliberately misled Parliament and the public. Do members remember that it said that Sir Brian Souter, a one-time SNP donor, was not involved in the deal? That was simply not true. It is perfectly legitimate that one of Scotland’s well-known business owners would be involved, helping to make introductions and even considering investing. What is beyond strange is

that the SNP, knowing all that, flatly denied that he was involved. He was simply airbrushed from the agenda. I cannot help but wonder, was the SNP embarrassed by Sir Brian's involvement or was it simply so arrogant that it thought that it could get away with not telling the truth?

Even more extraordinary, as the details emerged, the SNP decided, as Dean Lockhart said earlier, that it could just blame someone else. There was a surprise for us: the Government had never done anything like that before, Presiding Officer. Yes—it was the fault of the Opposition parties and it was the fault of the press. Unusually, it was not also the fault of the UK Government.

I am embarrassed that the SNP Government was taken in so easily. In terms that the Chinese will understand, I say that Scotland lost face by the Government taking the decision that it took. We need due diligence to take place in all cases, and the Scottish Parliament should have oversight. We welcome investment and we want to grow the economy, but such work needs to be open and transparent.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Would you please move the amendment?

Jackie Baillie: I move amendment S5M-04919.3, to insert at end:

“; recognises that inward investment can be a beneficial part of a broad economic development and growth strategy for Scotland; acknowledges the concern about the record of the companies party to the memorandum of understanding with the Scottish Government; regrets that the Scottish Government did not fully inform the public about this deal; believes that public funds and investment agreements with companies that do not pay their workers fairly or pay their fair share of taxes are wrong, and calls on the Scottish Government to develop a transparent approach to attracting investment to Scotland, which provides added value by creating jobs.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think that you used the term “deliberately misled”, which comes close to using in Parliament a term that I do not approve of. I will just let you consider that.

We now move to the open debate, with speeches of a very tight four minutes.

16:16

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Willie Rennie has set out in detail the extent of the SNP Government's complacency and incompetence in its dealings with the two companies that have been named. To argue, as SNP ministers and MSPs consistently have, that my party's response is an attack on genuine efforts to secure valuable inward investment for Scotland or on legitimate trade deals with China is a complete red herring. It is typical deflection from a Government that believes that nothing is ever its fault and that someone else is always to blame.

Let us be clear that, if the Prime Minister had invited the two companies to Downing Street and signed such an agreement without having done the most basic of checks, only to discover later that the companies were linked to human rights abuses and gross corruption and that the Prime Minister was the latest useful idiot who had been drawn into a string of photo opportunities, each of which is designed to induce the next and all of which have come to nothing, the SNP and its keyboard warriors would be demanding heads on spikes. However, because this shambles was cooked up in St Andrew's house, we were all told to simmer down. The SNP even had the audacity to denounce our criticisms as an attack on Scotland's inward investment record—a claim that is as artificial as SinoFortone's bona fides.

SinoFortone has registered no accounts since it was established. Its website has been taken down, and questions surround its London headquarters, which has no record of the company's existence. It has been reported that the website is down for “updating” and that the office was apparently only a virtual one.

SinoFortone did not allow such minor setbacks to thwart its bold ambitions. What happened to those ambitions? Plans to invest £2 billion in Welsh biomass went up in smoke; the deal on power stations for prawns was fishy, at best; £100 million for a theme park in Kent is on the slide; and a science park in Cambridge was pure science fiction. The list—and puns—go on, Presiding Officer, as do SinoFortone's antics.

The risk now is that the First Minister's signature and photo op, which were choreographed by the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work, are being used to lend credibility to SinoFortone's latest dealings. The £10 billion deal with Nicola Sturgeon has already been quoted to substantiate claims of a possible SinoFortone takeover of Liverpool Football Club. Had that materialised, I would—as a diehard Reds fanatic—have been supporting more than a simple motion of censure on the economy secretary this afternoon.

There was even talk of using UK investment to create a network of football academies across China. Perhaps that is why, in answers to questions earlier this month, Keith Brown suggested that the Scottish Government's final contact with SinoFortone, back in September, was to help the company to arrange for an Inner Mongolian delegation to come to Scotland to learn about football development. Most jaded members of the tartan army might argue that that was questionable behaviour under the Trade Descriptions Act.

In November, the First Minister said that there were lessons to learn. Two weeks later, in

response to a topical question from me, Keith Brown could not identify what those lessons were and said that all future agreements would be signed “in the normal way”. I welcome the cabinet secretary’s more candid and contrite tone in this afternoon’s debate but, to most people in Scotland, checking whether companies have connections with gross corruption and human rights abuses after inviting them to the First Minister’s residence, after putting pen to paper and after the photo op and the announcement in the Chinese press is anything but normal.

The debate has belatedly forced the economy secretary to give Parliament some of the answers that we have been desperately seeking for the best part of a year. All that we are waiting for now is an explicit apology, so I urge Parliament to back Willie Rennie’s motion.

16:20

Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary’s remarks and I am pleased to hear that lessons have been learned. I am sure that we can all agree that investment in Scotland is vital for our economy. The memorandum of understanding was about exploring possible investment, and the Scottish Government has a successful track record of attracting investment. In 2015, Scotland was second only to London in attracting investment, and that investment created more than 5,000 jobs and boosted the economy.

Serious concerns have been raised about the MOU, and I agree with Amnesty International’s conclusion that all the Scottish Government’s international relations should have a human rights component. I was pleased to hear the cabinet secretary recommit to the principles of promoting and protecting human rights. That will involve keeping up ethical standards and encouraging companies and other countries to do the same.

However, it has been made absolutely clear that the Scottish Government did not enter into any legal or financial commitments with the companies concerned or reach agreement on any investment. The Government would, of course, rightly have undertaken due diligence if any projects had come from the MOU. The Government should absolutely be expected to make sure that companies with which it makes legal or financial commitments meet certain standards when it comes to human rights.

The MOU that forms the subject of the debate collapsed last November, and I agree that some worthwhile lessons need to be learned, but I might just disagree on what they are. The Liberal Democrats have suggested that basic checks on the human rights record and the financial

underpinning of potential investors should be made earlier, although it is clear that due diligence would have been exercised in the case in question if things had progressed.

There is an element of hypocrisy in that approach given that, when the Liberal Democrats were in government at Westminster, they aggressively pursued business links with China and said that no subject was off limits. However, we are used to such hypocrisy from the Liberal Democrats, even on the topic of human rights.

Liam McArthur: Will the member take an intervention?

Maree Todd: No. Unfortunately, I do not have time.

We hear one story in the Scottish Parliament and another at Westminster. We regularly hear in the chamber about the concerns that the Liberal Democrats have about mental health, yet an inquiry by the UN into the period during which they were in power in the UK found that their Government’s austerity policies amounted to a systematic violation of the rights of people with disability.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I warn the member that I will tolerate a little deviation from the subject of the debate, but not the entire deviation.

Maree Todd: I think that this is a human rights issue. My experience of working in mental health care was that very many of the people I worked with were harmed by the UK Government’s policies when the Lib Dems were in power.

Today—the day on which Theresa May formally triggered article 50 and began the process of removing the UK from the European Union—is an historic day. Instead of point scoring, we should be thinking about what is ahead for the people of Scotland. *[Interruption.]* Brexit will cause a profound economic shock. In the area that I represent—the Highlands and Islands—people are feeling the impact already. We need to stand up for them.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but I must warn the member to keep to the topic of the debate. She has made two lengthy deviations from it.

Maree Todd: I thought that the debate was on the economy.

We need to stand up for our agriculture.

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): The member should be debating the motion.

Maree Todd: We need to stand up for our EU citizens. The uncertainty that they are facing is both a human rights issue and an economic issue.

I suggest that we look to the future and choose to build a stronger economy and a fairer society.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. I will take no promptings from front benchers as to what my job is here, thank you very much.

16:24

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): An event that was widely described in a country of 1.3 billion people as a “Scottish shambles” does not provide the sort of headline that anyone would desire for our country. However, thanks to the SNP Government’s incompetence, that is how the Chinese media reported the cack-handed attempt at setting up a deal with Chinese enterprises in the spring of 2016.

I make it clear that inward investment is welcome in Scotland, and we must create the climate to make Scotland an attractive place to invest in. Chinese investment is welcome and important to the UK, and the open, competitive economy that we in Britain enjoy is an attractive destination for Chinese business.

Just a few months ago, I was delighted to meet two businesspeople from Hangzhou, which is the e-commerce and logistics capital of China. They have registered a UK subsidiary in England, but they were pleased to be setting up an office in Central Scotland, which will generate jobs and investment. Before meeting them, I did what I would do before meeting a company from anywhere—I did basic background research, which is quite easy to do in these days of being able to tap things into Google. Thankfully, even Chinese news reports are in English. If the Scottish Government had done the same thing, the term “Scottish shambles” might have remained unknown to millions.

Some might speculate that the Scottish Government had indeed researched the companies that it was to do business with, which explains the attempt to keep the deal secret. One might call such an explanation rather cynical but, whatever the explanation might be, it was ironic that the deal was not revealed to the world by a Government press release, a bit of investigative journalism or even a leak. No—it was the much-maligned Chinese media that spilled the beans. We are thankful that they did so, because we can only imagine when the Government would have decided to come clean otherwise.

It certainly did not take long for it to come out that one of the companies with which the Government reached an understanding had been blacklisted by the Norwegian oil fund and had been identified by Amnesty International as being involved in human rights abuses through evicting families and stripping them of their livelihoods.

Having been found out for not having done due diligence—in fact, it had not even asked the basic questions—and having been far from transparent by trying to keep the whole matter quiet, the Government resorted to type by blaming everyone but itself.

In preparation for the debate, I reread the comments that the First Minister made previously. She warned against creating

“a climate that is seen to be inhospitable to investment,”—*[Official Report, 10 November 2016; c 11.]*

but this shambles has been damaging to Scotland. The message that is being sent out is that the Scottish Government is open to backroom business deals, and that has embarrassed and caused concern to our friends and prospective investors from not only China but elsewhere.

I call on the cabinet secretary to change the procedures for checking background details and to ensure that due diligence is carried out early to avoid similar fiascos. Let us be honest: if every lawyer, accountant, bank and building society has to carry out such basic tasks, surely the same thing must apply to the Government, too.

16:28

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I nearly choked on my Coco Pops when I read recently that this Government was one of the pioneers of the global open government programme. At the heart of the issue raised in the motion is the Scottish Government’s continued efforts to maintain secrecy and avoid scrutiny. This is a Government that goes out of its way to avoid answering parliamentary questions, that repeatedly refuses freedom of information requests and which even fails to record minutes of meetings between some senior lobbyists and the First Minister. After I had read that statement, I had to check that it was not 1 April.

The Chinese agreement came to light only when the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, was quoted on one of the companies’ websites as welcoming the deal, even though her Government had failed to make any statement or even bring out a press release on the matter. The First Minister is not usually so reticent in her media appearances. The level of secrecy that surrounded this agreement from the day Ms Sturgeon signed the controversial memorandum of understanding to the deal’s demise is not what anyone would expect from such a global pioneer of open government.

It is important to be reminded of the apparent purpose of the Parliament. The Parliament’s website states:

“The Parliament exists to define, debate, decide and legislate on issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

In doing so, it holds the Scottish Government to account and is answerable to the people of Scotland.”

Transparency and accountability were supposed to be designed into the fabric of the Scottish Parliament building and the DNA of its proceedings, but the Government shies away from robust challenge and questioning time after time. Members should not, of course, expect any internal scrutiny of ministers by their back benchers—Maree Todd’s speech spectacularly exemplified that.

Areas for potential Chinese investment included affordable housing, energy, industry, business parks, transport and something called community—whatever that means. There are many parallels with the Government’s courting of the Qatar Government. Alex Salmond, former First Minister, along with the current transport secretary went around the Gulf with some questionable individuals, including the Tory MP Sir Nicholas Soames, trying to flog infrastructure opportunities to the Qatari sovereign wealth fund and boasting of an expected return of 8 per cent. That was at the same time as construction workers—many of whom were poor migrant labourers—were being slaughtered at an appalling rate building world cup venues. We all remember the inaugural Scotland versus Qatar football match, of course. That will not be held again. It seems that, like the word “generation”, the word “inaugural” is taking on a new and foreshortened meaning.

The Chinese deal is not a one-off. Given the dual uncertainty of Brexit and another independence referendum, is it any surprise that the Government needs to scour the globe for investment from often questionable regimes? Did the SNP decide to hold its nose or turn a blind eye to human rights or other abuses in courting businesses and organisations that have been shunned by other countries? Was that genuine or chosen ignorance, incompetence or naivety? Whichever it was, it was not good enough.

It is not that we do not have the personnel. We now have three ministers with external affairs portfolio responsibilities, and it looks like only Mike Russell is doing any work. Why can we not get one of them doing something on such issues?

Thorough due diligence must be conducted on all future business relations, and that must include a robust human rights impact assessment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask the member to close.

Neil Findlay: Okay. I will finish there, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I say to anybody who is pulling faces about what is meant by deviating that they should read the

amendments to which members are speaking. Mr Findlay spoke well within the amendment; that is the difference. Members should check the amendments before they complain.

16:32

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The Liberal Democrats’ motion raises very serious issues, and the Liberal Democrats have raised those issues consistently. Human rights cannot be an afterthought. In dealings with countries such as China, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which Mr Findlay mentioned—and perhaps increasingly in the future, with the US—human rights and ethical business issues must be central to the discussion. The Government is due criticism for failing to ensure that and to check on the credibility of the company involved. An apology is due and I have not heard that in the clear terms that are required.

I am not disclosing any great secrets when I say that it is normal practice for Opposition parties and the Government to discuss in advance the wording of motions and amendments if they are seeking to build a majority. That is not only healthy in a period of minority government, it is absolutely necessary. The Lib Dems did not make the effort to do that. They have repeatedly raised serious points on the issue and highlighted failures in Government action that are not acceptable and must not be repeated. Today, however, they are taking that further, and they are beginning to risk appearing more interested in claiming a ministerial scalp than in changing Government practice. I note that they did not approach the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee, either, to ask whether it would examine the issues that are within its remit.

The timing also seems odd. I do not see a clear rationale for taking the one-year anniversary as an opportunity to censure the minister.

Neil Findlay: Will the member give way?

Patrick Harvie: I am afraid that I do not have enough time in my four minutes.

The Government discussed with us what its amendment should say. We proposed a much clearer way of allowing the Government to take responsibility, but it chose not to take on board our suggestions and I regret that. Its amendment also begins with a rather offensive tone, setting out the case for international investment and its track record on seeking it. That is simply not the issue for debate today.

Keith Brown said that the Government takes responsibility. I think that we need to hear something clearer in his closing remarks, and I think that an apology is required. I ask him to reflect on the approach that was taken by Nicola

Sturgeon when, as Deputy First Minister, she came to the chamber in 2010 to make an apology for an error of judgment. She did it simply and sincerely. Her apology was widely accepted by all sides and I think that she gained credibility by doing that.

The Greens will oppose the Conservative amendment, which, quite bizarrely, removes the criticism of the companies but leaves the criticism of the cabinet secretary. Either criticism of both is justified or criticism of neither is justified.

We will support the Labour amendment. Although we have one or two reservations about wording, there is far more in it to welcome than to criticise.

Personally, I am minded to abstain on the Government amendment and the motion if we hear a clear, simple and direct apology from the cabinet secretary in his closing remarks. I am not willing to instruct my colleagues on how they should vote. I think that the motion has been brought to us in the sense of a disciplinary decision for Parliament, and I think that each member should make their own decision on the basis of the facts and arguments that have been put forward.

If the censure motion passes, I will regard that as a light rap on the knuckles. It has no status in our standing orders. I have disagreed with Keith Brown on a range of issues and, no doubt, I will continue to do so in the future. However, I want to be clear about the fact that I do not see this in any way as a resignation issue. If the Liberal Democrats or anybody else take the issue to the next stage and bring a motion of no confidence, on the facts as they stand I would certainly vote against it.

I also ask all members who back the Liberal Democrat position and all those who will back the Government to reflect on the criticisms that are due of both positions and on the words of Nicola Sturgeon when she apologised for her lapse of judgment. I want members to reflect on the need for our political culture to give space for such apologies and to accept them in good faith. I hope that Keith Brown takes that approach in his closing speech.

16:37

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Like others, I found it a little surprising that, of all the angles that we could have examined the economy from, the Liberal Democrats have chosen this one. However, I am happy to take part in the debate.

Just as I might disagree with many individuals on many issues, many of us would disagree with

China on a range of matters, in particular its record on human rights, including those of its Christian and Muslim minorities, its approach to Falun Gong, and the situation with regard to organ harvesting. All that has left a lot to be desired.

Again on a personal level, my starting point would be that I am willing to talk to almost anyone. As we get to know people better, we form a judgment about them and can decide whether we want a longer-term friendship with them. It is the same with nations and organisations. We might know certain negative factors about a certain state or business but, until we speak to them, get to know them a bit and do a bit of digging, it is difficult to form a proper judgment.

We have had a short briefing from Amnesty International, and I very much agree with it. The key points are that we should do due diligence on all business relations, and include human rights in that; and that Chinese companies and authorities must be made aware that human rights abuses will affect their business and credibility.

For me, the question concerns the stage at which we undertake the due diligence process. Should we do that before we even talk to someone initially or before we go ahead and sign a deal? I suggest that—with regard to people, organisations and countries—it should normally be at the latter stage. By all means let us talk to people, share our views and concerns and consider whether we have much in common, but let us also be careful who we sign legally binding deals with.

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): John Mason says that we should do due diligence before signing a deal. Does the signing of a memorandum of understanding represent a deal?

John Mason: That is exactly the point on which I was going to intervene on Jackie Baillie, but she did not have time to take my point.

I will look at what an MOU is. I did not do a huge amount of research, but Wikipedia uses words such as

“indicating an intended common line of action ... often used in cases where parties ... do not imply a legal commitment”

which seems to be key. When we look at this MOU—all three pages of it—we can see how very vague the whole thing is.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): Will the member take an intervention?

John Mason: I will quote this first, and then we will see whether we have time. It says:

“This MOU is intended as a statement of intent and a platform to share confidential information, not a binding legal agreement.”

Again, it says:

“Nothing under this MOU shall be taken to represent a commitment of funds on the part of either party”.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member take an intervention?

John Mason: If it is very quick.

Mike Rumbles: Even the minister agrees that the Government made a mistake. Is Mr Mason seriously suggesting that the Government should not have done due diligence before signing the MOU?

John Mason: There are lessons to learn. I am happy that the Government has said that and will continue to do so. My main argument here is that someone has to judge at what stage they will do a really thorough investigation. If a company is taking over another company, they have initial chats and then they go away and look at the detail.

I am clearly going to run out of time.

Pension funds are mentioned in the motion. I used to be on a committee that headed up the Strathclyde Pension Fund. The question is whether you just do not invest in companies that are dodgy or whether you engage with those companies and try to get them to behave a bit better. We took the latter course. There are a lot of dodgy companies out there—from Russia, the United States, Qatar and other places. We must learn from experience, but let us not throw out the baby with the bathwater. We live in a pretty unpleasant world, so let us be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, Mr Mason, for keeping to time.

We now move to winding-up speeches. I call Richard Leonard to close for the Labour Party. You have four minutes, please, Mr Leonard.

16:41

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): This is an important debate for this Parliament, but it will also be an important vote for this Parliament. We are grateful to Willie Rennie and the Liberal Democrats for lodging it, because the memorandum of understanding containing the signature of Sir Richard Heygate, Dr Peter Zhang and the First Minister of Scotland is not merely a matter of good or bad business; it is one of good or bad government.

As others have said in the debate, the question is one of transparency and competence, but the issue is about so much more than that: it is about the power of this Parliament and our ability to exercise control over the executive. What it demonstrates is an executive that is both arrogant with power and stricken with moral cowardice. It is

a Scottish Government that is prepared to ride roughshod over parliamentary consent. Worse than that, it is one that is prepared to go behind the backs of the people and to appear to mislead them with further cover-up. That represents an abuse of privilege and is an example of power without responsibility—a telling reminder that the whole point of democracy is to hold that kind of misuse of power to account.

As we have heard in the debate this afternoon, the people of Scotland and their Parliament were told that Sir Brian Souter, a knight bachelor of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire and, over the years, a substantial financial backer of the party of Government, was not involved in the Chinese deal. Then it was admitted that he was involved. A press release was drafted and then blocked by the office of the First Minister. We only found out about the memorandum of understanding itself when reference to it was published—as Jackie Baillie said—in the English-language newspaper *China Daily*. Of course, it is now a matter of public record that Sir Brian Souter was involved. He was even quoted on the SinoFortune website as saying:

“It is a very positive step for Scotland to attract investment of this nature.”

So the question for the Scottish Government is: how come Sir Brian Souter knew about the secret deal but the rest of us did not?

The lure of private profit, private financial speculation and private profiteering from the building of affordable homes, from public transport and from public energy supplies sounds wrong and feels wrong—and it is wrong. We do not want a country that is simply open for business and not open for democracy. We do not want corridors of power that are closed to the working women and men of this country but open to baronets and tycoons.

I do not say this to the cabinet secretary—who I hope is listening—lightly. When he goes to Ineos in Grangemouth tomorrow morning, I hope that he will not be briefing Jim Ratcliffe or his associates before he briefs this Parliament tomorrow afternoon about the contents of the ministerial statement on unconventional oil and gas. I hope, too, that he will express the concerns that others have expressed about BP’s sale of the Forties pipeline system—which is an essential artery in our infrastructure—to Ineos in the next few days. He should take a strategic interest in, and oppose, that sale, which brings us back to the issues that lie at the heart of the debate. As with the Chinese deal, the problem is that there is too little transparency, too little accountability, too little scrutiny, and too little moral courage.

Let the lessons be learned from the sorry episode. Let us have inward investment deals, but let them be ethical. Let us reassert the principle of

democracy not only in our political realm, but in our economic realm too.

16:45

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank Willie Rennie for bringing the debate to the chamber. It has been an interesting afternoon, and I have enjoyed listening to the points that have been raised. The debate has reminded me of the classic movie, “The Good, the Bad and the Ugly”. In fact, that sums up the whole issue, and I will examine each of those headings in a moment.

First, I should say that what has surprised me most is that the Chinese papers seemed to know more than the Parliament did about what was going on with the deal. The involvement of Brian Souter and the Royal Bank of Scotland was kept fairly secret and under the table.

I turn now to the headings that I mentioned and discussion of whether the deal was, in fact, no more than a spaghetti western. I think that everyone welcomes the investment in Scotland—memoranda of understanding with companies can be good and should be welcomed. At that stage, it proved that Scotland is open for investment, and I hope that that will remain the case. As we have heard, China is investing elsewhere in the UK.

It is good that the Government has finally come clean, but it is sad that it has done so only today. A good aspect of the debate is that Keith Brown has finally said that, in the future, as a result of what happened with the deal, the Government will consider human rights. Another good aspect is that the Parliament is holding the Government to account.

I turn now to what is bad, starting with the total lack of transparency. Full details of all the information in the deal are still hidden. I will not go as far as Willie Rennie and say that we were duped, but there has been some wrong information given, and smoke and mirrors have played a part. It is bad that there was no disclosure to the Parliament, and it is outrageous that the Parliament should find out about the deal only by reading a Chinese trade paper. I give all credit to Jackie Baillie for being able to do that, because it is beyond my ability. Parliament should be kept informed.

The SNP’s incompetence is also bad. If the deal was so good, how come the Government ditched the Chinese in May and has had no contact with them since August? That is no way to manage an economic deal. Surely the Government could have pulled out the stops if the deal was worth so much and made contact with the Chinese. The SNP’s policy is to double the number of Chinese

investors in Scotland from 2011-12 levels. We have not seen anything of that, which is also bad.

I will go back to some of the bad aspects that members highlighted in the debate. Liam McArthur said that the Government was complacent. Jackie Baillie said that the situation was a walk down memory lane that brought back painful and powerful memories for Keith Brown. Dean Lockhart accused the SNP of being incompetent on the economy. Maree Todd usefully intervened to ask about article 50—I am not sure what that has to do with China, but there we go. Alison Harris mentioned that the deal was not transparent. Neil Findlay highlighted the fact that there was no accountability. Patrick Harvie said that there was a lack of ethics in the deal, and John Mason clarified that it was not a deal but a memorandum of understanding.

The ugly side of the matter is that there has been no diligence. The SNP has run away from the deal, saying, “It wasn’t me—it was everyone else in the Parliament who questioned the deal.”

I will sum up by saying—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have 10 seconds.

Edward Mountain: The situation is a Scottish shambles, engineered by the SNP. By definition, as a result of the offences that I have described, the deal fits the mould of “The Good, the Bad and the Ugly.” Unfortunately, however, the bad and the ugly outweigh the good.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Keith Brown to sum up for the Government.

16:49

Keith Brown: I begin by stating again the Government’s absolute commitment to promoting and supporting human rights. We fully support the European Convention on Human Rights, the Human Rights Act 1998 and the human rights safeguards contained in European Union law, and we want those rights to continue. Along with the Scottish Human Rights Commission and other partners, we are committed to developing a co-ordinated plan of action in Scotland to give effect to the United Nations guiding principles on business and human rights.

Our approach to trade and investment aims to promote and support those rights both here in Scotland—in terms of fair wages, union recognition and corporate responsibility—and internationally. It should come as no surprise to members that we share their concerns about China Railway Group, which is the parent company of around 45 subsidiaries around the world, including one of the signatories to the MOU, China Railway No 3 Engineering Group.

As we have already stated publicly, at the time the MOU was signed we were unaware of the Norwegian Government pension fund's concerns about China Railway Group and of Amnesty International's report on the Congo International Mining Corporation, one of its many subsidiaries. I therefore acknowledge that it is important for us to do as much as we can to check the human rights record of investors and to work with organisations such as Amnesty International to assist with that. We agree with Amnesty that all international relationships of the Scottish Government should have a human rights dimension.

I also confirm to Parliament that we recognise that it is important to undertake appropriate due diligence, although I reiterate that the MOU involved no legal, contractual or funding obligations on behalf of the Scottish Government.

A number of useful points have been made by members across the chamber during the debate. In particular, I want to pick up on what Jackie Baillie said. She asked for a parliamentary process that would be able to examine the diligence undertaken. I do not know the answer to that and I do not know what the mechanism would be, but I undertake to work with Parliament and with the Opposition parties to look at how that can be done. There are issues of commercial confidentiality, but I undertake to do that.

I also want to say, in response to Patrick Harvie, that I take full responsibility for the handling of the MOU, and I am sorry for the issues that have arisen from it. I can assure Parliament that we have learned and will learn lessons from the experience of the MOU. We will consider human rights issues in our engagement with overseas businesses and we will sign investment agreements only where appropriate due diligence, including on the human rights record of companies involved, has been undertaken.

As well as the appropriate scrutiny that today's debate has offered, it seems that, across parties, we are agreed, as a number of members have said, that attracting investment is critical to Scotland's economic future. In the spirit of what I said in response to Jackie Baillie, I would like to see us working across parties on that. It would be good for Scotland and good for investors. I take confidence from our strong track record in attracting such investment and from today's welcome announcement of an example of such investment by Genpact, which is bringing 300 jobs to Glasgow.

What we are about is not investment at any price but investment that is based on consideration of human rights issues and appropriate due diligence. I would also like to say that it is important that the business community sees the Parliament coming to a consensus—that

is something that businesses impress upon me regularly, as I am sure they do to Opposition spokespersons.

That is the basis of the offer that I have made to Jackie Baillie: if we can give the business community evidence of consensus and show that we are trying to take things forward in a way that both respects the Parliament's fantastic track record on human rights and takes maximum advantage of the business and investment opportunities that are out there, we will get to the right place.

I say that in good faith, and I undertake to initiate that discussion with Opposition spokespersons across the chamber in the medium term.

16:53

Willie Rennie: For the past year, we have been accused of being hypocrites, of running down Scotland, of being against investment, jobs and Scotland's economy, of indulging in cheap point scoring, and of many, many other things. There was little point in the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work coming before the Parliament today and acting all contrite but not apologising for even one of those insults over the past year. If it was not for my party and others in the Parliament, he would not be here today to make those points. This is our debating time, not his. It has taken a year for him to express any regret, and I am grateful that, after 12 months of our seeking some form of contrite behaviour from the cabinet secretary, he has at last deigned to come before us and say that he got some things wrong and will learn lessons.

That is a good thing, although it should not have needed an Opposition debate before the cabinet secretary did that. However, I am grateful for it and I want to build a consensus on the issues. I am in favour of having foreign direct investment into our country, and I take deep offence when people say that we are against it because we have dared to ask simple questions that the cabinet secretary should have asked of these supposed investors but did not bother to.

We are not talking about a normal memorandum of understanding; it has our First Minister's signature on it. It is not just some bog-standard timid agreement; it is bigger than that. Surely something that is to get our First Minister's signature merits investigation and due diligence before she puts pen to paper, but that did not happen in this case. I want an absolutely cast-iron guarantee—the Government likes to give such things—that, if it is going to indulge in any discussions with foreign investors, it will do the

checks before it asks the First Minister to put pen to paper.

I welcome the economy secretary's contrite approach today. However, his adviser obviously did not write the speech by Maree Todd, because she used all the old lines that were issued in the press release earlier this week and the abuse that was thrown at my party for daring to ask questions. I was amused by Patrick Harvie's contortions on the issue. He said that he will allow his MSPs to make up their own minds on the debate, even though his MSPs were not in the chamber to hear it, but nothing surprises me from the Greens any more. John Mason did the in-depth research of looking on Wikipedia to find out what a memorandum of understanding is, and that is perhaps the level of due diligence that the Scottish Government should have done.

We need a proper set of rules that the Scottish Government complies with and which protect this country's reputation on foreign direct investment and as a place that is reliable to come to and where people can take our word. We also need to protect our credibility on human rights. There is no point in having all the documents and international-standard human rights concordats if we do not apply them in action, and the SNP did not impose them in this case. Scotland's reputation on human rights has been tarnished, at home and abroad.

Let us recap some of the colossal mistakes that were made. We know from freedom of information requests that there were concerns from Government departments, which were ignored. There were warnings from Amnesty International, which were ignored. There was advice from the Norwegian sovereign wealth fund, which was ignored. I am surprised by that, because the SNP loves Norway and I would have thought that it would have at least paid attention to that.

To go back just a little, Simon Hume-Kendall from the equity firm London Group LLP, which did a £250 million deal, said:

"It was all ... strange. They came with a lot of ideas and hope and promises, and they were desperate to sign an agreement. No sooner had they got the TV and the press out than they faded into the night."

That is the kind of people who the Government made an agreement with.

Our request, which is not unreasonable, is for the Scottish Government to publish a document that sets out what it will do in the future. The economy secretary has undermined our country's reputation. For all the strategies and plans on human rights and all the rhetoric on foreign investment, the SNP has fallen short in practice. A deal was signed with people who the SNP knew little about. One company had connections with

human rights abuses and the other had no serious financial track record. What is worse is that the Scottish Government was used to build credibility in a series of public relations stunts across the country.

For a whole year, instead of confessing his mistake, the cabinet secretary deflected, blustered and blamed everyone else. Although the debate has forced him to adopt a different tone, the arguments of old have been made again today by proxy by Maree Todd. The First Minister must properly apologise for this catalogue of errors. I urge the Parliament to censure the cabinet secretary for dragging our reputation through the mud.

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-04940, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 18 April 2017

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Health and Sport Committee Debate: Inquiry into the Preventative Health Agenda

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 19 April 2017

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform;
Rural Economy and Connectivity

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 20 April 2017

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Debate: Defence Basing Reforms and the Impact on Scotland

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 25 April 2017

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 26 April 2017

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Justice and the Law Officers;
Culture, Tourism and External Affairs

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 27 April 2017

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.45 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of four Parliamentary Bureau motions. I invite Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S5M-04941, on First Minister's, portfolio and general questions and topical questions; motions S5M-04942 and S5M-04943, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments; and motion S5M-04944, on the designation of a lead committee.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the period for Members to—

submit their names for Portfolio and General Questions on Wednesday 26 and Thursday 27 April should end at 3.00pm on Thursday 13 April;

lodge a First Minister's Question for answer on Wednesday 3 May should end at 12 noon on Friday 28 April;

submit their names for Portfolio and General Questions on Wednesday 10 and Thursday 11 May should end at 12 noon on Friday 28 April;

lodge a Topical Question for answer on Tuesday 2 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 2 May;

lodge a First Minister's Question for answer on Thursday 1 June should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 30 May;

submit their names for Portfolio and General Questions on Wednesday 7 and Thursday 8 June should end at 12 noon on Thursday 25 May; and

lodge a Topical Question for answer on Tuesday 30 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 30 May.

That the Parliament agrees that the Bankruptcy and Protected Trust Deeds (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Carbon Accounting Scheme (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): We come to decision time. The first question is, that amendment S5M-04920.1, in the name of John Swinney, which seeks to amend motion S5M-04920, in the name of Tavish Scott, on education, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)

McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)

Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 68, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-04920, in the name of Tavish Scott, on education, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament understands that the Scottish Government's next steps document on educational governance is to be published in June 2017 and, in advance of this, calls for serious consideration to be given to the inspection and policy functions of Education Scotland to be separated and for a reorganisation of the SQA in recognition of the concerns expressed by the teaching profession to the Education and Skills Committee.

The Presiding Officer: The third question involves a pre-emption. If the amendment in the name of Keith Brown is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Dean Lockhart will fall.

The question is, that amendment S5M-04919.2, in the name of Keith Brown, which seeks to amend motion S5M-04919, in the name of Willie Rennie, on censure and apology on the anniversary of the Chinese agreement, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)

Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Abstentions

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 55, Abstentions 3.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment in the name of Dean Lockhart is pre-empted.

The next question is, that amendment S5M-04919.3, in the name of Jackie Baillie, which seeks to amend motion S5M-04919, in the name of Willie Rennie, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)

Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinrossshire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)

Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 58, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-04919, in the name of Willie Rennie, on censure and apology on the anniversary of the Chinese agreement, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinrossshire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)

Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Abstentions

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 54, Abstentions 3.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes that 21 March 2017 marked one year since the First Minister signed a memorandum of understanding with the Chinese companies, SinoFortone and China Railway No.3 Engineering Group; recognises that Scotland has a strong track record in attracting investment as evidenced by the fact that Scotland has ranked as the best place for inward investment outside London for five of the last six years; further recognises that the memorandum of understanding (MoU) was about developing a working relationship to explore potential investment and that no legal, contractual or funding obligations on behalf of the Scottish Government have been made and there has been no engagement with the company since September 2016; notes with concern the human rights record of China Railway No.3 Engineering Group's parent company, China Railway Group; regrets that the signing of the MoU gave rise to concerns, and commits to considering and taking account of these concerns in any future such situations; agrees that the Scottish Government must always consider the human rights implications of its engagement with countries and business; believes that investment agreements should only be signed where appropriate due diligence, including on the human rights record of companies involved, has been undertaken; welcomes Scottish Government engagement with Amnesty International and other organisations on human rights ahead of international engagements, and believes that, with appropriate care, it is possible for international trade to co-exist with support for human rights around the world.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that Parliamentary Bureau motions S5M-04941 to

S5M-04944, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the period for Members to—

submit their names for Portfolio and General Questions on Wednesday 26 and Thursday 27 April should end at 3.00pm on Thursday 13 April;

lodge a First Minister's Question for answer on Wednesday 3 May should end at 12 noon on Friday 28 April;

submit their names for Portfolio and General Questions on Wednesday 10 and Thursday 11 May should end at 12 noon on Friday 28 April;

lodge a Topical Question for answer on Tuesday 2 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 2 May;

lodge a First Minister's Question for answer on Thursday 1 June should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 30 May;

submit their names for Portfolio and General Questions on Wednesday 7 and Thursday 8 June should end at 12 noon on Thursday 25 May; and

lodge a Topical Question for answer on Tuesday 30 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 30 May.

That the Parliament agrees that the Bankruptcy and Protected Trust Deeds (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Carbon Accounting Scheme (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

Rotary Clubs (Champions of Change Awards)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S5M-03750, in the name of John Lamont, on congratulations to Rotary district 1020 and other champions of change winners. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament praises the excellent work of Rotary clubs across Scotland in delivering projects to improve their local area and beyond, as well as providing friendship and support for their members; congratulates Rotary District 1020 on being awarded two out of 12 Rotary Champions of Change awards in 2016 for humanitarian service; understands that Grant Stephen of the Rotary Club of Duns was commended for setting up and running the Dementia Café in Duns and Robin Hamilton of the Rotary Club of Dunbar received an award for his project in India providing sanitation at schools in the Kalimpong district; notes that the 2017 Champions of Change awards ceremony will be taking place in April and will once again recognise unsung heroes in domestic and international categories; further notes that the Rotary Club of Galashiels has recently delivered 15 analogue breast screening lorries to India, in partnership with Indian Rotaries and led by local Rotarians, Patricia Paterson and Peter Croan; believes that the fantastic work of groups such as District 1020 and other Rotarians across Scotland makes a huge difference to local communities across Scotland and worldwide, and congratulates Rotary International, which is celebrating its 112th anniversary in 2017.

17:07

John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I lodged today's motion as an opportunity to praise the excellent work of Rotary district 1020, which covers my constituency in the Borders as well as much of the south and east of Scotland. Last year, district 1020 members picked up two out of 12 Rotary champions of change awards, which recognise contributions to humanitarian services worldwide. I take the opportunity to welcome those members and other Rotarians from Duns, Dunbar, Larbert, Galashiels, Edinburgh and elsewhere to the gallery this evening.

Tonight's debate is also an opportunity to hear about the good work that is being done by other districts and Rotarians across Scotland. There is much good work to speak about, so I thank members from across the chamber who have signed the motion and who are here tonight to join me in acknowledging the contributions of Rotarians to improving the lives of Scots and people elsewhere.

Rotary was formed in 1905 in Chicago by Paul Harris, who was a Chicago attorney who with five others founded the Rotary Club of Chicago. Those

pioneers decided to hold meetings in each other's homes on a rota basis, hence the name "Rotary" was adopted.

In 1906, the very first act of Rotary service was the provision by the Chicago club of a public toilet outside Chicago city hall. From that small beginning, every year Rotary clubs undertake practical acts of service in communities across the world, and they have gone on to represent 1.2 million members. Rotary also operates the largest educational scholarship programme in the world in the form of the Rotary Foundation, and finances the largest humanitarian programme anywhere.

Closer to home, Rotary district 1020 covers much of the south and east of Scotland, from South Queensferry to the Scottish Borders and from Kilsyth to Newton Stewart, including Edinburgh. It has some 1,700 members, several Rotaract clubs for 18 to 30-year-olds and a growing number of RotaKids clubs for primary schools. Like other Rotary districts, 1020 does a huge amount of fantastic and worth-while work. Rotary clubs utilise the skills, expertise and dedication of their members to help to improve the lives of people in communities at home and abroad. In the UK, that is more than 50,000 men and women from all walks of life working towards positive change in neighbourhoods near and far. Whether it was fundraising for local charities, volunteering at local residential homes, working with disadvantaged children, arranging the local firework or flower displays, we have all come across worth-while projects in our constituencies.

Internationally, Rotary clubs reach out to people in need; for example, people who are suffering from disease or malnutrition, or who are first responders to natural disasters. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me, Mr Lamont—may I stop you there? I suspect that someone has a mobile phone switched on. Could everyone please check? I am sorry, Mr Lamont. Please continue.

John Lamont: Has the noise stopped?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think so. I think that they have realised—look for the person with the red face.

John Lamont: It was not mine.

This evening is an opportunity to celebrate and share some of the great work that clubs across Scotland carry out. However, as well as contributing to improving the lives of others, Rotary clubs provide fellowship and companionship for their members. Volunteers are given the opportunity to develop personal skills and to develop better awareness of the problems that face the world today. They are also given an opportunity to meet, work and have a great time

with like-minded people. That aspect of Rotary life is often overlooked, but membership serves an important purpose and provides Rotarians with an opportunity that would otherwise be difficult for some to access.

In the Scottish Borders and in my constituency there are so many fantastic examples of the excellent work that is carried out by district 1020, such as the dictionary 4 life project that saw all primary 6 pupils at Burnfoot school in Hawick being given a dictionary. In addition, Rotarians keep children safe at the Border Union Agricultural Society show each year; and there was the Rotary Club of Jedburgh's generosity to the group of Chernobyl schoolgirls who visited the Borders and were kitted out with new winter and summer shoes, thanks to the generosity of local residents.

There are so many worth-while projects that I could mention, but in the limited time that I have this evening, I will pick out just three examples of the excellent work that was carried out in district 1020 last year. Grant Stephen, of the Rotary Club of Duns, was given a champions of change award last year for his outstanding work in helping the local community. Grant raised money and awareness for Alzheimer's Scotland and played a key role in the project to recognise Duns as a dementia-friendly town. Like the rest of the Borders, Duns has a higher proportion of elderly people in its population than the national average, so that work is all the more important for local residents.

Robin Hamilton, of the Rotary Club of Dunbar, received a champions of change award as a result of his involvement with the Kalimpong project in Bengal in India. The project helps to tackle the problem of human trafficking by providing shelter homes and vocational training centres. More than 100,000 children and many more adults are estimated to be trafficked in India every year. That initiative is therefore really worth while, and Robin has helped to raise nearly £50,000 for it since the project began in 2012.

Finally, the Rotary Club of Galashiels and District in the Borders has delivered 15 analogue breast screening lorries to India, in partnership with Indian Rotary clubs and led by local Rotarians Patricia Paterson and Peter Croan. The increasing toll of breast cancer in developing nations is a devastating situation. The disease was once considered to be a problem of affluent nations, but it is now rooted firmly in developing nations such as India. The breast-screening project will help in tackling the problem.

I am delighted that representatives from Rotary district 1020 are here with us this evening to celebrate their fantastic achievement last year. We have with us in the gallery Robin and Carol Hamilton, Grant and Anne Stephen, Patricia

Paterson, Peter Croan and many others from across the district.

I am sure that we will hear about the work of Rotarians across other parts of Scotland in the debate, but I would appreciate hearing something from the minister about what the Scottish Government is doing to support the Rotary movement. I know, for example, that in partnership with local authorities, many Rotary clubs are involved in delivery of the community payback order system, and that others are involved in delivery of Scottish Government funded projects. A partnership exists, therefore, that I hope can be improved and developed.

As elected representatives, we can all play a part in supporting and promoting that fantastic work in our communities. Given the hard work that is carried out by Rotarians, the least that we can do is give up some of our time to speak at their events, write about the work of our local Rotary clubs in local newspapers or share a post or two on Facebook.

I am delighted to see the level of support in the Scottish Parliament for the Rotary movement, and I know that MSPs from across Scotland are grateful for the hard work of Rotarians in their areas. They deserve our support because, without them, hundreds of thousands of pounds would not be raised for charity, local projects would not be supported and many desperate people around the world would not get the help that they need. [*Applause.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I request that people in the gallery do not show their appreciation or otherwise. Thank you.

17:15

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I congratulate John Lamont on securing the debate. Although I recognise and applaud all Rotarians for their voluntary and humanitarian work at home and abroad, I will restrict myself to some examples from my constituency of Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale, which has Rotary clubs from east to west—at Melrose, Peebles and Penicuik; at Innerleithen, Walkerburn and Traquair; at Lauderdale; and at Galashiels and district, as is mentioned in the motion.

I will start with the club in Gala and a project that was mentioned by John Lamont. After a meeting with a surgeon from Pakistan at an awareness day, plans unfolded to send redundant medical units to Pakistan. After some discussions with the director of NHS National Services Scotland, the national health service in Scotland made available to the Rotary Club of Galashiels and District trailers that had previously been used for breast

cancer screening and which were available due to NHS Scotland upgrading its mammography X-ray screening technology from analogue to digital.

Amjad, the surgeon, advised that they could still be used in Pakistan and other parts of the world where analogue equipment is still in operation, so the trailers were shipped to Karachi in Pakistan, thanks to a generous donation from a businessman in Pakistan that met the substantial shipping cost of £133,000. Through the charity Rehabilitation Response, it was ensured that the empty space inside the units was filled with furniture to be donated to schools in Pakistan. The medical units were shipped out and arrived in Karachi in July and the first week of August last year. Patricia Paterson, who is the president of Galashiels Rotary, and Peter Croan, who have already been mentioned, attended the formal handover ceremony. The delivery of the units with the facilities to undertake breast screening has raised awareness as well as providing screening. There is no doubt that screening for and detection of breast cancer are highly important, which is now recognised in countries including Pakistan and not just in places like Scotland.

There have been thoughts about other joint projects including one on fridges for polio vaccination and a family project at the Hands centre. Discussions have taken place with the Rotary Club of Karachi—the movement is international—about the fact that several of those ideas would be excellent for RotaKids projects. There has even been an assessment of the possibility that the clinical impact may be greater if a focus on eye screening was taken on board. Another idea is the conversion of medical units for limb facilities or a medical facility.

The Rotary Club of Peebles is a medium-sized club with some 25 members of all ages. They, too, have contributed internationally and locally, and in the past few years have set up a dental project in Nepal and a refuge for children who are affected by AIDS in South Africa.

The Rotary Club of Penicuik has worked on backpacks for Mary's Meals, and while I am talking about meals, I note the sterling work that all the Rotary clubs do in collecting food for the food banks that, regrettably, we have. The Penicuik club has also collected for Macmillan nurses, whether at the end of the checkouts in the supermarket or on the streets, and it raised funds this month for the trustees of Friends of Chitambo, which supports a hospital in central Zambia.

I was pleased to welcome the Melrose Rotarians to a special lunch in the Parliament with others who had adopted stations along the Borders railway. The planting spaces at Tweedbank are a local focus for them, and they also support other local events.

From flower beds to collecting tins and major charitable work such as shipping medical supplies and support abroad, the touch of the Rotarians' voluntary work is invaluable. I am pleased to support John Lamont's motion and I congratulate the Rotarians on all the work that they do across my constituency and elsewhere in Scotland.

17:20

Rachael Hamilton (South Scotland) (Con): I am proud to take part in the debate, and I thank my friend and colleague John Lamont for securing it. I warmly welcome the Rotary members who have joined us in the gallery. Tonight, we recognise their fantastic work. They are men and women who come from all walks of life and whose aim is to contribute to the lives of others and to make a positive impact, at home and abroad.

In February 2017, just last month, I attended an event here in the Parliament to celebrate the 112th worldwide anniversary of the Rotary organisation. My colleagues and I met Rotary representatives to learn more about local community initiatives and the Purple4Polio initiative, which was set up to eliminate polio throughout the world.

Two Rotary members from district 1020, who are with us in the gallery tonight, have made such an impact: Grant Stephen and Robin Hamilton. Recently, the district governor, Andy Ireland, proudly accompanied both gentlemen to the House of Lords, where they received champions of change awards.

I should declare an interest as, in my career as an agronomist, I worked with Grant Stephen, and I know that his enthusiasm knows no bounds. It came as no surprise that Mr Stephen's work has been recognised. His relentless campaigning to raise money for Alzheimer Scotland has been influential, with Duns being recognised as a dementia-friendly town. That is brilliant for the Borders town and it is brilliant for raising Alzheimer's awareness across Scotland.

We all know somebody with dementia. My grandfather had vascular dementia, which impacted hugely on our family. Every 30 minutes, someone in Scotland is diagnosed with dementia. About 90,000 people in Scotland have dementia and researchers now understand that one in three people born in 2015 will go on to develop dementia in their lifetime, unless a cure or a vaccine is found. In the context of how prevalent the disease is becoming, I hope that towns and cities across the south of Scotland and the whole of Scotland will use Grant Stephen's work as an example of how to deliver dementia-friendly communities.

Robin Hamilton from the Rotary Club of Dunbar won accolades for his work in the Kalimpong

project in Bengal in India, helping to tackle human trafficking and in the process raising nearly £50,000 since the project began in 2012. Kalimpong, which is in north-east India, close to the borders with Nepal, Bhutan and China, contains many vulnerable people at risk from human trafficking because of high unemployment and a lack of steady income. Those who are trafficked are at risk of becoming HIV positive and developing AIDS. Even when they are rescued, they risk rejection from their communities.

To put the seriousness of the human trafficking situation in the area into perspective, the figure of three cases in northern Bengal in 2001 had increased to more than 1,000 by 2010. In 2012 there were 8,000 girls missing in Bengal, many of whom had been taken into trafficking on the false promise of work in the city. Instead, they were trafficked for just \$1,000. That is said to be just a small part of the picture. It is immensely saddening to hear of such practices and of vulnerable people being exploited to this day.

On a positive note, however, Robin Hamilton aims to create awareness through the Kalimpong project, teaching communities about trafficking and HIV/AIDS, providing vocational training to create sustainable livelihoods and creating a shelter home for women and young girls. We can all recognise the importance of Robin's work, and it is right that we congratulate him and pay tribute to the project.

The work of Grant Stephen and Robin Hamilton does not stop here. They will continue to make a positive impact. I wish them all the best, and I congratulate them once more on receiving their champions of change awards. Furthermore, I congratulate Rotary International, which celebrates its 112th anniversary this year.

17:24

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I thank John Lamont for securing tonight's debate and giving us the opportunity to speak about Rotary district 1020. As he said, the district stretches across south and much of central Scotland. Right across that part of our country, rotaries provide support and companionship to each other and to guests. They are also very much embedded in their local communities.

That is certainly the case in all five towns in my constituency, East Lothian. That engagement is multifaceted: groups do their own fundraising, they provide fundraising support for other local charities, and they provide stewarding at important community events, from the North Berwick highland games to the Haddington agricultural show.

This evening I want to focus on the Rotary Club of Dunbar. I declare an interest: on a number of occasions I have enjoyed Dunbar Rotary's hospitality, in return for which the club has endured having me as a speaker for the evening. I want to focus on Dunbar Rotary's international work, because, as members said, the club's former president, Robin Hamilton, won the 2016 champion of change award for his work on the project in Kalimpong.

Dunbar Rotary's connection with Kalimpong started in a very Rotary fashion: at a meeting in Belhaven in 2011, when Dr Miku Foning, from the Rotary Club of Kalimpong, was the club's visiting guest. As Rachael Hamilton told us, Dr Foning described the situation for many people in Bengal, in north-east India. He talked about their vulnerability to trafficking, prostitution, slavery and forced marriage and how they were simply disappearing into one of those dreadful fates.

Robin Hamilton did not just listen to the story of his colleague from India but responded, by asking the simple question, "How can we help?" From that was born the Sadhu Singh project. Robin mobilised not just Dunbar Rotary but 16 Rotary clubs from across Scotland and indeed places as far-flung as the Czech Republic, to raise funds to provide a vocational training centre, where people at risk would be able to learn seven different trade skills, to enable them to find a sustainable way to live and to avoid falling into the hands of traffickers. The clubs raised funds themselves and accessed a Rotary International global grant of around \$69,000.

All that bore fruit last year, when seven Rotarians from Dunbar travelled to Kalimpong and took part in the opening of the vocational training centre, as it was handed over to the Diocese of North East India, which will run it. However, Dunbar Rotary is not resting on its laurels. It is now raising funds for phase 2, which is a shelter for young women and girls who are at risk of trafficking. The project has been marvellously successful, but of course it is not finished.

I will end by returning to the local, because that is the great strength of Rotary—it stretches across the world but its roots are completely embedded in its clubs and their communities. Just last night, I was privileged to be a judge at an East Lothian Foodbank girl guides cooking competition, which was the culmination of a programme that East Lothian Foodbank had run with local girl guide units, in which guides had to cook with food that the charity provides. The approach was all part of the charity's outreach programme, and modest prizes were provided by the Dunbar and Musselburgh Rotary clubs. Of course, that is not the Rotary's only engagement with the East Lothian Foodbank; it also collects food regularly.

The great strength of Rotary is in how the local and the international are wedded together. I can do no better than end by quoting Dr Foning, who said to Robin Hamilton during one of their meetings:

"We are in the river together and must swim til we get to the other side."

That is what Dunbar Rotary has been doing, whether we are talking about the river at the corner of its own street or a river that flows from the foothills of the Himalaya. What a marvellous project that has been.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That was a long four minutes, Mr Gray, but they were certainly worth listening to. I call Stuart Stevenson to be followed by Alison Harris. I refer to your speech's length, Mr Gray, in case it encourages Mr Stevenson.

17:29

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I note the requirement for four minutes, Presiding Officer. I will use some of that to congratulate John Lamont on bringing the topic for debate to Parliament. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak about Rotary clubs.

I welcome the times when we as a Parliament look to the actions of hard-working Scottish citizens and citizens across the world. In particular tonight, we reflect on the people in our nation's Rotary clubs. The motto of Rotary International is "Service above self". If we have heard anything from the speeches so far, it is that their work exemplifies that motto.

The awards that we acknowledge tonight are a small enough gesture when compared with all the hours of compassionate service that club members give. I cannot help wondering what the world would look like if we did not have Rotary or, on the other hand, if more people followed its example. We might have had to invent Rotary if it had not been invented 112 years ago.

Rotary has been part of my life for a very long time, although not district 1020. I was brought up in Cupar in Fife, and my father was the president of the Rotary club there from 1956 to 1957. I first spoke to the Rotary club there, I believe, in 1962, at a sons and daughters evening that the club had organised, at which I was responsible for the vote of thanks to the members. I also spoke to the club in 1974 about my career, which was computers. When I revisit that speech, I see that it was a sorry tale of computer failures and difficulties—it is on my website, if members wish to look at it, under the comments section. It will take them into distant history.

The Rotary club movement, then as now, seeks to educate and to support the efforts of others. It inspires and empowers people across the globe. Tonight we focus particularly on Rotary's four-way test, which is part of the guiding principles for a club. It is an ethical guide to behaviour, and one that we can all learn from. It reads:

"Of the things we think, say or do:

1. Is it the TRUTH?
2. Is it FAIR to all concerned?
3. Does it promote GOOD WILL AND BETTER FRIENDSHIP?
4. Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned?"

I can certainly say, for my part, that friendship was a key part of what my father got out of being in Rotary and of what he was able to contribute to Rotary.

The people whom I see in old photographs of the club are all people whom I recognise and who were important parts of my life. I also knew what they did to support the local community and communities across the world. If the test—the ethical guide that Rotarians seek to live their lives by and to operate as Rotarians under—were adopted by us all in our own lives, we would be doing something quite special. We would run out of awards to give to people if everyone were to be serving. That would be no bad thing. We should aim for a day when we are a little less selfish and little more selfless.

I celebrate the efforts of Rotary clubs in Scotland and I hope that they will continue to evolve. From my contact with them, I know that they are very different from what they were 60 years ago; for example, the number of women members has grown, and the clubs are all the better for it. They also reach much further across the world. In the 1960s the Rotary Club of Cupar reached to Japan, which was thought to be extraordinarily novel.

Let me wish the Rotary clubs every possible success in the future. They had early promise, when after only 16 years they were established on six continents. Maybe we should invent some more continents—Rotary would be there before we turned our backs.

17:34

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): I am delighted that my colleague John Lamont has secured this debate for members' business this afternoon. Rotary, organisations like it and organisations such as Probus, Rotaract, Inner Wheel, RotaKids, Round Table and the Ladies Circle are known for their fellowship and for raising

funds for people who are less fortunate than ourselves.

At this stage, I declare an interest and say that I am a past chairman of Falkirk Ladies Circle. I certainly enjoyed many fun years being part of that group.

The annual champions of change awards give Rotary International in Great Britain and Ireland the opportunity to recognise particular people—those unsung heroes who go that extra mile in assisting others or inspiring others to do so. I am talking about people like Robin Hamilton from Dunbar, who is a member of his local Rotary club. I know that we have heard about the following people already, but they are worth mentioning again. Several years ago, Robin met a fellow Rotarian from a small part of India that is sandwiched between Nepal, Bhutan and China. It is a prime target area for people traffickers. With many vulnerable people, high unemployment and an escalating number of people being reported as missing, something had to be done.

A project was set up locally to highlight the issue and to reduce the stigma of trafficked women returning, who often had AIDS and HIV. Plans were made for a shelter home to be set up for women and young girls, and work commenced on a vocational training centre. Although some funds and grants became available, it was clear that the costs were far beyond what could be raised locally.

Enter Robin Hamilton and the Rotary Club of Dunbar. With assistance from a number of clubs from Scotland, England, India and the Czech Republic working with local bodies, funds were raised for phase 1, which was the completion of works on the training centre, including security fencing, sanitation, electrical work and provision of furniture. Training courses will be run on subjects including tailoring, animal welfare, carpentry and horticulture. Phase 2 will involve the shelter home for trafficked women and girls. What a difference those facilities will make to the lives of the people concerned.

Not all champions of change are making a difference to people overseas. Grant Stephen of Duns—whom my colleague Rachael Hamilton mentioned—works tirelessly in his community to raise awareness of dementia, and assisted in the setting up of a dementia-friendly cafe in Duns.

Patricia Paterson, who is a member of the Rotary Club of Galashiels and District, was approached by a doctor who did corrective work on children in Pakistan. He mentioned that soon-to-be-redundant national health service breast screening units would be of great benefit to his work in Pakistan, because they could be used not only for breast screening but as mobile operating

theatres and polio immunisation centres. Fellow Rotarian Peter Croan became involved and thoughts turned to the logistics of getting the units to Pakistan and meeting the £133,000 cost of shipping. Thanks to a generous donation from a Pakistani businessman, work on getting the units from Hamilton to Karachi gathered pace.

The units were filled with furniture that could be distributed to schools in Pakistan. Support was given by the British High Commission, and the project received positive coverage in Pakistan for Rotary and for Scotland. On 13 August 2016, 10 former NHS breast screening units were officially handed over. The ceremony was attended by the Chief Minister of Sindh province, who warmly thanked NHS Scotland and the members of the Rotary Club of Galashiels and District.

I am advised by the former district governor Andy Ireland that the Galashiels club intends to deepen the links that it has established through the project, and that it will continue to support projects to improve the lives of people in Pakistan.

I have touched on a few stories of ordinary people who are doing extraordinary things. I hope that, tonight, they feel that they are no longer unsung heroes, and that they are, indeed, champions for change, and people who this Parliament recognises have truly put service before self.

17:38

The Minister for International Development and Europe (Dr Alasdair Allan): I thank John Lamont for his efforts in bringing the debate to Parliament. It gives me great pleasure to acknowledge the tremendous work of our Rotary clubs and to welcome many of their members to the public gallery. As we have heard, they are part of an outstanding worldwide organisation that works at local, national and international levels to run successful campaigns that save lives around the globe.

Rotarians have been using their skills and links to clubs around the world to work to alleviate some of the causes of poverty in countries in which millions of people die of starvation and from diseases that could be prevented by clean water, proper sanitation or medicines. Members have built links with national and international charities, non-governmental organisations and community groups to promote projects to eradicate hunger and malnutrition, to reduce child mortality and to help with disease prevention and education for all. When natural disasters strike anywhere in the world, Rotarians are often some of the first people to take action by organising collections that raise large sums of money for the various charities that

are best equipped to provide relief to those who are in need.

As Mr Gray pointed out, we should remember that Rotary makes its mark not only overseas but here in our communities. Today, we have heard some great local examples of the contribution that Rotary has made to the lives of people across Scotland. Everything that is achieved by Rotary International and the Rotary Foundation depends entirely on the work of local clubs such as the Rotary clubs of Duns, Dunbar and Galashiels.

The cause of charitable endeavour—of, as the Rotary motto puts it, “Service above Self”—has a noticeable impact on people and communities across Scotland and beyond. The Government is clear that volunteering matters. It has huge economic significance, as it contributes more than £2 billion to Scotland’s economy every year, but perhaps more important is the fact that, without volunteers, many of our communities would simply cease to function. People all across Scotland make vital contributions every day to their families, communities and society as a whole—usually without fanfare or any reward—because they believe in the same things as we all believe in: equality for all, a fair society and a chance for everyone to participate and make a difference.

Volunteering is good for the volunteer, too, in building skills, enhancing employability and supporting mental wellbeing. At its best, volunteering in Scotland makes a crucial contribution to building social capital, fostering trust, binding people together and making our communities better places to live and work in.

On Mr Lamont’s question about potential sources of assistance for Rotarian projects, I would say that the most relevant sources of funding to any voluntary organisation include the community capacity and resilience fund, the empowering communities fund and the volunteer support fund. We recognise the numerous contributions that volunteers make as carers, providers, mentors and leaders and in many other roles, and we want to continue to support people to volunteer and to contribute to the issues that matter to them. That is crucial to our wider aim of creating a fairer, smart and inclusive Scotland with genuine equality of opportunity for everyone.

It is true that, in an increasingly globalised yet uncertain world, Scotland must remain internationally relevant. Scotland’s international framework, which was published in March 2015, sets the direction for Scotland’s international activity. The twin aims of that framework are

“To create an environment within Scotland that supports a better understanding of international opportunities and a greater appetite and ability to seize them”

and

“To influence the world around us on the issues that matter most in helping Scotland flourish.”

The framework acknowledges Scotland’s desire to be a “Good global citizen” by making

“distinctive contributions in addressing global challenges such as climate change, tackling inequality and promoting human rights”.

Last year, we updated Scotland’s strategies for engagement with India and Pakistan. Those strategies, which might interest members, look at how we can build sustainable partnerships in education, business, energy, water and culture. We are committed to building partnerships that have mutual benefit and which allow the countries involved to achieve their goals while collectively reducing inequality and building opportunities for mutual learning.

I take the opportunity to commend the Rotary clubs in Dunbar and Galashiels for their work in India and Pakistan on providing sanitation in schools and access to breast screening. As we have heard, such work is a clear demonstration that it is not simply for the Government and its agencies to pursue international links—important though that is—but for individuals and organisations to make the connections that impact so much on people’s lives.

It is impressive that community groups across Scotland are working tirelessly to improve lives not just in this country but, as we have heard, around the world. That provides evidence that our relationship with our friends and communities in other parts of the world is truly a combined effort and is being built up not just by Governments but by individuals and communities across Scotland, with much of the work being driven by groups such as our Rotary clubs.

The debate has been positive. I possibly feel personally cheated that I did not attend the Cupar Rotarian meeting in 1974 in which Mr Stevenson explained his views on computer programming, but I have no doubt that much traffic will be driven to his website after today to correct that historic wrong.

I echo the comment that it has given me great pleasure to acknowledge the tremendous work of our local Rotary clubs. I congratulate Rotary International, which celebrates its 112th anniversary this year. With the success of Scottish Rotary clubs at the 2016 champions of change awards, I wish our Rotary clubs all the best for the 2017 awards in April, which will again recognise unsung heroes in domestic and international categories. We should all work to ensure that Rotarians, who make a difference and volunteer their time for the benefit of others, get the recognition that they deserve, as they have today.

Meeting closed at 17:45.

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