



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Wednesday 16 May 2018**

**Session 5**



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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 16 May 2018

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Communities, Social Security and Equalities

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The first item of business this afternoon is portfolio question time. As always, members should try to be succinct, please.

#### Scottish Social Security System

**1. Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on progress in delivering the new Scottish social security system. (S5O-02087)

**The Minister for Social Security (Jeane Freeman):** As Audit Scotland recognises, we are on track to deliver the first wave of devolved benefits. The 13 per cent increase of the carers allowance supplement will be delivered this year, and the best start grant and funeral expense assistance will be delivered by summer 2019. We have started recruitment for the staff of our new social security Scotland agency both at the headquarters in Dundee and locally. However, we cannot deliver the devolution of social security powers in isolation, given the unavoidable central role of the Department for Work and Pensions in the safe and secure transfer of the benefits. It is imperative that the DWP matches our pace for delivery, and it is crucial that it has plans in place to prioritise that joint programme of work.

**Jenny Gilruth:** Does the minister agree that the Scottish Government is currently fighting child poverty with one hand tied behind its back, particularly given that new research confirms that the number of children who are growing up in poverty in working households will be 1 million higher than the number in 2010, because of the UK Government's brutal benefits cuts? How will the Scottish Government make different choices with the limited powers that it has?

**Jeane Freeman:** I agree with Jenny Gilruth's central point in her supplementary question. The Scottish Government is already providing over £125 million this year to mitigate the worst effects of the UK Government's austerity welfare agenda. We are the only country in the UK to set targets for the reduction and eradication of child poverty, and

our new social security powers are embedded in legislation, which all members voted for, that says that social security is a human right. The best start grant, which we will introduce to replace the sure start grant, is, together with the increase in the carers allowance, a significant financial investment in young families.

We are talking about a partnership between the Scottish Government and the citizens whom we represent. However, I repeat: for us to deliver what we have promised requires the DWP to match our pace. We already have at least two instances in which it has fallen behind the agreements that we reached with it and it is delaying our progress.

**Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con):** I agree with the minister that the success of the social security system will rely on a close working relationship between the Scottish Government and the DWP. What steps have been taken to ensure that interactions between the DWP and the Scottish social security agency are as smooth as possible, particularly in areas of split competence?

**Jeane Freeman:** As we have said before in the chamber and in the Social Security Committee, our Government social security officials and DWP officials are in constant—arguably daily—contact in order to ensure that we progress that work. However, we have a couple of recent examples of delays, which the Social Security Committee knows about. There was a four-month delay in receiving the integration software code from the DWP. That was received four months after the date that we agreed with the DWP and it agreed with us. There was also a delay of a year in implementing our commitment to mitigate the bedroom tax from the date that we agreed with the DWP.

Officials on both sides are doing their very best, but I need the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to give me an assurance that the warm words about co-operative joint work will be met by her ensuring that her department prioritises the work with us in the light of anything else that it may be doing. That has not been the case recently, and we will continue to pursue that matter with her.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** Kate Durie, who is a constituent of mine, was diagnosed with motor neurone disease last year, at the age of 67. As personal independence payments do not apply to those who are over 65, she is not eligible for them, which means that she cannot access any mobility allowance or automatically qualify for a power chair. She has had to spend £1,700 of her own money on a power chair, and it is likely that she will have to buy another chair in addition to that.

Disabled Scots are looking for certainty about how the assistance will give them access to the equipment that they need for their lives. In the absence of any detailed disability assistance policy proposals—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please come to your question.

**Daniel Johnson:** —or a clear timetable for delivery, will the minister say whether disability assistance will cover all adults or whether she will open up a mobility component for older disabled people?

**Jeane Freeman:** As I am sure that Daniel Johnson is well aware—we have talked about it for two years—the way in which we are designing the delivery and the content of the benefits that we are responsible for is through direct engagement with our experience panels and our stakeholder groups. They help us to devise what the system should be and how it should be delivered. We will continue to discuss with them matters regarding attendance allowance and the disability assistance, including—as this has been raised with me before—the possibility of offering a choice of a mobility component within attendance allowance, for example. We need to work all that through with them and we are doing that. As soon as we have a resolution, I will of course make the chamber aware of it.

### Affordable Homes (Fife)

2. **David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how much it is investing in delivering more affordable homes across Fife in 2018-19. (S5O-02088)

**The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart):** The Scottish Government has allocated affordable housing supply programme funding of more than £30 million to Fife in this financial year. That will be for housing association and Fife Council projects to deliver a range of housing in a mix of affordable tenures that primarily focus on social rented housing, which is a key Government priority. We aim to deliver 35,000 social rent homes across Scotland as part of our 50,000 affordable homes programme.

**David Torrance:** Will the minister commit to publishing a breakdown of that funding across all Scotland's local authority areas? How does our level of funding for affordable homes across Scotland compare to that in other parts of the United Kingdom?

**Kevin Stewart:** The Scottish Government's spend per head on the affordable housing programme is three times higher than that of the UK Government on its affordable homes programme. A full breakdown of the £568 million

allocated to all Scotland's local authority areas for 2018-19 is published on the Scottish Government's website, and I would be happy to make that available to the member.

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** During 2016-17, only 7,336 affordable homes were completed. If that rate continues, only around 36,000 homes will be completed by March 2021, and the SNP's target of 50,000 will not be achieved until two years later. Delivering a sufficient supply of affordable housing—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Will you come to the question, please?

**Alexander Stewart:** —should be a matter of urgency. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that it is a matter of urgency?

**Kevin Stewart:** As I explained at the Local Government and Communities Committee this morning, the target is not 10,000 a year; it is 50,000 over the course of this parliamentary session. Many housing associations and councils, now that they have the resource planning assumptions for the next three years of £1.79 billion, are putting in place plans to ensure delivery. Our target is extremely ambitious, but a recent report by Shelter Scotland, the Chartered Institute of Housing and the Equality and Human Rights Commission agrees that we are on track to deliver 50,000 affordable homes during this session.

### Equality Act 2010 (Bank Closures)

3. **Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the Equality and Human Rights Commission regarding whether the recent and proposed bank closures contravene the Equality Act 2010. (S5O-02089)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance):** I believe that the proposed bank closures and their replacement with mobile banking services will have serious implications for disabled people. That is why I have written to the Scotland commissioner at the Equality and Human Rights Commission, asking her to consider those implications in the light of the requirements placed on organisations by the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 to ensure that a disabled person can access the same services and premises, as far as possible, as someone who is not disabled. I am happy to share that letter with Gordon MacDonald.

**Gordon MacDonald:** The mobile banks that have been introduced in my constituency of Edinburgh Pentlands do not provide disability access. Does the minister share my concern that the 30-minute stopping timeframe is inadequate to

meet the demands of individuals and the areas that are served?

**Angela Constance:** I very much share the concerns that the member has articulated, and I know that they are shared by many members across the chamber. In my view, it is unacceptable that disabled people could in effect be excluded from conducting their financial affairs in bank facilities because the physical barriers presented by the mobile banking fleet may make it impossible for them to use those services. That is why I have raised the issue with the EHRC. The Equality Act 2010 places a requirement on organisations to take positive steps to ensure that, as far as possible, a disabled person can access the same services and premises as someone who is not disabled. If the proposed mobile banking alternative does not meet that standard, the potential implications would be considerable.

On the time constraint, I urge the bank in question to reconsider that. People should have sufficient time to conduct their transactions without having to worry about a time limit.

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Proposals by Link, which runs the United Kingdom's largest cash machine network, have raised fears that many automated teller machines could disappear from the high street. Age Scotland warns that that will hit older people hard. Does the minister agree that banks should invest more in the ATM network? Does she welcome the bill proposed by Ged Killen MP that seeks to ban ATM charges and protect access to free cash withdrawals?

**Angela Constance:** The member raises a very considered point. A range of financial and banking services are important to us all. The ATM network improves access for everybody, but particularly for people who may have disability issues or other issues to contend with in life. Therefore, it is worth while to have an ATM service that is as available as possible. I echo the concerns of Age Scotland and others about charging for ATM services. If the member would like ministers to pick up aspects of the matter that she has raised, we could certainly do that. I have outlined the action that we have taken in my portfolio, but ministers in other portfolios are engaging with the bank in question as a business in relation to how it could be more inclusive.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Time is moving on, and we are not getting terribly far through the questions. I ask the questioners and those who answer to bear that in mind.

#### **Scottish Universal Credit Flexibilities (Take-up)**

**4. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it

will provide an update on the take-up among claimants of the Scottish universal credit flexibilities. (S5O-02090)

**The Minister for Social Security (Jeane Freeman):** The latest data, which we published on 24 January, shows that, between 11 November and 31 December last year, 5,800 people had been offered one or both of the Scottish choices. Around 2,500 people have taken up either one or both of those. Subject to the provision of data by the Department for Work and Pensions, we plan to publish management information covering the first six months of the operation of the Scottish choices in the summer this year.

**Clare Adamson:** A recent Channel 4 investigation found that some 70 per cent of DWP staff say that the roll-out of universal credit should be stopped. That follows a Trussell Trust figure showing that food bank use is up by 52 per cent in areas that have had full universal credit roll-out for 12 months or more. Does the minister agree that the overwhelming evidence points to the roll-out of universal credit being nothing short of a disaster? Will she join me in once again calling for the United Kingdom Government to halt its roll-out or, if it will not do so, to devolve universal credit fully to the Scottish Parliament so that we can make different choices in the best interest of the people of Scotland?

**Jeane Freeman:** Layer upon layer of evidence over the past two years has demonstrated repeatedly that universal credit—in terms of the policies, the freezing of the benefits and the systems—is not fit for purpose and is causing significant hardship to many individuals across the country and to organisations and local authorities. Most recently, we have learned from the Chartered Institute of Housing, the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations of the particular difficulties that they have with the way in which the DWP schedules the payments of rent. The evidence is overwhelming, but the UK Government continues to pursue a policy and delivery mechanism that all the evidence shows is failing.

Contrary to the myths that have been perpetrated, most recently in the *Alloa Advertiser* by a Conservative MP, this Government is not shying away from its benefit responsibilities. On the contrary, simply give us more powers and the resources to match them and I will happily show the UK Government how much better we can do, going with the grain of the people of Scotland with a system that is based on human rights.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I recognise that ministers like to give full answers and all the information that they can, but I ask them to bear in mind that many members wish to ask questions.

### Remote and Rural Areas (Support for Older People)

5. **Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it supports older people in remote and rural areas. (S5O-02091)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That was a really good short question. You caught me unawares.

**The Minister for Social Security (Jeane Freeman):** We provide support to older people living in rural communities through our investment across a number of areas, including improving digital engagement, providing accessible housing, transport—specifically the bus pass, the air discount scheme and road equivalent tariff fares on the Clyde and Hebrides routes—reforming adult social care and funding free personal and nursing care, which helps nearly 78,000 older people. In addition, our new social security powers include responsibility for benefits that will be particularly helpful to older people, and our current ground-breaking draft strategy on social isolation and loneliness is taking positive steps to consult older people, particularly in rural communities, on what we might do next.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** Older people regularly find themselves the target of scams, mis-selling and pressurised door-to-door sales, and evidence from Age UK suggests that almost half of older people have been targeted in that way. Cracking down on scams has been raised by the Scottish older people's assembly, which visited Parliament this month, and trading standards has agreed to look into the views of older people. What actions will the minister take, or is she taking, to protect older people from those targeted actions by unscrupulous individuals and businesses?

**Jeane Freeman:** Some of the areas that Jamie Halcro Johnston raised relate to the new consumer powers that we have, and I will raise the matter with the cabinet secretary concerned. In addition, I know that my colleague Mr Matheson, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, is keenly aware of the matter and is discussing it with our police service and others.

### Highland Council (Meetings)

6. **Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government when the cabinet secretary last met officials from Highland Council. (S5O-02092)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance):** Scottish Government ministers and officials regularly meet council officers across Scotland, including from Highland Council.

**Edward Mountain:** In the past 20 years, there has been a 55 per cent increase in the number of people aged 75 and over living in the Highlands, with a corresponding reduction in the number of younger people. Given Audit Scotland's report on local government in Scotland, Highland Council has accepted a need for a fundamental redesign of service provision. What specific financial actions will the Scottish Government commit to in providing help to Highland Council in the huge redesign of the provision of local services?

**Angela Constance:** Mr Mountain has raised a really interesting question. The issue of an ageing population and depopulation in the Highland area and other parts of Scotland is a very real concern, both for the provision of public services and for parts of the economy, and also more broadly in terms of strong, cohesive and resilient communities. The question that he asked touches on many areas of Government.

In my own portfolio, I highlight our investment in housing. Highland Council currently benefits from £40 million in capital for affordable housing, and that will increase to £45 million by the end of this session of Parliament. There is also the work that we are doing on the review of local governance.

This is about not just local government services, but the public service as a whole. The strong thread that runs through all that work is about how we empower communities and enable citizens to have more say in the decisions that are taken at a local level.

**Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** Further to Edward Mountain's question, and specifically on housing, will the cabinet secretary outline how the partnership between the Scottish National Party Government and Highland Council through the Highland infrastructure fund is helping to deliver affordable housing around the region?

**Angela Constance:** Scottish Government housing officials meet representatives of Highland Council each week through the Highland housing hub, which is a strong partnership arrangement that helps to deliver affordable homes in the area. Highland Council leads on the overall management of the Highland infrastructure loan fund. All developers can bid for the fund through the council. Six million pounds has already been invested and £4 million is currently available for further developments. I am aware that there are two significant projects—one in Drumnadrochit and the other in Inverness—which will enable 618 new affordable homes to be delivered, alongside private housing developments, in those locations.



### Infrastructure Development (Planning)

**7. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it ensures that the planning system supports the development of infrastructure in areas with a growing population. (S5O-02093)

**The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart):** Planning authorities are required to prepare development plans to guide future development and infrastructure. An infrastructure-first approach to development is an important part of our planning reforms.

**Miles Briggs:** Constituents in Edinburgh who live in communities where there is a large increase in the number of new houses and flats that are being built are becoming increasingly concerned about the huge pressure that growing populations place on vital local health services, with many surgeries restricting their patient lists. What future public service scoping plans are being undertaken to make sure that we meet the future needs of new and existing communities?

**Kevin Stewart:** As I have pointed out, we are looking at that through the Planning (Scotland) Bill. The Scottish Government has provided and supported investment in three health centres in Lothian in recent times—the Blackburn, Firrhill and north-west Edinburgh partnership centres, which have all recently become operational. We also opened phase 1 of the new Royal Edinburgh hospital last year.

I want to ensure that local development plans, local authorities and the health service talk to one another in order to make sure that their plans are utterly intertwined. That is one of the reasons why I have spoken so often about intertwining community planning with spatial planning, because that will lead to essential changes.

I hope that that answers Mr Briggs's question, as I see that you are telling me to move on, Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I was not motioning at you, but please do not get up again. [Laughter.]

**Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP):** A good example of the issue is Robroyston in my constituency, where another 1,600 new homes have been proposed on top of several other completed developments, and the local community is rightly concerned about the lack of clarity on provision of facilities in an area that already suffers from lack of provision. How does planning legislation ensure that adequate facilities including schools, health centres and other local amenities are provided to cover the increased population in such areas?

**Kevin Stewart:** Our approach to developing the Planning (Scotland) Bill has involved extensive engagement, including with children and young people. It is important that they are involved because they are the future. For example, we undertook a survey with Young Scot, which showed that young people want to be more involved in planning.

Although I cannot comment on specific planning applications, as Mr McKee well understands, I agree that new housing developments should be supported by facilities that meet local needs. To help to achieve that, the planning bill will introduce stronger development plans that will be prepared with local communities, linked with community planning and supported by clearer delivery programmes. That will be good for all.

### Non-departmental Public Bodies (Public Participation)

**8. Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government how it encourages non-departmental public bodies to promote and facilitate public participation in their decisions and activities. (S5O-02094)

**The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart):** In 2016, we refreshed the national standards for community engagement, which play a crucial role in helping all sectors, including non-departmental public bodies, to promote and facilitate public participation in their decisions and activities.

In addition, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 provides a new right for community bodies to make participation requests to certain bodies, including a number of non-departmental public bodies. That provides opportunities for community bodies to be involved proactively in improving outcomes on their terms.

**Tavish Scott:** The minister will be aware that officers who have responsibility for public participation who work in the islands and have to travel to the Scottish mainland for work will soon have to pay car parking charges at island airports. Which Government budget will pay that cost?

**Kevin Stewart:** I beg your pardon, Presiding Officer, but I missed the last part of Mr Scott's question.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** He was asking you to pay for something.

**Kevin Stewart:** That does not surprise me.

On the serious matter of parking charges at island airports, I know that Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd is consulting extensively on the extension of car parking charges to Kirkwall, Stornoway and Sumburgh airports. That consultation includes passenger surveys at each

airport, as well as discussions with local authorities and elected representatives. I hope that the discussions will continue and that we will see positivity from them.

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** On HIAL, will the minister commit to a proper, meaningful and urgent consultation of people on Lewis who will be severely affected by the proposed imposition of car parking charges at Stornoway airport?

**Kevin Stewart:** As I have said, HIAL is consulting people in Kirkwall, Stornoway and Sumburgh airports, and I hope that that consultation comes to some positivity. Obviously, the matter is not in my portfolio, but I am sure that Mr Yousaf will be in touch with all the members on the matter.

### Medically Trained and Qualified Refugees (Registration)

9. **Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** I refer members to my entry in the register of interests.

To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting medically trained and qualified refugees in Scotland to achieve medical registration and contribute their skills to NHS Scotland. (S5O-02095)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance):** The Scottish Government is providing funding to the refugee doctors project, which is run by a partnership that is led by the Bridges Programmes. It aims to support refugees who were fully qualified doctors in their home countries to achieve General Medical Council registration and a licence to practise medicine. The new funding provided for this year means that the project has been expanded to include dentists, for the first time. I am delighted to say that 37 doctors have benefited from the project since funding was first provided in April 2017.

**Clare Haughey:** Will the cabinet secretary take this moment to acknowledge recent analysis that shows that Scotland has stood by its claim to be a sanctuary for people who are fleeing conflict—in particular, the city of Glasgow, which has had the highest intake of Syrian refugees and asylum seekers relative to its population?

**Angela Constance:** Recent analysis by the BBC looked at Home Office statistics for refugees and asylum seekers alongside population statistics. I am pleased to quote the article, which stated:

“It appears that Scotland has generally embraced its claim to be a ‘sanctuary’ for those fleeing conflict. Glasgow has taken 63 refugees and asylum seekers per 10,000 in the city—the highest level in any local authority.”

I pay tribute to Glasgow’s knowledge and expertise in supporting refugees and asylum seekers. It has been vital to the collaborative work on our “New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018-2022”. That shared vision and partnership approach to new Scots has supported local authorities the length and breadth of Scotland that have, since 2015, welcomed about 2,200 refugees through the Syrian resettlement programme.

### Sale of Public Buildings and Land (Planning Requirements)

10. **Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what planning requirements there are for public input prior to the sale of large public buildings and public land. (S5O-02096)

**The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart):** There are no town and country planning requirements related to the sale of land or buildings, whether public or private, because planning is concerned with the physical changes to land and buildings or material changes in their use, but not with the sale of land or buildings or who owns them.

**Daniel Johnson:** When a public building is sold to a private developer, it is not just the public sector but the entire community that loses an asset. Discussions are under way with NHS Lothian about the disposal of the Astley Ainslie hospital and its surrounding site in my constituency. For many people, that is not just a hospital but a green space, a walking route and part of the community.

Does the minister agree that large public sell-offs should go through the highest levels of pre-sale planning processes, to allow public scrutiny and consultation? Will he consider what could be done in the Planning (Scotland) Bill to require public bodies to meet such detailed planning requirements prior to sale? After all, publicly owned buildings belong to all of us—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have asked your questions. Thank you, Mr Johnson.

**Daniel Johnson:** We should have a say in how such buildings are used in the future.

**Kevin Stewart:** As I said in the first answer, planning is concerned with the physical changes to land and buildings or material changes in their use, but not with the sale of land or buildings or who owns them.

I understand that, as part of the process of disposing of surplus assets, NHS Lothian is committing to engagement with all key stakeholders, including the public, MSPs, councillors, the City of Edinburgh Council’s planning department, Historic Environment

Scotland and other interest groups, to collate ideas and issues that are important to people in the community.

### **Housing Needs (Assessment)**

**11. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether there has been a recent assessment of Scotland's future housing needs. (S5O-02097)

**The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart):** As the statutory local housing and planning authorities, local authorities undertake regular and continual need and demand assessments to support the development of their local housing strategies and development plans. Those plans are assessed by the Scottish Government to ensure that they are robust and credible.

In 2015, Sheffield Hallam University undertook an assessment of affordable housing need across Scotland that was commissioned by the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland and Shelter, to which Scottish Government analytical staff contributed.

**Liam Kerr:** I remind members of my registered interest as the landlord of a small flat in Edinburgh.

Under the Scottish National Party, the number of long-term empty properties has risen by 83 per cent from 20,328 in 2007 to 37,135 in 2017, which is the highest-ever recorded level. What action is the Government taking to tackle that rise, solve the housing crisis and enable more people to realise their dream of having a home?

**Kevin Stewart:** We are co-operating with Shelter and have doubled the size of the empty homes fund to bring homes back into use. Through the partnership with Shelter, we have encouraged all local authorities to put in place empty homes officers. In local authorities that have such officers, a number of properties have come back into use. We have doubled the budget for the empty homes fund and we are co-operating with Shelter. I encourage all local authorities that have not yet put in place empty homes officers to do so, because that makes a difference.

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Recent research by Crisis has demonstrated the huge cost to councils of keeping people in temporary accommodation beyond seven days. What are the barriers to councils getting people out of unsuitable temporary accommodation and what can be done to reduce those barriers?

**Kevin Stewart:** Like Elaine Smith, who has taken a keen interest in this issue for a long time, I want no one to be in unsuitable accommodation. That is why the Government has put so much

effort into the homelessness and rough sleeping action group, which is due to report on the third question that it has been set, which concerns how we can improve temporary accommodation in Scotland. Its recommendations will be with us shortly; I am interested in seeing them, and we will respond accordingly. Elaine Smith will be aware that, thus far, we have accepted in principle all the recommendations that the group has made, and I look forward to seeing its next set of recommendations.

### **Carers Allowance Supplement (Payments)**

**12. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government on what date the first payments of the carers allowance supplement will be made. (S5O-02098)

**The Minister for Social Security (Jeane Freeman):** The carers allowance supplement, which is a 13 per cent increase that will be uprated in line with inflation in future years, constitutes an overall investment of more than £30 million a year and will benefit more than 70,000 carers. The first payments will be made this summer.

**Claire Baker:** Earlier this year, the Social Security Committee heard that a decision on the status of the carers allowance supplement for the purposes of calculating the council tax reduction was still to be taken as civil servants had not yet completed their analysis. People are concerned about the date on which the supplement will be introduced. Given that there are 8,700 carers in Mid Scotland and Fife, can the minister confirm whether the Government will ensure that the additional income will be disregarded if carers receive or apply for the council tax reduction?

**Jeane Freeman:** As Claire Baker said, work is under way with our officials who work on the council tax reduction and in social security. I will be happy to update her as soon as we have completed that work and are clear that the council tax reduction and the carers allowance supplement will not contradict each other.

### **Gypsy Travellers (Rights)**

**13. John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government how it ensures that public bodies respect the rights of Gypsy Travellers. (S5O-02099)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance):** Scottish ministers expect public bodies to respect the rights of all the communities that they serve, and to be responsive to the needs of those communities in providing high-quality public services. Public bodies also have legal duties to eliminate discrimination, promote equality and foster good relations. That includes Gypsy

Travellers, who are protected as an ethnic group in Scotland.

**John Finnie:** The cabinet secretary will be familiar with the definition, which refers to people

“who consider the travelling lifestyle part of their ethnic identity.”

I have read the ministerial working group's extensive list of the matters that it intends to cover. I accept that the list does not seek to be exhaustive—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Can you get to the question, please?

**John Finnie:** Yes. Will the cabinet secretary engage with Gypsy Travellers on traditional stopping-over places, many of which have been sealed up, and encourage landowners, including local authorities and other public bodies, to open up the sites again in order to reinforce the value that we place on the travelling lifestyle?

**Angela Constance:** The Scottish Government recognises the rights of the Gypsy Traveller community to a travelling lifestyle that is part of their way of life, tradition and history. I am, together with the Minister for Local Government and Housing, pursuing the issue of halting stops on traditional routes. There are a host of other issues to do with sites and access to other services that need to be resolved to support the right of the Traveller community to their travelling heritage.

### Property Factors (Performance)

#### 14. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland)

**(Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it monitors the performance of property factors. (S5O-02100)

**The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart):** The Property Factors (Scotland) Act 2011 provides for the performance of factors to be regulated by requiring anyone who is acting as a factor to be registered and to comply with a code of conduct that sets out minimum standards of practice. The process provides a route of appeal to the housing and property chamber which, among other things, enables owners to have their concerns about their factor adjudicated by an independent judicial body. The tribunal notifies Scottish ministers of its decisions and when a property factor has been found to have failed to comply with any enforcement order that has been imposed by the tribunal.

**Graham Simpson:** Since 2013, the tribunal has issued 169 enforcement orders against factoring companies. One in five of those orders has never been complied with, which is pretty disgraceful. What is the minister doing about that? Has he

struck off any factoring companies, especially those that are repeat offenders?

**Kevin Stewart:** Two property factors have been removed from the register as a result of having failed to comply with the code and with property factor enforcement orders. Five property factors have been removed for technical reasons, and 78 have been automatically removed from the register as they did not reapply after the expiry of the three-year registration period. I know that Graham Simpson is taking an interest in the matter; I met him during the recess to discuss it. I have a determination to ensure that those folks who are not applying the code properly are dealt with. I know that Mr Simpson will be requiring regular updates from me on a particular point that he has raised and he can be assured that I will keep in touch with him about that issue because I want to see things done right for those folks who have had to thole property factors who might not be doing the job as they should.

## Erasmus+

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-12169, in the name of Joan McAlpine, on Erasmus+. I call Joan McAlpine to speak to and move the motion on behalf of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee. You have up to 12 minutes, please, Ms McAlpine.

14:40

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** It is with great pleasure that I open the debate on the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee's report on Erasmus+. The committee took evidence for its inquiry from a number of individuals and stakeholders, to whom we are very grateful. I am delighted that many of them have been able to make it along to the public gallery today and I welcome them all to the Parliament.

This piece of work all started with a visit to the Jack Kane centre in Craigmillar as part of our business planning day last August. On our visit, we met young people and volunteers who told us what the Erasmus+ programme means to them. I welcome to the public gallery today Scott, Kim, Cameron, Shannon, Dale and Emma from the Jack Kane centre.

I also thank our clerks, who did such a great job of putting the report together and supervising the inquiry for us.

Many of us are already familiar with aspects of the Erasmus+ programme. It is perhaps most well known for the role that it plays in facilitating university student exchange programmes in Europe and beyond. Some of the committee's members have participated in the programme and I am sure that they will want to share their experience as part of the debate. I think that the committee will agree that we were all very surprised and inspired to learn about the full breadth of activities that the programme supports. What our report highlights is just how broad the programme is and the extent to which it supports invaluable work across so many sectors in Scotland. For example, we heard evidence from YouthLink Scotland about how important the programme is to the voluntary and youth work sectors. I am delighted that YouthLink Scotland is represented in the public gallery today to watch the debate.

The voluntary and youth work sectors play an important role in supporting both our young people and our wider communities. For example, I have visited Loch Arthur, a sheltered community that is run by Camphill Scotland, in Beeswing near Dumfries in my region. Our membership of the

European Union, which supports programmes such as the European voluntary service and Erasmus+, has enabled young people from European countries to live at the Loch Arthur Camphill community and work on a voluntary basis beside people with learning disabilities for whom that community is home. Young Europeans make up 68 per cent of Camphill's volunteers, who are qualified in social work, occupational therapy or special needs education.

EU programmes such as Erasmus+ provide young people with valuable life experience while enabling invaluable support and services to be provided. Without programmes such as Erasmus+, many voluntary organisations, which are often reliant on the goodwill of volunteers and small teams of dedicated staff, might struggle in the long term to sustain the services that they provide.

The committee took evidence from the chair of the University Council for Modern Languages Scotland. She told us that Erasmus+ plays a vital role in supporting the one-plus-two language policy in Scotland and that it is also a vital source of support and funding for the professional development of our foreign language teachers.

Some of the most striking evidence that we heard was from the college sector. We were told how West Lothian College has used Erasmus+ to develop an award-winning programme that was genuinely life changing for the students who participated in it. We heard how that programme enables students who have never previously travelled abroad to study cookery in France, construction in Spain and hairdressing in Portugal. One observation in particular will stick with me from the evidence that we heard—that Erasmus+ inspires students to "look beyond Friday" and into their future lives.

Another clear message from stakeholders was that Erasmus+ is more than simply a source of funding for those amazing projects. It also provides an important framework that enables organisations such as YouthLink Scotland and West Lothian College to build networks with partner organisations overseas. That international co-operation not only helps the students who participate in the exchanges but offers new opportunities to the staff who support them; at an organisational level, it also helps with sharing best practice and putting Scottish institutions on an international stage.

I hope that those illustrations highlight to members why the committee quickly reacted and reached the strong conclusion that the programme is too valuable to lose. That is why the committee has set out a number of clear recommendations for the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments. To summarise our conclusions

briefly, the committee is calling for three main points of action. The UK should continue participating in the programme until the end of the current multi-annual financial framework in 2020; it should seek to continue to participate in the next refresh of the programme, which will start in 2021; and it should seek to retain full entitlements as a programme country—I will say a little more about that distinction later.

If the UK Government is not able to secure continuing programme participation, we call on the Scottish Government to consider how it might be possible for Scotland to continue full participation in the programme after 2020. In making that recommendation, we highlight the existing institutional structures that could support that, such as Scotland's devolved competency over education and the existing support that is available from the British Council Scotland.

The UK Government has stated its commitment to

“full participation in the Erasmus+ programme”

up until withdrawal. In a letter, it told the committee that the UK and EU have agreed

“in principle that the UK will continue to benefit from all EU programmes ... until the end of the current budget period.”

That has also been welcomed by the Scottish Government in its response to the committee, and I am sure that I speak for the committee in welcoming that outcome in the negotiations so far. The UK notes, however, that no decisions have been made about post-2020 programme participation, as the scope of that programme has not yet been agreed. The Scottish Government notes in its response that it is

“deeply concerned that the details of successor arrangements have yet to be proposed by the UK Government.”

In the debate, it is important to highlight the difference between partner membership and programme membership of Erasmus+. As an EU member state, we are able to participate in the full breadth of activities as a programme country. The committee is concerned that, after Brexit, the UK may be relegated to participating in the programme as a partner country. That would mean that we could not participate in the sport elements of Erasmus+, and some stakeholders, such as West Lothian College, told us that their international partners may not be able to continue working with them in the same way if the UK does not maintain its full programme status beyond 2020.

Although the negotiations remain on-going, we need to look beyond withdrawal and not lose sight of planning that is already under way to shape the future of Erasmus+ after 2020. It is vital that

Scotland's voice is not lost at this crucial point, so that we can help to shape the future of the programme and remain fully committed as a programme participant well into the future. We note that the British Council is engaging in those discussions at the moment. I understand that the British Council is represented in the public gallery today, and I thank it for its involvement in our inquiry.

I hope that this afternoon we will be able to debate how the Scottish Government can seek to influence the UK's negotiating position for the next programme period, and in particular the UK's ability to continue participating in Erasmus+ with the full rights and entitlements of a programme country. I welcome the debate and I look forward to hearing all members' contributions.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the findings and recommendations of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee's 1st report, 2018 (Session 5), *Erasmus+* (SP Paper 290).

14:50

**The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** I thank Joan McAlpine and the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee for lodging the motion for debate today. I welcome the representatives of the Jack Kane centre to Parliament, too. I commend the committee for its work in investigating the value of Erasmus+ in Scotland and the potential impact if Scotland should lose access to the programme following the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

The Scottish Government has a long association with Erasmus. It matters hugely to us. Indeed, our own Madame Ecosse, Winnie Ewing, worked with others to set up the original scheme 30 years ago when she was an MEP. Since then, it has gone from strength to strength.

The committee's report rightly highlights the success of Scottish organisations in securing funding for Erasmus+ projects. Scotland has traditionally performed well in Erasmus, securing around 12 per cent of UK funding in the first years of the current programme. More than €60 million was secured for projects in Scotland between 2014 and 2017. That funding is extremely valuable.

Erasmus+ is the most significant international exchange and mobility programme available in Scotland, but it is much more than that; it is about education and youth organisations and the impact on the individuals involved in it.

The greatest value of Erasmus+ is the experience that it provides for people across

Scotland, which Joan McAlpine mentioned: it expands their horizons, develops their skills and gives them the ambition and confidence that they need to thrive in a globalised world. The ability to spend time overseas and work with others in different countries can transform a person's life, and our whole community benefits from hosting those who come to Scotland and share with us their own culture and perspective on the world.

The evidence that was taken by the committee in its recent inquiry bears that out and matches what I have heard in my own conversations with staff and students in schools, colleges, universities and community groups across the country.

Although Erasmus began as a programme that was focused on mobility in higher education, its expansion over the past 30 years has brought considerable benefits to other sectors. Within schools, Erasmus+ funding makes a significant contribution to the implementation of the one-plus-two language learning policy. It provides existing language teachers with opportunities to maintain and refresh their language capability through visits to other countries, and it supports teachers through their qualification by funding the compulsory year abroad, which is required for the registration of language teachers in Scotland. Both those elements enhance the language learning experiences of our young people at school and are essential to the success of our languages policy. They are vital in equipping our young people with the skills and competencies that they need in an increasingly globalised world.

Erasmus+ benefits young people beyond the education system, too. I warmly welcome the decision to include youth programmes within Erasmus+ from 2014. It is often the people who are furthest away from higher education who benefit most from the opportunity to study or work overseas. Such exchanges bring an international perspective to the heart of our most deprived communities. The programme gives everyone the opportunity to learn about other cultures, languages and world views. That enriches the learning experience for people of all ages and opens them up to the possibilities of their own potential.

For young people experiencing socioeconomic deprivation in particular, international mobility is often a distant option. The evidence given to the committee included powerful examples of how participation in European projects can increase young people's commitment to being against discrimination, their interest in political life, their respect for and appreciation of cultural diversity and their readiness to work and live abroad.

That aspect of broadening participation in mobility and exchange opportunities is one that we whole-heartedly support. I am encouraged by the

Commission's proposal to double the budget for Erasmus+ in the next multi-annual financial framework from 2021 to 2027, and by the Commission's comments in November last year that the EU needs

"to keep working to open up the programme, extending opportunities for schools and stepping up our efforts to attract the most vulnerable members of our society, people with disadvantaged backgrounds and special needs."

It seems that Erasmus+ is likely to continue to develop in ways that will bring even greater benefits to Scotland in the future. However, those benefits are put at risk by the prospect of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. Since the EU referendum, the Scottish Government has worked closely with stakeholders across Scotland to understand the potential effect of the UK's withdrawal from the EU. Brexit has created terrible uncertainty for organisations that rely on programmes such as Erasmus+ to sustain international partnerships. That uncertainty has been compounded by concern at the lack of clarity from the UK Government over its intentions for the future relationship with the EU.

The Scottish Government's view is that the best way to retain the benefits of Erasmus+, as well as access to a host of other initiatives, policies and funding programmes, is to remain a member of the European Union. Short of that taking place, the UK needs to secure the closest relationship with the EU, including retaining membership of the single market and the customs union.

In terms of Erasmus+, we welcome the Prime Minister's comment in her speech in Florence on 22 September 2017 that the UK Government hopes to continue

"to take part in those specific policies and programmes which are greatly to the UK and the EU's joint advantage, such as those that promote science, education and culture".

However, we remain concerned that there has been no further detail or public comment to secure access to Erasmus+.

The Scottish Government continues to encourage the UK Government to provide clarity to those organisations whose planning for future activity depends on knowing what the UK's future relationship with Erasmus+ will be. Although the Scottish Government welcomes the statement in the joint report on phase 1 of the negotiations that the UK will continue to participate in EU programmes to the end of the current multi-annual financial framework in 2020, the UK Government needs to confirm its intentions to continue access to Erasmus+ as a matter of urgency.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** Is the minister aware that, when asked that question directly during Prime Minister's questions today,

the Prime Minister stated her intention for the UK to stay in Erasmus+ in the future?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I did not hear Prime Minister's questions because I was out on a ministerial visit, celebrating the Scottish Government's support for elite athletes—I hope that Brian Whittle will commend that work on another day.

The Prime Minister's desire to stay in Erasmus+ is welcome. However, we know from other ongoing discussions that Erasmus+ and other schemes, such as horizon 2020, cannot be separated from freedom of movement. If the Prime Minister was able to give an answer on freedom of movement at the same time, that would perhaps be more valuable to the stakeholders with which the Scottish Government is holding discussions.

We are an outward-looking and inclusive nation that has benefited greatly from access to a wide range of EU programmes. The lives of thousands of students, teachers, schoolchildren, volunteers and many others across Scotland have been transformed by Erasmus+ over the past 30 years. We want that to continue. Programmes such as Erasmus+ have been enormously beneficial to the lives of thousands of people in Scotland, helping people to develop skills, study and volunteer abroad and make close personal relationships with people from other countries and cultures. I warmly welcome the committee's report and acknowledge its recommendations. We will continue to work with our partners across Scotland and maintain our commitment to Erasmus+.

14:58

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** I thank those who gave evidence to the committee and welcome those involved with Erasmus+ to the public gallery today.

When students think of Erasmus+, they think of the invaluable exchange programme that allows them to experience new cultures, countries, cities and languages—not the 16th century philosopher, Desiderius Erasmus, whose name evokes the benefits of travelling and sharing ideas that the scheme promotes.

I thank the clerks for their work on the committee's report and put on record that my colleague Jackson Carlaw and I support the report's conclusions. The Scottish Conservatives also agree that Erasmus+ should be continued after Brexit.

As things stand, the UK will continue to benefit from all educational programmes until the end of 2020. In a letter to the committee's convener from the Department for Exiting the European Union, Steve Baker MP stated that the UK Government

“see future co-operation in education programmes as an area of mutual benefit to both the UK and the EU, provided we can agree a fair on-going contribution”.

Involvement in Erasmus+ has been a notable success, which translates into better job prospects for those who are fortunate enough to go on one of its programmes. The European Commission's impact study found that Erasmus+ students have better employability skills than 70 per cent of all students and that the unemployment rate is 23 per cent lower among those who participate. That may be because 64 per cent of employers consider international experience to be a positive, with 92 per cent looking for transferable skills in recruitment. The programme therefore goes beyond that fruitful and memorable year for a student and will impact positively on the rest of their life.

As Mike Russell noted in his letter to the committee, in 2017, Scotland received its highest-ever allocation of Erasmus+ funding. Nearly €21 million was awarded, compared with €16 million in the previous year, benefiting 159 organisations in the higher and adult education, schools, youth and vocational education and training sectors. Among those beneficiaries were some from my own constituency. For example, St Boswells primary school received £2,000 to support the professional development of its modern languages co-ordinator in Spanish, and Newcastleton, Broomlands and Knowepark primary schools received funding for French language immersion courses for staff members. During the committee's evidence session, we heard from YouthLink Scotland that the training part of the programme is very important and enhances a lot of its benefits.

Such funding will play a crucial role in the development of students and teachers. YouthLink Scotland found that young people with fewer opportunities who participate in Erasmus+ report a more significant effect than well-off young people. It is great that the programme is open to everyone and that students are supported with their travel and subsistence costs, depending on need. The committee recognised that funding in its report, and all of us on the committee recognised the excellent work that is being done by Scottish institutions and organisations that use Erasmus+ funding to raise attainment.

YouthLink Scotland also found that participation in European projects increases young people's commitment to tackling discrimination and their interest in political life, respect for and appreciation of cultural diversity and readiness to work and live abroad. Those other positive benefits come from participation in the programme and are further reasons for my being pleased that the UK Government is open to continuing it.



As we have heard today, Erasmus+ plays an important role in the whole of the UK. I therefore welcome the Prime Minister's and the UK Government's continued commitment to full participation until we have left the UK and the focus on securing participation after we leave the EU.

**The Minister for International Development and Europe (Dr Alasdair Allan):** I think that Rachael Hamilton meant to say "left the EU". Much as I welcome what she has said about the benefits of Erasmus+ and the Prime Minister's comments on those benefits, does she agree that, as things stand, it is quite difficult to see how it could function fully without the benefits that come from the freedom of movement of people?

**Rachael Hamilton:** Countries that are non-European members of Erasmus+, such as Macedonia, Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Turkey, pay into the scheme. There are ways in which we can use negotiations to pay into the scheme. Switzerland had a bit of a blip and it set up a programme—I think it was called the European mobility programme—because of the issues that it had with the free movement of people. Where there is will, there is a way. I think that it would be possible—particularly given the good work that the British Council is doing.

I will say a little bit about the benefits of the programme. Colleges Scotland reports that, every year, 1,600 Scots go abroad to European countries with Erasmus+, and the number of students who take up opportunities for outward mobility has doubled over the past seven years. We all agree that it is a fantastic programme.

I have taken Dr Allan's intervention, so I will not read out my paragraph about how continued participation would be possible.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** You have the time to do so, if the paragraph is not too long.

**Rachael Hamilton:** I would be repeating myself, Presiding Officer, which would be slightly boring to those who are listening. I am sure that we can find a way, as I have said.

We all want Erasmus+ to continue, and the Scottish Conservatives are open to exploring whether Scotland could still participate in the programme even by itself, which is a sentiment shared by Universities Scotland and Colleges Scotland and a matter on which the committee agreed.

Erasmus+ benefits students and teachers and creates opportunities that are enjoyed for a lifetime. We know that it helps to close the attainment gap, increases employability prospects, which is good, fights discrimination and increases

political engagement. For those reasons and many more, the Scottish Conservatives are committed to Erasmus+ and Scotland's future participation in the programme.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I gave a hint that there is time in hand. You have a generous seven minutes, Mr Gray. I am sure that you can use them.

15:05

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** For reasons that will become clear, I draw attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, which notes that I am the chair of the Hibernian Community Foundation.

This is an interesting debate because, in some ways, it illustrates the old canard that we sometimes do not know what we have got until we lose it. I congratulate the committee on undertaking its inquiry at a particularly important time.

If I am honest, although I have been aware of Erasmus for a long time, I have always had a sense—I do not know where it came from—that Scotland is not particularly good at taking the opportunities that the programme presents. If it has done one thing, the committee's report—along with the evidence that the committee has taken—has demonstrated that I was completely wrong.

In recent years, Scotland has become very good at seizing the opportunities that the programme provides. For example, according to Universities Scotland, in 2015, 2,000 students at higher education institutions took up Erasmus+ funding to study abroad, which was a 35 per cent increase on the previous year. In 2017, all the programmes taken together added up to funding worth €21 million, which was up from only €16 million the year before. The UK is in the top three countries in Europe for co-ordinating joint masters degrees funded by Erasmus, and 85 per cent of those programmes are led by Scottish universities. Indeed, Universities Scotland's briefing for today's debate says that 9.7 per cent of Scottish students study abroad as opposed to just under 7 per cent of English students.

The truth is that we are beginning to seize the opportunities of Erasmus+, and it is very unfortunate that we are doing so at the point at which we might lose them. I say, as gently as I can, to Rachael Hamilton that she may hope that we can continue with the benefits of Erasmus—we all agree that it means better job prospects, support for education and training opportunities for those from disadvantaged backgrounds—but there is no doubt that those opportunities are jeopardised by the uncertainty of the Brexit process.

The other thing that I have learned from the committee's work—Ms McAlpine referred to this—is the breadth of the Erasmus programme, which is certainly not just about studying languages. My nephew, who studied civil engineering at Edinburgh Napier University, spent a year studying in the Netherlands on a multinational course that enabled him to learn about aspects of engineering such as irrigation work, which is much more difficult to get practical experience of here, and he benefited significantly from it.

Languages are, of course, an important element of the programme. That is especially important for us now, given that we recently heard that the number of students in our schools succeeding at national 4 and 5 levels in modern languages has halved in the past 10 years. Of course, Erasmus does not just support language students. In my constituency, teachers from Law and Dunbar primary schools have been able to improve their language skills as part of the one-plus-two programme that the minister referred to.

Erasmus is also not just about academic study, and that brings me to the Hibernian Community Foundation. As part of our community football programme, we look after Hibernian Girls and Ladies Football Club, whose first team we have built into what is arguably the best women's football team in Scotland—it is certainly one of the top two. In case anybody doubts that, I note that the team is playing Hamilton at Easter Road at 7.45 tonight, and anyone who is at a loose end will not be sorry or disappointed if they go along.

Behind that, we have gone to great lengths to build a very strong girls academy, which provides opportunities for girls and young women from the age of around five to participate in sport and teamwork, to learn about health, fitness and sports science and to build their confidence and leadership skills and perhaps become coaches. One of the latest ventures that we have undertaken is a programme that is funded by Erasmus. As part of that, 25 to 30 of those who are involved in Hibernian Girls and Ladies FC will travel to Spain—to the Oliva Nova complex just outside Valencia—for an intensive programme that will allow them to learn from other European countries where women's participation in football, the facilities and the science around the sport are significantly more advanced than they are here in Scotland.

It is worth noting that, as Universities Scotland says in its briefing for today's debate, Erasmus is not just about outward travel by Scottish students to study overseas; it also brings many overseas students into Scotland, which enhances our university community and makes it an ever more vibrant and global community. That is an important element of the programme, too.

There is a small element of tragedy in discovering how important it is that we seize those opportunities just as there is the danger that we might lose them. Something that the minister said tells us that the situation is even worse than that, because the new opportunities that will open up as the next tranche of Erasmus is developed might be even greater. It is proposed that the budget for the programme will be doubled and that there will be an increased focus on inclusivity and accessibility for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, young people with disabilities and so on, which are precisely the groups of young people that we all agree could benefit most from participating in the programme.

Therefore, it really is important that we raise our voices, as the committee has helped us to do, and make the point that we should not commit to Erasmus only till 2020 but should find a way to commit to it beyond then, and that we should do that, as far as possible, through full programme status, so that aspects that have been available in the past, the benefits of which are so powerfully reflected in the report, such as the sporting aspects that I have talked about, will still be available to young Scots in the future.

15:13

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** I thank the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee's clerks and all those who submitted evidence to our inquiry. In particular, I thank the young people at the Jack Kane community centre for hosting us during the course of our work on Erasmus.

The idea of Erasmus tends to be associated with middle-class university students doing a year abroad. There are clear benefits to that for the individual young person, for Scotland and for Europe as a whole, but that prevailing view of the programme is not very accurate, as the minister highlighted in her opening remarks. I am not suggesting that university students doing a year abroad is not important, but Erasmus+ goes far beyond that. It funds programmes for young people from all sorts of backgrounds. In addition to working with universities, Erasmus+ has programmes with schools, colleges, training providers, sports teams—as Iain Gray mentioned—and youth organisations.

In practice, that means that groups of students from places such as West Lothian College are doing courses in Sweden, France, Germany and Italy and are gaining Scottish Qualifications Authority qualifications that link in with European qualifications on topics including hospitality, travel and tourism, business, engineering, healthcare, sport and education. For many of the young people involved—particularly those from working-

class backgrounds—such experiences can be life changing and, all too often, would not be an option without Erasmus+.

West Lothian College made it very clear in its evidence to the committee that Erasmus+ programmes have a positive impact on attainment. More importantly, those who have participated in Erasmus+ have loved it. It has grown their confidence, helped them to create connections with other young people across our continent and genuinely broadened the horizons of thousands of young people throughout our country.

The committee heard particularly valuable evidence from YouthLink Scotland, which helps youth work organisations to get involved in Erasmus+ projects. Many of its members are small organisations that, typically, have little administrative capacity of their own, such as the Jack Kane community centre, which works with and for young people in Craigmillar.

The focus of Erasmus+ funding in Scotland has been on inclusion. Many of the organisations that gave evidence to the committee were keen to stress that to us. Research that was noted in the committee's report, which other members have mentioned, suggests that young people from more deprived backgrounds get more out of projects such as Erasmus+ and that Erasmus+ has an extremely positive impact on their attainment.

It has also been mentioned that Erasmus+ brings a clear benefit in language education, which is woefully underdeveloped across the UK compared with its development in every other country in Europe. When students undertake a language degree at university, it often entails a year abroad, as do an increasing number of courses that are not directly related to language education, and Erasmus+ facilitates that for many universities.

When language teachers in Scotland are looking to develop their skills and improve their teaching, Erasmus+ provides opportunities for them to do so. Staff exchanges allow for cross-sectoral collaboration and exchange, and Erasmus+ ensures that language teachers in Scotland can enhance their skills by working directly with native speakers. When school pupils are learning languages, student exchanges give them an opportunity to truly experience the benefits of other languages. They give them the opportunity to go abroad and become immersed in not just the language but the culture that it comes from, and we know that that is the most effective way to learn.

Erasmus+ also speaks to the kind of country that we want to be. Cultural exchanges and training and learning opportunities abroad help to increase young people's appreciation of cultural

diversity and their opposition to division and bigotry. There is no shortage of evidence that those who experience other cultures and communities are less likely to harbour prejudiced views and are more likely to challenge such views. In the Parliament, we often pride ourselves on Scotland's progressive outlook and its aspirations to be an internationalist country. However, those virtues need to be nurtured and supported, and programmes such as Erasmus+ do that.

Despite all the benefits that Erasmus+ brings to Scotland, however, it is under threat. The UK Government has blindly committed itself to a hard Brexit and to ending freedom of movement. We have already heard numerous times, in numerous committee inquiries, about how much damage that will do to Scotland. If we do not act, Erasmus+ may well be one of the casualties. Although third countries can associate with the Erasmus+ programme, they must play by the rules. For example—this has already been mentioned—when Switzerland decided to introduce immigration restrictions in 2014, its negotiations to participate in the programme were suspended.

Unfortunately, all the indications are that the UK Government intends to introduce immigration restrictions and end freedom of movement within the European Economic Area. With all the splits in its Cabinet, its inability to agree even its own negotiating position and the regressive views that are held by the hard-right Brexiteers who are holding the Conservative Party hostage at present, we simply cannot rely on the UK Government to do the right and rational thing. Brexit will not just make participation in Erasmus+ harder; it will make it downright impossible for those who currently benefit the most from such programmes. Charities, colleges, schools and youth groups will find that they cannot participate any more. West Lothian College made that clear in its evidence, in which it pointed out that 100 per cent of its Erasmus+ projects are with other countries that have European freedom-of-movement rules.

Although Scotland's universities—particularly our elite universities—generally have the resources to navigate more complex rules and financially back exchange programmes with other countries outside the EU and Erasmus+, smaller charities and colleges cannot afford that, and many local authorities that support schools to do that certainly cannot afford it.

The committee's report calls for the Scottish Government to do what it can to negotiate Scotland's continued participation in Erasmus+ in the event that the UK Government is unwilling to do that. I support that conclusion, of course, but we should go further than that. We must devolve migration powers to Scotland. I and other members have called for that before in the

chamber, and I am sure that we will repeatedly call for it over the coming years. Right now, it is unclear what institutional frameworks could allow Scotland's continued participation in Erasmus+, particularly if the UK Government continues down the immensely self-destructive path of ending freedom of movement. By devolving migration powers to Scotland, we can ensure that there is a different path that allows us to continue to participate in the Erasmus+ programme and receive all the other benefits that migration brings to Scotland.

We voted to remain in the EU, and we want to continue to benefit from the programmes and principles that underpin it. Ending, in effect, one of our most successful youth projects in our year of young people is not just tragic; it is a deliberate act of generational vandalism by a Government that is wildly out of touch—and it is entirely avoidable.

15:19

**Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD):** Monday was one of those rare Shetland days at this time of year; it was very bright with a sparkling sea and the sun shone on the waves. I stood in the kirk yard in Ollaberry, which is a crofting community in the far north of Shetland, at one of the most difficult funerals that I have ever been to in my adult life. I watched a family bury a woman who was a daughter, a mum and a sister—someone who was a huge part of that community. It made me think of this debate, because one thing in Lizzie's professional life was her work in the Shetland part of the global classroom of Erasmus. Today I want to reflect on and respect the people who have made the Erasmus project work—certainly in my part of the world. People like Lizzie are the reason why so many young Shetlanders have been able to travel around the world and meet their peers from different parts of the globe.

When I worked in the House of Commons for Jim Wallace—it seems a long time ago now—I spent what felt like four days outside what was the Soviet embassy trying to sort out visas so that pupils from Anderson high school on Shetland could travel to eastern Europe to meet their peers in a community called Zlín in Czechoslovakia. That was then our take on the global classroom. How it has moved forward.

To all the people around Scotland—in my context, in Shetland—who have worked so hard to make sure that youngsters can meet, see and find out about the world around them, I say thank you. Erasmus+ has been enormously important. As Iain Gray rightly said, one cannot imagine why we would ever want to get rid of a programme that is so effective in building such links. It is important to remember that EU membership is not a prerequisite of participation: schools in Norway,

Iceland and Turkey are also part of Erasmus+. That is what makes it all the stronger, particularly for islands in the northern North Sea.

My community has done very well. We have invested strongly in Erasmus+ and have built it and worked with it. The British Council was rightly mentioned earlier: I thank it and many others for allowing Erasmus+ to happen. I will give two or three brief examples. In November 2017, Shetland got a batch of funding—€60,000, if I remember rightly—to allow four Shetland schools to improve language skills to help our global position in a multilingual world, which relates to the point that Ross Greer made. The initiators of that programme said that it would help teachers and pupils post-Brexit. That was a positive way to look at it, but it was for me, as a European, intensely sad.

Erasmus+ funding has made it possible for Shetland to host global classroom events. We had a particularly splendid one back in 2015, when schools and representatives from all over Europe came to the islands. There was an exciting moment at Aberdeen airport when we had to make some fast phone calls to get some Turkish young people through immigration, for which I thank all the officials who listened to my pleas to allow them through. They got to Shetland later that day. Brae high school in the north of Shetland, next to Sullom Voe in the Delting area of Shetland—I usually describe it as the oil industry school—welcomed pupils from Turkey, Norway, Latvia and Sardinia as part of the cultural exchange between communities on the edge of Europe.

I recall a European commissioner many years ago, when I did a ministerial job, telling me, “You're on the periphery of Europe.” He looked at the map of Europe on his wall in the Berlaymont building and, for once, the Shetlands were in the right place on the map. He turned to me and said, “Mr Scott—you are not on the periphery of Europe. You are on the periphery of the periphery.” This is what Erasmus+ has meant to us; it has brought together schools and young people from “the periphery of the periphery”. We then sent our youngsters to schools to spend a week in different parts of Europe: Turkey, Latvia, Sardinia and Norway, which we visit regularly. They learned about other cultures, their economies and how young people do things differently, and they learned about all the parallels.

More recent initiatives have involved Mid Yell junior high school on one of our islands to the north of Mainland in Shetland. It worked closely through Erasmus+ with a school from Spain on a project to share traditions and cultures, which is called “Treasure”. We have hosted many Erasmus+ ambassadors over the years, and

people from Shetland have travelled to various parts of Europe.

I endorse the committee's recommendations, which the convener spoke to, as well as Ross Greer's points about the wider impact of Erasmus+ and why it is important.

Brian Whittle referred to the Prime Minister's answer on the subject earlier today. I, too, saw that—I was just lucky enough to have the television on. If I was in our ministerial team here, I would drive right into that one. She gave the kind of answer that allows some wriggle room, as we say in politics, so I would seek to take advantage of that.

I will not make another Brexit speech, because we had that yesterday and I could not cope with another Jackson Carlaw wind-up, so I will just make one observation to conclude my very brief remarks. Most young people I know, including my kids, are European, and they want to stay that way.

15:25

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** I agree with the comments that the committee convener made regarding everyone who provided evidence to the committee and those who assisted. I wholly support the debate and the content of the committee's report, and I urge members to support the report and its conclusions and recommendations. The Erasmus+ scheme is not a European status symbol to be dismantled with Brexit; it is a life-changing opportunity that broadens horizons, opens minds and creates employment opportunities. What is not to like about that?

As members will know, the committee heard a lot of evidence in relation to the Erasmus+ program. We heard from educators, learners, managers and professionals in the sector, as well as from schools, youth groups, organisations and business. The evidence and assistance that we had from everyone who was at the Jack Kane centre, some of whom are in the gallery, was certainly a novel way to educate politicians.

I have a personal connection to the Erasmus+ programme in that I—as, no doubt, others in the chamber have—benefited from it. I remember fondly my time studying in France, Germany and Sweden, which was a life-changing experience for me. I will come back to that shortly, but I first want to make some comments gently to Ross Greer, who spoke about the middle-class background of Erasmus+. I grew up in Port Glasgow, which is not exactly a middle-class background. I encourage the member to get out of East Dunbartonshire and visit other parts of the West Scotland region, so that he can learn about other aspects of it.

When Erasmus was launched in 1987, there were just 3,244 students in the first year. By 2014, more than 3 million Europeans had studied through Erasmus and Erasmus+, and the hope is to add 2 million more changed lives to that statistic by 2020. In Scotland alone, there were 6,190 participants in 2016, which was up from 4,975 the year before. Last year, Erasmus+ had a budget of more than €14.7 billion, of which €21 million was received by Scottish programmes—up from €16 million the year before. In Scotland, 159 organisations are involved in Erasmus+.

The programme not only allows student mobility across Europe and beyond, but supports staff and projects to promote excellence in teaching and research, building on best practice from elsewhere. It also helps to foster democracy across the European Union and to promote discussions between learners and leaders. The programme encourages sports development and includes the Jean Monnet projects, which promote the study of the European Union across the world.

The committee heard from YouthLink Scotland that Erasmus contributes to achievement of many frameworks in Scotland, such as curriculum for excellence. We also heard that 70 per cent of UK companies believe that intercultural skills are very important. We heard from the British Council Scotland about the benefits of Erasmus+ as a soft power to grow the reputation of Scotland's excellent and well-regarded education system.

However, Erasmus+ does not affect only our education sector. Jackie Killeen of the British Council stated:

"The fact that people have had a positive experience when they have come here creates an on-going positive association with Scotland ... throughout their careers."—*[Official Report, Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee, 11 January 2018; c 16.]*

She stressed that the programme helps to build interest elsewhere in doing business in Scotland.

I welcome the UK Government's commitment to continue full involvement in Erasmus+ until the UK leaves the EU, including underwriting the successful bids. However, despite the commitment from the Prime Minister at Prime Minister's question time today, there is still no commitment on what will happen after we leave the European Union. Does leaving mean that, on the stroke of midnight on 31 December 2020, Erasmus+ in Scotland will end? That would be a disaster and a victory for small-minded narrow UK nationalists who cannot accept that the EU actually does some good.

The Department for Exiting the European Union does not include Erasmus+ in its "Higher Education Sector Report", nor has there been any

analysis of the value that the programme brings to these isles in youth work and the voluntary sector.

We heard from stakeholders that the uncertainty is already causing problems. Daniel Evans from West Lothian College said that the college is in the middle of a two-year programme that ends in 2019. Normally, it would not need to apply again, but it is having to do so now in order to guarantee access for 2019-20. That means a lot of extra work that was not planned for, which Daniel Evans described as “a strain on us”. That is the last thing our education establishments need right now.

Programme access is a right for all EU members, and European Economic Area members can negotiate membership, but that requires bilateral agreement with the EU. Outside those terms, Scotland might be limited to being a partner country, as Switzerland currently is. We heard in committee about the so-called Swiss model, which Rachael Hamilton touched on earlier. That status means that learners and educators are not able to participate fully, and lose out. Switzerland does not want to remain in that situation for long and wants to return to full programme-member status. Members will be aware that Switzerland is in that position because of the restriction on EU freedom of movement. The UK Government’s continued lack of clarity about freedom of movement may well affect our future Erasmus+ relationship.

In paragraph 78 of the report, the committee quotes Marion Spöring, who is the chair of the University Council for Modern Languages Scotland. She said:

“If we do not have freedom of movement, it would be a disaster for academic and social reasons, for the internationalisation of the country, for the experience of our students and staff and for research.” —[*Official Report, Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee*, 11 January 2018; c 15.]

I absolutely agree. Earlier in the report, at paragraph 33, we quote Marion Spöring again, explaining how important the study of languages is. Free movement is key for Erasmus+. Mobility of learners and educators is, indeed, one of the fundamental underpinnings of the scheme.

My Erasmus journey started in 1993 when I started university. As well as having the time of my life and many life experiences that I will cherish forever, a few other things happened. [*Interruption.*]

In preparation for the debate, I counted the nationalities of people whom I met. I met 20 when I was going through my degree, and when I was studying for my masters there were 11 of us in the class from 10 different national backgrounds, including Guadeloupe, South Korea and Argentina.

Nobody can tell me that the Erasmus+ scheme or its predecessor programmes do not matter: they do. They change lives and open opportunities for many people, like me, who came from places where employment opportunities were not aplenty. I care about educating future generations and about learning languages—another reason why Erasmus+ matters.

I urge the UK Government to open its eyes to this wonderful programme and to grasp the opportunity to remain in Erasmus+ and help future generations to become even better citizens.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr McMillan. People are wondering what your wonderful experiences were. We will hear about that some other time perhaps, Mr Carlaw.

15:33

**Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** As members comment, I do not have any wonderful experiences—at least, not from the Erasmus+ scheme. In all seriousness, I am very pleased to be speaking in this important debate. Although I am not a member of the committee, I put on record my thanks to its members and all those who contributed to the report, including young people who are in the gallery today.

As members will be aware, I voted to leave the European Union, but it is vitally important to distinguish between that decision and the suggestion that, somehow, Brexit means leaving Europe and severing all existing ties with the continent. Erasmus+ is a prime example of the kind of cultural and educational partnerships that we should be looking to continue long into the future.

Erasmus+ has been of great benefit to many young people across Scotland and our wider society. As Joan McAlpine touched on, the programme is still perhaps best known for its work in enabling university and college students to travel internationally, and facilitating the posting of international students here in Scotland. That clearly enhances the vibrancy and global nature of our campuses, and helps Scotland-domiciled students to develop a truly global perspective. That is particularly important for those from more deprived backgrounds, who might not otherwise have had those opportunities. On that point, I associate myself fully with the remarks made by the minister.

NUS Scotland noted that Erasmus+ has been proven to enhance participants’ educational achievements and is a firm driver of social mobility. To put it into perspective, the programme currently helps around 1,600 Scots go abroad to European countries every year. Numbers have been on an upward trajectory, as members have

mentioned, which shows how strongly young people feel about the project. With the numbers doubling over the past seven years, there has been a great opportunity for outward mobility.

However, as we have heard, that is only part of the wider programme. In my constituency, for example, Brownhall primary school received funding to support staff development in language learning, and Lockerbie academy has taken part in a learning exchange with a school in Italy. Dumfries and Galloway Council's award-winning youth service received financial support to host an international training course to upskill youth workers on active citizenship. Those are just a few examples; members around the chamber will have hundreds more.

Recently, the cross-party group on Brexit held a meeting that was facilitated by YouthLink Scotland. During those discussions, I was struck by how important and valuable the young people who were present, who were from around Scotland, believed the Erasmus+ programme to be.

As the briefing from Universities Scotland confirms, the benefits of Erasmus+ are not just anecdotal. The briefing recognises a notable correlation between periods of mobility and enhanced academic achievement by students, as well as a boost to skills and future employability.

That is why I am particularly pleased that the UK Government has publicly stated that the UK is committed to continuing full participation in the Erasmus+ programme up until we leave the European Union, and that people around the UK will continue to benefit from all EU programmes, including Erasmus+, until the end of the current budget period. I am even more pleased that the Prime Minister today signalled her continued support for that position continuing after 2020.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I did not watch Prime Minister's question time earlier, but it seems that the Prime Minister said:

"Erasmus is one of those we have cited that we may wish to remain part of, but of course we are in a negotiation with the European Union and we will be dealing with these matters in that negotiation."

Is Oliver Mundell happy with that level of assurance?

**Oliver Mundell:** I am happy with that level of assurance, because it shows commitment. Members in this chamber need to be pragmatic. People in Scotland would be very disappointed if, at a point when we are trying to establish the fundamental economic relationship between the UK and the EU after Brexit, we put that part of the negotiations on hold. We will come to the Erasmus+ issue in time and, at this stage, it is important that there is a firm commitment.

Rather than trying to score political points and ramp up the idea that there is disagreement on how important Erasmus+ is, members should work together to make the positive case so that Scottish students and those from around the UK can continue to benefit from it. It is one of the EU's most successful and iconic programmes. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Just a wee minute, Mr Mundell. Minister and Mr Carlaw, it is very rude to have your wee conversation when Mr Mundell is making a very interesting speech. Do you agree?

**Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** I do.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. You just go on, Mr Mundell.

**Oliver Mundell:** I am not sure that I agree that it is a particularly interesting speech, but I am trying.

On the point that I was just making, it is worth noting that a number of non-member states that have already been mentioned, including Iceland, Norway, Lichtenstein and Turkey, participate fully in Erasmus+, which provides hope and reassurance that reaching an accommodation is possible and likely.

**Dr Allan:** Although I appreciate that Turkey is in a different category, Oliver Mundell will obviously be aware that three of the countries that he just mentioned are part of the European Economic Area and have freedom of movement of people, which brings us back to the earlier point about the importance of the freedom of movement of people.

**Oliver Mundell:** The minister has effectively made my point for me by pointing out that Turkey does not fall into that category. We also have to recognise that a huge number of other global academic partnerships and relationships exist outside the EU's freedom of movement principle. It would be sad if we find out somewhere down the line that the EU has prevented Scotland or the United Kingdom from continuing to engage in something as important as this because of a lack of flexibility around accepting the democratic will of the people of the United Kingdom.

We need to avoid division and a sense that there is a problem. We need to encourage organisations and individuals to continue to apply and make bids while the UK is still a member state, because those applications and bids will be honoured. That is the priority while we wait for the right moment in the negotiations to ensure that this important policy continues post-Brexit.

15:40

**Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP):** With the opportunities that Erasmus+ affords people, it

would be a great shame if Scotland was no longer able to participate in it, or if we were to be denied the opportunity to participate as fully as we currently can. I thank the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee for its report and the effort that it has put into highlighting this important issue.

Given the planned expansion of Erasmus+ for 2021 to 2027, with its budget being doubled to €30 billion, this is the time to be at the heart of the scheme, not to be detached or even semi-detached from it. One of the aims of the scheme is to broaden the opportunities that might not otherwise be available to young people and those who support them, such as teachers. That is undoubtedly a good thing culturally, socially and indeed economically. Being able to experience the real lives of people in other countries opens minds, provides connections and enhances experiences in a way that going on holiday or sitting in a classroom never will. There is therefore a clear need for Erasmus+ and firm evidence of its value to Scotland and Scots.

As a former sports journalist and still-keen football fan, I want to focus part of my contribution on some of the impacts that the Erasmus+ scheme has had on football in this country. Erasmus+ funding allows for young players to spend time at winter camps via the vocational, education and training strand. Within the East of Scotland European Consortium project area, since 2014, Aberdeen, Cowdenbeath, Dundee United and St Johnstone have all participated in the winter camps.

As a Dons fan who is still buoyed by their finally winning at Parkhead to finish as premiership runners-up, let me focus on my club and how it has benefited from Erasmus+. Aberdeen's under-20 squad travelled to Austria in 2015 and the under-18 squad travelled to Portugal in January 2016. Host partners provided access to innovations in physiology, dietetics, coaching delivery, tactical analysis and cardiovascular training. Those young players who travelled were undertaking a modern apprenticeship in sporting excellence. Steven Gunn, Aberdeen Football Club operations manager, said:

"The opportunities provided by these visits were hugely important in the development of our young footballers, both personally and professionally."

Then there is St Johnstone, where 20 apprentices were able to gain experience of the training methods at an acknowledged UEFA centre of excellence in Portugal. The host partner was a regional training and coaching complex that is used by Portuguese and European professional teams and is recognised as having world-class records in talent identification, innovative coaching and player development. Apprentices had the

chance to learn about innovations in physiology, dietetics, coaching delivery, tactical analysis and cardiovascular training. The club believed that this would lead to improved success rates for apprentices in being admitted to the professional ranks of UK clubs, and that improved academic attainment and European exposure would improve employability in secondary careers. Life outside football is a vital consideration, because only a small percentage of apprentices will go on to have a full-time career and earn a living from the game.

In its application, St Johnstone highlighted that young people in Scotland are

"in the main, rather parochial in nature and exhibit a reluctance to undertake occupational mobility. This is particularly so with young people in the region where many have poor records of academic achievement and are socially disadvantaged."

The club therefore committed to using its participation in Erasmus+ to encourage other young people to seek out mobility opportunities, which is something to be welcomed.

Moving on from learning football skills to teaching languages, six schools in my constituency—Arbroath academy plus five primary schools—have received Erasmus+ funding since 2014. The one-plus-two language strategy requires teachers to have the confidence to teach languages, and the Erasmus+ programme has allowed teachers from those schools to undertake intensive courses. It is clear that the schools are seeking to properly engage their pupils in language learning—for example, by equipping teachers so that they can provide students with cultural awareness and knowledge that will help them to understand the importance and relevance of learning a modern language in today's global economy. The skills that the teachers learn can also be shared with colleagues.

It is not just language learning that schools are boosting through Erasmus+. Many schools are involved in exchange or co-operation programmes through projects on climate change, for example. Climate change matters because, as we know, it does not respect borders and no country has all the answers or ownership of best practice.

What does the future hold for Scotland's involvement with Erasmus+? The committee noted that

"uncertainty about the UK's participation in the programme beyond 2020 is creating an additional strain on some stakeholders in the current programme period."

Unlike Oliver Mundell, I am far from encouraged by Theresa May's comments today, which did not go nearly far enough. Even if the UK finds a way to continue participating in the scheme, restrictions might be placed on its involvement. The report highlighted the example of Switzerland. The



immigration policy that has been in place there since 2014 means that Switzerland cannot be a full participant, particularly in relation to sport. As Iain Gray and I have highlighted, that matters to Scotland.

Such opportunities are under threat from Brexit, and the UK Government must minimise any negative impact. I also back the committee's call that, if the UK Government is not willing or able to secure the UK's continued participation in Erasmus+ as a programme country, the Scottish Government should explore the use of existing institutional structures to allow Scotland to continue its participation.

I thank the committee again for highlighting this important issue, which has implications for my constituency and, as we have heard, the whole of Scotland.

15:47

**Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** I was a member of the committee last year, and I was among those who visited the Jack Kane centre in Craigmillar in August. As Joan McAlpine said, the young people we met there told us how Erasmus+ had provided them with the opportunity to travel and meet people of the same age in other countries. Several of those young people had not previously had an opportunity to travel much beyond their community.

The 35 students and staff of the University of Aberdeen who wrote to me in March identified similar benefits, with a focus on formal education rather than social engagement. They talked about removing barriers and the opportunity to study and live in different countries.

For both groups of young people, maintaining such access for those who come after them was crucial. The students said that it would be unfair for those who reaped the rewards of participating in Erasmus+ to deny that opportunity to future generations.

That is the challenge that we now face. For a generation and more, we have benefited from the free movement of students, teachers and groups of young people between Britain and ever wider areas of continental Europe. As things stand, there is no guarantee that future generations will be able to enjoy such freedom beyond 2020. The question of how to protect those benefits is of great importance, and the committee's report is a useful contribution to finding the right answer.

Yesterday's Brexit debate was an argument about reserved and devolved responsibilities. Today's debate is about whether we should seek to agree, after Brexit, to pool some of our resources with the European Union in order to

maintain cross-border initiatives to our mutual advantage. If we agree that that should be done, the question is, how?

It is important to recognise the scale of those cross-border links. From the University of Aberdeen and Robert Gordon University alone, more than 600 students and nearly 100 staff have gone abroad under the Erasmus+ programme in the academic years 2014-15 and 2015-16, and many students and teachers have come to Aberdeen and to Scotland from other countries. That is good for them and good for us.

I will give a single example of what Erasmus+ actually means. Last weekend, I met a young woman at a fundraising dinner in Aberdeen that was hosted by the region's enterprising community of Syrian former refugees. A postgraduate student, she is a citizen of an EU Baltic country who has used Erasmus+ to study in France and Spain and is now doing a master's degree in Scotland. She also hopes to work with Syrians in Aberdeen to learn from the experience and to share her language skills. She has reached an academic standard in French and Spanish, is fluent in English and has grown up speaking both Russian and Estonian. She is a model European and global citizen of the next generation.

We surely want young Scots to match that breadth and depth. A failure to join the successor scheme to Erasmus+ would put that at risk. In addition, the story makes the point that, while Erasmus+ benefits Scots who go abroad, it also benefits Scotland through those people who come from other countries to work and study here.

Of course, promoting an outward-looking culture among our young people is not only about access to European programmes of educational and cultural exchange. Figures just published show that the number of young Scots who are achieving qualifications in modern languages—the very area that I have just described—has fallen by almost half in the past 10 years. That is clearly very serious indeed, and it is an urgent issue for the Scottish ministers and the Parliament to address.

Very few young people in Scotland or anywhere else who voted in favour of Brexit, as Mr Mundell did, did so because they wanted to reduce their ability to travel, work or study abroad, so loss of access to European exchanges would certainly count as an unintended consequence of the vote two years ago.

**Stuart McMillan:** I am sure that Lewis Macdonald would agree with me that encouraging people to take the time to go and study abroad has been an issue not just over the past decade, but for quite some time. As was mentioned earlier, some people can, at times, unfortunately be quite insular regarding their own communities.

**Lewis Macdonald:** Absolutely. As Stuart McMillan has said, and as he knows from experience, it is a generational issue. The generation that members of this Parliament typically represent has had the benefit of those opportunities over the past 40-something years. The critical point now is how we secure those benefits for the next generation.

UK ministers have guaranteed that the commitments that were made under Erasmus+ will be honoured for the full period of the current programme to the end of 2020, which is welcome. However, they must now look beyond 2020 and make commitments of their own to maintain engagement in whatever successor programme the EU chooses to put in place. Labour's priority would be to take forward membership of and involvement in such programmes, and the CTEER Committee essentially calls on Conservative ministers to do the same.

Oliver Mundell cited what Theresa May said at Prime Minister's questions as an expression of willingness. It is an important starting point, but it remains a long way short of concluding an agreement with the European partners. I welcome the support from Rachael Hamilton and Jackson Carlaw for the committee's report. However, while many members on the Conservative side of the chamber recognise and support the principle of seeking to be part of a successor scheme, the issue is how much it matters to Government ministers when it is weighed in the balance against economic interests and backward-looking notions of national sovereignty.

As has been said, there are plenty of precedents for participation in the Erasmus+ scheme; it is not confined to member states of the European Union. The minister cited countries in the European Free Trade Association and the EEA that are Erasmus+ programme members, and Oliver Mundell cited Turkey, which is not a member of EFTA or the EEA but is nonetheless a programme member. Countries outwith the European Union and the European Economic Area have negotiated access to those programmes on a bilateral basis. They have given the question of access to the scheme sufficient priority to be weighed in the balance against other things, and that is the fundamental challenge for us.

It is clear that participation will have to be paid for, in addition to the financial contributions that have already been identified, and there will have to be a new agreement on freedom of movement for those who are involved. Those are big asks, but they are worth seeking answers to because of the programme's significance for future generations of young people and in order to maintain access in the future.

15:54

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** As other members have done, I thank the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee for the report that we are debating.

The Erasmus+ programme provides many hugely important opportunities for young people in my constituency to broaden their horizons, gain new social and educational skills and build on their confidence and personal development. I am particularly delighted that the minister welcomed the 2014 changes to open up Erasmus+ to youth groups. There was previously a perception that Erasmus was for the middle classes at university. I am not saying that that was the reality, but it was genuinely a perception that people had. The opening up of Erasmus+ to youth groups certainly made a huge difference, particularly to young people in low-income households in deprived areas that I represent, who have been able to seize many opportunities that otherwise would have been very difficult to obtain.

I have several wonderful youth organisations in my constituency and I will tell members of the benefit that Erasmus+ has been to one of them: Royston Youth Action. Royston, or the Garngad, is a fantastically resilient community, but is not without its challenges. Levels of unemployment, low pay and low-income families mean that the area has particularly significant deprivation, as well as various health and societal challenges. However, in recent years, Royston Youth Action has sent local youngsters to Austria and Finland and is planning further visits. It has also hosted youth exchange trips, which is important because it is not just about young Scots going to Europe but about Europe coming to Scotland. Royston Youth Action hosted a youth exchange last year for young Europeans to come to Scotland. This July, it hopes to host other young people from Finland, Austria and Estonia in Royston—the Garngad—who will see what we have to offer, which is vitally important.

I will quote Sharon Kelly, the project co-ordinator of Royston Youth Action, who said:

"Many of our young people had never been abroad before and getting to go on trips such as these funded by Erasmus Plus has quite literally been life changing for them. Some of them did not even have passports and we bought them for them and also ensured they had to collect clothing for travelling etc. All of the trips are funded by Erasmus plus and so there is not a high cost involved in taking the young people away, the short fall is provided by local fundraising. Many young people from areas like this cannot afford to go on schools trips abroad as these trips can cost up to £600.00, and so being able to provide a trip abroad through a youth project is fantastic."

Her words are better than mine in capturing what happens. However, we should also hear from a

young person who has benefited from the trips abroad. Toni is 16 and she spoke about young people from other countries coming to Scotland to see what Glasgow had to offer. She said:

“I am quite a shy person and do not have a lot of confidence but it was nice to meet young people from Austria, Poland, Hungary and Finland to get their views about life in their countries and their hopes. At the end of the week I felt a lot more confident in being able to speak to everyone from different countries and I learned so much during this week.”

That is a powerful testament to the benefits of Erasmus+.

Does Brexit throw all that into doubt? Absolutely, to be honest about it. The Conservatives’ Brian Whittle mentioned earlier in the debate the UK Prime Minister’s endorsement of Erasmus+ during Prime Minister’s questions today. However, there was no endorsement; it was a dreadful equivocation. She said:

“We may wish to remain part”

of Erasmus

“but ... we will be dealing with these matters in ... negotiation.”

That is hardly a ringing endorsement or a signal of intent. The future of young people in deprived communities that I represent should not be a plan in a game of negotiations on Brexit. That is simply not acceptable.

The committee’s Erasmus+ report highlighted another concern. If the UK Government sees the value of Erasmus+—we have heard some kind words in relation to that—then I would hope that it would be capturing or monitoring the impact or success of the programme. However, the committee report notes in that regard that the Department for Exiting the European Union’s

“sectoral report on higher education does not include Erasmus+ and ... does not appear to have produced an analysis of the value of Erasmus+ to those sectors participating in the scheme, such as youth work, voluntary, or school, further and higher education.”

I am sure that when we get round to those negotiations, the UK Government will look for an evidence base to continue with Erasmus+, but it is not collecting the data and I do not think that that is acceptable.

**Stuart McMillan:** I am sure that Bob Doris will agree that we should start those discussions now, rather than wait until the very last day before having them.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We are back on track with time, so you are in your last minute, Mr Doris.

**Bob Doris:** That is not so helpful, Presiding Officer.

I would like to think that the UK Government can multitask. There is quite an easy deal to be done here. If the UK Government is willing to put the money in, and if it is willing to guarantee freedom of movement for all the young people from other countries and from Scotland in relation to Erasmus+, we have a deal. We can have a deal in double-quick time. There is no issue in relation to this: Erasmus+ is not a consequential, underpinning economic deals in relation to the wider Brexit. That is just a nonsense.

I wanted to mention some details of the cash relating to Erasmus+. In 2021, the cash is doubling. I have other youth organisations in my constituency that are positioning themselves for bids for Erasmus+, but before they can even prepare a bid it looks as though the UK Government may pull the rug from under their feet. That is not acceptable.

16:00

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I thank committee members and the clerking team for the work that they have done on Erasmus+ and for the report that we have before us today. The current Erasmus+ programme covers a period from 2014 to 2020, backed by a substantial budget of around €15 billion. Each year, the programme funds somewhere in the region of 16,000 exchanges for UK students to work or study abroad. Studying abroad provides excellent opportunities for students based in Scotland and the rest of the UK to improve their language skills, to experience work outside the country and to broaden their horizons in different parts of the world. In the years during which it has operated, the Erasmus programme has built enduring links across Europe and further afield.

Erasmus+ is also an opportunity, as the committee recognised, to build on the UK’s soft power, an area in which we already do well. The programmes that Erasmus+ sponsors strengthen our cultural standing both within Europe and more widely, and the evidence also suggests that it is supported by and popular with people who have gone through an Erasmus programme.

Emerging in the 1980s, Erasmus followed a number of other exchange programmes created within Europe that operated in the early part of that decade. Since that time, Erasmus+ has brought together other programmes under its umbrella. As it stands, the programme supports a variety of different areas of education, training, sport and youth work. The study abroad schemes in universities are probably the most visible component, but there are many other examples of its work. For example, staff in education can also

benefit from the opportunity to train and work abroad.

Erasmus+ features in many of Scotland's schools. As the committee observes, €2.3 million of the total €21 million spent in Scotland in 2017 was directed to schools, with a further €0.75 for youth work organisations. I mention those elements because, when we consider the future of the UK's relationship with Europe, it is clear that there is a great deal of positivity across the board towards the work of programmes such as Erasmus+. We have seen that from a range of organisations in the education sector that have contributed their views to inquiries in both this Parliament and the UK Parliament.

In her speech in Florence back in September, the Prime Minister outlined the promotion of science, education and culture as examples of advantageous programmes and policies that have benefited the UK and the other 27 member states of the EU. I expect that there is broad consensus in this chamber with the view that, moving forward, the UK should continue to work together with the EU member states on areas of mutual interest. The UK Government has also outlined its willingness

“to make an ongoing contribution to cover our fair share of the costs involved”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 2 November 2017; Vol 786, p 6-7W.]

in such programmes.

As the minister, Steve Baker, pointed out in his letter to the committee, the content of the successor programme to Erasmus+ beyond 2020 has not yet been clarified. We know, however, that a number of possible proposals have been suggested at this stage, and that serious consideration has been given to increasing the budget for Erasmus+.

Participation in the successor programme, or programmes, will necessarily form part of the negotiations on the UK's future relationship with the EU, which remain on-going. However, in the meantime, the importance of programmes such as Erasmus+ was agreed by all parties in the December European Council summit, with the UK representation echoing the Prime Minister's willingness to continue co-operation on education and culture.

For some sense of the precedents behind that, we can look to the five non-EU countries that directly participate in the programme. Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein are the most obvious, but we also see among the programme countries Macedonia and Turkey, which are not part of the EU or EFTA and which lack much of the integration with the EU that the EEA states previously mentioned have. Those countries are followed by a fairly lengthy list of partner countries

from across the Balkans, north Africa, the middle east, the Caucasus, Russia and, of course, Switzerland. Those pre-existing relationships are of significant value in maintaining student mobility going forward, and they spread the impact of Erasmus+ beyond the EU.

Those countries have specific and various relationships with the Erasmus+ programmes, with the programme countries obviously having the closest interaction. In its report, the committee outlined its view that the UK should seek programme country status in the future. Of course we will look at the emerging shape of the post-2020 successor programme, but I am similarly minded that we should continue to participate as fully as possible.

Erasmus+ has been a positive feature of our relationship with the EU in past decades. There seems to be broad agreement that it would be beneficial to continue with it in the future. That is not to say that Erasmus+ is perfect. In common with many EU initiatives, it can be restrictive and bureaucratic in parts and it has limited global reach—it is currently supported by the international credit mobility scheme—but there is scope to do better in that regard and to look outward. There are areas in which the UK can be a constructive voice, working together with colleagues across the other participating countries.

It is clear that considerable thought must be given to how we ensure that continued co-operation in education is supported after the UK's departure from the EU. That must happen not just across this Parliament but across Scotland and the rest of the UK, too. We can see that that is happening, both here and in other places, and in that regard the committee's report is to be welcomed.

16:05

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):**

I am very pleased to take part in this afternoon's debate, which gives us an opportunity to have a different sort of debate about Europe. All too often in recent times, debates regarding Europe have been about either constitutional clash or economic calculation. Europe is much broader, and much more important, than that. The EU is not just about trade, migration or the single market; indeed, Europe is not just the EU. Europe is about people and culture.

We must be mindful that that was very much the mindset at the founding moment of the European project. It was about integration as a means of preventing war. Economic integration is a vital component of that, but only as a means of achieving integration, and cultural integration was

just as important, if not more so. Oliver Mundell, who is not in the chamber, made a similar point.

It is important that we do not simply conflate withdrawal from the EU with withdrawal from Europe. If we can participate in European institutions and programmes, we must seek to do so. However, this is not the course of action that I would advise or the one that I would want—I caution against a pick-and-mix approach to Europe that sees programmes simply as bargaining chips, in the way that Bob Doris and Stuart McMillan set out.

Given that we are in the position that we are in, we must look at the benefits of the programmes in which we participate. This afternoon's debate has been a useful opportunity to explore why Erasmus+ has been so important. If we can promote cultural exchange at a young age, we can foster the views and understanding that so many members have set out so well this afternoon. The €14 billion funding that is available and the €20 million that has been received by Scotland is clearly of huge value, but the programme's true benefit is incalculable.

I very much welcome the committee's report and this debate for many reasons. It is important that we hear about and discuss the benefits and importance of Erasmus and how we can preserve them. More important, we should discuss how we can take forward the possibilities to participate in Europe, specifically in relation to Erasmus+ but also as a general principle. The debate is also an opportunity to set out our views about how we can pursue being European in a much broader sense than simply just within the parameters of Brexit or the European Union.

I will turn to matters closer to home and say a little bit about the University of Edinburgh. I am hugely indebted to the university for the help that it provided to me ahead of this debate. It is proud to have participated in Erasmus since its inception in 1987. Since then, as the programme has grown, so has the university's involvement in it. I am sorry that Iain Gray is not in the chamber, because I think that I heard him say that he was wrong. Indeed, he was very wrong, because not only is Scotland a significant participant in Erasmus but the University of Edinburgh is the UK's largest sender of students via the Erasmus scheme and the largest host in Scotland. More than 12,000 students have participated in Erasmus just at the University of Edinburgh, which currently has agreements with more than 300 institutions in more than 20 nations.

The benefit is not just that Edinburgh students have a fantastic year; the programme helps them to learn languages and grow their understanding of other cultures. The programme is also about welcoming those who arrive in Edinburgh from

other countries, who enrich the university, our city and, indeed, our country. That is why Erasmus+ has been so important. The programme is not only about providing a good time for students—although I am sure that it does—or diffuse cultural benefits; Erasmus+ provides concrete benefits for those students who take part. Students who take part in Erasmus+ have lower unemployment rates, higher average incomes and better degree outcomes.

Of course, Erasmus+ goes beyond students and has a wider international and cultural impact. I discovered another interesting bit of evidence: there have been 1 million Erasmus babies since 1987, which we can all regard as an outcome of enthusiastic student exchanges.

However, we need to talk about Brexit, because that is why we need to discuss Erasmus+ and its benefits. Although the University of Edinburgh is committed to its collaboration with the scheme—indeed, application rates have risen—the benefits of Erasmus+ are in jeopardy.

There are opportunities to explore. People have discussed the examples of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey and Switzerland, and we must urge the UK Government to explore fully the possibilities. However, the UK Government cannot simply acknowledge that Erasmus+ has been of benefit or commit to participation only until the end of the current round—indeed, it is not enough for the Prime Minister to say, as she did in Prime Minister's questions today, that we might wish to remain part of Erasmus+. The UK Government needs to open dialogue, secure the possibilities and commit fully to taking part in Erasmus+ in the future.

Likewise, the Scottish Government should examine its options and the possibilities for participation. Education is a devolved area. Government is at its best when it is innovative and proactive. I suggest that the Government should explore the possibilities for being innovative and proactive in trying to take forward Erasmus+ from a Scottish Government perspective.

I wish that we did not need to have this debate. However, it has been a useful opportunity to explore how we can maintain our commitment to Europe, explore bilateral relations and, above all, ensure that students and young people continue to have the opportunities of international exchange that Erasmus+ has afforded them in the past.

16:12

**Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP):** I associate myself with the comments of our committee convener, Joan McAlpine. I thank the clerks for all their hard work on the report, fellow members of

the committee and all the witnesses who gave oral and written evidence.

Erasmus of Rotterdam was a famous European philosopher in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. He lived in France, Switzerland, Belgium and England, among other places, so he took full advantage of the free movement of people all those years ago. He taught at Queens' college at the University of Cambridge, where there is the Erasmus building and the Erasmus room today. There is an irony in the fact that the scheme is named after him but England voted to leave the EU, and we are debating the future of Erasmus+ today.

Erasmus also coined the phrase, "In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king." That takes me nicely on to the EU referendum campaign, which was conducted largely in a horrible atmosphere and did not really touch on how Europe benefits our everyday lives in this country and certain sections of society. The campaign was very much focused on unhealthy topics, with lots of misleading information and lies.

**Oliver Mundell:** Does the member agree that referendums in general are divisive and unpleasant by their nature? That has been the pattern in recent political events in the UK.

**Richard Lochhead:** I certainly think that referendums should be based on accurate information and reality. Given that many of the changes that have taken place between nations down the centuries have involved not referendums but much more unhealthy ways of taking decisions on the future of countries, it is fantastic that we have referendums in this day and age. However, I wish that all referendum campaigns would be responsible—the leave campaign was far from responsible.

One thing that is certain is that young people played a role in the last referendum campaign but, unfortunately, they did not play enough of a role. It is estimated that 75 per cent of people under the age of 24 voted to remain. Unfortunately, the turnout of people under the age of 24 was lower than the turnout of people over the age of 55, so the UK voted to leave the EU.

No doubt the reasons why so many young people were in favour of staying in the EU included programmes such as Erasmus+, and also the free movement of people and the ease of travel around Europe. Young people under the age of 24 had grown up with those throughout their lives, so they enthusiastically got behind the remain campaign in 2016.

Unfortunately, in the backdrop to the referendum campaign, issues such as the second world war were not discussed. Of course, the EU was born out of the ashes of a Europe that had

been wrecked because of that war. Since then, lots of programmes have looked at how we can have cross-border co-operation and exchange across the continent. Over the past 30 years, Erasmus has been a prime example of how European countries can work together and people can have their horizons expanded by travelling to other countries to live and work or learn. The programme has been exceptionally successful in doing that.

I was interested to learn that 9.7 per cent of students at Scottish institutions study abroad, compared with only 6.9 per cent of those in England and 7.2 per cent across the whole of the UK. Therefore there is evidence to show that Scotland is a very international, outward-looking country, particularly when it comes to our young people who want to live and study overseas. That is borne out by the statistics on the EU success story that is Erasmus+: €60 million has been invested in that in Scotland since 2014, across 700 projects and with an increasing number of young people taking part in the programme over recent years. Of course, the process is two-way, and there are more international students studying at our universities than there are at universities in the other UK nations.

Leaving the EU has brought many concerns for people who have benefited from Erasmus+ or who, through their employment, continue to be involved with it or who want to take part in the future. For example, the committee heard from Marion Spöring, of the University Council for Modern Languages Scotland, who said:

"Most of our students go through Erasmus+. If we do not have freedom of movement, it would be a disaster for academic and social reasons, for the internationalisation of the country, for the experience of our students and staff and for research."—[*Official Report, Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee*, 11 January 2018; c 15.]

Luke Humberstone, of NUS Scotland, said:

"as we have seen from Switzerland, when rules on freedom of movement or immigration are changed it makes developing bilateral agreements with individual countries much more complex".—[*Official Report, Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee*, 11 January 2018; c 14.]

Many other concerns about Erasmus+ were expressed to the committee. However, its many benefits were also illustrated. The briefing from Universities Scotland said that there was a notable correlation between periods of mobility and enhanced student academic achievement, skills and employability and that 93 per cent of learners agreed that they saw the value of different cultures after participation. There are many other benefits. For example, Emily Beever of YouthLink Scotland said:

“The focus of the current seven-year programme has been diversity and inclusion. Research has shown that young people with fewer opportunities rate the programme more strongly than well-off young people do, so that focus has been successful.” —[*Official Report, Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee*, 11 January 2018; c 25.]

The fact that the programme has many benefits is the reason for the committee making the recommendations that it has, as was explained by the committee’s convener, Joan McAlpine, in her opening remarks.

However, I have concerns. First, there is a lack of clarity, which we need to have as soon as possible. There is also the fact that we have a guarantee to continue to fund the programme only for as long as we are part of Europe. Well, we are leaving Europe soon—what will happen thereafter? I am also concerned about the long term. We have been experiencing the success of Erasmus over the past 30 years, but we should also look at what will happen to it in the next 10, 20 and 30 years. My concern is that the UK Government will give short-term guarantees, but I do not know how long those will be for. At the moment, we have one for up until we leave Europe. There may be a further one for another few years—who knows? Then the UK Government will stop the funding, and the funding that it has saved by leaving Europe will not be passed to Scotland, so, once again, the Scottish Government will be left to pick up the pieces and pay for these very successful programmes. That will stretch our Scottish budget even more, as a consequence of decisions that have been taken outwith Scotland.

We have to find a way in which we can have a guarantee from the UK Government to continue to fund Erasmus+, and to make sure that negotiations are successful so that we in Scotland can be a partner in that programme. We must ensure that our young people will still have the opportunity of working and studying overseas, which will bring to their lives, too, all the benefits that have been brought to Scotland over the past 30 years.

16:19

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** The Erasmus+ programme has benefited millions of students across Europe and beyond, giving them the opportunity to study, to train, to gain work experience and to volunteer abroad. Our continued participation in the programme should send a clear signal that we want to continue to work constructively with those in Europe as we leave the political institutions of the European Union.

It is clear that the Erasmus+ programme has been extremely successful in improving the job prospects of its participants, who on average have significantly better skills and are more employable than those who do not participate in it.

The success of the programme in Scotland goes well beyond simply improving participants’ job prospects. In Mid Scotland and Fife, there have been many successes in universities, colleges and schools, and individuals have benefited from that. For example, the programme assists universities and colleges in establishing new contacts with other institutions across Europe, and we have heard today that the University of Edinburgh has Erasmus+ agreements with more than 300 institutions across Europe and beyond.

Moreover, the scheme allows students to benefit from experiencing different cultures while studying for their qualifications. It unlocks their potential, builds the networks that they need for the future and gives them new opportunities.

For those reasons, I am pleased to see the report from the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee, and I pay tribute to its members—and its staff, including the clerks—who participated in the inquiry. If the motion on changes to committee membership is agreed to this afternoon, I look forward to joining the committee next week and having the opportunity to participate in its work.

We all—every party in the chamber—want to see the programme continue, because we can see the benefits to our communities, constituencies and regions.

The Scottish Conservatives have always wholeheartedly supported the Erasmus+ programme, because of its ethos and the outstanding opportunities that it gives. When European students participate in Erasmus+, it is often their first international experience, as well as being an opportunity to enhance their education at the same time as experiencing new cultures and organisations. Through the exchange, they get the chance to enhance their skills, which is a real benefit. The added bonus is that the programme is supported by grants, so financial assistance is available to ensure that individuals are given that opportunity.

We have heard from members about what has happened in their communities when individuals who come from a background in which such opportunities would not normally be available have that opportunity opened up to them through the programme and they are able to develop their skills.

As others have mentioned, despite Erasmus+ being financed and administered through the European Commission, there are a number of

examples of countries that are not part of the EU but which, by making a financial contribution, are full participants of the scheme. Many more engage with the programme as partner countries but with more limited access. As we have heard, Switzerland was redesignated as a partner country following its decision to end free movement with the European Union, and Turkey and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be full members in the scheme, despite not having freedom of movement with the European Union.

**Stuart McMillan:** I am sure that Alexander Stewart will agree with me, as paragraph 73 of the committee report highlights, how important free movement is in relation to Turkey and Macedonia.

**Alexander Stewart:** I am not disputing that in any way; it is very important in the process.

We can therefore conclude that even the continuation of freedom of movement is not a requirement for continued participation in Erasmus+.

In its report on the challenges and the opportunities of leaving the EU for higher education, the House of Commons Education Committee suggests that, given the UK's status as a more popular destination for EU students than some other countries, an arrangement that included continued full membership for the UK would benefit both sides. I very much consider that that is the case and that we can secure such an arrangement. It is clear that an arrangement can be found that would allow students from the UK and Europe to continue studying, volunteering, gaining work experience and training in each other's countries. The benefits to doing that are immense.

I look forward to seeing and hearing what will take place with regard to the European Union. We have seen partnership work continue to develop because we have been able to reach agreement. I look forward to agreements being reached and to our working together in support of that goal, given the many benefits arising from the programme, which we have heard about today. It is our duty in this Parliament to ensure that all of us—including the Scottish Government and the UK Government—sing from the same hymn sheet, because it is vital for the benefit of generations to come that the UK and the European Union reach agreement. I support the programme. I want to see it to continue for everyone, so that we can have those benefits for the future.

16:25

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** When we talk about Erasmus, we should probably start by recognising and honouring the pioneering work that was done by the wonderful

Sofia Corradi, Mamma Erasmus, or Mother Erasmus, who established the whole concept back in 1976.

As a young Italian student in 1958, she came back to Italy with a masters degree from Columbia University in New York, only to be laughed at by her professor at the Sapienza University in Rome, who told her:

"You cannot travel all around the world and then pretend to steal a degree here!"

She spent another year studying in Rome to complete her masters to the satisfaction of that university. Because she felt that others should not have to go through that, she started to develop the idea of a European project that would allow students to study abroad as part of their exams and have that recognised internationally. In 1976, for the first time, degrees that were achieved by Italians in France were recognised as equal in their own country, and in 1987 the Erasmus programme started to take off. Erasmus was born.

Sofia Corradi said in a recent lecture that the programme was probably illegal at the time, as there were then no agreed legal mechanisms in Europe to facilitate such a scheme, but she went ahead with it anyway and we are all the better off for it. Now, more than 4 million students have experienced the incredible exchange programme that Erasmus is, and Sofia's dream is to make it an internationally recognised programme across the world. She said that it was always a universal idea rather than just a European one.

From those early beginnings, it took around 20 years to top the 1 million mark in participant numbers, but 1 million newcomers are now taking part every three years. The programme's scope is now much broader, as it embraces vocational, apprenticeship, management and sporting programmes.

In Scotland, around 6,000 people took part in Erasmus+ in 2016, around 1,600 of whom were students. The participation rate is much higher in Scotland than it is in England and the other nations of the UK. Our Scottish universities are incredibly successful in winning funding to co-ordinate the Erasmus Mundus joint masters degree projects, which account for over 85 per cent of the projects. That shows how important Erasmus is to Scotland and why it is important to get an agreement in place.

The Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee and its clerks and staff deserve our thanks for bringing the report together at this important time. The messages from the report are clear. The UK Government needs to give us some commitments about its intentions beyond 2020 pretty soon. The committee recommends that the UK Government should



negotiate to retain programme country status, which would ensure the continuation of Erasmus+ in Scotland. According to the report, Turkey and Macedonia, which are not EU members, have secured that arrangement and have put in place agreements on freedom of movement—an important feature of the programme—for all participants. Surely the UK can at least match that.

The European Parliament is working on its next budget for the years ahead, and the Commission would like to double the Erasmus+ budget to around €30 billion. We need to know whether we are in or out and what our contribution will be towards this amazing programme. The committee has asked how, if the UK walks away from Erasmus+ beyond 2020—which would be a scandalous thing to do—the Scottish Government might continue to support our citizens to participate in the programme.

A real-life experience is probably more valuable than any number of statistics in illustrating the importance of Erasmus+. My daughter Niamh spent six months in Sweden from last summer. I will read out a brief extract of what she had to say:

“It was an invaluable experience in Sweden which I am so grateful to have been able to participate in.

It built my confidence, independence, and developed my interpersonal skills, opened my mind and was very humbling.

Travelling and living in a different country, finding my way, making new friends, interacting with different cultures was a wonderful experience.

I made friends for life, and had the opportunity to make amazing once in a life time memories, such as travelling across the arctic circle to Lapland, being hosted in a yurt with the Sami people who keep reindeer, drinking glögg and hearing about their unique way of life, and of course seeing the northern lights.

Academically, it was fantastic to be studying politics with students from all over Europe, escaping from the bubble and discussing our perspectives on contemporary issues ... Having to ‘act’ as the UK rep in a Brexit negotiation role-play in a room full of Europeans was not the most enjoyable part—but we did manage to reach a deal at the end.

I felt like I was taking on an ambassadorial role in representing my university and Scotland, which I am extremely proud to have had the chance to do.

I am eternally grateful for my experience; it has shaped me forever in the most positive way. The things I got to see and do and the people I met will stay with me for the rest of my life, and would not be possible without the Erasmus+ exchange programme.

It would be a real tragedy for students to miss out on this chance in the future.”

I saw a slightly shy, apprehensive and tearful daughter one day in August last year making her way from Glasgow airport to a new experience in Gothenburg—or Göteborg, as the Swedes call it locally—and returning six months later full of chat

and stories, brimming with confidence, and wondering what the fuss was all about in the first place. That is when the importance and relevance of the programme sank in.

Would Erasmus have happened anyway without Sofia Corradi? Quite probably. However, she had the dream and the determination to make it happen. She rightly said that Erasmus is not just about higher education; it is a programme of experience and immersion in another country. It costs a lot to do it, but Erasmus’s value cannot possibly be measured in terms of the cost alone. Erasmus is quite an incredible idea, and it was created by an incredible woman. All Governments have a duty to ensure that it continues.

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** We move to the closing speeches. I ask Mary Fee to close for the Labour Party.

16:31

**Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab):** The debate has been mostly a consensual one in which members across the chamber have expressed a clear commitment to the continuation of Scotland’s involvement with the Erasmus+ programme. In closing for Scottish Labour, I will touch on what members have said and the benefits of the Erasmus programme, but I also want to focus on the personal experiences of a member of my staff.

The convener of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee, Joan McAlpine, gave us details of the background to the inquiry and the work that the committee undertook, and Shirley-Anne Somerville and other members highlighted the impact that Brexit could have.

I was particularly pleased to hear Iain Gray commenting on the Hibernian Community Foundation and the work that it has done with Erasmus+ to support and encourage the participation of women in football. Ross Greer and Oliver Mundell spoke about the wider benefits of the programme, and Graeme Dey again highlighted its benefits to football.

Lewis Macdonald perfectly illustrated the benefits of Erasmus+ when he spoke about the young woman from Estonia and the importance of the programme to her. It is worth repeating what he said: Erasmus+ means that Scots benefit from going abroad, but Scotland also benefits from other people coming here.

It is extremely encouraging that, in the past year, Scotland has successfully obtained its highest-ever allocation of Erasmus+ funding, and it is deeply regrettable that Brexit casts a cloud of uncertainty over Scotland’s future in Erasmus+. It is disappointing that the UK Government has given only a short-term guarantee of UK

participation in Erasmus+ until 2020. I firmly support the committee's recommendation to the UK Government to commit itself to participation in Erasmus+ beyond 2020 and its recommendation that the Scottish Government clearly outlines its priorities for the programme.

The programme gives our young people the independence and responsibility to flourish as young adults through offering the opportunity to live for up to a year in another European country. That gives them the opportunity to learn another language, immerse themselves in another culture, and better understand different values and world views.

My office has witnessed first hand the tangible benefits of Erasmus. In August 2015, one of my staff, Rory Stride, embraced the opportunity of the Erasmus+ programme and moved to Sweden to study history and politics at Stockholm University. Although he chose to study at Stockholm, there were the options to study at the University of Groningen, the University of Lisbon or the University of Oslo. Through his experience of living in Stockholm, not only did he have the opportunities to become a connoisseur of cinnamon pastries and a fan of Scandi-noir drama, but he benefited hugely by immersing himself in the everyday culture, norms and values of the Swedish people, living his life in a residential area of the city like an average Stockholmer.

For the first time, Rory had the opportunity and the responsibility to live independently in a European capital city. He visited other Swedish cities, attended football games at Hammarby's Tele2 arena and ice hockey matches at Djurgården's Globen arena. He visited Skansen, which is the world's oldest open-air museum, the Nordic museum and the Riksdag—the Swedish Parliament—and he frequented the numerous coffee shops that are scattered throughout the picturesque cobbled lanes of Gamla Stan, Stockholm's old town, for fika, which once again involved a cup of coffee and the cinnamon pastries that he learned to love so much.

Rory made new friends from a variety of countries including Germany, the Czech Republic and South Korea. He was taught by leading Swedish academics in political science and learned new approaches to studying and a new perspective on history, finding out about Sweden's indigenous Sami population.

Socially, Erasmus+ offers our young people the opportunity to broaden their horizons by learning more about the cultures of different nations: their distinctive languages, their shared values and their national outlooks. The programme allows our young people the chance to appreciate and understand how interconnected and similar we are as Europeans.

Academically, the programme offers the opportunity for students to share ideas and rigorously debate a range of concepts. It allows our young people to develop an understanding of the similarities and variances in the world views of their European and international peers, which emerge from their differing backgrounds and lived experiences.

It is important to reiterate that Labour members fully appreciate and recognise the importance and the value of Erasmus+ and fully support Scotland's long-term involvement with the programme, post-Brexit. The world is undoubtedly becoming smaller, and leaving the European Union does not mean we must detach ourselves from Europe. We should focus on prioritising the protection and promotion of all opportunities for our young people to develop and to learn from their European neighbours.

It is imperative that the Scottish Government and the UK Government do all that they can to ensure that this vital opportunity for cultural exchange and social development is available for future generations.

16:38

**Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** This is a report with which Joan McAlpine, Tavish Scott, Ross Greer and myself are all associated—and that is before we include Richard Lochhead, Stuart McMillan, Mairi Gougeon and even Rachael Hamilton. We managed to achieve unanimous agreement on the report. That is worth repeating, because at times this afternoon I have wondered whether that was the case.

I, too, thank the clerks for their work—not just on this report, but on others. The committee, on which I have been pleased to serve since 2016 but am now leaving, has been at its best when we have had a singular focus and have arrived at a unanimous conclusion. I know that there is valuable work being done currently on the future of the screen sector in Scotland, which I look forward to seeing at its conclusion.

I come back to Iain Gray's comments. Many people will associate themselves with what he said about some people not properly understanding the success of the Erasmus scheme to Scotland over many years, which was a worthwhile point to make.

Ross Greer, in the first half of his comments, explained the breadth of the initiatives that have been incorporated in the Erasmus scheme, which is not fully appreciated. It has often been said that it is simply a programme for middle-class young people, but Ross Greer detailed all the ways in which it works. Of course, he then had to spoil it all by going into one of his polemics. I say to Ross

Greer only that all that would count for a lot more if his party had not abdicated its democratic responsibility to contest the election last June, which was about Europe. Only three members from his side did so, one being his leader, who came fourth in the seat that he fought. If Ross Greer is going to comment on issues, it cannot just be about saying in Parliament that, for example, he wants responsibility for migration to be transferred to the Scottish Parliament—a policy that 63 per cent of Scots do not want, as Professor John Curtice has shown—because he has to test those points out with the electorate, as well.

Erasmus+ is not a policy that is owned by any one political party. It is often said that the issue is all about the secret agenda of born-again Brexiteers. I represent Eastwood, which had the highest remain vote of any Conservative-held seat in the United Kingdom. Many, if not all, of the young people there are internationalists, as young people across Scotland instinctively now are. Yes—my constituency has many middle-class children. That is undeniable. However, it also has young people from challenging backgrounds.

During the European Union referendum and since then, I have met young people and understood and appreciated their commitment to an internationalist perspective. Tavish Scott was right—although his point was broader—that young people just want to be able, uninterrupted, to participate in Erasmus and have the ability to work and be educated through schemes across the European Union and the wider world.

To make it perfectly clear, I say that it is not acceptable to me if the outcome of our exit from the European Union means that we can no longer participate in the Erasmus+ programme. It is perfectly clear that the direction that the UK Government is taking means that we will continue to participate. Nobody has referred to it, but the UK Government has formally responded to the committee's report, and in that response it has gone beyond 2020 by making it clear that any bids that have been submitted while the UK is still a member, even if they are not approved until after we have left, will be honoured. The response makes it perfectly clear that UK participation in the future of the Erasmus+ programme is a key aspect of the UK's negotiating position.

**Ross Greer:** Mr Carlaw heard the same evidence that I heard. What impact does he believe the loss of freedom of movement will have on Erasmus+ participation for the likes of West Lothian College?

**Jackson Carlaw:** It is important to understand that, for some countries—Turkey has been mentioned in evidence—bilateral arrangements have been arrived at that have allowed them to be members of the Erasmus+ programme. That has

required freedom of movement of the participants. It is also important to recognise that the issue is not just important to young people from Britain who want to participate in Erasmus+ internationally, because the United Kingdom is one of the most favoured destinations for young people from the rest of Europe who wish to participate in the scheme.

To answer Lewis Macdonald's point, I say that it is not a case of balancing against the economic advantage. There are huge cultural and social advantages, but there is also a key economic advantage to our participation in the programme.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I absolutely appreciate Jackson Carlaw's point, but is it his view that that economic benefit is properly understood? How will it be weighed in the balance by his colleagues at Westminster?

**Jackson Carlaw:** One of the benefits of the report and the unity of purpose behind it in Parliament is that it gives us an opportunity, as Scottish politicians, to argue that very point and to ensure that it is properly represented in the debate that will take place leading up to that negotiation.

I enjoyed Tavish Scott's speech, which was much appreciated. He reminded us that Erasmus+ is often successful because of the commitment of individuals.

I was sorry, however, to hear that Oliver Mundell has had no wonderful experiences in his life, which is a terrible indictment of his father—the worst that I have ever heard.

I make an offer to Daniel Johnson to take him out to lunch, just to jolly up his life a bit, because he is so darkly unhappy all the time. Life does not need to be like that.

I will conclude with an observation that I have been reminded of during the debate. I will have to paraphrase Churchill, but I think that he said something about the art of a successful politician being the ability to argue with absolute conviction and certainty what the future would be and then, afterwards, to explain with absolute conviction and clarity why it did not happen. Both sides in the argument have fallen on either side of that, at times.

The report has united Parliament. Scottish Conservatives associate themselves with all its conclusions and recommendations. It would be a shame if others now sought to divide Parliament from that outcome. All of us together—this Parliament and all Scotland's politicians—

**Daniel Johnson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jackson Carlaw:** I am sorry. I am in my final seconds. We will discuss the matter over lunch.

All politicians now need to work together to ensure that the objective that we all want to secure, which is our continued participation in Erasmus+, is one of the outcomes of the negotiations that we are about to enter into. I am confident that it can be, but let us have a glass half full view, not a glass half empty view.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call the minister, Alasdair Allan, to wind up for the Government.

16:45

**The Minister for International Development and Europe (Dr Alasdair Allan):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. How much time have you planned for me?

**The Presiding Officer:** Seven minutes.

**Dr Allan:** That is good.

I commend the work of the Culture, Tourism and External Relations Committee in giving organisations from different sectors in Scotland the opportunity to give their views to Parliament on the value of Erasmus+. There has been some consensus in the chamber today—certainly around the report and the value of Erasmus+. The questions that have arisen this afternoon have been not as much about whether the programme should be continued as they have been about how it might be continued in the future.

I acknowledge the recommendations and conclusions in the committee's report. As the Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe said in his letter to the committee yesterday, we will consider those as we continue our work with the sector to mitigate the worst effects of Brexit.

Like Tavish Scott, I want to resist being wound up over Brexit this afternoon, but the evidence that was given to the committee and the testimony that the Government has received since the EU referendum have painted a very clear picture of what participation in Erasmus+ brings to Scotland. The funding is important and valuable, but the effect that the programme has on thousands of people's lives is more significant.

Iain Gray and Bob Doris both pointed to the fact that Scotland has been getting much better at availing itself of the opportunities that are presented by the programme—particularly the benefit for young people from less-privileged backgrounds. What the impact of the loss of access to Erasmus+ might mean is a relevant question for us today. Another relevant question is what will happen beyond the next year or two.

Ever since the EU referendum, the Scottish Government has engaged with stakeholders across Scotland to understand how the UK's

withdrawal from the EU might affect them. The feedback that we have received has played a significant role in shaping the Scottish Government's position, as set out in "Scotland's Place in Europe". It includes feedback from universities, colleges, schools, youth organisations and other funding programmes, specifically on the value of Erasmus+ and their concerns about how losing access to Erasmus+ might affect them.

The Scottish Government has heard many first-hand accounts from students, volunteers, administrators and others about their experiences and thoughts on the programme, and we have heard in the debate from a number of members about how organisations are finding that their planning is hampered by the continuing uncertainty. For example, time that is spent abroad is a critical part of some university courses, including modern languages courses. Prospective students who are currently considering where and what to study from the start of next academic year will not know whether or how that part of their course will be supported.

The main message is concern about the lack of clarity for the future. Recent confirmation—in the "Joint report on progress during phase 1 of negotiations under Article 50 TEU on the United Kingdom's orderly withdrawal from the European Union"—that the UK will continue to participate in EU programmes to the end of 2020 is welcome, and I am happy to welcome it, but stakeholders urgently need to know about the future beyond the next year or two.

We continue to press the UK Government to provide clarity about its intentions with regard to Erasmus+. Welcome as the Prime Minister's recent comments about possible future Erasmus+ commitments are, we need answers now about how the UK can make its aspirations a reality, and we need to be provided with some detail beyond the statement that has been made today.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Will the minister detail how he is currently engaging with the UK Government to make representations on the value of Erasmus+?

**Dr Allan:** That is a point on which ministers have engaged officials from both Governments to discuss regularly. We have publicly and through officials made clear the value of Erasmus+, and we have sought to establish where Erasmus+ fits into the negotiating priorities and timetable for the UK Government in its present situation in the Brexit talks.

Scotland's preference—and that of most members in the chamber—is to retain access to Erasmus+ as a full partner. The question—which has been raised a number of times during the debate—is what kind of access that will be. EEA

countries have a particular ease of access to Erasmus+ through the freedom of movement of people, but during the course of the debate, a number of members have pointed to examples including Turkey, Macedonia and others that have reached their own arrangements with the scheme. That is certainly relevant, but time is running out, and if we seek to arrive at such an arrangement outside the European Economic Area, we need sometime very soon to develop an idea of how that might work.

More positively, the budget for the current Erasmus+ programme is 40 per cent higher than that of its predecessor, as members have said. The fact that the European Commission recently proposed doubling the budget for the next iteration of the programme indicates how highly valued it is across Europe. We anticipate that the Commission will in the coming months publish more detailed proposals on the format and content of Erasmus+ from 2021 onwards. We will analyse those proposals closely and work with stakeholders around Scotland to formulate our response. Whatever the Commission proposes, and despite the lack of immediate detail on the UK's relationship with Erasmus+ after 2020, we intend to engage fully in discussions with partners around Europe on the future of the programme.

Erasmus+ represents an unparalleled opportunity for students, staff, young people and volunteers around Scotland. There is no other programme that compares with it in providing opportunities to so many people, and there is no prospect of a viable alternative being developed. The prospect of losing access to Erasmus+ should worry us all—especially because it is going to expand and become more accessible to people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Erasmus+ is an example of the extraordinary benefits of the European Union. That is what we seek to preserve in making the case for continued membership. If that is not possible, I join the committee in urging the UK Government to commit to securing the UK's position as a full programme participant in Erasmus+ from 2021 onwards.

16:53

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to close the debate—it is my first time doing so as deputy convener. I thank all members from around the chamber for taking part in the debate, which has been an interesting discussion that has highlighted the key issues identified by the committee's report.

The consensus in the chamber in recognising the value of Erasmus+, with many members highlighting work in their constituencies, and agreement over the desire to remain in the

scheme should send a strong message to the UK Government that we believe that its value should be recognised in the negotiations, and that every effort should be made to ensure that we still benefit from the opportunities that it provides.

I thank all those who provided evidence for the committee report, and I thank Colleges Scotland and NUS Scotland for the briefing that they provided for today's debate.

Committee members were encouraged when they saw the increase of funding that Scotland has received from Erasmus+. In 2017, Scotland received its highest-ever allocation of Erasmus+ funding when nearly €21 million was awarded, compared with €16 million in the previous year. The committee was told that that was a consequence of it being the 30th year of the Erasmus programme, with an increased profile and bigger budget, but that it was also a result of the continuing and growing appetite for international exchange. The funds benefited 159 Scottish organisations in the higher and adult education, schools, youth, and vocational education and training sectors. As Graeme Dey said, this is surely the time to engage with the scheme, not to leave it.

The main focus of the current seven-year Erasmus+ programme is diversity and inclusion. NUS Scotland has described the programme as a driver for social mobility. As members have recognised, the programme has been successful and a benefit to many young people who come from disadvantaged backgrounds—Bob Doris spoke about Royston Youth Action. Young people who have fewer opportunities are among those who rate the programme most highly. Many stakeholders gave us examples of how the programme has changed the lives of many young people; the Jack Kane centre in Edinburgh and West Lothian College gave powerful evidence to the committee.

The debate has been excellent because members have highlighted the range of the work that Erasmus+ supports in their constituencies. The committee welcomes the Prime Minister's agreement in principle to participating in the programme until 2020. That provides welcome assurance for current participants, but members have emphasised their concerns about the future. I will return to those later.

The programme is most recognised for its involvement with universities, but it also supports colleges, youth work, schools and teachers, as well as a sports programme. The committee heard from YouthLink Scotland about just how valuable Erasmus+ is to its work; YouthLink explained that its funding goes a long way towards supporting the sector. As Ross Greer identified, many youth work organisations are led by small teams of staff and

have limited resources. According to YouthLink Scotland,

“any loss of investment due to leaving the EU would present extreme challenges across a [youth work] sector that is already struggling to sustain the minimum level of services and project management.”

Rachael Hamilton and Tavish Scott talked about the work of schools in their constituencies. In evidence to the committee, Marion Spöring explained how vital Erasmus+ is for the international outlook of Scotland’s young people and how it supports the implementation of the one plus two language policy in our schools. The committee also heard how important Erasmus+ is for teacher training and development, from initial training to continuing professional development.

As Iain Gray said, we learned only last week that the number of Scottish pupils who are passing foreign language exams has halved over the past 10 years. Encouragingly, however, the number who achieve highers and advanced highers has increased. We need to look at expanding opportunities for learning languages. Having the ability to work, communicate and trade with other countries is increasingly important to our economy.

As Stuart McMillan identified, Jackie Killeen spoke about the broader value of the scheme in the softer power of UK cultural relations, and the importance of mutuality of exchange, all fostering interest in doing business with the UK, visiting as a tourist or studying in the UK.

Daniel Johnson made important points about the future of the programme, and he must have known that the Erasmus babies would be the headline from the debate. [*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Can we keep the conversation down, please, so that we can hear the member speak?

**Claire Baker:** Many members got to the nub of the issue, which is what we face in the future. Lewis Macdonald talked about how to protect and secure the benefits of the programme. A key concern for the committee is what will happen after 2020. In its response to the committee’s report, the UK Government noted:

“No decisions have been made about post-2020 programme participation since the scope of this programme has not yet been agreed.”

It is unfortunate that the UK is likely to have reduced influence over the direction. The Scottish Government said that it is

“deeply concerned that the details of successor arrangements have yet to be proposed by the UK Government.”

The committee makes the case for the UK to maintain its status as a programme country after

2020. That type of participation is currently open to all EU member states, acceding countries and EFTA countries that are party to the EEA agreement. Under current expectations for the direction that the UK Government will take, that would make programme country status difficult to achieve, but if a deal is possible, it must be pursued. It would be unfortunate if the UK was not able to secure programme country status, as it would then not be able to take part in the full breadth of the programme, particularly those areas that relate to sport—that benefit was highlighted by Graeme Dey and Iain Gray.

The committee considered the model that has been developed by Switzerland, which has lesser status as a partner country after it introduced immigration restrictions. Stakeholders advised us that this is not desirable and should not be seen as a reasonable compromise, because it would mean that we could not access the full breadth of the programme, and it would involve negotiating a complex bilateral agreement with the EU. That is why we are arguing for the UK’s involvement in Erasmus+ after 2020 to be prioritised in negotiations with the EU and for the UK Government to negotiate the UK’s continued participation as a programme country. However, that raises complex questions. Where would the issue be prioritised in negotiations? How would that approach be compatible with UK immigration policy? What would the costs of continuing be?

The committee also considered what would happen if that was not the outcome. It has asked the Scottish Government to undertake sectoral analyses of the impact of withdrawal from the EU in relation to Erasmus+ and to consider ways in which Scotland’s membership could continue.

It has been agreed in principle that the UK will continue to participate in the programme until 2020, but the question remains about what will happen beyond 2020.

Erasmus+ is not the only concern of the further and higher education sector. The impact of Brexit could damage the sector, and there is a great deal of uncertainty about the future of funding and exchange programmes. Colleges Scotland has said that anecdotal evidence suggests that invitations to collaborate in European projects are reducing.

This afternoon, the committee calls for the issue to be prioritised in the negotiations, because we all recognise, given the strong evidence that we have heard, that Erasmus+ is too valuable for us to lose.

## Business Motion

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-12258, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 22 May 2018

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: Tackling the Employment Gap

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 23 May 2018

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Economy, Jobs and Fair Work; Finance and the Constitution

*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 24 May 2018

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Local Government and Communities Committee Debate: Consultation on the Draft National Outcomes

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 29 May 2018

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 30 May 2018

1.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

1.30 pm Stage 3 Proceedings: Islands (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 31 May 2018

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Housing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

and (b) that, in relation to First Minister's Questions on 24 May 2018, in rule 13.6.2, insert at end "and may provide an opportunity for Party Leaders or their representatives to question the First Minister".—[Joe FitzPatrick]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motion S5M-12259, on committee membership, and motion S5M-12260, on committee substitution.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the following changes to committee membership will apply from close of business on Thursday 17 May—

Oliver Mundell be appointed to replace Jamie Greene as a member of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee;

Alexander Stewart be appointed to replace Jackson Carlaw as a member of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee;

Jamie Greene be appointed to replace Rachael Hamilton as a member of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee;

Rachael Hamilton be appointed to replace Michelle Ballantyne as a member of the Public Petitions Committee;

Michelle Ballantyne be appointed to replace Adam Tomkins as a member of the Social Security Committee; and

Tom Mason be appointed to replace Alexander Stewart as a member of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Alison Harris be appointed to replace Michelle Ballantyne as a substitute member of the Education and Skills Committee.—[*Joe FitzPatrick*]

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The first question is, that motion S5M-12169, in the name of Joan McAlpine, on Erasmus+, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes the findings and recommendations of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee's 1st report, 2018 (Session 5), *Erasmus+* (SP Paper 290).

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-12259, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on committee membership, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the following changes to committee membership will apply from close of business on Thursday 17 May—

Oliver Mundell be appointed to replace Jamie Greene as a member of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee;

Alexander Stewart be appointed to replace Jackson Carlaw as a member of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee;

Jamie Greene be appointed to replace Rachael Hamilton as a member of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee;

Rachael Hamilton be appointed to replace Michelle Ballantyne as a member of the Public Petitions Committee;

Michelle Ballantyne be appointed to replace Adam Tomkins as a member of the Social Security Committee; and

Tom Mason be appointed to replace Alexander Stewart as a member of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S5M-12260, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on committee substitution, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that Alison Harris be appointed to replace Michelle Ballantyne as a substitute member of the Education and Skills Committee.



## Focused Ultrasound Device

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-10550, in the name of Rhoda Grant, on the campaign for a focused ultrasound device. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes the support for Ninewells Hospital's campaign to raise funds for the purchase of a £1.5 million focus ultrasound device, which it believes would benefit all patients in Scotland, including in the Highlands and Islands; notes that this piece of medical technology can be used with the existing MRI scanning facility to allow surgeons to perform very small incisions within the brain using ultrasound beams; considers that this can be useful for patients with essential tremor and Parkinson's disease, and potentially for people with multiple sclerosis who have severe tremor, and understands that there is only one focused ultrasound device in the UK and that some patients will have to wait until 2022 for this treatment due to the significant waiting list at St Mary's Hospital in London.

17:03

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I have brought this motion to the chamber because of my constituent Mary Ramsay, who is in the public gallery tonight. Before I met her, I knew nothing about essential tremor, the condition that she was born with, which is basically a syndrome that causes uncontrollable shaking. As a child, she was referred to numerous specialists and was given, she says, "every tablet known to man". Due to the lack of understanding of her condition, she was then told that it was all in her mind. Mary was 48 years old when she received a definitive diagnosis. Although the condition is not life threatening, it can have a detrimental impact on someone's life. Depending on its severity, the condition can stop someone doing ordinary things, which means that sufferers often retreat into themselves and become depressed.

Mary was bullied—she was physically and verbally abused. She could not do basic things such as thread a needle or drink a full glass of milk. Eating with others became a nightmare, so she retreated into herself. As a result of her experience, she would like compulsory disability training to take place in schools in order to build understanding.

The scale of the condition is not widely known, but it is estimated that approximately 1 million people in the United Kingdom have it. It is difficult to be precise, because many people withdraw into themselves and away from the public as they find it difficult to deal with the impact, and they become isolated as a result. Mary is a pretty strong individual, and she kept going. As an adult, she

found the National Tremor Foundation. Until that point, she had felt that she was the only one with the condition, so it was fantastic for her to get in touch with others.

Mary would not be fobbed off and she insisted on seeing a specialist, who recommended deep brain stimulation. She went for it and had surgery to put electrodes in her brain. When you meet Mary today, she is pretty invincible. She says that she was as quiet as a mouse before she had her surgery, and now she is the mouse that roared. She was not happy to get the treatment only for herself, and she has now started to campaign for others. She had to go to Newcastle for her treatment. There is only one Scottish DBS centre in Glasgow, and it has a long waiting list. That spurred her on to help others, with her aim being to have more treatment available in Scotland.

There is a new treatment for the tremor that does away with the need for invasive surgery, and the aim is to make it available in Ninewells in Dundee. That would not help Mary, as she has already had the electrodes implanted for deep brain stimulation, but it would help others avoid surgery. The treatment could benefit not only people who have essential tremor but people with Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis and other conditions that lead to tremor. The new treatment is magnetic resonance-guided focused ultrasound surgery—there is an acronym, for that, which is MRgFUS, but it is almost as hard to say as the name itself.

The treatment is awaiting approval from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, but it is thought that approval for essential tremor will be given next month. There will be a proviso, which is that patients should be followed up in the long term to assess the longevity of the treatment's effect. It has already been approved in the USA and in other parts of Europe for treatment of essential tremor and Parkinson's. In addition, 16 patients in the UK have benefited from the treatment, which has been successful in reducing tremor in every single one of those cases.

Having the treatment available in Scotland would make us leaders in the UK and in the world. There is one other treatment centre in the UK, at St Mary's in London, which has a five-year waiting list. Distance and waiting time therefore puts treatment out of reach for Scottish patients. The treatment would be a game changer for those who are currently suffering in silence, and it would allow them to live their lives. I also understand that it can be used to improve the quality of life for those with inoperable brain tumours—something that the late Tessa Jowell fought for.

The treatment works by targeting the brain areas that produce the tremor with sound waves—ultrasound—using magnetic resonance imaging.

Patients are awake throughout and require no anaesthetic. A small lesion is created by heating up the brain tissue with ultrasound waves, and the effect on the patient's tremor is both painless and immediate. It is a day-case treatment that requires no hospital stay—it is revolutionary.

The treatment is minimally invasive. It has the same immediate and long-term effects as invasive alternatives such as deep brain stimulation but without the infection risk, and it does not require permanent electrical hardware or revision operations in the future. Currently, there are risks with DBS: a one in 1,000 risk of death, a one in 100 risk of stroke and a one in 30 risk of brain haemorrhage. More than 1,200 patients worldwide have had the new treatment without experiencing any significant comparable complications to date. The new treatment is also a third of the cost of DBS.

There are more than 1 million people with essential tremor in Britain, around 250,000 of whom are severely disabled by their tremor. Dr Peter Bain, who is a consultant neurologist and a founding trustee at the National Tremor Foundation, co-ordinates the trial of focused ultrasound surgery. He says that the new technique is the biggest breakthrough in functional neurosurgery in the past 20 years.

Ninewells is ideally placed to take this on. There is already a fundraising appeal in place, led by the University of Dundee, which needs £2.3 million to purchase the equipment. The equipment would pay for itself by allowing people to lead their lives, get back to work and play an active part in society and by cutting the cost of the treatment. It is an opportunity for Scottish patients to receive state-of-the-art, minimally invasive neurosurgery for some of the commonest causes of tremor and to establish Scotland as one of a handful of countries worldwide that are using the technology for research into treatments for brain drug delivery and brain tumour surgery.

As I said, the only treatment centre in the UK is at St Mary's in London, which has a waiting list of five years. Without our own treatment centre, not only will Scottish patients with tremor have to wait, there is a significant risk that the treatment will eventually be available only to those who can afford to pay for it. Therefore, we need to make sure that the treatment comes to Scotland.

17:11

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** I congratulate Rhoda Grant on securing this evening's debate, and I am pleased to be participating in it. Like Rhoda Grant, I welcome the fundraising campaign to raise the money that is required to purchase a focused ultrasound device for Scotland's national

health service that has the potential to benefit patients across our country. I commend all those who are involved in the campaign and all those who have supported it, especially Mary Ramsay. I was sad not to be able to meet her this afternoon.

It is a concern to all of us and to so many Scottish patients who could benefit from the device that we are seeing waits of up to five years to access it in the unit at St Mary's in London, which currently has the only one in the UK. Having a device in Scotland would obviously lessen the significant stresses and costs for patients in having to travel to London for treatment and the extra pressure that that places on their family members.

The focused ultrasound device is a piece of cutting-edge technology that allows doctors to use high-intensity sound waves to destroy tissue causing mistimed electrical signals inside the brain in the thalamus. Treatment is performed in imaging departments rather than operating theatres. The use of ultrasound in the brain to treat patients with neurological conditions that lead to tremors means far fewer side effects and risks than there with the traditional treatments of drugs or brain surgery. As Rhoda Grant said, the costs of the treatment are estimated to be a third of the costs of equivalent brain surgery.

Professor Gedroyc, who is a consultant radiologist at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, has described the device as a

"game-changer for patients with ... movement disorders because we can cure them with a treatment which is completely non-invasive and we don't have to give unpleasant drugs."

He is one of the many radiologists and neurologists who believe that the device has huge potential, and it is hoped that its use will soon be increased across the country to transform the lives of many people with a range of neurological conditions.

One of the main challenges for all health services in developed countries but certainly for our NHS is how to access and bring forward quickly the ever-increasing number of new drugs, technologies and devices that patients, understandably, want to be able to use, when resources are finite and there are so many competing demands across the NHS. The device at St. Mary's was funded wholly by the Imperial Health Charity, which funds major equipment purchases and is a great example of a charitable foundation making a real difference to patients' lives. I hope that we can see the fundraising campaign succeed in delivering a focused ultrasound device for Scotland

Again, I welcome the debate and the campaign, and I look forward to hearing from the minister

how the Scottish Government believes that Scotland can secure a focused ultrasound device, as it clearly offers so much promise for patients with essential tremor, Parkinson's and other life-limiting neurological conditions.

17:14

**David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):**

I warmly congratulate Rhoda Grant on securing this evening's debate and on her informative and well-researched speech, and I welcome Mary Ramsay to the public gallery. Her bravery throughout her early life circumstances led to her setting up a Scottish support group with the National Tremor Foundation, providing advice, guidance and support to others with her condition.

The purpose and objective of this evening's debate is to raise awareness of essential tremor and the need for developing treatment options in Scotland. As the Mayo Clinic makes clear,

"Essential tremor is a ... neurological ... disorder that causes involuntary and rhythmic shaking. It can affect almost any part of your body, but the trembling occurs most often in your hands—especially when you do simple tasks, such as drinking from a glass or tying shoelaces."

Although it is often confused with Parkinson's disease, the conditions vary in key ways, such as the timing of the tremors and the associated conditions. Parkinson's is also linked with stooped posture, slow movement and shuffling gait. The parts of the body affected can also differ. Essential tremor mainly affects the hands, head and voice, while Parkinson's starts in the hands and can go on to affect the legs, chin and other parts of the body.

Mary Ramsay could be described as a doughty fighter. Her life has not been easy. Imagine someone being told as a 20-year-old that they could not have children due to their condition? Yet she now has three children and 10 grandchildren. She has been campaigning for disability rights for about 40 years, but despite her long fight she is still frustrated by the gaps in service. People with essential tremor regularly contact Mary and express their disappointment with available treatments.

For Mary, deep brain stimulation was a godsend, giving her courage to speak out on behalf of others with disabilities, not just tremor. However, the surgery that Mary underwent is invasive and can have serious side effects, as we have heard from Rhoda Grant. It is no surprise that many are reluctant to undergo such a daunting procedure.

MRI-guided focused ultrasound surgery is a new treatment that is utilised to alleviate tremor. The incisionless treatment has the same immediate and long-term effect as invasive deep brain

stimulation but, in contrast, it does not require permanent electrical hardware, or revision operations in the future. As we have heard, however, that alternative procedure is currently available only in London, with long waiting lists.

I compliment the team at Ninewells hospital in Dundee, who have visited the London surgery team at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust in order to see the new surgery and the use of the high-intensity ultrasound device. The London team have expressed support for the introduction of that novel technology to Scotland and have offered to visit the Ninewells team to guide them through the first few procedures.

Mr Selwyn Lucas, a 52-year old painter and decorator from St Austell in Cornwall, was one of the first people to receive the treatment as part of the trial in the UK. For more than 20 years, he lived with a tremor in his right hand; it had grown progressively worse in the five years before he was treated. Commenting on the trial he said:

"Since the treatment I have been able to write my own name for the first time in many years and taken my wife out for a lovely meal without fear of embarrassing myself. I will also be able to go back to using my right hand which will allow me to take on more painting and decorating jobs."

As we have heard, £2.3 million is required to bring the new technology to Scotland, of which £1.5 million is to purchase a high-frequency machine for essential tremor treatment, £500,000 is for a low-frequency machine to treat brain tumours, and £300,000 is for running costs up front. So far, £400,000 has been raised by a robust fundraising campaign led by the University of Dundee, but the costs would be a crucial investment in Scottish healthcare. Bringing the treatment to Dundee would be an opportunity for Scottish patients to receive state-of-the-art neurosurgery for some of the commonest types of tremor, including essential tremor, Parkinson's and multiple sclerosis.

In addition, this is a chance to establish Scotland as one of only a handful of countries in Europe and worldwide that are using that technology for research into treatments for brain drug delivery and brain tumour surgery.

The chairman of the National Tremor Foundation, who himself lives with essential tremor, said:

"in my opinion the costs involved in setting up this equipment would be recouped many, many times over in years to come. The opportunity of assistance for people young and old to carry out their studies, work, pursue their ambitions and carry on with their everyday lives as a result of this treatment can only benefit the Scottish economy in the long run."

I congratulate Rhoda Grant again. I am delighted that Mary Ramsay is here. I thank

everyone who has helped to highlight this important issue to the Parliament.

17:19

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I am delighted to have the opportunity to take part in the debate, and I thank Rhoda Grant for securing it. I thank Rhoda Grant, Dave Stewart and Miles Briggs for telling me a lot more about this problem than I knew before. The fact that I have had the opportunity to research it before this evening is one of the benefits of having these debates, so I thank them for their contributions and for allowing me to learn more.

I take the opportunity to voice my support for the campaign to install a focused ultrasound device in Dundee.

I commend all those who have campaigned tirelessly on this issue, including Mary Ramsay, who I met this afternoon. As I found out this afternoon, Mary Ramsay is an eloquent and persvase—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, I meant to say persuasive. I knew that I would get that wrong. I am nervous because you are behind me in the gallery, Mary. I hope that you do not mind that I did not make that comment through the chair, Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I was just wondering whether Mary could teach me how to make members nervous.

**Edward Mountain:** As we have heard, £0.5 million has already been raised by the public to secure a focused ultrasound device. I welcome that and I believe that the Scottish Government really should be stepping up to fund the balance.

The case for purchasing a focused ultrasound device appears to be a simple one. Waiting lists could well be shortened and patient load could be lightened. If the Scottish Government commits to purchasing the device and putting it in Dundee, those benefits could be realised.

When I spoke to Mary Ramsay this afternoon, I learned how Highlanders who have essential tremor have to travel to Newcastle for treatment, because there is a four-year waiting list in Glasgow for deep-brain stimulation.

According to the National Tremor Foundation, focused ultrasound treatment is a lifeline for patients. A recent study showed that hand tremors improved by 75 per cent and quality of life improved by 65 per cent. That is a huge step forward.

Before today's debate, I read many patients' stories and learned about the remarkable recoveries that have been brought about by the treatment. In one example, which is similar to the

one that David Stewart mentioned, a patient described how the tremors in their right arm had completely disappeared after the procedure and they said that the treatment

"has frankly given me back my life; my only regret is that I did not have the treatment sooner."

That statement should be enough to make the case for why the treatment should be available in Scotland. That the treatment might also affect our ability to treat Parkinson's disease, epilepsy, the early stages of prostate cancer and, possibly, breast cancer, makes that case even more compelling.

As we know, politicians can talk and talk and talk, but let us try to avoid that. We could avoid it if the Government delivered a focused ultrasound device in Dundee. The question for the Government is whether to delay or deliver, to chat or to act. I say, let us act.

17:22

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** I remind the chamber that I am the parliamentary liaison officer to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport.

I was not intending to speak, Presiding Officer—as you know, I pressed my button during the debate—but I want to take the opportunity, from the SNP back benches, to thank Rhoda Grant for bringing the issue to the chamber and, of course, to thank Mary Ramsay for what sounds like an absolutely tireless campaign.

As Edward Mountain said, as I have sat listening to the debate, I have been educated. I suppose that the point of campaigns is to let us find out a wee bit about what is going on in different areas. There can be no doubt that minimally invasive treatment, where appropriate, is a good thing. I believe that that is in line with Scottish Government policy. I know that the health secretary has talked about these things many times in the chamber before.

As others have said, I like the idea of Scotland being a leader in this area; that is a good thing, given that no treatment centres are readily available. That can maybe link into wider challenges in the health service, such as the ageing population and the different types of treatment that people are looking for.

I am just learning about this subject today. As I said, that is the purpose of campaigns. I know that all these decisions have to be checked and balanced against the available evidence. I look forward to hearing the cabinet secretary's response to what she has heard.

You will be glad to hear that I do not need to take up my whole time, Presiding Officer. The

purpose of my standing up was to put on the record my thanks to the campaign for getting this issue to the chamber and letting me hear about another treatment.

17:24

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison):** I am very grateful to Rhoda Grant for bringing the motion to Parliament today. I join with others in welcoming Mary Ramsay to the public gallery and pay tribute to the work that she has undertaken in raising awareness of essential tremor and the debilitating impact of the condition. I also thank her for highlighting and raising interest in a new type of experimental treatment for those living with essential tremor.

As the members who have been involved in today's debate will know, the adoption of innovative medical technologies into the NHS has the potential to offer new ways to treat conditions. Some of those technologies have the potential to provide transformative improvements in the health and quality of life of patients.

However, as I am sure members will agree, it is imperative that before any new procedure is adopted into the NHS, it is first subject to rigorous clinical assessment to establish patient safety and efficacy. That is vital for clinicians and the patients who are in their care. It will support informed conversations between clinicians and their patients about the range of treatment options that might be available to them and the likely risks and benefits. With that knowledge, clinicians can offer the best information about the different treatment options, which will support shared decision making between clinicians and patients about their care.

In the case of the new technology and procedure that is the subject of the motion—magnetic resonance image-guided ultrasound for the treatment of essential tremor—current expert opinion has very recently been issued, albeit in draft form, by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. That guidance follows an assessment by NICE of the available clinical research evidence. The final guidance will be published in June, but the draft guidance is already available.

NICE has concluded that the available evidence suggests that the procedure does not give rise to major safety concerns. However, NICE has also concluded that the evidence of its clinical efficacy is presently too limited to recommend that it be used in practice in the NHS, unless there are special arrangements in place or it is used for the purposes of research.

As members might be aware, NICE assesses the safety and efficacy of interventional procedures—including the one that is at issue

here—on behalf of the NHS in Scotland, England and Wales. NICE provides advice on the suitability of the adoption of new procedures into the NHS based on its assessment of the evidence. The processes and methods that are used by NICE are designed to ensure that its guidance is expert, robust and developed in an open, transparent and timely way. Consequently, NICE guidance is authoritative, protects the safety of patients and supports clinicians—and the NHS as a whole—in managing clinical innovation appropriately.

Given the latest opinion from NICE that the evidence of efficacy is too limited, adoption as a commissioned national service for the treatment of essential tremor, or the other conditions that are mentioned in the motion, cannot be considered at the current time. Better evidence that demonstrates efficacy will be needed from all the nations across the UK. Where NICE has outlined special conditions for the use of a procedure, such conditions must be followed. In this case, the draft guidance mandates that clinicians must inform patients that there are special conditions attached to the use of the procedure—it can be used in research trials but it is not for routine clinical use—as current evidence of efficacy is limited.

I can well appreciate that that situation might be disappointing. However, I am aware that a number of clinical research studies in other countries are under way on the use of MRI-guided ultrasound for essential tremor.

**Rhoda Grant:** Obviously, the treatment is new and research needs to be carried out, but the research that has been carried out so far shows that the treatment could be a game changer. Would it not be good if Scotland could lead the way in the research? The University of Dundee is involved in the research, alongside Ninewells hospital. We could carry out the research procedure, but also lead the way in allowing that treatment to be available in Scotland.

**Shona Robison:** I am just coming on to that very point.

Research is in progress internationally that will improve the range of evidence on the safety and efficacy of the technology, and NICE will pay attention to that. The Scottish Government will also keep the situation under close review. Should new clinical evidence be generated from anywhere that demonstrates effectiveness and materially changes the clinical assessment by NICE, our position would of course be re-evaluated. That evidence would be expected to include a review of the clinical and cost effectiveness of the device, as well as its position in the current established treatment pathways.

With that in mind, as Rhoda Grant and many others have mentioned, and as members will be

aware, since it is noted in the motion, the University of Dundee and NHS Tayside are exploring the possibility of purchasing MRI-guided ultrasound technology. That is in order that they might join—and add to—the international research effort to evaluate the use of such technology for the treatment of movement disorders. I am encouraged by the university's plans to explore the possibilities of undertaking such research work, since that could provide opportunities for patients in Scotland to participate in clinical trials of the technology, and hence meet the requirements of the NICE guidance, albeit that that is in draft form at the moment.

Given that clinical efficacy of the technology is still unproven, it will be for the University of Dundee to assess it and decide whether to invest in it for research. However, should a facility be established in Dundee, the Scottish Government, through the chief scientist's office, would welcome a high-quality application to its competitive grant funding scheme for clinical research projects that aim to evaluate such technology further. As usual, applications would be independently and rigorously assessed, using the CSO's established processes. That is important, because it would mean that the application would undergo robust evaluation. An application would not be just about the appropriateness of the funding stream, but would undergo recognised evaluation processes that are important for establishing evidence.

In addition, the CSO's financial contribution to the National Institute of Health Research opens up opportunities for larger-scale funding from the NIHR's schemes for clinical research. Furthermore, like all research-active health boards, NHS Tayside has some discretion about the clinical research activities that it supports, using the research support funding that is provided by the Scottish Government through NHS research Scotland. It could therefore utilise some of that infrastructure funding to support trials of the technology if it chooses to do so. NHS research Scotland support is also available to facilitate the siting of both commercial and non-commercial trials and the recruitment of patients to them. Should the University of Dundee be successful in purchasing it, there will therefore be a range of opportunities and support, through the CSO and NHS research Scotland, to facilitate clinical research on that technology and on the procedure.

In bringing all that together, I can say that there will be an opportunity for Scotland, but that the proper processes will have to be gone through so that the evidence and evaluation of the technology will be robust and recognised internationally. I encourage the various partners to come forward through the routes that I have mentioned.

I will finish by reiterating that the Scottish Government is committed to having safe and effective care and treatment, which put the patient at their centre. In order to have that, we must ensure that decisions about the adoption of new technologies, interventional procedures or services into the NHS are based on the best available evidence. Although the clinical efficacy of MRI-guided ultrasound for movement disorders has not yet been demonstrated, I certainly hope that the clinical trials evidence that is being accrued internationally—and that I hope will happen in Scotland in due course—might enable a wider range of options with established safety and efficacy to be offered to patients who are in the situation in which Mrs Ramsay used to be. I aspire to that for Scotland.

I thank members for their contributions to the debate. I hope that they have found what I have had to say useful. There is still some work to be done by the various partners in progressing the technology, but, again, I thank Rhoda Grant for raising this important issue through her motion.

*Meeting closed at 17:33.*

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